SITUATION ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN in Trinidad and Tobago
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<tr>
<td>CAPA</td>
<td>Crime and Problem Analysis Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>CARICOM</td>
<td>Caribbean Community and Common Market</td>
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<td>CDB</td>
<td>Caribbean Development Bank</td>
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<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</td>
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<td>CFS</td>
<td>Child Friendly School</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>CSEC</td>
<td>Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Central Statistics Office</td>
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<td>CVQ</td>
<td>Caribbean Vocational Qualification</td>
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<td>ECCE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Care and Education</td>
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<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Indicators</td>
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<td>HFLE</td>
<td>Health and Family Life Education</td>
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<td>IMR</td>
<td>Infant Mortality Rate</td>
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<td>MICS</td>
<td>Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey</td>
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<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>NCD</td>
<td>Non-communicable Disease</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organization</td>
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<td>OECS</td>
<td>Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAHO</td>
<td>Pan-American Health Organization</td>
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<td>SRH</td>
<td>Sexual Reproductive Health</td>
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<td>SIDS</td>
<td>Small Island Developing States</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
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<td>SitAn</td>
<td>Situation Analysis</td>
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<td>SLC</td>
<td>Survey of Living Conditions</td>
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<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<td>U5MR</td>
<td>Under-5 Mortality Rate</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION
This Situation Analysis (SitAn) of children in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (hereafter T&T) is designed to help the Government shape national policies and action plans in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It describes the current situation of children, identifies barriers and bottlenecks in advancing children’s rights in health, education and child protection, and sets forth recommendations.

The two islands of Trinidad and Tobago form a unitary state situated in the southernmost end of the Caribbean islands between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Trinidad is the larger of the two, comprising 93 per cent of the country’s total area (5,066 km² / 1,956 sq mi) and 93 per cent of the total population of 1,327,367 (665,736 males and 661,631 females) 2011 census. The population is a mix of ethnicities reflecting the country’s colonial history. The largest groups are East Indian (35.4 per cent) and African (34.2 per cent), and there are smaller groups of various mixed races.

The bicameral Parliament consists of two chambers: the elected 41-member House of Representatives and the 31-member Senate nominated by the prime minister, the leader of the opposition and the president, and appointed by the president. Tobago has a degree of autonomy through the Tobago House of Assembly. The majority party appoints six members to the Assembly and the minority party appoints one.

T&T graduated to the list of high-income countries in 2011 and it remains one of the Caribbean’s wealthiest nations. The economy has been heavily dependent on the production and export of oil and gas since the 1960s. With the decline in international oil prices in the mid-1980s, the economy suffered an average annual fall of 4.2 per cent between 1982 and 1989. As unemployment rates climbed, the Government introduced an adjustment programme to improve the fiscal situation involving reduction of public expenditures, tax reform, rescheduling debt repayments and other austerity approaches. The Revenue Stabilization Fund, created in 2000 to resist the effects of volatile commodity prices, resulted only in weak signs of improvement. Then the 2008 global economic recession hit, causing the economy to contract 3.5 per cent in 2009 and again in 2010. However, while economies of neighbouring countries were severely crippled by the global economic downturn – with unemployment rates pushed into double-digits – T&T managed to stay the course. Poverty was not pervasive and there were significant improvements in the standard of living and expansion of opportunities for the growing middle-class. Energy exports accounted for about 78 per cent of total export earnings and 45 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) as of December 2015. In the same year, per capita income stood at US$17,640. Contributions from tourism and financial services were particularly significant given the falling price of petroleum products on the international market. Throughout these challenges, the Government has remained committed to the social sector, especially in the areas of health care, education, housing and social services, and security.

METHODOLOGY
This report is the first comprehensive SitAn of children in T&T since 2010 and focuses on the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups – children of migrant parents, those living with disabilities and those living in remote, single-parent households and poor urban communities. The analysis is based on an extensive desk review of more than 50 national and regional documents relevant to children, including development plans, surveys, studies and reports.
Although this documentation was useful in describing the status of children and women in T&T, the quantitative data sources needed to understand trends and changes in their status were often not accessible. Data was absent for indicators related to inequality, gender, health outcomes and behaviour, child development, nutrition, child protection, unemployment and social determinants of poverty.

Due to the limitations of available quantitative data, the use of qualitative information is highlighted. A range of stakeholders who support children in T&T were involved in key informant interviews, focus group discussions and field observations. This approach was pivotal to understanding the immediate and long-term impact of current policies and programmes on the lives of women and children in the country. Key informants included 33 representatives of the Government and civil society who were asked for their opinions on the status of children. More interviews took place in Tobago (44) than Trinidad (31), and eight interviews were conducted outside Port of Spain in Trinidad. There were 26 respondents from ministries, four from development partners and two from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Unfortunately, few interviews were conducted with children and it was not possible to meet with children living with disabilities or those in police cells or prison.

**FINDINGS**

The last published Survey of Living Conditions (SLC), in 2005, recorded the poverty level at 16.7 per cent, a significant decline compared to the previous level of 24 per cent in 1997–1998. Similarly, the level of indigence fell from 8.3 per cent to 1.2 per cent in the same period. A more recent SLC, which was completed in 2015 but is yet to be published, suggests the poverty rate is again rising “from 14.7 per cent to almost 24 per cent”. The rate of poverty in the youth population is as much as 28.9 per cent. Poor households are likely to have higher numbers of youth than non-poor households. Women are over-represented in lower income brackets and among the population that is economically inactive; it is therefore not surprising that poverty is concentrated in households headed by women – some 33.6 per cent of all households according to the 2011 Census. The report identified other characteristics of the poorest households including higher average household size (5.2 in the poorest quintile compared to 2.2 in the richest and a 3.6 national average) and unemployment rates more than twice the national average. Respondents were clear that poverty includes psychological deprivation and frequent exposure to high risk, vulnerable and borderline situations (living in substandard housing, drug and alcohol abuse, crime and violence). Nearly all of them agreed that poverty in T&T is “passed on from one generation to another” and that children and adolescents, especially girls, are the most vulnerable.

The legal environment for juvenile justice in T&T includes a variety of robust Acts that serve as cornerstones for the system. Several pieces of legislation were proclaimed in mid-2017, namely The Children’s Authority Act, Chap 46:10, The Children’s Community Residences, Foster Care and Nurseries Act Chap 46:11, and The Children Act, 2012 as well as the Family and Children Division Bill 2016, and the revised Status of Children (Amendment) Bill 2009. In 2013 the Ministry of Justice developed a draft Youth Justice Policy to introduce new legislation in a proposed Youth Justice Act. The legislation is designed to specifically address children and young persons in conflict with the law with a view to divert youths away from institutional settings when non-criminal acts have been committed.

The Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago is mandated to provide care, protection and rehabilitation of children in accordance with the powers and functions conferred on it by the Children’s Authority Act. Prior to the establishment of the Authority in May 2015, services for children in need of care and protection were fragmented, with several different
ministries responsible for delivery. In its first two years of operation, the Authority prepared a strategic operational plan; set up assessment centres for referrals; introduced staff training and orientation on child protection; developed policies, procedures and protocols to guide collaborative relationships with government departments, CSOs and others; and, importantly, established a child protection unit in the police force.

The Authority’s 2016 Statistical Report on child abuse examined 5,809 cases reported during the first year of the Authority being operationalised. The most common incidents involved sexual and/or physical abuse. Of the cases reported, 57.76 per cent were perpetrated against females and 41.6 per cent against males. The report highlighted several points regarding crime and youth in T&T. Delinquency may start with children in primary school (9–11 years), and children are engaging with delinquent and even illegal activities at younger and younger ages. On average boys are more delinquent than girls. Most acts of delinquency take place within the school setting and are directed at other children, and although fighting is the most common offence, there is also a high prevalence of sexual victimization. Among the 102 criminal gangs identified in 2012, just a small percentage (5.7 per cent) of children aged under 17 years were members. Gang populations are almost exclusively male. According to data from the Crime and Problem Analysis (CAPA) Unit of the Ministry of National Security, children (11–17 years) committed less than 5 per cent of all crimes during the period of 2007–2012.

There are three main youth institutions in T&T charged with ‘rehabilitation’ of youth offenders. The Youth Training Centre, operated by the T&T Prisons Service, caters for 16–18-year-old male offenders sent by the Courts for a period of training (not less than three and not more than four years) in lieu of imprisonment. Offences include everything but murder. St Michael’s Home for Boys and St Jude’s Home for Girls cater for children who have committed status offences or are in need of care and protection. In 2009, the total population of girls and boys in the three institutions was 486, and 44.5 per cent of them had not committed an illegal offence but were there for engaging in conduct considered unacceptable for youths.

The general perception of respondents was that youths were increasingly involved in crime and anti-social and delinquent behaviour. Interviewees attribute the cause to a complex interaction of risk factors including poor parenting (lack of “care and control”); an increasing number of single-parent households headed by women; unemployment; growing drug use (alcohol and cannabis); teenage pregnancy; dropping out of school; child abuse and exposure to violence; and general poverty.

In May 2016, there were 49 residential homes in operation across T&T housing 800 children. Critical inspection tools have been developed including a report template and a risk-rating matrix, and 28 centres had completed the pre-inspection exercises based on the minimum standards for licensing. The fostering programme in T&T grew out of a pilot launched in the mid-1990s. In 2007, 28 children were in foster care in 13 homes, decreasing to 23 children in 2013. In 2015, the Authority reported 25 children in the care of 13 foster providers. The Authority received 115 requests for adoption between October 2014 and March 2015, two children were adopted and 93 persons were on the waiting list with 85 of them approved. Child marriages of 548 children were performed from 2006 to 2016. Following a discussion with civil society, the Government organized a meeting on early marriage in mid-2016 under the leadership of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. Six months later, in January 2017, the Attorney General announced a bill to harmonize the country’s marriage laws and increase the legal minimum age of marriage to 18 years for girls and boys. This bill has passed through the Senate and been put before Parliament for debate.
As of May 2017, there were 640 refugees, asylum-seekers and other persons of concern recorded in T&T, among them 40 children (23 boys and 17 girls). Their countries of origin include Columbia, Cuba, Mexico, Pakistan, Syria and Venezuela. There is also an unknown number of undocumented migrants – those drawn to T&T with the hope of earning good wages in the agricultural and tourism sectors; persons smuggled in or trafficked; denied asylum-seekers; and persons whose migrant status has become irregular for one reason or another. Although the number of children affected by the irregular status of their parents is unknown, their presence has generated discussion regarding policies to protect them during the period their parents are in detention. Without a formal guardianship policy, these children are unofficially placed in the care of relatives or friends of their parents.

The Constitution of T&T guarantees education as a fundamental right and a responsibility of all citizens “…without discrimination by reason of race, origin, colour, religion or sex”. The National Development Strategy has set an agenda for a “modern, relevant education and training system” that is inclusive and accessible for all. The Government’s approach to education is based on the CARICOM Ideal Caribbean Person (adopted by Heads of State in 1997) and UNESCO’s Pillars of Education (1996), and is consistent with key frameworks on educational development and standards in the sub-region. Education is compulsory from age 6 to 16 years and free in the public system from pre-primary to tertiary level. All school children in uniform can travel by public transport free of charge while university students are issued with passes.

Public expenditure on education has been robustly maintained since the annual budget increased from 9.5 per cent in 2000 to 13.5 per cent in 2004. The Education Sector Strategy Document 2011–2015 projected gradual budget increases over the five-year plan mainly in the personnel category, which when combined with the declining school age population indicates that the shift from access expansion towards building an enabling legal environment and improving the quality of education will not necessarily require heavier investment. Universal access to primary school education was achieved in the 1960s and to secondary education in 2000. With literacy at 98.2 per cent in 2006, a high rate among the 15–24 age group, and universal primary and secondary education achieved, T&T has one of the better education systems in the Caribbean.

T&T is committed to achieving universal access to early education. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) conducted in 2000 and 2011 show an increase of fourteen percentage points in children attending early childhood care and education (ECCE) facilities. The 2011 MICS revealed an important disparity: just 72 per cent of children from the poorest households attend ECCE compared to 93 per cent from the richest households. In 2000 the Government set out to construct 600 centres across T&T with a view to expanding access, particularly into disadvantaged communities. In 2014, over 80 per cent of children aged 3–4 years (more than 33,000) had access to ECCE provided by 998 centres. However, a standardized curriculum introduced a decade ago is still not being uniformly practiced, and monitoring the privately operated centres remains a major challenge. The attainment of universal quality education and achievement of universal access to ECCE is at the forefront of the overall goals for the sector. The Government’s contribution to ECCE centres is extremely important to ensure equity in the delivery of services. In order to institutionalize these services, a basis for standards regarding licensing, fee structures, teacher training and curriculum needs to be integrated into the existing policies and guidance documentation towards an approved national policy.
In 2004, T&T had 548 government/government-assisted and private primary schools serving 133,692 children. By the 2013–2014 academic year, 126,000 pupils were attending primary schools. The number of secondary schools totalled 199 in 2008 and 163 in 2011. Secondary schools had 96,000 students enrolled in 2016. The first five years at secondary school are compulsory leading to completion of the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC). At that point students may opt to stay on at secondary school and work towards the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Certificate. The Government owns and operates 37 per cent of all primary and secondary schools, excluding 12 schools for children with special needs. Privately owned schools and those controlled by church/denominational boards represent 63 per cent. Of these approximately 51 per cent are owned by religious denominations. They are referred to as ‘government-assisted schools’ because they receive financial aid from government and are jointly administered by the Ministry of Education.

The transition rate from primary to secondary level was 90 per cent in 2011, and despite the attainment of universal access at both levels – maintained for nearly two decades – T&T continues to struggle with issues of efficiency at the secondary level. The participation rate at secondary level in 2011 was cited as less than 80 per cent in the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) Strategy Paper for T&T. Since then, the Government has redoubled its efforts to improve the quality and relevance of education and the learning environment at both primary and secondary levels. The results in terms of student performance have been promising, with 80 per cent of students scoring above 60 per cent on the Secondary Entrance Exam (SEA) and 54 per cent of the candidates for the CSEC obtaining passing grades in five or more subjects, including math and English A.

The 2011 Census report identified 3,302 children living with disabilities, representing 1 per cent of the child population and 6.3 per cent of all people with disabilities in T&T. The Government ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 25 June 2011 and has committed to providing the necessary human and physical resources to meet the demands of existing centres and provide for the expansion of services. The major challenges it faces are funding the appropriately skilled human and financial resources to ensure positive outcomes for the most vulnerable young children and determining the most cost-effective strategies and efficient means of doing so.

