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**Theory of Change, UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025**

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\* [E/ICEF/2021/23](#)

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## **I. Introduction to the theories of change**

1. This paper complements the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025,<sup>1</sup> by explaining the theories of change that underpin it. These theories of change explain how actions by UNICEF and a broad range of partners at the country, regional and global levels lead to impact for children, by changing long-term outcomes in the five Goal Areas introduced in the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021,<sup>2</sup> and in the cross-cutting programme areas of gender, disability, resilience, climate action and peacebuilding.

2. Section I of this paper articulates the high-level theory of change, which defines each structural element of the Strategic Plan in its simplest form (at the highest level of abstraction), and explains how these elements relate to each other, to the Goal Area theories of change, and to the Results Framework<sup>3</sup> against which UNICEF measures progress against the Strategic Plan. Sections II to VI apply this overarching schema to theories of change for each of the five Goal Areas.

3. These theories of change describe the causal logic through which inputs – both the direct outputs of UNICEF as an organization and actions by partners – contribute to a shared impact. They explain how UNICEF applies its priority operational strategies and works to improve its organizational effectiveness to deliver medium-term changes at the country level (regularly tracked through indicators at the Strategic Plan level), and how these changes contribute to long-term results that, in turn, advance impact, which is defined as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of children’s rights.

4. The theories of change also articulate the principles underlying the Strategic Plan, and identify the assumptions and risks that frame it, as well as the critical partnerships through which UNICEF aims to carry it out.

### **A. Theories of change and the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025**

5. This theory of change reflects the fact that the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 is being developed at a time of global crisis, great uncertainty and heightened vulnerabilities for all children across the world, especially the most disadvantaged. But this is also a time of opportunity. This Strategic Plan and the theory of change behind it represent the ambition of UNICEF to seize opportunities in crisis, expand and mobilize its partnerships, and make a real difference for children, not only over next four years, but to 2030 and beyond. This change starts with an inclusive, equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and extends to galvanizing far-reaching transformation of systems and norms to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of a world in which every child is included in society, has agency, opportunity and their rights fulfilled.

6. To achieve this impact, UNICEF will continue to strengthen its work towards long-term results in five interconnected Goal Areas linked to children’s holistic development and their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child – so that in all contexts, including humanitarian and fragile settings, every child, including adolescents, (1) survives and thrives with access to nutritious diets, quality primary health care, nurturing practices and essential supplies; (2) learns and acquires skills for the future; (3) is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices; (4) has access to safe and equitable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

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<sup>1</sup> E/ICEF/2021/25

<sup>2</sup> E/ICEF/2017/17/Rev.1

<sup>3</sup> E/ICEF/2021/12/Add.1

services and supplies, and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment; and (5) has access to inclusive social protection and lives free of poverty.

7. Across these areas of work, this theory of change is characterized by collaborative pathways to impact. These pathways describe how UNICEF will work together with, mobilize and influence a range of other actors, to catalyze change at the level of the systems that shape children's world, and their outcomes. This outcome focus responds to a key lesson from both the midterm review (MTR) and the evaluation of the previous Strategic Plan. UNICEF recognizes that while it has been making good progress in delivering its outputs, even before the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, children and institutions have not seen proportional, sustainable change at the level of outcomes.

8. Across the Goal Areas of the Strategic Plan, UNICEF has developed theories of change based on the types of systemic changes needed to accelerate progress towards key child-rights-related Sustainable Development Goals. UNICEF has identified these types of changes owing to their potential high impact on the multidimensional root causes of child deprivations. They include leveraging financing for children; supporting rights-based policies and legislation; market shaping and access; brokering global partnerships for children; transforming the landscape of data on children; and influencing social behaviours and norms.

9. These are not changes that UNICEF can effect alone. While the outputs of UNICEF contribute to these systemic changes, success comes from the concerted action of multiple stakeholders – national and local governments, the United Nations system and other international organizations, civil society, communities, businesses, caregivers and families, children and young people.

10. While these types of systemic changes apply to every context, they will not be carried out the same way, through the same strategies or with the same kinds of partners in every context. Framing them as a typology enables UNICEF to create this new Strategic Plan as a flexible framework that empowers country programmes to align with national priorities and respond to emerging threats to children in our rapidly changing world.

11. In the theory of change behind the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, partnerships are not only an indispensable means, but also an end in themselves. The people-centred approach of this theory of change is derived from its underlying human rights principles, and from the practical lessons that UNICEF has gleaned from experience, most recently during the COVID-19 response.

12. The theory of change expresses the core assumption that international solidarity and multilateral action are needed to address the world's most pressing problems, uphold human rights and ensure that no one is left behind. It recognizes that local actors are key agents of change; that empowering and engaging communities is a critical foundation for strong systems, resilient and inclusive societies, and effective action; and that children and young people are the most powerful partners of UNICEF – and, indeed, are leaders – in galvanizing change.

13. Responding to the concerns of children and young people and aligning with global movements for social justice, this theory of change shifts UNICEF towards a transformative, intersectional approach to inequality and discrimination. This approach strives to reflect and address the experiences of children and young people affected by multiple forms of discrimination, and to change systems and norms in a way that is grounded in gender equality, disability rights and anti-racism. That is what it takes to strike at the underlying, systemic causes of child rights violations and inequality, to break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, deprivation and

injustice – and thereby to build inclusive, more cohesive societies that enable all children to thrive.

14. The causal pathways envisioned in this theory of change reflect the diversity of contexts in which children live, and consider the broad range of risks affecting children – including the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, the spread of misinformation, social tensions, conflicts and violence, and public health threats. Humanitarian action is embedded in these pathways across all Goal Areas, to address the challenges faced by the increasing numbers of children affected by humanitarian crises and fragility. The theory of change responds to the grave threat that climate change poses to children’s rights and their futures. It centers resilience and peacebuilding, because making a real difference in children’s outcomes will require systematic efforts to build the capacities of individuals, communities and institutions to prepare for and respond to crises and change, and to foster social cohesion and trust.

## **B. The high-level theory of change**

15. The high-level theory of change explains how UNICEF sees impact-level change happening over the course of the Strategic Plan, to 2025 and, beyond that, creating a line of sight to the 2030 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. It frames the strategy at the heart of the Strategic Plan by indicating a feasible set of causal pathways through which UNICEF, working in partnerships with others, will contribute to the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the child-related Sustainable Development Goals, and the fulfilment of the rights of children,<sup>4</sup> women<sup>5</sup> and people with disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

16. The high-level theory of change has four core purposes:

(a) Logic: to describe with analytical integrity a set of causal pathways linking inputs to impact.

(b) Learning: to provide a conceptual framework against which the organization will review progress, risks and assumptions, and learn from the Plan’s implementation.

(c) Structure: to provide the structural basis for the Goal Area–specific theories of change, and for the Strategic Plan’s overall structure, components, narrative and Results Framework.<sup>7</sup>

(d) Communications: to communicate, for internal and external audiences, the Strategic Plan in its simplest form.

17. By articulating the causal logic of the Strategic Plan and the relationships between its components, the high-level theory of change also contributes to the evaluability of the Strategic Plan.

18. In reality, the causal pathways are complex, non-linear and inter-connected. The high-level theory of change is neither designed nor suitable for reflecting the complexity of programming and delivery in national contexts, but only for showing credible causal pathways linking inputs to impact.

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<sup>4</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>5</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

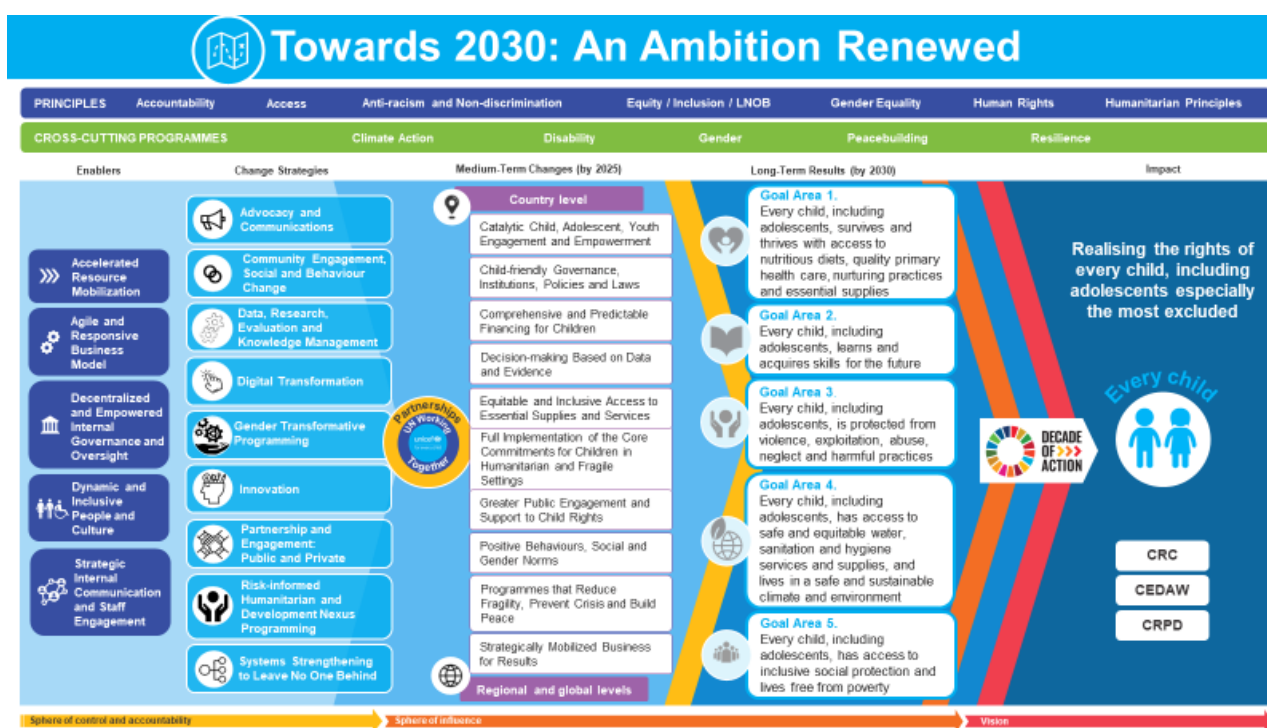
<sup>6</sup> Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

<sup>7</sup> While using the theory of change to develop the Strategic Plan document and the Integrated Results and Resources Framework, UNICEF is also required to harmonize with other agencies and adhere broadly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group *Results-based Management Handbook*.

19. The high-level theory of change is the simplest – and necessarily very high-level – expression of how the Strategic Plan sees change taking place. It does not represent everything that UNICEF does, nor indeed everything that will be in the Strategic Plan, which is itself a representative subset of the total activities of UNICEF over the planning period in a wide variety of operating contexts. It provides a high-level explanatory framework for the organization’s contribution to the fulfilment of the rights of the child – working in partnership with others – while allowing flexibility for regional- and country-level plans specific to those contexts.

20. Figure I provides a one-page schema of the high-level theory of change, showing how UNICEF will work in partnership with others to convert inputs into impact. Its core logic can be understood by moving across the columns from left (enablers) to right (impact), as visualized in Figure II.

Figure I  
High-level theory of change



21. Five organizational **enablers** support UNICEF in executing nine **change strategies**, in partnership with United Nations institutions and others. These change strategies lead to a set of medium-term changes – principally, but not exclusively, at the country level – such as changes in policies, increased financing for children, and increased child and adolescent engagement. These medium-term changes, in turn, contribute to **long-term results** across the five Goal Areas, which contribute to the envisioned **impact** – the fulfilment of the child-related Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of children’s rights, as laid out principally in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Figure II  
The core logic of the high-level theory of change



22. Across the top of the high-level theory of change schema (Figure I) are a set of principles and cross-cutting programmes. The **principles** underpin all of the activities of UNICEF. The **cross-cutting programmes** are programming priorities that UNICEF has identified as critical to achieving results in every Goal Area, towards the realization of children’s rights. These are therefore not articulated as individual Goal Areas, but rather are mainstreamed across all Goal Areas.

23. The high-level theory of change provides the conceptual basis for the theories of change of each the five Goal Areas, described in Sections II to VI of this paper. The Goal Area theories of change use the logic of the high-level theory of change to describe how UNICEF will effect change in each Goal Area, specifying *what* results will be delivered, and *how* they will be delivered. The corresponding results and indicators, which track whether change is actually happening as anticipated, shape the Results Framework of the Strategic Plan.

Figure III  
Results Framework architecture



24. The Results Framework, represented in Figure III, follows the results-based management logic of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group *Results-based Management Handbook*, which calls for three levels of results – impact, outcome and output. How these three levels relate to the different elements of the high-level theory of change is described below. The remainder of this section describes those elements, moving from right to left in the high-level theory of change schema (Figure I), starting with the desired impact.



## 1. Impact: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and realizing children's rights

25. The impact level in the high-level theory of change refers to shared results in two categories representing long-term changes in the lives of the world's children:

(a) **Sustainable Development Goal indicators** related to children's rights, such as child poverty, child mortality rates, or prevalence of female genital mutilation; and

(b) **Realization of human rights**, including the rights of children, as articulated primarily in the Convention on the Rights of the Child; of people with disabilities, as articulated primarily in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and of women, as articulated primarily in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

26. These results are 'shared' insofar as UNICEF cannot achieve them alone. They will be achieved in partnership with others, most notably partner governments. The relationship of UNICEF to the impact-level statements is one of *contribution*, not *attribution*. Indicators at the impact level are specified in Sections II to VI of this paper and in the corresponding Executive Board paper on the Results Framework.

## 2. Long-term results: The five Goal Areas and systemic change

27. The long-term results represent changes that UNICEF contributes to in order to realize the rights of every child. They are grouped into five Goal Areas, each of which articulates an outcome linked to a broad area of children's rights:

(a) **Goal Area 1:** Every child, including adolescents, survives and thrives with access to nutritious diets, quality primary health care, nurturing practices and essential supplies.

(b) **Goal Area 2:** Every child, including adolescents, learns and acquires skills for the future.

(c) **Goal Area 3:** Every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices.

(d) **Goal Area 4.** Every child, including adolescents, has access to safe and equitable WASH services and supplies, and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment.

(e) **Goal Area 5:** Every child, including adolescents, has access to inclusive social protection and lives free of poverty.

28. In the Results Framework, the long-term results are situated at the outcome level and measured through outcome indicators. They represent changes that UNICEF contributes to but are outside of the organization's direct sphere of control and accountability. Sections II–VI of this paper outline which Sustainable Development Goals each Goal Area supports and how UNICEF will work towards these outcomes over the period of 2022–2025, with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

29. Outcome indicators in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, compared with those in the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, demonstrate a higher level of alignment with the Sustainable Development Goal indicators as well as indicators tracked in various global monitoring frameworks. Where possible, UNICEF has retained many of the outcome indicators from the previous Plan, for continuity and in order to track longer-term results. Of the 67 outcome indicators, nine are Sustainable Development Goal indicators or are computed from a subset of the same data. A total of 58 outcome indicators will be computed from joint global monitoring or household surveys in

which UNICEF plays an instrumental role as a lead agency or core partner. The remaining outcome indicators depend on country office reporting but are designed to show higher-level institutional change or systems performance. Additionally, UNICEF also introduced new outcome indicators in programmatic areas it is spearheading, such as on mental health and remote learning.

### 3. Medium-term changes: Changing policies, practices and behaviours

30. The medium-term changes represent changes in policies, practices and behaviours that are the stepping stones for achieving changes in children's lives. In the Strategic Plan Results Framework, they are reflected primarily as output indicators. They are mostly situated at the country level, complemented by UNICEF work with partners at the regional and global levels, and aggregated for global reporting.

31. The high-level theory of change provides an indicative set of medium-term changes that UNICEF will work towards at country-level over the course of the Strategic Plan:

(a) **Catalytic child, adolescent, youth engagement and empowerment:** engaging children and young people as both an end in itself and a means to better policy, programming and empowerment.

(b) **Child-friendly governance, institutions, policies and laws:** improving the effectiveness, inclusiveness and accountability of public-sector, civil society and other institutions at the national and sub-national levels and in all territorial contexts; making changes in policies and laws to make them child-friendly and to advance impact.

(c) **Comprehensive and predictable financing for children:** increasing public and private financing for children, and making it more effective, efficient, equitable and transparent.

(d) **Decision-making based on data and evidence:** building out management information systems; generating and using data and other forms of evidence for policymaking and other decision-making affecting children.

(e) **Equitable and inclusive access to essential supplies and services:** shaping local and global markets, influencing donor and national financing priorities, and strengthening national systems to ensure equitable, inclusive access to affordable, acceptable, geographically accessible, appropriate and quality supplies and services addressing the current and future needs of children, with greater inclusiveness and accountability for service delivery outputs and outcomes.

(f) **Full implementation of the Core Commitments for Children in humanitarian and fragile settings:** delivering predictable, effective and timely humanitarian action that supports the building of resilient systems.

(g) **Greater public engagement and support to child rights:** engaging and growing the individual supporter and donor base of UNICEF, to advocate, donate and volunteer for children's rights.

(h) **Positive behaviours, social and gender norms:** changing harmful social and gender norms; supporting positive behaviours (e.g., positive parenting, health-seeking behaviours); supporting community engagement to ensure people-centred development, crisis response and recovery.

(i) **Programmes that reduce fragility, prevent crisis and build peace:** addressing root causes of fragility and conflict; reducing vulnerability and increasing the coping capacity of individuals, communities and systems; and strengthening vertical and horizontal social cohesion.

(j) **Strategically mobilized business for results (B4R):** engaging on and with the world of business to influence business policies and practices and mobilize business income, influence, technical expertise, innovation and core assets to contribute to sustainable and equitable social change for children.

32. The medium-term changes are presented in the theories of change to help to express and track an important layer of the work of UNICEF – one that makes a critical contribution at country level to achieving changes in children’s lives. In the Results Framework, medium-term changes are measured principally through indicators at the output level, and usually expressed in “Countries have...” language: e.g., “Countries have better policies...”, “Countries have strengthened systems...”. For instance:

(a) The medium-term result on ‘Catalytic child, adolescent, youth engagement and empowerment’ has been translated into indicators 1.5.3, 1.7.3, 2.2.3, 2.2.10, 3.2.3, 3.3.2, 4.4, 4.2.5 and 4.3.2.

(b) The medium-term result on ‘Child-friendly governance, institutions, policies and laws’ helped to form indicators including, but not limited to, 1.3.3, 1.5.3, 1.6.2, 1.6.4, 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 3.1.1 (a), (b) and (c), 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 4.8, 4.9, 5.1 and 5.5.

(c) Pathways of change that were illustrated regarding the medium-term result on ‘Decision-making based on data and evidence’ helped develop and refine indicators 1.4.5, 2.1.3, 3.1.4, 3.2.3, 4.5, 5.1, and 5.1.1 across the five Goal Areas.

(d) The medium-term result on ‘Comprehensive and predictable financing for children’ was reflected in developing indicators 1.1.4, 2.5, 3.2.3, 4.6, 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 5.3, 5.1.2 and 5.1.4.

(e) The assumptions laid out in the medium-term result on ‘Positive behaviours, social and gender norms’ were important in formulating indicators 1.5, 1.12, 1.13, 1.17, 1.7.3, 2.1, 2.7, 2.2.3, 2.2.6, 3.2, 3.3, 3.9, 3.1.7, 3.3.2, 4.1.3, and 5.2.2.

#### 4. Cross-cutting programme areas

33. Cross-cutting programme areas represent programming priorities that are not expressed as individual Goal Areas. Accelerating progress in these areas requires multisectoral action. Accordingly, these programme areas must be mainstreamed – with corresponding results and indicators – across all Goal Areas.

34. In a departure from its predecessor, the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 does not designate humanitarian action as a cross-cutting programme. It takes an approach that supports programming across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, recognizing that principled, timely, quality, child-centred humanitarian action not only saves lives and promotes dignity during crisis, but is also critical to building resilient systems, accelerating progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of children’s rights.

35. A humanitarian lens is therefore systematically applied to the theories of change underlying work on all Goal Areas, cross-cutting programme areas, change strategies and enablers, and UNICEF humanitarian work is reflected throughout the plan. Humanitarian principles are included among the guiding principles in the theory of change. Risk-informed humanitarian-development nexus programming is a critical change strategy, with indicators tracking critical issues including preparedness, accountability to affected populations, performance of coordination mechanisms and provision of disability-inclusive humanitarian programmes and services. The full implementation of the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) is also an important element of the theory of change, with related indicators included across the five Goal Areas. Humanitarian contexts are a category of

disaggregation for key indicators at the impact level as well as outcome and output indicators across Goal Areas.

36. The role of UNICEF in humanitarian coordination through the cluster system is a critical aspect of the organization's partnerships, across Goal Areas and with bearing on all cross-cutting programmes. In line with the CCCs, UNICEF supports the leadership and coordination of humanitarian response, along with national and local stakeholders, and in compliance with humanitarian principles. As a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), UNICEF leads the Nutrition, WASH and Education Clusters and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility.

37. As a Cluster Lead Agency, UNICEF coordinates sectoral emergency responses with government and other partners to ensure that partners address service gaps and quality shortcomings through coordinated humanitarian responses. Whether the cluster approach is activated or not, UNICEF plays a key role in both global and country-level inter-agency coordination for its areas of programmatic responsibility. This includes supporting coordination functions, needs assessment and analysis, response strategies, information management systems and tools, capacity-building and prepositioning of supplies, as well as ensuring that cross-sectoral issues such as gender-based violence, disability, localization, and accountability to affected people are integrated. In the Results Framework, indicators under the 'Risk-informed humanitarian and development nexus programming' change strategy (H8.4(a) through (d)) measure the performance of UNICEF-led cluster coordination mechanisms. The cross-cutting programme areas are as follows:

38. **Climate action.** Recognizing that climate change and environmental degradation pose grave threats to children's rights and futures, UNICEF will mainstream climate action across its work, including programming, advocacy, partnerships, supply and procurement, as well as its internal operations.

39. Across all Goal Areas, UNICEF will work to strengthen the climate resilience of services and facilities, including through climate-smart solutions and renewable energy; to promote education on climate change and environmental sustainability, linked to a range of essential services; and to mobilize collective action in partnership with children and young people, who have already been leading the way.

40. Climate resilience and environmental sustainability will be a key part of work to strengthen systems and address the key drivers of child poverty and vulnerability. Climate action, sustainable energy practices, environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction (DRR) are all critical components of resilience. Reducing vulnerabilities from scarcity of natural resources as a result of climate and environmental shocks and stresses is an important contributor to reducing fragility and increasing social cohesion. To truly serve the needs of communities, action on climate change, disaster risk, energy access, and environmental sustainability will take into account the particular vulnerabilities of girls and women, children with disabilities, and children in rural and urban contexts.

41. UNICEF recognizes that its programmes, operations, and supply chain need to work together for an effective climate response, and is incorporating climate action into organizational improvement efforts. UNICEF recognizes the importance of the environmental sustainability of its own global operations, and as the largest procurement agency in the United Nations, it also recognizes that its supply chain is one of its most influential levers for driving sustainability. Environmental and social safeguards are key to ensuring that UNICEF programming is climate and environmentally smart. With environmental and climate resilience guidelines now incorporated into the CCCs, the application of environmental and social safeguards in humanitarian programming contexts has expanded.

42. **Disability.** UNICEF recognizes that children with disabilities are among the most excluded and invisible members of every society. They face widespread discrimination, stigma and inaccessible environments that exclude them from a range of critical services and opportunities while exposing them to heightened risks and vulnerabilities, which are exacerbated in humanitarian crises and fragile contexts. Girls with disabilities and children with disabilities belonging to marginalized groups – including the disproportionate number of children with disabilities who live in institutions, deprived of family care – face compounding barriers and risks.

43. UNICEF will work across all Goal Areas to mainstream strengthened programming on disability rights. Many UNICEF programmes, including in humanitarian crises and fragile settings, are adopting a twin-track approach to ensure that children and caregivers with disabilities can access inclusive and barrier-free services and support – including primary health care, early childhood development (ECD), education and child protection services, and accessible WASH facilities – alongside targeted measures, including provision of assistive devices and promotion of accessibility, to facilitate their ability to access services and opportunities and participate in their societies on a full and equal basis with others.

44. **Gender.** Recognizing that the realization of children’s rights and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals requires the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, UNICEF strives for bold, transformative change and is expanding its efforts to integrate gender across the life course in all its programming and systems, while expanding and deepening its work to empower adolescent girls. To programme for gender equality in a transformative way that removes structural barriers, UNICEF will work to define transformative approaches within its organizational context; prioritize normative and structural change, grounded in and alongside rights-based approaches; and embrace intersectionality and a life-course approach.

45. All of the organization’s work, including in humanitarian and fragile contexts, will continue to amplify and elevate the leadership, participation and empowerment of girls, young people and women, in the context of working towards societal change that enables and supports them. This will include an emphasis on the gender-based division of labour, the disproportionate amount of unpaid care work that falls to women and girls, and the gender norms associated with maternity and motherhood. This work recognizes intersections with the needs of girls and women facing social exclusion and marginalization – including those living in poverty, those facing racial discrimination, those on the move, and those with disabilities – and responds to the needs of children and young people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

46. **Peacebuilding.**<sup>8</sup> Recognizing that children in fragile and conflict-affected settings experience a wide range of threats to their rights, UNICEF will design and implement conflict-sensitive programmes that contribute to social cohesion and peace, where relevant and feasible, in accordance with national plans, needs and priorities and respecting national ownership, and ensuring inter-agency coordination and synergy, in line with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational

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<sup>8</sup> While UNICEF is not part of the United Nations peace and security pillar (led by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations), UNICEF does make substantial contributions to peacebuilding and sustaining peace through actions focused on creating a conducive environment for peace within societies, and has done so for many years. UNICEF is working effectively with the United Nations peace and security pillar in the context of the United Nations integrated presences and through the UNICEF mandate to protect children in armed conflict. UNICEF has also clarified its approach from a humanitarian perspective in the revised CCCs.

activities for development of the United Nations Development System (QCPR) 2020 (A/RES/75/233).<sup>9</sup>

47. UNICEF programming will be informed by a robust conflict and risk analysis, in order to avoid doing harm or exacerbating conflict and violence factors. It will focus on delivering and managing social services in equitable, inclusive and accountable ways; promote the participation of communities, especially children, adolescents and young people; build trust and collaboration within and between communities and strengthen state-society relations; and strengthen individual coping mechanisms and capacities to deal with causes and effects of conflict and sustaining peace.

48. **Resilience.** UNICEF recognizes that even before COVID-19, children's rights were under threat from increasing levels of violent conflict, protracted crises, public health threats, fragility and the worsening impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. Across all its programming, UNICEF will mainstream a focus on resilience – the capability of individuals, communities and institutions to prepare for, prevent, respond to and recover from crises.

49. Building resilience is a key part of systems strengthening work and risk-informed programming, which considers a range of risks, such as those stemming from climate change and natural disasters, public health threats, violence and conflicts. It is also a core concept in enhancing coherence and collaboration among humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming.

50. Humanitarian response can build resilience by focusing on interventions that build local ownership and the capacities of affected people, strengthen systems, and contribute to social cohesion so as to enhance prevention and preparedness vis à vis future shocks, while improving long-term outcomes for children. At the individual level, building resilience includes a focus on mental health, increasingly a key part of programming across Goal Areas, as well as nutrition, both a key contributor to and an outcome of strengthened resilience.

51. In Sections II–VI of this paper, the Goal Area theories of change explain how these cross-cutting programme areas will be addressed. In the Results Framework, progress against cross-cutting programme areas is measured at the output and outcome levels, in two ways, through:

(a) stand-alone indicators – for instance, the percentage of countries with gender disparity in education (outcome indicator 1 in Goal Area 2), or the number of countries with disability-inclusive social protection programmes with UNICEF support (output indicator 2.3 in Goal Area 5); and

(b) categories of disaggregation for other indicators, for instance by sex (as seen in indicators 1 (a), (b) and (c) and 3.1.2, for example) or disability (for instance, indicators 2.1.4 and 3.1.3).

52. In addition to the above, the theory of change reflects UNICEF work in several other programming priorities that likewise cut across all Goal Areas: early childhood development, adolescence, mental health and psychosocial support, migration and urban. These respond to the evolving needs of children across the life cycle, recognizing the critical windows of opportunity for improving children's outcomes;

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<sup>9</sup> The QCPR recognizes the positive role that sustainable development can play in mitigating drivers of conflicts, disaster risks, humanitarian crises and complex emergencies, and that greater cooperation, coordination and complementarity among development, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian action and sustaining peace is fundamental for realizing children's rights and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

key contexts that affect children's outcomes in a rapidly changing world; and an increasingly holistic approach to children's well-being.

53. **Early childhood development.** ECD will remain a strategic programming priority of UNICEF in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. As of 2020, only 71 per cent of children aged 36–59 months were developmentally on track, and only 59 per cent of children under 5 years of age in UNICEF programme countries were receiving adequate early stimulation and responsive care from their parents or primary caregivers.

54. These data signal that the world is off track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal target for ECD. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the preexisting crisis of early childhood care and learning, causing a large-scale disruption of early childhood services and prolonged stress to parents and caregivers, who have become first responders for their children.

