

## Morocco

### Update on the context and situation of children

The reporting year marked a period of multiple stresses met with ambitious Government public policy.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine forced disruption in supply chains, leading to higher energy and food prices, and rising inflation. Combined with the ongoing mitigation for COVID-19 as well as persistent drought, these factors have challenged Morocco's economic recovery. In 2022, growth forecasts were adjusted to 1.1% (from 7.9% in 2021), with inflation at 6.6% in comparison to 1.4% in 2021. The budget deficit reached 5.3% in 2022.[1] The average standard of living of households in real terms fell by 2.2% annually between 2019 and 2021, and forecasts show that this decline is expected to reach 5.5% in 2022. Further, absolute poverty and vulnerability rates increased for the first time in decades, from 1.7% to 3% and from 7.3% to 10% respectively at the national level, between 2019 and 2021.[2] Ongoing socio-economic reforms have improved the absorptive capacity of the national economy in the face of exogenous shocks. However, an integrated approach, with a focus on investments in human capital, continues to be necessary for a diversified, competitive and sustainably resilient economy.

COVID-19 has shown the importance of investing in *health systems* that are resilient to crises and the value of strong primary health care to ensure continuity of care for all patients. The domestic budget for the health sector has increased from 23 to 28 billion Moroccan dirhams from 2022 to 2023, which represents 7.3% of total budget. While not universal, increased expenditures have improved coverage of health services. There is persistent shortage of human resources with only 7.2 doctors per 10,000 inhabitants on average. Maternal mortality remains 2.5 times higher in rural areas than in urban areas, neonatal mortality still accounts for 75% of infant mortality, and the country experiences the triple burden of malnutrition: stunting, micronutrient deficiency and overweight. To meet SDG 3, the health system reform seeks to reinforce decentralization of health programs to better respond to geographical inequalities, accelerate hospital budget reforms, digitization, human resource management and the repositioning of primary health care at the center of the system with a strong community component.

For the *education sector*, the government increased its budget from 62.5 to 69 billion dirhams between 2022 and 2023, of which 1.41 billion has been mobilized for preschool. In 2022, 1.6 billion dirhams was allocated to the *TAYSSIR* programme (for 2.3 million children), 322 million dirhams for the Royal Initiative *One Million School Bags* (for 4.6 million children) to tackle drop-out. Similarly, the *DAAM* program, directed 900 million dirhams to 126,460 widows and 214,000 orphaned children.[3] Against a backdrop of stagnating pre-school enrollment, and high levels of drop-out (9.7% in secondary school and 7.4% in high school), Morocco has embarked on a national reform of education, informed by a consultative process, with a triple focus: the learner, the teacher, and the school. It reprioritizes foundational skills, improved quality, reduced drop-out and civic engagement.[4] This vision was articulated in the country's commitments shared in the UN *Transforming- Education Summit* in 2022 in line with SDG 4.

In terms of *social protection*, in line with reforms announced in 2021 and the SDG 1.3, the Government accelerated the expansion of compulsory health insurance to cover 22 million additional beneficiaries, and the establishment of the Unique Social Register (USR) and the National Population Register (NPR). The USR and NPR will be finalized in 2023, ahead of rolling out family allowances on the basis of objective criteria of eligibility.[5] In the meantime, local social assistance services, intended for the most vulnerable (children with disabilities, children in social protection

institutions or on the street, migrants, single mothers, among others) continue to suffer from insufficient availability and quality, especially in terms of social worker capacity, governance and coordination.

The annual policy-shaping *Throne Day* speech focused on the importance of the social protection agenda, but equally on *child protection* and the need to intensify gender equality to ensuring the *inclusion of women and girls* at all levels of society. Several challenges remain in child protection, including 148,000 children, aged 7 to 17, who worked (88,000 of whom performed hazardous work) in 2021, the 25,402 children in 2021 in conflict with the law, the 5,402 children in detention centers in 2022, and almost 70% of child marriage applications accepted in 2021.[6] Support for children on the move continues to be a specific area of concern, with increased numbers of migrants, including children arriving from sub-Saharan Africa. In June 2022, an estimated 2,000 migrants crossed through to Melilla in Spain, an incident that was unprecedented in scale and nature.

