

Update on the context and situation of children

El Salvador's population is 6.6 million people; 2 million are children.

In 2019, the CO responded to focalized emergency situations such as flooding and droughts.

Political and socioeconomic situation

In February 2019, GANA's presidential candidate, Nayib Bukele, won the nation's presidential elections with 53.1% of votes. This victory constituted a political transition for El Salvador. For the first time since the end of the Salvadorian civil war, a candidate was elected to the presidency who did not represent either of the main political parties, FMLN or ARENA. The Legislative Assembly held its last elections in 2018 and is comprised of 37 ARENA, 23 FMLN, 10 GANA legislators, with the remaining 14 seats divided among smaller parties. The National Budget (USD 6,426.1 million) was approved in December following a long negotiation process.

For El Salvador remittances continued to play a critical role at both macroeconomic and microeconomic levels. According to the IMF, the Salvadoran economy grew during 2019, aided by a virtually zero-inflation rate and a 4% growth in remittances, returning to its long-term growth rate. An additional fiscal adjustment of approximately 2% GDP in 2021 would guarantee compliance with the Law on Fiscal Responsibility and would set the national debt-to-GDP ratio in a decreasing trajectory. Between 2019-2024, the country will face debt payments of USD 2,300 million.

In September 2019, the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Government of El Salvador signed a bilateral agreement to install an International Commission Against Corruption (CICIES) to "support, strengthen and collaborate with institutions in charge of preventing, investigating and sanctioning corruption".

Health, nutrition and WASH

According to the Ministry of Health (MINSAL), the mortality rate of children under 5 years of age is 5 per every 1,000 children born, thus remaining at 10.9; nevertheless, neonatal mortality increased from 5.5 in 2017 to 6 per every 1,000 births in 2018. The mortality of infants 8-days-old or less increased from 4.2 to 4.6 in the same period.

Adolescent pregnancies went from 21% to 19.3; despite the decreasing trend, 1 in every 5 pregnant women are younger than 18 years of age.

According to World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in 2017, El Salvador suffered losses amounting to more than USD 2,500 million due to losses in productivity, education and health costs, all related to malnutrition – 1 out of every 6 children suffers from chronic malnutrition. According to the Multi-purpose Household Survey (EHPM), 18.6% of households with children lack food safety (Ministry of Education, 2019).

In 2019, dengue suspected cases increased: in 2018 there were 8,443 registered cases while in 2019 27,470 cases were registered, this is an alarming 225% increase.

El Salvador advanced in access to basic family and community health services, yet, 46.6% of households with children do not have access to sanitation and 21.1% lack drinking water.

Education

According to the Ministry of Education, the percentage of schools in communities with gang presence decreased slightly from 44.6% in 2017 to 42.9% in 2018. Considerable challenges persist with respect to coverage: net enrollment rates in primary school rose from 5.1% in 2017 to 6.4% in 2018, and in preschool, increased from 56.3% to 57.4% (source: Ministry of Education, 2018). Between 2014 and 2018, preschool rates decreased from 58.6% to 57.4%; in primary school rates decreased from 86.4% to 82%; in middle school, it also decreased from 64.9% to 57.3% while in secondary school, rates remained essentially stagnant from 37.5% to 37.6%. Out of every 100 children that go into primary school, less than 40% graduate from high school.

Child Protection

El Salvador suffers chronic violence, affecting children in their homes, school and communities. In 2019, the National Civil Police (PNC) registered 2,390 homicides, 28.7% less than the previous year. According to the Attorney General's Office

(FGR), disappearances also decreased.

In 2019, the PNC registered 3,760 reports alleging sexual aggressions against children (0-17). This represents a 6.9% increase in comparison to the 3,516 cases reported in 2018. In 6 out of every 10 complaints in 2018, the victim was a girl. The FGR reported 736 crimes of violence against women (244 femicides).

According to the United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM), 37,316 migrants returned to El Salvador, 40.9% more than in the previous year. 52.2% came from the U.S., and 47.5% came from Mexico. 17.7% of them were children migrating due to economic drivers, insecurity and/or family reunification. Despite this increase, levels have yet to reach those of 2015 and 2016. More than 1.4 million Salvadorans reside in the U.S. In October 2019, Temporary Protection Status (TPS) was extended through to January 4th, 2021.

In September 2019, the U.S. signed a cooperation agreement with El Salvador in which the latter pledged to become a recipient of asylum seekers who reached or crossed the U.S. border in which the Salvadoran Government committed to not send to any other country, those asylum seekers before the U.S. renders a decision with respect to their petition.