55. UNICEF remains committed to accelerating programming and advocacy, including in humanitarian crises and fragile settings, to strengthen enabling environments and the provision of gender-responsive and disability-inclusive ECD services at scale. UNICEF will escalate parenting support to enhance the mental health and well-being of parents and caregivers, as well as their ability to provide early stimulation and nurturing care for children.

56. To reach expected results, UNICEF will leverage its expertise across sectors, including health, nutrition, education, child protection and social protection, in which results relating to ECD and parenting programmes are embedded. ECD will also contribute to the change strategy for 'Community engagement, social and behavioral change', as an avenue to elevate integrated parenting support programmes.

57. **Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS):** UNICEF embraces mental health as a holistic issue relevant to every sector of development. All Sustainable Development Goals reflect determinants of mental health and psychosocial well-being, and work in MHPSS specifically contributes towards Sustainable Development Goal targets 3.4 (reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases and promote mental health and well-being), 3.5 (strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse), 4.2 (ensure access to early childhood development, care and education), and 16.2 (end all forms of violence).

58. UNICEF work on mental health underpins the prevention, promotion and treatment continuum, and takes an approach that is collaborative and multi-sectoral in order to address the global burden of mental health problems in an effective way. Because children, adolescents and caregivers hold critical perspectives and skills necessary for informing and driving mental health policy, service delivery and research, their meaningful and safe engagement is a priority for UNICEF, and the organization is committed to making space for more diverse representation and opportunities.

59. Mental health will be integrated within the theories of change and Results Frameworks for Goal Areas 1, 2 and 3, with a dedicated result area in Goal Areas 1 and 3 – and in addition, the Strategic Plan will incorporate mental health into programming across all Goal Areas. The articulation of the organization's MHPSS direction within each of the Goal Areas is an important step towards strengthening institutional capacity and accountability to respond to the mental health and psychosocial support needs of children, adolescents and families around the world.

60. These changes will integrate and strengthen mental health solutions across the organization in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, while leveraging existing sectoral system strengthening, coordination and delivery mechanisms where UNICEF has

experience and credibility. Each sector of UNICEF work will (a) establish entry points for mental health, (b) integrate mental health within its overall sectoral strategy, and (c) advance sector-based solutions that can be delivered at scale while maximizing synergies with solutions in other areas.

61. **Migration.** The majority of children on the move – whether they are internally displaced, refugees, migrants or returnees, and whether they live in fragile or high-income contexts – face a persistent lack of access to basic services such as education, health, child protection and social protection, and are at particular risk of violence, exploitation, abuse, trafficking and immigration detention.

62. Children experience xenophobia and discrimination based on their migration status, despite the global consensus, enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that all rights belong to all children in a given country. This discrimination often intersects with the discrimination they face on account of their gender, race, ethnicity, religion or disability – and may be exacerbated for some categories of children, such as unregistered refugees, undocumented migrants, or unaccompanied children. The widespread exclusion that results hampers children’s long-term opportunities and deprives of the world of a young generation with high potential and motivation.

63. The types of measurement that have been added to these three Goal Areas reflect another strategic shift: away from a focus on direct service delivery, to a renewed focus on inclusion of children on the move into education, child protection and social protection systems. While UNICEF and partners will continue to serve children on the move through direct service delivery and providing alternative services wherever needed, the overall emphasis is to help local and national authorities in building, strengthening and reforming national systems so that they will include children on the move along with all other children, without discrimination based on a child’s migration status.

64. The Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, moves beyond a one-dimensional view of migration as a child protection issue, towards a more integrated approach across Goal Areas – reflecting a whole-child and whole-of society approach. While the previous Strategic Plan had just one dedicated indicator in Goal Area 3, the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 reflects children on the move across Goal Areas 2, 3 and 5. During the period 2022–2025 UNICEF will work towards a more strategic approach, to include all categories of children on the move in health systems, in all contexts, from fragile to high-income.

65. **Adolescence.** Adolescent development matters. Adolescents represent such a high proportion of the total population that it will be impossible to attain the Sustainable Development Goals without a focus on working with and for adolescents.

66. Investment in adolescents delivers a triple dividend – improving well-being now, enhancing it throughout a child’s life course, and contributing to the development of future generations. Healthy adolescents contribute to economic and social prosperity, interrupting the inter-generational transmission of poor health, poverty and discrimination. In humanitarian settings, the support young people receive, and their meaningful engagement, can have a lasting impact not only on their own recovery, but also on the future of their societies.

67. Adolescent engagement and participation matter, too. Meaningful engagement contributes to positive individual development, increasing young people’s self-esteem, communication, negotiation and problem-solving skills, and enabling them to develop transferrable skills and better relationships, which enhances resilience and well-being. Civic participation is one of the key activities for a healthy transition to adulthood. Young people’s civic engagement is associated with higher educational



outcomes, improved mental health and income levels in adulthood. These important outcomes align with the global strategy priorities of UNICEF, particularly in the areas of education and mental health.

68. All five Goal Areas include prominent results specific to adolescent development, including on the health and well-being of adolescent girls and boys (including mental health, adolescent nutrition, and HIV), learning and the acquisition of skills, safety and protection of adolescent girls and boys, and engagement and meaningful participation.

69. Adolescent engagement and participation are specifically noted under Goal Area 2 and Goal Area 4, as well as reflected in the change strategy ‘Community engagement, social and behaviour change’, which combines programmatic approaches addressing the cognitive, social, cultural, economic and structural determinants of rights violations, inequality, discrimination, mistrust, social divides and broken social contracts, and harmful social norms and behaviours. This strategy, focusing on bringing forth the voices of adolescents and young people, will respond to the growing importance of people-centered approaches, as demonstrated during the pandemic, and will embody UNICEF efforts to contribute to positive social transformation and address challenges that cut across and go beyond sectoral programming.

70. **Urban.** Almost 90 per cent of the world’s children and adolescents live in Africa and Asia, which are urbanizing rapidly. Today, approximately 1 billion people are estimated to live in slums, the worst form of informal settlement, of whom hundreds of millions are children under 18. Based on current trends, those numbers are likely to double by 2030 and triple by 2050. Scaling up urban programming for children and young people is now a global imperative in all regions.

71. Urban is reflected in the Strategic Plan with a dedicated indicator under the ‘Systems strengthening to leave no one behind’ change strategy, and through urban/rural disaggregation of select impact, outcome and output indicators. UNICEF will step up its urban programming, especially in poor and dense urban settlements, with a focus on disaggregated intraurban data and its use in planning and budgeting, child-responsive urban planning, and public spaces for children. UNICEF will also strengthen its partnership with UN-Habitat (the United Nations Human Settlements Programme) and other external partners, to integrate children’s issues into global and national urban policies and frameworks.

## 5. Principles

72. A set of guiding principles underlies all UNICEF activities. Stemming from the UNICEF mandate and human rights-based approach, they indicate the critical commitments behind how the organization works – in both its internal systems and processes and in all areas of its work for children, including programmes, advocacy, partnerships, supply and procurement, across all contexts.

73. UNICEF works with its partners to respect, protect and promote **human rights** standards and principles, and fundamental freedoms for all children, everywhere, without discrimination of any kind. UNICEF humanitarian action adheres to the **humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence**. These fundamental humanitarian principles underlie the CCCs, the organization’s core policy and framework for humanitarian action.

74. In all contexts, UNICEF is committed to **do no harm**. That means ensuring that its work, and that of its partners, protects children and does not harm them, intentionally or inadvertently. This includes a commitment to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, to safeguard the children and communities UNICEF works for and with.

75. The organization's **accountability** to children, their caregivers and communities, and other stakeholders stems from its human rights mandate. As a key duty bearer for children, UNICEF works to enhance the accountability of all actors to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This principle is expressed in the UNICEF commitment to strengthen the participation and engagement of children and their communities, as a priority change strategy (Community engagement, social and behaviour change), and in carrying out all its change strategies and implementing programming across all Goal Areas and cross-cutting programmes.

76. UNICEF is committed to strengthening mechanisms to gather, listen and respond to feedback from rights holders, and to holding service providers and other duty bearers to account, including for accountability to affected populations in humanitarian crises. This commitment is also expressed in the organization's engagement with global, regional and national human rights mechanisms to support the monitoring of and accountability for violations of children's rights.

77. **Non-discrimination** is a core human rights principle, articulated in article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in other foundational human rights instruments. It underlies the 2030 Agenda pledge to **leave no one behind**, guiding the organization's core focus on **equity** and **inclusion**.

78. UNICEF actively seeks out and supports children from the poorest, most marginalized, vulnerable and excluded groups, including children living in extreme poverty, children with disabilities, indigenous children, and children belonging to discriminated-against racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups and migrant communities. UNICEF strives to understand the root causes and intersections of child rights violations, and to address them by transforming institutions and norms.

79. UNICEF is working more than ever to address racial injustices and make **anti-racism** an explicit focus of its work to leave no one behind. Aligning with global movements for social and racial justice, UNICEF embraces and promotes diversity, equity and inclusion across all its internal systems and processes, as well as all its areas of work for children, and is committed to systematically addressing all forms of racial discrimination and injustice.

80. **Gender equality** remains at the core of everything UNICEF does. The organization aspires to spark bold, systemic change to redress gender inequalities and empower girls, women and marginalized people of all genders. UNICEF continues to expand its efforts to integrate gender equality across its programming and systems, including by deepening its focus on adolescent girls, addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the rights of all children and young people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

81. As a core principle, gender equality will require investment in sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis in all contexts; programmes informed by evidence, aligned with rights-based approaches, intersectional considerations and a life-cycle perspective; sufficient capacity to deliver on gender results embedded in all areas of programming; adoption of inclusive, diverse and family-friendly workplace practices; and a commitment to bold institutional benchmarks for accountability.

82. UNICEF is committed to ensuring that all children and communities have consistent and equitable **access** to essential products and services, as is critical to accelerating progress towards the child rights-related Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring that no child is left behind. In collaboration with partners including governments and industry, UNICEF aims to create a global public good for children, by strengthening national systems, expanding fiscal space and fostering healthy local and global markets.

## 6. Change strategies

83. **Change strategies** are the operational strategies that UNICEF will prioritize during the period of this Strategic Plan to support the achievement of development results. They have been selected for their potentially game-changing impact, and do not represent everything that UNICEF does. UNICEF has identified nine priority change strategies for this Strategic Plan:

84. **Advocacy and communications:** advocacy, communications and brand building with and for children and young people to support partnerships, resource mobilization and programme delivery to advance child rights and the related Sustainable Development Goals.

85. **Community engagement, social and behaviour change:** working with children, adolescents, families, communities, public systems and private stakeholders towards more peaceful, equitable, inclusive and resilient societies, with people-centred decision-making mechanisms and increased uptake of protective practices.

86. **Data, research, evaluation and knowledge management:** generating research, data and other forms of evidence, and applying and sharing it to support policies, planning, partnerships, resource mobilization, decision-making and programme delivery.

87. **Digital transformation:** harnessing digital tools to improve UNICEF programme implementation, streamline operations and processes, and enhance outreach, including through digital influence, beneficiary and stakeholder engagement, and fundraising.

88. **Gender-equality programming for transformative results:** working across all UNICEF programming to redress gender inequalities, remove structural barriers, change harmful gender norms, and empower girls, women and disadvantaged people from diverse population groups.

89. **Innovation:** supporting the development and scaling of new and promising solutions to the most pressing problems facing children, in line with UNICEF programming priorities; includes but is not limited to application of new technologies and products.

90. **Partnerships and engagement: public and private:** partnerships and engagement with public- and private-sector actors to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and achieve child rights at scale; includes engagement with governments, multilaterals and international financial institutions (IFIs); businesses, foundations, philanthropists, individual supporters and donors; civil society actors including non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations and academia; public-private platforms and multi-stakeholder groups.

91. **Risk-informed humanitarian and development nexus programming:** systematically linking analysis, planning and monitoring of results and financing across UNICEF humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming.

92. **Systems strengthening to leave no one behind:** strengthening the components, functioning, responsiveness and accountability of systems – including sectoral systems (e.g., health, education, child protection, WASH, social protection) as well as communities and families – to achieve impact for children at scale and strengthen resilience by building these systems' capacities to prevent and respond to crises and fragility.

93. In the Results Framework, the change strategies are measured through integrated Goal Area indicators at the output and outcome levels, such as in Goal Area 2 (2.5, Percentage of countries in which the percentage of national education expenditure

reaching the most marginalized is above 15 per cent) and Goal Area 3 (3.3.2, Number of people engaged through community platforms in reflective dialogue towards eliminating discriminatory social and gender norms and harmful practices that affect girls and women through UNICEF-supported programmes); and through their direct contribution to the delivery of programme results at the output level, under the change strategy section.

94. As elaborated in Sections II–VI, the change strategies will be deployed in each Goal Area to achieve sector-specific results, and thereby contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and realization of child rights. Some Goal Areas prioritize additional change strategies, as discussed in their respective sections.

## 7. Organizational performance enablers

95. The organizational performance **enablers** are the organizational structures, systems, resources and assets that UNICEF will continuously invest in to become a more agile, values-based, effective and efficient organization that can effectively respond to change and uncertainty. There are five enablers:

(a) **Accelerated resource mobilization:** maximizing flexible and predictable income for UNICEF programmes, to enable faster, more effective and at-scale delivery of results for children and humanitarian response.

(b) **Agile and responsive business model:** simplifying and automating processes and recalibrating functions to ensure that the UNICEF operating model can adapt more nimbly to changing and increasingly complex operating contexts while maximizing results for children through improved programme quality, accelerated delivery and greater efficiency.

(c) **Decentralized and empowered internal governance and oversight:** strengthening the accountability of individual staff members to deliver results for children, with oversight and decision-making following the principle of subsidiarity and informed by a common set of principles, including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, ethical standards, transparency and environmental sustainability.

(d) **Dynamic and inclusive people and culture:** ensuring that the entire UNICEF workforce is skilled, motivated, agile and empowered to perform at its best for the world's children, in a culture that is based on the core values of care, respect, integrity, trust and accountability, with zero tolerance for any form of misconduct.

(e) **Strategic internal communication and staff engagement:** fostering inclusive, transparent, constructive and authentic exchanges between staff at all levels, for enhanced awareness, agile collaboration and connectedness.

96. In the Results Framework, the enablers' performance is measured through corporate-level indicators.

## C. Assumptions and risks

97. This paper highlights two categories of risks and assumptions: (1) risks related to the high-level theory of change and the achievement of the Strategic Plan goals as a whole, and (2) risks relating individual Goal Area theories of change. The table below itemizes the first category, together with associated mitigation measures. Risks relating to Goal Area theories of change are detailed in Sections II–VI of this paper.

Table 2  
**Risks and mitigation measures associated with the high-level theory of change**

<i>Assumptions and risks</i>	<i>Mitigation measures</i>
Continued health-related and other risks due to <b>COVID-19</b> and reduced access to essential services.	<p>UNICEF will continue to provide global leadership to the COVID-19 Global Access (COVAX) Facility, to rebuilding health systems and to equipping partners for public health emergencies.</p> <p>The organization's approach to COVID-19 and associated public health emergencies is most clearly outlined in Goal Area 1 of the Strategic Plan. Recovery and building back better are prioritized across all Goal Areas in the Strategic Plan.</p>
Reduced <b>economic growth</b> leads to reduced public financing and aid for children, as well as financial insecurity for families.	<p>UNICEF will work with Governments and partners in the international community to orient Governments towards equitable public financing for children.</p> <p>Providing support to social protection in almost 150 countries, UNICEF is well-placed to support Governments to mitigate financial shocks facing vulnerable children in low-income communities.</p> <p>UNICEF will work with businesses to leverage more financing and better development solutions for children; and will advocate for increases in aid, particularly for children and for the most vulnerable.</p> <p>The organization's approach to economic and social policy and social protection is most clearly outlined in Goal Area 5 of the Strategic Plan.</p>
Short-term risks and long-term climate insecurity result from insufficient global leadership to tackle <b>climate change</b> .	<p>UNICEF will advocate for giving increased priority to addressing climate change, particularly by Governments, inter-governmental organizations and the private sector.</p> <p>UNICEF will work with Governments at the national and local levels to address capacity gaps around programme design, planning, financing, implementation and monitoring with respect to disaster risk reduction and environmental challenges.</p> <p>The organization's approach is exemplified in the cross-cutting programmes on 'Climate Action' and 'Resilience'.</p>
Increased <b>digital divides</b> lead to greater inequality between high- and low-income socio-economic groups.	<p>UNICEF will work with Governments and the private sector to advocate for investments in connectivity and digital infrastructure for the most marginalized, both at the household and individual levels and through service delivery infrastructure such as schools, health clinics, legal and judicial services for children.</p> <p>The Strategic Plan adopts 'Digital transformation' as a priority change strategy, applying not only to UNICEF operations, but also to the organization's role in helping people and service providers access and leverage digital technologies.</p>

<i>Assumptions and risks</i>	<i>Mitigation measures</i>
<p>Reduced accountability of states due to reduced <b>democratic or civic space</b> and reduced respect for <b>human rights</b>.</p>	<p>UNICEF will work with Governments, as duty-bearers, and with legal bodies that ensure accountabilities for the fulfilment of child rights at the national, regional and global levels.</p> <p>UNICEF will strengthen the ability of children, adolescents, communities and civil society to lobby for child rights and for the protection of civic and democratic space.</p> <p>‘Accountability’ and ‘Human rights’ are core Principles for this Strategic Plan.</p>
<p>Increased <b>humanitarian</b> needs result from political and military conflict, natural disasters and forced migration, and are not met by adequate leadership, resources and humanitarian access.</p>	<p>UNICEF will leverage the United Nations Development System and fully exploit its own distinct legal mandates in conflict situations and in humanitarian situations to ensure access to affected populations, support the delivery of key preventive and responsive services, ensure accountability to affected populations, and ensure the fulfilment of the CCCs.</p> <p>UNICEF will work with United Nations partners to reduce the occurrence, and the risks for children, of conflicts, environmental disasters and forced migration.</p> <p>This approach cuts across the Strategic Plan but is articulated most clearly in the ‘Risk-informed humanitarian and development nexus programming’ change strategy, in ‘Resilience’ and ‘Peacebuilding’ as cross-cutting Programmes, and in the integration of the CCCs across the five Goal Areas.</p>
<p>A collaborative, rules-based <b>multilateral system</b>, with the United Nations Development System at its core, is undermined by rising nationalisms and geopolitical fault lines.</p>	<p>UNICEF will work through the United Nations Development System at a political level, through public communications and through the direct engagement of children and adolescents, to strengthen support for collaborative, rules-based international systems and for associated accountabilities for Governments and the international institutions they govern.</p>
<p><b>Partnerships</b> are not leveraged within and beyond the United Nations system to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.</p>	<p>The primary accent of this Strategic Plan is UNICEF working in partnership with others, including, but not limited to, partner governments; United Nations agencies, by maximizing United Nations reform; the private sector; and civil society.</p> <p>UNICEF will measure its success by the quality of these partnerships and its ability to be catalytic in harnessing a range of actors to deliver results for children.</p>
<p>Insufficient attention to both <b>threats</b> (e.g., poor financial management, abuse and exploitation, racism) and <b>opportunities</b> (e.g., engaging young people).</p>	<p>UNICEF will continue to invest heavily in building support for child rights and for the organization’s mission, including with and through children and young people.</p> <p>In its day-to-day operations, culture and professional conduct, UNICEF will give the highest priority to sound financial management, safeguarding and combatting racism and other forms of discrimination, as exemplified by the inclusion of ‘Anti-racism and non-discrimination’ as a core</p>

principle of this Strategic Plan and of ‘Dynamic and inclusive people and culture’ as an enabler.

## II. Goal Area 1

### A. Summary

98. **Every child, including adolescents, survives and thrives, with access to nutritious diets, quality primary health care, nurturing practices, and essential supplies.**

99. Goal Area 1 seeks to ensure that all children – including those affected by humanitarian crises and living in fragile settings – have an equitable chance to survive, be healthy, well-nourished and stimulated as they grow, and benefit from the diets, services, practices and environments they need to thrive through childhood and adolescence.

100. **UNICEF has expanded its work in Goal Area 1 beyond child survival to strengthening national policies, programmes and systems in order to ensure that all children and adolescents grow and develop to their full potential and well-being. At the core of Goal Area 1 is a strategy aimed at strengthening primary health care and food systems as platforms for achieving outcomes related to children’s rights to survive and thrive and contributing to Sustainable Development Goals 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 4 (quality education) and 5 (gender equality).**

101. UNICEF work in Goal Area 1 is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and Goals, the UNICEF Health Strategy 2016–2030, the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030 and the CCCs. Children’s right to survival and development is recognized in article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, while articles 24 and 27 set out their right to health and nutrition. Following a rights-based approach for children to survive and thrive, UNICEF considers the essential elements of availability, accessibility, affordability, quality, adequacy, participation, accountability and sustainability.

102. Goal Area 1 advances the implementation of QCPR provisions on health (operative paragraph 27), disability inclusion (operative paragraph 14), climate action and environmental sustainability (operative paragraphs 29 and 30), while leveraging the comparative advantages of UNICEF on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (operative paragraph 36), all of which are key in advancing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of a society in which every child is included (operative paragraph 13).

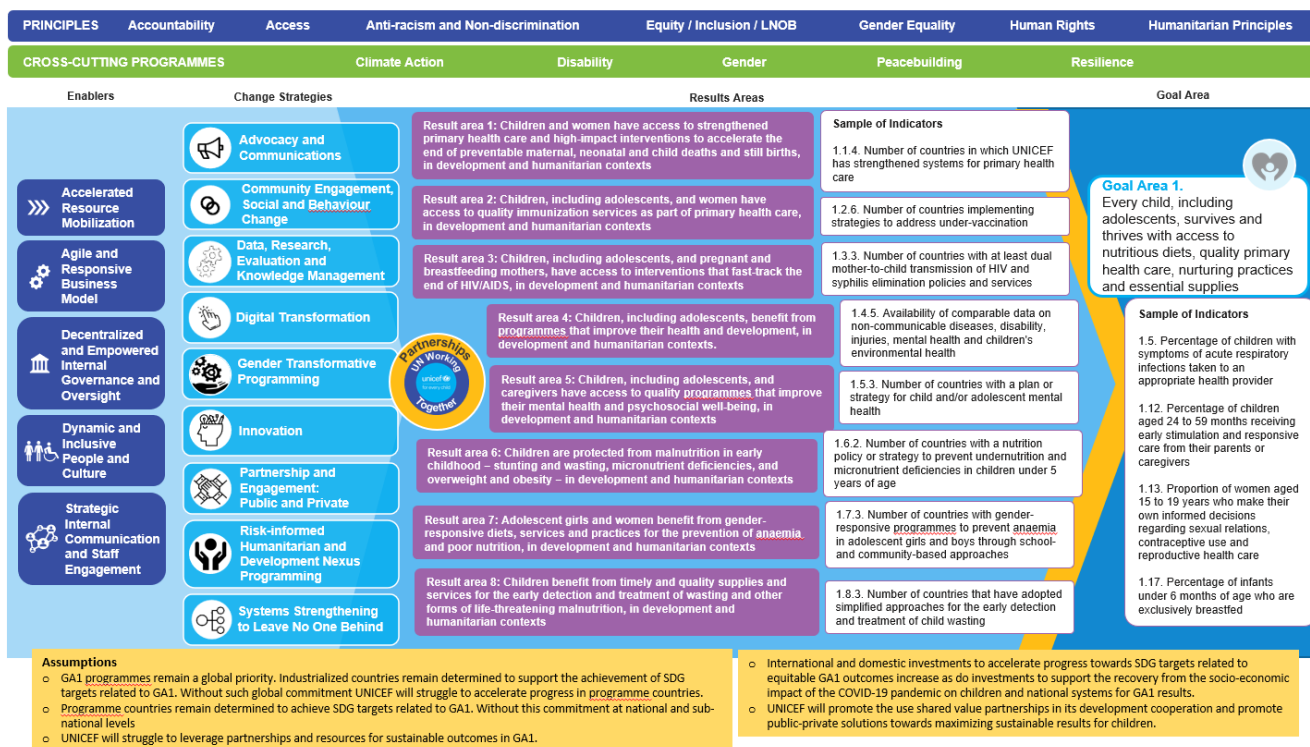
103. Goal Area 1 prioritizes the most vulnerable children in both development and humanitarian settings, including children living in extreme poverty, children with disabilities, migrant and displaced children, as well as those living in disadvantaged territorial contexts. Gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women inform all work in Goal Area 1, which also pays specific attention to children living in fragile, conflict-affected, and disaster-prone contexts, who are at greater risk of poor nutrition and health outcomes.

104. The recognition of the centrality of resilient primary health care systems for attaining universal health coverage for child survival, health and well-being, and of child-centered food systems, for delivering integrated, prevention-focused diets,

services and practices and support across the life course, has been the key shift in the UNICEF approach in Goal Area 1.

105. The midterm review of the previous Strategic Plan highlighted strengthening primary health care and food and nutrition systems in high-burden countries as indispensable to accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and flagged fragility and crisis as critical threats to children’s rights to survive and thrive, alongside inequalities in access to essential health and nutrition interventions such as maternal and newborn care, maternal and child nutrition, immunization, and HIV testing and treatment.

106. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced these shifts, highlighting the urgent need to strengthen health and food systems, especially in settings affected by crises and fragility, and to improve preparedness for crisis. It also further highlighted the deep inequalities in access to essential health and nutrition services, even in some of the world’s better-resourced health and food systems. COVID-19 also underscored the need to strengthen public health emergency preparedness, rapidly scale up response capacities, and increase multisectoral and international collaboration towards an equitable, rights-based response and recovery.



## B. Context

107. **Tremendous progress in maternal and child health and nutrition has been achieved over the past two decades.** The global under-five mortality rate declined by 59 per cent between 1990 and 2019. Since 2000, the proportion of children under 5 suffering from stunting worldwide fell by one third, and the number of children who are stunted, by 55 million. Despite this progress, significant acceleration is needed to meet the health- and nutrition-related Sustainable Development Goals and realize the rights of every child to survive and thrive.

108. **Under-five mortality is concentrated among newborns and, regionally, in sub-Saharan Africa.** In 2019, 47 per cent of under-five deaths occurred in the first



month of life, 28 per cent at age 1–11 months, and 25 per cent at age 1–4 years. In addition to these newborn deaths, 2 million babies are stillborn annually worldwide.

109. Sub-Saharan Africa carried more than half the burden of under-five deaths, with 2.8 million (53 per cent), followed by Central and South Asia, with 1.5 million (28 per cent). Since 2017, sub-Saharan Africa has been the region with the highest number of births, and this trend will persist for the rest of the century. Africa's child population will reach 1 billion by 2055, becoming the largest child population among all continents.

110. Current trends predict that close to 48 million children under 5 years of age will die between 2020 and 2030. Almost half of these under-five deaths will be newborns, with three-quarters taking place around the time of birth and the first week after birth. Nearly 75 per cent of all newborn deaths result from complications due to prematurity (35 per cent) or intrapartum-related complications, including birth asphyxia (24 per cent) and sepsis (14 per cent).

111. **Most maternal and newborn deaths can be prevented through quality antenatal care** – including prevention of low birthweight among newborns, skilled care at birth, postnatal care for mother and baby, and care of small and sick newborns. Disparities in access to these lifesaving services are associated with poverty and, in some cases, cultural barriers and social norms related to gender. Worldwide, a woman from the poorest quintile of households is much less likely to deliver with skilled birth attendant than a woman from the richest quintile – 54.7 per cent versus 94.2 per cent.

112. While gender disparities in under-five mortality and malnutrition continue to decline across all regions – with the number of countries showing higher than expected mortality for girls falling from 25 to 7 since 1990 – lower female admissions rates have been observed in special newborn care units and nutrition rehabilitation programmes in South Asian countries, which along with countries in the Middle East and North Africa account for most of the remaining 7 countries. Gender barriers to accessing care are also reflected in delays in decision-making to seek care for pregnant women, with those decisions often in hands of other family members, often men.

113. **Adolescent girls are a particularly vulnerable group.** Maternal conditions are the number-one cause of death among adolescent girls aged 15–19 worldwide. While very early childbearing (birth before age 15) appears to be declining steadily in all regions, childbearing among older adolescents (births before age 18) has remained stagnant. In low- and middle-income countries, 21 million pregnancies occur among girls aged 15–19 each year. In addition to quality maternal care, there is a critical need for mental health and parenting support to help adolescent mothers care for their infants and young children, especially in emergency contexts – and for childcare to enable adolescent girls to get an education.

114. **For children under 5 years of age, infectious causes such as pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria remain leading causes of death, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.** After many years of impressive reductions in the global burden of malaria, progress has stalled; the malaria incidence rate fell by 30 per cent between 2000 and 2014 – from 81 to 57 cases per 1,000 population – and then remained at a similarly low level through 2018. Between 2015 and 2019, in high-burden countries, 44 per cent of children with pneumonia remained untreated and 60 per cent of children with diarrhoea did not receive oral rehydration salts. Meanwhile, the emergence and global spread of antimicrobial resistance poses a significant threat to the treatment of infectious diseases, increases the costs of hospitalization and treatment, the risk of spreading these diseases, and the risk of death.

