

## Mexico

### Update on the context and situation of children

Mexico's economy is the second largest in Latin America, and one of the 15 largest in the world. Despite strong growth in gross domestic product (3.4%) and strong appreciation of the Mexican peso in 2023, the Economist Intelligence Unit predicts a slow-down in 2024 as growth becomes more moderate (growth of 2.4% is forecast).[1] During 2023 –fifth year of the current government administration, economic policy remained focused on tackling poverty, income inequality and regional disparities, increasing minimum wage and investing in the southern-poorer regions.

The most recent assessment of poverty levels[2] shows a decrease in the number of people living in poverty; from 51.9 million in 2018 (43.9%) to 46.8 in 2022 (36.3%). Conversely, the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty grew from 8.7 million (7.0%) to 9.1 (7.1%). In 15 of the 32 federal entities, extreme poverty was higher in 2022 than in 2018. From 2018 to 2022, the population vulnerable due to social deprivations[3] increased from 26.4% to 29.4%. Children are disproportionately affected. In 2022, 17 million children and adolescents (45.8%) lived in poverty, 3.7 million in extreme poverty (9.9%).

UNICEF's analysis[4] shows that public investment in children and adolescents decreased from 3.3% of GDP in 2018 to 2.9% in 2023. Although overall social spending grew from 50.4% in 2018 to 52.7% in 2023, social spending for children has diminished from 26.5% to 18% in the same period. The early childhood age group receives the least public investment. In 2020, public investment in the 0–5 age group was 0.5% of GDP. Only 1.6% of total public spending between 2018 and 2023 was allocated to early childhood; this represents only 14% of all resources directed at children and adolescents. One of the most vulnerable groups is indigenous children and adolescents; 8 out of 10 are poor.

Organized crime and conflict between drug cartels continue to play a crucial part in escalating violence and insecurity. This has disproportionate impact on women, children and adolescents, and people on the move. Homicides reported from 2018 to October 2023 rose to 192,362. This makes it one of the most violent periods in recent history. Ten women and girls in Mexico are murdered daily. 113,073 people remained missing by December 2023, (National Registry of Disappeared Persons).

Record numbers of people have been migrating, across all dimensions of human mobility. The Migration Policy Unit reported that, in 2023, 91,206 migrant children and adolescents in irregular situations were identified in Mexico. Of these, 6.2% were unaccompanied. In the same year, Mexico sent back to their countries 6,016 children and adolescents, including 3,272 unaccompanied. Most of them were from Central American countries. 30,337 migrant children and adolescents applied for refugee status in 2023 (January to October). This is a 19% increase from the 25,306 registered in 2022.

According to the 2023 Sustainable Development Report,[5] Mexico has slid down by two positions since 2022, and now ranks 80 out of 166 countries, with a score of 69.7. The most significant challenges to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and targets are those related to children's and adolescents' rights. Areas of greatest concern are: child poverty reduction; universal access to health and social protection; malnutrition in all its forms; maternal, neonatal and child health care; adolescent pregnancy; access to inclusive, equitable and quality education for all; gender equality and the empowerment of girls (both children and adolescents); inclusion and equal opportunities for the most vulnerable groups; and protection from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.

In 2022, 15.7 million (42.3%) children had no access to health services in 2022.[6] This affects 4.6 million children under 5 (45.9%). Low levels of pre- and postnatal care are also concerning; only 62.6% of pregnant women reported having timely prenatal visits, and only 18.4% of children have attended the recommended health visits[7] during their first year of life. Only 26.6% of two-year-old children had complete vaccination in 2022.[8]The 90% coverage goal of mandatory vaccines has not been met in any age group.[9]

In terms of education, Mexico faces high dropout rates, which escalated following COVID-19.

Coverage of mandatory basic education in schools decreased 6.3 points, from 96.8% in the 2014–2015

cycle, to 90.8% in 2022–2023. Main decline was in secondary schools (8.5 points), followed by primary (5.5) and preschool (5.2). Terminal efficiency in primary schools remained stable (approximately 97%).

