

Costa Rica

Update on the context and situation of children

Costa Rica is an upper-middle-income country and has been a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development since 2021. It has a population of 5.16 million people, of whom 23% are children and adolescents, and is reaching the end of its demographic dividend, with an ageing population and an increase in dependency rates.

According to the World Bank, in the past 25 years, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita has increased by 85%. However, this increase has not translated into a reduction in social inequities, as the Gini coefficient rose from 45.6 in 1997 to 49.3 in 2020. Historical disparities and exclusions persist, mainly affecting Indigenous, Afro-descendent and migrant populations and people with disabilities residing in rural and border areas and in informal urban settlements.

Monetary poverty is around 25% for the overall population, but higher for children and adolescents (39%). Public indebtedness is high, at 68% of GDP, making Costa Rica one of the most indebted countries in Latin America. Income poverty affects 23% of households, with female-headed households being overrepresented at 41% of non-poor households, 48% of all households living in poverty, and 51% of those in extreme poverty. Poor female heads of households have on average three years less schooling than those who are not poor.

In nutrition, the rate of wasting among children and adolescents is 2%, while 20% are overweight, and 14% are obese (School Weight and Height Census, 2019). Only 27% of children under 6 months of age are exclusively breastfed, with 39% being predominantly breastfed (EMNA/MICS-6, 2018). According to the Ministry of Health, the second half of 2022 showed a sustained decrease in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and associated deaths. From 3 January 2020 to 1 February 2023, there have been 1,186,176 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 9,158 deaths, reported to WHO. A total of 12,778,229 vaccine doses have been administered (WHO). The Comptroller General of the Republic presented a 2022 report showing a decrease in the percentage of fully vaccinated children between 2019 and 2021, suggesting that COVID-related anti-vaccination attitudes spilled over to general vaccination.

In education, both access and quality remain key challenges. Since 2018, school cycles have been repeatedly and significantly interrupted owing to strikes and the COVID-19 pandemic, consequently affecting entire cohorts of students who are now lagging in their learning. Seventy-four per cent of students ranked in the two lowest performance levels in reading proficiency. Eighty per cent of students in primary and 60% in secondary schools completed their education in the regular time frame. There are significant gaps in educational achievement for children and adolescents, with those living in rural areas, with disabilities and in extreme poverty most left behind. Only 8% of public primary schools offer the complete curriculum. The gap is further exacerbated by the digital divide, which constrains learning, social inclusion and future employability for the most vulnerable. Forty-two per cent of children and adolescents do not have access to a computer or tablet, and 13% do not have access to the internet.

As identified in the Survey of Women, Children and Adolescents (2018), only 14.6% of children aged 36–47 months attend an early childhood education programme, rising to 44.2% for children aged 36–59 months. For children aged 36–59 months, there is a gap of 11.3 percentage points between the poorest and the wealthiest quintiles (40.9% versus 52.2%). Nineteen per cent of education facilities do not have access to water, and 10% lack electricity; many remain inaccessible to students with disabilities.

In 2022, there were 62,455 migrant children formally enrolled in schools (MEP, 2022).

In 2021 (the most recent data available), 84,496 complaints about threats to or violations of children's rights were received by the National Child Welfare Agency: 24% were cases of physical or psychological violence, 22% violence due to negligence, and 19% due to family conflicts. Twenty-four per cent of parents and caregivers consider physical punishment an appropriate way to educate,

contributing to 49% of children aged 1–14 years being victims of violent disciplinary methods. Commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents increased by 44% in 2020 compared to 2019. Around 78.8% of children and adolescents aged 9–17 years use the internet daily and are thus potentially exposed to online violence.

In 2022, there were 13,170 children and adolescents without parental care, of whom 2,134 are in shelters and/or residential care, and 11,036 in family foster care.

The most significant social, political and economic events that directly or indirectly impacted UNICEF work in 2022 were the presidential and legislative elections, characterized by marked polarization on issues associated with social justice, equality and economic/fiscal crisis. After a second electoral round, the newly formed Social Democratic Progress Party won the presidential election but could not secure a majority in the Legislative Assembly, requiring strong alliances with other parties to pass its legal reforms.