**115. Continued progress in immunization depends on reaching the most underserved communities.** In 2019, an estimated 20 million children did not receive three doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP)–containing vaccine (DTP3) – an important indicator of vaccination coverage. Of these, 14 million children, referred to as zero-dose children, had not received any vaccines at all. Wild polio remains endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and 12 countries are yet to eliminate maternal and newborn tetanus. Overall, the experience with eradication and elimination programmes point to a collective failure to reach the most underserved communities with routine services, including but not limited to immunizations.

**116. Ending the AIDS epidemic among children and adolescents remains a distant vision.** In 2019, the number of children and adolescents living with HIV stood at 2.8 million. Just over half (53 per cent) of children aged 0–14 years were on antiretroviral medications, far short of the 2020 global target of 95 per cent. Among adolescents, treatment coverage – among the few countries that report age-disaggregated data – is estimated at only 38 per cent.

117. By contrast, more pregnant women living with HIV now receive treatment to reduce HIV transmission to their children – 85 per cent in 2019, up from 45 per cent in 2010. As a result, new HIV infections in children aged 0–9 years declined by 52 per cent, from 310,000 in 2010 to 150,000 in 2019. However, this progress has been too slow to meet the 2020 global target of less than 20,000 new infections. Moreover, about 4 in 10 infants born to women living with HIV miss out on a timely HIV diagnosis, and 50 per cent of those who are HIV-infected will die in the first five years of life.

118. The spread of HIV drug resistance poses an additional threat, as 5 in 10 infants diagnosed with HIV are infected by viruses resistant to first-line antiretroviral drugs. While there has been progress in reducing mortality for children living with HIV, less progress has been observed for adolescents, due to poor transition, poor retention in care for those who initiated HIV treatment in childhood, and low HIV testing and treatment access in those with newly acquired infections.

**119. Non-communicable diseases, injuries and environmental risks are serious threats to children’s survival, health and well-being.** Over a million children (0–19 years old) die every year from treatable non-communicable diseases. For children aged 10–19 years, the leading causes of death are injury, including road traffic accidents and drowning, interpersonal violence and self-harm. Additionally, 1.8 billion children under the age of 15 years breathe toxic air that is putting their health and development at serious risk, and 1 in 3 children have unacceptably high levels of lead in their blood. Furthermore, extreme weather events, heat waves, the spread of infectious and vector-borne diseases, the impact of antimicrobial resistance, and poor air and water quality are direct threats to a child’s ability to survive, grow and thrive.

**120. Mental health problems in children and adolescents remain grave and unaddressed.** Worldwide, 10–20 per cent of children and adolescents experience mental disorders. Half of all mental disorders begin by the age of 14, and three quarters by the mid-20s. Mental and brain conditions are the leading cause of disability in young people in all regions, while 1 in 4 children is living with a parent who has a mental disorder. Suicide is the third leading cause of death globally among 15–19-year-old girls, and the fourth leading cause of death among 15–19-year-old boys. In lower- and middle-income countries, the prevalence of perinatal mental disorders is over 15 per cent in pregnant women and nearly 20 per cent in women who have recently given birth.

**121. A triple burden of malnutrition threatens children’s right to survive and thrive.** While declines in stunting prove that positive change for nutrition is not only

possible, but is happening at scale, there is more work to be done. The nutrition situation of the world's children is characterized by a triple burden. The first burden is the continuing scourge of undernutrition, in the form of stunting and wasting. Globally, 144 million children under 5 years of age (21 per cent) are stunted, and over 47 million are wasted, of whom almost one third (more than 14 million) are severely wasted.

122. The second burden comprises micronutrient deficiencies, a hidden form of malnutrition in which children lack nutrients that are essential for optimal immune response, skeletal growth and brain development. UNICEF estimates that at least 340 million children under 5 years old (about half) suffer from micronutrient deficiencies.

123. The third burden is the growing prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity, now increasingly affecting children from poorer households in low-, middle- and high-income countries. An estimated 38 million children under 5 years old are overweight. But it is overweight estimates for older children that illustrate the true scale of the challenge: the proportion of children aged 5–19 years who are overweight rose from around 1 in 10 (10.3 per cent) in 2000 to a little under 1 in 5 (18.4 per cent) in 2016.

124. Maternal and child wasting often increases in the immediate aftermath of an emergency, due to inadequate diets and the high burden of disease. Emergencies often also have a negative impact on stunting, infant and young child feeding practices, and on the micronutrient status of children and women, particularly the most vulnerable.

125. **Children's diets are unacceptably poor across the life cycle.** Despite the importance of good nutrition across the life cycle, globally, at all ages, millions of children and adolescents do not benefit from diets that support healthy growth and development. For example, only about half (49 per cent) of newborns are put to the breast in the first hour of life, and less than half (44 per cent) of infants under 6 months of age are exclusively breastfed.

126. Two in three children aged 6–23 months (72 per cent) are not fed even the minimum diverse diet needed to grow up healthy. While most children (more than 75 per cent) in this age group are fed breastmilk and grains (wheat, rice, corn or others), 46 per cent are not fed any fruits or vegetables, and 60 per cent are not fed nutrient-dense foods such as eggs, fish or meat.

127. By region, the poorest dietary diversity figures are recorded in South Asia (18 per cent) and sub-Saharan Africa (22 per cent). Moreover, far too many school-aged children and adolescents around the world – particularly in low- and middle-income countries – have limited food options and are susceptible to seasonal food shortages.

128. Meanwhile, adolescents living in urban environments – including in low- and middle-income countries – are often surrounded by nutrient-poor foods and beverages, consuming too many snacks that are high in sugar, salt and saturated fat, and eating too few fruits and vegetables.

129. **Improving child nutrition requires a multifaceted response.** Globalization, urbanization, inequities, environmental crises, health epidemics and humanitarian emergencies are posing critical challenges to feeding children sustainably, today and for generations to come. The evolving nature of child malnutrition demands a new global response: one that delivers diets, services and practices that support good nutrition at every stage of life, while sustaining nutrition-responsive development for all children and women.

130. This response must acknowledge the central role of the food system – working together with the health, water and sanitation, education, and social protection systems – to provide nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable diets for children,

adolescents and women, while ensuring adequate nutrition services and positive nutrition practices across the life cycle.

**131. Millions of children are not developing to their full potential.** UNICEF survey data indicate that as of 2020, only 71 per cent of children aged 36–59 months are developmentally on track in at least three key domains of development: literacy-numeracy, physical, social-emotional and learning.

132. Only 59 per cent of children under 5 years old in UNICEF programme countries are receiving adequate early stimulation and responsive care from their parents or primary caregivers. The proportion of children who are developmentally on track or receiving adequate early stimulation and responsive care significantly varies across countries.

133. The world is off-track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal target 4.2, and a considerable proportion of young children are deprived of early stimulation and responsive care they need to realize their developmental potential. Meanwhile, around 52.9 million under-fives globally have a developmental disability. These challenges are likely to persist unless the enabling policy environment is strengthened to grant parents and caregivers' access to time, resources and services to enhance their parental engagement with children.

**134. Many of the barriers children face in accessing services, resources and equal opportunities for health and nutrition are the result of discriminatory laws, policies and social practices** that leave particular groups of children behind on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, migration status, or sexual orientation, and sometimes because of a combination of reasons related to their identity or that of their parents or family members.

135. For example, higher rates of mortality and malnutrition among certain groups are a result of racism and systemic discrimination that have longstanding historical roots. Minority communities often also face a lack of culturally appropriate health and nutrition services, which may be compounded by structural racism and historical discrimination, which increase inequalities in access to health resources and worsen health outcomes.

**136. Children face an uncertain future, and COVID-19 creates additional threats to children's health, nutrition and development.** Globalization, urbanization, climate change, ecological degradation, migration, conflict, antimicrobial resistance, inequalities, and predatory commercial practices threaten the health, nutrition and development of children in every country.

137. With under 10 years to the 2030 deadline to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the COVID-19 crisis is putting years of progress in maternal and child health, nutrition and development – achieved through concerted action by governments and partners – in jeopardy. The disruption in health, food and social protection systems caused by the pandemic has the potential to reverse the gains of the past two decades.

138. UNICEF analysis of interruptions in essential health and nutrition services shows that the degree of disruption has evolved continuously, resulting in continuous variations among countries and regions and across services. Immunization services have seen an early recovery, with a V-shaped recovery evident in most countries.

139. By contrast, institutional delivery, C-sections and inpatient care for sick newborns show prolonged and continued interruptions, with a much slower recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic is also a child nutrition crisis, due to its worrying impacts on household incomes and food and nutrition systems. The number of undernourished children could increase by over 9 million.

140. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a large-scale interruption of early childhood services, including childcare, primary health care, pre-school education and family visits, exacerbating a pre-existing crisis of care and learning. While the COVID-19 response has highlighted the significance of parents and caregivers as first responders for children's learning and development, their mental and physical well-being and ability to provide responsive care have been put at risk, which will have a significant and long-term impact on child development outcomes.

### C. Lessons learned, 2018–2021

141. Lessons learned from the previous Strategic Plan period have indicated that achieving progress in Goal Area 1 requires strengthening the capacity of health and nutrition systems to scale up the delivery of essential maternal and child health, immunization and nutrition services in high-burden settings. Providing effective support to countries' health and nutrition systems will take a determined, long-term, United Nations system-wide vision to strengthen policy frameworks, the staff capacities of systems, national standards and service quality.

**142. Primary health care – the cornerstone of universal health coverage – has been identified as a platform through which frontline services across sectors can be coordinated ensure the progressive realization children's rights.** This coordination includes working with civil registration services to ensure that all births are registered, and identifying children experiencing or at risk of violence and supporting them with services, including referral to child protection services.

143. In addition to expanding service capacity for mental health, child development and disabilities, and adolescent sexual and reproductive health, primary health care needs to be responsive to the evolving burden of disease, malnutrition, and risk factors for children, including non-communicable diseases, injuries, environmental hazards and the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance.

**144. Mounting evidence indicates that primary health care system strengthening interventions must work in tandem with food system strengthening interventions.** As UNICEF programming for nutrition has expanded to cover the triple burden of malnutrition – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight – it has evolved to focus on building food systems' capacities and accountabilities for children, adolescents and women.

145. UNICEF works to ensure that food systems protect, promote and support diets, services and practices that prevent child malnutrition in all its forms. This work is organized around three priority areas for engagement: (1) improving the quality of children's foods and diets through public policy and actions in food supply chains; (2) improving the quality of children's food environments, wherever children live, learn, eat, and meet; and (3) improving the quality of children's food and feeding practices throughout childhood and adolescence. The urgent need for food system transformation to ensure the health of people and the planet is now globally recognized, and children's right to nutrition, health and well-being must be at the heart of this transformation.

**146. UNICEF has an opportunity to build upon its leadership in integrated ECD interventions,** leveraging the multi-agency collaboration on the Nurturing Care Framework to provide support for parents and caregivers to provide responsive care and early stimulation through existing health and nutrition services. Sustaining the momentum requires strengthening ECD services in emergencies and working across health, nutrition, and education sectors, with clear guidance and in partnership with other organizations.

## D. Result areas

147. UNICEF work in Goal Area 1 aims for more children – girls and boys, including those living in humanitarian crises and fragile settings – to survive, grow and develop to their full potential and well-being, from early childhood through adolescence. Prioritizing the most vulnerable children in both development and humanitarian settings, Goal Area 1 aims to ensure that, throughout the critical years of early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence (0–19 years of age) children remain free from illness, malnutrition and death from preventable causes, including HIV, and benefit from diets, services, practices and environments that support AIDS-free survival, good health and nutrition, and holistic development.

148. UNICEF work in Goal Area 1 promotes a life-course view that supports the delivery of nutritious diets, essential services, parenting support on the provision of nurturing care, positive practices and an enabling environment. Supported by UNICEF work in the other Goal Areas, Goal Area 1 takes a multi-system approach to health, nutrition and development that improves linkages among the health, food, water and sanitation, education, childcare and protection systems at the household and community levels – empowering parents and caregivers, and bringing families and communities closer to the systems they rely on.

149. UNICEF will work to ensure that children’s health, nutrition and development are not undermined as a result of discrimination, that governments integrate, adequately finance and deliver Goal Area 1, with efforts targeted at fulfilling the rights of those children who are the most disadvantaged and discriminated against.

150. The theory of change for Goal Area 1 posits the following outputs for the achievement of this outcome:

(a) **Result area 1: Strengthening primary health care and high-impact health interventions.** Children and women have access to strengthened primary health care and high-impact interventions to accelerate the end of preventable maternal, neonatal and child deaths and stillbirths, in development and humanitarian contexts.

(b) **Result area 2: Immunization services as part of primary health care.** Children, including adolescents, and women have access to quality immunization services as part of primary health care, in development and humanitarian contexts.

(c) **Result area 3: Fast-track the end of HIV/AIDS.** Children, including adolescents, and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, have access to interventions that fast-track the end of HIV/AIDS, in development and humanitarian contexts.

(d) **Result area 4: Health and development in early childhood and adolescence.** Children, including adolescents, benefit from programmes that improve their health and development, in development and humanitarian contexts.

(e) **Result area 5: Mental health and psychosocial well-being.** Children, including adolescents, and caregivers have access to quality programmes that improve their mental health and psychosocial well-being, in development and humanitarian contexts.

(f) **Result area 6: Nutrition in early childhood.** Children are protected from malnutrition in early childhood – stunting and wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity – in development and humanitarian contexts.

(g) **Result area 7: Nutrition of adolescents and women.** Adolescent girls and women benefit from gender-responsive diets, services and practices for the prevention of anaemia and poor nutrition, in development and humanitarian contexts.

(h) **Result area 8: Early detection and treatment of malnutrition.** Children benefit from timely and quality services and supplies for the early detection and treatment of wasting and other forms of life-threatening malnutrition, in development and humanitarian contexts.

## E. Cross-cutting programme areas

151. **Climate action.** The Global Programme Framework on Healthy Environments for Healthy Children outlines five major actions intended to provide UNICEF and partners with concrete steps to address the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on child survival, health and well-being: (1) strengthening climate-resilience and environmental sustainability in health care facilities; (2) developing climate- and environmentally responsive primary health care; (3) embedding environmental health into school programmes; (4) promoting climate and environmental education and action with children and adolescents; and (5) mobilizing collective action.

152. Diets and their supporting food systems can nurture both people and planetary health – but in many parts of the world, they are instead driving child malnutrition, environmental degradation and climate change. At the same time, climate change is eroding and reversing progress in ending child malnutrition.

153. **Disability.** Responsive, nurturing care in the first years of life is key to disability inclusion. It comprises quality nutrition and parenting support, universal access to primary health care, regular developmental monitoring and screening, with robust referral to early identification and intervention.

154. UNICEF promotes a twin-track approach, which entails ensuring that children and caregivers with disabilities can access inclusive and barrier-free nutritious diets, essential health, nutrition and stimulation services and positive practices, alongside targeted services such as access to assistive devices (such as wheelchairs, hearing aids or eyeglasses) that facilitate their full and equal right to survive and thrive.

155. **Gender.** Goal Area 1 will continue a twin-track approach to gender, mainstreaming gender equality programming for transformative results throughout UNICEF work on health, nutrition and development, alongside targeted interventions.

156. Adolescent girls will be a central focus, with collaborative, multi-sectoral, girl-centred programmes that leverage the collective power of girls' voices and agency and address urgent issues including improving sexual and reproductive health and rights, adolescent pregnancy, menstrual health and hygiene, prevention of HIV and human papillomavirus (HPV), and addressing undernutrition, anemia and obesity. UNICEF will also focus on reducing maternal mortality, improving maternal nutrition, and gender-responsive caregiving and parenting in early childhood and adolescence. Systems strengthening efforts will promote equity for women in the social service workforce.

157. **Peacebuilding.** When planned and implemented using conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding approaches, health and nutrition interventions can contribute to increased social cohesion, trust and confidence, which in turn can lead to improved collaboration and increased uptake of health and nutrition interventions. Strengthening social cohesion and peace is an important strategy for increasing food security and preventing malnutrition and famine.

158. UNICEF will mainstream conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding approaches – including by analyzing and monitoring conflict dynamics to ensure these are not aggravated – in health, nutrition and ECD programmes, including by leveraging inclusive health and nutrition systems as platforms for strengthening intra- and inter-

communal collaboration, trust and social cohesion, and increased trust in institutions. This includes public health emergency preparedness, response and resilience-building initiatives, as well as malnutrition and famine prevention plans and policies. Nutrition programmes will be leveraged as a platform to foster social cohesion, inter-group collaboration and increased trust in institutions, as will ECD programmes, which will also be used to empower parents and caregivers to reduce the impacts of conflicts on children.

159. **Migration.** UNICEF will accelerate the inclusion of migrant populations in its health and nutrition programming, promote their systematic inclusion in national health and nutrition systems, address gaps in immunization coverage, and expand access to primary health care services as well as nutritious, safe and affordable diets.

160. **Resilience.** In all contexts, UNICEF will work to have preparedness and response plans that includes promoting maternal, newborn, child and adolescent survival, health and nutrition and has a coordinated mechanism in place for its implementation, ensuring procurement of emergency supplies and monitoring survival and health outcomes.

161. Nutrition and resilience are strongly interlinked, with nutrition both an input to and an outcome of strengthened resilience. Reducing malnutrition is crucial to strengthening resilience. Well-nourished individuals are healthier and have greater physical reserves; households that are nutrition-secure can withstand external shocks better. Conversely, households that are most affected by shocks and threats face the greatest risk of malnutrition; thus, strengthening resilience is essential to reducing malnutrition.

## **F. Change strategies**

162. **Partnerships and engagement: public and private.** UNICEF will focus on influencing public and private sector investments, policies, conduct, and voice to promote equitable and quality health and nutrition systems, services, practices and products. Business will be engaged as a provider of goods and services; as an employer; as innovator and investor; on its impact on communities and the environment; and as an advocate for children's rights.

163. UNICEF will facilitate shared value partnerships by leveraging capital, know how, innovation and other core assets to strengthen systems at scale, ensure access to services, and influence societal demand and behavior on health and nutrition. UNICEF will strengthen public-private sector collaborations on innovative financing, develop and implement family-friendly policies, and uphold alignment with international standards on products, services and market practices for health and nutrition.

164. UNICEF will engage with member states, multilateral and regional institutions, at the national, regional, and global levels, to advocate for strengthened health, food and social protection systems that ensure affordable and equitable access to nutritious and safe diets and essential health, nutrition and development services and practices for all children, adolescents and families, including through resource mobilization for UNICEF.

165. **Risk-informed humanitarian and development nexus programming.** UNICEF will continue the rollout of the humanitarian-development procedure through Goal Area 1 programmes and support the mainstreaming of risk-informed programming, including integration on context-specific gender analysis.

166. As part of this change strategy, UNICEF will ensure that all humanitarian and development health, nutrition and ECD policies, strategies and programmes in conflict-affected and fragile settings are informed by robust conflict analysis, at minimum are conflict-sensitive (do no harm), and where possible and relevant



contribute to the peacebuilding objectives by strengthening vertical (state-society) and horizontal (between communities) social cohesion.

167. UNICEF will support ECD approaches that include strengthening social cohesion and peace by focusing on the creation of positive self and group identities, the role and interaction among caregivers, creating nurturing home environments that emphasize critical thinking, and focusing on coverage and reach for marginalized populations.

168. UNICEF will support the strengthening of community engagement and accountability to affected populations in humanitarian contexts, with specific focus on strengthening the nexus of development and humanitarian action in conflict and peacebuilding, public health emergencies and natural disasters.

169. To deliver on the CCCs and fulfil its role as Cluster Lead Agency for Nutrition during humanitarian crises, UNICEF will invest in the design and implementation of high-quality health and nutrition programmes; secure sufficient capacity and resources to deliver on its sectoral commitments, including for emergency preparedness and response; and work more effectively with affected populations, national Governments and other partners, and with stronger accountability mechanisms.

170. **Advocacy and communications** will play a critical role across all Goal Area 1 outcome areas. Ensuring that children benefit from nutritious diets, essential services, positive practices, parenting support and an enabling environment that protect, promote and support optimal health, nutrition and development is often a low political priority.

171. UNICEF will step up its strategic engagement to influence policy and financial decisions that can unlock progress, guided by data-driven, evidence-based, insight-led advocacy strategies at the global, regional and national levels. It will use advocacy strategies that are agile and integrated, mobilizing the organization's many advocacy assets behind a shared goal. Where there is a clear value add for public communication or public mobilization to support these strategies, multichannel communication plans will be used to achieve measurable positive change.

172. Key approaches will include: (1) sophisticated influencing strategies to secure political commitment; (2) empowering and equipping young people with the information, skills and capacities to lead change; (3) strategic use of evidence, including new tools to make a compelling case for increased investment to pivot results; (4) audience insights, online and offline media, and community engagement; and (5) strategic partnerships with those who have influence over decision-makers, to transition gamechangers to scale.

173. **Digital transformation.** UNICEF envisions a world where child survival, growth, development and well-being are improved through digitally enabled health and nutrition delivery systems, and where digital technologies and innovations are applied to solve a wide range of child health, nutrition and development challenges. UNICEF will:

(a) leverage digital applications to improve information and counselling on maternal and child health, nutrition and child development and well-being;

(b) expand the reach and impact of social and behaviour change communication and parenting support strategies;

(c) reach school-aged children and adolescents with information, counselling and behaviour change messaging about healthy diets, physical activity, mental health and HIV prevention and care;

(d) develop the nutrition and health capacities of frontline workers and community resource persons; measure children's anthropometry; measure micronutrient deficiencies with low-cost digital technologies;

(e) improve the collection, timeliness and quality of health and nutrition data; and

(f) improve children's and adolescents' food environments with the help of artificial intelligence.

**174. Data, research, evaluation and knowledge management.** UNICEF will work to:

(a) establish its position as a thought and knowledge leader to draw attention to issues affecting children's right to survival, growth and development; shape global narratives on what works; and collaborate with partners, including academic institutions, to identify and fill knowledge gaps;

(b) provide technical leadership for global data collection and analysis, for example by being the authority on the indicators for Sustainable Development Goals 2, 3 and 4 and other child-related health and nutrition indicators;

(c) strengthen national data and information systems to improve the availability and quality of disaggregated data, for example by providing technical guidance on child-related indicators collected through national systems, and on data collection and analysis; and

(d) build capacity to generate, use and share evidence for decision-making and action, for example, by providing training and technical assistance to embed use of evidence and continuous learning across the programming cycle, using embedded implementation research in programmes, and providing tools, technology and technical support for the documentation and sharing of lessons learned from health, HIV, nutrition and ECD programming.

**175. Systems strengthening to leave no one behind.** The UNICEF approach to health systems strengthening requires:

(a) attention to inclusive governance and financing;

(b) equipping health staff with appropriate skills, equitable remuneration, and advancement for frontline workers, especially women workers;

(c) procuring and delivering effective supplies without stockouts;

(d) improving information flow and quality;

(e) engaging the private sector, faith groups and civil society – including parent and youth networks – to enhance the quality and reach of health and nutrition services;

(f) improving the link between the delivery and affordability of health and nutrition services, including access to social protection schemes; and

(g) improving evidence-based planning, prioritization and implementation and monitoring to address inequities.

176. To strengthen food systems, UNICEF will work with governments, the private sector, development partners and civil society to improve the quality of children's, adolescents' and women's foods, diets, food environments, and food practices through five areas of engagement: (1) national guidelines and standards; (2) actions in food supply chains, including food fortification; (3) public-sector policies, including on food labelling and marketing; (4) healthy food environments in homes,

schools and beyond; and (5) large-scale information, counselling, parenting and social and behavior change communication strategies.

177. Ending HIV as a public health threat will require differentiated service delivery models in primary health care and communities that adequately address remaining gaps, including (1) strengthening systems for improving retention in care and drug adherence; (2) reducing inequities in access to services by expanding the reach to marginalized and stigmatized populations with a high HIV burden, such as pregnant adolescent girls, key populations, including adolescents involved in drug use, sex work or same-sex relationships; and (3) supporting a combination of gender-sensitive HIV prevention intervention within facilities, schools and at the community level.

178. Promoting holistic early childhood development and ensuring that children develop to their full potential requires a system that prioritizes improving stimulation and nurturing care in the home, with resources for gender-responsive parenting support; the inclusion of caregiver mental health in ECD policies and plans; and the promotion of family-friendly policies including paid parental leave, breastfeeding support, affordable, accessible, quality childcare for young children, and child benefits.

**179. Gender-equality programming for transformative results:** UNICEF will

(a) advocate for and advance policies and budgets with increased and diversified financing for girls' and women's health and nutrition rights, gender socialization and parenting, family-friendly policies, and equitable remuneration, recruitment and advancement for women workers;

(b) strengthen monitoring information and evaluation systems to collect and report gender-disaggregated data;

(c) at the systems level, provide training and sensitization to change gender-biased behaviours and norms, promote quality and dignified care to support women's voices and decisions, and promote caregiver mental health;

(d) promote age appropriate and culturally relevant comprehensive sexuality education centered on empowerment, gender norms and addressing gendered power relations;

(e) link and layer health, nutrition and HIV services to facilitate women's access and decision-making, with women-centered social protection schemes, violence prevention and care services, and sexual and reproductive health services;

(f) design digital solutions to enhance women's and girls' access and engagement;

(g) promote norms change programmes at the household and community levels to address women and girl's independent mobility, the value of girls and boys, and women and girls' voices in service design and delivery and demand generation; change norms around men's engagement in child health; and promote women's decision-making through joint discussions and outreach efforts.

**180. Innovation:** In Goal Area 1, innovating at scale means making a positive impact for children within and across countries, unlocking significant economies of scale. The global presence of UNICEF and its influence with Governments and partners enables the organization to scale up innovations and invest in:

(a) quality innovations for health and nutrition services, including for diagnostics, care and treatment; data collection, analysis and decision-making;

(b) product innovations, utilizing data and market analysis to identify health and nutrition product needs for children; driving demand for innovative, commercially available HIV, health and nutrition commodities, and telehealth;

(c) process innovations, including for use of data, implementation research, geospatial solutions and artificial intelligence for right-sizing health and nutrition programmes, and the equitable distribution of health HIV and nutrition supplies, including vaccines;

(d) nutrition innovations, developing and scaling up low-cost, effective multiple micronutrient supplements, food fortification technologies and ready-to-use therapeutic foods;

(e) scaling of innovations, supported by implementation research and documentation to capture country and UNICEF partner experiences with implementation at scale.

**181. Community engagement, social and behaviour change:** UNICEF will:

(a) introduce a set of standard behaviour and social indicators within national data systems to inform interventions and track changes in behaviours and social norms towards achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 3;

(b) establish coordination, capacity development, data and monitoring mechanisms for risk communication and community engagement in public health emergencies;

(c) develop integrated social and behaviour change communication and social and gender norms facilitation and training packages, such as inter-personal communication to support social and behaviour change and contribute to a range of survive and thrive outcomes;

(d) promote gender-responsive parenting, co-parenting and male involvement in fostering holistic child development, starting during pregnancy and fostering bonding and attachment in early childhood;

(e) partner with consumer associations and adolescent girls' and women's networks to design solutions, gather feedback and promote the availability and affordability of nutritious, safe and sustainable diets for all children and women;

(f) design, implement, monitor and evaluate digital engagement strategies with adolescent girls and boys for healthy diets, physical activity and good nutrition;

(g) streamline community engagement across programme strategies, ensuring adolescent girls and women are equitably represented in community engagement and feedback processes; and

(h) establish behavioral science hubs, human-centered design approaches and long-running edutainment media programmes to identify and target behavioural barriers and drivers across the health interventions.

182. Parenting and family support is a critical part of this strategy. To better address the growing demand for support for parents and families, UNICEF will seek to empower and equip parents and caregivers with skills and resources, including preventive support for child and caregiver health, nutrition and emotional well-being.

183. Elevating parenting and family support as a key programme priority will act as a catalyst, enhancing the impact of UNICEF work to deliver results Goal Area 1 results for children. UNICEF work on parenting and family support will aim to:

(a) equip caregivers with knowledge and skills to provide appropriate direction and guidance to their children in the exercise of their rights;

- (b) encourage caregivers to demand and utilize family-friendly policies;
- (c) help them forge reliable and affectionate relationships with their children and within the family;
- (d) facilitate positive, safe environments free of violence, neglect or abuse;
- (e) promote positive parent-child relationships and responsive caregiving;
- (f) support opportunities for gender-responsive quality learning;
- (g) promote positive gender socialization of children and adolescents;
- (h) promote caregivers' abilities to foster child and adolescent empowerment and meaningfully engage with children and adolescents according to their evolving capacities;
- (i) understand caregivers' own and children's mental health; and
- (j) support caregivers to participate in community engagement and social accountability mechanisms.

