

Bolivia, Plurinational State of

Update on the context and situation of children

The Plurinational State of Bolivia —a lower-middle-income country with great ethnic and cultural diversity represented by 37 indigenous groups— has come far in improving the well-being of its 11.6 million children, adolescents and adults (projected population for 2020). In the last decade, the country made significant progress to reduce poverty, resulting in 663,000 fewer poor people in 2019 than in 2011. Despite these advances, persistent social disparities between urban and rural areas continue to blight the prospects of many poor and vulnerable families. The extreme poverty gap between rural and urban areas, for example, reached 21.4 percentage points (p.p.) in 2019.

Bolivia has been in the grips of a political and social crisis since the last quarter of 2019, which together with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, plunged the country into a deep economic recession that threatens to reverse the socio-economic gains of recent years in the short term. The collapse of global trade and the lower prices of Bolivia's main exports, such as natural gas and minerals, have made the recession the country's worst in 66 years, causing GDP to decline by 11% (June 2020). This comes on top of a low GDP growth of 2.2% (INE 2020) in 2019, the lowest observed since 2001 (growth has been below 4% since 2010).

The transitional government applied a policy of unconditional cash transfers to mitigate the loss of family income as a result of the supply and demand shocks caused by the lockdown measures implemented to slow the spread of COVID-19. Moreover, according to INE (2019) and Fundación Aru (2020), an estimated 47% of household-income depends on non-salaried work (74% in the case of households in extreme poverty). These figures illustrate the population's vulnerability to shocks, and the precariousness of the Bolivian labour market, according to INE, 8.6% of unemployment by November 2020.

Despite the provision of cash transfers, Fundación ARU estimates that between 8–20% additional households will fall into poverty. A household survey carried out with the support of the UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO) shows that 1 in 10 households reported having no sources of income after the start of the national lockdown, and that formal work as the main source of income decreased from 55% to 42%.

Bolivian children may have been largely spared from the direct health effects of COVID-19 but the crisis is having a profound impact on their well-being. Among the most severe impacts has been schools closing since 31 July, leaving 2.9 million girls and boys without access to public education and school-based feeding that boosts child nutrition. Children also miss out on other important school-based programming covering vaccination, deworming, mental health and sexual and reproductive health.

The pandemic made the digital divide visible, which undermines learning opportunities for the most vulnerable children. Unlike urban areas, in rural areas and especially in indigenous communities, internet access is unavailable, making it difficult to provide virtual educational services.

The proportion of food-insecure households that have one meal a day went from 8% to 34% after the start of lockdown, according to the household survey carried out by LACRO. This same survey identifies access to food (54%) and to employment and livelihood opportunities (41%) as the main priorities for families.

As children and adolescents have had to stay at home during lockdown, they have been exposed to

situations that are not always safe. As of 6 December 2020, 28,155 cases of violence against girls, boys, adolescents and women were reported by the prosecutor's office. Of all cases of violence, those against women and girls are the most common. Moreover, it is likely cases of violence have been underreported, due to the reduced capacity of service providers. According to UNICEF data (2020), services for reporting violence, such as Defenders for Children and Adolescents, worked at 20% capacity for several months due to the lack of protective personal equipment (PPE) and staff infected with COVID-19. In addition, the UNICEF-supported call centre, Familia Segura (Safe Family), reported that most calls (91%) were related to family violence against girls, boys, adolescents and women.

The pandemic has overwhelmed the public health care system, exposing its weakness in providing quality services to the Bolivian population. Despite efforts by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and UNICEF to sustain immunization coverage, between January and September 2020, there was a 17% reduction in vaccination of children under 1 year old in comparison with the same period in 2019 (20% less in the case of children aged 12–23 months). Antenatal visits and facility-based deliveries declined by 30% and 17%, respectively.

In addition, 2.4 million hectares were affected by wildfires in the Chiquitania region during 2020 complicating the coordination of COVID-19 humanitarian response.

