

Tunisia

Update on the context and situation of children

In 2022 Tunisia ranked second among African countries with a 70.69% achievement level of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), registering for the first time in years a reduction in SDG ratings (Sustainable Development Report 2022). The outlook for children is deteriorating, as the combined effects of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have exacerbated the country's economic challenges, and increased existing social vulnerabilities, particularly for the most vulnerable, in an uncertain socio-political context.

Economic growth averaged at 2.5 % of GDP in 2022 (African Development Bank, 2022). Unemployment stood at 15% in 2022, recovering to pre-COVID-19 levels, higher for youth (37,8%) (INS). Public debt continued to increase, from 52% of GDP in 2015 to 88.8% of GDP in 2022 (IMF), and inflation averaged 8.3% in 2022 (INS). The secondary impacts of the war in Ukraine accelerated the need to reform the subsidies and price-cap system in place. During the year, this system led to regular shortages/ unavailability of basic food items - such as flour, eggs and milk - as well as fuel and medicines due to disruptions in the supply chains at the global and national level, leading to general discontent among the population. In June 2022 the transition government presented an economic recovery reform programme, and reached a staff level agreement in October 2022 for a new IMF loan, which would provide 1.9 billion dollars over 4 years, and facilitate the country's access to international financial markets. Key measures include the reform of state owned enterprises and taxation; the control of public sector wages; and the reduction of energy and food subsidies towards more targeted social protection. The presentation to the IMF executive board is still to be scheduled and consensus, with unions - employers and enterprises -, parts of the political spectrum and communication to the public is limited.

The political transition continued in 2022 in line with the President's roadmap announced in December 2021 following his seizure of power in July 2021. Key milestones reached this year include: the national online consultation in the 1st quarter of 2022; the entry into force of the new constitution with a presidential set-up in August 2022 following the referendum in July 2022; and the first round of parliamentary elections in December 2022; all took place in relative calm but with low participation (5% in the online consultation; 35% with 95% positive votes in the referendum; 11% in the elections). Additional measures taken by the President include the dissolution of the Supreme Judicial Council in February 2022 and a new electoral law limiting the role of political parties, electoral campaigns, women representation and media reporting.

COVID-19 infection rates remained under control throughout 2022 and 55% of the country's population has completed its COVID-19 vaccination (66% of people older than 12 years), although regional disparities persist (Tunis 80%; Kebili 22%).

According to FAO data, 25.1% of Tunisians were in a state of moderate to severe food insecurity during 2018-20, compared to 18.2% during 2014-16. The weight of food expenditure in Tunisia represents 37% of consumption expenditure of the poorest households. (S&P Global Ratings). The average cost in Tunisia for a nutritious food basket for a family of five is 4.5 times higher than an energy food basket (INNTA and WFP, July 2022) and 61% of children under the age of 5 are either overweight or at risk of being overweight (MICS 2018), indicating the need to improve nutritional practices.

Monetary poverty increased from 14% in 2019 to 21% in 2020 (World Bank) and child monetary poverty from 21% in 2019 to 29% in 2020 (UNICEF, July 2020). Further deterioration is expected

considering the rise of commodity prices on the global and national markets. A major development for the social protection sector has been the institutionalization of the child benefit for children 0-5 years old through presidential decree in January 2022, following its successful introduction by the Ministry of Social Affairs with UNICEF's support mid-2020 and reaching about 150,000 children aged 0-5 years old in 2022 (13% in this age category).

The Ministry of Education estimates that 109,000 children dropped out of school in 2022, up from 79,000 in 2021; and strikes organised by teachers' unions over work conditions delayed the back to school 2022-23 across the country, leading to weeks of lost teaching for thousands of children. In 2018, only 53% and 25% of children from the poorest households compared to 95% and 80% of children from the wealthiest households complete lower secondary and high school respectively in Tunisia; and only 17% of the children aged 3 to 5 years among the poorest families are enrolled in pre-schools, compared to 82% in the richest quintile. (MICS Eagle 2022).