The Government of El Salvador officially acknowledged the existence of victims of forced displacement and has adhered to the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework.

Social Inclusion

The percentage of monetary poverty in households with children was twice as much as that in adult-only households (36.1% versus to 18.3%). The percentage of households with children living in multidimensional poverty remained stable up to 2017 (40.8% in 2016 and 2017) and dropped to 36.1% in 2018. This decreased from 50.3% to 45.5% in 2018, in terms of households with children 0 to 3. According to the EHPM, in the households with children and adolescents between 4 and 17 years old, the reduction was of 1.9 percentage points, ranging from 41.8% in 2017 to 39.9% in 2018.

El Salvador is the 6th country in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a 6.8 INFORM risk index rate, due to its exposure to human and natural threats and its limited capacity for institutional response.

Major contributions and drivers of results

2019 is the fourth year of the cooperation programme that runs from 2016 to 2020, covering the same time frame as that of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). Both these cooperation frameworks were developed prior to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UNICEF Strategic plan 2018-2021, however, the results and impact directly contribute to their implementation.

In the context of the definition of its priorities, the new Government of President Nayib Bukele has identified increased attention to and investment in early childhood development as central to its agenda for change, in great part, due to UNICEF's successful positioning of this requirement. The Presidency is scheduled to launch in the first half of 2020 a national ECD policy that has been developed with technical assistance from the CO.

In 2019, initial work was undertaken toward the elaboration of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and the new UNICEF cooperation framework, both of which will incorporate and reflect the new government's priorities and the SDGs. In this context, during the reporting period, the CO begun its work on the Situation Analysis of Children and Women (SITAN) and UN system Common Country Assessment (CCA). The UNSDCF and the country programme document are programmed to be finalized in 2020, should current work chronograms hold.

Under the leadership of the National Council on Children and Adolescents (CONNA) in its capacity as El Salvador's maximum authority of the national child protection system; the Presidency of the Republic; and, the Attorney's General Office, a Commission to monitor and assess the implementation of the 2018 concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child for El Salvador was established during the reporting period. UNICEF contributed to the wide dissemination of the 2018 Committee on the Rights of the Child concluding observations, including through the elaboration of user-friendly versions for the new government authorities and civil society.

In 2019, no emergencies were declared by the Government, however, the CO working together with United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and implementing partners, responded to localized emergencies, including severe drought in El Salvador's Dry Corridor, as well as to floods. Although the drought constituted a slow-onset emergency, CERF funding was granted, and UNICEF led in WASH and nutrition sectors. To build resilience through its CERF execution, the CO ensured a comprehensive and integrated multisectoral response. The CO has continued to strengthen emergency preparedness with Government counterparts, the UNCT and implementing partners.

Major results achieved in 2019:

During the reporting period, the CO continued its advocacy for children's rights and its efforts to promote increased financing for ECD, including through leveraging high-level political dialogues and engaging directly with decision-makers and influencers that included the Presidency of the Republic. In this context, in the second half of 2019, UNICEF was requested to provide technical support and guidance to the Presidency in the elaboration of its Early Childhood Development Policy which is scheduled to be launched in the first half of 2020. The CO has worked closely with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and World Bank to support the Government of El Salvador to arrive at an investment portfolio for ECD amounting to USD 750M that is informed by the analysis undertaken by UNICEF in 2018 together with New York University's (NYU) Global TIES for Children titled 'Invertir en nuestros niños: el norte común'; as well as by additional reports developed by the CO to assess the state of children through multidimensional poverty analyses.

These efforts have contributed to a USD 101.8M investment in ECD reflected in El Salvador's 2020 National Budget that is unprecedented in the nation's history. The development banks have established for the first time an investment envelope of USD 750 for ECD.

In conjunction with these efforts, the CO strengthened its collaborations with the private sector to promote increased coverage for ECD services, and to positively impact and position family-friendly policies. Through its strategic partnership with the Fundación Rafael Meza Ayau, the CO conducted an extensive survey to capture the private sector's concerns and recommendations with regards to the implementation of the new Salas Cuna law that is scheduled to come into effect in June 2020. The Law requires that all private and public sector entities with 100 or more employees provide employee child care for children 0-3 years of age. 99 representatives from 57 private sector companies were consulted and surveyed, resulting in the report 'Hacia la reglamentación de la Ley Salas Cuna' that was presented to the Presidency of the Republic in its capacity as the Government entity tasked to develop the law's regulatory framework. Preliminary estimates indicate that approximately 50,000 children in this age group would receive these child-care services that are currently unavailable to them and their families, although as per El Salvador's Constitution, this service is their constitutional right.