The COVID-19 crisis has most likely aggravated the problem of child labour in Bolivia, which before the pandemic affected 739,000 children, of whom 395,000 were girls and 344,000 boys (INE 2016). Children and adolescents have likely entered the labour market during school closures to help their families survive. A joint study by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the International Labor Organization (2020) estimates a possible increase in child labour in Latin America and the Caribbean of around 1 p.p. at 3 p.p. In absolute terms, this would represent, in Bolivia, between 31,000 and 92,000 additional children and adolescents pushed into child labour.

The transitional government, which took office in November 2019, initially called elections for 3 May 2020, but these were postponed to 18 October because of the pandemic. Luis Arce (Movimiento al Socialismo) was confirmed as outright presidential election winner, with 55.1% of the votes. The new government in Bolivia opened a space to rethink development challenges and solutions in the context of the new national planning cycle for 2021-2025, involving all stakeholders and guided by the Sustainable Development Goals and the call of the UNICEF Strategic Plan to leave no child behind. The hope is that this will generate an opportunity for an innovative work agenda within the framework of a new social pact.

Major contributions and drivers of results

In the third year of UNICEF Bolivia's Country Programme, contributions focused on positioning child and adolescent rights on the public agenda. UNICEF also consolidated intersectoral models for promoting child and adolescent development, preventing and responding to violence, and increasing access to quality and friendly services. Furthermore, UNICEF adapted programming to respond to the COVID-19 emergency and to better align with new national priorities, while protecting development gains from earlier years.

Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives

UNICEF programme contributions continued to prioritize implementing early childhood development (ECD) models in selected municipalities (El Alto-Independencia) with a focus on policy development and future scale-up in other municipalities. UNICEF also improved access to integrated quality

services, prioritizing strategies to promote positive child-rearing practices, nurturing care, and violence prevention.

The containment measures linked to COVID-19 included disruption of the provision of essential services. Accordingly, UNICEF helped ensure the capacity to implement blended or remote modalities for ECD service continuity across the country. UNICEF partnered with the Ministry of Education to train 21,738 early childhood teachers (90% of teachers at this education level nationwide), which will benefit 200,000 students. UNICEF also worked with the MoH to train 850 technical health experts on Child Development Surveillance Standards in all departments, enabling these standards to be met on an ongoing basis in all health facilities and furthering adequate child development.

UNICEF directly supported El Alto and Independencia municipalities in ECD service delivery, using in-person and remote modalities. This model initiative reached 12,227 children under 5, including indigenous children (100% of the targets set for 2019 in Independencia and 90% in El Alto). UNICEF also provided technical assistance to both municipalities to update their ECD plans for strengthening service delivery in the context of COVID-19, and to guarantee inclusion of ECD in the new municipal planning cycle for 2021-2025.

Additionally, the MoH and UNICEF accredited 15 new health facilities reaching 264 “Mother and Baby-Friendly” establishments nationwide; which benefited 11,830 pregnant women with counselling on breastfeeding and newborn care.

UNICEF partnered with the Expanded Programme on Immunization and the Micronutrient Programme to sustain implementation during confinement and to restore interrupted services. These actions guaranteed that 180,936 children under 1 year old, received the pentavalent vaccine, ensuring a national coverage of 80%. Despite efforts to sustain the national coverage of micronutrients, rates declined compared to 2019: 619,219 (51%) children aged 6-59 months received vitamin A in 2020 and 712,876 (63%) in 2019. Likewise, in 2020, 320,838 (24%) children under 5 received iron compared to 517,616 (39%) in 2019.

To respond to the double-burden of malnutrition, UNICEF supported a national study on overweight (22%) and obesity (13%) prevalence in schoolchildren. As a result of advocacy efforts based on these findings, the government declared the epidemic of overweight and obesity a national priority.