The results of the 2021 national assessment of Water, Hygiene and Sanitation (WASH) in institutions, endorsed in 2022, indicate that 6.4% of schools are confronted with water shortages that may last for more than one month, and that only 61% of schools and 53% of preschools provide a basic sanitation service. 16.4% of schools only offer a limited hygiene service. In addition, Tunisia is the 30th most water stressed country globally (WRI).

Child Protection Delegates received 17,069 alerts in 2021 (Ministry of Women). Protests following the dissolution of the Supreme Judicial Council resulted in the discontinuity of justice services for children in contact with the law. 296 children were in detention in 2022, 247 of which (83%) waiting for their trial (Ministry of Justice).

In 2022, almost 18,000 Tunisians arrived irregularly in Italy, representing the highest number in a decade (FTDES), and a deadly failed migration attempt in the south of Tunisia in September 2022, including local youth, has led to months of protests.

The combined impacts of the compound crisis result in a concerning outlook for children in Tunisia, underlining the importance to mitigate the negative impacts on children, particularly the most vulnerable, while also supporting continued investments in social sectors, to protect and promote human capital accumulation as the most critical basis for the inclusive and sustainable development of all Tunisians

Major contributions and drivers of results

The year 2022 was marked by critical results for children across the four pillars of the country programme.

Under the sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development result (SDG1 No Poverty, SDG10 Reduced inequalities, SDG17 Partnerships for development), UNICEF supported the Ministry of Finance to produce and publish a series of budget briefs on social sectors analyzing the composition, allocation and efficiency of budgets and their alignment with the SDGs. Key results show that whilst on average during the last decade 46% of budget expenditure is clearly related to the SDGs, SDG5, SDG6, SDG12 and SDG13 receive much lower allocations. Although public spending on children has increased over the past decade, it is mostly concentrated within the Ministry of Education. Budget briefs are a key tool for policy dialogue around the SDGs and leaving no one behind with the government and IFIs, providing evidence to protect and invest in human capital while improving efficiency and use of public resources. Finally, UNICEF engaged with government for the realisation of the MICS2023, enabling the measure of impacts of compound crises on the situation of children - including 33 SDGs indicators- to guide socio-economic recovery and reforms.

In the area of social protection, UNICEF worked in close partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the World Bank to continue and extend the child benefit, a grant of 30 TND (approx. 10 USD) per month per child addressing child poverty and contributing to human capital development. Initially implemented by the Ministry for children aged 0-5 of families of the national social assistance programme (AMEN Social) with UNICEF support, it was adopted for this age group by presidential decree in January 2022 continuing with the same amount with multi-donor budget support. UNICEF also mobilised funding from KfW and USAID to progressively extend the child benefit to children from AMEN Social aged 6-18 years old. As a first step, 114,000 children aged 6-18 years old (52% girls) from families in the poorest decile received 6 months of the child benefit, to mitigate the negative impacts of the compound crisis and supporting them to continue invest in the nutrition, health and education of their children. UNICEF also supported the doubling of the back-to-school allowance of 50 TND per child (approx. 17 USD) provided in September 2022, reaching 465,000 children aged 6-18 years old (52% girls). For the first time, the registration of beneficiaries was mostly done automatically thanks to interoperability between the AMEN Social database and school enrolment data from the Ministry of Education eliminating administrative burden: as a result, 70% of the beneficiary families received the back-to-school allowance during the first week of the school year compared to transfers implemented in November in previous years. A monthly disability allowance of 20TND was also included for 1,900 children, an entry point to further develop provisions addressing the needs of children with disabilities. Finally, UNICEF supported the printing of 500,000 health cards, facilitating through digitalisation the use of health services for AMEN Social families, in partnership with the EU.

