

## Nicaragua

### Update on the context and situation of children

#### Social, political and economic context

The most significant events in 2022 were the local elections, held in November in 153 municipalities, the ongoing fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the restoration of economic activity and the passing of Hurricane Julia, which struck the country in October.

As a result of the global crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy contracted by 1.8 per cent in 2020, as did household consumption (by 0.6 per cent). This was despite an expansion in public investment of 21.5 per cent and an increase in private investment of 11.0 per cent. In 2021, the economy recovered with a growth of 10.1 per cent and slowed in 2022, with a preliminary rate of 2.6 per cent. In addition, the global crisis caused by the Ukrainian war has resulted in a higher inflation rate, estimated by the Central Bank at 11.6 per cent in 2022, compared to 7.2 per cent in 2021, which increased the risks of food insecurity and malnutrition.

However, despite the striking of Hurricanes Eta and Iota, which affected a large part of the Caribbean coast and the northern part of the country in December 2020, in 2021 the economy regained momentum, growing by 10.3 per cent. This trend continued during the first half of 2022 with a 5.0 per cent growth rate.

#### The situation of children in Nicaragua

Nicaragua is one of the countries in the region that invests the most in the social sector as a proportion of its total domestic economy. Social spending in 2021 was 12.1 per cent of GDP. According to the most updated data of the Ministry of Finance in 2021, the country allocated 53.3 per cent of total public spending to the social sector, an increase of 21.7 per cent compared with 2020. This increase was driven by health spending, which rose by 50.6 per cent, and was largely due to the investment in vaccination against COVID-19. Annual spending per capita in the social sector was US\$602.56.

Spending on children and adolescents represented 87.0 per cent of the total social budget.

According to Ministry of Health (MoH) data, the mortality rate among children under 5 decreased from 19.7 deaths per 1,000 live births (LB) in 2018 to 12.0 per 1,000 LB in 2022. The neonatal mortality ratio decreased from 10.7 deaths per 1,000 LB in 2018 to 8.5 per 1,000 LB in 2022. The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) decreased from 36.2 per 100,000 LB to 31.4 per 100,000 LB in 2021. Institutional deliveries reached 95.5 per cent in the 153 health units that implement quality standards for maternal and newborn care. Exclusive breastfeeding increased to 46.0 per cent in 2020. However, 4.4 per cent of children under 5 still suffer from acute malnutrition, and 8.5 per cent are affected by chronic malnutrition.

Rural water supply coverage was 55.4 per cent in 2020. However, it is reported to have dropped to 34.7 per cent in 2022 due to infrastructure damage caused by Hurricanes Eta and Iota. Only 43.0 per cent of the rural population has access to safely managed sanitation. The urban water supply coverage is estimated at 93.0 per cent (2021).

Despite the pandemic, 1.8 million children attended school in 2021. In primary education, the pass rate reached 98.4 per cent, the retention rate was 84.6 per cent, and the adjusted net enrolment rate was 93.2 per cent. In secondary education, the values for the same indicators were 95.8 per cent, 82.8 per cent and 77.3 per cent, respectively. The gross enrolment rate was 66.1 per cent for initial education: 109 per cent for primary education and 87.4 per cent for secondary education. The dropout rate was 5.7 per cent for initial, 5.9 per cent in primary and 7.3 per cent in secondary education.

In 2022, the Institute of Legal Medicine (ILM) attended 6,506 children and adolescents who were victims of violence, of whom 3,796 were victims of sexual violence and 2,710 were victims of physical or psychological violence.

#### Emergencies (Hurricane Julia and COVID-19)

In October 2022, while the country was still recovering from the effects of Hurricanes Eta and Iota which affected Nicaragua in 2020 and caused damage equivalent to 6.2 per cent of GDP, the category

1 Hurricane Julia struck Nicaragua. A total of 123 out of the 153 municipalities in the country were directly affected, and 800,000 families felt its effect. More than 29,800 houses and 184 schools suffered damage and 716 houses were destroyed. The water supply in urban areas was affected, leaving 90,000 people without adequate access to potable water. Official data estimates the total damage at US\$368 million, which represents 2.6 per cent of GDP.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, no quarantine measures have been officially decreed in the country, and schools have remained open throughout this period with face-to-face classes, although some schools have voluntarily established online class modalities. However, according to official data, up until December 2022, the MoH reported 15,466 people infected with COVID-19 and 245 deaths.

