

Algeria

Update on the context and situation of children

The year 2021 was marked by the approval of the Government Action Plan (GAP 2021) which lays the foundations for a diversified economy, reinforced social policy and renewed governance geared towards improved performance and greater transparency among others. The GAP 2021 will be implemented through the adoption of sectoral road maps and mechanisms to monitor progress periodically. Special focus will be given to reducing disparities and improving access to basic social services in priority areas.

The oil price increase in 2021 provided additional fiscal space to the Government and restored its capacity to fulfil its social and economic commitments to the population in general and children in particular. The oil basket price exceeded the level observed before the COVID-19 pandemic, at \$80 per barrel in November 2021 (OPEC, 2021), while the economic growth forecast and national budget had been calculated at \$50 (Algeria Press Service (APS), 2021). In 2021, the budget for social transfer remained at 23.8 per cent of the total State budget (9.4% of GDP, Ministry of Finance, 2021).

As of 31 December 2021, 218,432 cases of COVID-19 and 6,284 deaths had been confirmed in Algeria. The vaccination campaigns have reached respectively 13 per cent (COVID-19 situation report in Algeria, World Health Organization (WHO), December 2021) and nearly 30 per cent of the total and eligible population to date. At the end of 2021, the vaccination pass became mandatory for travel purpose and access to some public facilities. The recent knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey on COVID-19 implemented by the Applied Economics Research Center of Development under the leadership of Ministry of Health (MoH) with UNICEF support, confirmed that nearly 60% of households are not willing to be vaccinated and 13% are hesitant.

About 32% of children benefit from social transfer, 45% in the poorest quintile (MICS, 2019). Half (51%) of children under 5 years and 56% of those aged 5-17 years are covered by health insurance. Fiscal reforms are being implemented to achieve fiscal equity among economic actors, individuals and households. In the framework of the 2022 finance law and the GAP 2021, the Government initiated the reform of the subsidy structure with the purpose of moving towards a compensation mechanism, from universal price subsidies to targeted cash transfers benefiting the poorest households.

Based on the recent sixth multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS6, 2019), the country has made remarkable progress in the reduction of child and maternal mortality. The rate of maternal health-care coverage is very high, reaching almost 99% for assisted deliveries. The maternal mortality ratio was estimated by the MoH at 48.5 per 100,000 live births in 2019. Algeria has already met the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets for neonatal and under-five mortality at national level, with rates of 19 and 12 per 1,000 live births, respectively in 2019. However, geographic and socioeconomic disparities affecting the North-East, the South and households in the poorest quintile remain to be addressed. The percentage of children aged 24-31 months who are fully immunized declined from 83.1% in 2013 to 61% in 2019 with the lowest rates in the central highland regions (31%) and among the poorest quintile (47.4%). The rate of exclusive breastfeeding, which increased from 25.5% to 28.7% from 2013 to 2019, is still very low. Aligned with the GAP 2021, the ongoing reform of the health system has prioritized the reduction of neonatal and maternal mortality. The reduction of gaps and disparities in health coverage for the High-lands and Southern regions is of particular importance. In the education sector, the priority was given to school reopening after closure due to COVID-19. Children in Algeria lost fewer school days in 2021 than in 2020 (six weeks in school year 2020/2021, compared to 13 weeks in 2019/2020). About 10.55 million children enrolled in school in September 2021, an increase of more than 560,000 compared to 2020. As part of the GAP 2021, the Government launched important efforts to improve the quality of education through major reforms of the evaluation system and pedagogy, and began the process of digitalizing classes. Efforts were sustained from previous years to improve the school environment (transportation, school feeding, etc.) and the prevention of school dropout, mainly because completion rates remain low in secondary education

(69% in lower secondary and 46% at the end of higher secondary). For all levels, completion rates are lower for boys, children from the poorest households and those living in rural areas. Boys represented 62% of dropouts and 65% of those who repeat classes.

Following the revision of the national Constitution in 2020, the Government took several concrete measures to allow the participation of youth and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the design and implementation of national policies. The GAP 2021 integrates child protection into several components in line with school violence prevention and the protection of children and individuals with special needs. The participation of children and young people is promoted through the implementation of a National Youth Promotion Plan. The creation of a National Civil Society Observatory as a link between citizens and national institutions and as a space for dialogue with CSOs on public policies, represents an important step forward in the Algerian political landscape.

The latest youth (15-24) unemployment rate reported was 26.9% in 2019 (23.6% for males and 45.1% for females). Youth (15-24) not in education, nor employment or training represented 26.2% (20.4% for males and 32.1% for females) (National Office of Statistics, 2019). Within the 2022 finance law, the Government decided to roll out an unemployment benefit that will cover youth in the age group 19-24, among others (APS, 2021).

