



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
11 May 2023

Original: English

**For information**

---

## United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

**Annual session 2023**

13–16 June 2023

Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*

### **Annual report on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025**

#### *Summary*

The UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025 specifies how UNICEF will accelerate progress on gender equality across the five Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, and within its institutional systems. The present document is the first annual report on the implementation of the Gender Action Plan and includes an update on the Plan's priorities, indicators and performance benchmarks.

---

\* E/ICEF/2023/9.

*Note:* The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.



## I. Overview

1. Escalating crises – from climate change to conflict and the effects of the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic – have exacerbated gender equality gaps, with devastating consequences. Millions of women and girls are experiencing heightened discrimination and violence, food and economic insecurity, barriers to education and jobs, and limited access to critical health and social services. For example, the number of acutely malnourished pregnant and parenting girls and women has jumped by 25 per cent since 2020 in the countries hardest hit by the global nutrition crisis.<sup>1</sup>

2. The rights of adolescent girls are especially at risk. Estimates suggest that more than 4.3 million girls are at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) in 2023 alone. Previously reported global reductions in the number of child marriages are stagnating. Girls continue to be twice as likely not to be engaged in any form of employment, education or training compared to their male peers, and their levels of digital access and literacy are particularly challenging.

3. In response, the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025 emphasizes an intentional programming shift that goes beyond responding to also changing the root causes of gender inequality for more transformative, lasting results. In 2022, progress was notable in quality maternal care, with improvements in perinatal care and skilled birth attendance, as well as nutrition counselling in pregnancy. There were advances in the number of out-of-school girls accessing education through UNICEF support, in provision of menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) services and in providing girls with the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. More countries engaged in promoting family-friendly policies and in parenting support to encourage positive discipline and gender-equal dynamics within families. Gender-sensitive social protection also continued to grow, with 115 UNICEF country offices implementing targeted interventions that tackle poverty and other issues affecting women and girls. Thirty-seven of these country offices have programmes that are gender-responsive or transformative, up from 22 in 2021. Millions more adolescent girls benefited from skills development and education-to-employment opportunities, and interventions related to ending child marriage. Institutionally, through continued investment in internal policies and systems, UNICEF met 88 per cent of the benchmarks of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. This includes marked progress made on gender parity targets that have previously been difficult to reach.

4. UNICEF, with its partners, will advance gender equality across all programmes, with a renewed emphasis on humanitarian action and on ending gender-based violence as fundamental, organization-wide priorities. UNICEF will also redouble efforts in areas that are trailing, paying special attention to adolescent girls. A newly developed adolescent girls' agenda articulates a bold organization-wide push to leapfrog girls' health, nutrition, protection, learning and economic outcomes. With girls' leadership, agency and voice at its heart, it sharpens the focus on joint programming and deepened partnerships across the United Nations, with Governments, the private sector and girls themselves. Finally, UNICEF will address the remaining organizational gaps in gender capacity, accountability and resourcing towards achieving meaningful, sustainable results and becoming a more diverse, inclusive and equitable institution.

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Undernourished and Overlooked: A global nutrition crisis in adolescent girls and women*, UNICEF Child Nutrition Report Series, 2022, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

