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**For decision**

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## United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda\*

### **Annual report for 2021 of the Executive Director of UNICEF**

#### *Summary*

This is the fourth and final annual report of the UNICEF Executive Director to the UNICEF Executive Board on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021.

The report is accompanied by reports on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system;<sup>a</sup> a joint annex on the implementation of the common chapter; and a data companion and scorecard.

Elements of a draft decision are presented in section VI.

<sup>a</sup> General Assembly resolution [71/243](#).

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\* [E/ICEF/2022/9](#).



## I. Overview

1. In the final year of its Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, UNICEF worked together with its partners to protect the rights of all children against the impacts of the global crisis fuelled by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, conflicts and climate change. Children in the poorest countries, in fragile and conflict-affected contexts and in the most underserved and discriminated-against communities have been hit the hardest. Throughout the four years of the Strategic Plan, UNICEF accelerated efforts to reach them with the essential services and support required to achieve the child rights-related Sustainable Development Goals, which were off track even before COVID-19 and now require a two- to sevenfold acceleration of progress. As the pandemic struck, the organization seized opportunities to innovate and advocate for children, broadened partnerships, and oriented its work towards strengthening the resilience of systems, communities, families and children.

2. The year 2021 saw extraordinary humanitarian needs, as escalating conflicts and protracted crises – including in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Myanmar and Yemen – destroyed lives, livelihoods and infrastructure, led to grave violations of children’s rights, and forced children and their families to flee their homes. Worldwide, children accounted for an estimated 42 per cent of the world’s 82.4 million forcibly displaced people.<sup>1</sup> In the first quarter of 2021, verified cases of abduction and sexual violence against children in conflict zones rose by more than 50 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively, compared with the same period in 2020. Meanwhile, only 37 of 61 parties to conflict have committed to formal action plans to protect children.<sup>2</sup>

3. About half of all children – approximately 1 billion – live in 33 countries at extremely high risk from the impacts of climate change, facing exposure to multiple, overlapping hazards such as heatwaves, cyclones, flooding, droughts, vector-borne diseases and polluted air, water, soil and food.<sup>3</sup> Children are more vulnerable to these impacts than adults, and those who live in poverty and lack access to essential services are especially susceptible to their life-threatening effects. As climate shocks deepen poverty and further curtail access to health care, nutrition, protection, safe water and sanitation, these children become even more vulnerable.

4. For children affected by fragility and complex humanitarian crises, where the interplay of conflict and climate change impacts have already devastated communities, the pandemic has compounded risks and diminished opportunities. In the central Sahel, threats of armed attacks and COVID-19 shuttered more than 5,000 schools, while 1.1 million children were uprooted in 2021, a 64 per cent increase from 2020, and millions more faced worsening poverty, hunger, water scarcity, violence, abuse and exploitation.<sup>4</sup>

5. Two years into the pandemic, the harms to children are inescapably evident. The crisis pushed an additional 100 million children into multidimensional poverty, and as of 2021, more than 1 billion children – half of the world’s children – were living without such necessities as health care, adequate nutrition, clean water, sanitation, safe housing or education.<sup>5</sup> As families struggled, 12 million more children were at risk of malnutrition, and the risks of turning to negative coping mechanisms

<sup>1</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Refugee Population Statistics Database.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), “Grave violations of children’s rights in conflict on the rise around the world, warns UNICEF”, press release, 31 December 2021.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, *The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index* (New York, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> UN News, “In central Sahel, ‘needs are growing faster than generosity’”, 27 January 2022.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, “COVID-19 impacts on child poverty”, web page. See [www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty/covid-19-socioeconomic-impacts](http://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty/covid-19-socioeconomic-impacts).

increased, putting up to 10 million more girls at risk of child marriage over the next decade and 9 million more children at risk of child labour by the end of 2022.

6. Progress towards quality education for all slipped further off track as unprecedented interruptions to schooling increased projections of learning poverty among children in low- and middle-income countries, from 50 per cent to 70 per cent. At least 24 million more children were projected to drop out of school, in addition to the more than 260 million already out of school prior to the pandemic.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, nearly half of refugee children remain out of school,<sup>7</sup> while internally displaced children in fragile settings often have even fewer opportunities.

7. While it will be some time before the multiple impacts of the pandemic on child mortality become clear, data as of 2020 do not show the feared reversals of progress, as service disruptions proved less severe than projected, while pandemic control measures limited exposure to negative health factors such as air pollution and may have had protective effects against the infectious diseases that contribute to under-five deaths. Still, not all countries are on track to end preventable under-five mortality by 2030. Five million children under 5 years of age died in 2020, with 43 per cent of these deaths occurring in fragile and conflict-affected situations.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, setbacks to progress in routine immunization led to an increase in the number of completely unvaccinated children – many of whom live in conflict-affected settings – of 3.4 million as of 2020.<sup>9</sup>

8. In 2021, COVID-19 vaccines and new treatments began to blunt the deadly impacts of the virus, but vastly unequal access perpetuated the inequalities that the pandemic had already deepened. Just 1 in 7 people in low-income countries has received at least one vaccine dose, compared with 2 in 3 in high-income countries.<sup>10</sup> Evidence suggests that the economies of rich countries are rebounding sooner than those of poorer countries.<sup>11</sup>

9. Despite pandemic-related service disruptions, UNICEF reached increasing numbers of children with life-saving interventions for wasting throughout 2020 and 2021, shifting to simplified, community-level approaches that led to 154 million children being screened for severe wasting in 2021, up 9 per cent from 2020, and nearly 5.5 million being treated, an increase of 10 per cent. With UNICEF support, in the 52 focus countries of the Every Newborn Action Plan, the percentage of women receiving at least four antenatal care visits increased to 64 per cent in 2021, up from 51 per cent in 2016, and the percentage of mothers receiving postnatal care increased to 65 per cent, up from 48 per cent.

10. In 2021, UNICEF supported countries to ensure learning continuity during school closures and help children recover learning losses, working across sectors to facilitate the safe reopening of schools and protect education financing, and scaling up digital learning solutions tailored to children's needs, interests and contexts. Throughout the year, UNICEF helped 48.6 million out-of-school children to access education, including 6.4 million children on the move and 31.7 million in humanitarian settings.

<sup>6</sup> João Pedro Azevedo and others, "Learning poverty updates and revisions: what's new?", Learning Poverty Monitoring Series, No. 1 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, *Coming Together for Refugee Education* (Geneva, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, *Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2021* (New York, UNICEF, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization, "Immunization coverage", web page, July 2021. See <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/immunization-coverage>.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Global Dashboard for Vaccine Equity". Available at <https://data.undp.org/vaccine-equity/>.

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF, *Prospects for Children in 2022: A Global Outlook* (New York, 2022).

11. UNICEF advocacy led to a major policy breakthrough on the non-detention of children, and since the beginning of the pandemic, more than 45,000 children across 84 countries have been released from detention.<sup>12</sup> Through joint programming with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 7.6 million adolescent girls at risk of child marriage received prevention and care interventions in 2021, up from 2.1 million in 2017. Disability-inclusive programming reached more than 4.8 million children with disabilities across 148 countries, including in humanitarian situations, more than double the 2.2 million reached in 2020. UNICEF reached targets for expanding access to safe water and basic sanitation, reaching 69.9 million people with the former and 59.6 million with the latter throughout the 2018–2021 period.

12. To enable the United Nations system to provide more effective and coordinated support to countries, UNICEF contributed to the system-wide vision of a new social contract, as called for in *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General*, and to the implementation of the mandates of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR). As a key player in the United Nations response to COVID-19 and its socioeconomic impacts, UNICEF facilitated equitable and accelerated access to COVID-19 vaccines and other essential supplies and services in 144 countries, engaging with partners to overcome supply scarcity, steep pricing increases and historic disruptions to global supply chains.

13. The interconnected challenges facing the world reinforce the urgent need for a reinvigorated multilateralism – but in recent years, cooperation among the global community has faltered badly. Amid escalating threats to global peace and security, rampant inequality, heightened discrimination, social tensions and violence, shrinking civic space, and the erosion of rule of law and respect for human rights, children are paying the price for failures in which they have had no hand. Today, their prospects hinge on reversing that trajectory, and working together to manage the pandemic and respond to climate change, conflicts and fragility.

14. Guided by its new Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, UNICEF has raised the level of its ambition, aiming towards the systemic transformation needed to fulfil its mandate and redress the injustices done to children. As children and young people across the world speak out and lead action to support their communities and call for change to secure their futures, UNICEF is rallying its partners around both the urgency and the opportunities of this moment. Together we must work to end the pandemic as quickly as possible and ensure a socially and financially inclusive recovery through long-term investments in human capital and resilient systems; we must protect the rights of children living amid humanitarian crises and fragility; and we must take decisive, concerted action to mitigate climate change and adapt to the impacts that the most vulnerable children and their communities are already feeling.

