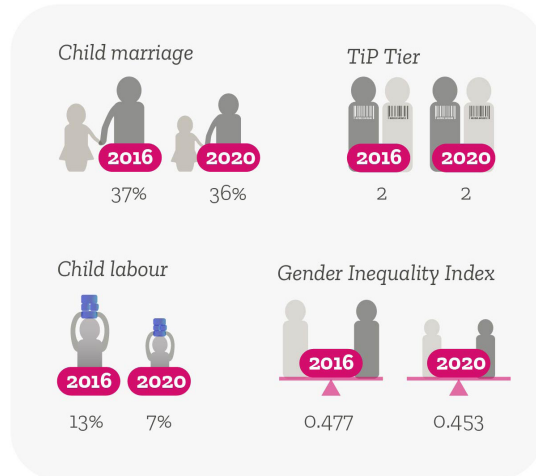


Dominican Republic

KEY NATIONAL INDICATORS IN 2016-2020



The Government of the Dominican Republic has made efforts to address human trafficking, including drafting a revised trafficking law, increased investigations and prosecutions, and the training of more tourist police staff. However, due to neglect and a lack of serious effort in several areas in 2019, the Dominican Republic was downgraded to Tier 2 of the watch list (Trafficking in Persons 2020 Report).¹

Although there is strong economic growth in the country, many people live in poverty. On top of that, Dominican Republic's civic space is currently rated as 'narrowed' by Civicus, a global alliance of Civil Society Organisations dedicated to strengthening civil society. Recent concerns include the accumulation of power in all state institutions by the ruling party – the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) – and its risks to the quality of democracy.

FOCUS OF OUR WORK

Down to Zero (DtZ) continued to work countering sexual exploitation primarily in Boca Chica and Barahona as tourist hotspots and in the border areas. One of the changes of the programme in working with the government has been that it no longer aims that Congress adopts a national protocol and budget to fight sexual exploitation of children – as it was concluded that the uncondusive political climate makes it almost impossible to reach this within the timeframe of the programme.

Budget 2016-2020

€ 1,308,752

MAIN RESULTS ON CHILDREN/YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Awareness-raising on sexual and reproductive health and rights including risks of sexual exploitation of children (SEC) and peer education activities led to a favourable change regarding the prevention and response to sexual exploitation of children and more ability of participants to signal cases of SEC to DtZ staff who followed up with counselling services. In 2016 and 2017 children and young people started to organise themselves in the municipality of Boca Chica, Santo Domingo province. A group of teenagers participated in the municipality protection network meetings demanding respect for child rights and addressing the SEC situation. At the same time, girl leaders shared their concerns about SEC at the Rights Restitution Boards at the community level. Child participants of the DtZ programme continued to act as agents of change, for example in June 2020, youth groups from municipalities in Boca Chica worked towards

joint advocacy with a presentation of children rights concerns in a proposal to the local council. Following awareness-raising activities in January-June 2017 in Barahona communities, many children became peer educators. In April 2019, children of all DtZ implementing communities in Barahona, carried out awareness-raising actions to prevent SEC with the use of digital technology, also reaching peers outside their communities.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY-BASED PROTECTION

As early as 2016, the programme's support to fifteen child protection committees resulted in religious leaders and community members designing action plans for the prevention of SEC in their communities. In 2017, representatives of the local press in Barahona communicated issues related to SEC and child protection through the media. Community members, including neighbourhoods with a large number of people working in the sugar industry have been sensitised and know how to contact institutions or trusted persons to report cases. In 2020, community members have been filing SEC complaints and played an active role in protecting children. In Barahona, the awareness of communication professionals has been raised and there is more attention to reporting cases of SEC by journalists while safeguarding the identities of minors. In Boca Chica, there are also other positive signs of change, for example connected to the form of SEC whereby an older man and an under-age girl are in an union, which is quite common in the region. Also now community leaders are engaged in conversations in small community groups where identified cases of child

Dominican Republic

exploitation are discussed. To increase a supportive and protective environment for children, the programme empowered communities and encouraged them to make use of municipal mechanisms to protect children and respond to SEC.

GOVERNMENT AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES (LEAS)

At the local level in both locations – Barahona and Boca Chica – there are Municipal Directories and Local Boards for the Protection and Restitution of Rights, defined by law 136-03 (Child Protection Act). Work in the field of SEC is progressing: the situation in Boca Chica has gone from “houses and massage parlours full of underaged girls to individual cases of sexual exploitation”.

In Barahona, organisations have started to implement the law, there is an increase in the protection system, people are filing complaints and psychosocial support services are available for sexually exploited children.

The programme also ensured the formation of community groups and supported them in following-up SEC complaints. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the Victims Assistance Unit of the Public Prosecutor’s Office have been structuring their services to address SEC and asked for capacity development for their staff. By the end of 2019, the organisations belonging to the provincial directory of Barahona received training by DtZ on the law, how to file complaints, the protection system and activated psychosocial support services to

sexually exploited children. Law and order in Barahona improved; the complaint system is in place, the CESTUR (tourist police) is functioning well and the staff of the Public Prosecutor’s Office is now specialised to handle SEC cases.

PRIVATE SECTOR

At the beginning of the programme, local hotels in Boca Chica participated in DtZ training to promote prevention of SEC and sign the existing Code of Ethics. Furthermore, last April 2020 the President of the Boca Chica tourism cluster requested to comply with the Code of Ethics, which is a sign of progress in addressing SEC. The business community in Barahona has become more open to protect children from sexual exploitation, due to the DtZ interventions with hotels and restaurants. Two (small) hotels and one restaurant now have policies in place to check whether an adult accompanying an underaged girl visiting their establishments is related to her. The largest tourist-oriented hotel in the area adheres to the Code and promotes protecting children from sexual exploitation. Through the tourist cluster in Barahona, which is an important partner in the DtZ programme, the hotel has started collaboration with DtZ. The Alliance supported the hotel to train small hotels in developing tourist activities towards family tourism and keeping away from being a target for sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism.

¹The Trafficking in Persons Report, or the TIP Report, is an annual report issued by the U.S. State Department. The report ranks governments based on their perceived efforts to acknowledge and combat human trafficking, from Tier 1 (full compliance with the minimum standards) to Tier 3 (no compliance and no significant efforts to do so).