## II. Introduction

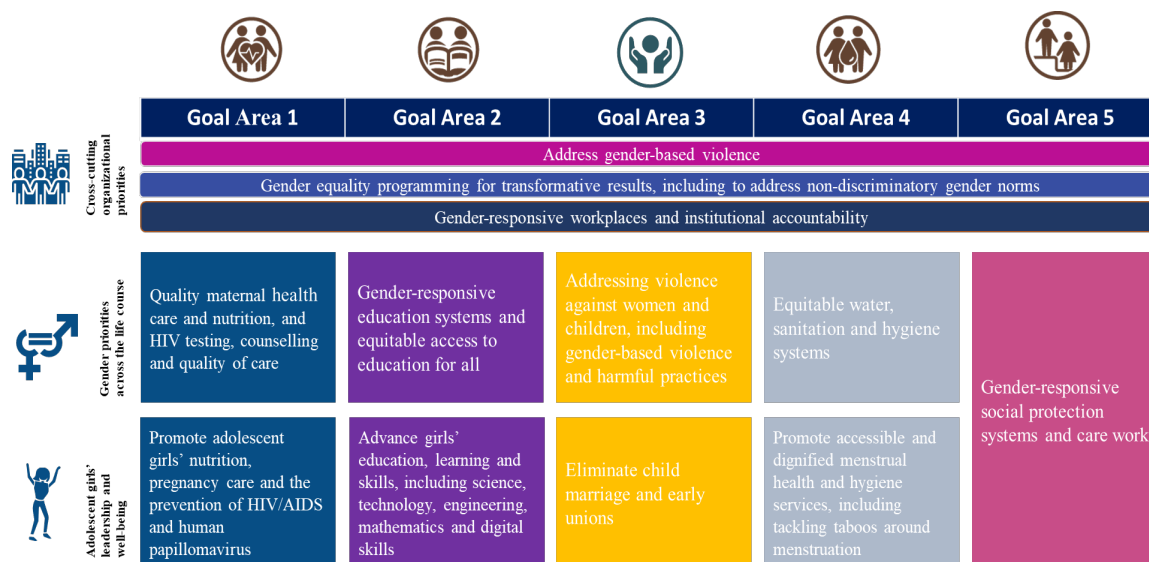
5. UNICEF commitments to advancing gender equality across its programmes and workplace are articulated in the Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025. The plan operationalizes the UNICEF Gender Policy, 2021–2030, an ambitious vision for gender equality that seeks to transform the underlying structural barriers that perpetuate inequalities.

6. This report reflects the overall trends in UNICEF successes and challenges in achieving gender results in 2022, and includes the programming priorities within the ongoing context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## III. Programmatic results

7. Recognizing that gender discrimination has lifelong and intergenerational impacts, the Gender Action Plan employs a dual-track approach that both (a) advances gender equality throughout the life course, and (b) promotes targeted actions to advance the leadership and well-being of adolescent girls. All UNICEF gender priorities are supported by the organization’s work in advocacy, innovation, partnerships, data, research and analysis.

Figure 1  
Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025: programmatic priorities



### A. Integration of gender equality across the life course

#### 1. Maternal health and nutrition, including HIV testing, counselling and care

8. Inequalities based on gender and other factors disproportionately compromise access to and the quality of health care for girls, women and marginalized children. This is amplified in the ongoing context of the pandemic for many countries. In 2022, UNICEF continued to make advances on health-related gender outcomes for women and girls by emphasizing integrated approaches to service delivery and health systems strengthening. Adaptable modalities, such as working through women’s groups and

using digital or mobile delivery methods, helped to scale up essential services and expand awareness among women and girls of their health, nutrition and other rights.

### **Quality and dignified maternal care and nutrition**

9. UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) continued to lead actions to advance the global maternal and newborn agenda through the Every Newborn Action Plan and the Ending Preventable Maternal Mortality initiative. In 2022, 39 countries were supported to strengthen delivery of quality maternal and newborn care. Almost 11,800 UNICEF-supported health-care facilities improved their quality of care compared to 8,600 in 2021. In addition, UNICEF contributed to strengthened systems for primary health care in 119 countries in 2022, up from 97 countries in 2021.

10. Overall, results for maternal care in 2022 were encouraging. Some 44.4 million live births were delivered in health-care facilities through UNICEF-supported programmes, up from 40.9 million in 2021. The percentage of live births attended by skilled health personnel increased by 5 percentage points to 86 per cent. More women also received perinatal care: the percentage of pregnant women who received at least four antenatal visits increased from 66 per cent in 2021 to 69 per cent in 2022, and the proportion of mothers receiving postnatal care increased from 68 per cent in 2021 to 73 per cent. Despite progress in global maternal care, results were more muted for pregnant and parenting adolescents, as evidenced, for example, by a decline in their access to antenatal care. Targeted investment is needed to address key gaps in their sexual and reproductive health needs and rights, including access to gender-responsive, adolescent-friendly health-care services, and removal of barriers to health-seeking behaviour, such as discriminatory norms.