Likewise, UNICEF and the National Statistics Office revised the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) by adding an ECD module for the first time, which will provide holistic nationwide data, enabling evidence-based decision-making and public policy design.

Moreover, according to the objectives set out in the Country Programme Document (CPD) and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), and to preserve the progress made during the last 3 years, UNICEF continued strengthening national capacities to provide comprehensive and culturally adapted services for 45,660 adolescents. UNICEF provided supplies in priority municipalities and trained 1,479 health professionals nationwide on adolescent pregnancy, violence prevention, sexually transmitted infections, HIV and lifeskills.

UNICEF and the MoH worked to ensure continuity of essential care and services for women, children and adolescents during the COVID-19 outbreak. UNICEF delivered 124 tons of biosafety supplies and PPE to 295 health facilities (100%) in 14 prioritized municipalities, provided staff training, protocol development and service monitoring, which facilitated maintenance of routine essential services for 366,300 people (12% children under five years old).

UNICEF also provided supplies (medical equipment, PCR and rapid tests for COVID-19 diagnosis), and staff training to 10 maternity hospitals, and 59 prioritized health facilities. These efforts helped ensure service continuity for 805 pregnant women with COVID-19 and their newborns, and 10,665 pregnant women received skilled and safe-care during childbirth.

The political crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic jeopardized the approval of the ECD National Law, currently under review by the Legislative Assembly’s Committee on Gender Rights. UNICEF will continue advocating with the newly elected authorities to achieve this long-awaited breakthrough.

Goal Area 2: Every child learns

Bolivia has taken unparalleled steps to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the closure of schools that disrupted 2.9 million schoolchildren’s education. Consequently, UNICEF Bolivia’s regular education workplan was abruptly brought to a halt, and efforts were redeployed to

respond to this unprecedented situation.

Most government efforts to resume learning were focused on virtual education. As such, UNICEF partnered with TIGO, Bolivia's second largest mobile carrier, and the Ministry of Education to provide 42,784 teachers (63% female) with the skills to deliver online education for 522,827 students (49% female) from pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. Within this framework, UNICEF mainstreamed content of the regular programme on prevention of violence and peaceful coexistence into the trainings, having a much larger teacher outreach on such a crucial topic. Furthermore, UNICEF and TIGO also implemented the 'School of Influencers: Digital Citizens' providing digital and transferable skills to 306 adolescents (222 female) aged 14-19 from 9 cities.

Despite these efforts, it was clear that the online modality would not reach the entire student population, due to the digital gap and inadequate digital skills among many teachers and students. Thus, to reach the most vulnerable and isolated children, UNICEF supported radio-education for 6,196 primary students (50% female) from Guarani, Guarayo and Chiquitano indigenous communities. Additionally, UNICEF developed guides for parents, which helped 72,096 children and adolescents (35,327 female) continue their education at home.

UNICEF in partnership with the Plurinational Observatory of Education Quality supported a study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of teachers on the use of virtual tools. The findings informed the National Pedagogical Meeting for planning and decision-making regarding the 2021 school year, along with the development of safe-return to school protocols.

Despite the challenging year, UNICEF and its partners showed great adaptability when promoting social participation in education, continuing the CPD activities for promoting children's and adolescents' skills development, and participation in school management. This resulted in 266 new Socio-Communitarian Education Councils and 180 new student governments. Moreover, 485 students benefitted from a virtual leadership course aimed at transforming gender roles and developing positive masculinities.

UNICEF also strengthened youth networks outside of school and empowered 1,034 adolescents (59% female) from target municipalities. These adolescents were trained on personal empowerment, leadership and peaceful conflict resolution, and on sexual and reproductive health and rights. These capabilities will also benefit communities where the adolescents live, especially in the context of the new pandemic-related challenges.

Finally, UNICEF Bolivia supported 'Soy Única, Soy TIC', a joint programme between UNICEF and the government's information and communication technologies agency, aimed at developing basic and intermediate digital skills for 127 adolescent girls (16-18 years) during 2020, and reaching a cumulative of 757 nationwide since 2019. The programme is bridging the gender gap by providing adolescent girls with skills to participate in a more equitable way in a society that is increasingly digitized.