Morocco continues to identify the economic *inclusion of young people* as a key issue. In the third phase of the National Initiative for Human Development (under auspices of the Ministry of the Interior) 726.67 million dirhams was directed at 10,289 young people for the incubation of 5,371 small businesses. Still, the continuum between quality education, transition to skills development and meaningful work remains tenuous for too many young people, including participation in the design and monitoring of policies and programmes that affect them.[7]

[1] Bank Al Maghrib Monetary Policy Report, Dec 2022.

[2] HCP, Social inequalities evolution note published, Oct 2022.

[3] MoEF, Economic and Financial Report and Finance budget law, 2023.

[4] MoE, Strategy Department, Education Compendium: 2015-2021

[5] MoEF, Economic and financial report and Finance budget law, 2023

[6] Ministry of Justice, 2023

[7] MoEF, Economic and Financial Report and Finance budget law, 2023

## Major contributions and drivers of results

2022 marked the end of a six year programme cycle and the consolidation of results ahead of a new UN Cooperation Framework and UNICEF programme of cooperation.

UNICEF Morocco worked with the Ministry of National **Education**, Preschool and Sports (MNEPS) to extend the provision of pre-school, inclusive and life-skills based education, and with the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communications (MJCC) to increase skills building opportunities for young people in the regions of Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, Marrakech Safi, Oriental and Souss Massa.

Preschool education enrolment has stagnated (-0.6% reduction 2019-20 and 2020-21)[1], however enrolment in rural areas and among girls has increased significantly (+4.4pts; +2.3 pts).[2] In 2022, national inclusive education guides were used to train 3,855 preschool educators. The guides are being adapted for primary school. UNICEF also provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF) and the MNEPS to develop financial modeling and scenarios for the preschool sub-sector. In partnership with the Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research, a national assessment was conducted of the preschool education programme (launched in 2019) to draw lessons and recommendations towards the generalization of the programme by 2026.

UNICEF continued to enable access for the most vulnerable children through capacity building of teachers, principals, and service providing NGOs on inclusive education reaching 2,073 teachers and administrative officials at subnational level and benefiting 7,157 children (3,104 girls). Education

services for 941 migrant children in three regions were provided as well as the administrative, pedagogical, and intercultural guidance to facilitate this integration. Staff from 32 out of 89 second-chance-schools (SCS) nationwide catering to out-of-school children (1,715 boys and 1,023 girls) had their capacities strengthened under a new model developed in 2021.

After three years, the MNEPS finalized the educational packages for LSCE (*mallette pédagogique*) in lower secondary schools for integration into the curriculum in 2023 as part of the education reform. Life skills and citizenship learning outside of the school setting for adolescents and young people was expanded through a social innovation and entrepreneurship curriculum within SCS (under auspices of the MENPS) and youth centres (MJCC), with the adaptation of the UNICEF *Adolescent Kit* and the *UPSHIFT* global initiative. As a result, the programme initially targeting 2 sub-regions now reaches 6 sub-regions and 1,761 adolescents and youth (907 females).

There was continued investment in improvement of the school environment. In three subnational regions, mobilization and training of head of schools focused on WASH including development of action plans to reduce school drop-out. These plans included school-based campaigns in 175 schools in highly prone areas. The rehabilitation of WASH facilities in those schools and hygiene awareness among children and teachers (including menstrual hygiene programmes for girls), reached 8,005 children (4,538 girls). Four subnational regions contributed to a survey on the situation of WASH in schools. Results will inform UNICEF Morocco's WASH programming in the new cycle.

Having reached the expected targets of the country programme, the programme will now intensify multisector efforts, including social behavior change interventions needed to ensure girls, particularly in rural settings, enter and remain in school.

With the Ministry of Solidarity and numerous other national partners, UNICEF Morocco provided technical assistance for the implementation of the National Integrated **Child Protection** Policy.