In 2022, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) recorded that 65.8% of students performed below level two in mathematics. The OECD average is 31%. In reading, 47% fell below level two; OECD average 26%. In science, 50.9% scored lower than level two, in line with the OECD average of 24%. [10] PISA results indicate a decline across all three assessed fields from 2018 to 2022: 5-point decrease in reading, 9-point decrease in science and 14-point decrease in mathematics. This learning crisis increased due to the extended 18-month closure of schools nationwide during COVID-19.

[1] One-click report: Mexico, 1 December 2023, Economist Intelligence Unit.

[2] CONEVAL, *Poverty in Mexico*, available at:

<https://www.coneval.org.mx/Medicion/Paginas/PobrezaInicio.aspx>

[3] According to CONEVAL’s methodology for multidimensional poverty measurement, a person is vulnerable due to social deprivations when he experiences at least one social deprivation, but has sufficient income to buy the aggregation of the basic food basket with the basic non-food basket.

[4] UNICEF, *Análisis de la inversión pública en infancia y adolescencia en México 2012-2023*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/mexico/informes/inversi%C3%B3n-p%C3%ABlica-para-la-infancia-y-adolescencia-en-m%C3%A9xico>

[5] SDG Index, *Mexico country profile*, available at: <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/mexico>

[6] CONEVAL, *Poverty in Mexico*, available at:

<https://www.coneval.org.mx/Medicion/Paginas/PobrezaInicio.aspx>

[7] Unar-Munguía M, Hubert C, Bonvecchio-Arenas A, Vázquez-Salas, RA. *Acceso a servicios de salud prenatal y para primera infancia*. *Salud Pública Mex.* 2023; 65 (suppl. 1): S55–S64, available at: <https://doi.org/10.21149/14796>

[8] Mongua-Rodríguez N, Delgado-Sánchez G, Ferreira-Guerrero E, Ferreyra-Reyes L, Martínez-Hernández M, Cenizales-Quintero S, Téllez-Vázquez NA, García-García L. *Vaccination coverage in children and adolescents in Mexico*. *Salud Publica Mex.* 2023;65(suppl. 1): S23–S33, available at: <https://doi.org/10.21149/14790>

[9] Ibid.

[10] OECD, *PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education, Annex B1. Results for countries and economies*. OECD Publishing, Paris, 2023, Available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/bc9c7189-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/bc9c7189-en>

## Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2023, the 2020–2025 Country Programme Document (CPD) entered its fourth year. As such, 2023 was a year of results consolidation and also of impressive growth, both in terms of staff and financial resources. In this context, important results have been achieved within the four priority programme areas. This has moved the child rights agenda forward and contributed the goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) in terms of child-related results. These results have also helped to address national priorities in the last full year of the current government (elections will take place in 2024). Work at state level has consolidated and broadened into a more comprehensive development approach with stronger and more technically solid field offices in Chiapas, Baja California (expanding to Sonora) and Chihuahua (expanding to Nuevo Leon); and technical staff and United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) in Yucatan, Guerrero and Michoacan. Amid the ongoing migratory crisis faced by the country, in October the entire country office had to make an extraordinary effort to respond to the emergency caused by Hurricane Otis in Acapulco while ensuring the regular programme was maintained.

Goal Area 1

UNICEF continued to support the government to reduce all forms of malnutrition, focusing on: (1) strengthening health and nutrition services in the health system; (2) strengthening regulations for healthy food environments; (3) improving nutrition behaviours among caregivers, children and adolescents.

During 2023, UNICEF and the ministry of health (MoH) collaborated to expand and implement the national strategy for prevention of all forms of malnutrition during the first 1,000 days. This is a significant achievement as no other strategy focuses this critical age group. Implementation started in Chiapas, Yucatan, Chihuahua and Guerrero. Over 800 health workers were trained, and 250,000 children and pregnant women were reached.