As part of system strengthening, UNICEF facilitated south-south knowledge exchange on social protection, bringing together experts from several Latin America and African countries, and supported the continued roll-out of the TRANSFORM multi-agency capacity building initiative in Tunisia, in collaboration with UNICEF regional office and ILO. In 2022 more than 50 social workers (26 women; 24 men) participated in training to deliver downstream transformative social protection trainings and 5 social protection micro-courses were translated in Arabic and made available for all Arabic speaking professionals on the global socialprotection.org platform. The upcoming certification of 4 Tunisian trainers will contribute to expand reach of the training in Tunisia and in the wider MENA region. More than 1,300 social workers participated in 4 regional consultations where the Ministry of Social Affairs introduced AMEN Social reforms and the child benefit for 0-5 years old.

Under the accountable institutions for children result (SDG16 Peace Justice), UNICEF supported the finalisation of tools and job aids for justice and police professionals dealing with children in contact with the law including: the finalisation of a toolkit developed with the Ministry of Justice and GIZ for the training of judges in child-friendly civil and penal law, and of a training toolkit for the Police Academy on handling cases of children in conflict with the law and victims of violence in line with national and international standards. UNICEF also supported four units specialised in the investigation of violence against women and children at the police and national guard in Kasserine and Kairouan through construction, rehabilitation and equipment, ensuring the availability of separate and adequate space in police stations in two of the most disadvantaged governorates. UNICEF further continued its advocacy and technical support on the return and reintegration of children from conflict zones, in coordination with ICRC, leading to the finalization of national reintegration guidelines and technical meetings to exchange on repatriation, a work expected to continue in 2023.

Under the effective education, health and protection services result (SDG2 No hunger, SDG3 Health Wellbeing SDG4 Quality education), UNICEF continued to accompany government system strengthening programmes, building on key initiatives and strong relationships established with line ministries.

In education, the validation in December 2022 with all national and international stakeholders of the sector analysis, supported by UNICEF as agent of the Global Partnership for Education system

capacity grant, was a key milestone towards the development of the new sector strategic plan. The sectoral analysis capitalizes on the World Bank's human capital review and shows that whilst Tunisia has continued to invest a significant share of resources in education (over 18% of the national budget and 6% of GDP), system outcomes in terms of learning achievements are very low. Progressive strengthening of internal resource allocations and system efficiency will be critical to driving the country's inclusive and sustainable development vision. The work will continue in 2023 with the participative development of the strategic plan.

UNICEF's support for strengthening the teachers' pre-service training system has continued throughout 2022, leading to the development and distribution of 8,000 educational kits to all pre-service training institutes, a partnership bringing together the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Education. The work for the update of national programmes and the establishment of a standardised learning outcomes' evaluation system progressed slowly although these were key areas included in the government vision presented for the Transforming Education Summit called by the Secretary-General in the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2022.

The national programmes to prevent and respond to school drop-out, modelled with UNICEF support registered progressive institutionalisation in 2022. More than 1,700 out-of-school adolescents benefited from the innovative Second Chance life-skills-based education programme, bringing the total number of beneficiaries since the inception of the programme in 2020 to 2,850; half of them already returned to school, enrolled in vocational training or benefited from job placements. The Second Chance centre in Kairouan, one the most disadvantaged regions, was handed over to the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training following completion of rehabilitation works and equipment. At the Regional High-Level Summit on the transition from Learning to Earning, the Minister presented the government commitment to develop a national policy framework for the Second Chance programme and, as a first step, a Presidential Decree was adopted in December 2022 enabling the Ministry of Education to open additional Second Chance centres as needed. Around 800 children at risk of drop-out benefited from orientation, catch-up education, and psychosocial support thanks to the in-school drop-out prevention programme which will be extended from 9 to 21 schools in 2023. UNICEF also continued to support the Ministry of Education improving the learning environment in boarding schools, most of which accommodate vulnerable adolescents, through trainings of 500 custodians and provision of recreational and education kits to 73 boarding schools and youth centers, benefiting 9,200 children (54% girls). All the 17,158 girls living in boarding schools in the country received hygiene kits (25,000 kits).