The rate of children in conflict with the law benefiting from alternatives to arrest and detention increased to 71.29% (18,110 children out of 25,402 children in conflict with the law). UNICEF and partners (the High Institute of Magistrature, Ministry of Justice, Public Prosecutors Office, High Council for Judiciary power, Ministry of Youth, and NGOs), strengthened national capacities in justice for children, including child-sensitive procedures, alternatives to detention and diversion in accordance with international standards. In 2022, 216 judicial actors, including 145 juvenile magistrates in the regions of Agadir, Meknes, Tangier and Oujda received targeted capacity building on intersectoral coordination, care for children in contact with the law, and alternatives to detention. In addition, UNICEF worked with the High Institute of Magistrature to develop a multidisciplinary training module on child rights including children on the move that was integrated into the basic training programme for judicial officers.

UNICEF continued to support the establishment and functioning of decentralized child protection systems (*les Dispositifs Territorial Intégrés de Protection de l'Enfance, DTIPE*) to ensure standardized identification, case management, and follow-up for children affected by violence or at risk. Tools were developed for implementing the DTIPE, including SOPs for assessment of victims of violence and human trafficking, information and data sharing. With respect to the social workforce, targeted training and orientations were provided to 946 social workers on case management and referral of child victims of violence and their families to specialized public services, including health and justice, impacting 21,555 child victims of violence and abuse.

In collaboration with the Moroccan League for the Protection of Children, a study on child abandonment was conducted. The study shows that in comparison to 2010, between the years 2008 and 2019, child abandonment decreased by 28% (4,554 vs. 3,281) and potentially as much as 49% (6,480 vs. 3,281). UNICEF worked with institutional partners and civil society to reduce child

abandonment and to improve the alternative care policy and social welfare services in secondary and tertiary prevention. Models of specialized mother and baby services to prevent abandonment; gatekeeping guidelines for children in difficult situation; SoPs for residential care services for migrant children; and SoPs for care leavers to facilitate their social reintegration were all developed during the reporting period.

A national plan of action to end child marriage was developed and adopted by all stakeholders. It builds on recent political momentum and includes measures to effect social and behavioral change, promote social protection, increase access to social basic services including education, strengthen judicial practices, and promote legal reforms, including the amendment of the Family Code.

Under the guidance of the Office of the Public Prosecutor, UNICEF convened actors for the elaboration of the national mechanism for best interests' assessment and determination for children, irrespective of their legal status, to gain access to education, health care, appropriate social and legal care and meaningful temporary accommodation. More than 1,491 children on the move (including 941 through the education sector) benefited from care, mental health and psycho-social support, administrative assistance, and referral to essential services in coordination with education and health services through local authorities and NGO partners such as *Orient Occident Foundation*, *Association for Child Protection and Family Awareness* and *Chabiba*.

Moving forward, the child protection programme will focus on transformation of the current response-based system to one that equally addresses prevention and quality service provision, and social and behavior change strategies to embed the role of the family in child and social policy (an emerging national priority). It will ensure the implementation of tools developed in the implementation and coordination of local child protection systems for all vulnerable children including children on the move.

Together with the MoH, the National Food Safety Office, Iodine Global Network and others, the **health programme** focused on the reduction of inequities in accessing mother, neonatal and child health interventions, by strengthening regional capacities to plan for and deliver quality primary healthcare services in nutrition, health and WASH in underserved geographical areas. UNICEF contributed to the COVID-19 response with a focus on assuring integration with primary health care.

In evidence-based planning and capacity building, health taskforces in three regions with low performing child health indicators were equipped to develop their regional child health action plans. Decentralization of social services remains a foremost national priority. In two of the three iodine deficiency disorder (IDD) endemic regions, a situation analysis was conducted to understand the local salt ecosystem which then served as a basis for regional roadmaps with priority to ensure availability of adequately iodized salt to consumers. Morocco adopted the Effective Vaccine Management (EVM) approach and the first national EVM assessment is ongoing. Morocco also hosted a EVM regional workshop for Middle East and North African countries, organized by UNICEF and WHO regional offices, resulting in a pool of trained EVM country managers. Furthermore, with contributions from USAID, GAVI and others, UNICEF Morocco contributed substantively to strengthening the vaccine cold chain system with the replacement of non-performance, quality, safety (PQS) fridges with WHO prequalified fridges and remote temperature monitoring system in some 400 out of a total of 2,500 health facilities equivalent to a replacement rate of 15%.