In 2021, nearly 40,000 Sahrawi refugee children and adolescents were enrolled in camps, including 37,746 (95%), in formal schools that cover preschool, primary and intermediate levels, and vocational training. Girls represented 51% of enrolments in preschool and 50.3% in primary and secondary. In 2020, 20% of children aged 5 to 17 were out-of-school. Less than 70% of students reach grade 5 and only 63% of fifth graders meet expected proficiency levels.

Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2021, UNICEF played an active role in the development of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) in tandem with the preparation of its next country programme. Building on the excellent partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), UNICEF ensured a consultative process during the strategic planning phase with a series of meetings gathering the main governmental line ministries. While the UNICEF country programme document (CPD) accepted by the MoFA, a one-year extension of the country programme was necessary to allow for adequate consultations on the UNSCDF with government authorities and other stakeholders.

The 2021 annual management plan integrated the regional accelerators and the subsequent adaptations of programmatic and management priorities to the COVID-19 crisis. The programme priorities mainly focused on: (a) developing the next UNICEF CPD 2023-2027); (b) accelerating social protection reforms; (c) improving adolescent girls' and boys' skills, learning and employability; and (d) accelerating results for children and youth through advocacy. Annual management priorities increased the focus on the staff empowerment and engagement, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of the office while dealing with the COVID-19 crisis.

Early child development (ECD) and health

In 2021, UNICEF interventions in ECD and health focused on supporting the MoH in the implementation of the national preparedness and response to COVID-19 and the vaccination deployment plans, in coordination with WHO. UNICEF contributed to strengthening the cold chain and logistics mainly via technical assistance and procurement of essential equipment. In the framework of the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility, UNICEF, in close coordination with the Government, played a key role in the procurement of more than 15.9 million doses of vaccines, out of the total of 34 million doses procured in Algeria in 2021.

UNICEF strengthened the implementation of the country's COVID-19 risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) plan in collaboration with the MoH, CSOs and other partners,

including WHO. The communication and awareness efforts were mainly directed towards fighting misinformation and promoting vaccination and barrier measures. UNICEF provided technical assistance for the development of a national platform for the organization, monitoring and supervision of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign. Over 125 million views were reached through various channels, including social media, with more than 500 posts on infection prevention, the promotion of family activities, misinformation, safe practices, parenting and stigma. The Algeria country office's social media platforms reached 417.000 followers in 2021 (+34.5% compared to 2020).

Despite the heavy mobilization for the COVID-19 response, it was possible to make progress in some areas of the health and ECD components of the regular programme. Regarding the neonatal mortality reduction strategy, UNICEF and the MoH made good progress in identifying relevant interventions for strengthening national capacities and health services in the most vulnerable wilayas. In partnership with the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF continued to support the digitalization of maternal death audits through the evaluation of the pilot phase, with the aim of extending implementation to another wilaya.

In terms of evidence generation, a formative evaluation of ECD programmes in Algeria was launched in 2021, in partnership with line ministries and institutions and under the leadership of the National Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CNESE). The evaluation aims to support the development of the ECD policy as well as cross-sectoral dialogue and advocacy efforts.

Through health interventions in the five Sahrawi refugee camps, UNICEF ensured vaccination for 21,000 children, supported the RCCE campaign, equipped 34 health centres in the camps to strengthen vaccine storage and transportation capacities, provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to 450 Sahrawi health workers along with training on the use and maintenance of oxygen equipment for treatment of COVID-19 patients

Education

UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Education (MoE) in improving the quality of education, equity within the education system and the institutional environment. As result of system strengthening support, the capacity of the MoE to respond to school dropout has improved through its school dropout prevention programme, which progressed from design to at-scale piloting readiness. Building on progress in 2019 and 2020 on the programme's technical design, important milestones were reached in 2021, in particular the identification of the leaders of the communities of practice in 2,076 schools and the training of 103 inspectors and education counsellors. A full set of online training materials for vulnerable children aged 6-12 years at risk of dropping out of school, is now available, including 89 learning modules and 35 video tutorials.

National capacities to respond to learning losses have been consolidated, starting with to the ability to measure learning and track evolution over time. Following the development of the instruments and training of key staff in 2020, this year saw the implementation of the first large-scale national student learning assessment targeting 2nd, 4th and 7th graders in mathematics, basic languages, and sciences (a total of 5,000 children). The analyses to be performed in 2022 will pay particular attention to learning losses during the pandemic and to gender gaps.