UNICEF collaborated with the Mexican Institute of Social Security; the ministries of labour (MoL) and education (MoE); and the welfare agency, the National System for Integral Family Development (SNDIF) to roll out a breastfeeding programme. A national certificate for ‘breastfeeding-friendly companies’ was developed by the MoL. This was implemented in Yucatán, Jalisco and Sonora, and led to 80 large and medium-sized companies becoming certified.

The national campaign, Heroes for Health – which promotes adequate knowledge about nutrition warning labels – reached 18 million caregivers and children in 2023. UNICEF continued to advocate to prevent the approval of lawsuits from the food and beverage industry against food labelling. UNICEF also provided technical assistance to promote child rights, working closely with senior authorities including ministers of the Supreme Court and the Child Protection Authority (CPA). UNICEF also supported the sanitary regulatory authority to monitor and regulate aggressive marketing activities targeting children.

In terms of social and behaviour change, the mHealth programme – in partnership with the National Institute of Public Health of Mexico (INSP) and SNDIF – reached 30,000 caregivers with personalized text messages via WhatsApp promoting nutritious diets, hygiene and physical exercise. The Eat like a Champion campaign was launched to inspire children and adolescents to adopt healthy habits. The campaign’s messages reached over 10 million people via social media and television. Additionally, there was direct municipal implementation in Tapachula, Chiapas, reaching 250,000 people.

Goal Areas 2 and 4

In 2023, the education sector underwent a controversial curricular reform, and there was also national discussion about the provision of free textbooks. Being a pre-electoral year, the government further focused on consolidating its educational model, Nueva Escuela Mexicana and its flagship direct cash transfer programmes for students and schools. This situation diverted, to some extent, the government’s attention to pressing issues that are a priority for children and adolescents, such as the recovery of learning, and a renewed focus on foundational learning, in a context where the sector has still not recovered from prolonged school closures during COVID-19. More evidence on learning gaps is also emerging from national (MEJOREDUCOM- National Commission to Improve Education) and international studies (PISA/OECD). UNICEF continued to advocate for equitable distribution of finance in education, and for social dialogue about the importance of education in poverty reduction. In line with UNICEF’s global ‘3 × 4 approach’, which focuses on three critical transitions, the country office continued its efforts to prepare children to be school-ready through access to quality early childhood education. The aim of this is to reduce learning poverty for children by the age of 10, by taking foundational literacy and numeracy methodologies to scale; and to equip adolescents with relevant skills to ensure they are engaged and ready for the challenges, of both work and life, by the age of 18. Four cross-cutting themes from the global approach were embedded in the country office’s strategies. These are: (1) providing education in emergencies (EiE) to migrant children and in the context of Hurricane Otis; (2) scaling digital learning through the online and offline Learning Passport; (3) ensuring gender equity and inclusion by achieving learning outcomes for Indigenous children, access to education for migrant children, resource mobilization for teaching science, technology, engineering and medicine subjects to girls; (4) educating children about climate change through teacher training and student participation, and climate-resilient water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructures in schools.

Of all children in Mexico, CotM continue to be the most excluded from formal education. UNICEF

continued to strengthen national and state education systems' capacities. A total of 16,000 employees in the education system were trained in the application of the normative framework on school access, as well as on inclusive education for CotM. As a result, four state-level operational plans for intersectoral coordination to ensure the right to education for CotM were put in place. In addition, 13,000 children benefitted from EiE delivered in shelters.

Participation in the Learning Passport as an alternative pathway for adolescents to access learning recovery continues to grow. In 2023, an additional 34,000 upper-secondary students received learning via this platform. To reach students from vulnerable schools, the country office deployed the offline model of the Learning Passport in 105 schools in marginalized communities across 10 states.

