

Update on the context and situation of children

During 2019, three major events affected children situation in Ecuador: 1) the on-going economic crisis and austerity measures; 2) the policy shift regarding the Venezuela migration crisis, moving from less restrictive policy aligned with the Human Mobility Law (2017) to a restrictive entry policy requiring Venezuelan nationals to apply for a "humanitarian visa", with no exception for children; and 3) the social mobilizations of October 2019, which affected children and adolescent in at least two ways: human rights violations and school closings for a prolonged time, affecting the right to education.

On the economic front, Ecuador continues to show a weak performance with a real GDP growth of 0.5% [1]. This economic crisis has translated into worse labour market indicators since in December 2018, adequate employment reached 40.6% while in December 2019, it decreased to 38.8% [2].

To deal with the low oil prices, the government of Ecuador has resorted to a series of loan deals to boost the liquidity position and support dollarization over the next few years. In February 2019, the government of Ecuador secured loan deals worth USD 10.2 billion. The agreements include a USD 4.2 billion deal with the International Monetary Fund and USD 6 billion worth of loans from institutions such as the World Bank, the Andean Development Corporation and the Inter-American Development Bank. With this unfavorable context, the government of Ecuador has pursued fiscal consolidation and committed to fiscal austerity, considering it as crucial, since missing IMF targets in this context could cut off Ecuador from its "soft" loans as opposed to market borrowing at high interest rates.

With this scenario, risks associated with UNICEF Ecuador CPD can be summarized as follow: 1) political instability will continue affecting programme implementation due to constant changes at ministerial levels and possible social unrest; and 2) the macro-economic constrains is resulting in cuts in social spending, reduction of public servants and austerity measures which are affecting service delivery, especially those linked with children wellbeing, such as education, health, early childhood services and social protection. UNICEF Ecuador is monitoring the impact austerity will have on children.

Since July 2019, under the Inter-ministerial Decree number SENPLADES-MEF-MDT-001-2019, the Government of Ecuador decided to reorganize and rationalize how services are rendered at provincial and municipal level, by reducing the number of zones and districts of each Ministry. To understand the impact of this, in Ecuador administrative division, a zone may comprise one or more provinces, while a district may comprise one or more municipalities. This is under the logic of deconcentrating of services. Thus, by reducing the number of zones and districts, services are removed from the most deprived areas and concentrated in urban areas, thus reducing presence and personnel were more needed.

This economic scenario has had an impact on the response to the Venezuelan migration crisis by the Government of Ecuador. As of August 2019, all Venezuelans have to apply for a "humanitarian visa" in Venezuela, Peru or Colombia, prior to entering the country. While the visa has no cost, the application form costs USD \$50 (only payable by credit card or online), requires applicants to have a passport, conditions hardly met by most Venezuelans. On 5 November 2018, under technical assistance and advocacy efforts from UNICEF Ecuador, the government approved the **Special procedure to protect children on the move and their families**, which provided a series of steps to ensure all children were registered at the immigration checkpoint, regardless the type of document they had, while providing steps to ensure a protective environment for the child. Ever since the visa requirements entered into force, this procedure is no longer fully implemented, and children are now required to travel with a visa. The measure has, in fact, increased irregular migration with all the risks associated to it, like human trafficking, sexual trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse, with serious consequences to the well-being of children on the move.

According to a national survey jointly implemented between the World Bank, UNDP, WFP, UNHCR, OIM, UNFPA and UNICEF in 2019, 41.4% of Venezuelans nationals in Ecuador were living with unmet basic need which is higher than their host communities where it reaches 26.9%.

On 1st October 2019, the enactment of Decree No. 883 brought about a series of measures, including an amendment regulating the price of hydrocarbon derivatives. The intend of the decree was to determine a new form of calculation of costs of hydrocarbon derivatives that did not consider the subsidy that existed on gasoline, including the definitive abolition of a diesel fuel subsidy that has been applied for 40 years in the country, as well as the reduction of labor benefits to public officials and other labour reforms.