UNICEF El Salvador has continued to provide technical guidance to inform the Government's formulation and prioritization of evidence-based interventions to respond to acute challenges faced by children, including through the development of a poverty eradication strategy for El Salvador based on the multidimensional poverty index indicators that gauge the situation of households with children and adolescents nationwide. The strategy, together with its cost analysis, was presented to the Presidency, and serves as a vital instrument to enable Government institutions to orient limited resources and target efforts to reduce multidimensional poverty in households with children, that are evidenced as El Salvador's most vulnerable.

The CO has supported El Salvador's Ministry of Education (MINEDUCYT) in its efforts to augment the net coverage of early childhood interventions targeting children 0-3 years of age. According to latest available figures, coverage of early childhood interventions rose from 1.4% in 2014 to 6.4% in 2018, in part due to strategic and concerted efforts to bring services closer to families in their communities. In 2019, the CO has continued to support the MINEDUCYT in its implementation of its 'Territorialización' strategy designed to bring ECD services to families in the territory through modalities including 'círculos de familia' (family circles) and 'También Soy Persona' (I am also a Person). UNICEF has provided technical assistance to the development of this strategy and supports its implementation in territory. The strategy capitalizes on innovative multisectoral coordination in territory and galvanizes the central role played by local governments which, together with civil society organizations, collaborate with the central Government to expand coverage and achieve improvements in the quality of services for ECD. During 2020, MINEDUCYT will undertake an evaluability assessment of this initiative with UNICEF's support.

UNICEF has contributed to national efforts to reduce the number of children who abandon school. El Salvador's national school desertion trend has been reduced from 97,646 students in 2016 to 76,030 in 2018, through the implementation of a strategy that reintegrates out-of-school children and improves school retention rates by targeting children at risk of school desertion. This strategy builds on interventions that include the identification of at-risk children and retention modalities; the establishment and activation of school retention protocols led by educators within the community; improvements in pedagogical practices; and the construction of a more comprehensive curricula that incorporates life-skills, and arts and music education in both regular and flexible education contexts. Additionally, the CO has contributed in strengthening monitoring and follow-up of the educational trajectories of students to address the educational lag of the most vulnerable populations, as well as to support these children and adolescents to reach the minimum standard learning levels. The Mesoamerica Education initiative, developed by UNICEF together with the IADB initiated in 2019, represents an opportunity to scale-up these validated modalities in municipalities affected by violence and migration from which relevant lessons learned and best practices have already been derived.

El Salvador was among the first nations to ascribe to the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, thereby

earning its status as a Pathfinder country in 2016. In 2019, progress was achieved in the development of the roadmap to inform a national action implementation plan aimed at accelerating compliance with SDG 16.2, that calls on all nations to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children. The new Government committed to, in early 2020, resume its leadership of this initiative, including through a public declaration of its compromise, and the identification of a new high-ranking focal point to champion these efforts.

In the context of Child Protection, the CO contributed in 2019 to strengthening reintegration programs for returned child migrants and forcibly displaced children. Partnerships were forged with the responsible Government institutions, namely the migration authorities Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería (DGME) and the corresponding government child protection entity the Instituto Salvadoreño Para el Desarrollo Integral de la Niñez y la Adolescencia (ISNA), as well as with civil society organizations that are servicing these populations such as CONTEXTOS, Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA) and the Misioneros Scalabrinianos. Working with these implementation partners, in 2019, the CO provided comprehensive support to 532 returned or internally displaced children to facilitate their reintegration. A comprehensive model of attention for the reintegration of children was also begun to enable their social reintegration in territory. Currently, the vast majority of services available to this population are provided by NGOs and no comprehensive consolidated model exists. UNICEF is therefore, promoting partnerships and fostering improved coordination efforts to better support these children and their families to receive comprehensive psychosocial, legal and social protection services for reintegration, including support for school reinsertion, to build their resilience.