In the area of early childhood development, UNICEF continued to support downstream and policy work to expand equity and quality of preschool services and the parenting programme. This included: capacity building for all 2,600 early childhood educators from the Ministry of Education and 340 educators and advisors from the Ministry of Women on quality standards for pedagogy; the inauguration of an early childhood education reference centre led by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which provides 12% of preschool services in Tunisia, particularly in disadvantaged areas; and the equipment of 30 new public preschools, under the initiative of the Ministry of Women to expand service availability in disadvantaged areas. Thanks to a partnership with the ministries of Women and Industry and GIZ, four preschools are located in the vicinity of industrial areas targeting employees' children, to explore how this could also benefit women's employment. UNICEF supported the operationalisation mobile units in the four positive parenting sites established as pilots in different socio-economic contexts, and operated by different government leads. The approach enables to test and learn and will be evaluated as part of the ECD strategy mid-term evaluation in 2023. Finally, on the policy side, while coordination of the national ECD strategy and action plan continues to remain constrained in the absence of dedicated government coordination resources, UNICEF supported the finalisation of the ECE expansion costing study. Key results indicate that, while Tunisia ensured near universalisation of one year of pre-primary education for both girls and boys, greater sub-sector governance and public investments are required to address equity and quality gaps. UNICEF will

continue to support policy dialogue on preprimary education in 2023 including with the finalisation of the national evaluation of competencies at the entry of children in primary.

As part of the health sector COVID-19 response, UNICEF delivered in 2022 1.8 million additional COVID-19 vaccine doses through the COVAX and AVAT initiatives in close coordination with WHO. Results of the 2022 Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices study on COVID-19 preventive measures and vaccination showed that the risk communication and community engagement interventions implemented in Tunisia were quite effective: 90% of the respondents confirmed that the communication campaigns contributed to their decision to get vaccinated; 61% of the surveyed population reported practicing COVID-19 prevention related priority behaviors. UNICEF strengthened capacities of community radios through training and equipment and supported a new community outreach campaign with the Scouts, combining COVID-19 barrier measures and vaccination with messaging on climate change. Using the Oxygen System Planning Tool with UNICEF support the Ministry of Health completed an inventory of existing oxygen capacities for the development of a national strategy in 2023. UNICEF is also supporting the procurement and installation of two oxygen generators for two public hospitals in underserved regions; as well as medical equipment for diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 patients, including long COVID, for a total value of 6.3 M USD. In immunization, the core area of the health programme in Tunisia, UNICEF continued support to the Ministry of Health to progressively upgrade the national vaccination cold chain for COVID-19 and routine immunization. This included the procurement of 1,066 WHO-prequalified PQS refrigerators, 27 freezers, 3 ultra-cold freezers -80°, remote temperature monitoring tools and fridge tags. As part of policy formulation, UNICEF supported the implementation of the Effective Vaccine Management assessment and the data collection was finalised. Finally, the pilot introduction of the e-vaccination card and digital data reporting platform (TUNeVACC) continued in 2022 with roll-out in all 1 230 health centers in Sousse and Kasserine governorates, following equipment and capacity building of 320 vaccination health workers.

Progress on child nutrition is still slow. However, the Ministry of Health intends to review the law on milk substitutes to address very low breastfeeding rates in the country; and launched with UNICEF support the development of a National Strategy on Child Nutrition and Diets.

In the area of child protection, UNICEF continued its support to the Child Protection Delegate (DPE) to collect, analyze and publish the caseload of children at risk, and the deployment of a new website with an online registry of all child protection services by location and a new feature to report child violations online. The psychosocial support helpline 1809 for violence against children responded to over 8,600 calls in 2022 and UNICEF is supporting a review to identify strengths and gaps. As online violence against children has significantly increased over the past years, due to high connectivity and COVID-19, UNICEF is supporting a capacity needs assessment across the sectors involved in prevention and response. Finally, as part of strengthening links between child protection and social protection services UNICEF supported the DPE to integrate TRANSFORM trainings with a contextualised child protection module, reaching 50 regional trainers in 2022.