To support teachers' capacities to respond to learning challenges in the classrooms, the Teacher Preparedness Training Package developed by the UNICEF Regional Office started to be distributed in 25,000 schools. To strengthen the national capacity to provide flexible education modalities, UNICEF continued to support the MoE pilot on blended learning in 10 primary schools in remote areas. Beyond cognitive skills, the life-skills agenda continued to move forward in 2021 with the dissemination of the Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation through partnerships with CSOs.

UNICEF focused its efforts in 2021 on the use of MICS6 data. The country office produced specific thematic fact sheets on key sectoral issues: school dropout, preschool, learning, equity, and adolescent development. The availability of an updated dataset and synthetic analytical tools informed the elaboration of the education programme strategy note and the preparation of the new country programme, which priority areas have been discussed and validated with the MoE.

Humanitarian interventions included continued support for the education of nearly 40,000 children in the in the Sahrawi refugee camps who benefitted from individual school kits, infrastructure

improvements and teacher training. The construction of infrastructure, including water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, benefited 1,557 enrolled children, 50% of them girls. Through a partnership with “Association Femmes Action Développement”, 1,057 education personnel (84% women) were trained in mathematics, Arabic language teaching and inclusive education. UNICEF procured PPE and hygiene products for 40,000 children, including 204 children with specific needs, as well as 2,392 education staff and educators as part of preparations for the back-to-school effort in 2021. UNICEF continued to lead the Education Coordination Group, including the development of a five-year education strategy that was discussed and validated by the Sahrawi education authorities and stakeholders during a conference in Algiers on 17 November.

Child protection

In 2021, UNICEF continued its efforts to strengthen the child protection system and institutions. In partnership with the Ministry of National Solidarity, Family and Women, it maintained technical support for the review of the National Plan for Children; lessons learned on its implementation will feed the preparation of the upcoming plan. UNICEF continued to promote the use of evidence for child protection, partnering with the National Body for the Protection and Promotion of Children (ONPPE) to organize a one-day training that convened 150 participants (ONPPE National Coordination Committee made up of 16 ministries, CSOs, police, civil protection and child health committee) to dialogue around MICS6 data, the SDGs and the priority areas of the new country programme. The ONPPE coordination role was also strengthened by supporting the development and implementation of a digital platform bringing together nearly 160 CSOs involved in child protection. UNICEF continued to strengthen national capacities for child protection services. The training of 40 Child Helpline staff in case management, online psychological support and referral to appropriate services was an important result. Since 2019, the toll-free number has positioned the ONPPE as a key provider of assistance at the national level. The ONPPE also launched a nation-wide competition on the Children’s Day with the participation of 2,000 children (80% girls) and a particular focus on mental health and psychosocial challenges. A caravan on mental health care reached 400 children with disabilities through psychosocial consultations and referral to appropriate services. UNICEF partnered with the National Foundation for Health Progress and Research Development (FOREM) to provide emergency psychosocial support to children affected by violent wildfires in several wilayas in the north of the country in August 2021. Volunteer psychologists supported more than 3,500 child survivors of the fires and 56 psychologists were trained in emergency psychosocial support.

Adolescent and youth participation

UNICEF and partners further consolidated results achieved in the areas of adolescents and young people’s engagement and life-skills development. Following the piloting of the Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation in 2020, UNICEF expanded the scope of its activities in eight additional wilayas thanks to partnerships with four additional CSOs. These partnerships allowed the successful implementation of the UPSHIFT programme for youth and adolescent development with a focus on social innovation and entrepreneurship. Some 920 young people aged 16 to 24 years participated in 16 bootcamps in 18 wilayas and developed 150 innovative projects to solve social and environmental challenges in their communities. An innovative partnership between UNICEF and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) strengthened youth’s capacity to find solutions to local problems due to climate change and the environment along with possible economic opportunities. A total of 4,023 vulnerable adolescents aged 10-18 in rural areas, out-of-school adolescents, adolescents with disabilities, orphans and adolescents in juvenile detention centres benefited from the adolescent kit activities including training on transferable life skills. The contextualization and translation of the kit into Arabic Braille language for adolescents with visual disability is another innovative achievement in 2021.

UNICEF strengthened its partnership with the Ministry of Vocational Training in mainstreaming life skills into the vocational training curriculum. This collaboration, which targets many out-of-school children, allowed the development of a reference framework and pedagogical guide on a wide range of life skills in the areas of “learning to be” and “learning to do” (employability). Some 140 vocational teachers, educators and programme designers in seven subnational institutes for pedagogical engineering benefited from the training of trainers.