Evaluation of the socioemotional learning methodology for preschools that was developed and tested in 2022–2023 demonstrated significant positive impact on students' socioemotional abilities, as well as teachers' capacity to address socioemotional learning in the classroom and thereby contribute to school readiness. Based on this evidence, it was possible to scale up the methodology with the MoE of Chihuahua, to benefit 65,000 preschoolers. In 2022, literacy and bilingualism methodology had a positive impact on literacy levels among Indigenous students. This led to its adoption in Chihuahua, where it reached 25% of all teachers in Indigenous schools. A modified version of the methodology was introduced in Chiapas, which used offline technologies. A total of 5,700 indigenous students in both states are currently benefitting.

The skills for life and employability framework developed by UNICEF in 2022 for the dual technical and vocational education and training model (TVET), was formally adopted by the MoE this year. It is currently being applied to 14,000 students, but it has the potential to reach 50,000 in 2024 by directly influencing the TVET curriculum and integrating life skills learning into different subsystems of technical upper-secondary education. UNICEF also contributed to developing the skills of teachers to help them to address emerging issues. Teacher training programmes reached 39,000 teachers and covered climate change, gender equality, psychosocial support, menstrual health, violence and digital learning through formal education.

UNICEF also initiated a baseline study about WASH services in a sample of 100 schools in Chihuahua and Chiapas, and a study to estimate the financial barriers to achieving universal coverage in schools. Results of the studies are due in 2024. In addition, manuals on menstrual health and hygiene were revised, and educational authorities and teachers in Chihuahua, Chiapas and Oaxaca were trained on this new content.

### Goal Area 3

UNICEF continued advocating to institutionalize and scale up violence prevention programmes within government services, and to strengthen the government's response to child abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect through the enhancement of response and care services to child victims of abuse or family separation. The country office continued to improve the quality of protection and care services for CotM that are provided by existing child protection systems. National protection policies were also strengthened. UNICEF also supported the government to reinforce its child protection administrative data systems. Additionally, the office advocated for the adoption of a national policy on child recruitment into organized crime and provided humanitarian response to Hurricane Otis.

A school-based violence prevention and gender equality programme, Schools in Action for Equality, was integrated within teachers' in-service curricula, allowing teachers to gain credits to advance their career. SNDIF and the Ministry of Wellbeing committed to adapt and pilot a Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) positive parenting programme. The programme was implemented in day-care institutions and the national monetary subsidy programme for working mothers.

Increasing the CPA's capacity to manage cases of abuse, child mobility and family separation was prioritized to contribute to the strengthening of child protection systems. In collaboration with the federal CPA, UNICEF initiated a budgetary needs assessment of CPAs, to advocate for increased public budget allocations. UNICEF supported standardizing case management practices through the development of a national child protection case management protocol that aims to align local procedures and national law. At the same time, UNICEF provided technical support to the federal CPA to adopt Primero as the first digital tool for child protection case management in the country. UNICEF also provided support for assessment of the maturity of Mexico's child protection system, to identify

high-priority interventions.

UNICEF continued to strengthen child protection response services, by supporting the development of a national protocol for handling emergency 911 calls reporting child abuse. Police and emergency line operators were trained in this protocol. UNICEF also promoted the adoption of specialized courtrooms and procedures for children in conflict with the law in 13 states. A protocol on legal representation for children in criminal justice proceedings was developed with the federal CPA. UNICEF advocated for the establishment of a one-stop justice centre for children in Michoacan. The state congress approved its creation and assigned US\$2 million for this purpose, as well as increasing annual funding for CPA to US\$290,000 (100% increase).

UNICEF supported strengthening child protection administrative information systems through a national child protection registry. This enables comprehensive administrative data on the provision of case management services to be recorded in all states, including children with disabilities. Technical assistance was provided to achieve interoperability between the administrative registries.

The Government of Mexico convened the first national forum for the prevention of child recruitment by armed groups, and committed to developing a roadmap for the first national public policy on the matter. UNICEF supported development of a draft national prevention and reintegration protocol for children associated with criminal armed groups. State plans in Michoacan and Guerrero were also developed.