T&T practices equity strategies that target assistance and social safety net programmes to needy students in the school system. The National Schools Dietary Services provides free meals for pre-primary, primary and secondary schools; in 2013–2014, it distributed 64,422 breakfasts and 96,448 lunches. The textbook rental and loan programme distributed over 203,000 books to children in the school system, including learning materials designed for special education centres. The school health programme, free to children under the age of 14, completed 12,231 screenings/testings for hearing impairment and 10,721 vision exams as well as providing support for children in need of uniforms. Before and after school care programmes are available at some schools.

The country provides one of the highest standards of free health care systems (including pre-natal care) in the Caribbean. Citizens can access free health care, including medicines, at public health-care facilities where health insurance is not required. Since 2005, the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme has provided free prescription drugs and other pharmaceutical items for treatment of many chronic conditions. The infant mortality rate (18 per 1,000 live births) and the under-5 mortality rate (20 per 1,000 live births) have consistently declined since the 1990s, but more effort is required to build on the MDGs.
achievements. In addition to three general hospitals, there are also two district hospitals and four specialist hospitals. The health workforce includes 1,543 (11.7/10,000) physicians and 4,677 (35.5/10,000) nursing and midwifery personnel with a 1:3 ratio of doctors to nurses and midwifery personnel. As of 2011, the country has 49 pharmaceutical personnel per 100,000 people. Regarding mental health services, the health system provides 74.4 beds per 100,000 people. Five Regional Health Authorities, each of which has at least one hospital and a share of the nation’s 100-plus polyclinics and health centres, are responsible for service delivery.

Standard health indicators provide an impressive snapshot of the health situation in the country. In 2008, communicable diseases coupled with maternal, perinatal and nutritional conditions accounted for an estimated 12 per cent of all mortality. The country is noted for its well-organized expanded programme of immunization with nearly 100 per cent coverage rates. The official declaration of the elimination of measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome was achieved in July 2015.

Over 95 per cent of women attend antenatal clinic at least once during their pregnancy and are attended by skilled health professionals at delivery. T&T is on track to eliminate mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV and AIDS. From 2010 to 2015, the rate of MTCT has been 2 per cent or lower, treatment coverage has gone up from 81 per cent to 85 per cent and testing among prenatal attendees has risen 50 per cent. The social-cultural environment contains both protective and risk factors that could influence levels of sexual and reproductive health issues including the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. Protective factors include strong adherence to religious values, close parental monitoring and a sense of social cohesion and cultural identity. Risk factors are associated with some categories of tourists and others passing through the country, early marriage, child sexual abuse and participation in transactional or commercial sex. Available data on the sexual behaviour of young women (15–24 years) raises concern: Approximately 68 per cent who had sex in the last 12 months reported having sex with a non-regular partner and only half of these women (51.2 per cent) claimed they used a condom in their last sexual encounter with the high-risk partner.

Chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) accounted for 77 per cent of mortality among adults in T&T in 2009. Existing research on the nutritional situation of school children reveals a 400 per cent increase in obesity rates among the 5–18 cohort from 1999 to 2009. The growing concern for childhood obesity has prompted the Government to target this age group with initiatives such as ‘Fight-the-Fat’ camps organized in 2014 for children aged 7–12 years.

CONCLUSION
The idea behind the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to create a global movement to advance work on the MDGs towards new commitments. In this sense, nations should frame their development plans and policies for the next years based on this new globally agreed development agenda.

To maintain an enabling environment conducive to delivering equitable social and economic growth and effective poverty reduction, certain capacities must be put in place or strengthened. These include: mobilizing and channelling resources to the appropriate sectors at the appropriate time for optimal production; enforcing standards and regulations (specifically, operationalizing the legislation and policies identified and/or in draft form); establishing a mix of social partnerships with key actors (local councils, civil society, research institutions, the private sector); and improving systems for generating, collating, and managing information so that it is easily accessible and shared across different agencies and with partners.
RECOMMENDATIONS

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

► Prohibit the use of corporal punishment of children in all settings, including the home, and abolish sentences of whipping for juveniles
► Improve court capacity to process cases, especially juvenile offenders
► Implement the recently proclaimed legislation including The Children’s Authority Act, Chap 46:10, The Children’s Community Residences, Foster Care and Nurseries Act Chap 46:11, and The Children Act, 2012
► Adopt and implement the draft Family and Children Division Bill 2016 and draft Status of Children (Amendment) Bill 2009
► Complete, adopt and implement the Youth Justice Act currently being drafted
► Standardize the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both girls and boys to eliminate marriage between children
► Establish/reinforce a children’s ombudsperson
► Modernize legislation reform policy to support the new directions in early childhood care and education (ECCE) to ensure accountability and compliance
► Integrate standards regarding licensing, fee structures, teacher training and curriculum into existing ECCE policies and guidance documentation towards an approved national policy.
► Sign/ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
► Sign/ratify the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict

SURVIVAL RIGHTS

► Produce and publish annual data on child and maternal health, including mortality, prenatal care, delivery, vaccination and other basic indicators
► Expand coverage of programmes for preventing and controlling child obesity with integral indicators and goals (involving all the relevant ministries)
► Increase access to family planning and sexual health education for in- and out-of-school youth
► Reinforce targeting of men in health initiatives (including men having sex with men in HIV prevention programmes)
► Provide in-service training for health workers geared towards better equipping them to monitor and coach patients with NCDs and to guide and treat the results of workplace and family stress that can result in drug and alcohol abuse
► Assess and replicate the Health Promotion Clinic in Tobago that integrates HIV services with sexual and reproductive health
► Accelerate discussion and action on health-care finance in order to take appropriate action and make the economic case to invest now in the control of NCDs.

DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

► Reinforce and favour outreach to 0–3-year-old children for early stimulation initiatives targeting the most vulnerable through the provision of sustained human and financial resources
► Expand the availability of ECCE services to ensure access for disadvantaged families
► Reinforce routine screening for disabilities and developmental issues to better
understand the magnitude of problems facing children with exceptionalities as well as provide a firm basis for planning and the development of strategies for inclusive education

► Ensure that all teachers routinely upgrade their training on curriculum delivery, classroom management and lesson preparation and provide mandatory refresher courses to ensure teachers are up-to-date on methodologies and materials
► Ensure that schools are environments of ‘healthy connectedness’ by introducing cross-cutting strategies to construct and maintain an environment that will build resilience in at-risk children
► Develop and establish national standards for teachers, school leaders, system managers and inspectors to promote professionalism
► Pursue the need for public-private sector partnerships in education in order to meet the rising costs of education while maintaining the level of investment from the state required to guarantee a high-quality education system.

PROTECTION RIGHTS

► Support ongoing public education and advocacy campaigns to increase the level of awareness about child sexual abuse, creating an inhospitable environment for its continuance
► Continue financial support and political will and embark on expansion initiatives for parenting programmes to reinforce parental ability to protect and safeguard their children, and assess current programmes to determine how best they can be scaled up
► Include child protection modules in health and family life education (HFLE) programmes in schools to help to inform children of their rights, develop a network for child victims and eliminate stigmatization
► Strengthen support and comprehensive counselling services for child victims of abuse
► Enhance in-service training of all service providers to help standardize policy and procedures for handling child abuse cases
► Reinforce the Children’s Authority to enable systematic and reliable data collection, collation and reporting on child abuse
► Enforce mandatory reporting for child sexual abuse.
1. INTRODUCTION

As part of its country programming process, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) assists governments to analyse the situation of children, youth and women. A Situation Analysis (SitAn) of children helps shape national programmes of action for children, UNICEF’s own programmes of assistance and the work of local and external development partners. It not only describes the current situation of children but also identifies and analyses the barriers and bottlenecks that prevent the full realization of their rights related to health, education and child protection. It is part of a process to help ensure that national policies to address the needs of children are on track to achieve the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The last SitAn for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (hereafter T&T) was completed in 2010. That same year SitAns were conducted in the Eastern Caribbean that covered the members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in one document. A new series of SitAns undertaken in 2015–2017 present individual reports for each OECS country, Barbados and T&T. Although UNICEF may have initiated and sponsored the process, this SitAn is the result of cooperation between the Fund and Government of T&T and aims to bring as many stakeholders as possible into the process. It is intended to support the Government, civil society and other stakeholders to better understand the situation of girls and boys in the country, increase national capacity for promoting human development and consequently contribute to the realization of human rights.

The UNICEF SitAn exercise undertaken in T&T takes a close look at vulnerable children at risk of violence and abuse and children whose rights to education and health are not being respected, protected and fulfilled.

### Table 1. Human rights and equity approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rights-based approach</th>
<th>Equity-based approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong>: Application of human rights principles in child survival, growth, development and participation.</td>
<td><strong>Definition</strong>: Application of an equity-focused approach in the realization of child rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect, protect, fulfil.</td>
<td>Poorest, most marginalized, deprived of opportunities, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope</strong>: All children have the right to survive, develop and reach their full potential regardless of gender, race, religious beliefs, income, physical attributes, geographical location or other status.</td>
<td><strong>Scope</strong>: All children have an equal opportunity to survive, develop and reach their full potential without discrimination, bias or favouritism. Focus is on the most marginalized children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guiding principles</strong>: Accountability, universality, indivisibility and participation. Justice is the overriding theme.</td>
<td><strong>Guiding principles</strong>: Equity is distinct from equality. Equality requires all to have the same resources, while equity requires all to have an equal opportunity to access the same resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequities arise when certain population groups are unfairly or unjustly deprived of basic resources that are available to other groups.</td>
<td>Concept of progressive realization of rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violations of child rights arise when their basic rights are not realized as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child’s four principles: non-discrimination; best interest of the child; right to survive, grow and develop; and right to participate/be heard.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of behaviour and values related to the Trinidadian family/community, traditions and culture provides a better understanding of how policy, legislation and supply and demand of services impact on the realization of children’s rights. Conditions that are pervasive in high-income environments – such as social capacity for organization and mobilization and ability to strengthen human capital within the economic and cultural context – are observed in order to assess how they currently affect the well-being of children and women.

In keeping with the UNICEF mandate “to advocate for the protection of children’s rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential”, the SitAn exercise is guided by human rights and equity principles. When applying the rights-based approach, a deliberate focus on equity is fundamental to better understand who are the most marginalized, what makes them vulnerable and why their rights are compromised. Table 1 summarizes the basic features of these two approaches.

At the root of the rights-based approach are the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and other core international, regional and domestic human rights instruments. The measurement of progress against these formal obligations is a central benchmark by which to assess the situation of children and women.

Equity means that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop and reach their full potential, the SitAn exercise is guided by human rights and equity principles. When applying the rights-based approach, a deliberate focus on equity is fundamental to better understand who are the most marginalized, what makes them vulnerable and why their rights are compromised. Table 1 summaries the basic features of these two approaches.

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Equity means that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop and reach their full potential without discrimination, bias or favouritism. This interpretation is consistent with the CRC, which guarantees the fundamental rights of every child regardless of gender, race, religious beliefs, income, physical attributes, geographical location or other status. Inequities generally

**Figure 1: Ten determinants of equity**
arise when certain population groups are unfairly deprived of basic resources that are available to other groups. It is important to emphasize that equity is distinct from equality. Equality requires everyone to have the same resources. Equity requires everyone to have the opportunity to access the same resources. The aim of equity-focused policies is not to eliminate all differences so that everyone has the same level of income, health and education. Rather, the goal is to eliminate the unfair and avoidable circumstances that deprive children of their rights.

**METHODOLOGY**

With a strong equity focus on the most disadvantaged, UNICEF has developed a framework that provides a basis for a holistic analysis of the determinant factors that affect the achievement of child rights as they relate to advocacy, policy analysis and partnership-building in an environment of reduced financing. The framework can also assess the quality of and access to services that are available for women and children.

The SitAn seeks to contribute to the development of programmes, policies and strategies that strive to understand and address the root causes of inequity so that all children, particularly those who suffer the worst deprivations in society, have access to education, health care, protection and other services necessary for their survival, growth and development. The framework of the 10 determinants listed in Figure 1 offers an ‘equity lens’ to examine structural and systemic barriers and bottlenecks to children’s rights that often indicate persistent rights-based failures.

In addition to the combination of approaches described above, this analysis is a result of an extensive desk review including examination of a wide range of national and regional development plans, surveys, studies and reports relevant to children. The list of sources used for quantitative analysis can be found in the box (see the References section for complete citations).
While this documentation was useful in describing the status of children and women in T&T, the quantitative data sources needed to understand trends and change in their status were often not accessible. Problems regarding the availability and accessibility of quality and reliable information about the socio-economic situation of women and children in the sub-region are well acknowledged by governments and development partners.

The absence of data for indicators related to inequality, gender, health outcomes and behaviour, child development, nutrition, social and child protection, unemployment and social determinants of poverty are notably acute. When programmes, plans and strategies are formulated in the absence of sound analysis, it is difficult to appropriately allocate budgets to attain the goals and objectives needed to realize the rights of children.

Lack of information sharing, as a practice, among government departments and civil society organizations and with the public in general continues to be an acute bottleneck to the development of informed opinions on economic and social development in the sub-region. Even where data exist, there is a lack of infrastructure and human resources required for their consistent collection, collation and presentation. The SitAn exercise confirmed that information collection and sharing can be highly centralized, often requiring clearance at Cabinet level before routine sectoral studies, surveys and basic information regarding budget and expenditures can be distributed.

The desk review of information and quantitative data analysis was combined with the voices of children and of a wide range of stakeholders who support children in T&T through key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observation. In view of the limited data available from surveys, studies and standard monitoring tables, this combination of interviews, focus groups and field observations was pivotal in understanding the immediate and long-term impact of current policies and programmes on the lives of women and children in the country.

Over 50 national and global resource documents were researched and reviewed to help formulate a list of questions used to guide the interviews and focus groups and examine specific issues. Thirty-two key informants representing the Government and civil society were asked for their opinions on the status of children: 26 from ministries, four from development partners and two from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). More interviews took place in Tobago (44) than Trinidad (31), and eight interviews were conducted outside Port of Spain in Trinidad. The interviews provided on-the-ground observations and insights from those who experience national level policies and programmes.

The focus group meetings were designed to be informal and took place in the meeting rooms of either ministries or directorates of national programmes and took an average of 1.5 to 2 hours. Each person was given a chance to speak and express her or his opinion, and the discussions were recorded and later transcribed. The goal was to have a detailed discussion among stakeholders and to gain insights into their understanding of issues affecting the achievement of the rights of children from both a duty-bearer and rights-holder perspective.