184. Child, adolescent and youth engagement and empowerment are also crucial parts of this strategy. UNICEF will partner with adolescents and youth as agents of change to accelerate programmatic results to enable all children, including adolescents, to survive and thrive. UNICEF will promote the safe and meaningful engagement of adolescents and young people as change agents through an emphasis on the following approaches:

- (a) empower adolescents and young people to plan and lead advocacy and policy efforts relating to their health, nutrition and well-being, including on mental health and HIV;
- (b) use peer-to-peer, parenting, school, digital and other strategic platforms to amplify adolescent and young people's voices and agency;
- (c) engage youth volunteers as a means to scale health and nutrition programmes, including campaigns to promote vaccination (e.g., COVAX), vitamin A supplementation and breastfeeding awareness;
- (d) leverage the power of volunteers to communicate with peers and access communities that are hard to reach and to organize around issues that are especially relevant to their lives and context, including mental health and COVID-19;
- (e) partner with adolescents and young people, including youth-led organizations, to meaningfully engage in planning, design, delivery, and monitoring and evaluation across health and nutrition programmes and services;
- (f) sensitize adults and build their skills and capacities to safely and meaningfully engage with and support the participation of adolescents and young people; and
- (g) strengthen internal processes for engagement with adolescents and young people.

## **G. Key partnerships**

### **1. United Nations working together**

185. Heeding the call of the United Nations Secretary-General, UNICEF is working with the H6 partnership and other partners to advance the Every Woman Every Child (EWEC) movement and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH). The H6 includes UNICEF, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World

Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the World Bank. The Secretary-General advocates positioning the H6 as a role model for United Nations reform efforts, providing UNICEF a key opportunity to leverage its expertise for improving children's rights.

186. The H6 proposes that the EWEC agenda be integrated into the Sustainable Development Goal 3 Global Action Plan for Health Lives and Well-being for All (GAP) and its accelerators, innovation and financing, and that the GAP's agenda should routinely include review of sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (SRMNCAH) within the GAP process. The H6 can lead country implementation where no GAP is present. Among the 12 agencies involved in the GAP, the H6 agencies align to advocate for women, children and adolescents. UNICEF co-leads the GAP's primary health care accelerator, focusing on maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health.

187. UNICEF is also a partner in the Global Financing Facility, to advance the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030). UNICEF and WHO have signed a collaboration framework that reconfirms the two organizations' commitment to the United Nations Decade of Action, in line with the principles of United Nations reform and with a view to achieving efficiency and effectiveness gains through joint action.

188. UNICEF is a founding member of UN Nutrition, which came into action in January 2021, as a result of efforts to harmonize the collective work of United Nations agencies on nutrition, in keeping with the United Nations reform agenda.<sup>10</sup> UNICEF supports FAO and WHO in fulfilling their mandate as providers of standards and normative guidance on food and nutrition. UNICEF plays the lead role in translating standards and normative guidance on nutrition into advocacy, policies, and programmes for children and women in development and humanitarian settings. UNICEF and the other UN Nutrition agencies are supporting the SUN Movement and the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting, responding to the Secretary-General's call for a coordinated approach to maternal and child nutrition.

189. In humanitarian settings, UNICEF works with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and WFP to provide nutrition services to refugee children and children living in fragile settings. Working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and WFP, UNICEF supports the scale-up of nutrition actions for school-aged children.

190. UNICEF is one of the 11 United Nations cosponsoring organizations for the UNAIDS. The Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations (CCO) gathers the cosponsoring heads of agencies and facilitates their input into the Joint Programme's strategy, policies, and operations. The Global AIDS Strategy 2021–2026 will provide directions to all the stakeholders, including the United Nations cosponsors, to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. UNICEF will continue to work closely with the United Nations partners on the priority programme areas such as prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV, pediatric HIV treatment, and HIV prevention among adolescents and youth, as guided by the new strategy.

191. In the context of UNAIDS, UNICEF leverages its unique global technical expertise in maternal and child health and its multisectoral mission to bring the needs of women, children and adolescents to global partnerships including the UNAIDS

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<sup>10</sup> UN Nutrition, was created in 2019, after extensive consultations with the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and WHO, the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition and the United Nations Network for Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) were merged into a single entity.

Three Frees partnership to fast-track ending AIDS in children and adolescents; the Global Prevention Coalition, whose mandate is to catalyze implementation of quality prevention programmes; and the Education Plus initiative.

192. In Goal Area 1 UNICEF has more than 70 common and complementary indicators with other agencies, including FAO, UNAIDS, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNFPA, UN-Women, WFP and WHO.

## **2. Other key partnerships**

193. UNICEF is a founding and strategic partner of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and one of its four permanent board members. The organization's work with Gavi has been highly synergistic, enabling the partnership to expand its reach. UNICEF and Gavi are aligned toward achieving equity, accelerating innovative approaches to close the immunization gap, and supporting market-shaping efforts to make vaccines more affordable and accessible to low-income countries, as well as promoting the adoption of targeted approaches to scale up vaccine introduction and coverage.

194. UNICEF is a key partner in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), a public-private partnership led by national governments and six global partners. UNICEF provides a leading role in strategy development, management oversight, and technical leadership in the areas of vaccine procurement, vaccine management, social mobilization and communication. UNICEF is a key partner in the Measles and Rubella initiative, Maternal and Newborn Tetanus Elimination Initiative, Eliminating Yellow Fever Epidemics strategy, the Global Task Force for Cholera Control, and the International Coordination Group on Vaccine Provision.

195. UNICEF and the Global Fund have an overlap in their mandates to help countries build better health systems. The Global Fund is a unique partnership to help the most vulnerable, and its targeted focus on ending the global epidemics of HIV, tuberculosis and malaria has helped to bring about incredible progress in bringing down childhood morbidity and mortality. UNICEF has a clear role to play in working with the Global Fund and partners to define the agenda for children and adolescents across the areas of the Global Fund's investments, ensure clearly defined activities for children are included in Global Fund proposals, budgeted and operationalized and, as much as possible, harmonized across the disease-specific programmes under a systems strengthening umbrella.

196. UNICEF is a key partner in the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A), and a co-lead for country readiness work and national deployment and vaccination plans, including readiness assessment, vaccine request form application, provision of guidelines, planning tools and technical support. UNICEF also plays a lead role in efforts to foster trust in vaccines by tracking and addressing misinformation. UNICEF leads the procurement and supply of vaccines and immunization supplies such as syringes and cold chain equipment to 92 low- and lower middle-income countries on behalf of COVAX. In that role, UNICEF is building on experience as the world's largest buyer of vaccines.

197. UNICEF is a key partner of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, a global effort uniting Governments, civil society partners, United Nations agencies, development partners, donors, and the private sector to support country-led efforts to end malnutrition. Since 2010, the SUN Movement has championed multi-stakeholder and multisector efforts to scale up nutrition policies, strategies and programmes. As of 2020, 62 countries have joined the SUN Movement – a declaration of commitment to develop and implement policies, strategies and plans of action to scale up nutrition and abide by the SUN Principles of Engagement. The United Nations Secretary-General appointed the UNICEF Executive Director to chair the SUN Lead Group.

SUN has helped spur critical improvements in national nutrition policies, strategies and programmes.

198. UNICEF leads the Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC). With more than 45 partners and 10 observers, the GNC aims to safeguard and improve the nutritional status of emergency-affected populations by ensuring a coordinated response that is predictable, timely, effective and at scale. When an emergency is declared, the GNC deploys surge staff for coordination and technical support to complement the work of the country team and cluster partners on the ground. A remote 24-hour help desk is available to provide immediate support on coordination, advocacy and normative guidance, and a range of other issues. The GNC plays a critical role in protecting crisis-affected populations from malnutrition and contributes to strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus and developing national capacities for sectoral coordination.

199. UNICEF provides technical leadership and coordination on early childhood development to several partnerships and networks to optimize programme impact. These include:

(a) the Nurturing Care Framework, including core partners such as UNICEF, WHO, PMNCH, the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN), the World Bank, and over 50 organizations;

(b) ECDAN and regional ECD networks; the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies ECD Task Team (with UNICEF co-leading);

(c) the Moving Minds Alliance, a consortium of funders advocating for and supporting ECD in emergencies, with UNICEF as a core partner;

(d) the Global Programme Partnerships, such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Gavi, the SUN Movement, PMNCH, and the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children;

(e) inter-agency partnerships for gender, like Generation Equality; and

(f) partnerships on family-friendly policies with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank, ECDAN, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO).

200. Similarly, UNICEF provides technical leadership and partnerships coordination for HIV/AIDS. UNICEF co-chairs the UN Stay Free partnership with the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to accelerate HIV prevention in adolescent girls and young women, and is a technical partner for the Global Fund Strategic Initiative on Adolescent Girls and Young Women.

201. UNICEF is a key member of the United States National Institutes of Health's Adolescent HIV Implementation Science Alliance, and enjoys a close working relationship with the United States Centers for Disease Control. UNICEF partners with academic institutions, including the PENTA-ID global research network and the Coalition for Children Affected by AIDS, as well networks of frontline providers, such Pediatric AIDS Treatment for Africa (PATA) and the African Network of Carers of Children with AIDS (ANECCA).



## H. Assumptions and risks

<i>Assumptions and risks</i>	<i>Mitigation measures</i>
Goal Area 1 programmes remain a global priority, and industrialized countries remain determined to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal targets related to Goal Area 1. Without such global commitment, UNICEF will struggle to accelerate progress in programme countries.	UNICEF will conduct advocacy at the highest global and national levels with industrialized countries to ensure that Goal Area 1 policies and programmes remain a global priority and will leverage strategies within Goal Area 1 results areas to this end.
Programme countries remain determined to achieve Sustainable Development Goal targets related to Goal Area 1. Without this commitment at national and sub-national levels, UNICEF will struggle to leverage partnerships and resources for sustainable outcomes in Goal Area 1.	UNICEF will engage with programme countries through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and its country programmes to align national priorities with Goal Area 1 targets. UNICEF will engage with partners to promote such alignment and maximize results for children.
International and domestic investments to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal targets related to equitable Goal Area 1 outcomes increase. Without this commitment, achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal targets is in jeopardy, especially at a time when the impact of COVID-19 threatens decades of progress towards Goal Area 1 results.	UNICEF will continue to emphasize the importance of international and domestic investments through evidence, advocacy, technical assistance, capacity development and service delivery.
Private sector policies, practices and investments contribute to sustainable progress towards Sustainable Development Goal targets for Goal Area 1. Without appropriate private sector engagement to create shared prosperity within planetary boundaries, progress in Goal Area 1 may remain inequitable and unsustainable.	UNICEF will promote the use of shared value partnerships in its development cooperation and promote public-private solutions towards maximizing sustainable results for children.

## III. Goal Area 2

### A. Summary

#### 202. Every child, including adolescents, learns and acquires skills for the future.

203. Education is a right enshrined in articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF work in Goal Area 2, including in humanitarian crises and fragile settings, advances Sustainable Development Goal 4 and contributes to many other Sustainable Development Goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and Sustainable Development Goal 8 on sustainable, inclusive economic growth and decent work for all.

204. Education reduces poverty and prevents its transmission across generations; drives sustainable economic growth; prevents inequality and injustice; and is associated with more peaceful communities, greater civic engagement and stronger democracies. It contributes to gender equality; leads to better health, particularly for women and children; helps to protect the planet; and empowers children and adolescents. Inclusive education can help foster social cohesion and combat discrimination and xenophobia. But the economic and social benefits of education depend on generating learning outcomes, not just getting children into school.

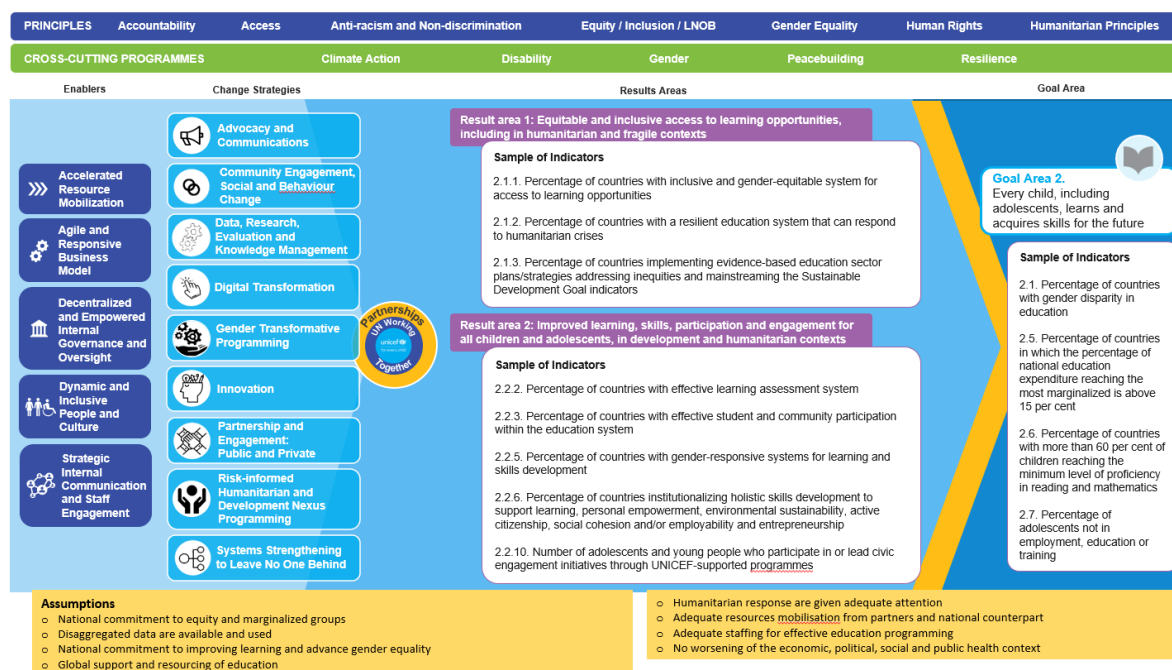
**205. UNICEF work under Goal Area 2 therefore focuses squarely on addressing the global learning crisis. It is shifting to increase the emphasis on early learning, including in emergencies, and education for marginalized adolescents, to complement the organization's existing core work in primary and secondary education.**

**206. Goal Area 2 emphasizes holistic skills acquisition and multiple learning pathways, so that children and young people acquire the flexible, relevant skills they need to establish decent livelihoods and navigate a rapidly changing economy. It focuses on creating safe and supportive school environments to enable children's learning, strengthening links between education and other sectoral systems to provide school-based support for mental health, well-being and nutrition, and protective environments that include a comprehensive response to school-related gender-based violence.**

207. Goal Area 2 furthers the implementation of QCPR provisions on education (operative paragraph 38), gender (operative paragraph 12), disability inclusion (operative paragraph 14), climate action and environmental sustainability (operative paragraphs 29 and 30) as well as leveraging the comparative advantages of UNICEF on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (operative paragraph 36), all of which are key in advancing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of a society in which every child is included (operative paragraph 13).

208. Responding to lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, Goal Area 2 will work to realize the potential of digital solutions to expand access to quality education, including through alternative learning pathways, and to make education systems more resilient in the face of crises. The vast extent of remote learning necessitated by the pandemic response has created an opportunity to reimagine education, but capitalizing on it will require tackling the digital divide – including by addressing its gendered aspects, and ensuring accessibility for children with disabilities – so that the expanded use of digital solutions does not exacerbate educational exclusion.

209. UNICEF will work with Governments and other partners to orient policies, expenditure, implementation and accountability towards the twin goals of equity and learning, including in humanitarian crises and fragile contexts. Priority is placed on the most marginalized children, including children with disabilities, children affected by humanitarian crises or living in fragile contexts, children on the move, and children from the poorest households, notably adolescent girls. Goal Area 2 continues to centre girls' education, now focusing especially on their transition to and completion of secondary education and their acquisition of transferrable skills.



## B. Context

210. Education challenges are greatest in low- and lower-middle-income countries as well as conflict-affected and fragile contexts. But even in upper-middle- and high-income countries, where access is almost universal, significant challenges remain in terms of learning and equity.

211. In 2019, 258 million children, adolescents and youth were still out of school, one sixth of the global school-aged population. In low- and lower-middle-income countries, where most out-of-school children live, 1 in 3 and 1 in 5 children, respectively, are out of school. Half of out-of-school children are in conflict-affected countries.

212. Significant disparities exist in participation in early childhood education. Worldwide, 73 per cent of children participated in educational activities organized one year before the age of primary school entry – but in low-income countries, that proportion stands at only 39 per cent. Of the 36 million children in this age group who were out of school, low-income countries accounted for one third, despite representing just 14 per cent of the total child population in that age group.

213. **Before COVID-19, the world was already struggling with a learning crisis.** Even though most children were in school, 6 in 10 (617 million) primary school-aged children and lower secondary school-aged adolescents were not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics.<sup>11</sup> About 5 in 10 children (387 million) at the end of primary school in low- and lower-middle-income countries were in learning poverty (defined as being unable to read and understand a simple text by 10 years of age), as were 61 per cent of adolescents completing lower secondary school. Trends observed pre-COVID-19 indicated that 43 per cent of primary school-aged children would still be learning-poor in 2030.

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'More Than One-Half of Children and Adolescents Are Not Learning Worldwide', Fact Sheet No. 46 September 2017, UIS/FS/2017/ED/46.

**214. While gender disparities in education have narrowed, girls and boys continue to face educational exclusion on account of gender, poverty, rural residence, disability and migration.** Gender disparities in education have narrowed over the years, with parity in access and learning achievements in primary education now achieved globally. Disparities remain to the detriment of girls in low-income countries, particularly in secondary education; for every 10 boys who complete lower secondary, there are only 8 girls.

215. Inequities worsen when considering the socioeconomic background and location: children from the poorest households in rural areas are the most excluded. Among disadvantaged adolescents from the poorest households in lower-middle-income countries, girls are 50 per cent more likely to never attend school than boys; among the poorest quintile of households, 30 per cent of adolescent girls and 20 per cent of boys have never been to school; and 20 per cent of girls and 15 per cent of boys who attended drop out before the end of primary school.<sup>12</sup>

216. In all regions except sub-Saharan Africa, boys appear to face a disadvantage in reading. Migrant and displaced populations are particularly disadvantaged in the learning crisis, and despite progress, children with disabilities remain left behind and excluded from education, making up to 15 per cent of the out-of-school population.<sup>13</sup>

**217. Children affected by humanitarian crises are particularly vulnerable to educational exclusion.** Conflicts are one of the biggest challenges to Sustainable Development Goal progress, with 76 per cent of active conflicts occurring in fragile settings, where progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets remains lowest. The current learning crisis in fragile contexts is occurring amidst a decades-long trend of relapse and intensification of violent conflicts, fuelled by entrenched patterns of inequalities, exclusion and marginalization. Weak governance and unequal distribution of basic social services in fragile settings create new instabilities due to the erosion of trust in Governments and institutions, while a large proportion of populations perceive their societies as failing them and excluding from meaningful influence. Climate change increasingly intersects with these patterns, as a visible conflict driver and a growing challenge to resilience.

**218. COVID-19 put the education of children and young people worldwide in greater jeopardy than ever before – especially for those already facing educational exclusion and disadvantage.** The pandemic caused the largest education disruption in history, affecting over 1.5 billion learners (or 90 per cent) at the peak of partial or total closures of educational institutions in the second quarter of 2020.<sup>14</sup> Children missed out on not only education, but health, nutrition and protection services in school. It is projected that 24 million learners will be at risk of not returning to educational institutions,<sup>15</sup> and 20 million more secondary school-aged girls could be out of school after the crisis.<sup>16</sup> The estimated impact in low- and lower-middle-income countries is worrisome: while 53 per cent of 10-year-olds were

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF Education Strategy, 2019–2030: Data and analytics. Weighted average based on available Multiple Indicators Cluster Surveys (MICS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) as of 2017. They are implemented in low- and middle-income countries.

<sup>13</sup> Findings from 14 countries that used the Child Functioning Module through the MICS.

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO, 'Education: From disruption to recovery', <<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>>, accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO, 'COVID-19 Education Response: How many students are at risk of not returning to school?', <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373992/>>, accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Malala Fund, *Girls' Education and COVID-19: What past shocks can teach us about mitigating the impact of pandemics*, April 2020, <<https://malala.org/newsroom/archive/malala-fund-releases-report-girls-education-covid-19>>, accessed 19 July 2021.

considered learning poor before the pandemic, there could be an increase of 10 percentage points as a result of COVID-19.

219. All Governments provided remote learning solutions during school closures, using online platforms, offline materials, TV, radio and take-home materials, in order to mitigate education disruption. Thirty per cent of school children (463 million) were not reached by these solutions.<sup>17</sup> The pandemic exacerbated the exclusion of children with disabilities as learning shifted to remote and online delivery, with less than half of surveyed countries taking steps to ensure accessibility for children with disabilities.<sup>18</sup> COVID-19 has further worsened access to continued, quality and safe learning for the 127 million school-aged children and young people who were already affected by humanitarian crises.

220. **Education can play a key role as a climate change mitigation and adaptation mechanisms.** If only 16 per cent of high school students in high- and middle-income countries were to receive quality climate change education, significant reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> could be achieved by 2050.<sup>19</sup> Access to a quality education is the most important factor improving communities' resilience to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change.<sup>20</sup>

### C. Lessons learned, 2018–2021

221. The Goal Area 2 theory of change is informed by lessons learned from reviews and evaluations – including the 2020 evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations, other evaluations and reviews of UNICEF education work, and organization-wide evaluations and reviews – as well as UNICEF programming experience, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

222. Evaluations and reviews have noted the need to scale up equity-focused programming in education, and to strengthen national systems to address the needs of the most disadvantaged children. This starts with increased investment in disaggregated data to recognize and address disadvantages faced by specific groups of children. This includes investment in gender analysis, and in gender-equality programming for transformative results as well as other multisectoral approaches to address the underlying causes of educational exclusion.

223. Experience with the education response to COVID-19 has reinforced the need to place learning at the centre of Goal Area 2, alongside equity. The education response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how digital learning solutions can be rapidly deployed at scale to reach the most marginalized, pointing to their immense potential to enable transformative changes in learning. As a result of this experience, UNICEF is prioritizing work to maximize the availability and potential of technology, to make digital learning part of a basic basket of essential services.

224. But COVID-19 also highlighted the limits of what technology alone can offer. UNICEF is responding to the need to intensify family and community engagement

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF, 'COVID-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures', <<https://data.unicef.org/resources/remote-learning-reachability-factsheet/>>, August 2020.

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF, Children with Disabilities: Ensuring their [inclusion in COVID-19 response strategies and evidence generation](#)', December 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Cordero, Eugene C., Diana Centeno and Anne Marie Todd, 'The Role of Climate Change Education on Individual Lifetime carbon emission', <<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0206266>>, accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/book/what-works-in-girls-education-evidence-for-the-worlds-best-investment/>>, accessed 19 July 2021.

and social mobilization to address demand-side barriers to children's education, and to support the participation of children and adolescents in decisions that affect them.

225. The 2020 evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations highlighted education's critical role in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. This has been echoed by children and young people affected by crises, as part of UNICEF consultations with children and young people to inform the Strategic Plan. The evaluation identified key entry points for strengthening education in emergencies at the policy and community levels, through key actions including addressing discrimination; community consultation; adapting policies, curricula and teaching methods; promoting student-led initiatives; and promoting effective skills development. Other reviews and evaluations have highlighted the need to increase efforts to improve coordination of education in emergencies responses, and to improve needs assessments and monitoring data, for more coherent humanitarian education responses and advocacy. Evaluations and reviews have also noted the need to strengthen education systems to prevent or mitigate the impacts of crisis, notably by investing in risk-informed programming.

#### **D. Result areas**

226. In line with the UNICEF Global Education Strategy and the CCCs, Goal Area 2 will work across the life cycle from early childhood to adolescence with the aim of strengthening national systems to better address inequities in education access. In humanitarian crises, UNICEF will ensure that well-coordinated education in emergencies responses provide access to safe and quality learning for children and youth.

227. Goal Area 2 will focus on two result areas:

(a) **Result Area 1: Access to quality learning opportunities.** Equitable and inclusive access to learning opportunities, including in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

(b) **Result Area 2: Learning, skills, participation and engagement.** Improved learning, skills, participation and engagement for all children and adolescents, in development and humanitarian contexts.

228. Increasing UNICEF work in pre-primary education and early learning, including in humanitarian emergencies, will constitute a strategic shift for this Strategic Plan period, as will an enhanced focus on education for marginalized adolescents. With regard to learning and skills, Goal Area 2 will prioritize foundational and transferable skills, digital skills and job-specific skills for marginalized adolescents, as well as youth engagement.

#### **E. Cross-cutting programme areas**

229. **Climate action.** UNICEF has longstanding work on education on climate change, environmental sustainability, and disaster risk reduction). The UNICEF global education programme will focus on reducing the risks to children and educational systems from the impacts of climate change, including disasters, and championing sustainability education and skills building for young people. This encompasses the updated framework on safe schools programming (which is being broadened to include environmental sustainability) as well as the promotion of climate and environmental education as an essential part of global citizenship.

230. **Disability** will be the focus of inclusive education programming, already fully embedded in result area 1, working through the lenses of laws, policies and plans; the school physical environment; materials and communication; human resources; attitudes; and Education Monitoring Information Systems (EMIS).

231. **Gender-responsive planning and programming** will continue to be a core focus, and UNICEF will support the development of gender-responsive education systems for access, learning and skills. Ensuring that no girl or boy is left behind includes an equitable focus on girls' education, particularly their transition to and completion of secondary education and acquisition of transferrable skills. This programming includes a comprehensive response to school-related gender-based violence, tackling the gender digital divide, and embracing alternative pathways to learning for both girls and boys.

232. **Peacebuilding.** UNICEF education programmes make key contributions to conflict prevention and peace in fragile and conflict-affected settings. The UNICEF contribution to peacebuilding through education will be reflected through Goal Area 2 outputs and indicators, and will use risk-informed programming approaches.

233. **Resilience.** Humanitarian and development programming must be designed and implemented to do no harm, prevent conflict, and build resilience, so that humanitarian programming contributes to system strengthening, while development programming contributes to preparedness and social cohesion. Resilience and DRR will be fully reflected in Goal Area 2, and will be a particular focus of systems strengthening work.

## F. Change strategies

234. **Partnerships and engagement, public and private.** Partnerships with, and commitment by, the private sector to support sustainable and equitable learning systems and services will be instrumental to achieving learning and skills goals at scale. UNICEF will focus on leveraging public and private sector investment, innovation, influence and conduct to support learning and skills outcomes in a way that is sustainable, accessible, relevant and empowering for children and adolescents. UNICEF will particularly seek to grow partnerships with the private sector based on the principle of shared value and a shared commitment to access, learning and equity in education. UNICEF will seek engagement on relevant policies and standards, including in the private sector, to make education systems, services and content affordable and accessible in a sustained way.

235. At the regional level, UNICEF will collaborate closely with regional bodies such as the African Union and regional development banks. At the country level, UNICEF is the lead agency for the education sector and is an active partner in Local Education Groups, often playing a leading role for the development community, for example as Coordinating Agency for the GPE.

236. **Risk-informed humanitarian and development nexus programming** is fully embedded in the other change strategies, particularly systems strengthening, through support to risk-informed sector analysis, evidence-based sector planning, preparedness and contingency planning, including support for remote learning readiness. UNICEF will prioritize (1) supporting well-coordinated emergency responses for education on a large scale, including through Rapid Response Mechanisms, and working with a range of national and international humanitarian and development partners; (2) rebuilding education systems recovering from conflict and natural disasters using risk-informed and conflict-sensitive strategies; (3) strengthening the resilience of all education systems through multi-sectoral interventions; (4) testing and evaluating innovations across all country contexts, including in areas such as blended learning approaches; (5) delivering MHPSS services; (6) and supporting the leadership and coordination of humanitarian response, along with national and local stakeholders, and in compliance with humanitarian principles. As a Cluster Lead Agency for education, UNICEF coordinates education in emergencies responses with Governments and other partners

to ensure that partners address education service gaps and quality shortcomings through coordinated humanitarian responses.

**237. Advocacy and communications.** In line with the global advocacy priorities on learning and digital access, communications and advocacy will be essential to accelerate results at the country and regional levels as well as through intergovernmental fora. Key strategies will include: (1) sophisticated influencing strategies to secure political commitment; (2) empowering and equipping young people with the information, skills and capacities to lead change; (3) strategic use of evidence to make a compelling case for increased investment; (4) audience insights; (5) online and offline media and community engagement to reach hearts and minds; and (6) strategic partnerships with those who have influence over decision-makers.

**238. Digital transformation.** Recognizing lessons learned from the education response to COVID-19, and the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to leapfrog in education, digital transformation will be pursued in line with the 'Reimagine Education' corporate priority, seeking to provide and expand access to world-class digital learning solutions, with a focus on access to devices, affordability, enhanced connectivity and youth engagement.

**239. Data, research, evaluation and knowledge management.** UNICEF work in education will support a culture of evidence and will prioritize generation of data and evidence through investments in data collection, education sector assessments and analysis, and research and evaluation activities at the country, regional and global levels. UNICEF will focus on (1) strengthening government capacities to generate and utilize data; (2) strengthening information management capacities in emergency responses; (3) disseminating data and evidence through knowledge management platforms, national and international networks and South–South cooperation; and (4) supporting the use of data and evidence to inform evidence-based policy, programming and advocacy, at the national and global levels. There will be increasing emphasis on embedding research and evidence generation within programmes and policies in order to analyze and address the gaps between policies and their implementation, for effective and equitable education service delivery.