During the reporting period, the first ever national WASH assessment was conducted in over 1,000 health facilities across the country using WHO-UNICEF global questionnaires and indicators, to facilitate SDG reporting. The assessment covered three factors (health centers vs hospitals), localization (urban vs rural) and status (public vs private). Preliminary findings indicate challenges in the availability of and access to improved water sources and sanitation facilities, the lack of standardized cleaning protocols and dedicated and trained cleaners. UNICEF continued capacity

building in Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) in 2022 through cascade training and a total of 602 health professionals representing about 12% of health facilities were trained on the national IPC guidelines for Primary Health Care produced previously.

UNICEF, the MOH, and the National Human Development Initiative concluded the design, testing and documenting of a working community health care model to deliver quality maternal and child services. With a focus on 39 rural catchment areas in three regions with low performing indicators, the model worked through health centers with maternity wings, and waiting homes for mothers in partnership with community health workers and local associations to accompany pregnant women. This model and findings are contributing to the national priority to place primary health care at the center of the health system. The Government is committed to scale up the model with some adjustments based on lessons learnt. In addition, a mother-baby box of locally produced items was successfully tested to incentivize pregnant women to deliver at facility and is among the policy considerations for inclusion in the family allowance roll-out. Finally, UNICEF Morocco provided procurement services for 17.6 million doses of vaccines and micronutrients in 2022, as part of the routine immunization programme.

SBCC and advocacy were adapted to the phase of the pandemic. Localized actions were prioritized, through community-based partners such as the *AMSAT*, *Association 100% Mamans*, *Y-PEER* and their networks to reach targeted population groups with relevant information on COVID-19 and where to access services, including vaccines. U-Report, the ICT platform to engage with young people was also adapted to Morocco and tested for engagement around COVID-19. Through these actions and social media engagement, UNICEF Morocco reached 15,641,290 persons. A comprehensive mapping of community-based partners for future public health crisis management as well as overall coordination for SBCC was also completed in 2022.

In 2023, the programme will focus on the strengthening of primary health care and availability of quality services during the first 1000 days, follow-up work to the national WASH and EVM assessments, the updating of the national nutrition protocol, and working at national and regional level to develop social behavior change communication strategies.

The **social inclusion programme**, in collaboration with key partners such as the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF), the National Office of Statistics (HCP), the National Observatory of Human Development (ONDH), the European Union (EU) the World Bank, and sister UN agencies (FAO, UNFPA, UNDP, UNWOMEN, ILO and WHO) through four joint programmes, engaged in technical assistance and advocacy to advance evidence generation, social protection, and public finance for children through an integrated approach.

Morocco is grappling with the impact of converging stresses, most notably the lingering impact of the pandemic, the effects of the crisis in Ukraine, and persistent drought. UNICEF and partners finalized several evidence generation products to inform the Government's response. The profile of multidimensional child poverty in Morocco (based on the N-MODA approach) was updated with additional analysis to consider the impact of the generalization of family allowances/cash transfers in 2023/4. This analysis indicates that multidimensional poverty of children has decreased from 39.7% in 2015 to 23.4% in 2019 at the national level due to the extension of social protection coverage. Meanwhile, data from the COVID Survey of Households (third round), shows the ways in which COVID-19 has reversed gains: for the first-time household poverty, vulnerabilities, and inequalities have increased.[3]3

In public finance for children, a priority reflected in the annual management plan, UNICEF continued to work with the child sensitive budgeting inter-ministerial committee on the preparation of three budget briefs (focus on education, child protection, and health). The study on scenarios for financing the SDGs through multiple sources and strategies was completed. This analysis included more than 40

different benchmarks/case studies with a mapping of relevant financing tools for Morocco, and a dynamic simulator to measure the need for financing to achieve the SDGs within the framework of the SDG Fund Joint Programme between UNICEF, WHO and UNDP which aims to develop a roadmap for an inclusive financing. Similar work in *social protection* on scenarios and analysis for financing the family allowances (with impact of subsidies, taxation and others) is ongoing, including a benchmark of country options. Also, in the area of social protection, the CO intensified its capacity building for line ministries with a focus on south-south experience sharing, with support from the UNICEF MENA and the IPC-IG. Finally, UNICEF has invested in advocacy both with national counterparts and funding partners for integration of select social services and case management in the family allowances to be rolled-out in late 2023.