These measures were rejected by different sectors of society, such as freight carriers, public transport users, small producers, as well as indigenous peoples and their organizations. From 3 to 13 October, Ecuador was on a nation-wide strike convened by different sectors of civil society that turned violent from both sides. Under the request of the government, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights visited Ecuador to determine human rights violations during the events, with a follow up report, which includes observations of human rights violations against children: the

Commission clearly states that the intensity of the state response would have had disproportionate effects against the integrity of girls, boys, and adolescents, that accompanied the demonstrations, as well as arbitrary detention of adolescents without due process.

Thus, the Commission recommends the State to “adopt all measures in order to guarantee the right of children, adolescents, women and elderly people to participate in social demonstrations with due protection of their right to freedom of expression and assembly”. It is important to note that, in the case of adolescents detained during the demonstrations, UNICEF Ecuador provided technical assistance to the Human Rights Ombudsman Office to ensure no further human rights violations would occur.

[1] International Monetary Fund. World Economic Outlook October 2019.

[2] Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos INEC.

Major contributions and drivers of results

Every Child Survives and Thrives

Between 2016 and 2018 maternal, under-5, under-1 and neonatal mortality have shown a slight increase. For the first one, it went from 39.7 (deaths per 100,000 live births) to 41.1. For the under-5 mortality rate, it grew from 11.6 (deaths per 1,000 live births) to 12.2. [1]

In December 2019, the National Institute for Statistics and Census of Ecuador released the results of the 2018-2019 National Health and Nutrition survey. There has been little progress reducing stunting rate in children under five; while in 2012 the rate was 25.3, in 2018 it reached 23.0%. Furthermore, for children under two, it has increased from 24.0% to 27.2% in the same time period.

UNICEF Ecuador contributed to the implementation of community-level intersectoral health and nutrition models to address **stunting** rates in seven indigenous rural communities of Imbabura and Cayambe. UNICEF Ecuador helped establishing committees across seven indigenous parishes and one municipality, reaching 49,940 people and 14,211 families in 97 communities.

Additionally, UNICEF Ecuador contributed to the development of 5 intercultural community-led centers for the promotion of health and nutrition, supported by the local intersectoral health and nutrition committees. These spaces encourage adequate care of children and pregnant women by promoting healthy habits and positive childcare practices amongst families, benefiting 10,000 people in 2,500 families. Considering that quality **WASH** services are an important determinant for the prevention of malnutrition, UNICEF has supported the organizational, administrative, technical and environmental strengthening of 23 rural water service providers, who serve a population of 5,277 families in Imbabura province.

While no cases of **severe acute malnutrition** were identified at country level, UNICEF Ecuador efforts to contribute **to reduce malnutrition focused on addressing the issue of overweight and obesity** which is increasingly affecting children and adolescents. This year, UNICEF Ecuador launched a social media campaign to raise public awareness on food labelling policies, reaching 25,5742 people on Facebook and 16,713 people on Twitter. Other complementing efforts include advocacy in the national assembly to support regulations on the food industry. Finally, UNICEF launched the international mass-media campaign “Eat Like a Pro”, which has reached 1,200,634 people since the beginning of 2019.

On promoting **maternal and newborn care and prevention and treatment of HIV**, UNICEF Ecuador continues to support the national strategy to certify health services as child and mother friendly establishments. Ecuador has developed its own methodology in which public health establishments that provide services for delivering babies must meet 89 quality standards for adequate treatment of pregnant mothers, ensuring at least five pre-natal controls, alternative care during the delivery process, including culturally sensitive practices, and newborn adequate care. UNICEF has provided technical assistance to 7 public health facilities to meet these standards and has culminated the process in two of them, which have already passed the certification process. UNICEF Ecuador contributed with technical and financial support to train 100 health professionals who provide direct medical services to mothers and newborn babies. These health care professionals provide medical attention to over 50,000 people a month, most of which are women and newborns.

To improve **quality ECD** (Early Childhood Development), UNICEF Ecuador continued strengthening an innovative intercultural approach to ECD services in priority indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian territories, with special focus on the Northern border with Colombia.