Within the reporting period, participating municipalities have enabled and refurbished 12 safe spaces where approximately 7,035 children participate in sports, arts and cultural programs, through which they acquire life skills, question gender stereotypes and increase awareness of their rights. Additionally, 203 children have participated in and benefited from community mediation services and mediation strategies in schools. Furthermore, the child protection and case referral system 'Si Protejo' designed by UNICEF, has been deployed in the municipalities of San Marcos, San Martín, and Santo Tomás. The system has provided municipal child protection specialists and social workers with a necessary instrument to facilitate their follow-up in instances where children and adolescents are in need of child protection services. Close to 1,349 children and adolescents with protection needs have been identified and referred to available social service programs in their communities.

In 2019, the UNCT, together with the Government of El Salvador and civil society began the implementation of the Spotlight initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls. Through its impact and contributions, UNICEF El Salvador is increasingly recognized for its work to eliminate gender-based violence. As such, UNICEF leads in the Spotlight initiative's prevention and behavioural change pillar, and co-leads in the laws and policies pillar. UNICEF has played a key role in ensuring that girls and their specialized needs are duly considered in the development of social policies and gender-based violence (GVB) prevention programs. This work is fundamental given that in the context of El Salvador, as elsewhere, the onset of GBV is often early childhood and presents in a continuum that spans development from girls, to adolescents and into womanhood.

In the context the Spotlight initiative, UNICEF has supported the National Civil Police and the General Prosecutor of the Republic in the creation and refurbishment of child-friendly spaces that are non-revictimized to address the needs of girls victims of violence. In alliance with OXFAM, the CO has continued its work in the development and implementation of a GVB prevention strategy in schools that prioritizes sexual violence. This strategy has been implemented in 42 schools located in six municipalities with high incidences of child and adolescent sexual violence. This scale-up has enabled the CO to reach schools in the western, central and eastern parts of the country that comprise a population of 28,121 students.

In 2019 the prevention and response to Zika programme was successfully concluded. Among its principal achievements, the programme's success resulted in the adoption by the Ministry of Health of UNICEF's Care for Child Development (CCD) approach which, has been recognized as effectively promoting improved intersectoral coordination that is conducive to comprehensive ECD services. The Ministry of Health's ECD promoters are therefore, adopting the CCD's child development instruments and thereby strengthening services.

The implementation of the response to Zika was also successful in strengthening, in a sustainable manner, the skill-sets and capacities of national and local health and education personnel and health care promoters, who in turn, also bolstered the effectiveness and efficiency of their multisectoral coordination and response. The CO increased awareness of the need to consider multisectoral perspectives, and thereby incorporate, the special requirements of people and children with disabilities within public policy agendas. This work also served to evidence the importance of services and interventions aimed at improving child rearing practices to strengthen parental abilities in ECD.

In 2019, UNICEF, together with FAO, WHO/PAHO and WFP responded to a slow-onset humanitarian drought emergency in El Salvador's dry corridor. UNICEF led the response in the WASH and nutrition sectors. The INFORM system and a joint assessment undertaken by the UNICEF CO together with FAO and WFP in 2018 underpinned the emergency response. Through an innovative approach that integrated response to WASH and nutrition sectors, the CO optimized its execution of

CERF and CERF-related interventions, while also strengthening the resilience of affected populations, in particular of children, pregnant and lactating women, and affected families. This approach also reduced the risk of illness caused by lack of access to potable drinking water and deficient hygienic practices. 296 health workers were trained to improve response capacities to severe malnutrition. 3,396 children under 9 years of age and 752 pregnant and lactating women were screened, and 106 children were diagnosed with acute moderate or severe malnutrition, that represents a prevalence of 3.1% in comparison to the national rate of 2.5%. The Ministry of Health is now equipped with nutritional, micronutrient and multivitamin supplies to address these cases of malnutrition, including RUTF for the first time. 555 families received hygiene items and 1248 people received information regarding safe practices in illness prevention. 5243 people gained access to safe water as a result of the installation of 31 water supply sites.

In 2019, the CO's emergency response capacities were strengthened. The EPP was updated as per established deadlines and a Multi-hazard Preparedness Plan was elaborated with the support of LACRO. The Plan will be periodically updated.

Lastly, the CO contributed to improving the monitoring and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to the situation of children, adolescents and women through the incorporation of modules and questions targeting their realities in the context of the National Health Survey that was initiated in 2019 using the MICS methodology. The National Health Survey is scheduled to be concluded in 2020.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

2019 was a transitional year for El Salvador. In June, a new government assumed office. This transition produced institutional changes and changes in government priorities. UNICEF El Salvador successfully leveraged the change in context to position key topics in the political agenda which, in some cases have been adopted by the new administration, including early childhood development, and the need to increase investment in children. In the first half of 2020, the Presidency will launch its National Policy on Early Childhood Development, developed in 2019 with the support of the CO in partnership with World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).