UNICEF continued to reinforce the government's response to child separation and neglect by supporting reform of the alternative care system. The number of states with operational foster care programmes increased from 3 initial pilot states in 2014, to 13 in 2023.

#### Goal Area 5

Throughout 2023, UNICEF worked to make child poverty visible and to enhance policy responses such as social protection and greater public investment for children. UNICEF continued its strong collaboration with the National Evaluation Council (CONEVAL) to develop a child poverty analysis and provide social protection recommendations to address this pressing issue. The findings from the analysis were presented in a working session with key government representatives from various federal Ministries and institutions, including the MoE, the MoH, the ministry of well-being, and the SNDIF. UNICEF continued to work with the ministry of well-being on a series of capacity-building sessions covering child-sensitive social protection. UNICEF also contributed to development of a 'cash plus' approach for the child grant programme. This consists of providing, not only cash, but informative infographics on flyers for beneficiary families. Topics covered include childhood development, breastfeeding practices and child nutrition, among others. At subnational level, together with the government of Mexico City, UNICEF organized a public event to highlight the value of the programme, Mi Beca para Empezar. This is Mexico City's main cash transfer programme, from which 1.2 million children benefit. The event gave strong visibility to the value of social protection and the urgency with which all children need to be reached, especially those living in poverty and deprivation (of whom 1.4 million children live in Mexico City, out of 17 million in the whole of Mexico).

UNICEF also worked with CONEVAL to present a study on best childcare practices. An event called 'Dialogues about Childcare policies in Mexico and Latin America' was also organized. This gathered together decision makers at federal and subnational levels, to give them policy advice aiming to increase childcare provision and spark discussions about establishing a nationwide care system.

In terms of public finance for children, UNICEF collaborated with the House of Representatives – which is responsible for approving the federal budget – specifically to develop various analyses to support expanding public investment for children. This mainly consisted of carrying out a study of public investment for children over the years (specifically, from 2012 to 2023), with inputs from the education, child rights and budget commissions. The findings and recommendations from the study were presented to various legislative commissions; consensus was then generated on the need to further invest in children, with an emphasis on prioritizing health and early education for children under 5 during 2024.

UNICEF worked on the development of a proposal for the 2024 presidential election. This highlighted key priorities for children in Mexico, including: (1) expanding universal health and social care to children under five; (2) improving quality and inclusiveness of education; (3) expanding universal

social protection to children; (4) preventing all forms of malnutrition and promoting healthy eating; (5) preventing and mitigating violence against children; and (6) allocating greater public investment for children in priority programmes and services. Such proposals will be utilized in policy dialogue sessions with 2024 presidential candidates and their teams, as well as with candidates at state level.

#### Emergency response

In October 2023, Hurricane Otis made landfall in the coastal areas of Guerrero state. Its strength was gained at a record high speed (it was upgraded from a tropical storm to a Category 5 hurricane in under 24 hours) and it had a devastating impact on the economy, lives and basic services. A total of 852,622 people were affected (251,207 of whom were children) in the municipalities of Acapulco and Coyuca de Benítez alone.

UNICEF mobilized a team to support the government's emergency response. Under the United Nations inter-agency coordination mechanism (UNETE), UNICEF led sectoral coordination in education, WASH, nutrition and child protection. A team based in Chilpancingo, the state capital of Guerrero, was deployed only three days after the hurricane. With support from the regional office, a L1 emergency was declared by the Office of Emergency Programmes (UNICEF Division) and resources were rapidly mobilized, both in terms of human resources, through surge, as well as financial resources, through emergency thematic funds and funding from the European Commission Directorate General of Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection.

Also the Office's ongoing humanitarian assistance for children on the move (CotM), continued this year, being led by 3 Field Offices located in strategic cities in both borders, but also at central and federal level by the Mexico City Office. Overall interventions have a two-pronged approach both in terms of providing direct humanitarian assistance but also by strengthening the Government's capacity to protect children and their families during the migration route. In that sense, emergency health and nutrition programmes in five border cities reached 100,000 pregnant women, children, and adolescents in critical conditions. Protocols for health-care assessment were standardized, and a regional health and nutrition card for migrant populations is being piloted in Tapachula, Chiapas. Ready-to-use therapeutic foods were also delivered.