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

UNICEF Bolivia works to prevent and respond to violence against children (VAC) by strengthening the child protection system through the development of legislation, carrying out capacity building initiatives, and designing specialized tools and protocols that establish procedures for diverse child protection services. As a result of the pandemic lock down, child protection services weakened, leaving children and adolescents exposed to the consequences of violence, neglect and confinement. UNICEF adapted its interventions to support protection services to continue responding to children and their families (466,451 children in 5 departments), with an emphasis on girls and women, populations at higher risk of gender-based violence (GBV). Interventions included technical assistance, hygiene supplies, PPE and online training for 13,226 frontline workers to enhance their capacity to tackle VAC/GBV under the COVID-19 restrictions.

The health emergency worsened the situation of vulnerable families (Venezuelan migrants, families in street situations and children at risk of separation or abandonment/institutionalization), who are mostly engaged in informal work with high-risk levels of contracting COVID-19 and job insecurity.

Therefore, UNICEF adapted regular programme interventions to continue supporting these vulnerable children and families through psychosocial and legal support and provided in-kind support to 1,030 families, benefitting 2,690 children (1,335 girls and 1,355 boys), and cash transfers to 369 families (91

girls and 499 boys).

In collaboration with 3 departmental governments, UNICEF provided technical support, PPE and hygiene supplies to 114 care homes and 7 remedial homes, benefiting 4,155 children and adolescents; and facilitating family reintegration of 360 children. Additionally, UNICEF supported continuity of judiciary processes for adolescents in conflict with the law, which reunited 106 adolescents with their families.

To address the risk of increased child violence and GBV during quarantine, UNICEF reached 107,000 people through a transmedia campaign in Spanish, Quechua and Aymara. The campaign focused on positive masculinities and equitable gender roles, while providing adults and children with self-care and stress management advice. UNICEF also joined forces with UN Women, UNFPA, MoH and the Special Police Force Against Violence to organize 3 webinars addressing mental health and violence prevention, reaching 15,000 people.

Lastly, UNICEF set up the 'Safe Family' helpline in April, receiving 24,513 calls (12,845 from children and adolescents) by the end of November. Almost 90% of calls were related to child and adolescent problems; 62% were made by women and girls; and 48% were related to incidents of violence. All cases of violence were referred to municipal protection services.

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

Despite the challenges of working in the context of social conflict and COVID-19 restrictions, UNICEF made important progress in regular programme activities while responding to emergencies caused by the pandemic, forest fires and droughts.

At the policy level, UNICEF helped develop user-friendly tools for implementing the National Strategy for Open Defecation Elimination in Rural Areas, with pilot testing kicked off in Independencia municipality. The pilot results will be used to inform future scale-up of interventions to end high open defecation in rural areas (44%).

In urban areas, UNICEF supported the implementation of a decentralized urban sanitation model, which provided 50 family sanitation modules to the most vulnerable families in Montero and directly benefited 250 children and adolescents. In addition, 4 studies were conducted in partnership with UAGRM-University to determine the quality of fertilizers made of human waste. Furthermore, UNICEF and Stockholm International Water Institute organized a WASH Bottleneck Analysis Tool Workshop, in Montero and Santa Cruz, resulting in action plans and signed municipal declarations for its implementation, which include a climate-resilience focus.

UNICEF helped prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in vulnerable communities and mitigate the impact of fires and droughts in Chiquitanía. The technical assistance and supplies distribution for sanitation utilities, municipal governments and health centers included PPE, hygiene kits, water tanks, washing stations, and communication activities on life-saving hygiene practices reached the total people in need (108.200 people, 48.690 children) from the most vulnerable communities in 5 departments.