The CO was successful in leveraging the main political, social and economic events in the country to position its advocacy for children in both the public and private sector. To substantiate its advocacy, the CO presented robust evidence on the situation of children, and effectively partnered with prestigious academic institutions and thinktanks, such as New York University Global Ties for Children. This strategic positioning allowed for the generation of new alliances with public-private sector actors that have been instrumental in achieving an increase in the amount of funding assigned to children and adolescents, both from the State as well as from development banks.

In the context of political transitions, to promote the continuity of plans and programs from former administrations and/or agreements stemming from previous high-level political dialogues, an evidence-based approach that adds visibility to the situation of children and demonstrates the impact on children and families should current plans not be maintained, is required to underpin the construction of an effective narrative which, must also be aligned to reflect priorities as defined by new government authorities. In 2019, the CO contributed to position continuity of interventions in the education sector to respond to both short-term and mid-term goals defined by the 2030 Agenda.

The CO works at a national level promoting public policies and programs designed to be implemented by the government, however, it also works, although with limitations, locally with the objective of creating intervention models that can be positioned for scaling-up to the national level through the identification of best practices and lessons learned. An example of this is the adoption by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education of the innovative Care for Child Development (CCD) Approach promoted by UNICEF.

To achieve scalability of these interventions and to reach children and their families, coordination and collaboration among local and state level actors is essential. UNICEF has, in several instances, played a key role in facilitating these alliances at a local level. This facilitation is fundamental for ensuring that children and their families have access to comprehensive services through the implementation of strategies such as the 'Territorialización' strategy for early childhood development, and local-level violence prevention. These strategies have proven that the creation of coordinating systems with a multi-sectorial approach allow for the achievement of higher coverage, better quality of services, and increased commitment from diverse actors towards a common collective practice, addressing knowledge gaps, and providing more sustainable and efficient funding.

To foster the institutionalization and scalability of interventions, a robust monitoring and evaluation evidence-based framework rooted in quantitative and qualitative analysis is essential. To this end, the CO has increased its investments in monitoring and evaluation, that have informed result-based decision-making processes, as well as fostered continuous learning processes for all parties involved.

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UNICEF El Salvador has also successfully positioned itself to leverage the reform taking place in United Nations by increasing collaboration with other system agencies, funds and programmes. This positioning was instrumental for example to respond to slow-onset emergencies, such as droughts and floods experienced.

UNICEF El Salvador has proven that, by including children and adolescents with disabilities in our preparation and emergency response processes, the capacity of people and families to organize and face risks and crisis is increased. Likewise, timely and articulated emergency response to situations require the existence of effective coordination systems, as well as robust and up-to-date statistical data to support the planning processes for response interventions.

During the cooperation cycle, UNICEF El Salvador has promoted innovative communication methodologies for development, capacity building and skill development to address and combat gender stereotypes. Examples include the methodology implemented with the NGO CONTEXTOS to support returned migrants to address trauma and other experiences using reading and writing for them to articulate their experiences, or the adaptation of the methodology designed by Musicians without Borders to the El Salvador educational system which promotes peaceful coexistence in schools through music.

El Salvador is affected by global and regional phenomena including migration, climate change, and epidemics such as Zika virus among other Arbovirosis. In this regard, the CO has participated in evaluations, studies, and sub-regional initiatives to comprehensive address these problems that affect the country with the purpose of finding and implementing effective solutions, together with nations facing common challenges.

2019 marked the conclusion of the Zika prevention and response program, notwithstanding the marked increase in cases of Arbovirosis in El Salvador. Suspected cases of dengue increased from 8,443 in 2018 to 27,470 registered cases in 2019, representing a 225% surge. Support to national authorities for Arbovirosis prevention and response will continue to be a priority for the CO. In this connection, work undertaken will need to continue promoting the CCD approach, to directly benefit the care received by children and children with disabilities and their families through its multisectoral approach that incorporates and involves education, protection, health, and nutrition.

During 2019, progress in strengthening collaborative and coordinating efforts with COs in Honduras and Guatemala for the protection and inclusion of children in the education system are a case in point. Together with Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala, the CO has worked to protect the rights of migrant children. Building on this approach and leveraging work undertaken in 2019, the Mesoamerica Education initiative with the IADB will allow for the exchange of best practices, the identification of scalable solutions and of monitoring and evaluation frameworks in 2020 and 2021.