To protect unaccompanied CotM, UNICEF supported the Government of Mexico to establish a memorandum of understanding between Mexico and the United States. This promotes the coordinated transfer of unaccompanied children from Mexico to the United States for family reunification purposes. UNICEF supported the adoption of national guidelines for the residential care of unaccompanied CotM to put an end to de facto detention of children in care institutions. UNICEF also supported the design of Baja California's independent living care model for adolescent children, including CotM, who are deprived of parental care.

In 2022, WASH became increasingly key in the context of migration. Efforts went beyond the WASH in Schools Network approach established in the CPD, and benefitted 474,000 people on the move. UNICEF improved WASH infrastructure in shelters, and distributed hygiene kits and disinfection supplies. This provided 318,000 persons with access to safe drinking water; 101,000 persons with access to sanitation; and 55,000 girls with menstrual health items.

#### Private Fundraising and Partnerships

In 2023, UNICEF Mexico's gross revenue grew by 32% in comparison with the previous year, reaching MXN\$314.2 million, (US\$17.6 million). This is an outstanding result; no other non-governmental organization (NGO) or United Nations agency has achieved this level of recovery since the COVID-19 pandemic. The Mexican business environment is still recovering. However, there is more optimism for this compared with previous years.

Individual giving is UNICEF Mexico's main fundraising channel, and it contributes 73% of the overall income. This channel generated US\$12,941,770 (MXN\$230,304,199), an increase of 18% in pesos and 34% in USD. The corporate channel accounted for 13% of Private Fundraising and Partnerships' gross revenue of US\$2,169,677 (MXN\$38,610,312); an increase of 25% in pesos and 42% in USD. The key influencers and foundations channel accounted for 14% of gross revenue, raising US\$2,544,820 (MXN \$ 45,286,139), which is an increase of 2% in pesos and 16% in US dollars.

The contribution of UNICEF Mexico to other resources regular (programmes) reached US\$8,251,140. Cost charging generated US\$3,251,707.62. The contribution to regular resources was US\$ 415,837 and



to the regional thematic fund was US\$70,242.81.

## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In 2023, UNICEF strengthened existing key relationships with sectoral and mainstream federal and subnational government counterparts to advance the agenda for children's and adolescents' rights and well-being. At federal level, partnerships with the MoH, MoE, the Ministry of Well-being, and CONEVAL focused on child nutrition, enhancing education quality, child poverty measurement and improving the reach and quality of social protection programmes. In particular, UNICEF has this year developed a strong relationship with the Mexican Institute of Social Security for Well-being. As a result, physical activity and nutrition materials targeted at adolescents have been distributed throughout all care centres in the country managed by this institution.

In child protection, UNICEF's main partners include the ministries of foreign affairs, public security and civilian protection, MoH and MoE, the Supreme Court, the Executive Commission for Assistance to Victims, the CPA, SNDIF, the Executive Secretariat of the Comprehensive Child Protection System, the National Migration Institute and the Mexican Refugee Agency.

Within Congress, a solid relationship was established with specific commissions of the House of Representatives, with whom UNICEF signed a collaboration agreement to analyse public investment for children from 2012 to 2023), and to jointly advocate towards greater investment for children in future budget allocations.

At the subnational level, there was continued collaboration with state secretaries of health, education and well-being, as well as local welfare and child protection entities. This is especially true where there are UNICEF field offices, such as in Chiapas, Baja California and Chihuahua. There were also continued and strong working relations with other states such as Michoacan, Guerrero, Yucatan and Nuevo Leon, and a new relationship with Sonora. Collaboration with the government of Mexico City on the expansion and strengthening of social protection programmes has also continued this year.