With technical and financial assistance provided by UNICEF, 1,786 children from 0 to 3 years of age were able to attend services in 59 ECD service centers in the Kayambi Indigenous People's territory, applying intercultural methodologies. Additionally, 4,858 children between the ages of 4 and 5 years have also received education services with intercultural approach. To expand the project, visits from other indigenous ethnic groups were promoted to share the Kayambi experience and looking for mechanisms to adapt it to other cultural contexts.

To promote adolescent-parents' retention in education at the northern border with Colombia, UNICEF set up "daycare and education spaces" for the children of the students attending flexible education modalities. This pilot project reached 107 girls and boys in the 3 cities of the Esmeraldas Province. The pilot initiative aims at contributing to improved ECD, while ensuring the right to adolescent parents to complete their secondary education.

Contributing to **gender responsive adolescent health**, UNICEF Ecuador, in alliance with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), has provided technical assistance to the Government of Ecuador to adequately implement the National Policy on Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy. The technical assistance focused on strengthening the capacities of the Ministry of Health, by training staff to assess the quality of health services for adolescents. Currently, the assessment is taking place in selected health service facilities and results are expected the first semester of 2020. Additionally, and in the framework of ESAMyN, UNICEF is supporting the development of guidelines on the adequate medical attention needed for adolescent pregnancies across health facilities. Adolescent pregnancy (measured by births among adolescents from 10 to 14 years of age by 1,000 female adolescents in that age group) reached 2.56 for 2018.

To raise the awareness on the costs associated to adolescent pregnancies, UNICEF and UNFPA developed a study on the **economic cost of pregnancy in adolescents and girls**. By using financial tools, the study provides evidence of the costs needed to attend girls and adolescent pregnancies. It also shows the cost associated with inaction on this issue, and the saving the Ecuadorian State could have, by promoting sound prevention policies.

At local level, UNICEF efforts to prevent adolescent pregnancy are closely linked to the maternal and neonatal health output. In the Esmeraldas province (northern border with Colombia), UNICEF is providing technical and financial assistance to local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in coordination with Ministry of Health (MoH) to increase technical capacities of community health workers (CHW) working in hard-to-reach areas. Through this initiative, CHWs are responsible to identify adolescents who are pregnant, provide counseling on regular check-ups, prevention and testing of HIV and family planning. Thus far, 150 pregnant teenagers received home visits from CHW.

Every Child Learns

The net attendance rate in primary and secondary school between 2017 and 2018 have remain about the same (97.4% and 96.9%, for primary; 70.8% and 72.7% for secondary)^[3]. As for children on the move, 33.1% of Venezuelans area out of school.

In achieving **equitable access to quality education and learning outcomes**, UNICEF contributed to the implementation of the territorial strategy for inclusion and quality of education developed by Ministry of Education. The components implemented with technical and financial support from UNICEF Ecuador were: 1) in-service school-based teacher training with emphasis on literacy skills; 2) multi-grade school programme, culture of peace; 3) increased access to WASH; and 4) disaster preparedness and response within the education sector. All together these components have contributed to accessing education for 140,541 children, trained 5,095 teachers and 10,076 community members.

During 2019, UNICEF conducted a thorough review of in-service school-based teacher training, to systematize the results, methodology, lessons learned, problems encountered, and solutions identified regarding education policy, legal regulations, institutional structure, and financing bottlenecks to promote institutionalization of the programme by the Ministry of Education. UNICEF Ecuador contributed with the implementation of the in-service school-based teacher training benefiting 135,000 children who were able to attend school and improve their learning.

UNICEF also provided technical and financial support to the multi-grade school program implemented in the rural areas of the Northern border by the Ministry of Education, as a strategy to increase inclusion in education, benefitting 5,446 children from 5 to 14 years of age attending primary education. The program includes in-service teacher training in multi-grade schools, where there are usually one or two teachers for all grades, primary prevention of violence through peace education, and improvement of the learning environment including access to WASH in schools.

Regarding **skills development**, UNICEF Ecuador provided technical and financial assistance to a consortium of universities to develop the first national documentation center to recover, preserve, promote and disseminate existing literature, training and research material on early childhood development and education in indigenous and afro-Ecuadorian contexts.