## II. Performance under the Goal Areas and cross-cutting priorities

15. After four years of implementation of the Strategic Plan – despite enormous challenges posed by the global pandemic in the final two years – UNICEF attained, or came close to, 100 per cent achievement for 19 out of 25 result areas. Sixty-six per cent of Strategic Plan output targets were met or nearly met, with 21 per cent just missed and 13 per cent significantly missed.

16. The primary underlying cause for missing 34 per cent of output targets was the cumulative impact of COVID-19, which caused significant reprioritization of

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<sup>12</sup> UNICEF, *Detention of Children in the Time of COVID-19* (New York, 2021).

programming and resources by UNICEF and partners. The performance trend over the full Strategic Plan period shows that after two years of implementation, pre-pandemic, 74 per cent of output milestones were met or nearly met, decreasing to 66 per cent as output-level progress slowed and in some cases stalled in 2020 and 2021 – particularly in Goal Area 1, where significant attention was directed towards the pandemic response.

17. The pandemic's impact on target achievement varied across the Strategic Plan's Goal Areas and corresponding result areas. In some cases, such as for some child protection results, the pandemic stimulated breakthroughs. For missed output targets, in-depth analysis reveals a range of proximate causes – all affected by the pandemic – related to funding, operational and sector-specific challenges, and overambitious target-setting based on assumptions that did not ultimately hold, including for some targets revised upward during the midterm review undertaken in the pandemic's early days.

18. The quality of resources once again proved critical in enabling UNICEF to flexibly and swiftly respond to changing circumstances and challenges in achieving results. A comparison of performance across results over the full Strategic Plan period reveals that progress rates were somewhat higher for result areas with a larger proportion of regular resources – demonstrating the criticality of flexible, quality funding for managing complexity and building responsive programmes at country level.

19. Outcome-level data were not available for all indicators and countries at the end of 2021. With the latest available information, 47 per cent of outcome indicators were either achieved or registered significant progress in 2021. As shown by the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, high rates of UNICEF-produced output indicators did not always translate to changes in outcome and impact indicators, which reflect the contributions of all partners.

## **A. Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives**

20. The COVID-19 pandemic upended progress on every measure of child survival, health, growth and development. Millions of children die of preventable causes every year. Without immediate action, 54 countries will miss the Sustainable Development Goal target for under-five mortality, and 61 will miss the neonatal mortality target. While the most recent data, from 2020, show no significant additional child mortality owing to the COVID-19 crisis, it will be some time before the pandemic's impacts become clear.<sup>13</sup>

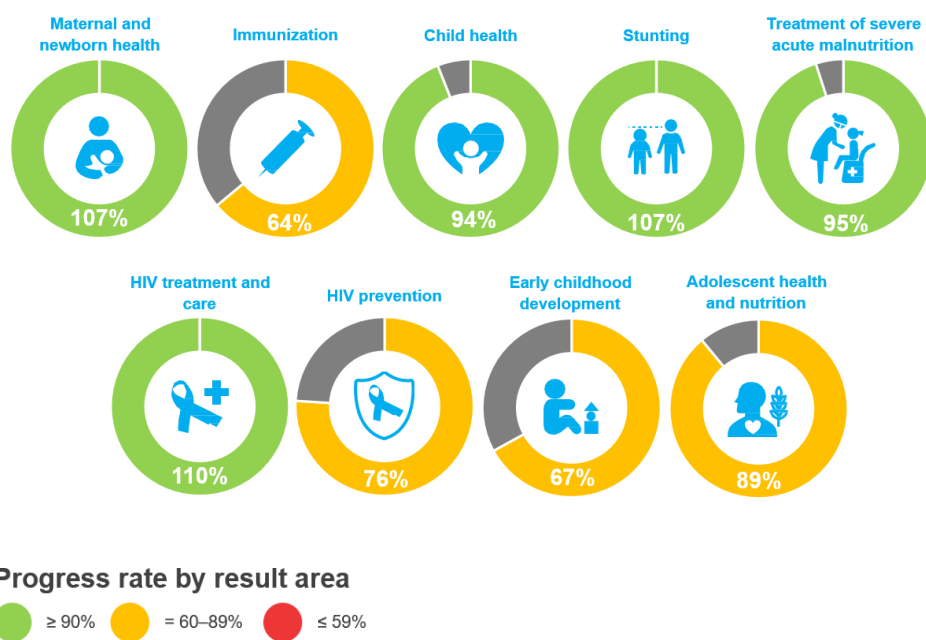
21. Immunization coverage data reveal the impacts of the pandemic and resulting disruptions to global health systems, with many indicators off track to meet Sustainable Development Goal and Immunization Agenda 2030 targets, and fewer supplementary immunization activities undertaken to eradicate polio and tetanus. Global coverage of the third dose of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, stagnant since 2010, is now on a downward trajectory, decreasing from 86 per cent in 2019 to 83 per cent in 2020.

22. The pandemic disrupted school health and nutrition programmes that are critical for child and adolescent health, and resulted in stockouts of life-saving supplies such as oral rehydration salts. Progress in areas including treatment with oral rehydration salts, pneumonia care-seeking and antenatal care for adolescents aged 15 to 19 years remains stagnant.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, 2021.

23. In child nutrition, progress since 2000 proves that positive change is possible and is happening at scale – but more work remains to be done. The world has reduced by one third, or 55 million, the proportion of children under the age of 5 years suffering from stunting. Still, wasting persists at alarming rates, threatening the lives of 45.4 million children.

24. While severe challenges continued in 2021, UNICEF delivered significant results for children while finding pathways to address the persistent systemic barriers to their rights to health, nutrition and development. At the output level, progress rates were above 90 per cent for five out of nine result areas under Goal Area 1. Progress was slowest in the immunization result area, in relation to output targets for introduction of vaccines in national immunization schedules, largely due to the diversion of resources to control the pandemic and introduce the COVID-19 vaccine. Progress rates were also slow in the result areas of early childhood development (ECD) and HIV prevention. In the adolescent health and nutrition result area, the output target related to school health programmes for adolescents was not met; due to COVID-19-related school opening challenges and countries in conflict situations, there was uneven reporting on this indicator. School health and nutrition is an important platform in which investments are needed.

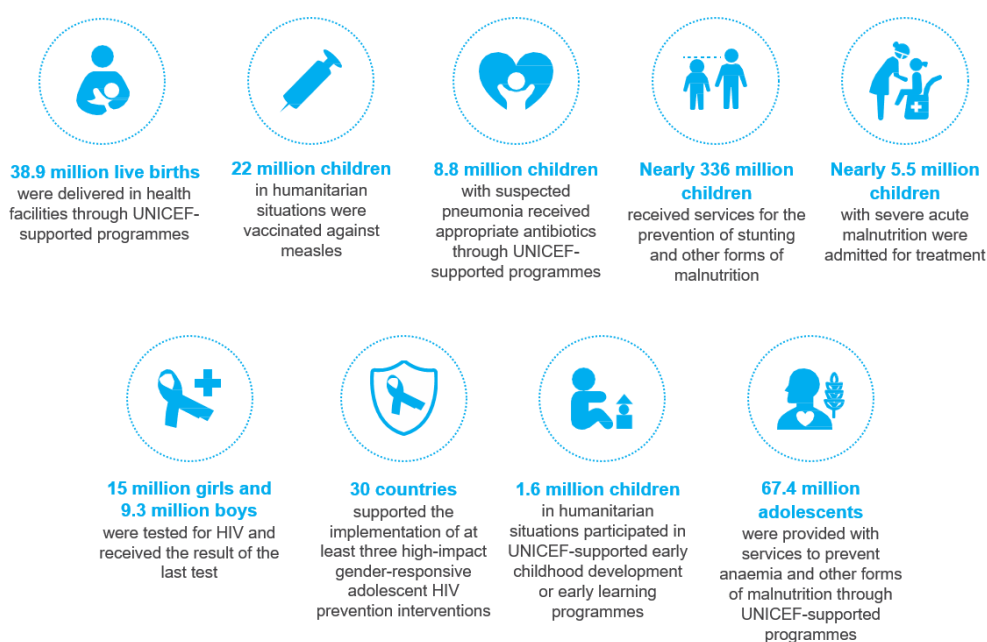


25. In 2021, the number of live births delivered in health facilities through UNICEF-supported programmes increased to 38.9 million, amounting to 180 million for the period 2016–2020. The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel increased to 80 per cent in the 52 focus countries of the Every Newborn Action Plan. Both antenatal and postnatal care interventions increased: the percentage of women receiving at least four antenatal visits increased to 64 per cent, up from 51 per cent in 2016, and the percentage of mothers receiving postnatal care increased to 65 per cent, up from 48 per cent.

26. In 25 high-burden countries, 8.8 million children with suspected pneumonia received appropriate antibiotics through UNICEF-supported programmes. In Ghana, for example, UNICEF launched the Scaling Pneumonia Response Innovations project to strengthen the quality of pneumonia care by training health staff, planning and

implementing oxygen systems and increasing access to the antibiotic amoxicillin in its child-friendly dispersible tablet form.