With regard to promotion of child rights, Information and Documentation Centre for the Rights of Women and Children and UNICEF developed a child-friendly game which benefited 350 children and adolescents from eight wilayas of the highlands and the South. The right to participation of children and adolescents was promoted for the first time during the elaboration of the new UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, when 68 young people aged 10-24 years from three different regions participated in consultation sessions.

Social inclusion of children and adolescents

In the area of social protection, the MICS6 data released at the end of 2020 provided increased evidence for the multidimensional poverty analysis and the production of a feasibility study on universal child benefit in Algeria. These efforts are occurring at a critical time of State reforms on the national subsidy scheme, including a growing trend towards targeted cash transfers benefiting the poorest households.

UNICEF collaborated with the CNESE and the National Equity Unit to generate the second edition of the government-led multidimensional child and youth poverty measurement and analysis. Efforts in 2021 were dedicated to defining the analysis protocols following the national Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis methodology and providing the foundations for data processing and the report’s production in 2022. The first product will be the main report on child poverty expected in the first quarter of 2022. The complete knowledge package consists of a main report on child and youth well-being, an equity profile report, thematic notes and the COVID-19 impact simulations on child poverty.

To contribute to the Government’s efforts in reforming social protection and to strengthen advocacy for a universal child benefit, a feasibility assessment supported by UNICEF was completed in 2021 as a preliminary step towards a broader analysis of social protection in Algeria that is sensitive to the situation of children and adolescents. The process and the outcome of the feasibility study allowed the building of national ownership, confirmed the availability of data for a child-sensitive evaluation of the social protection system and provided opportunities to deepen the dialogue with and between social protection stakeholders. The social protection evaluation came at the right moment with the Government’s adoption of a reform of the subsidy scheme within the 2022 finance law. The evaluation will provide robust evidence to support advocacy in favour of the adoption of a universal child benefit within the current reform context. In addition, UNICEF meaningfully contributed to the international conference on social protection organized by the CNESE in 2021 and used this opportunity to share its vision around the universal child benefit as a good policy option for children and social development.

To complement the above-mentioned achievements, a capacity-building project is in preparation to support the CNESE, ONPPE and sectorial ministries involved in public finance for children.

Data and evidence generation

The strategic planning process for the next UNICEF country programme served as a key opportunity to disseminate MICS6 survey results across the sectors. The consultation meetings with institutional partners, including the Ministries of National Education, of Health, of Youth and Sports, of Vocational Education and Training Professionals and ONPPE, were optimized to disseminate sectoral MICS data and facilitate a better understanding and use of the data. Likewise, MICS data informed the development of the new country programme and the UNSDCF. In addition, UNICEF partnered with ONPPE to organize an important MICS dissemination workshop, an important learning initiative that

enabled intersectoral discussions between governmental departments, civil society and others. UNICEF continued its technical support to the CNESE on setting up a national data platform, “Tahat”, for monitoring the SDGs and national priorities. A first version of a national database is being developed with more than 300 indicators and 200,000 points of information including MICS surveys with a focus on child- and youth-related indicators. The second step is ongoing and focusing on monitoring education sector outcomes.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

As part of its contribution to United Nations reform, UNICEF played a key role in developing the new UNSDCF. UNICEF chaired the social development result group (co-chaired by UNAIDS) and contributed to prioritization of key goal areas for children in the areas of health, education, child protection and social protection.

Partnerships with United Nations entities and international organizations were operationalized and/or initiated to support national institutions in the areas of social protection and public finance for children. The social protection work benefited from the expertise of the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, a UNDP research institution based in Brazil.

UNICEF strengthened its partnership with the CNESE around evidence generation to support and influence decision-making for more child-sensitive and equity-focused policies. This includes research and evaluations in the areas of ECD, child and youth poverty and social protection. The CNESE created a digital portal on socioeconomic data, the SDGs and child-related monitoring indicators, as well as results indicators for a pilot sector, in collaboration with UNICEF and Data for All initiative.

Partnerships with CSOs in the areas of adolescent and youth development expanded to promote and implement life skills, civic education and innovation among young people, especially the most vulnerable ones in some wilayas of the Highlands and the South. This initiative was an opportunity to cooperate and exchange with local authorities and universities. UNICEF initiated a strategic collaboration with the UNEP to promote eco-friendly behaviours among youth and increase their awareness and capacities about climate change.

UNICEF continued to support the ONPPE Permanent Intersectoral Committee, comprised of several ministries and CSOs, around reporting mechanism on children’s rights, the development of national and local programmes for children and child-related SDGs. The latter involved the Resident Coordinator’s office and helped create a connection with the Ministry of Health in the dissemination of MICS data.