**240. Innovation.** UNICEF will place learning at the centre of innovation work in education, prioritizing (1) fit-for-purpose mechanisms to monitor and measure outcomes; (2) partnerships with the private sector under a cocreation approach; (3) work with Governments and other critical stakeholders from the early stages of design throughout implementation; (4) evidence generation through testing and evaluating innovations; (5) school- and classroom-based (ICT-enabled) innovations that empower and support teachers and facilitators; (6) digital learning from home; (7) new approaches to personalized and adaptive learning; (8) data use and market analysis to identify where there is a product need for children; (9) and driving demand for innovative commercially available products that have the potential for uptake and impact, in combination with securing financing for these demands.

**241. Community engagement, social and behaviour change.** UNICEF will intensify family and community engagement to address demand-side barriers to education access and learning outcomes, including social and gender norms and support for the meaningful participation of communities, parents, children and adolescents in decisions that affect their lives. The following activities will be prioritized: (1) supporting parental and household engagement in learning and well-being in the home and community, including early stimulation for babies and infants, reading at home and making books available; (2) fostering playful and holistic learning at home for young children, and engagement in preschool and school activities; (3) changing harmful gender and social norms, including convening dialogues and providing information to promote girls' education and gender equality



in education, to prevent child marriage, child labour and violence against children; and (4) supporting social accountability for better service delivery, by providing parents with the information and opportunities to engage with and challenge the quality of public services.

**242. Systems strengthening to leave no one behind.** UNICEF will work closely with Governments, non-governmental organizations and other non-state providers, and leveraging its convening power at the country, regional and global levels. Systems strengthening work will include support to sector-wide analysis, planning, implementation and accountability, with a focus on equity in access and learning. The following will be prioritized: (1) strengthening education sector analysis and evidence-based sector planning and monitoring, including gender- and disability-responsive planning and risk-informed programming; (2) supporting pro-poor policies and public expenditure through analytical tools, policy dialogue and technical support; (3) strengthening capacities in data, delivery and accountability for results; (4) improving the alignment of inputs and actors so that education systems are clearly focused on addressing equity and the learning crisis; (5) improving the alignment of education systems with other systems; (6) improving links with social protection systems that address household financial barriers; (7) prioritizing an inclusive approach to systems strengthening that focuses on the structural issues facing adolescent girls, children with disabilities, migrant and displaced children, and other marginalized children and adolescents; and (8) adopting an access-focused lens to guide all supply chain strengthening work.

## **G. Key partnerships**

### **1. UN working together**

243. UNICEF works closely with UNESCO and other United Nations agencies, including as one of the eight United Nations agencies co-convening Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Education 2030. UNICEF has critical partnerships with United Nations agencies for country delivery, global leadership and convening, the production of global and regional public goods and their application at the country level. This includes working with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics on data issues and with the International Institute for Educational Planning on education sector analysis and planning. UNICEF also partners with UNHCR on the Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children. These partnerships – with agencies including UNESCO, WFP, UNHCR, UN-Women, ILO, WHO and UNAIDS – are being reshaped within the context of the reform of the United Nations Development System.

244. All indicators in Goal Area 2 are common or complementary with UNESCO and the World Bank, and some are also tracked through the Education Cannot Wait fund, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) or the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI).

### **2. Other key partnerships**

245. UNICEF works closely with the multilateral development banks as the largest providers of concessional finance and providers of significant technical assistance. The organization also works closely with funding agencies at the country and global levels, and with civil society organizations, academia, private foundations and the private sector

246. UNICEF is a member of the Board of Directors of the GPE and a major grant agent and coordinating agency for GPE programmes, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states. UNICEF hosts Generation Unlimited and Education Cannot Wait, for which it is also a major implementing partner. UNICEF hosts UNGEI and the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children.

247. UNICEF is the co-lead of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Global Education Cluster, with Save the Children, and with UNHCR currently co-leads the Humanitarian Education Accelerator, established to identify and grow innovations in education in emergencies.

248. UNICEF currently chairs the Global Alliance for disaster risk reduction and resilience in education systems. UNICEF is member of the steering group for the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies and the steering committee for the Global Coalition to Protect Education for Attack.

249. UNICEF currently co-chairs a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of Experts on Educational Institutions and COVID-19 with WHO and UNESCO.

## H. Assumptions and risks

<i>Assumptions and risks</i>	<i>Mitigation measures</i>
<p><b>Equitable access:</b> Insufficient government focus on equity and marginalized groups; government EMIS do not track marginalized groups; domestic and international allocations to pre-primary education remain small; insufficient focus on education pathways for adolescents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain strong focus on equity, through leadership, advocacy, policy dialogue, convening, programming.</li> <li>• Support Governments to develop disaggregated data in EMIS.</li> <li>• Expand UNICEF programming, convening and advocacy downwards to pre-primary education and upwards to marginalized adolescents, while maintaining the focus on primary and secondary, and in alignment with the principle of progressive universalism.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learning and skills:</b> UNICEF-supported programmes – both direct service delivery and support to Governments – support the expansion of inputs alone, with no impact on learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematically measure learning in all relevant UNICEF-supported education activities, both direct and indirect.</li> <li>• Align all inputs and actors in the education systems to support learning.</li> <li>• Global-, regional- and country-level advocacy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Education in emergencies and fragile contexts:</b> Insufficient funding; lack of humanitarian access; increased attacks on schools; insufficient focus on risk-informed planning; limited focus on measuring learning in humanitarian situations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to advocate for education in emergencies funding and strengthen partners' voices (e.g., through Education Cannot Wait).</li> <li>• Reinforce United Nations mandate, legal and rights-based frameworks for humanitarian access.</li> <li>• Invest in risk-informed planning with Governments and with 'non-humanitarian' actors.</li> <li>• Work with partners to ensure the measurement of learning and best practices (e.g., with the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies) to improve learning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Financial resources:</b> Insufficient funding for global education and for UNICEF education activities; UNICEF education funding restricted or projectized, limiting ability to drive UNICEF priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct global advocacy in partnership with others.</li> <li>• Diversify UNICEF funding base.</li> <li>• Demonstrate results.</li> <li>• Expand funding and seek unrestricted funding.</li> </ul>

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**Innovation:** Innovation is pursued for innovation's sake, without measurement of outcomes, or at the expense of core programming priorities; ICT-enabled innovations exacerbate inequities.

- Establish, enforce and track clear criteria for investing in innovation, including value-addition, cost-effectiveness, total cost of ownership, measurement of learning and assessing opportunity costs.
  - Focus on the most marginalized.
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## IV. Goal Area 3

### A. Summary

**250. Every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices.**

251. The right of a child to protection from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect is clearly established across various articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UNICEF approach in Goal Area 3 is guided by human rights principles, norms and standards, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three Optional Protocols, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

252. In humanitarian settings in particular, UNICEF is guided by the CCCs, the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and the Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming. In situations of armed conflict, UNICEF is guided by international humanitarian law and refugee law, and is specifically mandated to protect children by Security Council Resolution 1612.

253. Goal Area 3 contributes to multiple targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, including 3.4 (promote mental health and well-being), 5.2 (end violence against women and girls), 5.3 (eliminate harmful practices), 8.7 (end child labour), 16.2 (end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children), 16.3 (promote the rule of law and ensure access to justice), and 16.9 (provide legal identity for all).

254. Cutting across all these Sustainable Development Goals is the importance of strengthening the protective environment for children by, among other things, preventing family-child separation, ending institutionalization of children and strengthening family-based alternative care, and empowering parents and caregivers to engage in protective behaviours for children and families. Goal Area 3 prioritizes children at greatest risk of child protection violations, including children in humanitarian crises and fragile settings, children with disabilities, children deprived of parental care, children on the move, and children experiencing discrimination and exclusion, including the structural racism and discrimination increasingly being challenged in justice and law enforcement systems.

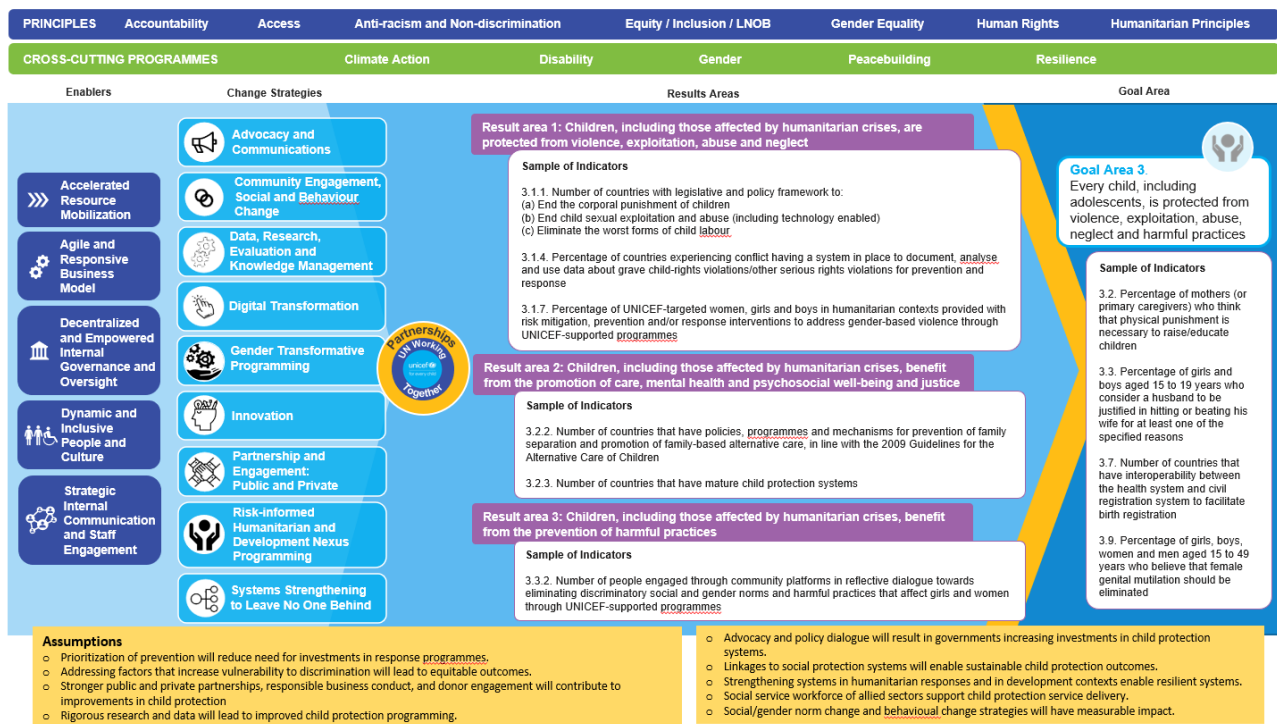
255. Goal Area 3 furthers the implementation of QCPR provisions on child protection, prevention and elimination of violence and discrimination (operative paragraph 38), gender (operative paragraph 12), disability inclusion (operative paragraph 14) and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (operative paragraph 113), which are all key in advancing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals as well as the realization of a society in which every child is included (operative paragraph 13).

256. Goal Area 3 has shifted towards a greater focus on preventing violence and harmful practices, including (1) by better understanding children's particular,

intersecting vulnerabilities; (2) by transforming negative social norms using social and behaviour change interventions informed by social science research; and (3) by enhancing the capacities of the social service workforce as an integrator between health, education, protection and other systems, to strengthen protective environments for children and address the multidimensional nature of child protection issues.

257. The shift stems from clear evidence that violence against children is preventable. The lack of primary prevention approaches, in both humanitarian and development settings, puts children’s well-being in jeopardy and overwhelms programmes that respond to children’s protection needs. The scale of harm and vulnerabilities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and measures to contain its spread further highlighted the importance of preventive measures to address exacerbating risk factors and bolster protective factors before too many children fall into cycles of adversity.

258. Goal Area 3 therefore operates from the premise that the child protection-related Sustainable Development Goals can only be achieved through well-thought-out primary prevention approaches. The disruptions in children’s access to protection services and support caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have also highlighted the need to reinforce systems, build capacities, enhance coordination, including in humanitarian contexts, and rapidly scale up evidence-based interventions.



## B. Context

259. Despite advancements for children over the past two decades, significant acceleration is required to achieve the child protection–related Sustainable Development Goals across all contexts. Countries in situations of fragility and conflict are furthest behind, while certain other contexts also accentuate threats to the protection of children, including violence along migration routes, armed violence in urban settings, and increasingly, violence in the virtual world. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges to children’s right to protection.

260. **Available data shows that despite progress, the world is not on track to achieve the child protection–related Sustainable Development Goal targets.** For example, while there has been a rise in birth registration levels globally – with about 3 in 4 children under 5 years old registered today, compared to 6 in 10 in 2000 – the total number of unregistered children in sub-Saharan Africa will continue to increase and will exceed 100 million by 2030, unless progress accelerates. Female genital mutilation (FGM) declined by a quarter in the last 20 years in the 31 countries with available data, but in order to meet the target of elimination by 2030, global progress needs to be 10 times faster than over the past decade. FGM remains concentrated in certain parts of the Sahel and East Africa.

261. Child marriage has declined over the past decades, with 1 in 5 young women married in childhood today, compared to 1 in 4 a decade ago. Without further acceleration, particularly among the most vulnerable populations, over 120 million girls are likely to marry by 2030. However, in order to eliminate child marriage by 2030, global progress would need to be 17 times faster than the rate observed over the past decade. The global burden of child marriage has shifted from South Asia to sub-Saharan Africa, though at the same time, there is no evidence of progress in Latin America and the Caribbean, with levels of child marriage remaining as high as they were 25 years ago.

262. **Violence against children remains a global issue, affecting children in all regions and all income groups.** In some areas – including justice, care and sexual violence – progress cannot be measured owing to lack of data, including disaggregated data. But available data clearly show that children’s right to protection from violence remains unfulfilled to a great extent, with serious consequences. More than 3 in 4 of the world’s children aged 1–14 years are regularly subjected to corporal punishment or psychological aggression by their caregivers, typically starting before 5 years of age.<sup>21</sup> Worldwide, 1 in 4 children under the age of 5 live with a mother who is a victim of intimate partner violence.<sup>22</sup>

263. In slightly more than 1 in 4 countries with data, at least 5 per cent of young women aged 18–29 reported experiences of sexual violence during childhood.<sup>23</sup> Fifteen million adolescent girls aged 15–19 have experienced forced sex,<sup>24</sup> while 1 in 3 have experienced emotional, physical or sexual violence committed by their husbands or partners at some point in their lives.<sup>25</sup> In 2020 alone, the United States-based National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received 21.7 million reports of child sexual exploitation to its CyberTipline, which included 65.4 million images, videos and other files. These reports are up by 28 per cent from 2019.

264. Globally, 152 million children are in child labour, and almost 73 million are performing hazardous work.<sup>26</sup> COVID-19 may lead to an increase in child labour for the first time in 20 years.<sup>27</sup> At least 2.7 million children are in residential care worldwide, with the actual number likely to be higher.<sup>28</sup> Bullying in schools is

<sup>21</sup> UNICEF, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*, November 2017.

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF, *A Familiar Face*.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Report of the Secretary-General*, E/2020/57.

<sup>24</sup> UNICEF, *A Familiar Face*.

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> International Labour Office, *Global Estimates of Child Labour: Results and Trends, 2012–2016, 2017*.

<sup>27</sup> UNICEF, *COVID-19 and Child Labour: A time of crisis, a time to act*, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Nicole Petrowski, Claudia Cappa and Peter Gross, ‘Estimating the Number of Children in Formal Alternative Care: Challenges and results’, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, vol. 70, 2017.

experienced by close to 130 million students aged 13–15 worldwide,<sup>29</sup> while a similar proportion are involved in physical fights.<sup>30</sup>

265. When it comes to the risk of homicide, the most dangerous place for an adolescent is Latin America and the Caribbean, where close to 70 adolescents die every day due to interpersonal violence. Adolescent boys of African descent are disproportionately represented in homicide statistics, and are more likely to live in communities characterized by high levels of armed violence and structural disadvantages including disorganized urbanization and urban segregation.

266. **Countries in situations of fragility and conflict are the furthest behind in attaining the child protection–related Sustainable Development Goals**, with only 18 per cent on track in 2018.<sup>31</sup> Nearly one fifth of children worldwide (420 million) live in conflict-affected countries, a rise of nearly 30 million from 2016.<sup>32</sup> Across conflict zones in all regions, armed actors conduct deliberate campaigns of violence against children, including targeting schools, abducting and exploiting girls and boys,<sup>33</sup> exposing them to sexual, physical and emotional violence, and forcing them to flee their homes in search of safety. Crises have now displaced 1 per cent of the world’s population, with 31.8 million children forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2019,<sup>34</sup> an increase from 31 million in 2018.<sup>35</sup>

267. Evidence on protection issues faced by children in humanitarian settings is limited, but disturbing where available. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism established 15 years ago has documented a shocking 250,000 grave violations against children in armed conflict, including the recruitment and use of over 77,000 children, the killing and maiming of over 100,000 children, rape and sexual violence against over 15,000 children, the abduction of over 25,000 children, nearly 17,000 attacks on schools and hospitals, and almost 11,000 incidents of denial of humanitarian access.<sup>36</sup> Children represent more than half the civilian casualties of landmines and explosive remnants of war.<sup>37</sup>

268. **COVID-19 has increased children’s vulnerabilities and undermined child protection systems, further jeopardizing progress.** While the medium- and long-term implications of COVID-19 remain to be seen, a review of evidence from previous pandemics and epidemics and their impact on child protection outcomes highlights how disruptions to the caregiving environment, schooling, work, and social and justice services can send women and children into a spiral of harm and violence, heightening the risk of negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and child labour, and of adolescent pregnancy for girls.<sup>38</sup> UNICEF estimates an additional 10 million child marriages may occur before the end of the decade due to the impact of

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF, *A Familiar Face*.

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF, *An Everyday Lesson: #ENDviolence in schools*, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Overseas Development Institute, *SDG Progress: Fragility, crisis and leaving no one behind*, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Save the Children, *Stop the War on Children: Protecting children in 21<sup>st</sup> century conflict*, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Save the Children, *Stop the War on Children*.

<sup>34</sup> UNHCR, ‘*Figures at a Glance*’, <<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>>, accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF, ‘*Child Displacement*’, <<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>>, accessed 19 July 2021.

<sup>36</sup> These are verified cases; actual cases are likely much higher. UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, ‘*UN Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict*’, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Cluster Munition Coalition, *Landmine Monitor 2019: 20-year review*, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Bakrania, Shivit, et al., ‘*Impacts of Pandemics and Epidemics on Child Protection: Lessons learned from a rapid review in the context of COVID-19*’, 2020.

COVID-19.<sup>39</sup> The increase in digital engagement and online schooling as a result of the pandemic brings new risks such as online bullying, child sexual exploitation and abuse, while the digital divide perpetuates social inequities, including the risk of children dropping out of school.

**269. A number of intersecting vulnerabilities underpin the protection challenges children face.** Age is itself a significant vulnerability factor, with different experiences and consequences of violence across the life cycle. Strong, frequent and prolonged exposure to violence during the formative years can disrupt brain development and increase the risks of disease, cognitive impairment and economic hardship well into adulthood.

**270. Self-inflicted violence becomes more common in adolescence,** with suicide the third leading cause of death for adolescents aged 15–19. Worldwide, an estimated 10–20 per cent of adolescents experience mental disorders, with half of all mental illnesses beginning by the age of 14.<sup>40</sup> Approximately 15–23 per cent (or 1 in 4) of children live with a parent who has a mental disorder.<sup>41</sup>

**271. Global evidence suggests that children with disabilities are at heightened risk of violence.** During times of humanitarian crisis, they become even more vulnerable and face higher risks of becoming victims of injury, abuse and neglect.

**272. Gender is a strong determinant of a child’s experience of child protection violations,** and also affects access to services and opportunities and may exacerbate inequalities and have other lasting adverse impacts throughout life. Gender inequality and negative coping mechanisms such as child trafficking, child labour and child marriage clearly play out in humanitarian and crisis contexts. In addition, compared to same-age heterosexual peers, children and young people who are subject to discrimination based on sexual orientation are at increased risk of interpersonal violence, such as bullying and harassment, including at school, as well as self-inflicted forms of violence, including suicide.<sup>42</sup>

**273. Legal status and access to civil documentation make a difference for children.** Migrant, stateless, refugee, displaced and undocumented children as well as children living in informal settlements face a persistent lack of access to basic services, stigma and discrimination, and increased risks of violence, exploitation, abuse and trafficking. Even though the Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to all children in a country, essential rights and services often remain accessible only to its nationals. The rise in xenophobia and hate speech, and of discrimination based on religious, ethnic, linguistic or other factors, can lead to an increase in violence aimed at minority or other groups. Children living in street situations are particularly subject to stigmatization by communities and police, are vulnerable to abuse in the streets, and are more likely to come into contact with justice systems owing to discrimination based on their status.

<sup>39</sup> UNICEF, ‘*COVID-19: A threat to progress against child marriage*’, 2021.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

<sup>41</sup> Leijdesdorff, S., et al., ‘Prevalence of Psychopathology in Children of Parents with Mental Illness and/or Addiction: An up-to-date narrative review’, *Curr Opin Psychiatry*, July 2017, vol. 30(4), 312–317.

<sup>42</sup> UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, 2014.

### C. Lessons learned, 2018–2021

274. Lessons from the midterm review (MTR) of the 2018–2021 Strategic Plan,<sup>43</sup> from the COVID-19 pandemic response, and from other sources inform the Goal Area 3 theory of change.

275. The MTR reinforced that the multidimensional nature of child protection issues calls for collaborative research and solutions across sectors and agencies, as well as a recognition of how vulnerabilities intersect. It flagged the need to identify and target the poorest and most marginalized children, who bear the greatest burden of protection risks, as critical to achieving results in Goal Area 3, and to invest more in tools for quality data disaggregation on sex, gender and disability, across the humanitarian and development nexus. This lesson has been reinforced by the pandemic, which exacerbated existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, worsening the situation of children who were already at risk before COVID-19, such as children in residential care settings, those deprived of liberty, or those living on the streets.

276. The pandemic showed that the empowerment of children, including adolescents, is an accelerator for social change. Child protection programming needs to increase the engagement and legal empowerment of children and young people, especially those with lived experience of justice and welfare systems, and to make non-discrimination (with attention to gender, race, disability, sexuality and age) a more intentional programmatic approach. The extent to which pandemics like COVID-19 fuel discrimination, xenophobia and hate crimes has pointed to non-discrimination in child protection laws, policies and practices – in particular, the inclusion of migrants and refugees in national systems – as a key part of improving preparedness for future crises.

277. COVID-19 made visible many of the ‘invisible’ issues related to protecting children, particularly violence in the home, mental health and the risks facing children in vulnerable situations. It also provided entry points to advocate for systems reform, including in the social, justice and care systems, as well as for recognizing the essential role of the social service and justice workforces in child protection.

278. UNICEF investment in establishing global partnerships and coordination platforms in recent years, including in the humanitarian sphere, was critical to creating the momentum for unified advocacy and rapid delivery of technical guidance to guide programming at global, regional and national levels during the pandemic. This reinforces a lesson learned during the MTR, which found that increased leadership and guidance on balancing and connecting issue- and systems-based approaches have proven critical to enable UNICEF to achieve good results, as has capacity-building in newer areas of work, such as child-friendly budgeting and child online protection.

279. There is a clear need to increase efforts to improve coordination of child protection in emergency responses, including to ensure better sector needs assessments and analysis, better monitoring data, and more coherent humanitarian child protection responses and advocacy. Children in humanitarian contexts face further barriers in accessing legal aid and child-friendly justice systems, creating significant challenges for victims of sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, particularly where there is mandatory reporting. Accelerating children’s access to justice along the humanitarian-peacebuilding-development continuum, including for survivors of violence, will be crucial.

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<sup>43</sup> UNICEF, *Midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021: Lessons learned*, May 2020.



280. COVID-19 highlighted the potential of digital engagement to take programming to scale, along with caveats regarding the level of service quality and the risk of widening the digital divide. While remote modalities for case management contribute to the scaleup of service delivery, they cannot entirely replace in-person services, and should be used to complement, not substitute for, community-based interventions.

281. The pandemic highlighted the ongoing need to invest in child helplines across countries, including in humanitarian crises and fragile settings, to ensure access to remote, confidential reporting, counselling and referral services. The quality of reporting channels for violence – including for sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations and humanitarian workers – needs to be improved at scale, based on evidence about what works, and taking into account barriers to reporting as well as the need for strengthened community-based approaches. While UNICEF recognizes prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse as an organizational responsibility at all levels, Goal Area 3 provides several critical contributions to this agenda: (1) scaling up safe and accessible channels for reporting sexual exploitation and abuse, (2) survivor-centred assistance, and (3) strengthened accountability for child survivors, including related to child-sensitive investigations.

#### D. Result areas

282. To contribute to the Goal Area 3 outcome – that every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices – the theory of change for Goal Area 3 posits includes three result areas:

(a) **Result Area 1: Protection from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect.** Children, including those affected by humanitarian crises, are protected from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect.

(b) **Result Area 2: Promotion of care, mental health and psychosocial well-being and justice.** Children, including those affected by humanitarian crises, benefit from the promotion of care, mental health and psychosocial well-being and justice.

(c) **Result Area 3: Prevention of harmful practices.** Children, including those affected by humanitarian crises, benefit from the prevention of harmful practices.

283. These results aim towards three objectives outlined in the forthcoming UNICEF Child Protection Strategy: (1) prevention, (2) ensuring that no child is left behind, and (3) strengthening access to response services. UNICEF aims to scale up evidence-based prevention approaches to the population level – not only in the core child protection sectors of social welfare and justice, but also in education, health, social protection and other sectors. These approaches include universal access to justice, family and parenting support, safe schools and safety online, as well as universal adoption of transformative norms and values.

284. To ensure that no child is left behind, UNICEF will target interventions to children at greatest risk of child protection violations, including children in humanitarian crises and fragile settings, children with disabilities, children deprived of parental care, children on the move, and children experiencing other forms of discrimination and exclusion. Where children are experiencing violations, UNICEF will work with partners to strengthen access to response services to prevent recurrence and provide care, support and justice.

#### E. Cross-cutting programme areas

285. **Climate action.** Climate change and environmental degradation exacerbate child protection risks through resource scarcity, food insecurity, forced migration,

violence, conflict, natural disasters, increased poverty, stress on public services, compounding household vulnerabilities, and insecure environments.. The increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters due to climate change will exacerbate these impacts. Particular areas of concern in Goal Area 3 are water scarcity and migration, both drivers of increased protection risks. UNICEF work on climate change adopts four approaches: making children the centre of climate change strategies and response plans; empowering children as agents of change; protecting children from the impacts of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation; and reducing emissions and pollution.

286. **Disability.** UNICEF child protection work is aligned to the organization's strategies for the inclusion of girls and boys with disabilities, and focuses on the twin-track approach of mainstreaming disability alongside targeted child protection interventions, in both humanitarian and development contexts. Areas of particular focus are: (1) children in the residential care system; (2) violence in the home, school and community; (3) children affected by mines and explosive devices; (4) support for children and adolescents with mental health and psychosocial problems; (5) children affected by stigma and discrimination; and (6) harmful practices. Data collection and disaggregation by disability is pivotal for monitoring of progress in these areas.

287. Gender equality, women's empowerment and protection have a strong influence on children's protection, with strongly evidenced links, for example, between intimate partner violence and violence against children. In a recent survey, 58 per cent of girls and young women reported being harassed and abused online, with 1 in 4 feeling physically unsafe as a result. UNICEF seeks to promote positive gender norms, adopting a transformative approach to ending harmful practices and tackling the intersections among violence against girls, boys and women.

288. **Peacebuilding.** Conflicts pose one of the greatest threats to children's rights globally. UNICEF child protection work, especially in fragile and conflict-affected settings, plays a significant role in national and local efforts to build peace and strengthen social cohesion, notably regarding issues such as children associated with armed forces, mine risk education, violence and access to justice. Peacebuilding programming, in turn, can be fundamental to achieving child protection goals by reducing the likelihood of conflicts and violence.

289. **Resilience.** Recognizing that humanitarian and development programming should be designed and implemented to 'do no harm', prevent conflict, and build resilience, humanitarian programming should contribute to systems strengthening, while development programming should contribute to preparedness and social cohesion. Youth engagement and participation is a core strategy.

## F. Change strategies

290. **Partnerships and engagement, public and private.** Partnerships with public and private institutions, networks and platforms are essential pathways to leveraging sustainable change at scale. This involves collaboration and advocacy to address regulations, policies, institutional conduct and practices that are directly and indirectly harmful to children; and leveraging public and private financing, resources, innovation, skills and other capacities to support systems-building across child protection thematic priorities, and strengthening the social service workforce.