Every child protected from violence and exploitation

Contributing to reduce **violence against children**, UNICEF worked on improving child protection systems at local level, while providing technical assistance to the National Assembly for the reforms to the Child and Adolescent Protection Law (CONA for its Spanish acronym). At the same time, it focused on promoting safe environments in schools and communities and addressing sexual violence against children in both spaces. Also, UNICEF Ecuador is promoting child-sensitive safety nets at community level in the Northern border indigenous and afro-descendent communities.

UNICEF Ecuador promoted a study showing strengths and weaknesses of the child protection system at local level which set the baseline for the development of a model to bring about improvements, which is being tested in seven cities along the Northern border of the country (Tulcán, Esmeraldas, San Lorenzo, Eloy Alfaro, Lago Agrio, Putumayo, Pedernales).

UNICEF also provided technical assistance to the National Assembly on-going process for an integral legal reform of the CONA, which regulates the way the child protection system should work. As part of this technical assistance UNICEF has provided access to international experts to provide a comparative analysis with other countries in the region, on the juvenile penal system, the prevention of sexual violence and abuse, focusing on the right of the victim`s time to present criminal charges, so that sexual crimes committed against children and adolescents are not subject to a statute of limitations as approved by the national referendum of February 2018.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education in the development the policy to prevent sexual violence against children in schools, with the participation of the educational community members (teachers, students, parents, authorities). The institutionalization of this policy seeks the improve procedures to prevent and derive sexual violence cases within the school system while also providing guidelines for the adequate specialized attention to the victims. It is important to mentioned that 2.1% of Ecuadorian students from 5 to 17 years of age mentioned they were physically punished by their teacher, while for Venezuelans it reached 7.8%^[5].

UNICEF is collaborating with UNWomen and UNHCR in building resilience and protective communities for women and children at the border between Colombia and Ecuador, in a bi-national initiative, with support from the Peace Building Fund (PBF). In the case of Ecuador, the programme focuses in 3 municipalities to develop community-based mechanisms for child and women`s protection in locations that are strongly affected by the presence of organized crime groups , and where there is little presence of State institutions. During 2019, 996 families, more than 2,000 children and 82 teachers were reached through culture of peace activities, which identified special protection needs, like psychosocial attention to 130 adolescents during the first six months of implementation (July -December 2019).

Regarding **harmful practices** around adolescent pregnancy, UNICEF Ecuador has integrated Communication for Development activities to address the social norms and practices that allow communities to perceive "as normal" early unions and adolescent development, working closely with the health section of UNICEF CO.

Finally, on **access to justice**, as part of preventing revictimization, UNICEF Ecuador worked on provided technical assistance to the Judiciary Council, to develop, implement and institutionalize the forensic protocol to interview children victims of sexual violence in judicial procedures, which ensure adequate protection of the victim rights. To ensure its applicability UNICEF CO is providing technical and financial assistance to ensure adequate training of justice operators such as prosecutors, judges, and provincial technical teams. As part of ensuring sustainability, UNICEF Ecuador is working with the School of Prosecutors and the School of the Judiciary Power in integrating the training as part of the permanent curricula of both.

Additionally, UNICEF Ecuador is currently working on a process for the development of a "single protocol to identify and attend sexual violence cases against children" as a national guide for the adequate treatment of sexual violence cases against children by different actors at different stages, preventing re-victimization of children. This protocol intends to guide procedures needed to implement to ensure adequate protection, referral and management of sexual violence against children that can be applied by ministries such as Health and Education, but also by the Police, local and national authorities and any other relevant actor.

Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

In terms of UNICEF Ecuador contribution to the global goals of providing **drinking water, sanitation, hygiene and ending open defecation**, UNICEF WASH initiatives focused on 3 key aspects:

- **Utilize evidence to promote child rights:** UNICEF has engaged with the National Institute of Statistics (INEC) to carry out an in-depth analysis on five aspects related to SDG 6.1 and 6.2 monitoring: 1) profiling of the remaining population still practicing open defecation; 2) calculation of safely managed sanitation; 3) water quality and household hygiene practices; 4) sustainability of water and sanitation service levels; and 5) WASH in schools and

WASH in health facilities. The main findings of these in-depth analysis are related to the critical situation of the sector related to water quality (explaining around 20% of the gap towards the achievement of SDG 6.1), the socio-economic and geographic specificity of population practicing open defecation, the fact that besides 45% of the population is connected to a sewage system that does not treat wastewater and finally, from the WASH in schools baseline, 300,000 children go to a school where there are no sanitation facilities and 165,000 children where water service is lacking (AMIE, 2019).