11. UNICEF has strengthened its focus on the needs of girls and women within its nutrition programming, adopting gender-responsive and transformative strategies to reduce the impact of harmful social norms on the nutrition of women and children. Actions taken include promoting women's decision-making power regarding diets, services and practices, and engaging male caregivers in child feeding and care. Forty-two UNICEF-supported countries integrated anaemia prevention and nutrition counselling in their pregnancy care programmes for women, rising from 30 in 2021 and surpassing the 2022 target of 35. UNICEF support in Pakistan enabled counselling on infant and young child feeding for 2.1 million mothers and the establishment of peer-support caregiver groups for over 10,000 parents to promote gender-responsive nutrition practices in communities.

12. UNICEF continued to respond to the specific health needs of women and their children in humanitarian contexts. In Myanmar, UNICEF and partners provided birth delivery kits, essential medicines and nutrition counselling to support women and their children, benefiting about 2.9 million children under 5 years of age and over 61,200 pregnant and lactating women. In Ukraine, UNICEF helped to navigate safe humanitarian access for health and other vital services for women and children, dispatched more than 6,500 midwifery and obstetric kits in 312 perinatal facilities across 24 regions, and reconstructed four shelters in paediatric and maternity hospitals in the city of Lviv to ensure safe treatment of children and pregnant women.

### **Community health workers**

13. UNICEF continued to prioritize support for a professionalized health workforce, including community-based health workers – a majority of whom are women. These investments are yielding results. In 2022, the number of health workers receiving skills and support for delivering essential maternal, newborn and child health services through UNICEF-supported programmes reached 1.2 million, from about 800,250 in

2021. In Yemen, UNICEF support to 3,600 female community health workers, who are trained to detect and refer cases of disease, epidemic threats, malnutrition and pregnancy complications, among others, benefited 3.6 million people in rural and remote areas, including 880,000 children (about 50 per cent girls) and 810,000 women of reproductive age. Skills support for 2,900 leaders of mother-to-mother women's groups in Cameroon reached about 226,000 caregivers (about 172,000 female and 54,000 male) with information on infant and young child feeding. Beyond training, more dedicated support is required to address the economic barriers faced by many female front-line workers and, in so doing, increase their agency to make household decisions.

### **Gender-responsive adolescent health**

14. Ten more UNICEF programme countries integrated adolescent health priorities, including sexual and reproductive health, in primary health-care services or through school and digital platforms in 2022, compared to 27 in 2021. In Bangladesh, under the aegis of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO supported the development of the National Strategy for Adolescent Health. An integrated training package – addressing sexual and reproductive health, mental health, MHH and gender-based violence prevention – was disseminated to service providers, contributing to about 144,000 adolescents receiving services from UNICEF-supported health centres in 12 districts. An adolescent-focused health website was also launched, which, by November 2022, already had almost 10.4 million visitors. In indigenous communities in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, UNICEF is supporting adolescents to become community health reporters who convey important messages about HIV and teen pregnancy prevention. Over 1,800 adolescents were trained (1,050 girls), reaching 10,000 community members through social networks and local radio in 2022.

### **HIV**

15. Globally, antiretroviral therapy coverage of pregnant women is more than 80 per cent. Under UNICEF leadership, the last mile to elimination of mother-to-child transmission framework uses principles of data-driven differentiated programming for testing, care, treatment and support of pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV. The framework is driven by the Global Alliance to End AIDS in Children, which is expanding action at the country level, including to close treatment gaps and prevent and detect new HIV infections among pregnant and breastfeeding adolescent girls and women. Additionally, UNICEF is promoting the strategy of triple elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B to step up services for pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV or at risk of HIV. This approach is being used in countries with high treatment coverage that are aiming for validation of elimination, including Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### **Gender and immunization**

16. The pandemic presented opportunities for UNICEF to renew its focus on the gender dimensions of immunization and the impact on women and families, especially children who have not received any basic, routine vaccines (zero-dose children). The UNICEF Immunization Roadmap 2018–2030, as well as related programming tools and guidance, articulates transformative approaches that target the barriers to access and use of services and the underlying power dynamics within households. To inform interventions, gender analyses around COVID-19 vaccination and zero-dose children

were carried out by UNICEF in Afghanistan, Ghana, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea in 2022.