291. **Risk-informed humanitarian and development nexus programming.** Child protection programming in both humanitarian and development contexts will be designed and implemented to 'do no harm,' prevent conflict, build resilience, and contribute to systems strengthening, preparedness and social cohesion. Child protection programming in humanitarian and fragile settings has a particularly important role to play in engaging communities, Governments and parties to conflict

to protect child rights and women's rights, systematically linking analysis, planning and monitoring of results and financing across UNICEF humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming.

292. In line with the CCCs, UNICEF supports the leadership and coordination of humanitarian response, along with national and local stakeholders, and in compliance with humanitarian principles. UNICEF accountability for the coordination of the child protection sector in humanitarian response (as the lead for the Child Protection Area of Responsibility within the Global Protection Cluster) includes supporting child protection coordination functions, in particular sector needs assessment and analysis, child protection response strategies, information management systems and tools, capacity-building and prepositioning of supplies, as well as ensuring that cross-sectoral issues – such as gender-based violence, disability, localization, and accountability to affected people – are integrated.

293. UNICEF values the importance of humanitarian cash transfers to address financial barriers facing children, adolescents, parents and caregivers and to enable access meaningful opportunities that could contribute to child protection, and also seeks to ensure that transfer systems do not put children or women at risk.

294. **Advocacy and communications.** The proliferation of knowledge and evidence on risk factors for children in the family and the community, and on prevention and response interventions that can work at the population level, is transforming global and national conversations on child protection. This provides a new opportunity to use advocacy and policy dialogue to strengthen national-level duty bearers to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children. For this to be successful, the empowerment of all rights holders is necessary, so that their voices can be heard and considered.

295. UNICEF has made addressing mental health, child abuse and neglect one of its global advocacy priorities. At the global, regional and country levels, UNICEF will conduct integrated advocacy to make the investment case for action and highlight the costs of inaction; promote universal prevention, response and prevention of recurrence; and address barriers stemming from behavioural and social norms barriers, to break public taboos.

296. Key strategies will include coalition-building, deployment of strategic evidence, investments in community engagement, social and behaviour change, media and social media engagement, deployment of champions and Goodwill Ambassadors, clear calls to action and the use of audience and behavioural insights to sensitively address taboos and shift norms and policy dialogue. Parental engagement through the UNICEF Parenting Portal will be another aspect of this strategy in Goal Area 3, as will youth engagement on addressing taboos.

297. **Data, research, evaluation and knowledge management.** While child protection has made significant strides in evidence generation, the sector will continue to invest heavily in the collection and application of quality disaggregated data and research to support evidence-based policies, planning and decision-making. UNICEF will invest in building the evidence base on the effectiveness of preventive approaches, in both humanitarian and development settings, and building responsive and accessible feedback mechanisms within national data systems to inform interventions and track changes in priority results, including social and behaviour change results. Of particular concern is the absence of data for monitoring certain Sustainable Development Goals, which will need dedicated focus during the Decade of Action.

298. **Community engagement, social and behaviour change.** Working with individuals, including children, young people, parents and caregivers; groups; the private sector; and communities to change attitudes and behaviours and to challenge harmful social and gender norms is particularly important for child protection, including in humanitarian crises. UNICEF will seek especially to strengthen the resources, resilience and voices of children, including adolescents, with a focus on the most marginalized, particularly to support their engagement in legal and statutory processes that relate to them in keeping with their evolving capacities.

299. In humanitarian settings, UNICEF will advocate with parties to conflict to uphold the norms and standards that protect children (including international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights law), which are increasingly under attack. Across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, this work would include taking into consideration social determinants of exclusion, for instance based on disability, ethnicity or legal status.

300. Strengthening systems for community engagement and sustained social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) at scale entails improving SBCC- and community engagement-specific governance and accountability, coordination, capacity development, evidence and data systems. It also requires establishing long-term large-scale partnerships (e.g., with faith-based organizations, women's groups, self-help groups, youth networks, organizations of persons with disabilities, tribal groups, and artists' federations) and with media (including TV, video, digital media, and community media). This will enable the creation of accessible spaces and platforms for ongoing dialogue among families, communities, parents, adolescents and youth on social norms and practices, and creating new social narratives, building social capital and fostering trust, social cohesion and resilience within communities across development, humanitarian and fragile settings, and among people of all ages, genders, ethnicities, races, religions and abilities.

301. **Gender-equality programming for transformative results.** UNICEF work for positive social change will cut across all areas of child protection, for example from shifting prevalent beliefs and expectations at the country and global levels, to working towards more positive parenting roles and expressions of masculinity to reduce violence against children. This includes working with men and boys on recognizing and using their role in furthering the interests of women and girls, while simultaneously transforming masculinities and practising accountability towards women and girls.

302. **Systems strengthening to leave no one behind.** A core element of child protection programming is strengthening the components, functioning, responsiveness and accountability of systems. Working with other sectoral actors will enable more preventive and holistic programming towards children's well-being. Focus will be placed on strengthening community engagement at scale, as well as governance mechanisms for participation and social accountability. This can deliver the desired system-wide impact for children and build capacity to prevent and respond to humanitarian crises and fragility; strengthen the resilience of systems, communities, parents and caregivers; and address equity, inclusion and behavioural and social norms barriers, all with particular emphasis on marginalized groups, such as children with disabilities, children from minority populations, and children on the move.

303. **Public finance for children.** Engaging and influencing government budgets through the public finance for children framework is essential to achieve sustainable domestic financing for inclusive child protection policies and services and recognizing the centrality of influencing medium- and long term development plans and midterm expenditure frameworks to integrate child protection priorities. This

involves (1) undertaking evidence-based advocacy with government partners at the national and sub-national levels to demonstrate the economic case for investing in essential child protection policies, institutions and services in government budgets; (2) avoiding investments that undermine the inclusion of children; (3) providing economic and financial analysis and costing to support government partners to maximize the efficiency, effectiveness, inclusiveness and equity of these resources for greater cost-effectiveness, scale and impact; and (4) strengthening the transparency of child protection resources to improve inclusive participation and accountability.

**304. Innovation and digital transformation.** The child protection sector has not historically been at the forefront of technology-based innovation, but this is changing. UNICEF will promote inclusive, accessible and innovative programming tools and methods, including, but not limited to, (1) applications of new technologies; (2) scaling up existing technologies and tools, such as Primero<sup>44</sup>; (3) developing open-source accessible and safer digital content and partnerships with mobile companies for at-scale digital engagement; (4) working with companies to better safeguard children who use their digital platforms; and (5) harnessing digital tools for community engagement and adolescent participation, including for improving access and quality of services, strengthening data collection and protection, and supporting the social welfare workforce.

## **G. Key partnerships**

### **1. UN working together**

**305.** UNICEF and UNFPA co-lead two of the largest joint United Nations programmes, on ending child marriage and eliminating FGM. Indeed, the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage remains one of the largest United Nations joint programmes on a singular issue. Currently in its second phase of programming, this \$200 million programme continues to provide a good example of how joined-up action can provide essential political, policy and programmatic leverage to identify and implement collective solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically, Sustainable Development Goal 5.3.

**306.** UNICEF works with a range of United Nations agencies across the child protection portfolio, including with 14 agencies, including UNDP and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), on legal identity; with United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and others on access to justice; with ILO on child labour; with WHO on mental health and on violence against children; and with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) on child online protection.

**307.** In humanitarian situations, UNICEF works with IOM, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNHCR, UNFPA, WHO and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), and leads the Child Protection Area of Responsibility. As a Cluster Lead Agency, UNICEF coordinates Child Protection in emergency responses with governments and other partners, to ensure that partners analyze and advocate for Child Protection needs and that interventions meet minimum standards through coordinated humanitarian responses.

**308.** On protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, UNICEF also works with OHCHR, WFP, UNDP, the IASC Secretariat, the United Nations Development

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<sup>44</sup> Primero is an inter-agency open source software platform that helps social services, humanitarian and development workers manage protection-related data, with tools that facilitate case management, incident monitoring and family tracing and reunification.

Coordination Office (DCO), the United Nations Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the United Nations Victims' Rights Advocate. The UNHCR-UNICEF Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children is also an important framework for collaboration. Lastly, the Special Representatives of the Secretary General on VAC, Children and Armed Conflict, and Sexual Violence in Conflict are important allies.

309. In Goal Area 3, 38 indicators are common or complementary with multiple United Nations agencies, including ILO, IOM, OCHA, OHCHR, UNDP, DPO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNMAS, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), UNODC, UN-Women and WHO.

## **2. Other key partnerships**

310. UNICEF works with a range of inter-agency groups and thought leaders at the global level. UNICEF continues to accelerate progress towards critical violence-related goals through the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children (GPEVAC) and with the 10 core agencies in INSPIRE. The WePROTECT Global Alliance is fostering a network of global partners to strengthen actions to combat online child sexual exploitation.

311. UNICEF works with networks, such as the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, the Better Care Network, the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, the International Federation of Social Workers, the International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates; with initiatives such as Parenting for Lifelong Health; and with civil society organizations including Child Helplines International; and with leading child-focused agencies, such as Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages and World Vision.

312. UNICEF also engages with various regional bodies and a wide range of partners at the national level, including government institutions, civil society organizations (including faith-based organizations), academia, and national human rights institutions.

## **H. Assumptions and risks**

313. The Goal Area 3 theory of change makes a number of assumptions, notably that:

(a) Increased government prioritization of prevention programmes will reduce the need for investments in response programmes in the long run.

(b) Addressing key factors that increase children's vulnerability to discrimination, exclusion and rights violations (related to factors including gender, age, disability and legal status), including in fragile, conflict-affected and violent contexts, will lead to equitable child protection outcomes.

(c) Stronger public and private partnerships, responsible business conduct, and donor engagement will contribute to improvements in normative frameworks, policies, resourcing, core assets and innovations for child protection.

(d) Rigorous research and data on child protection, including improved disaggregated data and interoperable information management systems, will lead to better policies, reach of services and improved child protection programming.

(e) Stronger linkages between social protection systems and child protection systems, including social service workforce strengthening and public financing for children, will enable sustainable child protection outcomes.

(f) Strengthening systems, including those for coordination, in humanitarian responses and in development contexts enables systems that are resilient in fragile contexts and can adapt to fluid situations.

(g) The social service workforce of the health, education, WASH, ECD and nutrition sectors supports child protection service delivery.

(h) Social and gender norms change and behavioural change strategies, linked to systems strengthening work, will have a measurable impact.

(i) Advocacy and policy dialogue will result in Governments increasing investments in child protection systems, including prevention programmes.

<i>Risks</i>	<i>Mitigation measures</i>
<b>Pandemics, including COVID-19</b> , erode child protection rights, and the restriction of services inhibits the delivery of child protection interventions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partner Governments and the international community to support pandemic preparedness, fast and flexible child protection response strategies based on international human rights standards and principles, and adequate budget allocations.</li> </ul>
<b>National Governments</b> give insufficient priority to child protection, resulting in weak leadership, insufficient resources and lack of accountability for outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build and support public understanding and create popular pressure for change.</li> <li>• Advocate with Governments and other decisions-makers.</li> </ul>
<b>Online</b> risks to child protection increase faster than the development and implementation of regulatory and other mechanisms to address them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase work with national and global bodies to provide effective regulation, education and other mitigating measures.</li> </ul>
<b>Inadequate coordination</b> between partners undermines alignment to government priorities and programme effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate inter-agency mandates and leadership clearly.</li> <li>• Commit adequate resources to partnerships.</li> <li>• Seek more opportunities for joint programming, including through United Nations reform.</li> </ul>
UNICEF fails to secure <b>financial resources</b> for child protection at an adequate level and of the optimum type (long-term, unrestricted).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for more and better financing for child protection at the country, regional and global levels.</li> </ul>
A growing <b>narrative against human and child rights</b> , together with misinformation, undermine the priority given to child rights violations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase public understanding of human and child rights, including through formal education.</li> <li>• Support advocacy towards duty bearers.</li> </ul>
Children or communities face <b>collateral harm</b> because of UNICEF or its partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNICEF systems will be engineered to minimize the threat of collateral harm to children, and sexual exploitation and abuse, arising from UNICEF people, partners and work, in accordance with international standards and best practices for safeguarding.</li> </ul>

## V. Goal Area 4

### A. Summary

**314. Every child, including adolescents, has access to safe and equitable WASH services and supplies, and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment.**

315. All children have the right to a safe and clean environment in their homes, communities, schools and health care facilities. WASH is critical for children's health and nutrition. Water itself is a key basic need, while sanitation is critical to maintaining clean environments for children, reducing the risk of diarrhoea and a host of other waterborne diseases, which are major child killers, and enabling children to survive and develop to their full potential. WHO estimates that about one quarter of under-five deaths could be prevented through healthier environments that reduce key risks, including air pollution, unsafe drinking water, inadequate sanitation and hygiene, and exposure to toxic chemicals.

316. Children's right to a safe and clean environment is increasingly placed under threat by effects of climate change and environmental degradation, which pose existential threats to children's ability to survive, grow and thrive. Climate change impacts including increased exposure to natural disasters, dwindling freshwater resources, sea-level rise, and emergencies and protracted crises around the world make achieving the human rights to safe drinking-water and sanitation a significant global challenge, especially for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Polluted air and water threaten a children's right to health-sustaining conditions (art. 2(c)), and the greater range of disease vectors due to warming temperatures threaten the right to health (art. 24). The right to education (art. 28) is increasingly under threat as disasters and heatwaves disrupt educational services. The rights to social protection (art. 26) and protection from exploitation (art. 34–36) are under greater stress because of increased competition for scarcer natural resources and stresses upon social safety nets. All these impacts that are compounded in societies affected by conflict and insecurity.

317. Safeguarding children's rights requires holistic solutions that both address sudden-onset impacts of climate change, such as hurricanes and floods, and build resilience through climate-smart development that strengthens the services and systems children need to survive, grow and thrive and makes them resilient in the face of climate and environmental threats. This not only helps to secure gains made over decades of progress, but also builds adaptive capabilities to growing threats.

318. Goal Area 4 contributes to the environmental, resilience-building, and gender equality components of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, advancing Sustainable Development Goals 6 (water and sanitation for all<sup>45</sup>) and 13 (climate action and disaster risk reduction), and contributing to Sustainable Development Goals 2 (nutrition and food security), 3 (health), 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 7 (sustainable energy), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (sustainable consumption and production), 15 (biodiversity), and 1 (end poverty), 3, and 11, in terms of reducing the loss of lives as well as economic losses from disasters. Goal Area 4 programming also contributes to sustainable progress in

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<sup>45</sup> Alongside Sustainable Development Goal targets 6.1 and 6.2 – which aim, respectively, towards universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, and adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, with an end to open defecation – Sustainable Development Goal 6 also addresses freshwater scarcity, increased pollution, and growing competition for water resources, as well as highlighting the importance of coordinated action on water quality (target 6.3), water use efficiency (6.4), and more integrated, transboundary water resources management (6.5).



numerous other Sustainable Development Goals and the associated priorities for other Goal Areas, as well as the achievement of the Paris Agreement and post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Goal Area 4 upholds humanitarian principles, as embedded in the CCCs, to ensure the rights of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and communities.

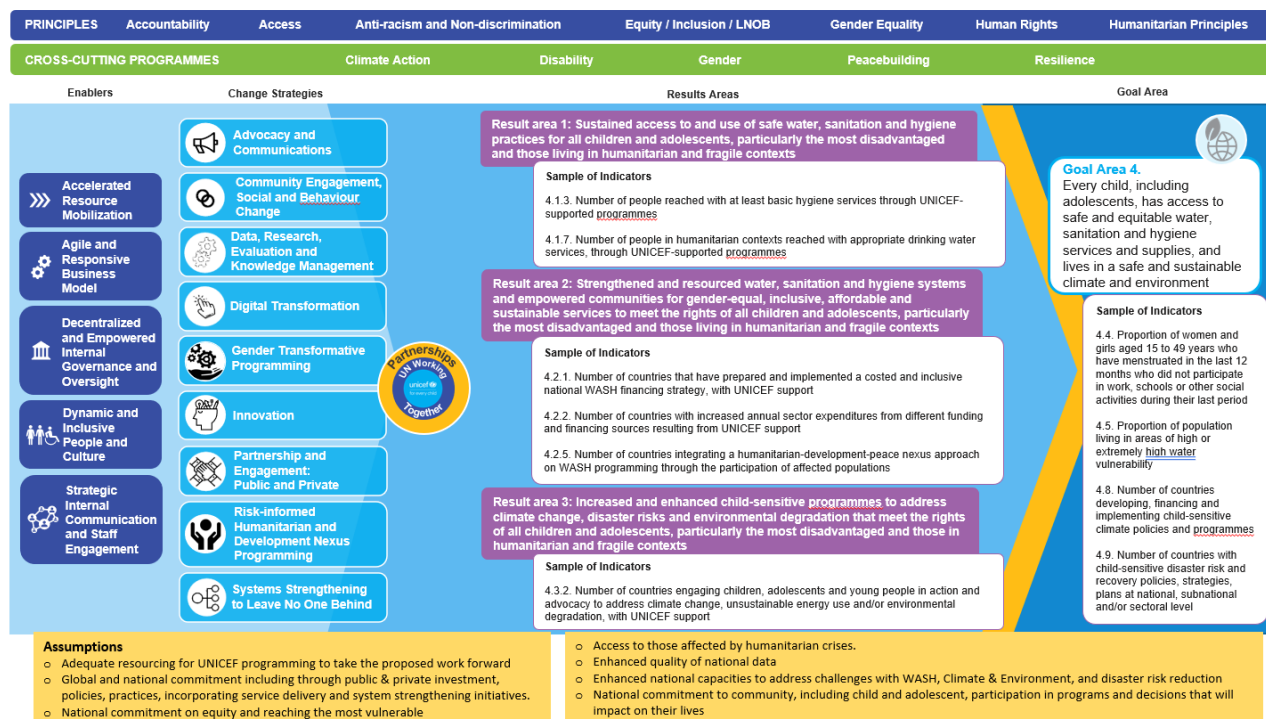
319. Goal Area 4 furthers the implementation of QCPR provisions on climate action and environmental sustainability (operative paragraphs 29 and 30), gender (operative paragraph 12), youth participation (operative paragraph 15), as well as leveraging the comparative advantages of UNICEF on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (operative paragraph 36), which are all key in advancing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of a society in which every child is included (operative paragraph 13).

**320. UNICEF has made strategic shifts under Goal Area 4 to strengthen WASH service delivery as well as broader WASH systems, including in humanitarian crises and fragile settings. This shift stems from the recognition that achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 requires not only supporting Governments to accelerate service delivery, especially in fragile contexts, but also strengthening systems and sectors to develop strong enabling environments for WASH at all levels, including critical governance aspects required for public authorities to organize, regulate and deliver these services.**

**321. UNICEF is increasing its private sector engagement and seeking innovative financing to reach the most vulnerable communities at the scale needed to meet Sustainable Development Goal 6 and to make WASH systems climate-resilient. Goal Area 4 is also increasing its focus on safe water for children and communities in water-insecure contexts; scaling-up WASH in schools and health facilities, along with community-level capacities for infection prevention and control, as critical elements of public health emergency preparedness and response.**

**322. UNICEF is also expanding child-sensitive programming to address climate change, disaster risks and environmental degradation, as an integral part of Goal Area 4 and as a cross-cutting programme. This expansion responds to the recognition that a whole-of-society transformation is necessary for effective action on climate change, disasters and environmental degradation, with an emphasis on protecting children from impacts already occurring and reducing emissions and pollution to levels that are safe, so that future generations may inherit a safe and sustainable planet.**

323. UNICEF commits to ensuring that every child is included in WASH, climate and environment policies and programmes, including through participatory approaches for greater engagement in decision-making. Goal Area 4 interventions respond to the needs of children in extreme poverty, children with disabilities, migrant and displaced children, and children affected by racism, other forms of discrimination, humanitarian crises and fragility. There is a key emphasis on participation of women and girls.



## B. Context

324. **The Sustainable Development Goals relating to WASH, climate and environment are not on track.** The goal of universal basic WASH services by 2030 will not be achieved if the current trajectory continues, owing to challenges in service delivery and in the governance of the systems and agencies mandated to deliver services. Sustainable Development Goal 6 is one of the most off-track Sustainable Development Goal, according to *Sustainable Development Goal 6: Synthesis Report 2018 on Water and Sanitation*. The Sustainable Development Goals around climate action, disaster risk reduction and environmental sustainability are also not on track.

325. Since 2000, access to basic drinking water has increased at 0.5 percentage points per year worldwide, while access to basic sanitation has increased by 1 percentage point per year. Despite this progress, huge gaps persist, with significant variations across vulnerabilities related to gender, disability, poverty, fragility and humanitarian crises. Sanitation shows one of the largest relative disparities: in half of countries with data, the proportion of children in the poorest urban households who have basic sanitation services is less than half that among children from the richest urban households. Children in extremely fragile contexts are among those at particular risk of being left behind; they are more than eight times as likely to lack basic drinking water and almost four times as likely to lack basic sanitation, compared to children in non-fragile contexts.

326. **Girls and women bear disproportionate impacts from poor WASH, climate change, lack of access to energy and environmental degradation.** There is often a gender imbalance in WASH-related decision-making at the household level and beyond, which can significantly and negatively impact women's and girls' access to WASH. The burden of WASH-related labour, such as fetching water for the household, often falls on early adolescents, particularly girls, creating a significant physical burden, increasing the risk of violence, harassment and exploitation at or on the way to water sites outside of the home, and taking up time that could be used for other activities, such as learning, with potential negative impacts on school performance or attendance. Women, girls and young children also bear a greater

burden from indoor air pollution caused by the use of solid fuels for cooking or heating.<sup>46</sup>

**327. Climate change and environmental degradation are global phenomena, and the burden of their impacts falls disproportionately on children – especially the poorest and most vulnerable.** The global climate crisis is a child rights crisis. It poses a major threat to children’s health, nutrition, education, development, their very survival and future potential – especially for the most vulnerable children, who overwhelmingly live in areas that are more vulnerable to climate shocks. Climate change and its impacts threaten decades of development gains for children, families and communities.

328. The year 2020 was the hottest on record, while atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels are the highest they have been in at least 3.5 million years. Rising sea levels threaten the habitability of coastal areas, and a tenth of the world’s population live in areas that are less than 10 metres above sea level. Around 500 million children currently live in areas with high or very high risk of flooding, and nearly 160 million live in areas of extreme or high risk of drought.

329. The number of climate-related disasters has increased by nearly 35 per cent since the 1990s.<sup>47</sup> Climate change is a significant driver of increased disaster impacts and losses over the last decades, and these impacts are only expected to worsen. Over the past decade, 83 per cent of recorded disasters were caused by hydrological-meteorological and climatological hazards, such as heatwaves, storms and floods. The 7,348 disaster events recorded worldwide since 2000 have claimed over 1.23 million lives and affected over 4 billion people,<sup>48</sup> while leading to approximately \$2.97 trillion in economic losses. Geophysical events including earthquakes and tsunamis continue to be especially deadly, and have killed more people than any of the other natural hazards in the past 20 years.<sup>49</sup>

330. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 saw numerous natural disasters, with 51.6 million people directly affected by floods, droughts or storms as of September,<sup>50</sup> in addition to being one of the worst years on record for wildfires. Factors compounding disaster losses include increased exposure of vulnerable populations, and lagging risk governance systems that have not kept up with population dynamics or disaggregated vulnerabilities.

**331. Water scarcity is a serious issue, with climate and environmental stresses affecting water supply.** Globally, 450 million children live in areas of high or extremely high water vulnerability (living in areas most affected by water scarcity and relying on a poor level of water service), 3.2 billion people living in agricultural areas with high to very high water shortages or scarcity, and 1.2 billion people living in severely water-constrained agricultural areas. The most vulnerable children and communities in these areas bear the brunt of the consequences. By 2040, 1 in 4 children (almost 600 million) are projected to be living in areas of extremely high water stress.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

<sup>47</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), *World Disasters Report 2020*.

<sup>48</sup> EM-DAT: The international disasters database, <<https://www.emdat.be/>>.

<sup>49</sup> Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), *The Human Cost of Disasters: An overview of the last 20 years, 2000–2019*.

<sup>50</sup> Walton, D., and M. K. van Aalst, ‘Climate-related Extreme Weather Events and COVID-19: A first look at the number of people affected by intersecting disasters’, IFRC, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> UNICEF, *An Environment Fit for Children*, 2019.

332. It is estimated that children under 5 years old bear close to 90 per cent of the burden of disease attributable to climate change, resulting from factors including water scarcity, increased incidence of waterborne diseases, broader ranges of disease vectors, and the physiological impacts of extreme temperatures and pollution.<sup>52</sup> Most of the world's children already breathe air that is considered unsafe, and air pollution is estimated to kill over 600,000 children each year.<sup>53</sup> Over a third of all children are exposed to lead, for which there is no safe level of exposure, resulting in life-long cognitive and developmental impacts.

333. Poor children, particularly in the global South and the lower latitudes – whose nations have contributed the least to climate change – are the most vulnerable, because they have the fewest resources to adapt to climate change. Small island developing states (SIDS) across the world are particularly vulnerable; in the Caribbean alone, the number of children displaced by extreme weather events has increased six-fold in the last five years. Sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia are also particularly vulnerable.

334. Poor girls and women from poor countries will shoulder the greatest burden, as they will have to spend increasing amounts of time acting as caregivers and securing ever scarcer water, food and fuel, while being denied access to services. They are also at particularly at risk in situations of conflict, migration or displacement.<sup>54</sup>

**335. WASH humanitarian assistance requirements have doubled over the last decade.** UNICEF is the biggest WASH actor in humanitarian contexts, delivering over 50 per cent of global results, and WASH represents nearly 20 per cent of the total 2021 Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) funding requirements (\$1.2 billion) and over half of the overall WASH programme expenditure since 2013 (around \$500 million each year).

336. As one of the few dual-mandated agencies, UNICEF has the credibility and expertise to provide integrated support across the disaster continuum, including preparedness, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, humanitarian response, and resilient recovery. The updated CCCs now have provisions for environmental sustainability, and for incorporating climate adaptation into recovery efforts. In 2020, WASH targeted 70 million people with \$1.6 billion worth in appeals. In this context of increasing need, funding levels of humanitarian WASH appeals have dropped from 48 per cent to 42 per cent between 2014 and 2018, requiring renewed efforts and attention.

**337. WASH interventions have been central to the COVID-19 response, but the pandemic also disrupted, and highlighted gaps in, WASH systems.** Like other public health emergencies and disease outbreaks, such as Ebola and cholera, COVID-19 highlighted the centrality of WASH for prevention and as a frontline response to public health emergencies. Improved handwashing and infection prevention and control measures in health care facilities have been key to stopping viral transmission and safely reopening schools, workplaces and public spaces.

338. The pandemic highlighted the need to strengthen behaviour change and community engagement, to sustain messaging, dialogue and engagement on handwashing in communities, and to accelerate progress on WASH in health care facilities, schools, early learning centres and other key facilities. With 90 per cent of COVID cases reported in urban areas, and many dense urban settlements

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<sup>52</sup> Sheffield, Perry E., and Philip J. Landrigan, 'Global Climate Change and Children's Health', *Environmental Health Perspectives*, March 2011; 119(3): 291–298.

<sup>53</sup> WHO, 'Prescribing Clean Air', 2018.

<sup>54</sup> World Bank and FAO, 'Gender-Differentiated Impacts of Climate Change', 2017.

experiencing difficulty in implementing prevention measures, the pandemic also highlighted the importance of urban WASH.

339. At the same time, the pandemic also disrupted the provision of basic WASH services, operation and maintenance, and in some cases led to postponement of new investments. The economic impact of COVID-19 will make it even harder to achieve the 2030 targets for universal access to WASH services, owing to potential cuts in ODA, government budgets and household spending power.

340. **COVID-19 highlighted the critical importance of action on climate change and environmental degradation, as part of an inclusive recovery that builds resilience.** The pandemic demonstrated the interconnectedness of people across the globe and of the various risks we face – relating to health, climate and environment, and economies – showing that the well-being of all depends on building the resilience of the most vulnerable.<sup>55</sup> Studies have shown that air pollution both increases the incidence of COVID-19 in a community and exacerbates its health impacts.

341. While lockdowns and industrial closures as a result of COVID-19 initially resulted in a global decrease in emissions and pollutants, the pandemic also slowed global momentum on climate action. It also hampered the ability of children and young people – who in recent years have played a leading role in advocacy and campaigning on climate action – to mobilize and influence action. Environmental degradation, pollution and energy consumption have subsequently increased due to the unmanaged disposal of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical waste; increased use of fossil fuels in health care facilities; households resorting to cheaper, carbon-intensive fuels due to disruptions in income and livelihoods; and increased economic activity fueled by stimulus that does not prioritize a sustainable recovery.

342. It will be critical that the COVID-19 response and recovery is inclusive, sustainable and targeted towards solutions that build resilience, drive economic recovery, help guard against future pandemics and other disasters, and address the grave long-term threat that children face from climate change.

### C. Lessons learned, 2018–2021

343. The Goal Area 4 theory of change is informed by many lessons drawn from the 2018–2021 Strategic Plan period. The 2020 midterm review identified the need to make WASH systems climate-resilient and address water scarcity, to push for addressing the full ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals for safe sanitation and hygiene, to scale up WASH in institutions, and to link lifesaving WASH needs with sustainable development solutions using peacebuilding approaches.