27. In humanitarian contexts, 812.2 million people were reached through behavioural messages on disease prevention and access to health services, 22 million children aged 6 months to 15 years were vaccinated against measles, and more than 1.6 million people received insecticide-treated nets through UNICEF-supported programmes. The total number of recipients of insecticide-treated nets during the period 2016–2021, in both humanitarian and development contexts, was 9.5 million.



28. In 2021, UNICEF support helped countries to regain, and accelerate, pre-pandemic progress in nutrition. UNICEF reached nearly 336 million children with services to prevent stunting and other forms of malnutrition (a 38 per cent increase from 2020), and 67.4 million adolescents with services and support to prevent anaemia and other forms of malnutrition (a 91 per cent increase from 2020).

29. Amid pandemic-related service disruptions, UNICEF shifted to simplified, community-level approaches for the early detection and treatment of wasting, increasing the number of children reached with life-saving interventions throughout 2020 and 2021. In 2021, UNICEF helped 30 countries shift to these approaches; as a result, 154 million children were screened for severe wasting (up 9 per cent from 2020) and nearly 5.5 million children were treated (up 10 per cent), of whom 88.9 per cent recovered.

30. UNICEF surpassed its most important nutrition targets. From 2017 to 2021, the number of countries with a national strategy to prevent stunting increased from 41 to 66 (target: 60); the number of countries with programmes to improve children's diet diversity increased from 30 to 63 (target: 60); the number with programmes to improve maternal nutrition increased from 47 to 73 (target: 70); and the number of countries with programmes for childhood overweight prevention increased from 15 to 31 (target: 30). UNICEF led the global nutrition cluster and responded to 27 nutrition emergencies, reaching 5 million children with treatment for severe wasting in humanitarian settings.

31. The number of countries with a national ECD policy or action plan rose from 67 in 2018 to 99 in 2021, reflecting growing political commitment to ECD. In 2021, 13 countries had policies, laws or regulations to address two or more family-friendly

policies (parental leave, breastfeeding support, childcare and child benefits), up from 6 in 2020. In addition, 128 had government-owned multisectoral ECD programmes, up from 80 in 2018, and 61 of these had established costed action plans, nearly double the number in 2018, paving the way for sustainable scale-up. In 2021, nearly 1.6 million children under the age of 5 years across 76 countries participated in UNICEF-supported ECD and early learning programmes in humanitarian contexts. However, these children represent only 57 per cent of 2.8 million children who UNICEF aimed to reach. The demand for ECD and early learning interventions has rapidly outgrown existing capacities and resources, highlighting the need for more strategic elevation to achieve the benchmarks set out in the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. Notwithstanding the number of children reached, the Strategic Plan's approach to ECD was also aimed at supporting systems to advance in maturity so that children are provided with encouraging environments to develop to their fullest potential. From this perspective, the transformative changes witnessed from 2018 to 2021 are considered significant, as the number of countries institutionalizing ECD policies and multisectoral ECD programmes throughout the period consistently increased.

32. In 2021, global programme expenses in Goal Area 1 across 157 countries totalled \$2.53 billion, including \$1.39 billion for humanitarian action.

## **B. Goal Area 2: Every child learns**

33. The COVID-19 crisis brought education systems across the world to a halt, setting progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 further off track and threatening to reverse gains in ensuring education access and quality across the world. School closures lasted an average of 224 days, affecting more than 1.6 billion students at the pandemic's peak. While nearly every country offered remote learning opportunities, at least 463 million students globally remain cut off from education, mainly due to a lack of remote learning policies or lack of equipment. When remote learning was offered, the quality and reach varied greatly, only partially substituting for in-person learning.

34. Evidence shows that the resulting learning losses are substantial, disproportionately affecting the most marginalized children and youth and exacerbating the global learning crisis even more than previously feared. In low- and middle-income countries, rates of learning poverty (the proportion of children unable to read and understand a simple text by 10 years of age), already above 50 per cent pre-pandemic, may reach 70 per cent. Meanwhile, up to 80 per cent of children on the move are not achieving expected literacy proficiency levels.

35. School closures caused more than interruptions in education. Nearly 370 million children in 150 countries missed out on school meals.<sup>14</sup> Nine million more children will be at risk of child labour by the end of 2022.<sup>15</sup> This generation of school-age children risks losing \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings as a result of school closures,<sup>16</sup> the equivalent of 14 per cent of today's global gross domestic product.<sup>17</sup>

36. In 2021, UNICEF worked with partners to mitigate the pandemic's impacts by providing distance learning to children, including by scaling up digital learning solutions; coordinating with the health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

<sup>14</sup> João Pedro Azevedo and others, "Learning poverty updates and revisions".

<sup>15</sup> International Labour Organization and UNICEF, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward* (New York, 2021).

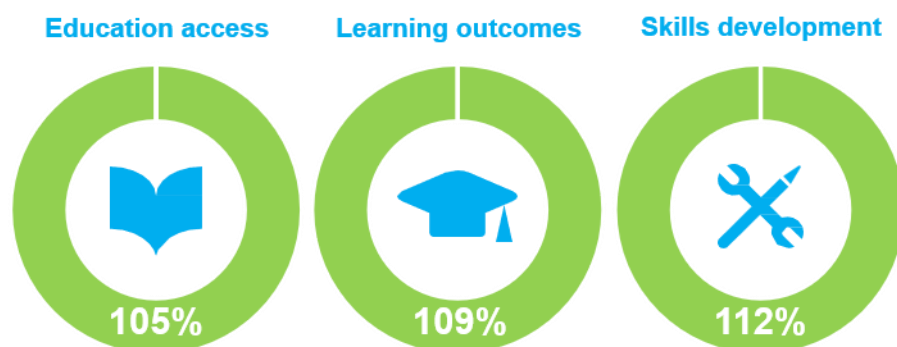
<sup>16</sup> Present value.

<sup>17</sup> Artur Borowski and others, "Missing more than a classroom: the impact of school closures on children's nutrition", Innocenti Working Paper (Florence, Italy, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 2021).



sectors; providing education professionals with learning opportunities, support and guidance on mental health and psychosocial well-being; strengthening the resilience of education systems; and protecting education financing. Mission: Recovering Education 2021, a new partnership with the World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), focused on a safe return to schools for all learners; mitigating learning losses; ensuring access to holistic services at school; supporting teachers; and expanding digital learning. Giga, an initiative launched in 2019 by UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union, has connected more than 3,000 schools to the Internet.

37. Looking ahead, UNICEF is advocating to urgently address learning losses and reach the most marginalized children, including by protecting education financing with equitable allocations. The organization will use the Transforming Education Summit – called for by the Secretary-General as part of the follow-up to the *Our Common Agenda* report, and planned for September 2022 alongside the seventy-seventh General Assembly – to call on Governments and education actors to address the learning crisis.



#### Progress rate by result area

● ≥ 90%   
 ● = 60–89%   
 ● ≤ 59%

38. At the output level, progress rates for all three result areas under Goal Area 2 were above 90 per cent in 2021. Progress was slowest for the outcome target regarding effective education systems for learning outcomes in result area 2.

39. In 2021, UNICEF supported 48.6 million out-of-school children (50 per cent girls) to access education, bringing the total to 149 million since 2016. Among them were 6.4 million children on the move (48 per cent girls) and 31.7 million children in humanitarian settings. Forty-two million children (18.1 million in humanitarian settings) received learning materials, bringing the total since 2016 to 137 million children, while 85,586 school management committees or similar bodies received training. Forty-five per cent of supported countries had gender-responsive teaching and learning systems.

40. UNICEF-supported skills development programmes benefited 33 million children in 91 countries, of whom half were girls and 1.7 million were in humanitarian settings. Twenty-eight per cent of UNICEF-supported countries had systems institutionalizing gender-equitable skills for learning, personal empowerment, active citizenship and/or employability.



**48.6 million out-of-school children** participated in early learning, primary or secondary education



**More than 42 million children** were provided with individual education/early learning materials



**33.3 million children** participated in skills development programmes for learning, personal empowerment, active citizenship and/or employability

41. Out of 62 million children targeted in the Humanitarian Action for Children appeal in 2021, 31.7 million children (50 per cent girls) were reached with early learning, primary or secondary education. For example, in Mali, UNICEF provided access to education for 209,643 children (including 104,522 girls) in conflict-affected areas through formal and non-formal education interventions, while 810 teachers were trained on psychosocial support, basic pedagogy and classroom management in conflict and disaster risk reduction, assisting 47,384 students (including 24,434 girls).

42. UNICEF continues to negotiate with parties to conflict and armed groups to protect education facilities from attacks and encourage the endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration.

43. In 2021, global programme expenses in Goal Area 2 across 147 countries totalled \$1.19 billion, including \$683 million for humanitarian action.

### C. Goal Area 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

44. Decades-long progress in children's protection has resulted in increases in birth registration and reductions in child marriage and female genital mutilation, while child labour rates have remained at 9.6 per cent of children aged 5 to 17 years since 2016. However, current projections indicate that impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic may erode the gains and jeopardize progress towards protection-related Sustainable Development Goals.