Nicaragua is one of the countries with the highest COVID-19 vaccine coverage in the Americas. According to WHO/PAHO data, as of January 2023, 92.3 per cent of the population has had at least one dose and 88.9 per cent has completed the full primary dosing schedule.

### **Sustainable Development Goals and international commitments**

Nicaragua has made progress in meeting the SDGs, especially Goal 3 "Good health and well-being", and Goal 5 "Gender equality". The country is implementing a National Plan to Fight Poverty and for Human Development 2022–2026, which was approved in 2021. This plan addresses several of the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, early childhood, primary and secondary education, health and well-being, and gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women.

Nicaragua is currently in seventh place in the Global Gender Gap Ranking 2022 of the World Economic Forum, being currently the country with the highest gender parity in Latin America.

## **Major contributions and drivers of results**

In 2022, UNICEF strengthened the strategies to leave no one behind, innovation, evaluation and knowledge management, and other change strategies from the UNICEF Strategic Plan (SP) 2022–2026 to obtain results for Nicaraguan children.

### **Response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

UNICEF contributed to implementing the national deployment plan against COVID-19 jointly with PAHO, GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance and the COVAX mechanism.

To this end, it strengthened MoH capacities to reach the most remote areas of the country with sufficient quality vaccines, while providing technical support to maintain the demand for vaccines through campaigns designed to build confidence in immunization. This was achieved by strengthening the cold-chain system implemented by the MoH, with the purchase of ultra-freezers, solar refrigerators, cold boxes and other supplies. Thirteen biological banks were upgraded for the temporary storage of vaccines, and 3,100 health technicians and community leaders were trained in the application of vaccines and the prevention of transmission. Furthermore, 700 vaccinators were deployed for door-to-door campaigns.

In 2022, UNICEF purchased and delivered 980,000 syringes to MoH for COVID-19 vaccinations.

In collaboration with WHO/PAHO and under the leadership of MoH, UNICEF supported the State of the Cold Chain in Nicaragua study that has helped strengthen the vaccination system, and which will be the basis for the study on effective vaccine management to be done in 2023.

On the demand side, to promote community engagement, and social and behaviour change related to vaccines, UNICEF technically and financially supported MoH in the design and implementation of a social and behaviour change communication strategy, in which two campaigns were developed, namely Cut the Contagion and Long Life for All. These campaigns have reached more than 2.5 million people. For the first time in the country, religious organizations were involved in vaccination campaigns. 250 religious leaders were sensitized and trained to advocate for vaccination against COVID-19 in their communities and in the regular programme. Campaigns were culturally developed for indigenous and Afro descendant population group, and those with major gaps in vaccination

coverage.

Under the COVAX mechanism, the country received 5 million doses of vaccines from Canada, the European Union, France, Norway, Japan, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States of America.

Furthermore, the Government of Nicaragua purchased or received vaccines directly from other partners. All these efforts contributed to Nicaragua ranking second in the Americas, and also second in the Americas in coverage of at least two doses of vaccines per person against COVID-19.

UNICEF strengthened national efforts to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education by providing technical assistance in the training of more than 14,000 teachers on strategies to reduce the learning gap, and to provide socio-emotional support through a programme for community educational counsellors.

### **Every child survives and thrives**

UNICEF continued to support national efforts to fulfil children's rights to survival, health and development, within the framework of SDGs 2, 3, 4 and 5, Goal Area 1 of the SP and Goal Area 1 of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2022–2025.