344. **Systems strengthening is essential for scaling up WASH to achieve the full ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals.** Accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 6 will require strengthening the systems that facilitate WASH service delivery. Emerging areas for increased action include leveraging innovative financing solutions, building sustainable markets for WASH products and services, addressing the challenges of delivering WASH in urban areas, and addressing water scarcity. In addition, COVID-19 highlighted the role and importance of community-led response teams in delivering WASH services and information, highlighting the need to also strengthen community groups and platforms, as an integral part of system strengthening.

345. **Closing data gaps is critical to identifying and addressing inequalities in WASH.** Many countries still lack the necessary data to identify service levels and

<sup>55</sup> Germanwatch, ‘Global Climate Risk Index 2021’, <<https://germanwatch.org/en/19777/>>, accessed 19 July 2021.

inequalities in WASH services and to track progress in reducing them, making it more difficult to target investments effectively and to hold duty bearers accountable. Disaggregation of data, including by rural and urban residence, will remain important moving forward. Investment in transparent and fit-for-purpose monitoring systems is critical to identify and address inequities in service provision. Local monitoring and accountability, alongside enhanced service delivery, are also critical for sustaining gains after communities end open defecation, by helping to stabilize and reinforce new social norms.

**346. Action on climate and environment need to be integrated across all UNICEF work.** The Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 was the first to include action on climate change and environmental degradation, and since then, it has become increasingly evident that these issues threaten progress across all Goal Areas and that UNICEF has credible responses to offer. The UNICEF collaborative advantage covers three main focus areas: (1) evidence-based advocacy for climate and environmental action, as an integral part of safeguarding child rights; (2) improving the resilience of the social services children depend on through action in established sectors (such as WASH, health and education), in humanitarian and development contexts; and (3) engaging children, adolescents and young people as active agents and champions of change. There is need for stronger integration of climate and environment in education and skills programming in ways that are sustainable and help to inform long-term change.

**347. Maintaining strong interlinkages and entry points for resilience-building in humanitarian efforts is critical.** The humanitarian-development nexus can be made concrete through child-centered preparedness, disaster risk reduction (DRR), common country assessment (CCA), response, and recovery. Decades of DRR efforts can be leveraged to scale up climate change results on the ground.

## **D. Result areas**

348. Goal Area 4 has three result areas:

(a) **Result area 1: Safe and equitable water, sanitation and hygiene services and practices.** Sustained access to and use of safe water, sanitation and hygiene practices for all children and adolescents, particularly the most disadvantaged and those living in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

(b) **Result area 2: Water, sanitation and hygiene systems and empowerment of communities.** Strengthened and resourced water, sanitation and hygiene systems and empowered communities for gender-equal, inclusive, affordable and sustainable services to meet the rights of all children and adolescents, particularly the most disadvantaged and those living in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

(c) **Result area 3: Climate change, disaster risks and environmental degradation.** Increased and enhanced child-sensitive programmes to address climate change, disaster risks and environmental degradation that meet the rights of all children and adolescents, particularly the most disadvantaged and those in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

349. Goal Area 4 has two result areas relating to WASH – strengthening service delivery and strengthening WASH systems. To accelerate service delivery, UNICEF has identified strategic programming shifts to make WASH systems disaster- and climate-resilient and address water scarcity. This result area will push for addressing the full ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals for safe sanitation and hygiene, scaling up WASH in institutions, and linking lifesaving needs with sustainable development solutions using peacebuilding approaches. It also reflects

the UNICEF mandate as co-custodian for tracking progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 6.1 and 6.2.

350. On the WASH systems side, UNICEF will work to strengthen the WASH sector through increased financing, human resources capacity, innovative approaches, strong advocacy, communication and strategic partnerships to make these shifts happen. This will bolster the identified strategic programming shifts to accelerate WASH service delivery.

351. UNICEF will facilitate the critical role of national and local government authorities as central to systems strengthening and service delivery. UNICEF will continue to support and advocate with national Governments to strengthen implementation and monitoring systems to enable effective monitoring of inequalities in WASH services, and to prioritize action to narrow equity and data gaps. UNICEF will continue to play a critical role in strengthening leadership and accountability for coordination, aimed at meeting core functions to result in predictable, effective and high-quality product and service delivery, linking to the CCCs.

352. With regard to climate action – the third result area in Goal Area 4 – UNICEF will continue to work with partners at the global and local levels to achieve the social transformation that is necessary. Result area 3 emphasizes holistic, cross-sectoral, evidence-based advocacy, programme design and implementation, and the engagement of young people. Actions will be structured around four pillars that underpin UNICEF advocacy, implementation programming and internal sustainability efforts: (1) Making climate, disaster risk reduction, and environmental policies and plans child-sensitive; (2) empowering children and young people as agents of change; (3) protecting children from the impacts of climate change, disasters, and environmental degradation; and (4) reducing emissions and pollution to levels that are safe for children.

## E. Cross-cutting programme areas

353. **Climate action.** Climate action is an intrinsic part of Goal Area 4. While all Goal Areas incorporate climate action into their results, based upon focused interventions where UNICEF has demonstrated ability to deliver at scale, Goal Area 4 incorporates the cross-sectoral work of UNICEF on climate change, as well as climate-resilient WASH programming. It tracks the broader outcome of child-friendly climate, environment and DRR government policies, implementation of child-sensitive programming and strengthening of systems for disaster preparedness.

354. Framed within the organization’s collaborative advantage, UNICEF climate action will focus on:

- (a) Reaching every child with climate-smart social services
- (b) Advocating for child-centered climate, environmental and DRR policies and budgets.
- (c) Supporting and being led by young people. This is anchored within a dedicated cross-sectoral output in result area 3.

355. **Gender and disability.** To truly serve the needs of communities, action on climate change, disaster risk, energy access, and environmental sustainability must take into account the particular vulnerabilities of women and girls, adults and children with disabilities, and across rural and urban contexts. The vulnerability of women and girls to the impacts of climate change can be reduced by increasing their awareness of risks and their access and control over natural resources. There is also increasing evidence that education, particularly for girls, can be an extremely

effective in helping societies combat the impacts of climate change.<sup>56</sup> Promising approaches include building on successful models of community-level decision-making systems, such as water committees, that intentionally address the equitable participation, leadership and decision-making of women.

356. WASH results will be disaggregated by sex, disability, urban and rural residence, and across UNICEF programming regions. Goal Area 4 will continue to expand programming around menstrual health and hygiene, tracking key contributions to the Gender Action Plan in this area at the WASH sector level, through the UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for WASH. In addition, result area 2 will track systems strengthening shifts on gender and disability, by tracking WASH sector progress at the national levels on these critical issues.

357. **Resilience and peacebuilding.** Climate action, sustainable energy practices, environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction are all critical components of resilience. Reducing the vulnerabilities resulting from scarcity of natural resources is also an important contributor to reducing fragility and increasing social cohesion. Meanwhile, humanitarian, development and peacebuilding nexus work in WASH is planned as one of the outputs of Result Area 2, and will build upon ongoing work.

358. Inadequate WASH service provision can lead to rights violations that can create tensions between states and their citizens or among groups within societies, and can exacerbate the risks of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF maintains its central role in humanitarian WASH response, in terms of meeting the CCCs and supporting effective coordination through the Global WASH Cluster, while working to strengthen resilience across the humanitarian-development nexus and strategically shifting to strengthen peacebuilding in WASH programming.

359. The implementation of guidelines in the CCCs that emphasize environmentally sustainable approaches during response, and the prioritization of climate- and disaster-sensitive solutions during recovery, will aid in the global effort to better integrate humanitarian action with disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

## F. Change strategies

360. **Partnership and engagement, public and private.** UNICEF will leverage the potential of the private sector to achieve, foster and support results for children and adolescents (through business for results, or B4R) by mobilizing business investment, influence, conduct, expertise, innovation and market reach in the areas of WASH and climate change, especially in the critical areas of:

(a) Investment: unlocking private sector investment through direct philanthropic grants and financial flow brokered by private sector entities, for instance, by supporting development of private sector-financed facilities for WASH systems, services and practices targeting children and adolescents.

(b) Core assets: using shared value partnerships and private sector platforms to mobilize business to develop and rapidly scale up market-ready innovations, and unlocking distribution supply chains where possible.

(c) Business practices: supporting the development and adoption of business policies and practices, and creating and updating standards and practical

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<sup>56</sup> Brookings, 'Why Is Girls' Education Important for Climate Action?', <<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2021/02/10/why-is-girls-education-important-for-climate-action/>>, accessed 19 July 2021.



guidance around the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on children.

(d) **Advocacy and policy dialogue:** influencing policies and regulations around WASH services for children and adolescents, and investing in evidence generation, knowledge sharing and advocacy for child-sensitive climate policies related to business.

**361. Risk-informed humanitarian and development nexus programming.** The central role of UNICEF in humanitarian WASH response will continue, in terms of meeting the CCCs and supporting effective coordination through the Global WASH Cluster, while embracing good programming experience to strengthen resilience across the humanitarian-development nexus and strategically shifting to strengthen peacebuilding in WASH programming.

362. The CCCs explicitly mention identifying and mitigating gender-based violence-related risks, including barriers women and girls experience when attempting to access WASH services, and UNICEF will continue to work with other sectors and partners to address these. Risk-informed programming (including disaster risk reduction) is a core tenet of UNICEF actions around climate change and the environment, and the CCCs include guidelines for building adaptive capacity to climate impacts and future disasters during recovery.

363. **Advocacy and communications** will play a critical role in achieving results in Goal Area 4. UNICEF will influence and persuade decision-makers and key stakeholders at the global, regional and country levels to take action on the impacts of climate change and water insecurity. The organization's Global Advocacy Priority 4 will look to address both climate change and water insecurity by advocating for mitigation and adaptation actions and ensuring that children and young people are considered, prioritized, present and heard at the national, regional and global levels. Different advocacy tactics, including strategic communications, working in coalitions, mobilizing public constituencies, producing compelling content and leveraging evidence, can support the strengthening of WASH systems as well as the promotion of multi-sectoral child-sensitive solutions to climate change and environmental degradation.

364. **Evidence and knowledge management.** UNICEF will continue to support to the WASH JMP and address critical gaps in the mapping of Sustainable Development Goal 6, including in middle- and higher-income countries. A key component of Result Area 3 is the generation of focused evidence to identify localized risks to children as a result of climate change, disasters and environmental degradation, as well as appropriate solutions, with a view towards holistic, multi-sectoral integration of these issues into government information systems.

365. **Community engagement, social and behaviour change** will be strengthened across Goal Area 4 in order to achieve sustainable behavior change results and outcomes. It will especially address hygiene, given the high impact and cost-effectiveness of handwashing with water and soap, building on the COVID-19 response. Dignified menstrual health and hygiene supplies and systems will also be a focus.

366. Action on climate change, disasters and the environment will not only recognize the vulnerabilities of women and girls, but also respond to the fact that they often hold the keys for effective action. UNICEF will also engage communities and children to achieve behavioural changes that contribute to a more environmentally sustainable economic model, as the true key to addressing the climate and environmental crisis.

367. Sustainable behavioural and social change will be achieved through:

(a) Use of evidence-based strategies to address behavioural and social gaps in Goal Area 4 programming.

(b) Equity and inclusion, including addressing core gender equality issues such as menstrual health and hygiene and the engagement of women and girls.

(c) Increased civic engagement and empowerment of marginalized groups, including women and adolescents, for equitable access and use of water, sanitation and hygiene.

(d) Ensuring people-centred approaches and social accountability for sustainable behaviour and social change.

(e) Strengthened monitoring and evaluation to measure and achieve medium- and long-term results, including through systematic inclusion of consultations with women and girls in monitoring and evaluation systems.

368. Engaging children and young people is a critical component of community engagement to drive action on climate change and environmental degradation. In recent years, vocal and active children and young people have pushed climate change into the mainstream consciousness, as they demand action and generational justice. WASH is increasingly also seen in terms of its societal impacts, including on children and future generations.

369. UNICEF has a unique opportunity to participate and influence the dialogue on these topics, to engineer positive change for children and future generations. Engaging children, adolescents and young people to campaign, advocate and act on climate change and the environment, as well as on water insecurity, can help accelerate positive change. Close collaboration with organizations representing marginalized groups, such as organizations of persons with disabilities and youth-led organizations, is necessary in order to find solutions that consider the needs of all.

370. **Systems strengthening to leave no one behind.** While many countries have aligned national WASH sector targets, policies and plans with the ambitious Sustainable Development Goal targets 6.1 and 6.2, far fewer have adequate systems and finances to implement them. Barriers include, among others, weak public financial systems and lack of public financing, poor regulatory oversight to control quality and continuity of services, a high proportion of services delivered by informal providers, and weak monitoring and review systems to ensure that services reach those in the most vulnerable situations. UNICEF will work to further support and capacitate Governments and partners on new streams of financing, improved monitoring and coordination systems. Gender and disability tracking at the systems level will be a critical tool (as evidenced by result area 2).

371. Climate change and environmental degradation are global phenomena, but require local actions and systems to build resilience to their impacts, including disasters, and to reduce emissions and pollution. While many countries have produced nationally determined contributions aligned to the Sustainable Development Goal targets on climate and environment (which include disaster risk reduction), these commitments are not sufficient, nor are the financing and delivery to meet them. For this reason, both the scale of ambition of policies as well as their delivery and implementation are intrinsic parts of result area 3.

372. UNICEF will expand its support to Governments in developing child-sensitive climate and environmental actions and plans. UNICEF will increase its support in areas such as resilient water and sanitation systems, the use of renewable energy in health centers, and social protection systems that are responsive to climate and

environmental shocks. UNICEF will also promote community education and empowerment, and support young people to be climate and environment champions, as these form a foundation for resilient systems.

373. **Innovation.** Goal Area 4 activities will employ innovation to drive change for the most vulnerable, using data and market analysis to identify where there is a product need for children and building on this to drive demand for innovative, commercially available products that have the potential for uptake and impact, while securing financing of these demands. These efforts will build upon the organization's unique learnings in product innovation, for example around accelerating ongoing market-based sanitation initiatives to better select and scope where to engage to drive research and development of new products. UNICEF will also invest in knowledge sharing with Governments, including best practices on supply chain management and examples of where integration can improve access, and support Governments in building systems capacity for managing in-country logistics and considering outsourcing to the private sector.

374. UNICEF will continue its support to both technological and business model innovations to increase the penetration of solutions to address climate change, environmental degradations and the risk of disasters. These include technological innovations in identifying risk (such as remote sensing and early warning systems), innovations to shape markets (as in the case of solar energy and waste management), as well as business model innovations such as risk transfer (e.g., parametric insurance) and leasing models for sustainable energy.

375. **Digital transformation:** UNICEF will increase investment in digital platforms, like U-Report, and content to amplify its voice and reach around WASH, climate, energy and environment, and to raise awareness, facilitate advocacy and engagement, and support digital delivery of key programmes and services, including enhanced monitoring of services and resources, including water resources.

## **G. Key partnerships**

### **1. UN working together**

376. UNICEF is currently vice-chair of UN-Water, and works with WHO on the JMP and the Hand Hygiene for All initiative (also with the World Bank, ILO, UNHCR and others). UNICEF fully supports UN-Water's Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework to unify the international community for sustainable WASH for all. The Framework prioritizes five accelerators – financing, data and information, capacity development, innovation, and governance – to rapidly deliver results in countries at an increased scale, unlock bottlenecks and strengthen accountability towards more equitable service delivery.

377. UNICEF works with UNHCR on the Blueprint for Joint Action for refugee children, with UN-Habitat on urban data and WASH, with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on environmental protection, with IOM on climate migration, and with FAO, WFP and the World Bank on climate change-linked, shock-responsive social protection.

378. UNICEF works with the Climate Principals group chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General; UN-Energy; Sustainable Energy for All (SEforAll); the Sustainable Development Goal 7 Technical Advisory Group for the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF); the Health and Energy Plan of Action convened by WHO, UNDP and the World Bank; the United Nations Environment Management Group; the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR); the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI), which comprises UNDP, UNEP, IOM, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC),

UNFPA, WFP, WHO, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), UNDRR and FAO; and the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) Secretariat, with the same partners as CADRI, plus the World Bank and European Union (EU)).

379. UNICEF works with UNDP on climate finance, youth engagement, and policy support. At the regional level, UNICEF works with Regional Economic Commissions and issue-based coalitions.

380. In Goal Area 4, over 35 indicators are common or complementary with UN agencies, including FAO, IOM, OCHA, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNHCR, WFP and WHO.

## **2. Other key partnerships**

381. Key partnerships beyond the United Nations system include the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership, of which UNICEF hosts the Secretariat; the Rural Water Supply Network; the Toilet Board Coalition; the WASH in Schools and WASH in Health Care Facilities global networks; the Global Handwashing Partnership; the WASH4Work Partnership, which UNICEF formerly chaired; global monitoring of WASH affordability; and the WASH Working Group in the Global Task Force for Cholera Control, which UNICEF also formerly chaired.

382. UNICEF plays key regional sectoral roles, such as with the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW), and regional networks such as SACOSAN and AfricaSan. UNICEF leads the Global WASH Cluster, a partnership of 78 organizations, and is part of the Accountability for Sustainability partnership with UNDP, the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), and the Sanitation and Hygiene Applied Research for Equity (SHARE) consortium. Other key partners include the World Bank, Water Global Practice, and research institutions working on global WASH issues, including the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), Institute for Development Studies (IDS) Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) Hub, and REACH Oxford. UNICEF maintains strong technical partnerships with bilateral financing partners and IFIs, and continues to work very closely with all relevant national line ministries, local governments, city authorities and utilities.

383. UNICEF is expanding its private sector partnerships in WASH, focusing on market shaping and nurturing business for results (B4R). UNICEF will accelerate ongoing market-based sanitation initiatives and build on its World Economic Forum (WEF) partnerships through platforms on Mobilizing Hand Hygiene for All and Humanitarian Innovative Finance.

384. Partnerships with local civil society, youth and faith-based organizations as well as organizations of persons with disabilities will be expanded, to strengthen the linkages between WASH and peacebuilding based on lessons learned and following the framework for WASH Sector Resilience in Fragile and Conflict-affected Contexts. UNICEF will include children and adolescents in programming, advocacy and decision-making processes via youth networks and movements for sector policy and strategy development at the global and national levels, and will ensure that gender and disability issues are reflected.

385. Key partners around climate, environment, and disaster risk reduction include the Global Alliance for Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES), which UNICEF co-chairs; the World Bank, on energy; the World Resources Institute; the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Partnership; Prudential; Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies; the Health, Environment and Climate Change Coalition; the Healthy Environments for Children Alliance; the Climate and Clean Air Coalition; the Every Breath Counts Coalition; the Children's Environmental Rights Initiative; and YOUNGO, the Youth Constituency of the

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), consisting of youth-led non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

## H. Assumptions and risks

<i>Assumptions and risks</i>	<i>Mitigation measures</i>
It is assumed that UNICEF maintains and increases funding and adequate skills levels to make the required strategic shifts in programming to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and reduce current levels of inequity. Without these, programming impact will be constrained.	UNICEF will continue to demonstrate its leadership role and mandate on these key areas. Inadequate funding may lead to programming choices such as prioritizing humanitarian WASH response over development needs.
It is assumed that countries remain determined to reach the Sustainable Development Goals related to WASH, climate, DRR and environment, with global and national commitment reflected in through public and private investment, policies and practices, incorporating both service delivery and system strengthening initiatives.	National support for strengthening systems and going beyond service delivery is essential for global acceleration towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. Without this, UNICEF would need to advocate for increased prioritization by Governments.
It is assumed that countries maintain their commitments to equity and reaching the most vulnerable, and resolve to address these key priorities in their planning.	UNICEF continues to work with Government and partners to identify and target the most vulnerable, paying special attention to gender, disability and other constraints affecting the ability of rights holders to realize their rights.
It is assumed that child and adolescent voices will be heard and built upon, as part of continued national commitment to community participation in programmes and decisions that will affect their lives.	UNICEF continues to work with all partners and stakeholders, especially at the community level, including children and adolescents, to ensure their voices are heard and incorporated into programmes that affect them.
It is assumed that humanitarian access can be achieved, but there is a risk that access may be denied.	UNICEF and its closest partners have a good track record in negotiating access. UNICEF is able to rapidly respond and use opportunities quickly as they arise. UNICEF will strengthen its response capacity in humanitarian crises, take up the enhanced CCC principles and strengthen its programming around the triple nexus, increasing resilience-building in response and recovery efforts.
It is assumed that UNICEF will continue to be able to provide support to countries in generating data and evidence, resulting in enhanced national data quality. COVID restrictions have increased the risks of data collection exercises being interrupted.	Because UNICEF has a track record in helping countries improve data systems and enhance national capacities, countries tend to welcome its support. Increased investment in equity measurement through disaggregated data will be of critical importance moving forward. UNICEF will continue to work with Governments and partners to identify and address current data gaps in reporting and provide technical support in cases of access restrictions.
It is assumed that capacity building resources will be made available, with a willingness to adopt new approaches and best practices, in	Because of longstanding UNICEF support for capacity development, this will be done through joint consultation

order to enhance national capacities to address challenges related to WASH, climate, DRR and environment, including mobilizing climate and environmental finance.

on needs and opportunities. UNICEF will continue to work with Governments at the national and local levels to address capacity gaps around programme design, planning, financing, implementation and monitoring.

## VI. Goal Area 5

### A. Summary

**386. Every child, including adolescents, has access to inclusive social protection and lives free of poverty.**

387. Goal Area 5 aims to ensure that girls and boys, particularly the most disadvantaged and excluded, and including those in fragile and humanitarian contexts, have access to adequate, inclusive, gender-responsive and shock-responsive social protection and no longer live in poverty.

388. Freedom from poverty is essential for ensuring that every child can live with dignity and realize their full potential. The Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly recognizes the right to social security (art. 26) and the right to an adequate standard of living (art. 27). The 2020 Report of the Secretary General on the Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically recommended the need to prioritize social protection systems as a core element for reducing child poverty, and to intensify efforts to improve the standard of living of all children, particularly the most vulnerable.<sup>57</sup> The role of social protection in humanitarian contexts has also been recognized in recent years; it was an important consideration in the World Humanitarian Summit and a core pillar of UNICEF work since 2017.

389. Eliminating child poverty and ensuring access to social protection have been recognized as critical priorities of the 2030 Agenda. Goal Area 5 advances Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 10 and contributes to other Goals. Sustainable Development Goal 1, aiming towards the elimination of poverty, includes explicit requirements to measure and monitor multidimensional child poverty (1.1.2), accelerate progress around public spending for poverty reduction (1.a.2 and 1.b.1, of which UNICEF has recently become custodian).

390. Access to social protection is a core target of Sustainable Development Goals 1 (1.3) and 10 (10.2), which aims at reducing inequalities. Social protection is also an accelerator for multiple Goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 2 (contributing to zero hunger and the elimination of all forms of malnutrition); 3 (supporting the realization of universal health coverage); 4 (contributing to equitable access to education and early childhood development); 5 (supporting gender equality and care); 8 (promoting decent work and preventing child labor); and other Sustainable Development Goals, including 16, 11 and 17.

391. Focusing poverty elimination and social protection efforts on children is critical: children are more than twice as likely to live under the global extreme poverty line as adults. Addressing the multiple and compounding deprivations that children experience requires explicit commitments to understanding the drivers of child poverty and scaling up comprehensive strategies to address them.

392. The full realization of children's right to access social protection will not only ensure that every child lives free of poverty, but also prevent those at risk of poverty – due to exclusion, discrimination, or environmental or conflict-related risks – from

<sup>57</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/307, 12 August 2020, <https://undocs.org/A/75/307/>.

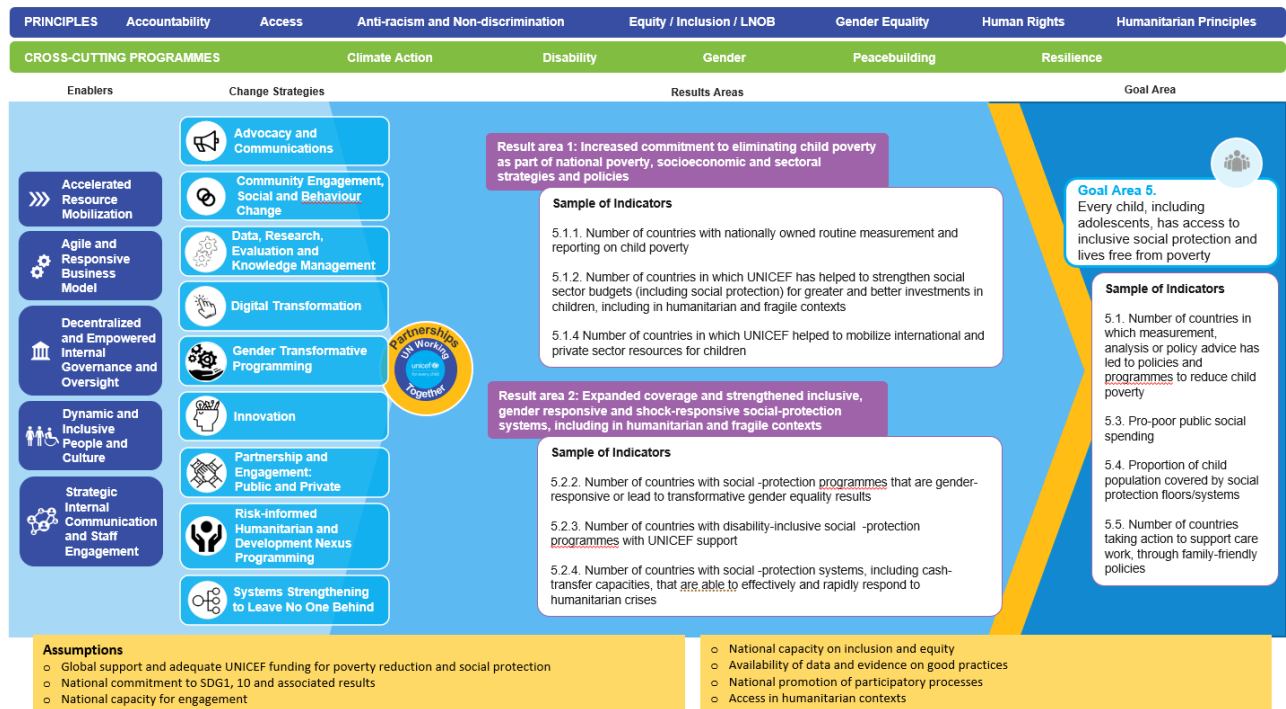
falling into it. While COVID-19 has expanded the recognition of social protection as a central intervention to reduce child poverty and inequality – and has spurred a significant increase in the scale of social protection systems across regions – critical gaps remain, in terms of coverage, adequacy, inclusion and risk-informed programming.

393. Today, the world faces a double challenge: to reverse the negative impacts of conflict, climate change and COVID-19 ('Triple C') on child poverty, while accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 10. The UNICEF contribution and unique comparative advantage in addressing this challenge lies in its role in ensuring that Governments realize their commitments to eliminating child poverty, and in its longstanding leadership in ensuring access to inclusive, gender-responsive and shock-responsive social protection systems, across multiple contexts.

**394. Responding to this challenge, UNICEF has sharpened the focus of Goal Area 5, which will be dedicated to reducing child poverty and expanding access to social protection, including in fragile contexts and humanitarian crises. The organization is increasing the emphasis on inclusive, gender-responsive and shock-responsive social protection systems as a driver for integrating the most disadvantaged and excluded children. Collaboration across Goal Areas will be promoted to effectively address the needs and deprivations of children living in poverty, while also strengthening critical links among social protection systems and other sectoral systems.**

395. Goal Area 5 furthers the implementation of QCPR provisions on social protection (operative paragraph 26), gender (operative paragraph 12), disability inclusion (operative paragraph 14), youth participation (operative paragraph 15), as well as leveraging the comparative advantages of UNICEF on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (operative paragraph 36), all of which are key in advancing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of a society in which every child is included (operative paragraph 13).

396. UNICEF commits to ensuring that every child is included in poverty reduction and social protection policies. Goal Area 5 recognizes gender inequality as one of the most fundamental of structural barriers to progress on poverty and child poverty, and works towards social protection and other poverty reduction strategies that specifically respond to the needs of girls and boys, children in extreme poverty, children with disabilities, migrant and displaced children, those facing discrimination and racism, as well as and those affected by fragility, humanitarian crises, or living in other disadvantaged territorial contexts.



## B. Context

397. Despite critical commitments, global extreme child poverty has fallen only modestly, from 19.5 per cent in 2013 to 17.5 per cent in 2017 according to joint UNICEF-World Bank analysis, and at a slower rate for children than adults.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, only 35 per cent of children globally receive social protection, with significant regional disparities.<sup>59</sup>

398. Nearly 20 percent of all children under 5 years old in the developing world live in extremely poor households. In absolute terms, the majority of children living in extreme poverty, around 270 million, live in middle-income countries. However, the proportion of children in extreme poverty is much higher in low-income countries, where almost half (48 per cent) of children are in extreme poverty, compared to 17.7 per cent in lower-middle-income countries, and 5.5 per cent in upper-middle-income countries. Extreme child poverty is increasingly concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, followed by South Asia. The Middle East and North Africa region has seen an increase in extreme poverty, largely spurred by the conflicts in the Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic.