- **Strengthen enabling environments:** UNICEF has supported a national WASH BAT sector analysis focused on quality and sustainability of rural water and sanitation services, and including a Climate Change lens, which resulted in a sector action plan aiming at resolving the principle sector bottlenecks identified. UNICEF supported also a consultancy together with the Ministry of Water to strengthen the official sector capacity building strategy.
- **Empower communities:** three major local projects have been supported by UNICEF directed at WASH in schools in small rural schools in Esmeraldas province and accompanying UNICEF's nutrition programme in the high burden province of Imbabura.

Regarding **environmental sustainability for children**, during the last semester of 2019 UNICEF has initiated a process to define its country level strategies on climate change, with the aim of promoting children's rights and voices and positioning UNICEF Ecuador as a trusted and credible partner in the implementation of the National Determined Commitments (NDCs) and National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAP). This work has centered around five pillars: 1) evidence generation on the specific vulnerabilities of children and youth; 2) negotiations and technical assistance to promote child rights within the national climate change agenda; 3) advocacy and networking to establish children and youth as agents of change; 4) capacity building and dialogue to integrate climate change as a cross-cutting issue in the regular programmatic work; and 5) analysis of opportunities to reduce the environmental footprint of the office.

As a direct result of this work, UNICEF Ecuador has established a dialogue with the Ministry of Environment to pilot and institutionalize subnational youth participation mechanisms. Additionally, UNICEF Ecuador developed a process to consolidate opinions, experiences and proposals from more than 400 adolescents and youth through U-Report and focus groups; jointly with the Ministry of Environment, held capacity building activities on the 25th Conference of the Parties (COP25) negotiations for 10 leaders of national youth organizations; provided technical assistance to the implementation of the local Conference of Youth and supported the construction of a dialogue between the Sub-secretariat of Climate Change and youth movements. Further UNICEF Ecuador is strengthening the body of evidence for strategic guidance of future actions.

Emergency Response

Through the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), UNICEF provided legal assistance and orientation to 6,877 people (2,259 women, 1,399 men, 1,518 girls and 1,701 boys). With the Hebrew International Assistance Service (HIAS), 6,101 girls and 6,140 boys played in the Child Friendly Spaces at the border points, where they also received key messages on protection. To address the need of unaccompanied adolescents, UNICEF Ecuador set up a half-way house to provide assistance to adolescents while their family reunification process was resolved. In 2019, 30 adolescent girls and 45 boys were attended in this house.

Some 35,000 people including 19,000 children, rested at the Temporary Resting Spaces in Rumichaca and San Miguel, where families, especially vulnerable groups, could spend the night and receive support while waiting to go through immigration procedures. In these spaces, 25,000 blankets were distributed to protect children from the cold, and 16,768 children (8,975 girls and 7,793 boys) under 3 years received a kit for their hygiene and care.

Through the implementing partner Adventist Development and Response Agency (ADRA), and in coordination with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF screened 8,008 children (3,933 girls and 4,075 boys) under 5 years to identify and treat malnutrition. Out of them, 7,182 received nutritional supplementation to prevent their malnutrition and 86 were referred to specialized services for moderate and acute malnutrition.

Regarding WASH, UNICEF and ADRA installed 30 water filters, 15 handwashing stationaries, and rehabilitated 10 sets of toilets at the migration points. The infrastructure part was complemented with hygiene promotion sessions with families on the move, where 39,133 people participated and 6,385 received hygiene kits to use during their journey. In Rumichaca, UNICEF also installed a water treatment plant and at the southern border of Huaquillas, UNICEF concluded the drilling of a water bore to provide the immigration facilities with running water.