Under the sustainable management of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), environment and climate change result (SDG6 Clean water and Sanitation, SDG13 Climate action), UNICEF is supporting the development of the National Strategy on Climate Change and Children Rights led by the Ministries of Women and of Environment. A national participatory action research, which will inform the strategy, is also ongoing, involving 240 young researchers and reaching nearly 5,000 young people. UNICEF supported young Climate Change negotiators to advocate for the ratification of the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Change by the government including through a side-event at the COP27. A key result in 2022 was the validation of the national WASH assessments on SDG targets 6.1 and 6.2 conducted in 2021 by line ministries in 4,817 schools and 4,008 preschools with UNICEF support. The assessments indicate that 96% and 91% of preschools have a basic water and hygiene service respectively, and only 53% provide a basic sanitation service; basic water, hygiene and

sanitation services are available in 90%, 78% and 66% of schools nationwide, evidencing educational and health risks for children to be addressed going forward. Importantly, the Ministry of Education has reviewed its official administrative data collection tools to ensure annual updates for these indicators. In 2023, UNICEF will continue to support the Ministry of Health to validate the WASH assessment undertaken in 1,930 primary health centres, as well as the finalisation of the risk informed WASH Bottleneck analysis and Climate Landscape Analysis for Children (CLAC).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and system strengthening, UNICEF continued to support Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)/WASH interventions, with small-scale repairs of WASH infrastructure in 172 schools, reaching over 53,000 children and rehabilitation works underway in 55 healthcare centers to reach about 28,000 beneficiaries. All 2,176 primary healthcare centers received IPC kits (including water quality test kits and soaking tanks) and, in coordination with WHO, UNICEF supported the update of IPC protocols for sterilization, hand hygiene, bio-cleaning and medical waste management. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education to produce and distribute 150,000 posters and 300,000 flyers on hand hygiene to all 6,103 schools countrywide for a safer back to school in the COVID-19 context. Finally, as part of emergency preparedness and localization, UNICEF supported the digitization of UTSS warehouses, a key local responder addressing the needs of the most vulnerable population in development and emergency situations

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

Close partnership was fostered with the World Bank, which through a loan to Tunisia continued to support the child benefit for the 0-5 years old age group introduced with UNICEF's support in 2020 and institutionalized by law in January 2022. Regular exchanges took place to identify learnings, address bottlenecks and identify opportunities for the further strengthening of the national social protection system, including in light of the introduction of the 6-18 years old child benefit and the doubling of the 2022 back-to-school allowance. In addition, several south-south knowledge sharing exchanges in the area of social protection were supported, including through the active support of the Ambassador of Argentina.

UNICEF closely cooperated with OHCHR in supporting Tunisia's preparation of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) report, submitted to the Human Rights Council in August 2022. The previous UPR was from 2017. Close partnership continued with ICRC, OHCHR, and other key partners on the file of the repatriation and reintegration of children from conflict zones. Considering the increasing trend of children on the move over the past years, UNICEF is coordinating with different stakeholders, including UNHCR, IOM and Save the Children, to prepare a policy brief with support from UNICEF headquarters.

Close collaboration continued with DCAF to support the Child Protection Delegate in developing its Information Management System, website and a mapping of social services for better referrals. In addition, UNICEF collaborated with DCAF and GIZ supporting the Juvenile justice bureau of the Ministry of Justice with the implementation of its annual workplan.

Throughout 2022, close cooperation continued with WHO on the support for the COVID-19 response and in particular for the delivery of COVID-19 vaccine doses in the context of the COVAX initiative.

In cooperation with all technical and financial partners active in the education sector, UNICEF, as grant agent for the system capacity grant of the Global Partnership for Education, provided technical support and coordinated efforts for the finalization and validation of the sectoral analysis of the education sector.

In 2022, over 90 million USD was mobilized (the Gavi Alliance, the German Cooperation/KfW, Japan, the Muslim World League and USAID), representing a 290% increase in donor contributions as compared to 2021, and exceeding in the 2nd year of the country programme the amended Other Resources target for the cycle (initially planned at 25 M USD and updated to 60 M USD in 2022).