In the UN system response framework to COVID-19, UNICEF and other agencies coordinated efforts for the economic reactivation and resilience of indigenous communities in the wildfire-affected Chiquitanía region. BCO's intervention strategies included WASH actions to address the post-fires environmental and COVID-19 crisis with a climate resilience approach.

UNICEF, in collaboration with organizations of children and young people, and through technical assistance provided to the Ministry of Planning (MoP) and the Plurinational Authority of the Mother Earth, ensured the inclusion of a child approach in the national policy (National Determined Contributions) on climate change. This process will also contribute to include a climate-resilience approach in the governmental planning process for the 2021-2025 cycle. Moreover, placed the country's youth-movement in international spaces linked to climate governance.

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

UNICEF, within the framework of the regular programme, continued providing technical assistance to the MoP, developing 10 tools aimed at guaranteeing the inclusion of children in the next planning cycle (2021-2025) of municipal and departmental governments.

As a cornerstone in the electoral advocacy efforts, UNICEF launched a new document entitled 'Six Priorities for Children in Bolivia'. UNICEF also organized meetings with the main presidential

candidates to share an analysis on the challenges facing children in Bolivia. These advocacy efforts guided the adoption of priorities for children in the public agenda.

In response to COVID-19, UNICEF set a research agenda aimed at contributing to policy dialogue on the impacts of the emergency crisis on children and adolescents and providing guidance to the government on how to tackle these impacts. The first study developed with a think-tank (ARU), was on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and contributed to the government's analysis of social measures used to compensate for the loss of household income. Other studies on child poverty, VAC, education and child labour were due for completion by year end.

In addition, the COVID-19 crisis opened a path for UNICEF to open discussions about the country's social protection system. UNICEF developed studies and tools to inform the redesign of the social protection system and enhance its responsiveness to children in emergencies.

In the U-Report's second year in Bolivia, 4,679 adolescents and young people participated in 14 surveys carried out on topics such as COVID-19, feelings during quarantine, violence at home, access to virtual education and nutrition during the pandemic. The results were analysed and used by UNICEF teams in their programmatic work and have been widely disseminated in mass media for advocacy purposes.

Programme Effectiveness

Despite COVID-19 setbacks and limitations, UNICEF continued driving results for children by fostering partnerships and consolidating risk communication and community engagement, ensuring that messages and materials were developed in indigenous languages. Moreover, UNICEF strengthened data-collection for decision-making, increased mitigation control measures and built up capacities to operate in the context of emergencies, including updating the risk analysis in the new Emergency-Preparedness-Platform.

UNICEF Bolivia raised US\$9.1M this year for programme implementation during the 2020-2022 period, surpassing the fundraising goal of US\$4.7M for 2020. This amount includes US\$3.2M for the emergency response. UNICEF also allocated US\$1.3M of other regular resources (ORR) to the COVID-19 response, which is included in reported ORR implementation (US\$6.5M).

The exponential growth of UNICEF Bolivia's social networks, including engagement with celebrities and influencers, helped UNICEF reach broad audiences with COVID-19 prevention messages and raise awareness about VAC/GBV and other issues that affect families. For example, 1.2M people were reached with life-saving and mental-health enhancing messages by the 'UNICEF at Home' webinars during lockdown, and the first-ever telethon 'Time to Act', provided unprecedented fundraising results (US\$165K) and visibility for UNICEF's COVID-19 response.