According to data on the number of people leaving the Migratory Reception Station of Los Planes, Chiriquí province, Panama, it is estimated that more than 200,000 transit migrants entered and passed through Costa Rica in 2022, representing a 61% increase from 2021. Close to 15% are children and adolescents, mostly Venezuelans (around 65%) but also from Haiti, Cuba, Colombia and Ecuador, among others. In October 2022, the President signed two important migration decrees. The first decree corresponds to a reform of the Refuge Rules of Procedure, eliminating automatic work permits for asylum applicants. To receive a work permit, asylum applicants should request one during the first month of entering the country and must be registered in the Costa Rican Social Security Fund. The second decree creates a temporary two-year special migration category for nationals of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, which applies to those who waive their refugee application, register with the CCSS and demonstrate that they have no criminal record in their country. Priority humanitarian needs for the migrant and asylum seekers population continue to be related to limited financial resources, insufficient food, water and shelter, and difficult access to basic public services.

Major contributions and drivers of results

Inclusive early childhood development and education

Inclusive quality education

After backing the development and implementation of the national STEAM education strategy in close to 100 priority education centres in 2021, UNICEF supported its scale-up to a total of 244 schools in 2022. Due to the success of the initiative and the need for national coverage, the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) included its STEAM strategy in the 2023–2026 National Development Plan. Also contributing to STEAM efforts, in collaboration with the Lego Group and UNICEF's Global Supply Division, Lego bricks were donated to 25 selected schools, benefitting close to 8,500 children.

Born out of the global partnership with Microsoft, and as a central element of UNICEF Costa Rica's Reimagine Education strategy, the digital initiative Learning Passport or 'Aprendo Pura Vida' platform was launched by the MEP in 2022. The MEP has formally adopted the Learning Passport as a key component of its national educational recovery and resilience strategy and for its teacher training initiative, directly benefitting 1.2 million students and teachers.

UNICEF supported the National Learning Institute to develop and implement a monitoring and management system and the Social Inclusion Policy for its dual education programmes, an educational strategy that favours the process of learning by doing, carried out in two learning environments: an education centre and a private company. Results suggest that students completing dual education programmes have significantly higher success rates of finding a job than students in normal vocational training programmes.

UNICEF worked with the MEP to develop and implement an educational guide for children with hearing loss or deafness. The guide has provided much-needed pedagogical and practical guidelines to help teachers provide support to more than 800 children with hearing disabilities through lip reading,

articulation and other auditory training techniques.

Early childhood development

UNICEF advocacy has been pivotal in achieving progress in the national early childhood development agenda, improving the care conditions for children, including positive parenting. UNICEF continued to strengthen the National Child Care and Development Network (REDCUDI) with the development and implementation of an early childhood development (ECD) quality certification, which is key to supporting the quality homologation and homogenization of its different childcare arrangements, benefiting 58,344 children from 1,200 childcare centres. UNICEF also supported the development of a curriculum and technical guidelines for a remote parenting and childcare programme, which is highly instrumental in providing ECD services directly to families where public childcare infrastructure is not currently available, benefiting 94,000 children.

To strengthen REDCUDI's technical and organizational capacities, after supporting the development of its digital platform and providing georeferenced location and administrative and financial data on all childcare centres in 2021, implementation and user training phase were completed in 2022. This platform is crucial, as it permits the generation of evidence and monitoring of ECD coverage and quality at a national scale, currently covering more than 1,000 childcare centres.

With support from Kimberly Clark, a robust communication strategy was carried out to encourage positive parenting and prevent child violence with a gender approach, reaching more than 3 million people.

Child protection

UNICEF supported the Child Welfare Agency (PANI) in its resolution to reduce the number of institutionalized children without parental care, by providing the costing estimates and operational needs of the different family care models developed in 2021. PANI was able to accurately budget for the implementation of the models in 2023, aiming to reduce the number of children in institutional residential care by 100 this year. As part of these efforts, UNICEF also worked with PANI to support Indigenous organizations to identify Indigenous foster families to offer culturally appropriate child protection services.

UNICEF and PANI also joined forces to promote positive and violent-free parenting with the implementation of the 'Families in Action' online training-of-trainers programme. The nearly 100 participating community leaders reached 525 parents and caregivers and more than 2,000 children and adolescents.