The fieldwork for the qualitative research took place from 22–29 June 2016 in Trinidad and 20–23 September 2016 in Tobago. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in public places by a trained data collector using a questionnaire prepared for the research. The goal was to identify and define the problem, obtain the thoughts and experiences of the participants and examine how people in both urban and rural settings viewed the problems facing children. It was also expected that participants would give their opinions about the reasons for and solutions to the problems. Although question categories prepared for the quantitative research were the same as for the semi-
structured interviews, participants were encouraged to expand on any topic they wished in the hope that more of the insiders’ experiences would be explored.

Unfortunately, few children were interviewed, and it was not possible to meet with children living with disabilities or those in police cells or prison. Once the field data collection exercise was completed, emails were sent to different government departments to follow up on requests for data and check for accuracy. Notes and recordings were transcribed and checked for errors and clarity.

As a 'stocktaking' exercise, the status and situation of children in T&T emerging from the SitAn process were presented and discussed at exit meetings attended by government, NGO and UNICEF staff. The overarching results were presented and discussed in plenary. The consultation meeting received attention from high-level officials, mid-level technicians and development practitioners from all sectors. Main findings from this report were presented followed by a robust discussion of concrete actions needed to address the issues emerging from the SitAn. The meeting resulted in agreement on short-term and long-term priorities for UNICEF and other key partners to include in programme plans and project designs. This step in the process will go a long way towards encouraging the Government and development partners to consult the SitAn report as a key reference document for programme development when it comes to designing interventions for children in T&T.

LIMITATIONS
i. Because the initial fieldwork was carried out during the summer break, reaching pupils, teachers and principals was very difficult.

ii. Participants in the semi-structured interviews were mostly from the core stakeholder groups, and very few parents were interviewed.

iii. Several fundamental documents that normally serve as the basis for strategic analysis were outdated, incomplete and/or inaccessible – for example, the T&T Survey of Living Conditions (2005), Education of All Progress Reports, among others.

iv. The availability and quality of quantitative information varied widely, and there was a lack of consistency in methodologies for reconciliation processes used to estimate and update data.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT
After this introductory chapter, the report provides a country overview in Chapter 2, including governance structure, legal framework related to children, demographics and the economy.

Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 then assess the situation of children relative to the right to an adequate standard of living; the right to be protected (from sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect); the right to education (early childhood development, primary and secondary); and the right to health (infant and child mortality, HIV and AIDS, chronic diseases and obesity).

Chapter 7 looks at how the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can accelerate progress for children, and finally Chapter 8 offers concluding remarks and general recommendations.

The report aims to establish the extent of progress towards the realization of the rights of children in T&T and determine the shortfalls with the intention of identifying opportunities to accelerate progress for the country’s children.
2. TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
OVERVIEW

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) is comprised of two sister islands situated between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean at the southernmost end of the chain of Caribbean islands. Trinidad is 4,768 km² (1,841 sq mi) in area, comprising 93.0 per cent of the country’s total area. Tobago is 30 km (19 mi) northeast of Trinidad and measures about 298 km² (115 sq mi) in area, or 5.8 per cent of the country’s area.

The country is regarded as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) and faced with some similar disadvantages,³ except T&T is more economically advanced thanks largely to an oil- and gas-based economy and a more diverse workforce. Trinidad is the industrial hub of the two islands, where most of the industries (oil and gas), commerce and other business sectors reside. Tobago, on the other hand, is the tourism hub, attracting the larger proportion of tourists. Other sectors such as manufacturing, fisheries and agriculture, although small, are important to job creation, especially for the most economically vulnerable section of society.

However, a sluggish global market for oil and gas over the last few years sent the economy into a tailspin, and in 2017 the country entered into recession. Prior to the economic downturn, T&T struggled with economic and social disparities among its population and these continue to persist today, exacerbated by the economic challenges. Responses to and progress on social issues have been uneven, prolonging the urban-rural disparities and income inequality articulated in the 2005 poverty study.⁴ These issues remain a pressing long-term challenge. Women and children bear the brunt of the consequences, especially with rising crime rates, domestic violence and abuse.

T&T, along with other islands in the Caribbean, has undergone a period of transformative integration to encourage the region to operate as a single economic space under the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Single Market and Economy (CSME). This has witnessed greater movement of goods and services within the region, but also movement of skilled economic migrants into T&T as well as

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³ “High levels of vulnerability of the natural, economic and social systems of SIDS arise from: (1) their small population size; (2) their remoteness from major markets geographically, giving rise to higher freight and communication costs; (3) their vulnerability to external micro- and macro-economic fluctuations; (4) their narrow resource base, where the reliance on a limited number of natural resources to fuel sustainable development, is prevalent; and (5) their exposure to global environmental challenges such as threats from global climate change (sea level rise, destruction of coral reefs critical to food security, decline in tourism), biodiversity loss, waste pollution, and the acidification of the oceans.” United Nations General Assembly 2010.

⁴ Kairi Consultants Ltd. 2007.
outward migration of citizens of the countries within the region.

As a member of CARICOM, the Government of the T&T benefits from the common standards and services of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (RNM) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), among other important sub-regional entities. Additionally, T&T is an official member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Association of Caribbean States, Organization of American States, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

According to the Central Statistical Office (CSO), the total population in 2016 was 1,360,000. Trinidad accounts for 93 per cent of the country’s total population. There is a bulging youth population (Figure 3). The population in Trinidad is concentrated in the western half of the island, while the largest population in Tobago is in the southern half of the island.

The country is a melting pot as a result of its colonial history. East Indian (35.4 per cent) and African (34.2 per cent) are the largest ethnic groups, followed by smaller groups of various mixed races such as mixed-other 15.3 per cent, mixed-African/East Indian 7.7 per cent, other 1.3 per cent and unspecified 6.2 per cent (2011 est.). The life expectancy on average is 73 years, with males having a lower life expectancy of 69.9 than females at 75.9 years.

**MIGRANT POPULATION**

Migration is a vital element in the history of the Caribbean. There are three primary migration flows: (i) internal migration (e.g., from rural areas to a city); (ii) intra-regional migration (movement among Caribbean islands); and (iii) outward migration (e.g., to Latin America, Europe or North America). Three of the most important factors influencing these flows are socio-economic inequalities (both within the Caribbean and globally), tourism and human trafficking. The
liberalization of trade barriers and the free movement of workers as a consequence of globalization have resulted in both legitimate and illicit migratory flows in the region.

United Nations migration profiles show countries of origins for immigrants include Grenada, Guyana and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.8 Trinidadians emigrate to destinations including Canada, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the United States. The profile of the migrant population in T&T is illustrated in Figure 4.9 According to UNICEF, T&T had a negative net migration of -15 migrants per 1,000 population from 2010–2015, with more people emigrating than during 2005–2010, when the rate was -11.10

**CHILDREN OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS**

T&T is known as one of the largest refugee-receiving countries in the Caribbean. As of May 2017, the UN Refugee Agency (UNCHR) recorded 640 refugees, asylum-seekers and other persons of concern in the country.11 In July 2016, Living Water, a key partner with UNHCR in T&T since 1989, reported a total of 41 children (23 boys and 18 girls) of concern among the refugees and asylum seekers. Their countries of origin included Columbia, Cuba, Mexico, Pakistan, Syria and Venezuela.

The current refugee policy, adopted in 2014, provides protection for refugees and guides processes for obtaining permits, authorizing work and accessing social assistance. However, with an increase in the number of asylum-seekers – up 62 per cent in 2016 compared to 2015 – obtaining work permits can be difficult. Living Water works with UNHCR to conduct refugee protection activities in the areas of education, health, shelter, resettlement and food security. In January 2016, the Immigration Division of the Ministry of National Security established

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8 UNICEF undated.
9 Source of data for figure: CSO, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development 2012 and UNICEF undated, as indicated.
10 UNICEF undated.
a Refugee Office with a view to facilitate registration and monitoring of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Undocumented migrants are often drawn to T&T by the hope of earning good wages in the agricultural and tourism sectors. These can be persons who are smuggled or trafficked across the border, who have been denied asylum or whose migrant status has become irregular for one reason or another. Although the number of children affected by the irregular status of their parents is unknown, there have been discussions regarding the creation of a policy for children of irregular migrants, particularly their status and guardianship if their parents are detained. This is of critical importance as children are not allowed to stay at the detention centre. In the absence of a formal guardianship policy, these children are unofficially placed in the care of relatives or friends of their parents.

POLITICAL AND GOVERNANCE SYSTEM
T&T gained independence from Britain in 1962 and became a Republic within the Commonwealth in 1976. It is a unitary state, with some degree of autonomy for Tobago exercised through the Tobago House of Assembly. The bicameral Parliament consists of two chambers: the 41-member directly elected House of Representatives; and the 31-member Senate nominated by the prime minister, the leader of the opposition and the president, and appointed by the president. The president is elected by an electoral college composed of the bicameral Parliament. With regards to the Tobago House of Assembly, six members are appointed by the majority party and one by the minority party.

T&T has a stable democracy that includes the following main political organizations: the People’s National Movement (PNM); the People’s Partnership (PP), a coalition consisting of the United National Congress (UNC), the Tobago Organization of the People (TOP), the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) and the Congress of the People (COP); and the Movement for Social Justice (MSJ). The most recent election in 2015 was a victory for the PNM.

The current Constitution of T&T, the supreme law of the land, came into force in 1976. The separation of powers is positioned across three branches of government where the legislative power is vested in the Parliament, the executive power is vested in the President and the Cabinet and the judicial power is vested in the courts.

The judiciary is headed by the chief justice, who is appointed by the president after consultation with the prime minister and the leader of the opposition. It is comprised of the Supreme Court (made up of the Court of Appeal and the High Court) and the Magistracy. Further appeals may be taken to the judicial committee of the Privy Council in London for final decision. In recent years there have been attempts to transfer this function to the Caribbean Court of Justice, based in Port of Spain, Trinidad, but this has not come to fruition.

Local government is handled by nine Regional Corporations and the five municipalities of Arima, Chaguanas, Port of Spain, Point Fortin and San Fernando. The various local councils are made up of a mixture of elected and appointed members. The Tobago House of Assembly, established in 1980, exercises certain powers over the island’s finances and other delegated responsibilities for policy, planning and administration in coordination with the executive and legislative branches of government.

As of June 2015, the 24-member Cabinet includes the Attorney General. The Cabinet has overall responsibility for policy formulation and management of the day-to-day-operations of the nation covering the following areas: agriculture, commerce, education, finance, foreign affairs, health and the environment, housing, information, justice, planning and economic development, public works and ports, social
services, human resource development, tourism, trade, and youth, sports and culture.

**LEGAL FRAMEWORK RELATED TO CHILDREN**

The legislative framework for child protection in T&T is grounded in international and regional conventions and universal systems of rules that govern and regulate decision-making, agreements and laws concerning children.

**SOME OF THE INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS ARE:**

- Commitment to child protection through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2015
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified 1990
- The International Labour Organization Minimum Age Convention (C138), ratified 2004, and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (C182), ratified 2003

**ECONOMY**

Known as one of the more prosperous and fastest-growing countries in the region, T&T is the leading Caribbean producer of oil and gas with an economy characterized by its heavy dependence on the production and export of these products since the 1960s. Windfalls from petroleum production in the early 1970s and the 1980s delivered a rise in income, robust investment in infrastructure and overall improvements in living conditions as the country graduated to middle-income status. It moved onto the list of high-income countries in 2011.

With the decline in international oil prices in the mid-1980s, T&T entered a period where the economy saw an average annual decline of 4.2 per cent between 1982 and 1989 and unemployment rates climbed. In 1988, the Government introduced an adjustment programme that focused on improving the fiscal situation through reduction of public expenditures, some degree of tax reform, rescheduling the repayment of debts and other classic approaches to austerity designed to improve the incentive framework. It created a Revenue Stabilization Fund in 2000 to resist the effects of volatile commodity prices with withdrawals and deposits aligned with the ebb and flow of oil and gas revenues. The situation showed timid signs of improvement until the global economic recession of 2008 caused the economy to contract 3.5 per cent.

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12 BBC 2012.
13 IDB 2011

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in 2009 and remain so in 2010.\textsuperscript{14} However, while the economies of neighbouring countries were severely crippled by the global economic downturn, pushing unemployment rates into double digits, T&T managed to stay the course. Poverty was not pervasive and much progress was made toward achievement of the MDGs as T&T experienced significant improvements in the standard of living and expansion of opportunities for the growing middle-class.

In 2016, T&T continues to be considered as one of Caribbean’s wealthiest countries. Energy exports accounted for about 78 per cent of total export earnings as of December 2015, accounting for 45 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) though only 3.6 per cent of employment.\textsuperscript{15} Higher inflation rates were recorded in 2016, up from 3.1 in 2015 to 4.7 in 2016, and unemployment has also been slightly increasing from 3.7 per cent in 2015 to 4 per cent in 2016.\textsuperscript{16} A decline in the number of individuals with jobs, coupled with withdrawals from the labour force, contributed to the rising unemployment rates. Also, retrenchment notices increased by 13.4 per cent for the first six months of 2015. Although the oil and gas sectors have dominated the economy for decades, tourism and financial services represent important contributions to much of the recent non-energy growth, particularly relevant considering the falling price of petroleum products on the international market. Per capita income (Atlas method) was US$17,640 in 2015.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite the financial challenges, the Government’s commitment to the social sector remains unchanged, especially in the areas of health care, education, housing and social services and security. However, with the exception of security, few increases in budgetary allocations occurred across the sectors from 2014–2015.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} CDB 2011.
\textsuperscript{16} Central Bank 2016.
\textsuperscript{17} World Bank 2017.
\textsuperscript{18} Ministry of Finance 2014, 2015.
3. THE RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

Children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. Governments should help families and guardians who cannot afford to provide this, particularly with regard to food, clothing and housing (CRC, article 27).

The lives of children are overwhelmingly more affected than those of adults by the discrimination and marginalization they endure as a result of deprivation and poverty. The shame, abuse, psychological stress, exclusion and stigma they experience diminish their self-esteem, confidence and ability to function socially, often leaving psychological footprints deeply affecting their personal growth and development. When examining the patterns and drivers of the lives of children living in poverty, a rights-based approach grounded in the four core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is imperative: the right to life, survival and development; non-discrimination; consideration of the best interests of the child; and respect for the views of the child. In keeping with the CRC and other key human rights instruments, the framework for poverty analysis should look beyond economic deprivations towards persistent inequalities that are likely to underpin the causes.