UNICEF signed a multi-donor partnership with the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission (ECHO) to fund the humanitarian education programme for Sahrawi refugee children in line with the multi-year strategy of education. UNICEF initiated a framework for cooperation and exchange of experiences between the Saharawi health centres and the Algerian public health centres with the support of the Algerian Ministry of Health. UNICEF partnered with the World Food Programme to strengthen life skills and environmental awareness in the Sahrawi refugee camps schools.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

UNICEF Algeria is continuously learning from the COVID-19 pandemic which created challenges as

well as opportunities for greater and more effective collaboration with all partners. For instance, the COVID-19 crisis response relied in turn on increased responsiveness of sectoral partners. At the same time, the crisis offered the opportunity to build capacity to respond simultaneously to short-term needs while continuing to work on long-term agendas such as the school dropout prevention programme, life skills and citizenship education and psychosocial support.

The availability of up-to-date data for children in Algeria through MICS6 laid the groundwork for evidence-based planning in the development of the next UNICEF country programme and UNSDCF 2023–2027. Designing a MICS dissemination plan moved UNICEF from making data available to the actual use of evidence in policy dialogue and design. For instance, the experience of the workshop organized with ONPPE on the use of the MICS for reporting progress towards the SDGs ended up creating further interest from national partners and NGOs and needed to be extended. The partial implementation of the dissemination plan also provides another important lesson, which is that dissemination activities are a full-time job and requires dedicated resources to reach a greater audience in government institutions, the academic world and civil society.

UNICEF communication for development (C4D) programming expanded in scope and quality thanks to the close relationship with the MoH arising from the completion of the first KAP survey on the impact of RCCE messaging. Thanks to the trust built in UNICEF, the survey findings and recommendations, presented at the Scientific Committee with the presence of the Ministry of Health, will be critical in making timely adjustments of the messaging and addressing hesitancy about vaccination.

Based on lessons learned from a past evaluation project in the social protection sector, UNICEF decided this year to engage in a feasibility assessment prior to starting the full evaluation the social protection programme in Algeria. The practice helped reduce the risks of engaging in a complex evaluation exercise without ensuring prior availability of data and commitment of the ministries involved in the evaluation process. As a result, the scope of the evaluation was adjusted to respond to the actual needs of government institutions before starting the data collection process. In the near future, this approach is expected to increase national ownership of evaluation findings and policy recommendations.

Another key lesson learned relates to the country office's planning capabilities within the new working conditions imposed by the pandemic. The new context highlighted the need for better collaboration between the operations and programme teams to improve efficiency, risk mitigation and compliance with rules and procedures. Strategic operations should enhance results-based planning and client-oriented services, particularly by strengthening synergies and systematizing satisfaction feedback surveys, with special attention to the challenging environment that requires strong capacity to adapt and respond adequately, efficiently and effectively.

The next CPD (2023-2027) will build on the lessons learned from implementation of the previous country programme based, in particular, on: (a) the need to improve the production and systematic use of evidence-based data and analyses regarding the well-being of children and young people to better understand the disparities in inclusive access to high-quality social services, boost advocacy and inform public policy; (b) the need to optimize and scale up promising digital solutions throughout the cycle through strengthened partnerships; and (c) the need to gradually strengthen UNICEF collaboration with other United Nations entities to further accelerate synergies and results for children and young people.

Innovations

Since the beginning of the current programme, UNICEF has implemented several innovative initiatives across sectors. In the health sector, UNICEF continued to support the MoH in strengthening its Health Information System, which is among the key priorities of the GAP 2021. The most prominent results of the collaboration with UNICEF are the ongoing digitalization of the maternal death audits, the equipment of decentralized epidemiology and preventive medicine services to strengthen their tracking

capacities of COVID-19 contact cases, and the national platform for the organization, monitoring and supervision of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

Regarding youth programming, UNICEF tested the implementation of the life-skills agenda through new partnerships with local CSOs. Building on the close work of the CSOs with the local authorities, the implementation of programmes such as UPSHIFT and the adolescent kit at local level bears the potential to inform national policies via a bottom-up approach. The different experiences with civil society are in line with the Presidential decree setting up a National Civil Society Observatory as one of the main pillars of change on the policy design process. Another innovation is the translation of the adolescent kit for expression and innovation in Brail to the benefit of visually impaired adolescents; it will be further shared with UNICEF country offices worldwide under the “leave no one behind” principle.

In the education sector, the school dropout prevention programme was implemented through a pragmatic training approach, using lessons learned from the past. The approach, based on the creation of in-school communities of practice, provides the capacity to reach practical and effective changes at the classroom level, instead of a traditional training-of-trainers approach.