In coordination with the National Network for the Prevention of Child Violence, UNICEF supported the training of personnel from the Legislative Assembly on the rights of children and adolescents and the prevention of child violence in schools, family and communities.

UNICEF, as part of the National Steering Committee for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour and Protection of Adolescent Workers, supported the development of the National Strategic Plan to make Costa Rica a Country Free of Child Labour 2022–2025. As a member of the National Commission Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, UNICEF provided technical assistance for the development of the National Protocol for the Comprehensive Care of Children and Adolescents Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Commercial Sexual Exploitation.

UNICEF continued its promotion and support to "Casas de la Alegría", in collaboration with the Costa Rican Coffee Institute. The programme seeks to protect and contribute to the development of children, while their parents and relatives are working in the coffee harvest, mitigating the child labour risk in the Costa Rica coffee plantations and offering free public care and social protection services to children.

In response to a request from the government to the United Nations System to support the prevention of violence in the port city of Puntarenas (due to an exponential increase in reported violent criminality), UNICEF participated in the development and execution of an inter-institutional territorial violence prevention strategy. UNICEF's response concentrated on the implementation of the 'Civic Centres Without Walls' programme, providing positive alternatives to adolescents through cultural, art, recreational and sport activities and psychosocial support. As a result, close to 140 workshops and

sporting activities were organized, reaching approximately 500 children and adolescents. As a global early adopter of the Social and Behavioural Change shift, UNICEF Costa Rica is supporting the prevention of violence against migrant children. Based on prior qualitative and quantitative research, work is concentrating in the prevention of xenophobia and fight against stigma and discrimination of migrant children and their families.

Social inclusion, public advocacy and communication Monitoring and evaluation

As the final year of the 2018–2022 cooperation cycle, UNICEF Costa Rica successfully developed its new 2023–2027 Country Programme Document in 2022 and contributed to the development of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Based on solid evidence and an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional process with the participation of almost 150 partners, including government institutions, civil society organizations, municipal governments, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, private sector organizations and more than 1,500 children and adolescents, and directly aligned with the UNSDCF, the Country Programme Document ambitiously addresses the country’s main challenges and opportunities to significantly improve and accelerate the fulfilment of children’s rights, with a solid focus on gender, social inclusion and the Sustainable Development Goals.

UNICEF supported the National Council for Children and Adolescents to create the 2023–2033 National Children and Adolescents Public Policy, which is expected to be completed and approved in the first semester of 2023. UNICEF’s collaboration centered on all methodological aspects of the new policy, including the development of a situation analysis of children and adolescents, based on a thorough consultation process at the national and regional levels with the participation of more than 1,700 children and adolescents.

Knowledge generation and management

With technical guidance from the University of Costa Rica and UNICEF, PANI was able to independently estimate and publish its second report on public spending on children and adolescents in 2022. The report’s results and recommendations proved invaluable during the national budget discussions, as it provided solid data concerning the negative effects on the realization of children’s rights of any reduction in public spending.

Continuing a robust knowledge management process concerning the measurement and identification of local determinants of child malnutrition, in 2022 UNICEF supported the work on malnutrition care in two local health offices in the cantons of Mora and Talamanca, both with prevalence above 35%, and in the case of Talamanca with the two faces of malnutrition – overweight and malnutrition – in the Indigenous population. This work will be completed in the first quarter of 2023, with the development of local malnutrition prevention plans for the two local health offices. It is expected to be scaled up to at least 10 more offices with high malnutrition prevalence (reaching 60% of offices with the highest prevalence of malnutrition).

Advocacy, communication and participation

Strategic communication activities were essential to achieve greater visibility of children’s rights progress and challenges and UNICEF’s work on the public and media agenda. Social networks have maintained sustained growth, increasing by more than 18K followers compared to 2021. More than 2,300 messages were posted on UNICEF social media, which have 167,000 followers, reaching 8.654 million people. In addition, 518 press releases published in national and international media, reaching 593 million people. There were 897 mentions of UNICEF in partner networks, achieving a reach of 109 million people.