Successful alliances with academia and civil society include expanded collaborations to strengthen violence prevention programmes and response services with: Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en Mexico; Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, AC; Fronteras Unidas Pro Salud; Fundación Internacional Granito de Arena; Asociación Guerrerense contra la Violencia hacia las Mujeres; Salud Integral para la Mujer; the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS); Early Institute; and PLH.

Partnerships were also built with other NGOs such as Lightshine, Resilis, RELAF- Red Latinoamericana de Acogimiento Familiar, Juconi and the Hope Effect Foundation to implement foster care programmes. For mental health and psychosocial support services, UNICEF collaborated with HIAS and La Jugarreta.

With the concrete purpose of strengthening our academic partners and alliances with think tanks, agreements have been signed with the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the Newman Institute, and the Colegio de la Frontera Norte, the Universities of Veracruz and Queretaro and the Stockholm International Water Institute, among others.

Overall, partnerships within the United Nations system were strengthened in 2023. For emergency preparedness and response, UNICEF worked closely with United Nations agencies under the framework of UNETE led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (United Nations) and the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO). UNICEF also supported the RCO to establish a programme management team; that is, a group of deputy representatives of agencies for joint planning and coordination. In light of UNSDCF development starting in 2024, it is a particularly important moment to have a sound United Nations coordination mechanism at the programme level, and UNICEF is expected to play a central role in it. Furthermore, UNICEF continued to co-lead the Operations Management Team with the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services. The team's primary task is to implement the United Nations United for Efficiency initiative in Mexico. The Business Operation Strategy continues to be the main task of the operations group; where UNICEF continues to play a leadership role, particularly in human resources, supply and finance.

In terms of UNICEF's public exposure, partnerships and communication alliances are crucial. Goodwill ambassadors continued to deliver UNICEF's messages; with the actor Cesar Costa joining Come Como Campeón (CCC) and being involved fundraising efforts. Canal ONCE's Puppets have also joined CCC. In addition, activities were organized for Children's Day, and the plastic artist Jorge Marin donated a child-size version of his famous sculpture, *Wings of Mexico*, to UNICEF and UNICEF Innocenti; this will be displayed in Florence, Italy. Other key individuals who collaborated were Dr Mauricio González, a health influencer; Cristo Fernandez, a renowned actor; and Alexa Moreno and Donovan Carrillo, who are Mexican Olympic athletes. In addition, groundwork with new partners began in 2023: Se Regalan Dudas Media, (one of the largest online broadcasters for Spanish speaking countries); the Red Mexicana de Ciudades Amigas de la Niñez; and three Mexican soccer teams joined efforts to expand CCC and create alliances to increase visibility ahead of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup in 2026.

Private sector contributions were key in terms of expanding programme coverage and for humanitarian interventions. In particular, for the education programme, the country office established relationships with Essity, Akelius Foundation, Formula E, Banco Santander and Sony. New partnerships were made with Formula 1, Chery Automobile, BMW, Abertis, Fundación Televisa, Dr. Simi Foundation and Fondo Unido. It is important to mention the donation of US\$1 million from the Mexican major donor, Elias Sacal, who also became part of UNICEF's International Council.

During 2023, UNICEF Mexico mobilized contributions for several emergencies across the world (e.g., the Syria/Turkey earthquake, the Gaza Strip conflict), but particularly for local emergencies such as Hurricane Otis. Moreover, to enhance and maximize impact, UNICEF bolstered alliances and engagement with primary business chambers and associations, including Consejo Coordinador Empresarial, Confederación Patronal Mexicana, International Chamber of Commerce and American Chamber. The office has raised awareness about family-friendly policies and has identified prospective new companies through these efforts and the child rights and business talks.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

Throughout 2023, UNICEF continued working both at federal and subnational levels. Based on solid relationships and trust gained with subnational governments, UNICEF managed to make important advances in policies, programmes and budget allocation for the most vulnerable children. UNICEF also provided a timely response to the emergency caused by Hurricane Otis in October. Collaboration at the federal level has also made important advances in 2023. A partnership agreement was signed with the ministry of well-being, with whom UNICEF collaborated to enhance materials on positive childcare practices. These were then disseminated through the ministry's social assistance interventions throughout the country. A new partnership was also established with the ministry of public security and civilian protection on child recruitment, while ongoing partnerships with MoH, MoL, MoE, SNDIF and CPA were further enhanced.

