

# Health in Timor-Leste

An investment opportunity for private and public donors

unicef   
for every child

## The opportunity

All children have the right to survive and thrive.

UNICEF promotes a global shift from treating diseases to strengthening health systems so that all children, adolescents and women of reproductive age have access to affordable, sustainable quality health care.

UNICEF envisions a strong health system that includes preventive, promotive and curative care, supports family practices and produces equitable health, nutrition and development outcomes for infants, children, adolescents and women of reproductive age. Systems should be gender responsive and deliver integrated service packages of appropriate quality for all children and women, regardless of their location, sex, ethnicity, language or religion.

Timor-Leste has made significant progress in improving maternal and child health, bringing down maternal mortality rates by an impressive 80 per cent since 1990. Demographic Health Survey data in 2016 also showed a dramatic reduction in under-five mortality rates, from 64 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2009 to 41 deaths per 1,000 live birth in 2016. Infant mortality rates reduced from 45 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2009 to 30 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2016 for children under 1 year old. Notably, the country achieved Millennium Development Goal 3 by reducing under-five mortality by two thirds (72 per cent) since 1990.

These great achievements show not only the commitment of the Government to child and maternal health, but also its ability to improve health outcomes rapidly if the right investment is made. The 2011–2030 National Health Sector Plan has played, and will continue to play, a critical role in strengthening the quality of and access to free universal health coverage in Timor-Leste.

Through increased investments in newborn health, Timor-Leste can ensure a healthier generation that performs better in school and later becomes part of a productive workforce, ultimately boosting economic growth for all.

### Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3: Good health and well-being

UNICEF's health programme contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 – good health and well-being. Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being is important to building prosperous societies. Concerted efforts are required to achieve universal health coverage and sustainable financing for health, address the growing burden of diseases and tackle environmental factors contributing to ill health.

3 GOOD HEALTH  
AND WELL-BEING



## The challenges

While remarkable progress has been made in child and maternal health in Timor-Leste, two areas for concern remain: full immunization and neonatal health.

Full immunization of Timorese children remains a challenge. In 2016, only 49 per cent of children (aged 12–23 months) received all basic vaccinations as part of the Timorese national vaccination programme. Some of the challenges to achieve full immunization are a result of limited public financing for immunization some barriers to vaccine acceptance and uptake, while supply chains, workforces and logistics systems are not yet robust enough in many areas to ensure vaccine delivery.

Neonatal mortality rates have stagnated at around 20 deaths per 1,000 live births over the past decade, falling only marginally. It only reduced from 22 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2009 to 19 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2016.

### Neonatal mortality

The first 28 days of life – the neonatal period – is the most vulnerable time for a child’s survival. Children face the highest risk of dying in their first month of life.

Lack of obstetric and newborn services contribute to the stagnating newborn mortality rates – 88 per cent of health-care facilities in Timor-Leste do not offer basic emergency obstetric and newborn care. Around 43 per cent of pregnant women do not receive skilled assistance during delivery. Skilled attendance at birth is marked with significant disparities between rural and urban areas, where, respectively, 55 per cent and 14 per cent of pregnant women do not receive skilled attendance at birth.

A mother’s level of education matters; only 5 per cent of mothers with tertiary education compared to 67 per cent of uneducated mothers do not receive skilled attendance when giving birth. Additionally, 65 per cent of mothers (urban 60 per cent and rural 70 per cent) and 69 per cent of newborns (urban 43 per cent and rural 89 per cent), do not receive recommended post-natal visits. The lack of or low coverage of these life-saving interventions contributes to a high maternal mortality ratio and stagnating newborn mortality.

Januario and his daughter Agnesia (8 months old) at the Ossu Health Centre.





## The solutions

### ① Improved and equitable access to and use of quality maternal, newborn and child health services, including immunization, in six priority municipalities

It is critical to save the lives of mothers, newborns and children and address preventable stillbirths by supporting high-quality, evidence-based, equitable and low-cost care and services before, during and after birth – at health facilities and at home. UNICEF will work to ensure that services are designed to enable families and their communities to meet all needs of young children.

It is also important to build the capacity of health workers to deliver quality maternal and newborn health services at community health centres and health posts. UNICEF will strengthen the front-line health worker network for timely home visits to promote antenatal and postnatal care and exclusive breast feeding, to make referrals from community to health-facility care and to ensure every child receives routine immunization.

UNICEF and partners will support immunization programmes to help children survive and lead healthy lives. Efforts will include engaging communities to create vaccine demand, procuring and distributing vaccines, and keeping vaccines safe and effective.

### ② Key influencers (health-care workers, local authorities, community and faith-based organization leaders, and community health workers) are well equipped to promote positive social norms and healthy behaviour practices, and improve demand for quality health services

Social and behaviour change is at the heart of UNICEF's programming. Elements of this work reinforce and magnify the implementation of health interventions. UNICEF will support the Government of Timor-Leste and local partners to mobilize communities so that they improve health-seeking behaviour. UNICEF will build the capacity of front-line workers on kangaroo mother care and early essential newborn care services to be delivered in the community. These low-cost, high-impact interventions aim to reduce neonatal and maternal mortality.