UNICEF Costa Rica appointed the young surfer Brisa Hennessy as its first national ambassador. The young champion is reinforcing communication activities, drawing attention to the needs and rights of Costa Rican children and adolescents. More than 50 posts were published through social media and media outlets, reaching more than 20 million people worldwide.

Eight national campaigns to promote COVID-19 prevention, child vaccination, prevention of child

burns and scalds, positive and shared parenting responsibility, and reading and writing awareness reached 79 million people over four social media channels of UNICEF and partners.

UNICEF collaborated with the MEP to produce The Reading and Writing Adventure TV series and didactic materials to promote reading and writing and educational recovery in primary school (grades 1–3), reaching more than 1 million people.

As part of World Children’s Day, a video was produced on the traditional Indigenous ritual ‘dance of the little devils’, featuring Indigenous Boruca children calling for support to preserve their language, culture and traditions.

UNICEF collaborated with the Andrey Amador Race (the country’s most important professional cycling event) to promote the Rally for Children (#haciendopuntosporlaniñez) with the participation of more than 40 well-known athletes, who joined UNICEF’s fundraising efforts.

In coordination with the National Child Care Network, ECD services and positive parenting were supported through a digital advocacy campaign and virtual activities, with the engagement of more than 60,000 people. In addition, a campaign called ‘Child burns should be prevented’ reached 500,000 people through social media outlets and 45 press releases. The number of hospitalizations of children and adolescents decreased from 277 in 2021 to 229 in 2022, according to the National Children’s Hospital.

In 2022, individual donor fundraising grew by 4,937% in the number of new donors and by 3,109% in income. As of December 2022, UNICEF had more than 1,600 individual donors and contributions of more than US\$18,000 monthly. At least 15 potential corporate partners have been identified for reinforcing joint work through donations, policies favouring children and families, communication, advocacy, etc.

Adolescent participation and empowerment

Alongside civil society and public and private sector allies, UNICEF strengthened the voice and participation of adolescents and youth, empowering them as change agents and strengthening their capacities and platforms for promoting, championing and enabling initiatives centered around some of the most important child-related issues.

A total of 6,663 U-Reporters provided key inputs into policies and advocacy work concerning education strategies and mental health promotion.

UNICEF co-led the United Nations Interagency Youth Work Group and supported the creation of the United Nations Youth Advisory Group. The latter has been highly instrumental in promoting youth rights on national and local political agendas.

UNICEF was involved in implementing the ‘Soy Valentia’ (‘I am Brave’) programme led by the Women Connecting non-governmental organization, providing a leadership training programme and digital materials addressing the most important issues for adolescent girls, with the engagement in 2022 of more than 131 adolescent girls and young women.

As part of the World Children’s Day celebrations, UNICEF, the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO), the Legislative Assembly and PANI organized a dialogue between a national representation of 25 children and adolescents, the Minister for Children and Adolescents and members of Congress to discuss the need for more direct participation mechanisms for children and adolescents and their current main concerns. Among the needs and agreements prioritized was the creation of a parliamentary forum for children’s and adolescent’s issues.

A total of 168 children and adolescents participated in the consultation process for the preparation of General Observation No. 26 concerning children’s environmental rights;

UNICEF supported Costa Rica’s youth delegation at COP27, which played a strong role in advocating for the fulfilment of children’s rights during the global climate negotiations.

Emergency response and humanitarian action

With support from the US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, UNICEF and its partners supported several humanitarian assistance interventions and strategies in 2022.

In an alliance with the Costa Rican Red Cross, the Child Welfare Agency, the Municipal Emergency Committee of San José and the Lloverá Foundation, UNICEF has provided 13,600 kits with basic

hygiene items (soap, hand disinfectant gels, menstrual hygiene products, toilet paper, etc.). As most kits were for family use, and as some humanitarian supplies were provided per unit, the total number of vulnerable transit migrants benefited reached 38,920.

Safe, secure and 24/7 water, sanitation and hygiene facilities at key points of transit migration routes were facilitated by UNICEF, specifically in Paso Canoas, the San José metropolitan area and in the bus station in Tablillas, Los Chiles, benefiting more than 10,683 migrants in transit in 2022.

In response to the need for stronger psychosocial, academic and recreational support for migrant and non-migrant students in highly vulnerable primary schools located in host communities, UNICEF and the MEP are implementing the 'Listening Classroom' programme in primary schools, benefiting approximately 4,778 students in 148 primary schools.