Lessons Learned and Innovations

UNICEF's support to evidence-based policy making, including the budget briefs by the Ministry of Finance, the evaluation of the 0-5 years old child benefit programme, and the upcoming update of child-related indicators with the MICS2023, continue to attract keen interest from partners and strengthened UNICEF's contribution as a knowledge broker for children. Thanks to its continuous and consistent engagement in public finance for children, UNICEF contributes to technical discussions with the IMF to better understand the impacts of the planned socio-economic reforms on social sectors and children welfare.

The extension of the child benefit to the 6-18 years old group is fully in line with government priorities as indicated in the Prime Minister's reform programme presented in June 2022. One of the reform axes is dedicated to promoting social inclusion and makes explicit reference to the child grant as part of ongoing social protection floor reforms. The reform programme also includes plans for a national campaign to sensitize the population on the relevance and advantages of moving towards a new

system. The extension of the child benefit to the 6-18 years old age group enables the country to measure the impact of doing this, whilst at the same time providing direct support to families most in need in the current difficult socio-economic context. UNICEF will continue to document the impacts of cash transfers on households so that national and international stakeholders can use this evidence to support the Universal Child Benefit as a key programme in the broader socio-economic reform agenda, as a critical measure to absorb the shocks of the subsidy reform on the most vulnerable, while ensuring continued investments in human capital.

The fact that UNICEF was selected as grant agent for the system capacity grant of the Global Partnership for Education provided a key opportunity for UNICEF to advocate for due focus on equity and quality of education in the sectoral analysis of the education sector. In addition, jointly with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs an innovative fundraising initiative was launched in July 2022 among the Tunisian diaspora through the Global Giving Platform. It has been agreed to take stock of the experimentation in July 2023 in order to decide on next steps.

UNICEF successfully capitalized on two major international events organised in Tunisia in 2022: the TICAD8 (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) organised in Tunis in August 2022 and the Sommet de la Francophonie organised in Djerba in November 2022. Both events represented important advocacy opportunities for children, and UNICEF's support to the Government for the organisation of side-events on both occasions was greatly appreciated. UNICEF's contribution to the TICAD8 was recognised with a certificate of merit awarded by the Ambassador of Japan.

In terms of innovation, the Ministry of Health decided to build on the success of the Evax.tn platform used for the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine to expand the system to comprise all vaccines, following a joint presentation of the TUNeVACC during the TICAD8 conference. The pilot introduction of the digital vaccination card in the Governorates of Sousse and Kasserine provided a key opportunity for UNICEF to support this process, whilst at the same time contributing to improved routine immunization results for children. UNICEF already mobilized donor support for the implementation of this starting from 2023.

The secondary impacts of the war in Ukraine have accelerated the need to reform the subsidies and price-cap system in place, and laid bare the heavy dependence on grains for dietary intake. As part of strengthening nutrition practices for children, UNICEF mobilized resources to in 2023 support policy reform and public awareness outreach for more balanced nutrition for children, in cooperation with the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Trade. This equally provides an opportunity to capitalise on the work undertaken in support of the development and roll-out of the national positive parenting programme, and its synergies with the social protection programme.

UNICEF also supported young Climate Change negotiators participating at the COP27 in Egypt and youth involved in the participatory action research to advocate for youth participation using the Young Climate Activists Toolkit developed by the UNICEF MENA regional office. In addition, roundtable discussion on climate change of the Minister of Education with Tunisian youth from all regions was supported during the Sommet de la Francophonie in November 2022. UNICEF mobilised important funding to work on Climate Change in schools through USAID, and importantly, in December 2022 the Ministry of Education decided to introduce Climate Change in the curricula in primary schools, work which will be pursued in 2023. As Tunisia is the 30th most water-stressed country worldwide, the negative impacts of Climate Change represent an important additional risk for children and UNICEF will aim to substantially invest in support for dialogue, awareness and policy solutions for the remainder of the country programme