To support families to reach their destination or install in host communities, UNICEF implemented through HIAS, a cash-transfer (CBI) programme for transit and installation. In 2019, 1,554 families received transit CBI in Rumichaca and San Miguel. Installation CBI was given to families whose intention was to start their lives in Ecuador. The latest was given to 2,125 families. During this process, HIAS also delivered information to families on safe practices and key messages on protection for the prevention of trafficking, GBV and violence during their journey, reaching 138,051 people.

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In schools, UNICEF worked to promote the inclusion of migrant children and adolescents, reaching 94,534 students (61,254 girls and 33,280 boys) and 11,068 teachers with psychosocial support.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

The most important lesson on programme implementation is related to the economic and political context of Ecuador and the challenges it entails for programme sustainability. The risks associated with this factor can be summarized as follows: 1) political instability will continue affecting programme implementation due to constant changes at ministerial level and the pre-electoral year; and 2) the macro-economic constrains plus the deal reached with IMF has resulted in cuts in social spending, reduction of public servants and austerity measures which are affecting service delivery, especially in education, health, early childhood services and social protection. This reality requires UNICEF to increase its territorial presence, developing models that can articulate social sector efforts, such as the work being done to reduce chronic malnutrition, and advocate for national and local policies and budgets that support innovative approaches to ensure children's rights in times of economic crisis.

As part of understanding how local governments can contribute to children's rights, UNICEF identified opportunities to work with local governments on planning and budgeting at local level with participatory methods that benefit children, adolescents and families, having identified potential areas such as housing, public space, public transport and WASH.

To improve outcomes in education UNICEF Ecuador in alliance with its private sector partner Diners Club International co-designed and implemented a strategy that pursues innovative analysis on the current state and the future of education. The initiative is called *Edupasión* (mixing 'education' and 'passion' to illustrate the purpose of the initiative) and the implementation, in 2019, focused on a communication strategy to create and disseminate messages to the audience specifically interested in education and development. The strategy reached 10,776 people through videos. Additionally, 30 documents on the current state of the education system and innovative ideas on how to improve them are being analyzed by the steering committee of *Edupasión*, which includes UNICEF and Diners Club Ecuador, our main corporate partner.

UNICEF Ecuador also worked on U-Report, launching five surveys with different groups of adolescents and youth organizations on issues agreed with them such as: women representation in media, sex education, quality of education, cyberbullying and climate change. The voices and opinions of 1,730 young people were part of this initial phase and the results were used by them to raise awareness of public authorities about the different issues that affect their lives.

In September, UNICEF CO started a pilot initiative that entails the recruitment of face-to-face fundraisers through United Nations Volunteers (UNV). The agreement with UNV at country level included dialogue with our respective HQs and ROs. The pilot project had an intended duration of 6 months, which has been extended for another 6 months given initial satisfactory results. This will allow us to draw lessons learned from implementation, evaluate the efficiency of this pilot and measure results adequately.

As part as the global Memorandum of Understanding between High Commissioner on Refugees, World Food Programme, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNICEF, Ecuador CO is participating in a pilot project for harmonization of cash transfer programmes in humanitarian contexts, which aims to improve effectiveness and efficiency of this type of interventions

Finally, understanding that the human mobility crisis from Venezuela requires strong advocacy, UNICEF Ecuador supported the World Bank initiative to conduct a Living Conditions Survey on Venezuelan migrants and host communities in Ecuador. This study, while executed by the World Bank, included financial support from UNICEF and five other UN Agencies and it provides evidence-based data about the situation and deprivations that Venezuelan and Ecuadorian households in host communities are facing. The study aims at influencing a policy agenda that addresses their social and economic inclusion, and it draws policy recommendations under three pillars: 1) strengthening social, political and economic opportunities; 2) developing and strengthening national and local capabilities; and 3) lifting barriers for social and economic integration. Besides contributing financially, UNICEF also contributed by providing insights on how to link findings with children's rights, and is currently analyzing the data to develop a policy ask and raise funds to plug the needs of children on the move and children on host communities.

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