## **2. Gender-responsive education systems and equitable education access for all**

17. The effects of education losses on young learners owing to the pandemic remain severe in many countries. An estimated 11 million girls may remain out of school, with adolescent girls particularly disadvantaged.

18. In 2022, UNICEF stepped up investment to increase inclusive, equitable access to learning by supporting, among others, distance learning, provision of learning materials and safe school reopening. Globally, through UNICEF-supported programmes, 37.9 million out-of-school children and adolescents accessed education and, in countries providing sex-disaggregated data, 50 per cent or 15.5 million of these were girls, and over 250,000 were children with disabilities. In humanitarian contexts across 74 countries, 18.6 million more children benefited from improved access to education compared to 2021.

19. UNICEF and partners continued to promote gender-responsiveness in education systems to expand girls' access to learning and skills development. In 2022, 47 per cent of UNICEF-supported countries had gender-equitable systems for access to learning, rising from 38 per cent in 2021. The percentage of countries with gender-responsive teaching and learning systems increased by 1 percentage point to 46 per cent; while 43 per cent of countries had gender-equitable systems for skills development, up from 39 per cent in 2021. UNICEF worked with partners in Kyrgyzstan, for example, to embed anti-discrimination and gender equality provisions in educator training and across all primary school curriculum and textbook development. In Viet Nam, UNICEF is supporting the development of a new national early childhood education curriculum that is child-centred, inclusive and gender-responsive.

20. The focus on digital literacy and closing the gender digital divide has sharpened in many countries. Across 61 countries, 13.7 million more children accessed education via digital platforms through UNICEF programmes in 2022 (about equal the number of girls and boys in countries reporting sex-disaggregated data).

## **3. Addressing violence against girls, boys and women and ending female genital mutilation**

21. UNICEF works to address the global crisis of violence against children and women through multisectoral and survivor-centred approaches that tackle the gender dimensions of violence. This includes a more pronounced focus on prevention through changing gender norms that perpetuate and are reinforced by violence. In 2022, across 109 countries, UNICEF-supported health, social welfare and justice-related services reached 4.7 million children who experienced violence (48 per cent girls in countries reporting sex-disaggregated data).

22. Support to partners to strengthen national legislative and policy frameworks to protect children and reduce gender-based violence have contributed to some progress. Forty-three countries, 14 more than in 2021, have frameworks in place to end child sexual exploitation. Examples include Zambia, where the new Children's Code Act, 2022 prohibits harmful practices and criminalizes child sexual exploitation, and the Philippines, where UNICEF supported the passage of critical child protection laws such as the law increasing the age of sexual consent from 12 to 16 years of age and legislation against online child sexual exploitation.

23. Parenting programmes demonstrate powerful potential to break intergenerational cycles of gender-based violence. UNICEF has ramped up its positive parenting programmes, reaching about 11.8 million parents and caregivers across 81 countries in 2022, almost four times as many as in 2021. In addition, 25.2 million children, parents and caregivers were provided with community-based mental health and psychosocial support services, more than double the number in 2021. Even so, much more needs to be done to shift harmful attitudes – in 102 countries with data, over a third of adolescent girls and boys surveyed considered a husband to be justified in beating his wife.

24. A UNICEF-supported programme in Papua New Guinea, part of the inter-agency European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative, expanded its multisectoral prevention and response interventions in 2022, reaching 4,400 parents and 9,200 children with parenting support to prevent violence. In schools, 3,500 students participated in Safe Schools clubs, and almost 6,000 teachers underwent psychosocial support training to benefit 104,000 students. Further, through multiple social and behaviour change communications initiatives, over 105,000 people benefited from education about harmful gender norms and behaviours.