Limited progress was realized in strengthening the capacities of subnational institutions for social policy planning, though this focus will be strengthened through the integrated approaches outlined in the new country programme, including the integration between child protection and social protection interventions.

Internally, UNICEF Morocco included **integration and practicing of core values as part of the workplace culture as priority in the annual management plan**. Three years into the pandemic, the office employed a number of measures to enhance workplace communication, well-being and cohesion, a joint effort of the Staff Association and management. Following an all-staff consultation on the most pressing issues facing staff, sub-topics were identified for ongoing attention. The first all-staff retreat since the pandemic was held with the support of the regional MENA staff counsellor. In addition, a full day session on communication in the workplace was facilitated by the organization's culture and diversity unit. Finally, after much preparation the Office will move to new and more conducive work premises.

[1]MoE, Strategy Department, Education Compendium: 2015-2021

[2]MoE, Strategy Department, Education Compendium: 2015-2021

[3]The incidence of absolute poverty increased from 1.7% in 2019 to 3% in 2021 at the national level and from 3.9% to 6.8% in rural areas. The vulnerability rate increased from 7.3% in 2019 to 10% in 2021 at the national level and from 11.9% to 17.4% in rural areas. Source : note on the « **Evolution des inégalités sociales dans un contexte marqué par les effets de la COVID-19 et de la hausse des prix** » - HCP 2022 : ([https://www.hcp.ma/Evolution-des-inegalites-sociales-dans-un-contexte-marque-par-les-effets-de-la-COVID-19-et-de-la-hausse-des-prix\\_a3588.html](https://www.hcp.ma/Evolution-des-inegalites-sociales-dans-un-contexte-marque-par-les-effets-de-la-COVID-19-et-de-la-hausse-des-prix_a3588.html))



## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

Strategic partnerships were instrumental to results achieved. A high-level workshop co-chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAEC) and UNICEF Morocco was an opportunity to take stock and validate priorities moving forward. Subsequent consultations with an even wider set of partners, including NGO partners, contributed to a results framework aligned with advancing the SDGs. UNICEF Morocco's new programme for the next five years represents a culmination of this extensive concertation.

UNICEF Morocco contributed to several flagship partnership initiatives to advance cross-cutting priorities for children and south-south cooperation. With UNFPA and ILO, it convened an 11-member country delegation representing ministries, private sector, and young people to the UN in the first-ever MENA Learning-to-Earning Summit on young people with national commitments around skills development and the labor market. The process built upon the collaboration between UNDP, UNFA and UNESCO through joint workplans signed with the MJCC (with focus on social innovation and revitalizing youth centers across Morocco). UNICEF Morocco took forward its engagement with the private sector through a roundtable, with the media and public sector, looking at opportunities for collaboration around young people's development. UNICEF shared lessons from its innovative partnership with UNICEF Finland, and Nokia which utilizes employee engagement in *UPSHIFT* programming. On the margins of the Transforming Education Summit, the Government of Morocco, in partnership with UNICEF, WFP, UNESCO, WHO and FAO held a high-level side event to offer evidence-based recommendations around the impact of school health and nutrition in the education sector. It demonstrated Morocco's commitment to convene partners around social sector issues through its south-south cooperation agenda. The Social and Behavior Change Summit in Morocco convened nearly 2,000 practitioners globally to discuss evidence and practice, particularly in the context of COVID-19. Moroccan leadership was represented in the opening panel to set the stage, in an expansive booth sharing country examples, and in a plenary session dedicated to public policy and SBCC. UNICEF's associate director in social protection contributed to an international conference on social protection held in Morocco to assess progress on the implementation of the social protection reform, its governance, the sustainability of its financing, coordination at the decentralized level. Similarly, UNICEF partners with the World Bank, the ILO, and the European Union to jointly undertake capacity building around social and information-sharing to ensure coordinated technical support to the Government.