In collaboration with PANI, the General Directorate of Migration (DGME) and participating local development associations, UNICEF supported the operation of 35 safe spaces throughout the country, for children and adolescent migrants and nationals in priority migrant destination communities, providing child protection, psychosocial assistance and learning recovery services for a monthly average of 2,800 highly vulnerable children and adolescents. Strategically, a safe space was opened in coordination with the DGME in the National Temporary Care Centre for Migrants located in the southern border municipality of Corredores, and another in the northern border municipality of Los Chiles, in coordination with the local development association.

Continuing the process started in 2021, the legal status of an additional 5,087 migrant students was regularized by the DGME in 2022, with legal and monetary support from UNICEF, bringing the total to 8,687 children. UNICEF and its partners have identified available hotels and shelters to provide short-term accommodation for highly vulnerable families with children and adolescents who for different reasons temporarily cannot continue their migration journey. Emergency accommodation has been provided for 915 highly vulnerable migrant children and their family groups.

In 2022, children's needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be met, especially regarding their reintegration into education, mental health support for adolescents and young people, preventing and responding to the high incidence of cases of harassment and violence in schools, as well as the promotion of children's vaccination coverage, which decreased during the pandemic.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

Under the leadership of the RCO, UNICEF actively participated throughout the technical and political process of the development and approval of the 2023–2027 UNSDCF, providing solid evidence, analysis and promising practices to accelerate the 2030 Agenda for children.

With support from UNICEF’s WASH multi-country initiative and in coordination with UNOPS and MEP, small-scale repairs of WASH infrastructure have been completed in 11 priority schools in highly vulnerable communities in the Nicaraguan border area of Barra del Colorado. These works are key to broadening and strengthening the students’ access to safe water and sanitation, and enhancing the schools’ attendance and retention efforts, especially for girls. A total of 850 children and adolescents, mostly migrants, Afro-descendants and living in poverty, benefited from this initiative.

UNICEF, in coordination with UNESCO, UNFPA and the RCO, supported the MEP in the development of the country’s Transforming Education Summit proposal, based on the results of a participatory process that facilitated the gathering of different sectors. Youth aged 12–17 shared their perspectives through a U-Report online poll. Members of private and public institutions, universities and NGOs joined national consultation workshops. Around 400 unionized teachers also offered their views on the 10 most pressing issues for the education system. The proposal was presented by MEP during the global summit and has been a reference for the development of the MEP’s National Education Road Map for Action.

UNICEF, UNESCO, UNFPA and the RCO successfully implemented a joint programme to strengthen the SDG financing architecture with a specific focus on improving public spending in the education sector. UNICEF is the lead agency. The main results for 2022 were: (1) design of an Integrated National Financing Framework that provides guidelines and a road map to strengthen SDG financing planning; (2) pre-feasibility studies of four innovative SDG financing mechanisms; and (3) development and implementation of an education results-based budgeting methodology with a gender and social inclusion approach.

UNICEF has also strengthened multisectoral alliances for the humanitarian response in partnerships with key public institutions and local protection systems. In coordination with the DGME, PANI, local governments and other UN Agencies, agile and inter-institutional mechanisms have been established in frontier areas and in San José metro area to respond on the ground to the rapidly changing humanitarian needs. UNICEF also signed agreements with the Costa Rican Red Cross, the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress, and the Lloverá Foundation to provide humanitarian assistance to highly vulnerable migrant children and their families.

In an alliance with PAHO/WHO, the Ministry of Health, the Costa Rican Social Security Fund and PANI, UNICEF advocated for and supported various campaigns promoting vaccination and hygiene practices to prevent COVID-19, reaching millions of people through different platforms. UNICEF also supported vaccination fairs in 12 high-COVID-risk communities, reaching approximately 10,000 people.