### **Ending female genital mutilation**

25. UNICEF estimates that more than 200 million girls and women have undergone FGM, and that more than 4.3 million girls are at risk in 2023. In its fourth phase, the UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation is accelerating action by focusing on policy advocacy and monitoring, evidence-generation, girls' agency and shifting harmful norms. In 2022, as a key milestone, the African Union established an accountability framework that will aid in tracking Governments' action on their commitments to end FGM. UNICEF has worked closely with the Government of Egypt and other partners to reform policies and mobilize communities to drive down high prevalence rates. As a result, a national health survey released in late 2022 showed that although overall rates remain high, the rate among adolescent girls aged 15–17 years has fallen from 61 to 37 per cent.

26. Almost 384,000 women and girls in 19 high-burden countries received UNICEF-supported prevention and protection services in 2022, more than double the projected target. In Eritrea, FGM elimination has been integrated into social protection programming supported by UNICEF, using home visits, income-generation activities, distribution of school materials and community-driven social and behaviour change interventions to promote education, female agency and gender equality. Almost 42,000 families benefited from home visits and 21,000 people were engaged in community dialogues, contributing to over 57,000 girls being protected from FGM.

### **Gender-based violence in emergencies**

27. Gender-based violence in emergencies interventions in 67 countries reached 5 million women and children for risk mitigation and 6 million for prevention. In countries providing sex-disaggregated data, 3.6 million girls and women were reached, up from about 1.7 million in 2021. For example, survivor-centred services benefited 31,000 people in Lebanon, while 125,000 people were reached with risk mitigation in Ukraine, and 106,000 people were reached with prevention interventions in Somalia. Safe spaces for women and girls have gained traction as an instrumental modality for providing gender-based violence services in emergency settings. Such spaces also offer life-saving integrated services for health, nutrition, education and life skills (including digital literacy) and are a means of helping to build agency and share critical information. In 2022, in Afghanistan, through 117 community-based

safe spaces established by UNICEF in 19 provinces, almost 78,500 women and 53,400 girls were reached with a range of services, although it should be noted that 75 of these spaces were subsequently closed.

#### **4. Equitable water, sanitation and hygiene systems**

28. In 2022, in more than 100 countries, UNICEF continued efforts to provide equitable access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities. The focus remains on reaching women and girls who are disproportionately affected by inadequate WASH facilities, and persons with disabilities, who often struggle with accessibility. Through UNICEF-supported programmes, 30.6 million more people gained access to safe drinking water (15.5 million women and girls in countries reporting sex-disaggregated data), and more than 26 million people had access to basic sanitation services (12.5 million women and girls).

29. In humanitarian contexts, UNICEF-supported water programmes reached 17.7 million girls and women (for a total of 39.4 million people) while sanitation programmes reached 4.5 million girls and women (for a total of 9 million people). For example, an additional 1.49 million people in Iraq gained access to gender- and disability-inclusive WASH services in 2022 (760,000 girls and women, 87,500 persons with disabilities). This was achieved through systems-strengthening with private and government partners and implementing innovative solutions to water scarcity.

30. UNICEF also scaled up support in 2022 to schools and health-care facilities to provide access to the full complement of basic WASH services. Sanitation facilities supported were single-sex, disability-inclusive and included MHH facilities so that women and girls could have safe, private spaces for their hygiene needs. Almost 33,000 schools and 11,000 health-care facilities were supported in 2022, with services scaled up in China, Kenya, Malawi, Timor-Leste and Zimbabwe, among other countries.

31. UNICEF has continued to promote gender-responsive WASH sector governance and systems-strengthening to increase the meaningful participation by women in WASH management and planning. In Nepal and the Sudan, women who were trained in the management, operation and maintenance of WASH services have been able to take ownership of supply services and influence management committee decision-making in their communities. An innovative partnership to build a more gender-balanced cadre in the male-dominated WASH sector in Viet Nam is empowering women through activities such as an all-women's network to promote leadership and enhance career prospects in the sector.