UNICEF provided technical support to the family and community health model implemented by MoH as a basic intervention, strengthening the Maternal Home network, improving the clinical management skills of 541 health professionals, and providing technical assistance in implementing the neonatal complications assessment based on clinical quality standards. In addition, UNICEF supported the creation of protocols and regulations for infant and neonatal care, and arranged training for 5,150 health workers, who provide direct care to children and mothers.

The clinical assessment of complications methodology has been integrated into the quality improvement plans of the 153 municipalities. Its implementation is being monitored in 60.0 per cent of the municipalities supported by UNICEF.

As a part of its data-gathering and research efforts, UNICEF developed the primary health care costing study, which identified the funding gaps of key programmes for the survival of children. Using the OneHealth tool, cost estimates were made for 12 programmes and 151 interventions. 652 health posts, 11 departmental hospitals, 16 primary hospitals, and 236 primary health care units were strengthened through technical assistance to implement the Twelve Steps to Breastfeeding strategy.

UNICEF supported MoH in accelerating actions for the elimination of the vertical transmission of HIV. As a result, by 2022, 95.2% of children born to mothers with HIV received prophylaxis, testing coverage among pregnant women reached 86.0%, and 97.0% of pregnant women with HIV received antiretroviral treatment. The vertical transmission rate was 3.6%.

UNICEF continued to strengthen MoH capacities for the timely diagnosis and care of acutely malnourished children by training 760 health technicians in the use of Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) measuring tapes and the Simplified Protocol for screening and care. In addition, UNICEF adapted the NutreMuac application to include the screening of pregnant women. The NutreMuac application is a technological innovation developed by UNICEF in the Dominican Republic and adapted for use in Nicaragua that automates the recording of acute malnutrition management at the primary healthcare level, and strengthens nutritional surveillance in real-time.

With technical and financial support from UNICEF, 277 children with disabilities in the North Caribbean Coast region of Nicaragua received tender nurturing care based on the Care for Child Development approach, thanks to inter-institutional coordination with local authorities, in partnership with the non-government organization (NGO) Los Pipitos.

A total of 2,400 people from five Mayagna Indigenous communities of Alto Wanki, in the North Caribbean Coast region, eliminated human fecal contamination through the implementation of the total sustainable sanitation and hygiene strategy (SAHTOSO) with the support of Guatemalan experts in accordance with South-South cooperation strategy.

### **Every child learns and acquires skills for the future**

UNICEF supported national efforts to fulfil children's right to inclusive quality education, within the framework of SDGs 4 and 5, Goal Area 2 of the SP and Goal 2 of the GAP.

UNICEF strengthened the education system to leave no one behind, providing technical support to

improve the quality of education in Nicaragua, through the following activities :

- a) Support for the continuous training of 1,639 teachers, and in the initial training of 2,852 teachers, in areas related to the particular attention to vulnerable groups such as children and adolescents with disabilities.
- b) The development of a prototype for accessible digital textbooks. These textbooks will have technological applications for use by all, regardless of disability status or preference in learning styles. This initiative has the potential to eventually make the entire learning system digital.
- c) The promotion of inclusive education with adequate physical infrastructure in 15 schools, qualified teaching faculties for more than 300 teachers, access to interconnectivity, and improved community awareness in 15 communities.
- d) Continuous training for teachers who impart educational modalities designed for children and adolescents who cannot attend regular schools, such as out-of-town primary and secondary alternative education programmes and multigrade schools.
- e) The technical preparation of school leadership involving more than 3000 school principals that directs the planning and evaluation activities in the classroom, as well as the continuous training of teachers during inter-learning pedagogical meetings.

As part of the promotion of the educational community's participation in improving education, UNICEF contributed to the strengthening of the school volunteer movement by providing recognition and skills training, with printed material on socio-emotional support in high-risk situations, which helped to build a violence-free school environment.

To strengthen the communities most affected by climate change, UNICEF supported the regional government of the North Caribbean in the training of teachers, school directors and pedagogical advisers in techniques for socio-emotional aid and education in emergencies in three of the region's municipalities most at risk of natural disasters.