To enhance partnerships with subnational authorities, it was fundamental to reinforce UNICEF's presence in priority states. The capacity and structure of the three field offices (i.e., in Baja California, Chihuahua and Chiapas) have been strengthened by the creation of staff positions to reduce reliance on UNV contracts. However, UNICEF continued working with teams of UNVs in some states (e.g., Michoacán, Guerrero and Yucatan). The physical presence of UNICEF personnel to facilitate ongoing dialogue with local authorities was the key to achieving important policy advances for children. To further reinforce of UNICEF's presence on the ground, approval was sought to establish additional field offices in the north of the country, as well as duty stations in the capital cities of the priority states. It is important to align the objectives of the field presence (policy dialogue with local authorities versus service delivery in response to humanitarian needs) with the team's composition and profile, and at the same time to find a financially feasible approach.

UNICEF continued to generate evidence for effective policy advocacy. Engagement of government partners and academia in evaluating and systematizing good practices has been the key to promoting



government ownership in order to institutionalize interventions.

Leveraging public finance to achieve results for children has been identified as a key strategy across all programme areas and at all levels (federal, state and municipalities). While it is important to continue budget analysis, in order to generate actual change in budget allocations, it is critical to identify key programmes or interventions and to conduct focused advocacy, engaging all stakeholders. Great success was achieved in Michoacan, where the state congress requested to allocate public budget to establish a one-stop justice centre for children (i.e., US\$2 million) and to increase budget allocation for child protection institution. This influences the final version of the state budget for 2024. UNICEF's strategy to engage multiple stakeholders – both the government and legislative bodies as well as civil society – has been shown to be highly effective in generating policy change.

Strengthening coordination platforms with NGOs and United Nations agencies has also been central to amplifying results, especially in the migration and emergency responses. The contribution of civil society has been essential to support implementation of national policies in an increased number of states. UNICEF should continue investing in joint programmes with United Nations agencies and civil society. Effective partnerships with academia are also essential to advocacy and evidence generation.

Armed violence in Mexico is pervasive and translates into some serious forms of violence. Child recruitment is one of them and, as such, the country office has started work on this issue. This year has proven that ending recruitment of children is a complex process that requires intersectoral work, high-level advocacy, and the analysis and attention of possible actions in the legislative, public policy and cultural spheres. Other forms of violence, such as child marriage and commercial sexual exploitation of children, are underfunded and not sufficiently addressed by either the UNICEF country office or the government. In 2024, the Mexico Country Office will embark on the preparation of the new CPD (2026–2030). In-depth reflection needs to be undertaken to decide on how these issues, together with other emerging and/or unattended themes, should be addressed in the new Country Programme.

In terms of use of technology, while the office is very engaged with harnessing digital solutions to accelerate learning or increase access, the use of these solutions has provided mixed results. The Learning Passport has proven its great potential for scalability to reach significant numbers of students and teachers, and initial research by UNICEF Innocenti suggests that it has positive impact on learning outcomes. However, the UNICEF evaluation of the AI platform, *MatematIA*, has not demonstrated a significant impact on learning outcomes, but it has reduced dropout rates. The use of digital technologies at primary school level has not yet been formally evaluated or systematized, but initial observations suggest that students' interest is heightened by the use of technologies. However, teachers are struggling with how to use and integrate these technologies in order to innovate classroom teaching. While UNICEF is working closely on these initiatives with the MoE, and has jointly implemented teacher training, the absence of a more comprehensive strategy from the government limits the potential to re-imagine education with the use of technology. This may, therefore, be an area of opportunity for UNICEF to support the new government.