The last published Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) in T&T was in 2005 and recorded poverty at 16.7 per cent and the level of indigence at 1.2 per cent, representing a significant decline over the results of the 1997–1998 poverty levels of 24 per cent and 8.3 per cent, respectively.\footnote{19} The report noted that female heads of households were more likely to be poor than male heads of households, with 21.4 per cent of female-headed households being poor compared to 17.1 per cent of their male counterparts.\footnote{20} With the poor among the youth population as much as 28.9 per cent, the analysis suggested that poor households were likely to have higher numbers of youth than non-poor households.\footnote{21} With regards to the geographic area and ethnic distribution of poverty, the data show that eastern and southern sections of the country had higher percentages of poor and indigent populations.\footnote{22} The location of these ‘pockets of poor’ largely corresponds with areas with limited access to pipe-borne water as well as more likelihood of pit latrines versus indoor toilets.\footnote{23} Concerning the ethnic distribution of poverty in T&T, 45.6 per cent of the poor are found in African households and 38.5 per cent in Indian ones.\footnote{24}

A more recent SLC that was completed in 2015 has yet to be published. However, preliminary findings, announced in press coverage, suggest an increase in the poverty rate “from 14.7% to almost 24%.”\footnote{25}

\footnote{19} Kairi Consultants Ltd. 2007.  
\footnote{20} Ibid.  
\footnote{21} Ibid.  
\footnote{22} Ibid.  
\footnote{23} Ibid.  
\footnote{24} Ibid.  
\footnote{25} Clyne 2016
Understanding the distribution of poverty in T&T, a high-income country with a resilient petroleum-based economy and single-digit unemployment rates, is complex. T&T has been placed in the high human development category for several years, with human development indicators (HDI) remaining relatively flat since 2010. The HDI for 2015 is 0.780, positioning the country at 65 out of 188 countries and territories. When the value is discounted for inequality, however, the HDI falls to 0.661, an overall loss of 15.3 per cent due to inequality in the distribution of all other HDI dimension indices.

The 2005 SLC analysis also presents the degree to which the issue of inequality has changed over time, with the Gini coefficient fluctuating between 0.4 in 1957–1958, 0.51 in 1971–1972 and 0.39 in 1997–1998.

**EMPLOYMENT, POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY**

When examining trends and disparities, a focus on the employment-poverty link is essential, and it is important to highlight that labour force participation is largely determined by economic conditions as well as the social and cultural context. T&T, as with most countries in the sub-region, continues to struggle with lingering weaknesses in the financial, labour and housing markets as the repercussions from the 2008 global financial and economic crisis persist (see section on the economy in Chapter 2 for details).

The labour force grew from 618,000 in 2010 to 658,600 in 2014, and women represented 41.4 per cent of the labour force in 2016.

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26 UNDP 2016.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid. The Gini coefficient measures the degree of inequality in the distribution of income in a society on a scale between 0 (everyone is equal) and 1 (all the income is earned by one person).
29 Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago 2015.
Of those employed, 16.3 per cent were engaged in construction and 8.2 per cent in manufacturing; as previously noted, although petroleum and gas accounts for about 45 per cent of GDP, only 3.3 per cent of the active labour force are engaged in this sector.

While World Bank Enterprise Surveys, in general, stress the importance of an adequately trained labour force and high participation rate of women in the workforce as key determinants for private sector business development as well as a generally healthy economy, gender disproportionally affects the likelihood and quality of employment in the Caribbean. More women are unemployed than men and women are more likely to occupy low-paying jobs with low skill requirements and high staff turnover rates.

Many of the employed live in households whose income or consumption levels fall below the poverty level threshold, and they therefore spend considerable time looking for better paying jobs. This group, categorized as the ‘working poor’, is generally clustered in the 25–44 age group, works in the informal sector and is more or less economically depressed, disenfranchised and marginalized. For the poor single-female headed household, the informal economy is an important contributor to survival, as formal sector employment often does not afford flexibility required to care for dependents.

A CDB study released in 2015 identifies an acute unemployment problem for youth (18–24 years), who represent 25 per cent of the population in the Caribbean. The report shows a rate of 25 per cent unemployment among youth compared to 8 per cent among adults, with unemployment among young females (30 per cent) considerably higher than young males (20 per cent). Similarly, as illustrated in Figure 5, the trend over a five-year period in T&T indicates that young women (15–19 years) have consistently higher rates of unemployment than young men of the same age.

A study published in 2010 by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) revisits ideas about the distribution of poverty, asserting that over 60 per cent of the world’s poor are to be found in upper- and high-income countries such as T&T. These countries contain many of the standard characteristics of rural poverty at significant national levels. To understand and properly treat the rural poverty situation requires a focus on different and more indicative factors that go beyond per capita GDP, including the level of economic growth, the fiscal ability of governments to effectively address economic and social development issues using own-generated resources, and the percentage of the population living in rural areas.

Over the course of the 20th century, T&T gradually built up a social protection model with a strong contribution-based pillar (with growing access to health care services and education) in conjunction with a non-contributory pillar directed toward servicing vulnerable families. The country’s high-income status and wealth from the energy revenue created the fiscal flexibility for generous investment in social protection. Government – in partnership with NGOs and international agencies – continues its commitment to delivering equitable and quality social services for sustainable development, particularly to the vulnerable and marginalized.

Poverty clearly constitutes a multidimensional phenomenon that invades all aspects of the lives of individuals, families and communities, as noted in a comprehensive study published in 2001 by the World Bank. When the poor in 23 countries were asked about their views

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30 CDB 2015.
31 Sumner 2010.
on poverty, the voices indicated that it is not simply the absence or lack of specific goods but is a combination of a number of deficiencies coupled with powerlessness that affects their ability to bargain and defend themselves and their families across the spectrum of social, cultural and economic domains. Their responses project a combination of a sense of dependence, insecurity, anxiety, impotence, inability, inferiority and ill treatment.32

Those interviewed for the SitAn gave the clear message that poverty also includes the experience of psychological deprivation and frequent exposure to high risk, vulnerable and borderline situations (living in substandard housing, drug and alcohol abuse, crime and violence). Nearly all agreed that poverty in T&T is “passed on from one generation to another” and that children and adolescents, especially girls, are the most vulnerable.

POVERTY AND THE FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLD
Because women are over-represented in lower income brackets in addition to having higher representation among the population that is economically inactive, they are more affected by poverty than men. As Figure 6 illustrates, 28.8 per cent of the nation’s children aged 0–14 were living with their mother in 2000.33 Poverty is concentrated among households headed by women, which the 2011 census estimated to be 33.6 per cent of all households.34 The 2005 SLC report notes that 37.8 per cent of households in the poorest wealth quintile are headed by women, compared to 62.2 per cent headed by men.35 The report also identifies the following characteristics in the poorest households: higher average household size (5.2 in the poorest quintile compared to 2.2 in the richest and 3.6 overall national average); unemployment rates more than twice the national average; and 13 per cent of the poor households have no income earner present.36

As women generally support larger households than men, they are more at risk of becoming or remaining poor. They carry greater responsibilities for caring for and the maintenance of the family. These poor households tend to have three or more children in addition to one or two extended family members, including other working age adults. The inequalities associated with the negative consequences of the low status of women in society can result in little support from intra-family relationships, largely dominated by males.

These households are also characterized by low levels of education, low school attendance rates among the children living in the household, children fathered by multiple men, inadequate adult guidance and support for children and limited access to basic health care. Most men engaging with female-headed households prefer a ‘visiting relationship’, leaving parenting to the woman. Many poor women living in

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33 UNICEF 2000.
34 CSO, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development 2012.
35 Kiari Consultants Ltd. 2009.
36 Ibid.
this scenario resort to survival strategies that may include illegal activities and/or transactional sex.

Typically, these poor households headed by single women represent prime conditions for inter-generational poverty to take hold, promoting a ‘learned helplessness’ (see Figure 7). Sexual and gender-based violence and drug and alcohol abuse are more likely to occur in these households as opposed to non-poor households with common-law or married couples. Dysfunctional mating patterns and early pregnancies often lead to the girl child repeating the cycle of poverty that trapped the single mother heading the household. A regional study showed that teens who get pregnant had teenage mothers themselves, either lived in homes with no male authority or father figure or tended to live away from their parents and were likely to have had their first sexual experience before the age of 16.\footnote{Maharaj et al. 2009.} The boy child can also get caught in this poverty trap, often dropping out of school to bring more income into the household and potentially falling into gang activity and the drug trade.

Poverty promotes casual or dysfunctional relationships as single women pursue partners who can bring monetary contributions to the household, evolving into ‘revolving door hook-ups’ and transactional sex. As the cycle continues, the female changes partners in pursuit of material and financial gain and the chances of pregnancy increase, adding to the already overwhelming responsibilities of the growing household.

Children in these households are affected by these conditions in different ways depending on their age and sex, with consequences often leading to exposure to vulnerabilities, many of which have far-reaching negative consequences on their growth, development, survival, protection and capacity to express themselves. The perceptions of vulnerabilities facing these

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7}
\caption{Learned helplessness}
\end{figure}
The Situation Analysis of Children in Trinidad and Tobago

Table 2: Children perceived to be vulnerable in T&T

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is perceived to be vulnerable</th>
<th>What makes them vulnerable (risk factors)</th>
<th>How the vulnerability is manifested (outcomes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Particularly vulnerable:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ 37.8% of poor households headed by women. Likely to have 5 or more children by different fathers. Vicious cycle of serial relationships particularly affecting the girl child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children (0–15)</strong></td>
<td>Physical and emotional neglect</td>
<td>Harmful behavioural patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmful consequences of poverty are difficult to reverse in the 0–5 age group.</td>
<td>Abuse/dysfunctional family situation</td>
<td>Slow cognitive development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inadequate income</td>
<td>Poor socialization process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indigence, vulnerability</td>
<td>Malnutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adolescent girls and boys (15–19)</strong></td>
<td>Indigence, poverty and vulnerability</td>
<td>Child pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This group represents a major opportunity for the future of T&amp;T</td>
<td>Emotional and educational underperformance</td>
<td>Girls and boys exposed to sexual abuse, violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dysfunctional and/or violent families and/or communities</td>
<td>Child pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risky behaviours</td>
<td>Boys drop out from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ineffective schools</td>
<td>Engaging in substance abuse, crime, gangs (as perpetrators and victims)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ineffective legislation</td>
<td>Early marriage/parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children in residential care centres</strong></td>
<td>Missing connectedness to family and community</td>
<td>Stigmatization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removal of children from their biological environment is sometimes needed for protection and care.</td>
<td>Ineffective legislation and/or regulation of processes and care centres</td>
<td>School dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low level of awareness</td>
<td>Poor socialization process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children of migrant families</strong></td>
<td>Low social status likely associated with situation of parent in country (low paid, low skills, language barrier, parental absence)</td>
<td>Conflict with the law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children left behind by migrating parents(s): number unknown</td>
<td>Lack of legal status/ appropriate documentation to access social services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separation from extended family and culture, language barrier.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic vulnerability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indigence, poverty and vulnerability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional and educational underperformance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dysfunctional and/or violent families and/or communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children in conflict with the law</strong></td>
<td>Stigma</td>
<td>Recidivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of juvenile arrests</td>
<td>Poor academic performance</td>
<td>Risk of life-long negative effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comparative difficulty for social inclusion</td>
<td>No second chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulty accessing social services</td>
<td>No higher level education due to absence of diversion opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
children as discussed in the interviews and focus group discussions are shown in Table 2.

It should be noted that not all households headed by single females are poor and at the centre of dysfunctional behaviour among young people, but more of such households are poor and – as discussed – there may be a notion of ‘learned helplessness’ that can promote intergenerational poverty. Budding research in the region points to nuanced analysis that drills down on the female-headed household and the union status that would likely contribute to her poverty. A female heading a poor household where the male has migrated, for example, does not present the same outcome as the female-headed household in a ‘visiting’ or ‘revolving door’ relationship. Also, elderly women heading household are less likely to be poor. It is important to make these distinctions when discussing single female-headed households and poverty, particularly in cultures that sometimes prefer visiting relationships and assume there is no welfare gain from marriage.
4. THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement. (CRC, article 19)

As outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), all children under 18 years old should be protected from conditions that violate their rights, expose them to abuse and exploitation, devalue them and draw them prematurely into adult roles. Particularly vulnerable are children deprived of parental care, victims of sexual, physical, emotional abuse and neglect, children in conflict with the law or living with one or more disabilities, and victims of trafficking, exploited for commercial purposes. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include a specific target to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children”.38 Aligned with this target, the international community has renewed its commitment to reform child protection agencies and systems. It is also clear that many of the other targets will not be achieved without addressing the concerns of vulnerable children. Actors and institutions at the individual, interpersonal, community, organizational and policy levels bear the duty of delivering the services, creating the demand and enabling the environment that nurtures the growth and development outcomes essential for the realization of children’s rights.

A robust, dynamic, and comprehensive legal framework is indispensable to enable rights-holders to exercise their rights and duty-bearers to discharge their responsibilities in achieving the ultimate goal of a developmental approach to the care and protection of children. In addition to the CRC and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), T&T has adopted other key international legal instruments aimed at addressing interlinked problems of harmful child labour, trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children for commercial gain (see Chapter 2). In several instances, its efforts have been more progressive than other countries in the region, notably in the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD) in 2015.

Further, national legislation and policies articulate bold targets aligned with the SDGs and strategic regional visions that aim to improve the lives of girls and boys in the areas of education, health, food security

38 United Nations General Assembly 2015, Target 16.2.
The Situation Analysis of Children in Trinidad and Tobago

and social protection. Investing in children is central to the development targets set out in the National Development Strategy (NDS), Vision 2030 under Theme I: Putting People First: Nurturing our greatest asset. The theme acknowledges that the citizens of T&T are central to the development of the nation. It states that “The family will be protected and supported” and includes specific goals that speak to “protecting our children and the elderly”.39 These plans prioritize poverty alleviation and the strengthening of the legal, institutional and social protection frameworks and policies, with particular attention to children and the most vulnerable. They convey the Government’s view of social protection as a basic right for all and one that is translated into policies, programmes and activities that meet the best interests of children, with a focus on those children most at risk, vulnerable and excluded.

The Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (the Authority), set up on 18 May 2015, carries the mandate to provide care, protection and rehabilitation of children in accordance with the powers and functions conferred on it by the Children’s Authority Act, Chapt. 46:10, Part II. Prior to its establishment, services for children in need of care and protection were somewhat fragmented among several different ministries responsible for service delivery.

When the Authority became operational, several important pieces of legislation were proclaimed that provide the working framework and subsequently legalize the allocation of state funds to deliver the package of child protection services. The bold move in FY 2014–2015 to group several pieces of legislation into the new operational framework under the Authority has better positioned the agency to deliver dividends for the protection of children in T&T. This framework is composed of the following:

- The Children’s Authority Act, 2000
- The Children’s Community Residences, Foster Care and Nurseries, 2000
- The Children Act, 2012
- The Adoption of Children Act, 2000

The Family and Children Bill was enacted in July 2016 introducing key amendments to various Acts that helping to modernize the legal framework for juvenile justice.