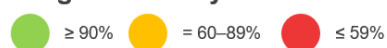
45. UNICEF is making a strategic shift towards prevention of child protection violations in both development and humanitarian contexts. Looking ahead, UNICEF affirms the need to: strengthen protection systems, including the social service workforce; invest further in access to justice and jointly address violence against women and violence against children; deepen intersectoral collaboration; increase the focus on social and behavioural change and gender-transformative programming; ensure the participation of children as agents of change, particularly in administrative and judicial processes that concern them; and prioritize the inclusion of children with disabilities and children on the move into child protection systems.

46. At the output level in 2021, progress rates exceeded 100 per cent for all three result areas under Goal Area 3. Progress was slowest in relation to output targets for quality assurance systems for social service work and protective services for children

on the move. Globally, the bottleneck to establishing quality assurance systems for social service work has been putting in place systems of licensing or accreditation, as the pandemic led countries to focus on social service continuity rather than making longer-term investments in quality.



#### Progress rate by result area



47. The largest ever release of children from detention was a major result in 2021. Since the beginning of the pandemic, more than 45,000 children across 84 countries have been released. In 2021, child-friendly justice services reached 384,000 children in 81 countries, or nearly half of all children in contact with justice and administrative bodies – up from 210,000 in 48 countries in 2017 and exceeding the 2021 target by more than 17 percentage points.

48. Across 129 countries, UNICEF reached 4.4 million children who had experienced violence (approximately 53 per cent girls, 47 per cent boys) with health, social work, justice and law enforcement services, 80 per cent more than in 2017. Nearly 45,000 children with disabilities across 64 countries received such services, up from 10,000 in 10 countries in 2017.

49. Regional alliances, particularly with the African Union, and the traction gained by the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to End Child Marriage resulted in 7.6 million adolescent girls across 47 countries receiving prevention and care interventions, compared with 2.1 million across 23 countries in 2017. In 2021, this included more than 11,000 adolescent girls with disabilities across 20 countries, a tenfold increase from 2017.

50. Improved interoperability with other sectors, especially health; increased decentralization of services; and investments in digitization have been game-changers, even during the pandemic, in strengthening birth registration, civil registration and vital statistics. There has been exponential growth compared with 2017 in UNICEF-supported notification (up 134 per cent), registration (up 90 per cent) and certification services (up 149 per cent). Forty-seven countries have in place free and universal birth registration services within the civil registration system, up from 14 in 2017.



**12 million children, adolescents and caregivers** in humanitarian situations were provided with community-based mental health and psychosocial support



**7.6 million adolescent girls** received prevention and care interventions to address child marriage through UNICEF-supported programmes



**37.9 million children** had their births registered in 63 countries through UNICEF-supported programmes

51. With continued UNICEF support, community-based mental health and psychosocial support programmes, including targeted awareness campaigns, reached more than 8.4 million children and adolescents in 111 countries (up 170 per cent from 2017, in 54 additional countries), as well as nearly 3.6 million parents and caregivers in 97 countries. UNICEF support to adolescents aged 10 to 14 years increased 62 per cent since 2020, while support to children with disabilities grew more than fivefold since 2017.

52. In 2021, UNICEF provided protective services to nearly 2.3 million children on the move in 74 countries, a 140 per cent increase compared with 2017. More than 179,000 unaccompanied and separated children received family tracing and reunification services and alternative care across 67 countries. For children separated from their families while fleeing Afghanistan, UNICEF led inter-agency, cross-border coordination across four regions and provided technical guidance to Governments to trace and reunify families or recommend safe alternatives pending reunification.

53. In line with Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), UNICEF monitored grave violations against children in 21 situations included in the Secretary-General's annual report on armed conflict. In 19 countries, UNICEF provided protection and reintegration support for 13,000 children who exited armed forces or groups. In 21 countries where landmines and explosive remnants of war threaten children and families, 5.2 million children received survivor assistance and relevant prevention messages to avoid injury.

54. UNICEF continued its scale-up of systems and programmes to protect communities from sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian and development actors, resulting in 117 country offices engaged in prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse system establishment, and 53 with such systems in place in 2021, having developed country action plans, rolled out the United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, strengthened referral pathways and implemented capacity-building for partners. Across 93 countries, 61 million children and adults now have access to safe and accessible sexual exploitation and abuse reporting channels, a nearly tenfold increase from 2017.

55. In 2021, global programme expenses in Goal Area 3 across 151 countries totalled \$773 million, including \$422 million for humanitarian action.

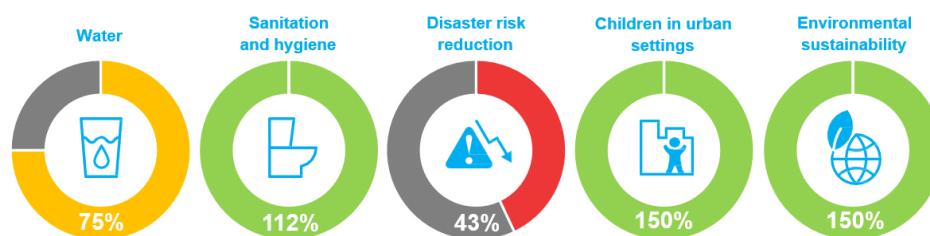
#### **D. Goal Area 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment**

56. Despite significant results from UNICEF WASH programmes, the world will struggle to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6, leaving the rights of children and families to safe water and sanitation unfulfilled. As of 2021, 3.6 billion people

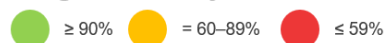
still lack access to safe sanitation, one quarter do not have safely managed water services, and one third do not have a hand-washing facility with soap in their homes. The world is on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goal target of eliminating open defecation, but rates are still high, and even increasing, in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, parts of South Asia, and Oceania.<sup>18</sup>

57. In 2021, UNICEF sharpened its focus on strengthening national WASH systems, leveraged its sector leadership role to broaden collaboration for WASH, and supported national and local Governments on policies dealing with WASH, climate, disaster risk reduction and child-responsive planning and budgeting. Looking ahead, UNICEF is increasing emphasis on WASH in institutions such as schools and health facilities, making WASH systems climate-resilient, addressing water security, and expanding child-sensitive programming to address climate change, environmental degradation and disaster risks. Meanwhile, ongoing emergencies around the world – including the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ukraine – make clear the continued need for UNICEF support for emergency WASH services.

58. Despite continuing challenges as a result of the pandemic, climate change and economic crises, UNICEF met or exceeded most Goal Area 4 targets. At the output level, progress rates were above 90 per cent in three out of five result areas under Goal Area 4. Progress was slowest for the output target regarding child-sensitive national or local risk management plans in the result area on disaster risk reduction. In the area of water, UNICEF surpassed the ambitious target of reaching 60 million people over four years, but the pace of progress was slow in implementing community-level water safety plans, due to changing strategic priorities in programme countries.



#### Progress rate by result area



59. Throughout the period 2018–2021, UNICEF reached 69.9 million people with access to safe drinking water and 59.6 million with basic sanitation, against a target of 60 million each (figure I). A growing number of UNICEF-supported WASH systems are climate-resilient, and in 2021 UNICEF engaged with government partners in 87 countries on climate-resilient WASH programming. Emergency support reached an annual average of 38.8 million water beneficiaries and 9.5 million sanitation beneficiaries, more than 40 per cent more than in any other period since systematic tracking started in 2007.

60. In 2021, 106 countries implemented national community-based hand-washing behaviour change programmes with UNICEF support, exceeding the target of 78. Through UNICEF humanitarian relief programmes, 33.3 million people gained or regained access to water services for drinking and hygiene, and 8.4 million to

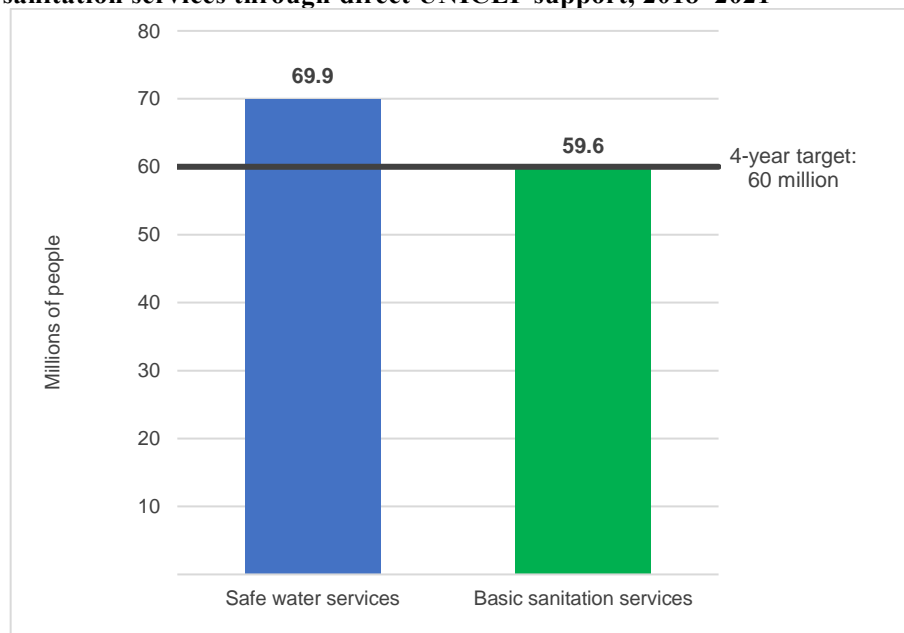
<sup>18</sup> World Health Organization/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, “Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000–2020: five years into the SDGs” (Geneva, WHO and UNICEF, 2021).

sanitation services. UNICEF emergency menstrual hygiene services reached more than 1.3 million girls and women.