399. **Extreme child poverty is more prevalent in conflict-affected settings, and social protection is a critical intervention to address it.** About 41.6 per cent of children in countries affected by conflict and fragility live in extremely poor households. They experience multiple shocks, keeping them locked in a downward spiral of overlapping deprivations.

<sup>58</sup> World Bank Group, 'Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty: An update', <<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/966791603123453576/pdf/Global-Estimate-of-Children-in-Monetary-Poverty-An-Update.pdf/>>.

<sup>59</sup> UNICEF and ILO, *Towards Universal Social Protection for Children: Achieving SDG 1.3*, <<https://www.unicef.org/media/49401/file/Towards-universal-per-cent20social-per-cent20protection-per-cent20for-per-cent20childrenpdf/>>, 2019.



400. The number of countries with national social protection programmes that are ready to respond to crisis more than doubled in the past 4 years, including through the development of emergency response plans, efforts to risk-inform policies, and strengthening delivery, targeting and coordination mechanisms.<sup>60</sup> Where existing systems cannot be leveraged, the direct delivery of cash transfers to crisis-affected children and their families has become a critical strategy to reduce deprivation. Ideally, humanitarian cash transfers are delivered in a way that builds on or forms the basis for sustainable social protection systems for children.

401. In 2020, 67 countries provided cash in response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and other crises. In 29 of these countries, where the social protection systems were either not inclusive or did not exist, UNICEF delivered cash transfers directly to children and families, leveraging some components of the social protection systems of nine of the countries. These interventions drew on the organization's growing in-house capacity to design independent systems where needed to deliver cash transfers.

402. **Gender inequality is one of the most fundamental of structural barriers to child poverty reduction.** Girls and women are overrepresented among those living in poverty globally and across most regions. Sex differences in poverty prevalence are associated with a disproportionate burden of care and domestic responsibilities assigned to women, such that women aged 24–34, who tend to shoulder most of these responsibilities, are 25 per cent more likely to live in poverty than men in the same age group.<sup>61</sup> Female-headed households are almost 50 per cent more likely to be in extreme poverty than male-headed households.<sup>62</sup>

403. COVID-19 has compounded the economic challenges faced by women and girls, reinforcing the social norms that underpin them. Feminized sectors have been hardest hit by unemployment during COVID-19, and it is estimated that 47 million more women will be driven into extreme poverty in 2021.

404. Well-implemented social protection can address gendered risks across the life cycle – but critical gaps remain in the gender-sensitivity of systems. The evidence confirms the role that social protection can play in increasing women's access to productive assets,<sup>63</sup> economic empowerment, employment and decision-making<sup>64</sup>; improving school enrolment and attendance as well as health service use; supporting adolescent girls' mental health<sup>65</sup>; and reducing intimate partner violence.<sup>66</sup> However, critical gaps remain in ensuring that social protection is gender-responsive. Only 18 per cent of social protection responses to COVID-19 were gender-sensitive.

405. **The compounding impacts of climate change and conflict and COVID-19 ('Triple C') have halted recent progress towards reducing poverty and inequality.** After nearly a quarter century of steady global declines in extreme poverty, global extreme poverty is on the rise. The World Bank estimates that in 2020, an additional 119–124 million people were pushed into extreme poverty as a result of

<sup>60</sup> UNICEF Global Social Protection Programme Framework, 2019, <<https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-social-protection-programme-framework-2019/>>.

<sup>61</sup> World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of fortune*, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> World Bank Group, 'Global Estimates of Children in Monetary Poverty'.

<sup>63</sup> Natali, L., et al., Zambia Cash Transfer Evaluation Team, 'Making Money Work: Unconditional cash transfers allow women to save and re-invest in rural Zambia, *Innocenti Working Paper* no. 2016-02, UNICEF, 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Bastagli, F., et al., 'Cash Transfers: What does the evidence say? – A rigorous review of programme impact and of the role of design and implementation features', ODI, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Angeles, Gustavo, et al., 'Government of Malawi's Unconditional Cash Transfer Improves Youth Mental health', *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 225, 2019, pp. 108-119.

<sup>66</sup> Buller, A.M., et al., 'A Mixed-Method Review of Cash Transfers and Intimate Partner Violence in Low- and Middle-income Countries', *The World Bank Research Observer*, 33(2), 2018.

the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19.<sup>67</sup> Prior to the crisis, approximately 1 billion children lived in multidimensional poverty, and it is projected that an additional 150 million children were pushed into poverty by end 2020.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, inequality within and between countries is rising, with significant regional variations. The Gini Coefficient for emerging market and developing countries is expected to rise to 42.7, comparable to 2008 levels, essentially wiping out inequality improvements of the past 12 years.

**406. COVID-19, conflict and climate change disproportionately affect children.** COVID-19 is affecting three distinct groups of children living in poverty: (1) It is severely worsening the situation of children who were already poor and vulnerable, most of whom live in rural areas and contexts affected by conflict, fragility and displacement. (2) Children who had managed to emerge from poverty in recent years are quickly falling back into it. And (3) children who had never experienced poverty before are now falling into poverty. For instance, there has been an increase in poor children in urban areas and informal settlements, and among families working in the informal sector. Across all these dimensions, children from disadvantaged and marginalized communities are disproportionately affected, including those who continue to experience structural exclusion and discrimination due to gender, ethnicity, racism, caste, disability, migration status or geographic location.

**407. Social protection has been the leading response to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, but critical gaps remain.** More than 200 countries have expanded their social protection coverage, with an expenditure of around \$750 billion. This response has highlighted the ability of existing national programmes across diverse contexts to respond quickly and effectively, by increasing assistance through top ups (vertical expansion) or by expanding coverage. While significant and commendable, the response has highlighted the critical gaps that remain in the sector, including in coverage, adequacy, and financing, as well as limited investment in inclusive and shock-responsive systems, and an urgent need to scale up critical elements of social protection systems, including health insurance and family-friendly policies.<sup>69</sup>

408. The crisis has highlighted additional challenges to ensuring that the path towards recovery is inclusive and child-sensitive. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a global economic crisis with severe, long-lasting impacts, putting social sector investments and spending at risk. Even before COVID, globally, spending on social sectors was still far from adequate to meet coverage gaps and ensure access to services for children, especially in low-income countries. Governments' ability to respond is also affected by their ability to access finance, and by the crowding-out effects of debt repayments.

### C. Lessons learned, 2018–2021

**409. UNICEF recognizes the need for a specific strategy to support the most deprived children across multiple contexts, as part of its universal mandate.** This supports the realization of fundamental rights, while also it represents an essential investment to ensure that no one is left behind. Enhancing parents and caregiver's

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<sup>67</sup> Lanker, Christoph, et al., 'Updated Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on Global Poverty', <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-looking-back-2020-and-outlook-2021/>.

<sup>68</sup> UNICEF, 'Impact of COVID-19 on Multidimensional Child Poverty', <https://data.unicef.org/resources/impact-of-covid-19-on-multidimensional-child-poverty/>.

<sup>69</sup> In essence, family-friendly policies refer to the time, services and resources that support working parents and caregivers to reconcile work and family life. See UNICEF, 'Redesigning the Workplace to Be Family-Friendly: What Governments and businesses can do', <<https://www.unicef.org/early-childhood-development/family-friendly-policies/>>.

capacities to meet children's needs, while also enhancing their economic capacities, contributes to dynamic local economies. Similarly, ensuring that every child lives free of poverty and has equal opportunities strengthens social cohesion and contributes to building inclusive and peaceful societies.

**410. The pandemic highlighted the extent to which policy and financing choices that do not explicitly prioritize social investments, address exclusion and discrimination, or enable multi-sectoral coordination contribute to poverty and inequality.** The socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, conflict and climate change have also highlighted the critical need for UNICEF to further elevate and enhance its explicit commitment to eliminating child poverty and strengthening social protection systems, to effectively address risks and crisis, while enhancing resilience of families and communities.

411. In order to enable an inclusive recovery, UNICEF will need to work with Governments, the main funders of key social services for children, to protect social spending, ensure financing systems are efficient and transparent, and work with other partners to identify new and innovative public and private financing options to address gaps, scale up innovation, and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. To this end, UNICEF is engaging in critical global processes such as the Financing for Development Agenda, the G-20, as well as critical partnerships to enhance its voice on the importance of inclusive recovery.

**412. The COVID-19 emergency response showcased national social protection systems as a powerful tool to meet humanitarian needs, but also spotlighted the need to scale-up risk-informed systems** that can effectively preempt and respond to shocks and stressors, not only personal shocks experienced during the life cycle (such as illness or loss of employment), but also the impacts of climate change, displacement and conflict. Lessons from the COVID-19 response have highlighted the need to reinforce both humanitarian and development financing to build and strengthen systems and further enhance their role in preparedness and response.

**413. UNICEF experience has reinforced the lesson that strengthening data quality, collection, monitoring, analysis and evidence generation is key to reducing child poverty and scaling up social protection.** There is a need for innovative sampling and survey strategies to ensure inclusive approaches, for systematic integration of climate and conflict as part of child poverty analysis and in the design of risk-informed social protection systems. It will be key to enhance capacities to monitor child-sensitive spending and generate evidence on the return on investment.

414. As a longstanding leader in impact evidence on social protection, particularly on the impact of cash transfers on children's outcomes across multiple sectors, UNICEF needs to continue to strengthen this evidence base. This will entail looking at the new challenges and opportunities posed by COVID-19 as well as the longer-term implications of Agenda 2030, including deepening the evidence base on cash plus, generating operational evidence to strengthen and scale-up inclusive social protection and its links with other sectors, as well as strengthening the investment case for a systems approach, including in humanitarian contexts.

**415. Despite important progress in expanding coverage of social protection and in strengthening social protection systems, critical gaps remain in terms of inclusion and adequacy.** The increase in child poverty also shows that structural inequalities have been exacerbated. This requires specific efforts to address the systematic exclusion of critical groups, including migrant and displaced children, children with disabilities, and children from marginalized communities, as well as to enhance the gender-responsive role of social protection.

416. Based on the existing evidence and lessons from past action and crises, reducing child poverty and inequality requires an explicit structural change in economic dynamics, along with the promotion of inclusive policies benefiting children, from early childhood through adolescence. Within this context, UNICEF will leverage its unique added value in child poverty programming, integrating the specific vulnerabilities of specific groups, strengthening inclusive, gender-responsive and shock-responsive social protection systems, supporting adequate, effective and inclusive investments for children, and tailoring responses to address spatial differences and strengthen community, local and sub-national capacities, including in emergency and fragile contexts.

#### D. Result areas

417. Based on its assessment of the challenges facing the most vulnerable children, and responding to lessons from the 2018–2021 Strategic Plan period, the theory of change for Goal Area 5 will focus on two core result areas:

(a) **Result area 1: Reducing child poverty.** Increased commitment to eliminating child poverty as part of national poverty, socioeconomic and sectoral strategies and policies.

(b) **Result area 2: Access to inclusive social protection.** Expanded coverage and strengthened inclusive, gender-responsive and shock-responsive social protection systems, including in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

418. Accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 10 and supporting the full realization to children’s rights to social protection and an adequate standard of living requires explicit commitments to inclusive development, enhanced human capital investments, and stronger links between humanitarian and development programming. In this context, UNICEF will leverage its added value and longstanding leadership in social policy and social protection to contribute to reducing child poverty, enhancing opportunities for inclusive financing for children and expanding access to inclusive social protection.

419. UNICEF will continue to support Governments to enhance their capacity to routinely monitor progress in child poverty reduction, integrate child poverty into socio-economic and sectoral commitments, while also increasing explicit commitments to child poverty reduction via policies, legislation and budget allocations, following the model and milestones UNICEF has developed in partnership with the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty.<sup>70</sup>

420. Accelerating progress towards reducing child poverty also requires an inclusive financing strategy that helps translate policy and strategic commitments into well-funded and effectively managed programmes and results, ensuring the scale-up and sustainability of interventions, and thus their long-term impact. UNICEF will further enhance its work to protect social spending, including in contexts of economic contraction, ensuring that financial resources are used efficiently, enhancing their quality, transparency and impact on equity, while also working with partners to identify new, innovative financing options towards sustainable, child-sensitive and inclusive national fiscal responses.

421. UNICEF will continue to work to ensure that inclusive social protection systems expand coverage to ensure every child realizes their right to social security, while working with Governments and multiple stakeholders to enhance critical linkages

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<sup>70</sup> See UNICEF and End Child Poverty Global Coalition, *A World Free from Child Poverty: A guide to the tasks to achieve the vision*, <<https://www.unicef.org/reports/world-free-child-poverty/>>, for complete description of this model and milestones.

across sectors to address the multiple and compounding vulnerabilities across the life cycle, from early childhood to adolescence. UNICEF will scale up its work to ensure that social protection programmes are effectively designed and implemented, adequately financed, and respond to climate, conflict, displacement, economic and other risks.

422. In humanitarian contexts, UNICEF will fulfil its sector-level commitment per the CCCs, and scale up its work on shock-responsive social protection systems, including cash transfers, to support children and families impacted by humanitarian crises. In contexts where such systems do not exist, UNICEF will continue to deliver effective humanitarian cash transfers as key building blocks for nascent social protection systems.

423. Effective implementation of poverty reduction strategies also requires enhancing the capacity of local governance structures, including the complex governance systems in urban settings, to effectively plan, budget and deliver child-sensitive social services and social protection. Approaches must be informed by an understanding of differences across territories and must focus on large rural and intra-urban deprivations that are being masked by national averages.

424. UNICEF will develop an integrated approach to local governance, incorporating tailored approaches to different territories, including urban programming targeting slums and informal settlements, and Child-Friendly Cities. This work will prioritize a community- and people-centered development approach, enhancing agency and empowering children, adolescents and caregivers to participate and shape pathways out of poverty.

## **E. Cross-cutting programme areas**

425. **Climate action, peacebuilding and resilience.** Climate change and conflict are key drivers behind increases in poverty, including child poverty. Measurement of child poverty and policy approaches to address it will be adjusted to integrate climate, environmental and conflict-related risks. Social protection systems will be enhanced to ensure that they integrate climate- and conflict-related risks and vulnerabilities as part of their design and implementation to enhance response in humanitarian and fragile contexts, mitigate negative impacts of climate- and conflict- related risks, enhance resilience and contribute to peacebuilding.

426. Countries affected by humanitarian crises and fragility will be supported to design, establish and maintain social protection systems, including for the effective delivery of humanitarian cash transfers. Where the reach of central authorities is limited or non-existent, engagement with local governance structures will be sought as an effective way of enhancing social protection interventions and strengthening resilience.

427. **Disability.** Children with disabilities and their families are overrepresented in poverty, often due to the costs of disability, which increase family vulnerabilities and undermine sustainable pathways out of poverty. UNICEF will deepen its support to Governments to develop quality assessments for children with disabilities and their families, support the development of inclusive social protection systems, including disability assessment and eligibility determination, information systems and programmes. This will also include the scaleup of cash-plus to further strengthen community-based support services, rehabilitation, assistive technology, ECD, inclusive education, and support the transition from school to work, as well as preventing institutionalization.

428. **Gender.** UNICEF will enhance its capacity to measure and monitor the gendered dimensions of poverty, and influence the design of effective gender-responsive poverty reduction programmes. UNICEF will support Governments to design and adapt gender-responsive and transformational social protection systems, increasing accessibility, effective coverage, adequacy and linkages with key services, including childcare, family-friendly policies, and gender-based violence response. This includes working to increase the gender-responsiveness of humanitarian cash transfers and social protection in fragile and humanitarian contexts.

## **F. Change strategies**

429. **Partnerships and engagement, public and private.** Progress on Goal Area 5 results will rely on furthering the unique added value UNICEF provides on human capital, inclusion, gender equality, financing and social protection systems strengthening. It will be critical to integrate these approaches into broader economic development, in close partnership with the United Nations, civil society and the private sector. Examples of this strategy include revamping the organization's contribution across key fora, such as Financing for Development and the G-20, and deepening engagement with IFIs, National Committees, bilateral resource partners, and key United Nations platforms such as the Social Protection Inter-Agency Board, Universal Social Protection 2030 (USP2030), Grand Bargain commitments, and United Nations Country Teams on social protection and humanitarian cash.

430. UNICEF will enhance its private sector engagement to identify new blended financing options to expand social services, as well as to enhance their effectiveness, including via technology and innovation. An important focus will be to advance gender-sensitive, family-friendly practices and decent work in business operations and supply chains, including in the informal sector. Partnerships with local structures, including via the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative, will be further enhanced.

431. **Risk-informed humanitarian and development nexus programming.** Currently, more than 75 per cent of the world's extremely poor people live in fragile contexts. UNICEF is committed to systematically filling evidence gaps and integrating risk-informed programming into poverty reduction strategies, including social protection and financing. An important shift will be strengthening climate- and conflict-sensitive analysis to enhance the prevention and preparedness role of social protection systems, enhance local development processes, and increase inclusive and effective financing for early action and preparedness.

432. **Advocacy and communications.** UNICEF will continue to use data and evidence to develop effective messaging, build coalitions and support Governments to further their commitments to scale up social protection and reduce child poverty. UNICEF will elevate its high-level advocacy to ensure that Governments prioritize an inclusive recovery, safeguard critical social spending, enhance efficiency and mobilize additional public and private finance. Evidence-based advocacy will help to enhance the visibility of child poverty and the impacts of conflict and climate at the country level, make the case for adequately financed poverty reduction policies and the scale-up social protection systems, including in humanitarian crises, and highlight the critical importance of gender-responsive and disability-inclusive policies. Advocacy will also focus on the critical imperative of working with sub-national stakeholders, across an integrated programming approach bringing together urban programming, local governance and Child-Friendly Cities.

433. **Digital transformation** will be a key contributor to enhancing the effective functioning of social protection systems and the delivery of cash transfers, including in humanitarian crises and fragile contexts. The focus will be on strengthening management and information systems and the interoperability of multiple systems,

payment delivery, information sharing, data collection and protection standards and grievance mechanisms and, ultimately, enhancing efficiency and accountability mechanisms at the local and national levels.

434. **Data, research, evaluation and knowledge management** will support the organization's commitment to apply the most promising strategies to reduce poverty and expand social protection across multiple contexts. UNICEF will continue to improve child poverty measurement, integrating conflict and climate change, territorial (intra-urban) and inclusion dimensions, the long-term impacts of the economic crisis on child poverty, and evidence on safeguarding and transforming social spending for sustainable and inclusive recovery, as well as innovate financing. Partnerships are already under way to further enhance the investment case for social protection investments in humanitarian contexts. UNICEF will prioritize the expansion of operational evidence on disability inclusion, effective protection of migrant and displaced children, gender equality programming for transformative results, and preventing and mitigating climate-, environment- and conflict-related risks.

435. **Community engagement, social and behaviour change.** UNICEF will support effective strategies to strengthen community engagement, child and adolescent participation, empowerment of parents and caregivers, social norms and accountability strategies for poverty reduction and effective social protection policies. Social and behaviour change approaches will play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment and promoting positive attitudes and norms that support equity and inclusion of stigmatized and excluded groups.

436. Key accountability structures will be enhanced to facilitate the active participation of local actors, children, adolescents and communities in the development of child poverty reduction and social protection interventions, and strategies for enhanced accountability. Key examples include scaling up efforts for inclusive financing, participatory budgeting, grievance mechanisms, and meaningful consultation and participation in the design and implementation of social protection programmes.

437. **Systems strengthening to leave no one behind.** In line with its Social Protection Framework,<sup>71</sup> UNICEF prioritizes child-sensitive systems development. The organization will remain at the forefront of evidence generation (including child poverty measurement), monitoring of social protection systems-building, and sustainable financing. UNICEF will develop tools to facilitate the functioning of these systems, including management information systems (MIS), delivery, grievance mechanisms, human resources and sub-national coordination. UNICEF will continue to ensure that social protection systems include different types of programmes (including social transfers, family-friendly policies and childcare) to address the multiple needs of children, from early childhood through adolescence and youth, and will work to strengthen the social service workforce.

438. UNICEF will continue to leverage its work across other social sectors, including health, education, child protection, WASH and nutrition, to integrate child poverty reduction priorities and link critical services. As a core component of systems strengthening, UNICEF will continue to prioritize the development of shock-responsive social protection and build the capacity to deliver in humanitarian contexts. As outlined in the CCCs, UNICEF will continue to build on social protection in humanitarian action, including cash, to build nascent inclusive social protection systems.

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<sup>71</sup> UNICEF Global Social Protection Programme Framework.

439. **Innovation.** Reducing child poverty and increasing access to social protection requires innovative strategies and broader partnerships, particularly given the challenges posed by COVID-19. Identifying new financing options, including public- and private-sector modalities to ensure an inclusive recovery, will be critical. This will include new approaches around debt restructuring and relief to benefit children and adolescents, and efforts to enhance efficiency, transparency and accountability in budget execution.

440. Building on its comparative advantage, UNICEF will advance innovation in social protection programming, particularly in fragile contexts, modelling community-based social services and creative cash-plus approaches. UNICEF will continue to work as a trailblazer for innovation to address the needs of the ‘new poor’, including children in urban settings, migrant and displaced children, and those impacted by the care crisis.

441. **Gender-equality programming for transformative results** for social protection and child poverty reduction addresses gendered power dynamics and gender relations that impact well-being. UNICEF aims to meaningfully shift practice towards gender-responsive (addressing gendered needs and risks) and, where feasible, transformative programming. This includes efforts to mitigate underlying gender inequalities affecting the uptake and delivery of social protection; promotion of positive gender norms in addressing women’s and men’s economic roles; and policies and budgets that redress systematic biases that disadvantage women and girls, including through promotion of family-friendly policies, equitable remuneration, strengthened monitoring and evaluation, and meaningful participation in the collection and reporting of sex- and age-disaggregated data for social protection programming.

## **G. Key partnerships**

### **1. UN working together**

442. Working within the United Nations development system at the global, regional and country levels will remain a core priority for UNICEF. UNICEF will continue to build and strengthen strategic partnerships across priority areas, including as a leading member of the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) and the steering committee of the USP2030 group, contributing to building coordinated approaches and furthering gender equality, childcare and disability, among other priority agendas. UNICEF is the co-lead of the Grand Bargain Group on Social Protection and Humanitarian Cash, and is committed to design and implement cash transfers in emergencies in a cost-efficient and cost-effective manner, in close collaboration with UNHCR, WFP and OCHA, as per the Principal-level 2018 United Nations Common Cash Statement.

443. At the regional and country levels, UNICEF plays a leading and coordination role for many strategic policy and programmatic processes, including in the context of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals Fund’s Social Protection and Financing Windows, and coordinating national and regional Social Protection Groups. ILO and UNICEF are partners on universal social protection, social protection measurement, Sustainable Development Goal reporting, and country and regional policy and programmatic collaboration, as well as in developing TRANSFORM, a system-focused training package for social protection practitioners.

444. UNICEF works with the International Training Centre (ITC) of ILO to deliver e-coaching on gender-responsive social protection systems. UNICEF and WFP work together on shock-responsive social protection and co-lead the social protection pillar of the socio-economic response to COVID-19, as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Task Team. With FAO, UNICEF co-leads of the



Transfer Project, an initiative to generate evidence of policy and programmatic change related to social protection.

445. To accelerate commitments to enhance financing and prioritization of social spending, including social protection, UNDP and UNICEF work together on inclusive recovery and inclusive financing, including through a flagship project on finance, leveraging their joint capacities towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals Fund's Financing Window and the Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs). Through the Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children, UNICEF is working with UNHCR towards inclusive financing of services for refugee and migrant children.

446. In Goal Area 5, 14 indicators are common or complementary with United Nations agencies, including ILO, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), UNDP, UNESCO, UN-Habitat, UN-Women and WFP.

## 2. Other key partnerships

447. UNICEF will continue its work as co-founder of the End Child Poverty Coalition, to support progress around child poverty. The World Bank will continue to be a critical partner on child poverty and social protection, including through collaboration on measurement and analysis of child poverty data, as well as joint programming on social protection and public finance. UNICEF will continue to strengthen its partnership with the World Bank and other partners to promote gender-responsive social protection and care, enhancing evidence, advocacy and effective programming at scale.

448. UNICEF will continue to leverage its critical partnership with the Better Care Network, through the Collaborative Platform on Care Reform as well as ECDAN. To further the critical inclusive financing agenda, UNICEF will continue its partnership and strategic collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), particularly around their commitment to protecting and enhancing social spending, aligned with their social spending strategy. UNICEF will continue to strengthen critical partnerships and coalitions, including with the International Budget Partnership (IBP).

449. UNICEF is strengthening its partnership with United Cities and Local Governments, to improve learning and exchange of good practices, strengthen policy and advocacy and amplify the voices of sub-national governments. UNICEF also works to strengthen sub-national planning and budgeting tools and approaches through exchanges with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), UNCDF and the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment.

## H. Assumptions and risks

<i>Assumptions and risks</i>	<i>Mitigation measures</i>
<p><b>Global support and adequate UNICEF funding for poverty reduction and social protection:</b> It is assumed that UNICEF maintains and increases funding and adequate skills for child poverty reduction (including public finance and local governance) and social protection. The related risk is that there will be inadequate resources and capacity for growth and renewed focus in these areas.</p>	<p>The UNICEF mandate, areas of focus, added value and global experience across thematic areas and contexts (including countries of all income levels, fragile contexts and humanitarian crises) make the organization uniquely well placed to support Governments in enhancing their policy, programmatic and financing commitments to reducing child poverty. UNICEF has a comparative advantage and leadership in the development, implementation and assessment of child-sensitive, shock-responsive social protection systems. The organization supports social protection in over 147 countries, providing sound, evidence-based</p>

	<p>technical assistance and guidance for policy and strategy development, systems strengthening, programme design and implementation, and evidence generation. UNICEF will continue to enhance and demonstrate this leadership role and comparative advantage, supporting countries to realize children's rights to social security and an adequate standard of living.</p>
<p><b>National commitment to Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 10:</b> It is assumed that programme countries remain determined to address and achieve Sustainable Development Goal targets related to poverty reduction, inequality and social protection, and that they prioritize equity and results for children. Without this commitment, UNICEF will face challenges in its partnerships and programming.</p>	<p>UNICEF will emphasize and continue to demonstrate the importance of attention to eliminating poverty and equity in global discussions, among resource partners and with programme countries.</p>
<p><b>National capacity for engagement:</b> It is assumed that countries will have the capacity to manage their reform processes. Linked to this, it is assumed that programme countries will make resources available for improved child-sensitive social protection and reduction in multidimensional child poverty. Where resources are insufficient, it is assumed that countries will leverage part of the received official development assistance, grants or loans to use them for these purposes.</p>	<p>UNICEF will support countries to improve the management of their public finances, to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their expenditures, improve their budget processes and explore innovative financing options. UNICEF also works with ministries to prepare budget submissions that are realistic and show returns. UNICEF continues to work with international partners to leverage part of their resources for children. The organization's emphasis on government leadership and ownership makes it a trusted and credible partner, and Governments usually welcome its expertise in supporting the management of policy processes and its critical convening and coordination role.</p>
<p><b>Availability of data and evidence on good practices:</b> It is assumed that UNICEF will provide support to countries in generating data and evidence to measure child poverty and social protection (including through disaggregated data, large-scale surveys such as MICS, and research studies) and develop policy options. There is a risk that some Governments may be overstretched and not view this area as their core mandate.</p>	<p>The UNICEF track record in helping countries to improve data systems and pursue their own research agendas and capacities means that host countries tend to welcome its support. Increased investment in equity measurement through disaggregated data will be of critical importance moving forward.</p>
<p><b>National promotion of participatory processes:</b> It is assumed that at least some significant public support exists for the equity, child poverty reduction and social protection elements of the 2030 Agenda. There is a risk that rising nationalism and populist movements will oppose aspects of the equity agenda, social protection measures and active engagement for and by vulnerable groups, such as children on the move or Indigenous children.</p>	<p>UNICEF will continue evidence-based advocacy and policy discussions to enhance public support for reducing child poverty and enhancing access to inclusive social protection. UNICEF will support strengthening local-level processes to enhancing the voices, agency and meaningful participation of children, adolescents, caregivers and community stakeholders. UNICEF has recognized experience in social and behaviour change communication, which will be essential to advancing child poverty and social protection results. UNICEF will boldly defend the human rights-based approach, and the equal rights of all children.</p>

**Access in humanitarian contexts:** It is assumed that humanitarian access can be achieved to pursue all aspects of UNICEF work in Goal Area 5. There is a risk of that access being denied. It is also assumed that Governments will willingly work to expand social protection and cash responses, especially in fragile contexts and humanitarian crises.

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UNICEF has a good track record in negotiating access, and is able to respond rapidly and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. UNICEF both supports Governments to develop social protection systems that extend social assistance to people in humanitarian crises, and delivers cash directly when needed.

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