Statistics on the magnitude of the diverse problems related to children in need of care and protection in T&T are limited. One of the first milestones for the Authority was the release of an important statistical report in early 2016 that presented revealing data for 2015–2016. While the report provides a glimpse at the situation, trend analysis is not possible and these official figures most likely do not reflect the actual scale of the problem. Other results of the first two years of operation include the preparation of a strategic operational plan; the establishment of assessment centres for referrals, training and orientation of staff in the specialized area of child protection; development of policies, procedures and protocols to guide collaborative relationships with other government departments, civil society organizations and others; and, most importantly, the establishment of the Child Protection Unit within the Police Services.

The Authority enjoys continued support from relevant ministries and is vested with the power and responsibility for the overall promotion of and respect for children’s rights through advocacy and intervention on their behalf. Although not directly under The Authority mandate, the following planned projects and programmes will greatly complement the Authority agenda and help to attain the goals and targets outlined in national planning documents include:

- Establishment of the Inter-Disciplinary Child Development Centre (IDCDC)

Development of Social Displacement Centres strategically located on both Trinidad and Tobago

Elaboration of a National Strategy for the Promotion and Protection of Children’s Rights

Establishment of a National Children’s Registry

Carrying out of key research and studies on issues of child protection

Expansion of the database management system for the Authority

Elaboration of a national child policy Strengthening of the National Parenting Programme

SEXUAL, PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Strengthening national protection systems relies on several very important determinants and their complex interaction. An example of this complexity is seen in the high social tolerance for child abuse in some communities. Reports of child abuse examined in the Authority’s One Year Statistical Report reveal that there were 5,801 cases over a one year period from May 2015 to May 2016 (see Figure 8 for monthly report totals). Data indicate that multiple offending occurs within households, with more than one child victim and children often victims of multiple types of abuse. Analysis of reported cases during the one year period reveals that reports of sexual abuse accounted for 24 per cent of all reports, with reports of neglect and physical abuse amounting to 23.5 per cent and 16.2 per cent, respectively.

All administrative districts reported cases of abuse, with 2.6 per cent of the reports received from Tobago, one of three districts reporting under 3 per cent of the total cases. Of the cases reported, 57.7 per cent of the victims were girls and 41.6 per cent were boys. Examining the gender dimension of child abuse reveals that the girl child is more likely to be the victim of sexual abuse (86.8 per cent) whereas both girls and boys are comparably affected by physical abuse, neglect and lacking care and guardianship.
Mothers were identified as the perpetrator of the abuse in 34.5 per cent of the cases reported followed by fathers in 17.1 per cent of the cases.\

An aggressive public education and communications campaign was launched in May 2015 shortly after the Authority became fully operational. A user-friendly web site was established that received over 240,000 visits and over 3 million hits, averaging 20,212 per day between September 2016 and August 2017. Over 12,000 calls received follow-up by the Authority staff. Further, a 24/7 emergency response system was put into operation in mid-August 2017. The Authority’s Emergency Response Team (ERT) attended to 1,150 reports of children in imminent danger over the period of August 2015 – May 2017. The obvious increase in the Authority’s responsiveness to children in need of care and protection is likely to be a reflection of these new initiatives, as it is common for the number of reports to increase with accelerated advocacy efforts. The months of May and August show an increase in reporting which may correspond with the school holidays when perpetrators have more access to children during the school holiday period.

Over the period of twelve months, the Authority completed 2,606 investigations (excluding 1,150 cases tended to by the ERT), 287 full multi-disciplinary assessments and 491 forensic medical examinations. It underwent an intense period of staffing up and training during FY 2014–2015 with the recruitment of 73 new professionals and administrative personnel, bringing the total staff number to 129. The Authority continues to advance an aggressive recruitment and training agenda with a total staff complement of 137 at end of August 2017.

As shown in Figure 9, sexual and physical abuse are the most common forms of reported abuse cases. The universality of child sexual abuse is not in doubt. However,

**Figure 9: Children in need of care and protection, May 2015-February 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% of Reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trafficked</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begging/receiving alms</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortal danger</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond control</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacking care&amp; guardianship</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: the Authority, Statistical Bulletin*

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
many experts agree that rising incidents of sexual violence against women and girls is particularly worrisome, with per capita rates higher than the global average. The body of well-respected research conducted region-wide by the University of Huddersfield and commissioned by UNICEF has helped to deepen the understanding, gravity and complexities of child sexual abuse in the Caribbean.46

Cases of child sexual abuse include both girls and boys who are victims of “sexual penetration” exposed to sexual acts or “sexual touching”.47 The Children Act of 2012 has newly introduced sexual grooming as a crime. Vulnerability to sexual abuse depends in part on the child’s gender and age. Approximately one in five of the total child abuse cases reported between 18 May 2015 and 17 May 2016 fell into the category of child sexual abuse, with the majority of cases involving the girl child.48 While the victims were of all ages, over 559 per cent of cases involved 10–17-year-olds, reflecting the tendency for rates to rise after the onset of puberty (with the highest rates occurring during adolescence). Babies and toddlers (0–3 years old) represented 13 per cent, ages 4–6 made up 13.7 per cent and the 7–9 age group 15.8 per cent.49

While it is nearly impossible to establish statistically the extent to which child abuse affects poor households in T&T, data and analysis from the 2004 SLC provide an informative background and set of circumstances. Of all households considered poor in 1997–1998, an estimated 21.4 per cent were headed by single women compared to 17.1 per cent for males.50 As previously noted, women generally support larger households than men, are more at risk of becoming or remaining poor and carry greater responsibilities for caring for and the maintenance of the family. The inequalities associated with the negative consequences of the low status of women in society can result in little support from intra-family relationships, largely dominated by males. Poor women living in this scenario may resort to survival strategies that include illegal activities and/or transactional sex. Children in these households are greatly at risk of neglect and physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

“Although we are just getting a grip on collecting statistics on child abuse, the numbers don’t lie. It is alarming to see toddlers being sexually abused…we think there are many more cases going unreported, but the help line is making it easier for people to call in and report.”
- Government administrator

The consequences of physical abuse go far beyond the immediate results of morbidity and mortality. The longer-term negative effects can be devastating on mental and reproductive health as well as general socio-economic development, especially for children. It is widely acknowledged that health information systems require strengthening in the Caribbean and that the morbidity and mortality statistics required to fully understand the burden of violent behaviour are not current, do not always meet quality standards and/or are simply not available. Equally problematic are official crime statistics, which are found to underestimate levels of victimization when compared to self-reported data. This

46 Jones 2013. Also see Howe 2012.
47 The terms “raped, buggered, sexually molested”, are no longer used in the 2016 legislation and have been replaced with “sexual penetration. The same legislation replaces “sexual touching” has also replaced the term “inappropriately propositioned for sexual favors”.
48 Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago 2016.
49 Ibid.
is acutely so when looking at statistics on domestic violence and child abuse, for example, as actual incidents tend to be much higher than is reported. However, interrogating these data despite the shortcomings is important to understand the magnitude and scope of the problem. Although there is limited quantitative data available on the subject, increasing awareness of interpersonal violence, violence against children and aggression in the Caribbean is a result of significant qualitative data emerging through studies and surveys and more self-reporting due to effective advocacy and social media campaigns. According to a study on interpersonal violence, injuries accounted for 10–25 per cent of hospital admissions in T&T in 2008.\(^{51}\)

**BIRTH REGISTRATION**

Article 7 of the CRC calls for the registration of a child immediately after birth. Registration is needed to obtain a birth certificate, which is required for access to diverse essential services such as health care and school enrolment.

The Birth and Death Registration Act in T&T stipulates that a child should be registered within three months of birth at the Registrar of Births and Deaths in the district in which the birth took place. Late registration requires an appointment with the Registrar of the Civil Registry. There is no fee for birth registration. Registration of a child born to a mother married to the baby’s father at the time of birth can be done by the mother in the absence of the father. However, if a child is born out of wedlock, the father’s details can only be entered in the register if both parents attend together to register the birth. In this case, it is also possible for the father’s details to be entered at a later date. Birth registration may also be completed by a legal guardian or person present at the birth.

The introduction of an electronic birth registration system in October 2010 is promising in terms of accelerating the process and eliminating common errors made when the forms are completed manually. Moreover, the process – which has been known to take up to a year – can now be completed within seven days.\(^{52}\)

An update on the situation of birth registration in Latin America and the Caribbean published in 2016 highlights that an estimated 15 per cent of children in T&T whose births are recorded have no proof of registration, with little difference for girls and boys.\(^{53}\) Although 90 per cent of mothers of unregistered children know what the registration process requires, the lowest level of birth registration is found among the following age infants:\(^{54}\)

- 0–11 months (estimated at 12 per cent unregistered)
- 12–23 months (estimated at 2.5 per cent unregistered)
- 24–47 months (estimated at 2 per cent unregistered)
- 48–59 months (estimated at 1 per cent unregistered).

**RESIDENTIAL AND FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION**

The birth family of a child is the best possible safe haven when it provides a nurturing environment. However, this environment can become dysfunctional and dangerous for some children due to parental divorce, abandonment by parents/caregivers, all forms of abuse, domestic violence, failure of family support or death of parent/caregiver. When children are deprived of a nurturing environment at home, they may be admitted to residential care. Children rejected by their natural parents feel confused and ashamed and face the stigmatization and discrimination

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51 Le Fran et al. 2008.
52 Webb 2010.
54 Ibid.
that, through no fault of their own, often accompanies their situation.

While it is the court that grants orders from placement, referrals of children in need of care and protection in T&T come from, police, hospital or the parent/caregiver themselves who lack parenting ability and/or capacity. The Authority’s vision is to ensure that every child in need of care and protection is provided with a loving home environment. In doing so, the primary focus is placed on the child’s return to his/her immediate or extended family, where this is possible and in the best interest of the child. This is often facilitated through strengthening families and building capacity within homes. Otherwise, residential care, foster care and adoption are other options pursued.

RESIDENTIAL CARE
The Authority is mandated to license and manage the community residences that serve as temporary homes for children in need of care and protection. A gap analysis that it conducted in 2002 covered 50 community residences in operation serving 850 children at the time.\textsuperscript{55} The analysis raised concerns among the unlicensed homes that were struggling with delivery of quality care, safety and security as well as with management issues affecting staffing, record-keeping, funding and complaint procedures. There was a need for improved staff skills/training to better recognize signs of abuse and for proper food handling. More importantly, the research found that over half of the residences had not satisfied the individual care plan requirement for the children.

By August 2017, the Authority – now in full operation – reported 44 homes across T&T with 660 children in residence (four of these are fully funded by the state).\textsuperscript{56} Critical inspection tools were developed including a report template and a risk-rating matrix, and 28 centres had completed the pre-inspection exercises based on the minimum

\textsuperscript{55} De Souza 2013.
\textsuperscript{56} Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago 2016.
standards for licensing. Initial training was conducted to improve overall management and understanding of the licensing procedure. The Authority was able to ensure routine monitoring visits to the residences and investigate reports of abuse and non-compliance. The need for transitional homes for children approaching 18 years of age and the separation phase is under discussion, with plans to facilitate young people’s reintegration into the community and equip them with life skills.

FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION
The fostering programme in T&T grew out of a pilot effort launched in the mid-1990s and has developed little since then. In 2007, 28 children were in foster care; in 2013, 23 children were in foster care in 13 homes; and in 2015, the Authority reported 25 children in the care of 13 foster providers. Following the transfer of foster care services from the National Family Services Division to the Authority in mid-2015, new foster care providers are being recruited to fulfil the vision of fostering as a short-, medium- and long-term solution for children who are in need of care and protection, waiting for adoption and/or are in need of emergency placement. To this end, the Authority has set up a register of approved foster providers and developed processes, protocols and procedures to guide the foster care unit.

Adoption should only be undertaken as a uniquely child-centred practice and only if it is in accordance with all other rights of the child concerned. Under the Adoption of Children Act, 2000, the Authority was given the responsibility for managing the process of and arranging for adoptions. It then received over 4,000 adoption dossiers from the Adoption Board, which previously had the mandate. As with most countries in the

region, the major challenge is shortening the period of approval for prospective adoptive parents. With few children available for adoption and the preference for babies or toddlers, there is a long waiting list. Also, the process itself can be lengthy. While the Authority received 115 requests for adoption between May 2015 and August 2017, fourteen adoptions were granted and the waiting list totalled 73 approved prospective adoptive parents.

CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW AND JUVENILE JUSTICE
A review of official crime data in T&T covering the period 1990–2013 presents an annual average of 242 murders, 553 woundings and shootings, 4,217 robberies, 5,747 burglaries and break-ins, 247 rapes and 127 kidnappings. The same report notes that although overall criminal activity decreased in 2013, the murder rate increased with 405 murders reported in that year. The report establishes the following salient points regarding crime and youth in T&T:

- Delinquency may start with young children as early as primary school (ages 9–11 years)
- Engagement with delinquent and even illegal activities is occurring at younger and younger ages
- On average boys are more delinquent than girls
- Most acts of delinquency take place within the school setting and are directed at other children
- Fighting is the most common offence, though there is also a high prevalence of sexual victimization
- Only a small percentage (5.7 per

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57 Lim Ah Ken 2007.
58 De Souza 2013.
59 Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago 2015
60 Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago 2017.
61 Seepersad 2016.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid
cent) of children under 17 years were represented in the 102 criminal gangs identified in 2012. Gang populations are almost exclusively male.

According to a review of data from the Crime and Problem Analysis (CAPA) Unit of the Ministry of National Security, presented in an Inter-American Development Bank technical note, legal offences committed by children (11–17-year-olds) constituted less than 5 per cent of all crimes committed during the period 2007–2012, as presented in Table 3.

Rehabilitative and therapeutic approaches to the treatment of juvenile offenders are an important step towards the transformation from a culture of violence to one where children’s rights are fully realized. As a principle, rehabilitation should be emphasized at every step of the juvenile justice system including: the diversion of cases from the system; avoiding discriminatory sentencing and unnecessary remand and detention; and ensuring visitation with family and friends for detained juveniles.

There are three main youth institutions in T&T charged with the ‘rehabilitation’ of youth offenders:

| Table 3: Total number of crimes, and crimes committed by 11–17-year-olds, 2007–2012 |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Murders         | Wounding & shooting | Rape and sexual offences | Kidnapping     | Burglaries      | Robberies       | General larceny | Narcotics offences |
| All crimes (number committed) | 2,648 | 3,877 | 4,588 | 914 | 29,305 | 29,277 | 31,045 | 3,131 |
| Youth crimes (number committed) | 43 | 60 | 140 | 22 | 363 | 553 | 144 | 189 |
| % of crimes committed by youth | 1.6 | 1.5 | 3.1 | 2.4 | 1.2 | 1.9 | 0.5 | 6.0 |

► Youth Training Centre: Operated by the Trinidad and Tobago Prisons Service, the centre caters for young male offenders between the ages of 16 to 18 sent by the Courts either on remand or to await trial. They are also sent to YTC to serve a sentence. During their stay boys receiving a sentence are provided with period of training and rehabilitation.