Finally, within the framework of the pandemic, UNICEF implemented two activities related to Accountability to Affected Populations and Humanitarian Performance Monitoring and made plans to incorporate these processes into interventions in 2021.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

For the third year, UNICEF contributed to achieving the results envisaged in the UNDAF 2018-2022. UNICEF leads the UN thematic groups, Inclusive Social Development Towards Human Development Group, the Monitoring and Evaluation Group and the Interagency Adolescent and Youth Group. UNICEF co-leads the Interculturality, Decolonization and Dismantling Patriarchy Group. The UNICEF Humanitarian Country Team activated its coordination mechanisms this year in collaboration with the government and participated in the National Emergency Operational Committee, including the thematic coordination roundtables. UNICEF leads the roundtables for education and WASH and co-leads the health and nutrition and protection roundtables. UNICEF also coordinates the Group of Partners for Bolivia's Development health and education platforms. These platforms, composed of bilateral, multilateral and intergovernmental organizations, contributed to strengthening coordination and response to the pandemic. Likewise, UNICEF helped elaborate the UN Socioeconomic Response Plan for COVID-19, including two funding proposals for the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund.

In response to social conflicts in 2019, an interagency taskforce was formed to create spaces for dialogue to consolidate a culture of peace during 2020. UNICEF coordinated El Alto's Adolescents and Youth Dialogue and the La Paz Women's Dialogue. UNICEF also worked with UNODC on a study about the perceptions of individuals in Senkata, an area of El Alto where violence erupted in 2019. The information was used to develop a communication and social mobilization strategy during 2020, which was interrupted when COVID-19 restrictions began.

Within the framework of the UN Response Plan for COVID-19, UNICEF partnered with UNFPA to implement activities for the continuity of comprehensive health services for adolescents. Likewise, actions for prevention and care were executed with PAHO/WHO and WFP in priority recovery/isolation centres. The introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine is also being coordinated with PAHO/WHO under the COVAX mechanism.

UNICEF, UNFPA and UN-Women implemented a Joint SDG-Fund Initiative. The programme aims to improve budgetary allocations and apply efficient management models in institutions responsible for the response to VAC/GBV. Furthermore, UNICEF, IOM and UNHCR implemented programmes for Venezuelan migrants; for example, the "Uniting-Voices" communication programme that uses the U-report platform to share information with adolescents and young migrants.

UNICEF also strengthened work with 4 departmental governments and 14 municipalities to support continuity of essential services during the pandemic. Activities included technical assistance, online-training on biosecurity protocols and provision of hygiene-kits, PPE, and handwashing stations. Moreover, partnerships with civil society organizations such as Munasin-Kullakita, Caritas, Bolivian Campaign for Education, the Federation of Bolivian Municipal Associations, the Autonomous Municipal Governments of Cochabamba Association, and Red Cross, among others, helped UNICEF reach the most vulnerable families with life-saving interventions during the pandemic, including those focused on COVID-19 transmission prevention, health and food security, prevention of violence and flexible learning modalities.

Finally, UNICEF continued strengthening collaboration with the private sector. This year partnered among others with the ERBOL Network which brings together 170 radio-stations nationwide, for messaging about COVID-19, with Reduno for Sesame Street and 'Time to Act' telethon, and BISA Bank for mobile-transfers for a Cash Transfer Programme.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

This was a unique year for UNICEF Bolivia's programme implementation. The pandemic and socio-political conflicts during 2019-2020 meant that many interventions had to be executed differently. Such adjustments led to stronger preparedness actions and unique lessons learned.

The short-term and transitional nature of the new administration and the replacement of authorities and

technical experts throughout the state apparatus hindered coordination and communication to address the emerging health crisis. This situation was a bottleneck in the implementation of the annual workplans with national entities. Thus, UNICEF strengthened joint work with subnational government authorities and civil society organizations to reinforce the effectiveness and impact of their work in the context of the humanitarian response. UNICEF also continued working closely with the municipal associative system.

During the pandemic, the importance of a clear division of roles and responsibilities among the different levels and coordination mechanisms within a given sector held even more weight. This situation especially revealed gaps in the health, education and social protection sectors' functioning and highlighted the importance of building capacities for emergency preparedness at all levels to ensure continuity of services. Moving forward, UNICEF will continue strengthening capacities in these sectors through technical assistance to the emergency committees and sectoral coordination groups in all levels.