UNICEF leads the United Nations Operations Management Team and co-leads the United Nations Youth Working Group together with UNFPA and supported the creation of the United Nations Youth Advisory Group, comprising 27 young people from across the country.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

UNICEF Costa Rica will close a five-year cooperation cycle in February 2023. Key lessons learned from the reviews of the Country Programme 2018 to 2023 include the need to (1) evolve from a ‘modelling’ to a ‘scale-up and inclusion’ programme approach to benefit children, adolescent and families who are still left behind and not benefiting from the country’s overall development; (2) ensure more robust gender-transformative programming to be achieved through the inclusion of specific interventions in each of the programme components, integrating the gender approach both in the analysis of contexts and inequalities in general, as well as in the vulnerabilities that affect children and

especially adolescent girls, promoting gender-responsive actions and social norms change; and (3) enhance partnerships with the private sector and key leaders from Afro-descendent, migrant and Indigenous communities, persons with disabilities and women's organizations.

The work with individual donors and the private sector has proved promising and effective, opening up several opportunities to partner with individuals, companies and associations to benefit children and adolescents, especially those from vulnerable communities. The individual donor base increased from around 20 donors in 2021 to more than 1,600 in December 2022, mobilizing over 95,000 US dollars up to December 2022. Therefore, UNICEF Costa Rica will prioritize private sector fundraising activities in the next programme cycle.

UNICEF Costa Rica must also continue to reinforce its emergency preparedness, response and recovery work, enhancing the emergency–development nexus approach. With an increase in mixed migration flows crossing and coming to Costa Rica and several climate-related emergencies (such as large- or medium-scale flooding occurring at least twice a year, droughts regularly affecting the Pacific coast, and ongoing volcanic activity, earthquakes and disease outbreaks), it is imperative to mainstream humanitarian work across all sectors and interventions, with a prevention and resilience-building focus.

Recommendations derived from the evaluation of the Country Programme between 2018 and February 2023 include the need to: (1) strengthen monitoring and evaluation to estimate UNICEF's contribution at all levels; (2) establish a direct relationship between the Country Programme and the national planning system; (3) build and monitor the theory of change of the new Country Programme; and (4) propose tangible and achievable results according to the Country Office's technical, financial and human capacities.

The proposed new Country Programme Document 2023–2027, to be approved by the UNICEF Board in February 2023, has included the above-mentioned lessons and recommendations, ensuring solid, relevant and contextualized programming, advocacy and partnerships to advance children's rights in Costa Rica.

The robust evidence analysis and the vast consultative process to develop the new UNSDCF 2023–2027 ('Closing gaps for a Sustainable and inclusive Costa Rica') have proved successful, leading to the approval and launch of the new United Nations cooperation cycle by the President of the Republic in November 2022, with the engagement of high-level executive, legislative and judicial authorities, as well as the private sector and civil society.

While Costa Rica is well known for its progress on social affairs, the relatively high scores it has attained in health, education, WASH and other social indicators hide persistent historical inequities in 25 out of 84 municipalities, mainly on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts and in border areas and peri-urban areas of the country. Historical disparities and exclusions regarding gender, family income and place of birth persist, mainly affecting Indigenous, Afro-descendent and migrant populations, and children with disabilities. Jointly with the rest of the United Nations System, under the UNSDCF, the new Country Programme will target its downstream interventions in these areas. Besides geographic targeting, the Country Programme will also seek to reach the same child with multiple interventions, thereby addressing multiple deprivations and enhancing the impact, efficiency and effectiveness of its interventions.

The two innovative UNICEF Costa Rica programmatic interventions in 2022 were the creation of the Judicial Mentoring Model and the reading and writing INSPIRA volunteering programme, which was consolidated in the reporting year. The former was implemented in coordination with the Office of Restorative Justice of the Judicial System to address the growing number of adolescents in conflict with the law who fail to comply with the alternative measures ordered by judges. The programme comprises 24 mentors who provide orientation and accompaniment to adolescents and young people on the design and execution of an effective social reintegration plan that allows them to fulfil their life projects.

UNICEF Costa Rica's INSPIRA volunteering programme was consolidated in 2022 by scaling up its literacy and life-skills initiative which targets girls and boys from highly vulnerable migrant communities nationwide. Through a cascade mobilization and training programme, 150 volunteers were engaged in extramural education activities to support children from impoverished families to

recover from the learning losses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2018 teachers' strikes. Around 1,000 children have started to benefit from this reading and writing skills programme which engages community volunteers.