► St. Michael’s Home for Boys: Boys sent mostly for status offences, behavioural issues, and in few cases for care and protection.

► St. Jude’s Home for Girls: Girls sent mostly for status offences or in need of care and protection.

In 2009, the total population in the three institutions was 486, and 44.5 per cent of the girls and boys in the three institutions were there because of so-called ‘offences’ that are not illegal but are considered unacceptable behaviour for youths.

The qualitative analysis for the SitAn presented a general perception of high crime and anti-social and delinquent behaviour among youth. This perception is greatly influenced by the media and, in turn, is likely to drive the public call

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
for action to reduce crime among youth and subsequently becomes the basis for government strategies in response to youth violence. The focus of such strategies is frequently punishment.

Interviewees attribute the causes of criminal behaviour among children to a complex interaction of risk factors including poor parenting (lack of ‘care and control’), an increasing number of female single-parent households, unemployment, growing drug use (alcohol and cannabis), teenage pregnancy, problems with suspension/expulsion/dropping out from school, child abuse, exposure to violence and general poverty.

Interviews with single mothers working as teachers and government administrators highlighted the difficulties of keeping children safe and on a solid path to productive adulthood. Delinquent behaviour develops among children because of the absence of quality in some aspect of their lives. It is the lack of parental guidance that can make young boys and youth vulnerable, and they often engage in harmful behaviours that result in conflict with the law and juvenile offences.

The legal environment for juvenile justice includes a variety of robust acts that serve as cornerstones for the system including the Family and Children Bill 2016. In 2013, the Ministry of Justice developed a Draft Youth Justice Policy that seeks to introduce new legislation in a proposed Youth Justice Act. This legislation is designed to specifically address children and young persons in conflict with the law with a view to divert youths away from institutional settings when non-criminal acts have been committed.

As is the case in other Caribbean nations, the process of reform designed to bring forward a more child rights-focused administration of justice for children has been slow. Model child justice bills and standard strategies have been widely introduced that can be contextualized to national realities. These actions have gone a long way towards harmonization of the judicial process for children accused of committing offences, including reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system. The Juvenile Court Project in T&T is on the cutting edge of this progress in the region.

**CHILD LABOUR**

The term ‘working children’ covers diverse productive activities – some invisible, others more apparent. In most Caribbean cultures, children historically perform simple tasks at home, on a family farm or for a family business. In addition to having the child’s help, some families consider this as training for future economic activities. On the other hand, child labour implies more strenuous or sometimes exploitative work often involving risks to the child’s physical well-being and intellectual, spiritual, moral and social development. Child labour squanders a nation’s human capital.

In T&T, child labour is not widespread. A US Department of Labor report notes that 5,975 children between ages 5–14 (3 per cent) were working in 2014.66 There is limited data on the categories and causes of child labour, but it is assumed that most working children are found in the informal sector and in agriculture. Attention to the issue is growing, including an impressive video frequently aired on local TV in 2015. In addition to the video and other media campaigns to end child labour, modules have been included in the health and family life education (HFLE) programme in schools. The Government hired/trained 14 labour inspectors, and there were 704 inspections on the job in 2014 with no investigations resulting.

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

According to the Palermo Protocol (2000), child trafficking is “the recruitment,
transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation". UNICEF stresses that this is “a violation of their rights, their well-being and denies them the opportunity to reach their full potential”. Proving force, fraud or coercion is not necessary for the offence to be characterized as human trafficking. There are no exceptions to this rule: no cultural or socio-economic rationalizations alter the fact that children who are exploited in prostitution are trafficking victims.

For two consecutive years T&T has been classified on the Tier 2 Watch List by the annual Trafficking in Persons Report. Although it has never been classified as a Tier 3 country (the most serious on the 1–3 scale), it continues to be a destination, transit and source country for adult and child victims of sex trafficking and forced labour. In regard to child sex trafficking occurs, 35 cases were investigated in 2015, four of which were confirmed and prosecution was initiated for one. NGOs in the country have noted the presence of classified ads that call attention to the availability of children for commercial sex. Young women and girls from Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guyana and Venezuela are lured into prostitution in brothels and clubs having come to the country expecting legitimate employment.

Although T&T does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, there are signs of progress. Funding was increased in 2015 and 2016 for the Counter Trafficking Unit, which underwent a change in leadership and has developed collaborative relationships with NGOs. Although funding was decreased in 2016 and 2017, he Unit has been reinforced with four new staff, bringing the total human resources to 10 law enforcement and two immigration officers. While no-one has been convicted under anti-trafficking laws, the recent revisions to The Children Act (2012) prescribe penalties of 10 years to life imprisonment as well as fines for sex trafficking and forced labour.

**EARLY MARRIAGE**

It is widely recognized that empowering women and girls delivers dividends in terms of accelerating progress towards all goals and objectives throughout the national development agenda. In addition to violating a basic human right, early marriage impinges on a series of other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle drivers of early marriage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Poverty and economic pressure</td>
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<td>2. Lack of social protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>(personal safety of girls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Weak implementation of civil</td>
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<tr>
<td>registration system</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Contradiction between cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or traditional laws and civil</td>
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<tr>
<td>legislation</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Inequitable/rigid gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>and cultural norms, and power</td>
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<tr>
<td>imbalances between sexes</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Limited adolescent access to</td>
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<tr>
<td>quality social services</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Perceived low value attached to</td>
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<tr>
<td>the girl child</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Dowry price determined by</td>
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<tr>
<td>age of bride: the older the bride,</td>
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<tr>
<td>the higher the dowry</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Fears of influence of ‘Western</td>
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<tr>
<td>values’ on girls ‘purity’</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Lack of confidence and</td>
</tr>
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<td>knowledge for adolescents</td>
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<tr>
<td>to influence decisions that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affect pathways to a productive future.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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68 UNICEF 2011.
69 United States Department of Labor 2014.
70 United States Department of Labor 2016.
71 There are several international agreements that establish (i) the definition of a child and (ii) child marriage as a union in which one or both parties are under the age of consent, including the CRC, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and CEDAW, among others.
The Situation Analysis of Children in Trinidad and Tobago

The harmful practice of child marriage transcends all geographic, cultural, religious, economic and social frontiers. Some of the drivers are listed in the box. While boys are also married as children, girls are disproportionately affected and more likely to spend their lifetime recovering from the harmful limitations resulting from being married before adulthood (at the age of 18 as defined in the CRC). When examining the reasons and damaging consequences of child marriage, cultural and inequitable gender and social norms persist as the root causes. In many cultures, customary practice defines adulthood as the onset of puberty.

Parents can be uncomfortable with the shifting balance of power as girls move through puberty into adolescence. They fear girls will establish their own sexual relationships and wish to avoid the stigma attached to young girls seeking knowledge and information regarding sexual and reproductive health (SRH), birth control, etc. For this reason, they exercise the child marriage option in order to maintain family honour and community respect.

In T&T, the types of marriages of minors that took place during 2006–2016 were civil unions (117), Hindu unions (328) and Muslim unions (103). The ages of girls married before their 18th birthday during that same period are presented in Table 4. According to the 2011 Census, 1.8 per cent of girls aged 15–19 were married and 3.6 per cent were living in common law unions.

The different legal and cultural frameworks that provide for marriage of children under the age of 18 are as follows:

- The Hindu Marriage Act, Chapter 45.03 – a girl may marry at age 14 and a boy at 18
- The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, Chapter 45.02 – a girl may marry at age 12 and a boy at age 16

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**Table 4: Underage marriages, 2006–2016**

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<tbody>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>175</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>548</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
► The Orisa Marriage Act, Chapter 45.04 – a girl may marry at age 16 and a boy at age 18
► The Marriage Act, Chapter 45.01, which governs Christian and civil marriages – consent can be obtained for marriages of minors (under the age of 18)

Under the leadership of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, the Government launched a discussion with civil society and development partners on the issue of early marriage in June 2016. Heated debates on the issue took place, with the Inter-Religious Organization suggesting that the country’s marriage laws should not be amended. In January 2017, however, the Attorney General publicly announced a bill to harmonize the marriage laws and raise the legal minimum age of marriage to 18 years for girls and boys, without exception. By 18 January 2017, this bill had passed through the Senate, and it is before Parliament for debate at the time of writing.\(^7^5\)

\(^7^5\) Global Voices 2017.
5. THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

“Children’s education should develop each child’s personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. It should encourage children to respect human rights and their own and other cultures. It should also help them learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people. Children have a particular responsibility to respect the rights of their parents, and education should aim to develop respect for the values and culture of their parents” (CRC, article 29).

Education is guaranteed by the T&T Constitution, which recognizes that it constitutes both a right and a responsibility of all citizens: “there have existed and shall continue to exist without discrimination by reason of race, origin, colour, religion or sex, the following fundamental human rights and freedoms, namely ... the right of a parent or guardian to provide a school of his own choice for the education of his child or ward”. The National Development Strategy has set an agenda for education that calls for a “modern, relevant education and training system” that is inclusive and accessible, including meeting the requirements of special needs students and children with learning disabilities.

Education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing childhood poverty and inequality and consequently features prominently in international child rights conventions. No nation has achieved sustained economic development without considerable investment in human capital, including education at all levels: early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and technical and vocational education and training (TVET). All people regardless of sex, age, race, ethnicity, migrant status and ability/disability have a right to life-long learning opportunities that equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to seize opportunities and fully participate in society. Education empowers the vulnerable, shapes a capable workforce and has a major influence on a country’s standard of living.

The cornerstones for the Government’s approach to education are the CARICOM description of the Ideal Caribbean Person (adopted by Heads of State in 1997) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Pillars of Education (1996). Further, the approach is consistent with key regional frameworks designed to guide educational development and standards in the sub-region, including:

- Towards Regional Policy on Gender Equality and Social Justice, approved in The Bahamas in 1995
- Education for All in the Caribbean: A Plan of Action for 2000–2015
- The Regional Framework for Action on Children 2012–2015
- The Montego Bay Declaration on TVET, March 2012.

The Education Act, chap. 39:01 stipulates that education is compulsory from the ages of 6–12, although this was subsequently increased to ages 6–16, and is free of charge in the public system from pre-primary to tertiary level. All school children in uniform can travel by public transport free of charge, and university students are issued with passes. However public transport

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76 The Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, chap 1, part 1:4e.
77 Ministry of Planning and Development 2017.
outside of the of Port-of Spain, urban areas may not always be reliable.

With a literacy rate of 98.2 per cent in 2006,\textsuperscript{79} including a high rate among the 15–24 age group, and universal primary and secondary education, the children of T&T continue to access one of the better education systems in the Caribbean. This high literacy rate reflects strong participation in primary and secondary school. Additionally, it speaks to the effectiveness of the school system to prepare students with adequate reading and writing skills that promote lifelong learning opportunities.

When the oil windfalls arrived in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Government had the foresight to restructure the education system. The period of 1993–2006 also brought important improvements to the education sector, including greater access at both the primary and secondary levels, with new primary and secondary schools constructed and refurbished and comprehensive training of all teachers at both levels. This period of growth and modernization focused on expansion of the number of schools for greater and more inclusive access; change and reform at the Ministry of Education (MOE) to strengthen institutional support of service delivery; and the involvement of the community to encourage active participation of parents and caregivers. The two strategic plans for education (1993–2003 and 2002–2006) that guided this critical period of modernization espoused the notion of a 'seamless approach' with a view that all children should be prepared to advance to each new level fully equipped to succeed.\textsuperscript{80} These plans were guided by the regional Plan of Action for 2000–2015 and the national Vision 2020. Universal access was achieved in the 1960s for primary school and in 2000 for secondary school education.

Largely influenced by a strategic assessment of the Ministry in 2010, the Education Sector Strategic Plan: 2011–2015 builds on the achievements of the expected results outlined in the previous two plans for the sector. The attainment of universal quality education and of universal access to early childhood care and education (ECCE) came to the forefront of the overall goals for the sector. The following actions are prioritized: (i) amending the current Act to address gaps for basic education including clear definitions of the role of the MOE with regard to denomination boards; (ii) developing a basic education governance act that would provide a governance framework for all levels of basic education from ECCE to secondary and emphasize community participation; (iii) developing legislation to make pre-primary education a prerequisite for entering primary school; (iv) producing regulations that would strengthen the recruitment and training of all teachers and establish a system of standards for certification and licensing; (v) establishing a framework to guide and institutionalize a comprehensive and sustainable programme for modernization of public primary and secondary schools; and (vi) developing a set of minimum standards for government recognition of private schools operating in the basic education system.

Public expenditure on education has been robustly maintained since the annual budgetary allocation to the MOE went from 9.5 per cent in 2000 to 13.5 per cent in 2004.\textsuperscript{81} A 2011 country report noted an average government investment of 13.4 per cent per year for distribution across all the sub-sectors.\textsuperscript{82} Forty per cent of this went to primary education. The Strategic Plan 2011–2015 projected gradual budget increases over its five-year existence, mainly in the personnel category. This – combined with the declining school age population – is

\textsuperscript{78} Ministry of Education, 2002.
\textsuperscript{79} Ministry of Social Development, CSO and UNICEF 2008.
\textsuperscript{80} Ministry of Education 1993, 2002.
\textsuperscript{81} Ministry of Education 2004.
\textsuperscript{82} CDB 2011.
perhaps an indicator that the shift from access expansion towards building an enabling legal environment and improving the quality of education will not necessarily require heavier investment.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

Failure to invest in early childhood education (ECE) means that children in the 0–5 age group are robbed of their potential for optimal development in the physical, cognitive, linguistic and socio-emotional areas. It is widely acknowledged that the skills developed in early childhood represent the foundation for future learning, skill building and labour market success. Investments in quality early childhood development (ECD) strategies are a basic step towards enhancing the long-term potential for a healthy and well-educated workforce with the knowledge and skills needed for productive and fulfilling work and full participation in society. Children completing pre-primary learn how to work with others, understand patience and negotiation and develop other skills that are the basis for life-long learning opportunities and social interaction in the school years and beyond.