61. The largest relief operations, including in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Yemen, responded to crises fuelled by conflict and climate shocks, including drought and storm events, and exacerbated by COVID-19. In Ethiopia, UNICEF provided safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene to the most affected communities, including displaced and host communities, reaching about 4.9 million people with access to safe water supply (exceeding the target of 2.2 million) and 500,000 with access to basic sanitation facilities (82 per cent of the 610,000 targeted), while also delivering risk communication messages to more than 3.1 million people.

Figure I  
**Number of additional people with access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation services through direct UNICEF support, 2018–2021**



62. In 2021, global programme expenses in Goal Area 4 across 122 countries totalled \$1.11 billion, including \$758 million for humanitarian action.

**E. Goal Area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life**

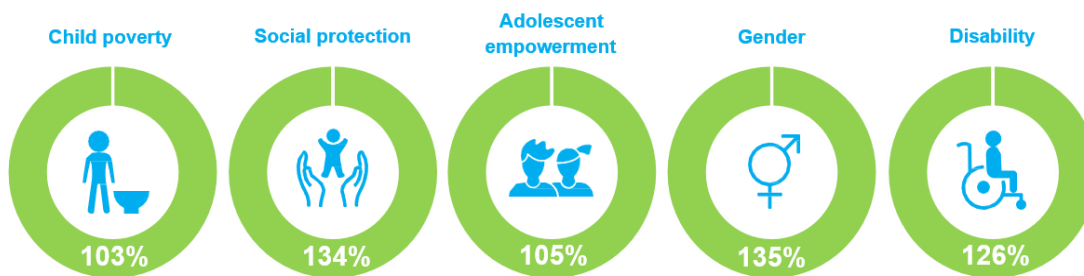
63. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed an estimated 100 million additional children into multidimensional poverty, bringing the number of children suffering deprivation of their rights and development in at least one area – such as education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation or water – to more than 1 billion worldwide. The crisis

significantly increased the vulnerability of women and girls, putting an additional 10 million girls at risk of child marriage, on top of pre-pandemic projections of 100 million more child brides by 2030. It exacerbated barriers facing the world's 240 million children with disabilities, who account for 1 in 10 children.

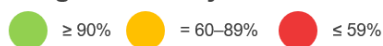
64. In 2021, UNICEF partnered with the World Bank, Save the Children and the Global Coalition on Child Poverty, among others, to make visible the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on child poverty, and has supported socioeconomic impact assessments in 86 countries since 2020. UNICEF played a leading role in the social protection and public finance response to COVID-19, working closely with other United Nations agencies and international financial institutions.

65. UNICEF expanded its work on child poverty, public finance, social protection, gender, disability and adolescent empowerment across the 2018–2021 period. Looking ahead, the organization is sharpening the focus of this Goal Area on reducing child poverty; supporting countries to leverage public finance towards an inclusive recovery; and expanding access to social protection, including in humanitarian crises and fragile contexts. Strengthening the capacities of social protection systems to respond to shocks will be a priority, as will inclusive, gender-transformative programming that links social protection with other services that are critical to addressing the multiple dimensions of deprivation.

66. At the output level, progress rates in 2021 were above 90 per cent for all five result areas under Goal Area 5. UNICEF met all of its output targets in this Goal Area, except for those regarding nationally owned measurement and reporting on monetary poverty among children and reaching children with disabilities with emergency kits.



#### Progress rate by result area



67. In 2021, UNICEF supported countries in analysing and monitoring child poverty, and prioritizing it in national strategies. Using nationally owned measurement and routine reporting systems, 71 countries reported on multidimensional child poverty, and 86 countries on monetary child poverty. UNICEF supported 78 countries in building capacity on child poverty measurement, and 33 countries reported that measurement, analysis or advocacy led to policies and programmes that reduced child poverty.

68. UNICEF-supported cash transfer programmes reached nearly 133 million children in 95 countries, including 19 million benefiting from humanitarian cash assistance to 9.4 million households. Gender-transformative and disability-inclusive social protection programmes were significantly scaled up. Social protection work in 100 countries had intentional gender objectives, up from 29 in 2019. UNICEF supported Governments in 53 countries to make social protection systems inclusive of children with disabilities, up from 26 in 2019, and in 22 countries, to make them inclusive of children on the move.



**105 countries** had nationally owned measurement and reporting on child poverty



**Nearly 133 million children** and young people were reached by UNICEF-supported cash transfer programmes



**19.6 million adolescents** participated in or led civic engagement initiatives through UNICEF-supported programmes



**7.6 million adolescent girls** received prevention and care interventions through UNICEF programming on child marriage, including through life skills initiatives



**More than 4.8 million children** with disabilities were reached with programmes and services

69. Country-level work on public finance increased in 2021, with 65 countries generating evidence and strengthening national social sector budgets, up from 55 in 2020. In 74 countries, up from 28 in 2020, UNICEF provided evidence and technical support on spending equity, triggering government action to improve equity across public spending in 37 countries.

70. In 2021, 19.6 million adolescents (54 per cent girls) participated in civic engagement across 125 countries, including 5.7 million adolescents engaged in humanitarian action and nearly 700,000 in climate change advocacy. This result, nearly four times the target, demonstrates increased UNICEF commitment and investment in adolescent engagement. UNICEF consulted with adolescents in programming processes in nearly all countries (92 per cent), although only 22 per cent reported consulting with marginalized adolescents, against a 60 per cent target.

71. In 2021, UNICEF reached more than 4.8 million children with disabilities across 148 countries through disability-inclusive programming, including in humanitarian situations, more than double the 2.2 million reached in 2020. UNICEF provided safe water to more than 450,000 persons with disabilities in the Syrian Arab Republic, while inclusive menstrual health and hygiene interventions reached 8,700 girls and women with disabilities in Myanmar. More than 1 million children with disabilities were reached with social protection services, including 13,000 from cash transfers in Mozambique.

72. In 2021, global programme expenses in Goal Area 5 across 157 countries totalled \$727 million, including \$352 million for humanitarian action.

## F. Humanitarian action

73. Amid the unprecedented global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, 235 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2021 – the highest number in decades, and a figure projected to rise to 274 million in 2022, not least due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Prolonged and violent conflicts remained the key drivers of humanitarian needs. In 2021, these included escalating crises in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Myanmar, and increased humanitarian needs in the central Sahel, Cabo Delgado (Mozambique), South Sudan, the Sudan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Yemen.

74. An estimated 35 million (42 per cent) of the 82.4 million forcibly displaced people as of mid-2021 were children under the age of 18 years, many unaccompanied or separated from their families. Disease outbreaks continued increasing, while climate change and natural disasters caused an increasing number of extreme weather events and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, particularly in countries beset by violence.



75. UNICEF responded to 483 new and ongoing humanitarian crises in 153 countries in 2021, compared with 455 in 153 countries in 2020. These included five<sup>19</sup> Level 3 and seven<sup>20</sup> Level 2 emergencies, and comprised 104 natural disasters, 84 sociopolitical crises, 226 health emergencies (including COVID-19 pandemic responses), 27 nutrition crises and 42 other situations. UNICEF enables activities in an increasing number of violent conflict and complex high-threat environments through a comprehensive security risk management process consistent with both the United Nations Security Management System and the security benchmarks outlined in the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action.

76. In 2021, UNICEF took steps to make its humanitarian action more predictable, efficient and equitable, applying lessons learned from major evaluations and the review of UNICEF humanitarian response. These changes are already supported by the revised Core Commitments for Children and the new emergency procedures. Together with the implementation of the recommendations in the report “Strengthening UNICEF’s humanitarian action, The Humanitarian Review: findings and recommendations”, these initiatives will make UNICEF more accountable to the people it serves, and deliver a stronger response for children.

77. Key humanitarian results achieved in 2021 are presented within the respective Goal Areas in this report and in the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action.

## G. Gender

78. UNICEF ended 2021, the final year of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021, on an overall positive trajectory in its progress towards gender equality, both programmatically and institutionally. Marked advances in programme areas including menstrual health, girls’ learning, preventing child marriage, gender-responsive social protection, WASH and maternal health illustrate the importance of deliberate gender results, with clear indicators and targets, and of gender-targeted resourcing. Resourcing flexibility and expanded partnerships, particularly with the private sector, have catalysed innovative solutions, as demonstrated by results relating to gender socialization and girls’ skills and agency.