Kangaroo mother care is a method of care of preterm infants. The method involves infants being carried, usually by the mother, with skin-to-skin contact, with exclusive breast feeding and early discharge from hospital. It has shown to decrease mortality and morbidity in preterm and low-birthweight infants by providing protection from infection, regulating temperature, breathing and brain activity, and encouraging mother-baby bonding.

Elsa, 25, at home in Gleno with her three children.



## Impact

By 2025, working with partners in the public and private sectors, UNICEF in Timor-Leste aims to contribute to the achievement of these key results:



Over **95 per cent of women** receive at least four antenatal visits (currently 87 per cent)



Over **70 per cent of live births** are attended by skilled health personnel (currently 56 per cent)



Over **50 per cent of mothers and newborns** receive postnatal care (currently 35 per cent)



**75 per cent of municipalities administer** the second dose of the measles and rubella vaccination to over 80 per cent of children (currently 15 per cent)



**150,000 people** are reached with health promotion activities at health-care facilities and at the community level



Auria with newborn baby Lucia. "I came to this hospital in a truck. I started at 10 and reached the hospital an hour later," says Auria, at the Baucau hospital in Timor-Leste.



## How to help

UNICEF's work to improve the health status of children and women requires a budget of US\$17.26 million for 2022–2025. Of this amount, UNICEF has committed US\$840,000 from its resources. Now, UNICEF is seeking partners from both the private and the public sector to financially support its health programme with a total amount of US\$16.42 million. Donors can contribute in two ways:

- 1. Contribute to thematic funds and other flexible funds** – This type of funding targets a specific goal area of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, such as child survival, while enabling the Country Office to direct the investments to activities that are most needed within this thematic area. This gives UNICEF's experts the flexibility to focus on interventions that will have the most impact in accelerating results for children.
- 2. Contribute to specific activities** – If you are interested in contributing to specific solutions, UNICEF is ready to partner with you. UNICEF has developed the following budget for its maternal, newborn and child health work for 2022–2025 and can provide more details on any of the interventions listed below.

SOLUTIONS	FUNDING REQUIREMENT (US\$) 2022–2025*
1. Improved and equitable access to and use of quality maternal, newborn and child health services	16 million
2. Positive social norms and healthy behaviour practices promoted, and demand for quality health services improved	420,000

\*More detailed budgets for each solution are available.

**UNICEF's work to improve the health status of children and women requires a budget of US\$17.26 million for 2022–2025. Of this amount, UNICEF has committed US\$840,000 from its resources.**

Strategies deployed under each solution include:

- **Service delivery:** Procurement, distribution of supplies and equipment, logistics, transportation, warehousing, infrastructure, direct assistance, cash grants, monitoring and innovations
- **Capacity development:** Development of materials, training aids, information, education and communication materials, workshops, social mobilization and community empowerment
- **Institution building:** Development of plans/micro-plans, institutional mechanisms and tools, guidelines, protocols and standards, coordination, oversight strengthening, management information systems, resourcing and budgeting
- **Evidence generation:** Situation analysis, research, studies, surveys, evaluation, assessments, generation of profiles, knowledge management and innovative approaches
- **Policy dialogue and advocacy:** Strategy and policy formulation, convening meetings, organizing workshops, study tours, South-South cooperation, partnership building and media outreach





© UNICEF/UN0333113/SOARES

## The health-care workers who keep mother and child health services functional in Timor-Leste

In 2020, measures imposed to stop the spread of COVID-19 brought some services to a halt. While essential health services have recovered thanks to health-care workers such as Beatriz Filomena da Silva dos Santos, the pandemic remains a threat to service delivery.

Beatriz is one of Timor-Leste's 6,000 plus health-care workers. As a midwife, she oversees maternal and child health services in Liquica's three health centres, spread across the municipality that stretches along the coast westward from the capital, Dili.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on our health programmes here," says Beatriz. "At first, we were forced to limit services, which had an impact on immunization and nutrition services in the health facility and on our outreach programmes in communities. Many children and pregnant mothers missed out on services they needed."

But thanks to technical and financial support from the Ministry of Health and UNICEF, immunization rates and services for pregnant mothers recovered quickly.

"As a mother and a health-care worker, I know how important it is to have antenatal care and have children vaccinated against preventable diseases," she points out. "We [health-care workers] were all determined that children and mothers would not miss out on these essential services."

Today, Beatriz is extremely happy to be able to continue providing regular health-care services in Liquica municipality.

We hope you are inspired to join us and take a leading role in improving the health of children and women in Timor-Leste. If you have any questions or would like more details, please contact:

**Bilal Durrani**  
Country Representative  
UNICEF Timor-Leste  
bazdurrani@unicef.org

**Rukshan Ratnam**  
Communication Specialist  
UNICEF Timor-Leste  
rratnam@unicef.org

[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

© United Nations Children's  
Fund (UNICEF)

September 2022

**unicef**   
for every child