The associations between poverty and physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development in children at an early age have been shown by a body of international research. This research notes that young children living in poverty and in other vulnerable situations are: (i) apt to perform poorly in primary and secondary school, (ii) prone to repetition and (iii) inclined to leave school prematurely. Inclusive pre-primary education provides children in poor communities with equality of opportunity for realizing their right to education and the potential to perform to the best of their ability. Reaching adolescent and young adult stages in life without achieving the basic skills offered by primary and secondary school is likely to produce adults with fewer opportunities for becoming highly productive citizens who attain adequate income status. They are more likely to become parents prematurely, with undeveloped parenting skills that eventually contribute to the intergenerational transmission of poverty. In addition to children living in poor communities, children of asylum seekers and migrants and children living with disabilities are equally vulnerable.

Notable in the region is the dominant role in the initiation of ECD programming of NGOs and development partners (UNICEF, Bernard van Leer Foundation and religious denominations). The Caribbean Policy Brief prepared for the 2010 UNESCO World Conference on ECCE noted that the involvement of non-government entities may have been one reason for resultant weaknesses such as limited systemic linkages to health services that could promote developmental monitoring and early intervention; a missed opportunity to focus on early stimulation; and development of services geared towards providing working mothers with custodial care.

T&T is firmly committed to achieving universal access to early education. The goal to transform ECCE has figured prominently in sector strategy documents and other national plans since 1993. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) conducted in 2000 and 2006 shows a slight increase of 5 percentage points in the number of children attending ECCE. The 2006 MICS reveals an important disparity in that 65 per cent of children from the poorest households are attending ECCE compared to 87 per cent from the richest (see Figure 10). In mid-2000, the Government set

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83 See Engel and Black 2008, for example.
84 Ibid.
85 Charles 2012.
out to construct 600 centres across T&T with a view to expand access, particularly into disadvantaged communities identified by the 2005 SLC. However, the ECCE programme offering two years of centre-based programmes for children from 3–4 years old is not compulsory.

In general, access to ECCE is managed by the MOE for 3–4-year-olds and the Authority for the 0–3 cohort. The MOE delivers ECCE service through the following models:

- Government-assisted centres that are generally either state run or government partnerships with NGOs or denominational groups. The partnership operations receive funding from the Government.
- SERVOL centres, which receive funding from the Government but are supervised by SERVOL staff.
- Private centres owned and/or managed by entrepreneurs or institutions. Most do not receive financial support from the Government.

Although no comprehensive ECCE policy has been approved and proclaimed, the following achievements are pertinent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. ECCE (3–4-year-olds) situation at a glance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrolment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2002–2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>27,655</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>29,685</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>33,118</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of ECCE centres</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>963</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of teachers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>414 (auxiliary staff not included)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not available</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>2,203 (includes auxiliary staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education 2008</td>
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<td>Ministry of Education 2016</td>
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88 Ministry of Education 2008.
► National ECCE curriculum guide (drafted in 2006) grounded in a child-centred approach
► Standards for Regulating ECCE Services (2005)
► Provision of screening for disabilities through the Ministry of Health
► 80 ECCE centres equipped with wheelchair ramps and toilet facilities designed for ease of access for children living with disabilities.

On the other hand, without an ECCE policy and legal framework to enforce compliance, the curriculum guide has been described as like a “toothless dog”.89 Analysis conducted in 2005 examined 998 ECCE centres and found a number of different types of curriculum in practice: (i) 401 centres used the MOE guideline; (ii) 147 used the Montessori model; (iii) 270 used the SERVOL model; and (iv) 180 used others.90 Most ECCE centres in Tobago used the MOE or SERVOL guidelines (of the 51 centres in operation, only two used the Montessori and eight used others). The MOE staff for the ECCE Division totalled 16 in 2016 with five field officers responsible for the districts.

As mentioned above, the legislation making provision for the Authority’s role in the monitoring, licensing and regulating of nurseries caring for children 0–3 years old has yet to be proclaimed. Although there has been no official declaration of the Government’s intent to mandate the Authority to act in the management of nurseries, they continue to carry out this role. By end-2016, instruments for processes and procedures had been drafted and the Authority had contacted 1,042 nurseries to begin the inventory of service providers and assessment of operational status.91 Building a strong, routine regulatory function (covering licensing, spatial and physical condition standards and requirements) can be a challenge since an estimated 98 per cent of the nursery and day-care facilities are privately owned. For example, the Authority is not always notified of the opening and closure of facilities.

Given the value of early stimulation of children 0–3 years of age, the number of children in this age group who do not access services and the lack of a standard curriculum for nurseries, regional practices can provide inspiration for T&T as the Government turns its attention to this education sub-sector. Offers of support have been expressed by the IDB, CDB, UNICEF and other international partners in a bid to improve the infrastructure, supervision of private providers, teacher training, harmonization of a child-centred curricula and development of a comprehensive strategy for ensuring that ECCE goals and targets are met.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

In 2004, there were 548 government, government-assisted and private primary schools serving 133,692 children.92 The number of schools decreased in 2011 by one. By the 2013–2014 academic year, 126,000 pupils were attending primary schools.93 The number of secondary schools totalled 199 in 200894 and 163 in 2011.95 Secondary schools had 96,000 students enrolled in 2016.96 The first five years at secondary school are compulsory for students leading to completion of their

89 As characterized by interviewee No. 24.
90 Ronalie Thornhill 2014.
91 Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago 2015.
95 Ministry of Education 2012.
96 Ministry of Finance 2016.
Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC). At that point, students may opt to stay on and work towards the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Certificate.

The Strategic Plan for the education sector noted that the state owns and operates 37 per cent of the schools in the primary and secondary level, excluding the 12 schools for children with special needs. Privately owned schools and those controlled by church/denominational boards represent 63 per cent.97 Of these, approximately 51 per cent are owned by religious denominations, are referred to as ‘government-assisted schools’, receive financial aid from the Government and are jointly administered by the MOE and their denominational boards.

The transition rate from primary to secondary level was 90 per cent in 2011;98 despite the attainment of universal access at both levels maintained over nearly two decades, T&T continues to struggle with issues of efficiency at the secondary level. The participation rate in 2011 at secondary level was cited as less than 80 per cent in the CDB Strategy Paper for T&T.99 Since then, the Government has doubled down on efforts to improve the quality and relevance of education and the learning environment at both levels, with promising results indicated on student performance. This was described as “outstanding” in the Social Sector Investment Programme (SSIP) 2016, with 80 per cent of the students scoring above 60 per cent on the Secondary Entrance Exam (SEA) and 54 per cent of the candidates sitting for the CSEC obtaining passing grades in five or more subjects including math and English A.100 The progress is impressive considering the growing problem with male deviance in the secondary school system that, according to emerging data, undermines academic achievement and could be a major contributing factor to rising crime rates.101

T&T practices equity strategies that target assistance and social safety net programmes to needy students in school system. The National Schools Dietary Services provides free meals for pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. In 2013–2014, 64,422 breakfasts and 96,448 lunches were distributed. Textbook rental and loan programme distributed over 203,000 books to children in the school system, including learning materials designed for special education centres. The school health programme, free to children under the age of 14, completed 12,231 screening/tests for hearing impairment and 10,721 vision exams. There is support for children in need of uniforms. Before- and after-school care programmes are available at some schools.102

Nonetheless, inequalities begin very early, with the children at greatest disadvantage falling behind at the very start of their schooling experience. Prospects of children entering, progressing and completing primary education are directly linked to their household and community situations. The more positive the school experience, the more easily children can develop ‘healthy connectedness’ in other areas (see Figure 11). The degree of healthy connectedness children experience with parents, families, communities, church and the learning environment can determine a successful start and completion of primary education. The more children experience healthy connectedness across all these areas, the more they are able to foster values such as mutual respect, responsibility and service within the community so as to access every opportunity to value themselves and to experience well-being.

97 Ministry of Education 2012.
98 Ibid.
99 CDB 2011.
100 Ministry of Finance 2016.
101 See, for example, Seepersad 2016.
102 Ministry of Finance 2016.
Children living with high levels of poverty and/or dysfunctional home environments are at greatest risk of experiencing psychological, social and developmental barriers during their primary years. Pupils coming from these environments are the most likely to have poor attendance rates due to transportation difficulties, for example. They perform poorly because of improper nutrition, attention deficit disorders and inability to concentrate. They are more likely to come from single-parent households where adult supervision, guidance and support is limited or absent. Most teaching staff are not sufficiently trained or experienced to address such issues with these children being left behind.

**CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

The 2011 Census report identified 3,302 children living with disabilities, representing 1 per cent of the child population and 6.3 per cent of people with disabilities in T&T. The country ratified the CRPD on 25 June 2011. The MOE has expressed its commitment to providing quality education to those with various impairments by providing much of the necessary human and physical resources, including the operation of 10 public special education schools and support for 20 private schools in 2003. Routine screening services take place for children from ECCE to the age of 14, including assessments, recommendations and in some cases assistance in accessing treatment. Over 2,300 children with disabilities received such assistance in 2014.
The question of sufficient teaching and learning resources and materials to meet the demands of existing centres and provide for the expansion of services should be examined. A major challenge facing the Government is funding the appropriately skilled human and financial resources it takes to improve positive outcomes for the most vulnerable young children and to determine the most cost-effective strategies and efficient means required to redress these disparities. The Government’s contribution to ECCE centres is extremely important to ensure equity in the delivery of services. In order to institutionalize these services, a basis for standards regarding licensing, fee structures, teacher training and curriculum needs to be integrated into the existing policies and guidance documentation towards an approved national policy.
6. THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

Children have the right to live. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily (CRC, article 6). Children have the right to good quality health care – the best health care possible – to safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help them stay healthy (CRC, article 24).

Mothers should have appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care (CRC, article 24).

Because of progressive improvements in health planning, delivery and public education systems, children in T&T have better chances than ever to reach adulthood. The country provides one of the highest standards of free health care (including pre-natal care) in the Caribbean. Citizens can access free health care at public health-care facilities. Since 2005, Trinidadians have had access to free prescription drugs and other pharmaceutical items for treatment of many chronic conditions through the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme.

In addition to three general hospitals, T&T’s public health system includes two district hospitals and four specialist hospitals. Health care through privately owned services is available at all levels of service. In 2009, T&T reported a health workforce that included 1,543 (11.7/10,000) physicians and 4,677 (35.5/10,000) nursing and midwifery personnel, with a 1:3 ratio of doctors to nurses and midwifery personnel. As of 2011, the country has 49 pharmaceutical personnel per 100,000 people. Regarding mental health services, T&T has one psychiatric hospital (74.4 beds per 100,000 people). The responsibility for the provision of health services to the population rests with five Regional Health Authorities (RHA). Each RHA is populated with at least one hospital and several of the nation’s 100 + polyclinics and health centres.

Standard health indicators provide an impressive snapshot of the health situation in the country. In 2008, communicable diseases coupled with maternal, perinatal and nutritional conditions accounted for an estimated 12 per cent of all mortality. The country is noted for its excellent, well-organized Expanded Programme of Immunization, with nearly 100 per cent coverage rates. The official declaration of the elimination of measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome was achieved in July 2015. Over 95 per cent of women attend antenatal clinic at least once during their pregnancy and are attended by skilled health professionals at delivery.

106 Commonwealth Health Online undated.
107 Yearwood 2012.
108 Commonwealth Health Online undated.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
Whilst the infant mortality rate (IMR) and under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) have consistently declined since the 1990s and are hopeful, as illustrated in Figure 12, more effort is required to build on the MDG achievements and ensure children live to pursue healthy lives and well-being as adults. The three most common causes of death for children under 5 years in 2010 included congenital anomalies (24 per cent), prematurity (16 per cent) and birth asphyxia (12 per cent) followed by pneumonia (7 per cent), injuries (6 per cent) and neonatal sepsis and HIV/AIDS (both 3 per cent).

**HIV AND AIDS**

The social-cultural environment contains both protective and risk factors that could influence levels of SRH issues including prevalence of HIV and AIDS. Protective factors that come together to limit risks include strong adherence to religious values, close parental monitoring and a sense of social cohesion and cultural identity. Risk factors are associated with some categories of tourists and others passing through the country, early marriage, child sexual abuse and participation in transactional or commercial sex. Available data on the sexual behaviour of women aged 15–24 raises concerns, with approximately 68 per cent who had sex in the last 12 months reporting sex with a non-regular partner during that period. Of those women, only half (51.2 per cent) claimed that they used a condom when they had their last sexual encounter with the high-risk partner.

In 2012, the prevalence of HIV in T&T, as a percentage of population aged 15-49 years, stood at 1.6 per cent. HIV prevalence has continued to rise since 1990, although the rate of growth decreased in the period 2000–2012. Between 2005 and 2014, there was a 27 per cent decline in new HIV infections, an 80 per cent decline in AIDS cases and an almost 70 per cent decline in AIDS-related deaths, with AIDS no longer one of the top 10 causes of mortality. In 2014, 1,050 new HIV infections were recorded, a decline of 9 per cent over the 2010 figure. The majority of new infections (64 per cent) were among the 15–49 age group. Generally, cases among youth have declined but a ‘feminization’ of HIV has been observed, with more new cases.
The prevalence of HIV among men having sex with men is estimated at 27.7 per cent. Figure 13 provides an overview of trends in new HIV infections.\textsuperscript{112}

T&T is on track to eliminate mother-to-child transmission (MTCT). For five consecutive years (from 2010), the rate of MTCT was 2 per cent or lower, treatment coverage rose from 81 per cent in 2010 to 85 per cent in 2014 and testing among prenatal attendees was up 50 per cent.\textsuperscript{113} However, 162 of the women attending antenatal care in 2014 tested positive for HIV compared to 144 in 2009 (although rates were higher in the intervening years) (see Table 6).\textsuperscript{114}

Despite testing sites being expanded in 2014, additional treatment sites are needed along with multi-disciplinary treatment and care teams. Two good practices are notable in the country: (i) a residential centre for children living with HIV and AIDS (Cyril Ross

Figure 13: Trends in new HIV infections by sex and year of diagnosis, 1983–2014

Table 6: Anti-natal care attendees who tested positive for HIV, 2009–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of antenatal care attendees who were tested for HIV</td>
<td>12,325</td>
<td>12,744</td>
<td>13,910</td>
<td>14,949</td>
<td>13,467</td>
<td>19,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of antenatal attendees who tested positive for HIV</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HACU Annual Programme Reports

\textsuperscript{112} NSU and HACU reports
\textsuperscript{113} HIV Secretariat 2016.
\textsuperscript{114} Ministry of Health, NSU and HACU reports, 2015
The national life skills curriculum includes gender relations and human sexuality and sexual health modules and is taught in forms 4 and 5 of secondary school as part of the HFLE curriculum. The degree to which LGBT human rights issues are included is uncertain because of the prevailing conservative Christian and Muslim cultures. Moreover, with Roman Catholics the largest denomination in the country (21 per cent of the population), teaching of SRH is likely to cover the minimum of information and perhaps exclude contraceptives.\textsuperscript{115} The fight to stamp out HIV and AIDS must include access to family planning and sexual health education for in- and out-of-school youth. As it stands, adolescents require parental approval to access medical services including SRH information services. Laws and policies should be clear in protecting confidential SRH information for adolescents, and an effort should be made to ensure user-friendly access including for adolescents who are new parents.