79. Other priorities, such as gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and girls’ secondary education, remain plagued by deep-rooted and persistent barriers to progress, and in some cases are underresourced by partners. These areas have been subject to alarming risks of setbacks owing to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic – as evidenced in rising domestic violence rates, increased school dropout among adolescent girls even after school reopenings, and an increased number of girls at risk of child marriage. Keeping attention on the disproportionate impacts on girls and women will remain paramount, to ensure necessary investment to address pre-COVID-19 inequalities that have been exacerbated and correct reversals in gender equality gains, especially in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

80. UNICEF made significant advances in becoming a more gender-responsive organization and workplace. Gender Action Plan institutional standard benchmarks in areas, including use of gender analysis in country programme design and monitoring, show that since 2018, UNICEF country offices have been increasingly addressing underlying barriers to gender equality. The 2020 revision of the Core Commitments

<sup>19</sup> The protracted emergencies in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, the global COVID-19 pandemic, the northern Ethiopia crisis, and Afghanistan.

<sup>20</sup> The complex humanitarian situations in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger), and in Cabo Delgado (Mozambique), internal displacement and health epidemics in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the escalation of violence in Myanmar, the effects of climate change and worsening drought in southern Madagascar, and the earthquake in Haiti.

for Children in Humanitarian Action also integrated clear gender equality standards and benchmarks to ensure more deliberate gender integration throughout UNICEF humanitarian action.

81. Looking forward, the UNICEF Gender Policy, 2021–2030 and the Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025, finalized in 2021 and aligned with the new Strategic Plan, embrace a more ambitious role for UNICEF as a global gender champion, and articulate a transformative, values-based approach to gender equality as fundamental to child rights.

### **III. Strengthening organizational performance**

#### **A. United Nations reform**

82. In 2021, as events in the second year of the global pandemic reinforced the urgent need for a reinvigorated multilateralism to address the interconnected challenges facing the world, UNICEF made collaboration with other United Nations entities a cornerstone of all of its work. The organization remained committed to advancing the reform of the United Nations development system, to enhance its ability to deliver effective and coherent support to countries, as required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

83. UNICEF engaged in the United Nations development system's integrated, multidimensional response to the socioeconomic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other strategic partnerships with United Nations entities focused on areas with high potential to accelerate results and impact for children at a large scale – including the Blueprint for Joint Action with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to accelerate the inclusion of refugee children and their families in national systems, and the UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, which entered its fourth phase in 2021. An increasing proportion of UNICEF country offices delivered programmes jointly with other United Nations entities, at 87 per cent against a target of 74 per cent for 2021. Inter-agency pooled funds, as a proportion of total UNICEF non-core resources, increased for development interventions, while slightly declining for humanitarian interventions.

84. UNICEF worked with other United Nations entities, including the United Nations Development Coordination Office, the United Nations Development Programme, UNFPA and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), to improve common country analyses and ensure that country programme documents derived directly from the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. In accordance with the agreed funding arrangements for the resident coordinator system, UNICEF transferred \$6.4 million in coordination levy payments and \$8.3 million in United Nations Sustainable Development Group cost-sharing to the United Nations Secretariat in 2021.

85. UNICEF continued its leading role in the operational aspects of United Nations reform to achieve further efficiencies – as a critical facilitator of embedding children's rights in national development agendas. UNICEF co-chaired the Business Innovations Group of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and the task team on efficiency impact reporting, and chaired the task team on common premises through the end of September 2021. UNICEF achieved 53 per cent common premises in 2021, up from a baseline of 39 per cent in 2018, and established mutual recognition champions.

86. UNICEF supports the implementation of the Business Operations Strategy to reduce administrative overhead costs and free up more funds for programmes. The strategy was implemented across 127 UNICEF offices, reaching the 2021 target, with an estimated cost avoidance of \$72 million for a five-year period.

87. UNICEF reflected the mandates of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system in its Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. The results framework integrated indicators on climate action and environmental sustainability; the humanitarian-development nexus; disability inclusion; gender equality and prevention of violence and discrimination; business operations and efficiencies; and funding. Together with United Nations partners, UNICEF identified 11 common indicators and a range of additional complementary indicators demonstrating where UNICEF anticipated achieving results in synergy with other United Nations entities.

## **B. Strategies**

88. UNICEF engaged with United Nations human rights mechanisms on child rights, including with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the Universal Periodic Review. The organization amplified child rights advocacy in intergovernmental forums such as the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly Third Committee, and in other United Nations-wide forums.

89. In line with the United Nations system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation, UNICEF strengthened partnerships with United Nations agencies – including UNESCO, UNFPA, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization (WHO)/Pan American Health Organization and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation – focusing on shared Sustainable Development Goals in education, nutrition and health, and COVID-19 response and recovery. Demand-driven South-South and triangular cooperation with Africa and least-developed countries was strengthened, including through collaboration with the African Union Development Agency.

90. Global support for UNICEF has never been stronger. The organization grew its supporter base from 79.7 million in 2018 to 160.2 million in 2021, comprising 114.9 million social media followers, 18.8 million U-Reporters, 12.6 million volunteers (up from 1 million in 2018), 9.3 million active donors and 4.6 million children engaged through child rights education initiatives with National Committees. Global advocacy on vaccines, education, mental health, water, climate, and nutrition and child protection in humanitarian situations led to positive policy changes and actions in 92 per cent of intended countries.

91. UNICEF revenue saw a good year in 2021, with the period 2018–2021 showing an overall increase of 32 per cent compared with 2014–2017. Challenges persisted in funding humanitarian appeals – in a context of record humanitarian needs – and in raising regular resources and other flexible funding that, as the COVID-19 response highlighted, are key to the organization’s ability to respond quickly, innovate, adapt to children’s evolving needs, and carry out foundational work, in areas including data and research, gender and digital transformation.

92. In 2021, UNICEF procured \$7.18 billion in supplies and services from nearly 11,150 suppliers. From 2018 to 2021, UNICEF exceeded its projected target of \$670 million in savings by \$335.5 million through strategic procurement and engagement, achieving savings of \$117.9 million in 2021 alone. As its procurement and logistics lead, UNICEF collaborated with the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access

(COVAX) Facility to deliver 958 million COVID-19 vaccines to 144 countries. With UNICEF support, 10 advance purchase commitments were established between manufacturers and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. UNICEF operationalized the World Economic Forum Supply Chain & Transport Industry Charter and the UNICEF Humanitarian Airfreight Initiative, and partnered with 16 air and sea carriers to ensure priority management of COVID-19 supplies.

93. To turn vaccines into vaccinations, UNICEF expanded its supplier base to meet the increasing demand for syringes and delivered 849.5 million syringes to 92 countries. UNICEF procured and delivered 800 ultra-cold chain units that can store 200 million messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) vaccines requiring -80°C refrigeration to more than 70 countries. In January 2022, WHO, UNICEF and Gavi jointly established the COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery Partnership, an inter-agency initiative building on existing resources globally, regionally and in-country to better assess country needs and help accelerate vaccination coverage in countries that face the biggest challenges to reaching their targets.

94. As demand and funding needs remained high for quality-assured personal protection equipment, UNICEF shipped more than 434 million such items to 115 countries to protect front-line workers and ensure health service continuity. Negotiations with suppliers achieved 40 per cent price reductions for COVID-19 diagnostics, and more than 7 million rapid diagnostic tests were shipped worldwide. Therapeutics, including 17.4 million Dexamethasone tablets and ampoules, were deployed to 37 countries, and 21,034 oxygen concentrators were shipped to respond to the oxygen crisis, especially in Southeast Asia.

95. This work to leverage partnerships and resources for children was instrumental in facilitating equitable and accelerated access to COVID-19 supplies and services in 2021. UNICEF mobilized private sector donor commitments of just over \$1 billion towards the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) Humanitarian Action for Children appeal, country-level appeals and the ACT-A Supplies Financing Facility, receiving \$279 million net revenue from more than 500 partnerships and contributions by the end of 2021. UNICEF and the World Bank signed 56 agreements in 35 countries (27 in Africa) for the procurement and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics, therapeutics and personal protection equipment, amounting to an additional \$1.074 billion in programme and supply agreements for the procurement and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics.

96. In 2021, UNICEF took steps to become a more data-driven, evidence-based agency in which learning, accountability and ongoing improvement are a vital part of organizational culture and drive performance. The organization harnessed evaluation to inform its decision-making processes and to focus evaluative attention on the COVID-19 response, generating lessons to improve preparedness for future emergencies. UNICEF evaluations relied on remote data collection and other alternative modalities, as necessary adaptations to the challenges of COVID-19 and, going forward, as promising complements to traditional approaches.