### **Every child is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices**

UNICEF contributed to the strengthening of national capacities to protect children against violence in compliance with SDGs 10 and 16, within the framework of SP Goal Area 3 and GAP Goal Area 3. UNICEF strengthened the child protection against violence system by providing technical support to national institutions through the following.

- Supporting the reactivation of the Inter-institutional Commission of the Protocol for Comprehensive Care of Child and Adolescent Victims of Sexual Violence, with the participation of the institutions that are part of the social welfare system. The commission will strengthen inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, address the adequacy of protocols for institutional action and the need to improve care, continue capacity building and, as a result, implement the protocol at the local and national levels.
- Supporting the regional council of the Northern Caribbean Coast region for the approval and initial implementation of the community route for access to justice for children and adolescent victims of gender-based violence in this region.
- Developing and implementing an integrated communication strategy for the prevention of violence against girls and women in the Northern Caribbean Coast region.
- Supporting the implementation of a strategy to protect children in irregular migration situations at six border posts in the country. A total of 3,400 children were reached through this strategy, mainly adolescents, utilizing psycho-social attention, and delivering informative material and aid kits that included hygiene and COVID-19 infection prevention supplies.
- Training 1,137 officials from border municipalities in the application of the Protocol of Attention for the Repatriation of National and Foreign Children and Adolescents in a Situation of Irregular Migration.
- Together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), distributing 620 protection kits to migrant children and adolescents. Other kits were also delivered to officials of the Migration Institute, which provides front-line care at border posts.
- Improving the capacities for face-to-face and remote attention of 144 psychologists from the Ministry of Finance and the Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ), using the GBV psycho-social Attention

Model for Migrant Girls, which includes attention to people in human mobility situations and victims of violence.

- Training 702 people, including staff of UNICEF and other United Nations agencies, state officials and non-government partners, on protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA).
- Assisting the MoF, technically and financially, to implement the school of values to promote nurturing care, good coexistence and new patterns of parenting for the prevention of violence. In 2022, 9,804 parents and caregivers actively participated in this initiative, and technical support was provided to the SCJ to apply socio-educational measures to 2,004 adolescents in conflict with the law through a systemic approach model for social reinsertion.

### **Winning greater public engagement and support for child rights**

UNICEF promoted communication strategies for social and behavioural change, in partnership with institutions, communities and families, to empower children and their families through behavioural interventions that promoted the adoption of positive practices, such as disaster preparedness, risk communication, health, positive parenting, early childhood development and the importance of education.

UNICEF reached 80 million user contacts, an increase of 37.0 per cent compared with 2021. A content strategy engaging children and youth was developed through television, radio, newspapers and social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube), with a positive news coverage of 96.0 per cent. To achieve these results, 189 communication products were developed, including stories and live broadcasts. More than 700 news publications about UNICEF were shared in digital and traditional media, and 51 press releases, 10 statements, 30 videos and 10 articles and life stories were published. UNICEF generated the active participation of 31,116 adolescents, children and young people through advocacy campaigns and events, such as World Children's Day and World Play Day. For the first time, a national television channel dedicated special live programming to World Children's Day, with 102 children as presenters and content creators, reaching more than 450,000 people.

During the year, 1,755 children, adolescents and young people were involved in generating content for UNICEF. In partnership with five universities, UNICEF strengthened and expanded a network of 1,264 youth volunteers committed to the well-being of children and adolescents.

### **Supporting decision-making based on data and evidence**

UNICEF used data, research, evaluation and knowledge management to help the Nicaraguan state in particular, and society in general, to comply with children's rights.

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) is one of the main global tools that assess the situation of children. Nicaragua has not yet carried out a MICS, but the Government is committed to its implementation, with the support of UNICEF, United Nations agencies and other bilateral and multilateral partners. Lack of resources did not allow for the completion of the MICS in 2022. To secure funding in 2023, UNICEF developed an active fundraising campaign with international public donors, several of which have already committed funds, and the budget and survey plans were adjusted. Nevertheless, during the year the mapping and household listing exercise was completed, and the electronic applications were prepared. The survey is ready to be implemented in 2023.