UNICEF Morocco technically collaborated with the UN family on the finalization of the UN Cooperation Framework, four joint programmes in social protection, on migration with IOM and UNHCR, and child protection, particularly child marriage with UNFPA and UN Women. It played a substantive role in communications, particularly advocacy milestones, the gender working group, and in operations (HACT, business operations, and procurement), among others.

UNICEF Morocco is increasingly engaging with its donors beyond funding towards strategic joint advocacy and communication. With the EU, USAID, Belgium, Canada, Finland, and so many others, UNICEF Morocco has organized forums on children's rights, field visits, human interest stories and much more.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

During the reporting year, UNICEF Morocco noted several lessons that will influence the implementation of the next programme cycle.

**The value of engaging both at national level and select sub-regional levels. For example, in**

education, UNICEF worked at central level to help develop models to address service gaps and challenges (inclusion, early childhood, disabilities and others). The incremental process of gathering good practice, engaging with stakeholders, developing programming models in select regions, generating evidence and then working with central actors for national scale-up proved effective. Having validated this approach with four regions, UNICEF will introduce two additional regions to address upcoming priorities of ensuring retention of adolescent girls into school, with greater emphasis on multi-sector responses linking to health, child and social protection. It will develop programmes of work with Beni Mellal Khenifra and Fes Meknes, a selection informed by the national education reform, the gender development index, dropout rates, the national human development index, and the local programmatic environment.

**The policy framework for child protection is robust however** gaps remain around migrant children and select pockets of children (those affected by the lack of consistent local services, children in institutions, children in a child marriage, children at risk of abandonment, and others). This was confirmed in the 2022 visit by the Special Representative on Violence Against Children, Najat Maalla M'jid. The child protection programme has used a mixed strategy to address this gap, working collectively with NGO partners, line ministries, foundations, and constitutional entities to advocate for strengthened policies and programmes. It also partnered with NGOs and local authorities to ensure a minimum of services reach the most vulnerable children. After years of advocacy, evidence generation, and political engagement at the highest levels, there is important progress in the prevention of child marriage. Similarly, advances have been made on alternatives to detention for children and the coordination between local authorities and NGOs in service provision for migrant children. UNICEF and partners will use lessons from these experiences for the operationalization of the localized child protection systems (DTIPE) to ensure more standardized case management for children. And, it will accompany the ministry of solidarity in its objective to strengthen the family as a key sphere of child protection, with a focus on prevention and care. This will require new strategies in social and behavior change communication as well as linkages with national programmes such as the upcoming family allowance programme for 2023/4.

**Work in social behavior change programming and communication has matured post COVID-19.** Morocco hosted the global social behavior change communication summit in 2022. During the opening, both the ministers of health and of solidarity, spoke to the critical role social behavior change communication is playing and will increasingly play in public policy. Programming in COVID-19, child protection, and other sectors have resulted in SBCC strategies being considered critical to achieving all programme results.

**Adolescent participation can meaningfully strengthen country office programming.** The country office partnered closely with adolescents this year, from engaging in regional and global events, to partnering with adolescents to take on topical advocacy campaigns to working with its adolescent advisory group in day-to-day programming. The country office will work with the advisory group to continue to intensify its role and contribution within the new country programme.

**WASH and climate change programming must be expanded.** Annual reviews with education and health partners both raised the need for technical support in WASH and water sensitive programming. An assessment conducted in over 1,000 health facilities and select education facilities as well as the Climate Landscape Analysis for Children process underway will inform next steps in view of the impact of drought and persistent water scarcity.

**South-south cooperation must be enhanced in all programme streams.** Morocco's south-south cooperation agenda is foremost in its foreign policy and engagement. And while UNICEF in Morocco has contributed in meaningful ways to this agenda, more can be done to leverage UNICEF's global presence, country office footprint, and recognized expertise to both share Morocco's promising milestones in development as well as to provide relevant country examples and experiences to sharpen



existing programming where relevant.

**Multisector gender programming will be necessary to achieve programme results.** UNICEF has mobilized resources to respond to the inequities facing adolescent girls, and to do so in multi-sector way. Given the centrality of gender-specific results in the new country programme, the country office will need to develop clear monitoring strategies for pursuing and monitoring this area of work.

In 2023, the country office will focus on developing an innovation strategy that will help to drive programme results and respond to the growing interest by national partners.