A related lesson learned was the importance of advocating for sustained work processes that incorporate technical teams from government counterparts, not just political authorities. The participation of technical teams allowed commitments to be maintained despite the high turnover of authorities (4 Ministers of Health, 3 Ministers of Planning of Development, 2 Ministers of Education, and 3 INE Executive Directors).

The significant government staff turnover undermined some gains reported in 2019 in terms of capacity building. For instance, political tensions within the transitional government hampered the Ministry of Education from communicating and operationalizing its strategic thinking. Moreover, the Education Strategic Plan which derives from the Economic Development Plan have both come to an end during 2020. The political turmoil did not leave space for the government to prompt the development of a Medium-Term Strategic Plan to guide the vision for the next few years. UNICEF will take advantage of the different studies developed during 2020 regarding the impact of the pandemic in school attendance and learning, the digital divide and others to provide technical advice for the strategic thinking during the education planning cycle for 2021-2025.

Within the context of suspended educational activities, the need to offer virtual education and flexible learning modalities was urgent. UNICEF responded by providing more than 42,000 teachers with digital tools and relevant content to conduct virtual classes in a safe online environment, helping to ensure continuity of learning. The lesson learned was that UNICEF needs to be prepared to provide more support in times of transition than is usually required and to bring it to scale quickly.

UNICEF Bolivia learned how to better develop and deliver virtual training as capacity building measures and reach broader audiences. In some cases, this occurred more equitably. For example, child protection workers in remote parts of the country that usually would not attend training joined. UNICEF will strengthen such strategies with a more in-depth intercultural approach and translation into local languages in 2021.

UNICEF Bolivia learned that in times of crisis finding solutions that protect essential personnel in all sectors and partners, was the best way forward. For example, ECD programming used a broad range of service delivery modalities, including virtual channels. Safe modalities for service provision helped keep programming going and restart activities that had stopped and even expanded access for some hard-to-reach participants. UNICEF will continue to work with partners using these blended modalities in 2021 and future crises. Nevertheless, it is essential to mention that the lack of Internet connectivity is a challenge that needs to be overcome because it led to further exclusion for some highly vulnerable populations.

Another lesson learned was that the context of a pandemic/crisis is a significant opportunity to advocate for strengthening social protection systems and applying innovations. More than ever before, UNICEF participated in the government's technical discussions on social protection and key aspects of delivering social programmes during emergency contexts. Simultaneously, UNICEF implemented a cash transfer programme for vulnerable children and families using a direct payment modality for the first time. The cash transfers helped families cope with the shock and loss of income caused by strict lockdown measures while minimizing the negative effect COVID-19 had on programme results – since the cash transfer beneficiaries were already part of UNICEF regular programmes and most of them

were in social and family reintegration programmes-. Through this, UNICEF learned important lessons about how to design a cash transfer plan, beneficiary selection mechanisms, cash transfer distribution through a financial services provider, and monitoring procedures. UNICEF will build upon this experience in 2021 and in future interventions of this nature.

WASH is another area where UNICEF found a unique window of opportunity to promote long-standing goals. Since this area played a critical role in response to the pandemic, there was an opportunity to accelerate hygiene practices and advocate for the fundamental human right to access adequate water and sanitation. Improving the design of Family Sanitation Modules to give vulnerable families access to adequate sanitation was an achievement, which provides a clear path for scale-up in years ahead.

While UNICEF improved connectivity and developed digital strategies to enhance its programmes and results for children, traditional media also helped UNICEF achieve institutional visibility while disseminating messages and materials through social networks that supported children, adolescents and families during hardships. Furthermore, UNICEF Bolivia's social networks grew significantly in 2020, and UNICEF is now the leading UN agency in the development of virtual activities and the number of followers.

Another key finding was that UNICEF's staff maintained performance and achieved expected results while working remotely from home. Thus, the teleworking option will be kept as a viable alternative for challenging situations when attending the office is impossible, and when flexible arrangements can promote work-life balance.