97. In 2021, UNICEF launched two data initiatives to enhance the visibility and inclusion of children with disabilities. The global report, *Seen*, counted, included: using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities, presented the first ever global and regional estimates of the number of children with disabilities, plus data on more than 60 indicators of child well-being. UNICEF established the Centre of Excellence on Data for Children with Disabilities to promote evidence generation for use in decision-making and advocacy, by strengthening data availability and quality. Meanwhile, UNICEF continued to be the world leader in the provision of data on the situation of children around the world – with [data.unicef.org](https://data.unicef.org)

now the world's leading source of data on children and used by more than 3 million people globally.

98. UNICEF also strengthened the data function by combining different data streams for greater, more detailed, or swifter insights. Doubling down on the unique strength of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey programme, UNICEF triangulated household survey data with increasingly robust administrative data, “big data” from social and new media streams, mobile phone data records, artificial intelligence analysis of satellite and drone images, and digitized community data collection. The MICS Plus phone survey provided rapid (monthly) data on fully representative samples of the populations of Georgia and Mongolia. With its new Strategic Plan, UNICEF will further strengthen data governance and combination of data streams for maximum impact for children.

### **C. Management performance**

99. UNICEF management performance was strong across the four years of the Strategic Plan, even as the organization navigated the effects of the pandemic and other unforeseen challenges. Overall performance across the five enablers was positive, except for the new enabler on “a stronger value-based culture”, established during the midterm review in 2020, with targets set at the maximum level of ambition, reflecting the organizational commitment to the highest standards in this area. Although UNICEF has made significant progress on organizational culture since 2018, the organization needs to continue strengthening the timeliness of investigations and the overall approach to measuring performance in this important area.

100. In 2021, UNICEF made good progress in finding efficiencies across processes and programming, including in its humanitarian work, and further streamlined work in country and regional offices. The organization continued work to ensure that all personnel are treated with respect, in an environment that motivates everyone to contribute and develop their talents, skills and innovative thinking.

101. UNICEF made important strides in 2020 and 2021 with respect to data and monitoring on organizational culture, including diversity, equity and inclusion. The first biannual Pulse Check survey on workplace culture provided real-time data on dimensions including psychological safety and trust, empowerment, trust in leadership and work-life harmony. In order to foster greater accountability on workplace culture, the Pulse Check data are integrated into offices' performance scorecards as well as the performance evaluations of heads of office. UNICEF closely monitors and analyses the data, and holds follow-up conversations with offices to help improve workplace culture.

102. In 2021, the total staff count was 15,905, up about 15 per cent from 13,792 in 2017, with 70.5 per cent national staff for four years in a row. Within the authority given to the Executive Director to establish senior-level positions on an as-needed basis, an additional seven were approved in 2021, and funded from the approved institutional budget envelope. UNICEF strengthened human resources management, implementing new initiatives on staff well-being, learning and career development. As COVID-19 affected the UNICEF workforce, increased teleworking continued as part of the policy on flexible work arrangements in many duty stations.

103. UNICEF made significant progress in gender parity in the 2018–2021 period, maintaining overall gender parity in the international professional staff category, and working to address remaining gender imbalances in some offices and functional areas. In the general service staff category, certain positions, mainly in the functional area of transportation (notably, drivers), remained predominantly staffed by men. To

recruit more women into such positions, UNICEF will conduct proactive talent outreach and workplace inclusion programmes in 2022.

104. More than half of country offices devised targeted programmes to attract underrepresented groups. New programmes were introduced to provide tailored career development support for youth and staff with disabilities. Still, only 24 per cent of offices reported offering reasonable accommodation in the hiring process. UNICEF will deepen its efforts in recruitment of people with disabilities.

105. UNICEF used digital technologies to secure its business continuity and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition to a new Digital Core in Valencia, Spain, was implemented, serving to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness, strengthen global cloud infrastructure and video conferencing, and improve information security. A key component of the new location is the close relationship with the United Nations Global Service Centre, which hosts the United Nations base, and with whom a memorandum of understanding and service-level agreement were signed.

#### **IV. Revenue, expenses and resource mobilization<sup>21</sup>**

106. Despite the global economic downturn and uncertainty created by COVID-19, 2021 was a record-breaking year for UNICEF, with total revenue of \$8.57 billion, an increase of 14 per cent from 2020.

107. In 2021, total public sector revenue (from Governments, intergovernmental organizations and inter-organizational arrangements) increased by \$520 million (up 9 per cent from 2020). Private sector revenue (from National Committees, individual donors, non-governmental organizations and foundations) increased by 29 per cent, to \$2.08 billion.

108. Regular resources revenue from the public sector increased to \$762 million in 2021 (from \$412 million in 2020), and regular resources from the private sector increased to \$819 million (from \$773 million in 2020). The ratio of regular resources to total revenue increased by 3 per cent from 2020 (from 19 per cent to 22 per cent). In 2021, 116 Governments contributed to UNICEF resources. The largest contributors in 2021 were Sweden, the United States of America, Germany, Belgium and Norway.

109. Revenue for humanitarian assistance (other resources (emergency)), at \$3.05 billion in 2021, was 30 per cent higher than in 2020. The humanitarian funding requirement increased to \$7.17 billion in 2021, from \$6.32 billion in 2020, representing the largest-ever funding request for humanitarian action by UNICEF. Despite escalating needs, by the end of December 2021, UNICEF had only received about 41 per cent of this in humanitarian donor contributions (\$2.96 billion).

110. Total humanitarian expenses in 2021 amounted to \$3.60 billion (57 per cent of the total 2021 expense); \$3.41 billion of this amount was in other resources. Of the 30 country offices with the largest overall expenses, about 62 per cent of country-level expenses were classified as humanitarian. These offices comprised 74 per cent of total country-level expenses, both humanitarian and non-humanitarian; 27 of them had Humanitarian Action for Children appeals in 2021.

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<sup>21</sup> Financial information is unaudited.

Table 1  
**Revenue source and type, 2020 and 2021**

(Millions of United States dollars)

<i>Source of revenue</i>	<i>2020 actual</i>	<i>2021 actual</i>	<i>2021 plan<sup>a</sup></i>
<b>Regular resources</b>			
Government and intergovernmental agencies <sup>b,c</sup>	412	762	536
Private sector <sup>c</sup>	773	819	756
Other revenue <sup>d</sup>	242	275	126
<b>Total – regular resources</b>	<b>1 427</b>	<b>1 855</b>	<b>1 418</b>
<b>Other resources (regular)</b>			
Government and intergovernmental agencies	2 740	2 476	2 315
Private sector	546	719	629
Inter-organizational arrangements	477	465	200
<b>Subtotal – other resources (regular)</b>	<b>3 763</b>	<b>3 660</b>	<b>3 144</b>
<b>Other resources (emergency)</b>			
Government and intergovernmental agencies	1 776	2 219	1 528
Private sector	291	541	203
Inter-organizational arrangements	290	294	180
<b>Subtotal – other resources (emergency)</b>	<b>2 358</b>	<b>3 054</b>	<b>1 911</b>
<b>Total – other resources</b>	<b>6 121</b>	<b>6 714</b>	<b>5 055</b>
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>7 548</b>	<b>8 570</b>	<b>6 473</b>

*Note:* Due to rounding, the totals may differ slightly from the sum of the columns.

<sup>a</sup> According to financial estimates approved by the Executive Board in September 2021 (E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.6/Add.1).

The data in this column are presented on a modified cash basis.

<sup>b</sup> Gross regular resources from Governments include income taxes paid by UNICEF on behalf of the citizens of Governments that contribute to regular resources.

<sup>c</sup> 2020 actual and 2021 include contributions of \$53 million and \$65 million, respectively, for specific management activities.

<sup>d</sup> Other revenue includes income from interest, procurement services and other sources.

Table 2  
**Revenue source, 2020 and 2021**

(Millions of United States dollars)

<i>Source of revenue</i>	<i>2020 actual</i>	<i>2021 actual</i>	<i>2021 plan<sup>a</sup></i>
Government and intergovernmental agencies	4 929	5 457	4 379
Private sector	1 610	2 079	1 588
Inter-organizational arrangements	767	759	380
Other	242	275	126
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>7 548</b>	<b>8 570</b>	<b>6 473</b>

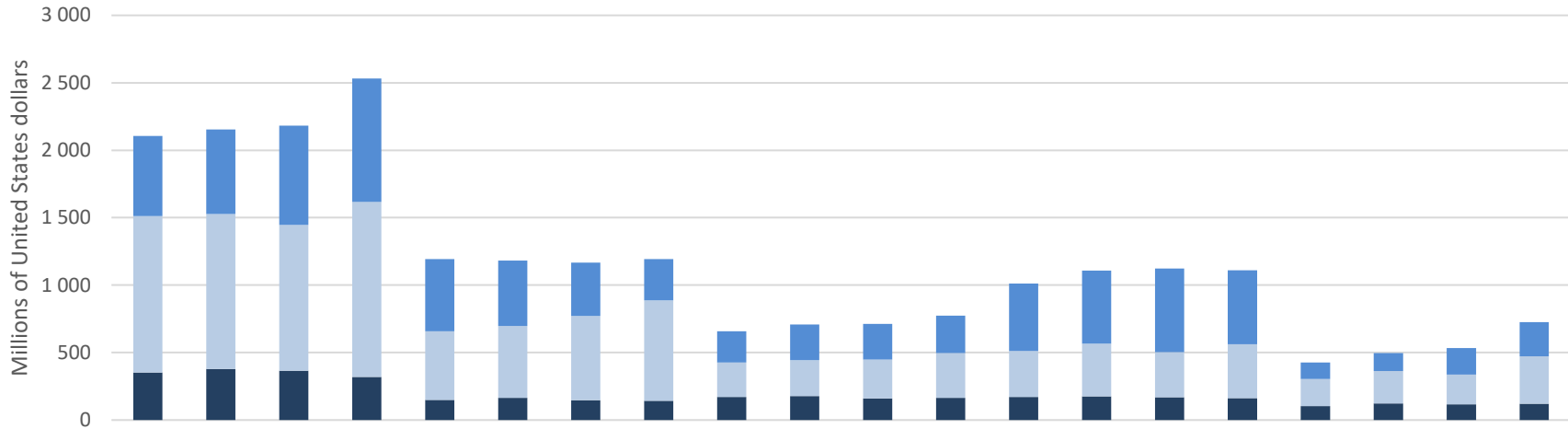
*Note:* Due to rounding, the totals may differ slightly from the sum of the columns.