32. An estimated 1.4 billion people live in areas with high water vulnerability, making them susceptible to the worsening effects of climate change. UNICEF efforts to promote climate-resilient development include improving the overall access to and the quality and reliability of water through strengthened and upgraded WASH systems. This is known to ease the burden on women and girls who are the primary water collectors in families globally. In 2022, with UNICEF support, 1,885 solar-powered water supply systems were installed across 40 countries to increase water reliability and proximity to communities, thereby reducing travel and time spent by women and girls on collection.

#### **5. Gender-responsive social protection systems and gender-responsive care work**

33. UNICEF prioritizes social protection systems-strengthening as a critical lever for inclusive, equitable and ultimately transformative outcomes. Efforts are emphasizing reinforced, interlinked sectoral services and their increased availability



to the most vulnerable, including women and children with disabilities, female-headed households and displaced families. In 2022, 115 UNICEF country offices integrated gender-specific objectives in their social protection work, 15 more than in 2021 and a dramatic increase from 29 in 2019. For example, 58 country programmes are targeting gender-based violence prevention, 61 are prioritizing increasing girls' access to education, and 49 are promoting the decision-making power of women and girls.

34. UNICEF is supporting a multisectoral approach in Mozambique that combines cash transfers with nutrition information, caregiving skills training and case management to reduce gender-based violence risk and strengthen mothers' ability to reduce child malnutrition. In Lebanon, advocacy by UNICEF and partners led to new gender-responsive, inclusive provisions in the national social protection strategy. The 'Haddi' child grant – which benefited 130,000 children in 2022 (about 52,400 girls), including about 12,000 children living with disabilities – was linked to gender- and inclusion-related services associated with access to education, maternal care, protection and other services. All staff, from call centre operators to money transfer agents, received training on gender equality and inclusion issues, as well as violence prevention.

35. The global care crisis, both exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic, disproportionately burdens women and girls. In response, UNICEF and partners continued to support Governments to implement family-friendly policies and gender-responsive care-related services. In 2022, 24 UNICEF country offices, 11 more than in 2021, addressed family-friendly policies and care work through measures such as child benefits, parental leave and childcare. For example, UNICEF and the Government of Colombia are developing a national integrated care system to benefit children, parents and persons with disabilities. UNICEF is also supporting transformative parenting programmes with a deliberate emphasis on engaging fathers in caregiving. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, an initiative providing men with parenting education on fatherhood resulted in significant increases in the number of fathers actively caring for their young children and participating in prenatal check-ups.

## **B. Adolescent girls' leadership and well-being**

36. Adolescent girls are disadvantaged across multiple dimensions of their lives. Urgent action is needed to address their rights and needs, including to amplify their voice and agency.

37. The new UNICEF adolescent girls' agenda seeks to 'build back equal' for girls, elevating and accelerating programming in all contexts through more interconnected girl-driven support that meets girls' diverse and overlapping needs. Critically, the agenda targets discriminatory norms and systems related to age and gender that are chief impediments to girls' agency, leadership and potential.

### **1. Adolescent girls' health and nutrition, including HIV prevention**

38. Progress on quality care for pregnant and lactating adolescent girls (aged 15–19 years) continued to be uneven in 2022. UNICEF supported 46 countries, contributing to 76 per cent of live births attended by skilled health personnel in 2022, an increase of just 1 percentage point from 2021. The percentage of adolescent mothers receiving postnatal care increased to 64 per cent, compared to 62 per cent at the baseline, while the percentage of mothers receiving at least four antenatal visits dropped to 56 per cent from 57 per cent at the baseline.

39. Globally, adolescent girls face information gaps and considerable restrictions to accessing reproductive health care. The proportion of girls aged 15–19 years who were able to make their own informed decisions about sexual and reproductive health and rights was 29 per cent (out of 33 countries reporting), a concerning drop from 33 per cent at the baseline. This trend underscores the importance of prioritizing actions that tackle the root causes that restrict girls' right to bodily autonomy, such as gender-discriminatory attitudes and practices. A UNICEF programme in Brazil is promoting adolescent girls' agency in addressing sexual and reproductive rights, gender-based violence and the impact of climate change by supporting adolescent citizenry centres to engage with local authorities. In 2022, more than 1,500 such centres – which mobilized about 31,000 adolescents – presented a plan of action on girls' empowerment and sexual and reproductive rights in dialogue with local government.

