



© UNICEF Ecuador /2021/Kingman

UNICEF EDUCATION

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Case Study

ECUADOR

Mental health and psychosocial well-being services are integrated in the education system

18 October 2021

Ecuador is highly prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, landslides, volcanic eruptions. Mental illness has a significant impact in Ecuador, contributing to almost one fourth of the global burden of disease of the nation. [UNICEF Data](#), indicates that in Ecuador self-harm is the second leading cause of death among 10–19-year-olds girls and boys. UNICEF and Ecuador's Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) have joined efforts to ensure that the mental health and psychosocial well-being of children, adolescents, and teachers are protected and promoted, notably, in the aftermath of the 2016 earthquakes and the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2014, a [legislative reform](#) enabled the 'Department of student Counselling' (*Departamentos de Consejería Estudiantil*) (DECES) to be created within Ecuador's education system. The DECES is a pioneering component of how public schools are organized in the country to support teachers and children's well-being. It consists of a multidisciplinary team of professionals with experience and training in social sciences, psychology, and social work. These teams develop tools, procedures, and strategies to ensure that schools are safe and nurturing environments where students are supported to reach their full potential. One of the DECES functions is to monitor different situations that can affect students' mental health, psychosocial well-being, and learning (i.e. children with learning difficulties, child survivors of GBV). They accompany children at risk, using preventive measures and other means of support while also responding to situations that affect the mental health and psychosocial well-being of children.

The DECES assures coordination and collaboration among children, school professionals, and caregivers. The innovative system facilitates a comprehensive network of services and resources such as referrals to primary health care centres, child protection authorities and other services provided by NGOs.

RESULTS

- Between 2015 and 2016, UNICEF provided financial and technical support to the Ministry of Education to strengthen the DECES' capacities by developing and implementing a 120-hour training course on comprehensive human development, including how to support students' mental health and psychosocial well-being. A total of 3,100 DECES professionals completed the training who in turn replicated the training in their own workplaces, reaching 10,000 teachers working with approximately 210,000 students across the country.
- In 2016, following the devastating earthquakes, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education to [adapt its curriculum to effectively deliver education in an emergency context](#) in a way that is responsive to student's mental health, psychosocial well-being and learning needs. UNICEF also trained the DECES and teachers in implementing the new curriculum.
- More recently, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF, with the financial support from the [Education Cannot Wait](#) (ECW) global fund, developed an innovative approach to support DECES and teachers to provide psychosocial support for children by telephone and other remote means during periods of school closure. UNICEF has contributed to providing training and supervision to

1,200 teachers, reaching 48,000 primary and secondary students in 14 provinces. Additionally, UNICEF delivered cell phones, data plans, and tablets so that teachers and DECES could make telephone calls for psychosocial support to 82,572 students while schools were closed.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Ecuador's initial investment and prioritization of strengthening the MHPSS capacity of DECES have assured children, adolescents, and teachers' mental health and psychosocial support needs were addressed rapidly and more effectively during the covid-19 pandemic.
- Having a multidisciplinary team of trained professionals dedicated to promoting the mental health and wellbeing of students and teachers has been instrumental in ensuring school communities' positive mental health during emergencies.
- Several recent studies have shown the importance of supporting policy development and increasing the number of MHPSS trained professionals within the education system in Ecuador.

NEXT STEPS

UNICEF plans to continue strengthening the capacities of DECES professionals in five provinces selected by the ECW project to promote students' safety, mental health, and psychosocial well-being when schools reopen. UNICEF is also developing new materials to support the mental health and well-being of younger children attending child development centres and other pre-primary education facilities.

Cost effectiveness: Finally, an investment of US 1,325,000 UNICEF's allowed 3,100 DECES and 3,932 teachers access to cell phones and data plans to support their students' learning and mental health and psychosocial well-being during the COVID 19 pandemic.

For more information, please contact:

UNICEF Ecuador: oficina@unicef.org.ec

© UNICEF October 2021

unicef 
for every child