The country programme evaluation and the Eta and Iota Hurricane response evaluation were completed, and the implementation of their response plans was initiated. In addition, UNICEF started the implementation of the gender programmatic review response plan conducted in 2021. Nicaragua participated in the UNICEF real-time evaluation of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNICEF continued to provide technical support to the country to improve its capacities to analyse the public budget for children. Thanks to this support, the Ministry of Finance will issue, in the first quarter of 2023, an analysis of social spending on children.

### **Risk-informed humanitarian and development Nexus programming**

Nicaragua is one of the countries with the highest risk of disasters in the Central American region and ranks 21st out of 192 countries and territories in OCHA's 2022 World Risk Report not only because of its geographical position, which places it in the path of hurricanes, but also because most of its

population living in the Pacific region are constantly threatened by seismic activity due to the collision of the Coco and Caribbean tectonic plates, and the Pacific Ring of Fire, which keeps several volcanos active. Preparedness for possible events that could generate humanitarian needs or emergencies is a permanent necessity.

In 2022, UNICEF contributed to developing the capacities of the national system for disaster prevention, reduction and attention, supporting activities at the municipal level through the training of response brigades, improving tools such as EDAN (Damage Assessment and Needs Analysis) and preparing response plans. Emergency preparedness activities included the training of 90 teachers as multipliers for future workshops on emergency education at the municipal level, and of 24 technicians as workshop facilitators in socio-emotional support practices of the organizations of the Global Movement for Children.

UNICEF has mobilized financial resources for community preparedness, especially in three coastal municipalities in the North Caribbean Coast region, where hurricanes and flooding from the overflowing of the country's major rivers constantly affect communities along their banks and in low-lying areas.

Following the Nexus between humanitarian and development work strategy for change, all the work initiated in response to the Eta and Iota hurricanes has resulted in broad risk-preparedness programming in the community at the local, regional and national institutional levels. This programming will be incorporated into the proposed new CPD as an important focus of the work in the coming years.

## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

Working in permanent coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNICEF supported the efforts of Nicaraguan institutions, in particular the SCJ, the Ministries of the family, finance, education and health, the General Secretariat of the Presidency and the national system for the prevention, mitigation and attention to disasters, among others. At the subnational level, UNICEF supports the autonomous government of the North Caribbean Coast region and local governments.

UNICEF worked jointly with other UN agencies, including UNFPA for the development of the MICS, IOM for the protection of migrant population, WFP for emergency preparedness and WHO/PAHO to strengthen the national capacity for vaccination against COVID-19, within the framework of the GAVI Alliance and the COVAX mechanism.

Inter-agency agreements were signed with UNOPS to strengthen the COVID-19 vaccine cold chain and with OCHA to improve the local capabilities of the national system for disaster prevention, mitigation and response.

As the lead agency coordinating the UN Communications Group, UNICEF coordinated the implementation of an inter-agency SDG communication and advocacy strategy to promote the implementation of the 2030 agenda. UNICEF also leads the SDG inter-agency group, in which it strengthened the capacities of agencies to analyse the extent of their compliance with the 2030 agenda. In addition, UNICEF integrates the gender and emergencies inter-agency groups.

Along with NGOs and other UN agencies, UNICEF is part of the Nicaraguan chapter of the World Movement for Children, an alliance that advocates for the fulfilment of children's rights. UNICEF coordinates the activities of the Communications and Child Protection groups.

In 2022, partnerships with bilateral and multilateral Governments and donors such as Canada, the European Union (ECHO), Germany, India, Japan, Switzerland and the United States of America helped UNICEF meet its child rights mandate.

UNICEF worked in alliance with Plan International for disaster risk reduction in the North Caribbean Coast region, and supported the work of the local NGO Los Pipitos for the care of children with disabilities. UNICEF collaborated with the Zamora Terán Foundation for the design of tools to be incorporated into the development of accessible digital textbooks. Furthermore, UNICEF established partnerships with five universities to develop a network of young volunteers who promote children's rights.