40. Anaemia prevention in girls – which has lagged in part owing to service-delivery disruptions caused by school closures and lockdowns during the pandemic – saw improvement in 2022. Thirty UNICEF-supported countries, two more than the baseline, had gender-responsive programmes to prevent anaemia in adolescents through school- and community-based approaches. Across 63 countries, 116.2 million children and adolescents benefited from UNICEF-supported gender-responsive anaemia and malnutrition prevention programming, a sharp increase from 67.4 million in 2021. In countries with disaggregated data, more than 60 per cent of girls were reached with malnutrition prevention services.

#### **HIV prevention and human papillomavirus immunization**

41. In sub-Saharan Africa, there are three new HIV infections among girls aged 10–19 years for every new infection among boys of the same age. This disproportionate impact on girls is most stark in Eastern and Southern Africa, where they account for 25 per cent of all new infections. In 2022, UNICEF promoted new prevention strategies that are poised to be game-changers for controlling the epidemic in adolescents, including peer-led programmes; differentiated service delivery for prevention and self-care using digital technologies; novel testing technologies; improved treatment regimens; and new options for pre-exposure prophylaxis. Out of 37 HIV-priority programme countries, UNICEF is supporting combination HIV-prevention interventions in 33 of them. In South Africa, UNICEF and partners continued to expand the adolescent girl peer-mentor counselling model to promote utilization of HIV services. Over 31,600 pregnant and lactating adolescents have enrolled in health-care facilities as a result, and stipends for mentors have been allocated within the government budget.

42. In 2022, five more countries (Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Lesotho, Kyrgyzstan and Sierra Leone) were supported to introduce the HPV vaccine in their national immunization programmes, making it a total of 128 countries that have done so to date. Thanks to a consistent supply chain and strong partnerships with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and WHO, this positive trend in coverage is set to continue, with a target to reach 86 million girls in low- and middle-income countries with the vaccine by 2025.

43. In countries that have scaled up HPV vaccination coverage or are preparing to do so, UNICEF is focusing on the gender dynamics in families and communities that impact the demand for and acceptance of the HPV vaccine. To promote vaccine demand in Uzbekistan, for example, UNICEF supported capacity-building of almost 515,000 teachers and school administrators and also supported information sessions with immunization experts, reaching more than 3.5 million parents, community leaders and adolescent girls. So far, 94.4 per cent of girls aged 12–14 years have completed HPV vaccination.

## 2. Adolescent girls' leadership, learning and skills, including digital skills

44. UNICEF has ramped up support for adolescent skills development, recognizing its immense potential to provide alternative learning pathways, enhance transitions from education to satisfying work, and help adolescents to benefit from twenty-first century economic opportunities. The need is great, given the large number of adolescents, especially girls, who are not in employment, education or training.

45. UNICEF and partners continued to expand gender-transformative strategies to empower adolescent girls, prioritizing girls who are out of school or who are unable to participate in formal education systems. In Malawi, UNICEF assisted 6,000 teenage mothers who were excluded from formal schooling to participate in an accelerated functional literacy programme and access other vocational skills and entrepreneurship opportunities. In Nepal, UNICEF-supported flexible learning initiatives contributed to school re-enrolment of almost 5,700 girls while, through the Rupantaran programme, 8,300 girls accessed life skills and peer-support activities related to preventing child marriage and promoting girls' agency and leadership.