**CHRONIC DISEASES AND OBESITY**

The functioning health system described at the beginning of this chapter is one largely designed to meet the demands of the struggle to combat malnutrition and preventable infectious diseases. However, there is a rapid dietary and epidemiological transition taking place where chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have replaced malnutrition and infectious diseases as major health issues. This requires a very different approach for public health-care systems to meet the new supply, demands and quality standards.

### Table 7: Risk factors for NCDs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioural risks*</th>
<th>Biological risks (18+)**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heavy episodic drinking</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient physical activity</td>
<td>41.5% (adolescents 11-17 years: 81.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarette use</td>
<td>21.1% (15+ years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco use</td>
<td>18.4% (youth 13-15 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Higher risk factors among males than females, except insufficient physical activity

**Prevalence higher among women than men, except hypertension

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\textsuperscript{115}CSO, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development 2012.
According to the 2012 County Report from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), chronic NCDs accounted for 77 per cent of deaths among 30–69-year-olds in T&T in 2009. Of these, 65 per cent were caused by four NCDs: cardiovascular diseases, malignant neoplasms, diabetes mellitus and respiratory diseases. Currently one in eight individuals in the country is diabetic and one in four has hypertension. Risk factors for NCDs are shown in Table 7.

The public health system is struggling to maintain relevance for optimal performance in an environment where control of chronic NCDs requires: (i) a different lot of equipment (lab set-ups and x-ray tools) for investigation and diagnosis using delicate imaging instruments, at both the central and sub-national levels; (ii) a change in outreach strategies including rigorous efforts to equip health personnel with skills to monitor and communicate for behavioural change; and (iii) a higher quality of human resources prepared to handle patients dependent on drugs and alcohol as a result of stressful home and work environments. Additionally, unlike the fight against infectious diseases, efforts to reduce the incidence of NCDs will not produce immediate results but requires long and sustained input to register significant change.

Existing research on the nutritional situation of school children in T&T (including BMI surveys) reveals that there was a 400 per cent increase in obesity rates for this age group from 1999 to 2009. The growing concern about childhood obesity among ages 5–18 years has prompted the Government to design and launch targeted initiatives. For example, Fight-the-Fat camps were organized in 2014 for children 7–12 years old.

T&T is prioritizing efforts to treat, prevent and control NCDs through:

- Revised guidelines on healthy and nutritious foods in schools for canteen operators
- A Childhood Obesity Plan

Figure 14: Making the economic case to invest now to reduce NCDs

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116 Commonwealth Health Online undated.
117 PAHO undated.
118 Doon 2016.
The Situation Analysis of Children in Trinidad and Tobago

A National Non-Communicable Diseases Commission
An Inter-Ministerial Committee, established in 2015, to enhance cooperation and collaboration across sectors
Close collaborative relationships with civil society organizations for prevention and control activities
An increase in initiatives that target men
Advocacy programmes that promote a family approach to eating healthy and staying active.

At the end of 2013, average life expectancy at birth was 70 years. While the factors driving health-care costs are complex, the rising prevalence of chronic NCDs is one of the main drivers along with the occurrence of new and re-emerging communicable diseases. Also, Trinidadians are accustomed to a well performing health-care system, with the expectation for services to be free or low cost yet equal to those in large industrialized countries. This is currently challenging the Government as it embarks on discussions about health-care financing, particularly at a moment when fiscal space is decreasing and health-care costs are rapidly rising. Investing now will save millions of dollars in the future, as outlined in Figure 14. The bid to change behaviours and attitudes regarding the production and consumption of nutritious foods is challenged by the need for resolved political will, sustained resources and considerable time.

ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY

Although there are signs of decreasing numbers of teenage pregnancies, the problem continues to be a focus for T&T: 2,324 girls aged 13–19 became new mothers in 2013 (the highest number over an eight-year period), 1,972 in 2014 and 2,168 in 2015, the lowest since 2006. In 2015, there were 297 pregnancies among girls aged 13–16 and 10 among girls under 10 years old, while 1,861 pregnancies were recorded among 17–19-year-olds. The number of teenage pregnancy reported in primary and secondary schools between 2012 and 2016 totalled 139, increasing from 12 in 2012 to 30 in 2016, and 11 of them were primary school students.

The adolescent fertility rate stood at 40.8 in 2012 compared to 18.7 among similar countries ranked in the very high HDI category. The total number of abortions recorded across the country was 227 in 2013, 198 in 2014 and 98 in 2015.

In some Caribbean nations, legislation allows for pregnant teens to continue to attend school as long as possible. While there is no such legislation in T&T, girls do exercise the option to return to school after giving birth (although usually a different school). Those who opt not to return due to the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy and/or the burden of young motherhood but who desire to complete their secondary education are able to enrol in courses that allow them to attain their certificate of completion and sit for exams. The fees associated with these courses are often a major bottleneck, however, as teenage mothers struggle to gain employment and independence.

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121 AGLA 2016.
122 Data submitted by Student Support Services Division, MOE to the Joint Select Committee (JSC) a special function of Parliament, 2017.
123 UNFPA 2015.
124 AGLA 2016.
7. THE SDGS AND A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN

While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set the international development framework for action until 2015, United Nations Member States had agreed at the Rio +20 Conference to create a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to coordinate development efforts post-2015. The SDGs represent a new framework for global development that was officially adopted at the SDG Summit in September 2015. The process of developing the SDGs was not limited to the United Nations; it involved vast participation from different stakeholders from civil society, private enterprises and citizens around the world. There are 17 Goals (see Table 8) and 169 targets. They are action-oriented, global in nature and universally applicable. Indicators to measurable progress on outcomes have also been adopted.

The Caribbean Joint Statement on Gender Equality and the Post 2015 and SIDS Agenda called on the SDGs to consider the social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities of SIDS, and the resulting challenges for sustainable, human rights-based and gender-responsive development. The Statement highlighted the situation of girls and boys in its focus on freedom from violence, accessing capabilities, economic empowerment and leadership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well being for all ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Children, youth and future generations are referenced as central to the SDGs, which aim "to provide children and youth with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities, helping our countries to reap the demographic dividend including through safe schools and cohesive communities and families". Children are directly related to 12 of the goals and indirectly to the other five. The SDGs include targets on reducing inequality, ending violence against children and combating child poverty – capturing critical issues for children and expanding on the MDGs. Many of the other targets also call for addressing the concerns of vulnerable children.

Actors and institutions at the individual, interpersonal, community, organizational and policy levels bear the duty of delivering the services, creating the demand and enabling the environment that nurture the growth and development outcomes essential for the realization of children’s rights.

In addition, the SDGs call for a “data revolution”. All targets must be measurable to ensure equitable results for all children. In addition, disaggregated data will be essential for monitoring equity gaps, strengthening social accountability and ensuring that the gaps between the most and least advantaged groups are narrowing. Data should also be disaggregated by all grounds of discrimination prohibited by international human rights law, including by sex, age, race, ethnicity, income, location, disability and other grounds relevant to specific countries and contexts (e.g., caste, minority groups, indigenous peoples, and migrant or displacement status). The global framework of goals, targets and expected indicators for 2016–2030 have significantly expanded compared to the MDG era and will place higher demands on data collection.

Adequate resources and increased capacities will be critical to generating quality disaggregated data for SDGs monitoring. This will be particularly challenging for T&T and other islands in the Caribbean, given their resource and capacity constraints. However, part of the responsibility arising from T&T’s signing in support of the SDGs is a commitment to regularly reporting on its progress. Moreover, the SDGs contain a commitment to provide support to SIDS to strengthen the capacity of national statistical offices and data systems as well as a target to significantly increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable disaggregated data in SIDS by 2020.
8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Situation Analysis (SitAn) has identified areas in which action is needed in order to ensure that the rights of all girls and boys in T&T are realized. These general observations and recommendations are being made with the acknowledgement that a proper, equity-based analysis of the situation of children depends on the availability of disaggregated data covering different aspects that might influence their lives, including – but not limited to – gender, age and socio-economic status. While the Government produces some documentation that was useful in describing the status of children and women, the quantitative data sources needed to understand trends and change in their status were often not accessible. Equally important is the limited number of interviews the exercise was able to complete and the fact that very few children were available for interviews and focus group discussions.

In line with the government review of the progress and achievements of the MDGs, the following actions are suggested for incorporation into a future set of goals and targets aligned with the SDGs and national strategy and planning documents to address the unfinished development agenda.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The legislative framework for child protection in T&T is grounded in international and regional conventions. However, there are cornerstone pieces of legislation and policies that remain in draft form or have not been proclaimed. Adoption and enforcement of these should be accelerated for operationalization. It is recommended that the Government:

i. Prohibit the use of corporal punishment of children in all settings, including the home, and abolish sentences of whipping and life imprisonment for juveniles

ii. Improve court capacity to process cases, especially for juvenile offenders


iv. Complete, adopt and implement the Youth Justice Act

v. Standardize the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both girls and boys to eliminate marriages between children

vi. Establish/reinforce a children’s ombudsperson

vii. Modernize legislation reform policy to support the new directions in early childhood care and education (ECCE) to ensure accountability and compliance

viii. Integrate standards regarding licensing, fee structures, teacher training and curriculum into existing ECCE policies and guidance documentation towards an approved national policy.

ix. Sign/ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

x. Sign/ratify the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

xi. Sign/ratify the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict


SURVIVAL RIGHTS

T&T has become firmly placed in the class of high-income countries. In general,
Trinidadians are accustomed to a well-performing health-care system. Nearly 100 per cent of women have a skilled birth attendant at delivery, vaccination coverage is 98.7 per cent, mother-to-child-transmission of HIV is on track to be eliminated and the infant and under-5 mortality rates are steadily declining. However, the rise in chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and child obesity calls for new approaches and service delivery in health-care systems designed to combat the behavioural and biological risks. In this context, the following actions are recommended:

i. Produce and publish annual data on child and maternal health, including mortality, prenatal care, delivery, vaccination and other basic indicators

ii. Expand coverage of programmes for preventing and controlling child obesity with integral indicators and goals (involving all the relevant ministries)

iii. Increase access to family planning and sexual health education for in- and out-of-school youth

iv. Reinforce targeting of men in health initiatives (including men having sex with men in HIV prevention programmes)

v. Provide in-service training for health workers geared towards better equipping them to monitor and coach patients with NCDs and to guide and treat the results of workplace and family stress that can result in drug and alcohol abuse

vi. Assess and replicate the Health Promotion Clinic in Tobago that integrates HIV services with sexual and reproductive health

vii. Accelerate discussion and action on health-care finance in order to take appropriate action and make the economic case to invest now in the control of NCDs.

DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

T&T has maintained its coverage of universal primary and secondary education with very high participation levels for more than a decade. The country is approaching universal access at the pre-primary level as well. Gender parity is recorded at all levels. With respect to the future vision to ensure that all citizens, at every stage of their learning journey from early years to adulthood, are able to reach their full potential and be successful in life, at work and in society, the following recommendations are made:

i. Reinforce and favour outreach to 0–3-year-old children for early stimulation initiatives targeting the most vulnerable through the provision of sustained human and financial resources

ii. Expand the availability of ECCE services to ensure access for disadvantaged families

iii. Reinforce routine screening for disabilities and developmental issues to better understand the magnitude of problems facing children with exceptionalities as well as provide a firm basis for planning and the development of strategies for inclusive education

iv. Ensure that all teachers routinely upgrade their training on curriculum delivery, classroom management and lesson preparation and provide mandatory refresher courses to ensure teachers are up-to-date on methodologies and materials

v. Ensure that schools are environments of ‘healthy connectedness’ by introducing cross-cutting strategies to construct and maintain an environment that will build resilience in at-risk children

vi. Develop and establish national standards for teachers, school leaders, system managers and inspectors to promote professionalism

vii. Pursue the need for public-private sector partnerships in education in order to meet the rising costs of education while maintaining the level of investment from the state required to guarantee a high-quality education system.
PROTECTION RIGHTS

Care and protection of children is a moral imperative for the Government and all members of society. Much has been accomplished to change a culture of silence on sexual, physical and emotional abuse of children in T&T, as evidenced by the increased numbers of cases reported. Children sometimes need to be removed from their family for protection and care. Residential care services, such as the community homes operated by the Children’s Authority, offer an option until children can be reunited with their biological families, placed in foster care or adopted. However, this option can be strengthened to minimize the negative consequences of the experience on children and families. Once a child comes in conflict with the law, it should not mean punishment, stigma and limited opportunity for a second chance in life. In order to capitalize on the gains made thus far, further investments and sustained effort are needed in the following areas:

I. Support ongoing public education and advocacy campaigns to increase the level of awareness about child sexual abuse, creating an inhospitable environment for its continuance

II. Continue financial support and political will and embark on expansion initiatives for parenting programmes to reinforce parental ability to protect and safeguard their children, and assess current programmes to determine how best they can be scaled up

III. Include child protection modules in health and family life education (HFLE) programmes in schools to help to inform children of their rights, develop a network for child victims and eliminate stigmatization

IV. Strengthen support and comprehensive counselling services for child victims of abuse

V. Enhance in-service training of all service providers to help standardize policy and procedures for handling child abuse cases

VI. Reinforce the Children’s Authority to enable systematic and reliable data collection, collation and reporting on child abuse

VII. Enforce mandatory reporting for child sexual abuse.

THE SDGS AND THE FUTURE

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were officially adopted in September 2015, represent a new framework for global development (see Chapter 7). The aim is to create a global movement to continue the work begun with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as advance towards new commitments. Nations should therefore start framing their development plans and policies for the next years based on this globally agreed development agenda. For T&T, that means some strategic changes in terms of producing and using data. Information systems that collate, manage and generate information should be easily accessible and shared across different agencies and with partners to produce evidence-based decisions and a national research agenda that fills the notable gaps in the existing body of knowledge.

Priority should be given to promoting child-centred initiatives and to sustaining recent gains in the areas of education (particularly ECCE), health and protection. Also important is establishing a mix of social partnerships with local councils, civil society organizations, research institutions and the private sector. Leadership must be willing and capable of reaching agreements with key actors in order to define bureaucracies that eliminate top-down approaches and achieve development paradigms featuring a dynamic and broad base that is constructive, inclusive and optimally engaged. For civil society organizations to flourish, they need support to improve their technical capacity and access to a wide variety of information and to government officials.
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