



Better Care: Updates on SDG 3 in the Dominican Republic



BY STAFF REPORTS ON DECEMBER 9, 2020

GLOBAL HEALTH

SEATTLE, Washington — The Dominican Republic has made moderate improvements toward [U.N. Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 3](#), which aims for good health and wellbeing in a population. In spite of this headway, the country still has [major obstacles to overcome](#) – including high rates of traffic deaths, adolescent fertility and child mortality – before it can consider SDG 3 accomplished.

Traffic Deaths

Frequent traffic deaths pose one problem impeding the Dominican Republic's [public health agenda](#). In fact, the Dominican Republic has the highest rate of traffic deaths per person in the Americas. The rate of traffic deaths in the small Caribbean country was 29.3 per 100,000 people in 2013. By 2016, it increased to 34.6 per 100,000. That same year, average rates in Europe totaled only 9.3 per 100,000 people.

Part of the issue stems from the local popularity of two and three-wheeled vehicles, whose riders comprise approximately 46.6% of traffic deaths in the Latin Caribbean. Two-wheeled vehicles are the

preferred transportation in the region because of their heightened maneuverability and fuel efficiency. In response to this high frequency of traffic deaths, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is directing [monitoring efforts and making tailored recommendations](#) in line with its Plan of Action on Road Safety. These include recommendations for infrastructure maintenance, tighter traffic legislation and public awareness campaigns directed at underreporting.

Adolescent Fertility

The rate of adolescent fertility in the Dominican Republic has [slightly decreased in recent years](#), but it still remains high. From 2017 to 2018, it decreased from 94.3 to 93 births per 1,000 people in girls aged 15 to 19. As with traffic deaths per person, the Dominican Republic experiences the [highest teenage pregnancy rate](#) in the Latin Caribbean, the region with the second-highest rate in the world (after sub-Saharan Africa).

Early pregnancy falls under SDG 3 in part because it poses a health risk to both mother and child. According to the NGO Girls Not Brides, pregnancy and birth-related issues [cause 70,000 annual deaths](#) worldwide among adolescent girls. Fortunately, the prevalence of skilled health workers in the Dominican Republic keeps this figure low domestically. In 2015, 99.6% of births on the island [had trained medical personnel](#) on hand, and infants who received at least two WHO-recommended vaccines had a 94% survival rate.

Child Mortality

In 2018, the national mortality rate among children under the age of five was 28.8 deaths per 1,000 live births. This marks an improvement over 2014, where the reported rate was 35 deaths per 1,000 live births. However, this improvement is undermined by increases in the maternal mortality rate, which escalated from 90 to 104.4 deaths per 100,000 live births between 2016 and 2017. This is seven times higher than that of the United States. The leading cause of maternal mortality in the Dominican Republic is internal hemorrhaging.

Pablo Wagner, hospital director at Los Mina Hospital in Santo Domingo, blames the high mortality rate [on poor infrastructure](#). Hospitals like his deliver births for free under the Dominican Republic's public healthcare option. Given the extent of domestic poverty, however, they are crowded by mothers who cannot afford private treatment. In numbers, Los Minos is equipped to handle 1,500 to 2,000 births per year. Instead, it handles between 12,000 and 13,000 births annually. Many of these patients have received little to no maternal education or prenatal care and are therefore unable to distinguish internal hemorrhaging from other pains, bypassing the window in which doctors can save them.

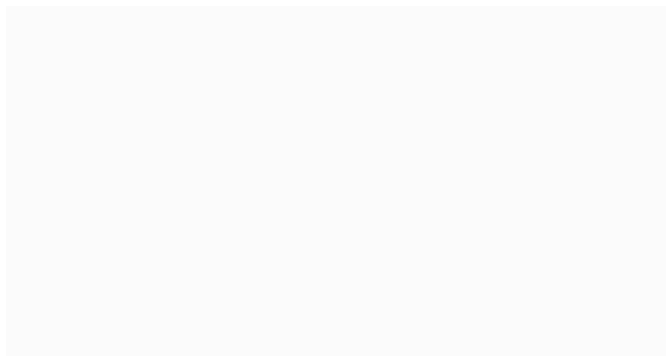
While the Dominican Republic is improving on its goal to bring good health and wellness to its citizens, the new administration – which [took over in August 2020](#) – still has significant hurdles to overcome, particularly in infrastructure and public health awareness.

– *Pedro Vega*

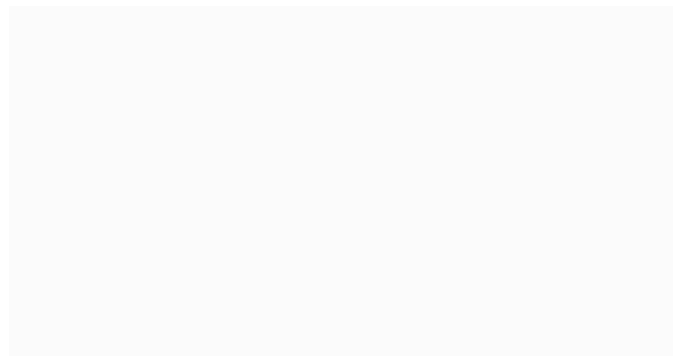
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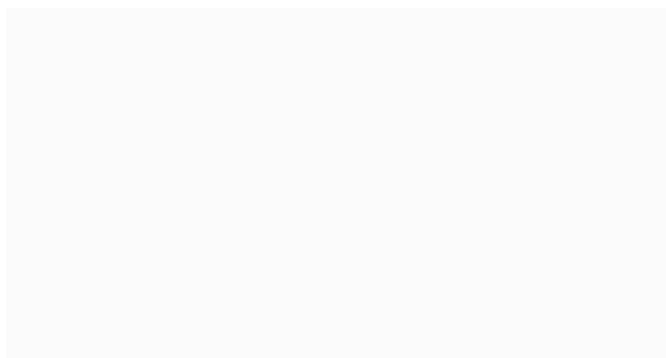
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