UNICEF strengthened its alliance with the Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN). With UNAN, UNICEF has worked on the production of a prototype of accessible digital textbooks and on the development of a master's degree in disability, with a focus on inclusive education, for key MoE staff.

In 2022, UNICEF broadened its alliance with the TIGO telecommunications company to protect children against internet abuse. In collaboration with the private sector partner, CLARO, UNICEF disseminated prevention and preparedness messages in anticipation of the arrival of Hurricane Julia and mental health issues.

Children's Rights and Business Principles (CRB) advocacy activities were developed with the private sector as part of the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the CRB to position this agenda within the business ecosystem in Nicaragua, establishing the bases for strengthening private sector engagement.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

The main lessons learned in 2022 were related to the evaluation of the cooperation programme 2019–2023, the evaluation of the emergency response to Hurricanes Eta and Iota, and the Real-Time Assessment (RTA) of the UNICEF support to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Latin America and the Caribbean region. The following lessons learned are highlighted:

- The use of UNICEF core strengths and comparative advantages to address urgent national needs (health system strengthening, risk communication and community engagement), was recognized by stakeholders as a key partner in the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the activities supported by UNICEF were more effective when accompanied by strong, early coordination with other international development agencies.
- The scaling-up and replication work of the Kangaroo Families strategy has had a direct impact on the reduction of neonatal mortality, thanks to combining this strategy with the exclusive breastfeeding strategy. UNICEF needs to continue to support and ensure the full institutionalization of this strategy.
- The coordinated response of the organizations that make up the Global Movement for Children to the emergency generated by Hurricanes Eta and Iota made it possible to carry out a rapid assessment process of children's needs, as well as to work by taking advantage of the thematic capacity, experience and added value of the different partner organizations. This capacity must be strengthened for future emergencies.

Another lesson learned has been the importance of strengthening areas for the exchange of experiences and good practices, and the existence of areas for coordination, especially in institutions that are part of the implementation of the Protocol for Comprehensive Care for Child and Adolescent Victims of Sexual Violence. This commission detected a shortage of forensic doctors and psychologists in various territories. As a result, UNICEF partnered with the ILM to include in its workplan the resumption of the collaboration agreement between the MoH and ILM from previous years, whereby ILM will accredit the training by MoH of forensic doctors.

A noteworthy innovation in 2022 was the adaptation of the NutreMUAC smartphone application used by UNICEF in the Dominican Republic to monitor the risk of severe and moderate malnutrition in children under 5. The adaptation considers the community strategies for the detection of acute malnutrition under the framework of the Community Health and Nutrition Programme, which included the incorporation of the measurement of the mother's arm circumference with the effective participation of MoH technical staff.

Another innovation was the involvement of religious organizations in the vaccine confidence campaigns. For the first time, UNICEF supported MoH to involve religious leaders in these processes, developing material and training the leaders. Religious leaders have a very important voice in areas with historically low routine immunization coverage and the lowest COVID-19 vaccination coverage. This innovation opens the door to involve these leaders in other campaigns such as routine immunization or dengue prevention.

In the framework of supporting inclusive education, UNICEF is developing a prototype of an accessible digital textbook, based on two units of the books, Mathematics for first grade and Knowing My World for second grade. The prototype will include technological applications that allow children and adolescents with any type of disability, as well as any learning style, to develop their learning processes through these accessible digital textbooks. The objective of this initiative is for it to be scaled-up to all books used by MoE.

The South-South cooperation has proven to be an effective mechanism for mobilizing resources and developing local capacities in quality education and inclusion. The growing interest of MoE in this cooperation modality opens up significant opportunities to increase support and technical assistance to the country. Some examples of South-South cooperation this year are the support for the implementation of the accessible digital textbook project, teacher training in relatively new subjects such as neuroscience and disability, and the transformation of teacher training colleges from the technical level to the university level.