<sup>a</sup> According to financial estimates approved by the Executive Board in September 2021 ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.6/Add.1](#)).

The data in this column are presented on a modified cash basis.



**Figure II**  
**Direct programme assistance by goal area and resource type, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021**



		<i>Every child survives and thrives</i>				<i>Every child learns</i>				<i>Every child is protected from violence and exploitation</i>				<i>Every child lives in a safe and clean environment</i>				<i>Every child has an equitable chance in life</i>				<i>Total (rounded)</i>			
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2018	2019	2020	2021	2018	2019	2020	2021	2018	2019	2020	2021	2018	2019	2020	2021	2018	2019	2020	2021
Regular resources		353	379	365	319	150	165	146	142	172	178	161	164	171	175	169	162	103	122	117	120	949	1020	958	907
Other resources (regular)		1160	1149	1081	1298	509	533	626	746	255	266	288	332	341	392	334	401	201	241	221	353	2466	2581	2549	3131
Other resources (emergency)		593	625	736	914	534	485	395	304	231	264	263	277	499	542	620	547	123	134	195	253	1980	2049	2208	2296
<b>Total</b>		2106	2153	2181	2531	1192	1183	1167	1192	658	708	712	773	1011	1109	1122	1111	427	497	533	727	5395	5650	5715	6334

111. In 2021, UNICEF made every effort to comply with the cost recovery policy and Executive Board decisions. In total, two waivers were granted, with a corresponding impact of approximately \$1.96 million.<sup>22</sup>

## V. Looking forward

112. Several key lessons emerged across the period of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, drawn from programming experience in humanitarian and development contexts, including during the COVID-19 response, and from reviews and evaluations of UNICEF work. UNICEF has already incorporated these lessons into the development of its Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. Notably, the pandemic reinforced the critical importance of investment in strengthening systems, and the need to integrate services so that every child and community can access essential services and support. In 2021, it became clear that UNICEF-supported investments in systems strengthening before the pandemic had made a critical difference in enabling countries to regain progress that had stalled due to COVID-19-related shocks, further reinforcing the criticality of flexible regular resources.

113. The pandemic yielded important lessons on preparedness – revealing serious shortfalls and spotlighting its many dimensions. Beyond the urgent need to strengthen health systems and enhance local, national and international capacities to prevent and respond to public health emergencies, the pandemic showed that preparedness equally requires putting in place capacities to address socioeconomic impacts – so that systems can continue delivering the full range of essential services children that depend on, and families receive support to both meet basic material needs and cope with the psychological toll of crisis.

114. UNICEF has increased its focus on strengthening shock-responsive social protection, to ensure that systems are ready to respond to rapidly escalating needs, working across sectors to make sure that schools, health clinics and other institutions are equipped to address public health threats as well as risks stemming from disasters, climate change and conflicts. The organization has also increased focus on scaling up digital and other alternative pathways for learning, health and social service delivery, and community engagement, so that these can continue even when crises restrict mobility or displace populations; and ensuring that humanitarian responses build local ownership and capacities, strengthening institutions and communities.

115. Work to enhance social cohesion – by addressing discrimination and enhancing accountability and participation, so that services and systems are equitable and responsive to children and their communities – is another key component, as is mental health and psychosocial support, to build the resilience of individuals and families. The new Strategic Plan identifies risk-informed programming across the humanitarian-development nexus as a key strategy, and mainstreams a focus on resilience across all UNICEF programming, to enhance the capabilities of individuals, families, communities and institutions to prepare for, prevent, respond to and recover from crises.

116. UNICEF will build on and scale successful programming adaptations and innovations that enabled continued service delivery and support to strengthen national systems amid the disruptions of the pandemic. These include such flexible, community-based approaches as simplified management of wasting, through which UNICEF was able to increase the numbers of children reached with treatment and care throughout the pandemic. They also include digital modalities, including information management platforms for child protection case management, such as

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<sup>22</sup> See section on Cost Recovery in the report for 2021 on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021.

Primero, and remote learning platforms, such as the Learning Passport – both of which saw significant scale-up in 2021.

117. To ensure sustainability when scaling innovations, UNICEF will draw on findings of the 2018 evaluation of innovation in UNICEF work, as well as lessons from experience with successful initiatives, such as the life and livelihood skills initiative UPSHIFT, the DHIS2 health information management system platform, and the Can't Wait to Learn programme that brings literacy and math instruction to out-of-school children. UNICEF has learned that it is critical for successful scaling to work closely with local institutions and secure national commitment and ownership, and to incrementally taper off financial input to enable counterparts to plan for financial sustainability.

118. The Humanitarian Review, the evaluation of the previous Strategic Plan and the experience of the COVID-19 response all highlighted the need for UNICEF to strengthen coordination, coherence and collaboration across humanitarian and development work, in line with its dual mandate. In response to these lessons, UNICEF has integrated humanitarian action throughout the pathways to change envisioned in the new Strategic Plan, embedding specific programme and operational commitments to implement the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. The pandemic has frequently heightened social divisions, discrimination and grievances across the world, highlighting the need to address these root causes of social unrest, instability and conflict. Conflicts and fragility, in turn, pose some of the most significant risks to the rights and well-being of children and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals – a lesson learned time and again, and reinforced in early 2022, as the rapid escalation of war in Ukraine brought destruction of schools, hospitals, homes and civilian lives, and triggered a massive movement of refugees.

119. Informed by unprecedented consultations with children and young people from across the globe during the development of the new Strategic Plan, responding to the sharp exacerbation of inequalities during the pandemic, and aligning with global movements for social justice, UNICEF is adopting a transformative, intersectional approach to inequality and discrimination, as required to address the underlying drivers of gender inequality, racism, homophobia, ableism and all forms of discrimination, and to transform institutions and norms, so that no child is left behind. Reaffirming that gender equality remains at the heart of all of its work, UNICEF is taking a gender-transformative approach across its programming, and acknowledges the vital need for consistent attention, investment and commitment to moving the needle forward for all children and adolescents regardless of gender identity. Building on its new evidence and guided by a new Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy, the organization is ensuring that children and caregivers with disabilities can access inclusive and barrier-free services and support at the community level, including through targeted measures such as provision of assistive devices and promotion of accessibility.

120. Responding to the midterm review and evaluation of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, which found that good progress in delivering its outputs was not always translating into proportional, sustainable outcome-level change for children, UNICEF's new Strategic Plan is oriented towards driving that change. Its strategic approach focuses on systemic changes that have the potential to address the multidimensional underlying causes of child rights violations in all settings, including humanitarian crises and fragile contexts. This approach is necessarily premised not on what UNICEF can do alone, but on mobilizing a broad coalition of partners to maximize collective impact.

121. Today, looking ahead means reckoning with a volatile present and an uncertain future – while remaining steadfast in our commitment to children. What is clear is the

need for collective action, now, to accelerate equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments in every country; to protect social spending and prioritize services and vital support for children and their families, without discrimination of any kind; to uphold the rights of children affected by conflicts; and to provide sustained support for strengthening inclusive, resilient national systems, and enhancing preparedness and capacities to cope with future shocks. Together with its partners, UNICEF is laying the foundation for the renewed global solidarity and transformative change that the world urgently needs to meet the challenges of COVID-19, conflicts and climate change – and, out of crisis, to build a society in which every child has opportunities to thrive and agency to shape their own future, in accordance with their rights.

## **VI. Draft decision**

### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the annual report for 2021 of the Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as the report on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021; the report on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system; the joint annex on the implementation of the common chapter of the strategic plans, 2018–2021 of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); and the data companion and scorecard;

2. *Decides* to transmit the above-mentioned reports to the Economic and Social Council, along with a summary of the comments and guidance of the Executive Board.

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