46. The UNICEF Skills4Girls initiative, implemented in partnership with private sector partners such as Clé de Peau Beauté Co, Ltd., Chloé, Dove and Pandora, has grown considerably. Since 2020, 2.4 million adolescent girls and young women have been reached across 22 countries with girl-focused learning opportunities, including linkages to peer support, mentors and job placements. In Kyrgyzstan, UNICEF is helping to forge an enabling environment of parents, teachers and policymakers to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and careers for girls. This includes integrating STEM components into national education plans and organizing large-scale awareness events that feature technology careers and mentoring opportunities. With the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, UNICEF-supported digital learning for girls benefited about 55,000 adolescent girls in 2022, through girl-centred learning content and STEM-related and digital literacy courses, all provided on a national platform. In Jordan, Serbia and Tajikistan, UNICEF is also partnering with the Government and the private sector to enhance national platforms that link girls to jobs through internships and job placements. For example, in 2022, out of 692 girls trained in digital skills in Tajikistan, 136 obtained jobs locally and 97 were working online with international companies.

47. In 2022, 16.1 million adolescents (45 per cent girls) across 89 countries participated in or led civic engagement activities through UNICEF-supported programmes, including 340,000 engaged in humanitarian settings. This result, which is 20 per cent below the target, is explained by the decrease in the number of adolescents engaged in humanitarian action due to scaling down of the COVID-19 response globally. There was a notable increase, however, in the number of adolescent girls aged 10–19 years who participated – almost 3.5 million in 2022, compared to about 2 million in 2021. For example, the #BeSafe volunteer programme in Kazakhstan, which promotes girls' leadership in disaster risk reduction and climate change action, equipped 264 girls with the skills to conduct public advocacy activities that reached more than 1.2 million people.

## 3. Eliminating child marriage

48. Through the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and other initiatives, UNICEF and partners continued to consolidate global efforts to end child marriage. In 2022, 41 UNICEF countries implemented prevention and care interventions to address child marriage that were delivered through safe spaces, mentorship, literacy, livelihood skills and services for sexual and reproductive health

and rights. The number of adolescent girls receiving such interventions through UNICEF-supported programmes increased sharply to 17.2 million from 7.6 million in 2021. Of this group, the number of girls with disabilities, who often face additional barriers to accessing support, also rose significantly to over 75,300 girls in 18 countries, compared to 11,000 in 20 countries in 2021.

49. UNICEF and partners prioritized investment in quality disaggregated data and research, which are critical to supporting evidence-based policies and programmes. The Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism, now in its second year, includes 50 new child marriage analytical country data profiles. UNICEF analysis of administrative data in Ethiopia in 2022 revealed a significant increase in child marriages in drought-affected areas; this critically informed its emergency response. Targeted engagement platforms reached around 1.5 million community members (about 80 per cent women), contributing to community reporting of approximately 1,200 cases of child marriage and 1,300 of FGM.

50. In 2022, 53 UNICEF country programmes worked to challenge discriminatory gender norms that drive harmful practices, 8 more than at the baseline. Social and behaviour change interventions included multimedia campaigns and community outreach, which engaged 31.1 million people, of whom over half were women and girls, compared to 22.3 million in 2021. In Bangladesh, for example, a UNICEF-supported social media campaign using child journalists spread messages on positive gender norms and gender equality to 26.5 million adolescents and young people. In addition, religious and community leaders were supported to engage boys and men in dialogues that promote positive masculinities and gender equality, such as in Mali, where almost 440,000 boys and men were engaged in such activities, resulting in the prevention of 755 child marriages and 445 cases of FGM.

#### **4. Accessible, dignified menstrual health and hygiene**

51. In 78 countries, UNICEF-supported programmes addressed the MHH needs of 17.5 million women and girls in 2022. Of this number, 3.4 million were reached with services and 13.6 million with information, while, in humanitarian settings, 3.7 million women and girls benefited from MHH services and information provided by UNICEF.

52. Systems-strengthening remains a key pillar of UNICEF efforts, not only to improve the policy environment, but also to shift harmful attitudes about MHH that fuel discrimination against adolescent girls. With UNICEF support, ‘period poverty laws’ were signed in Brazil, Ecuador and Peru in 2022, providing for free distribution of menstrual supplies in schools. Over 63,000 girls in Brazil received MHH supplies; education and communication messaging about the new law reached about 2 million people. In Eastern and Southern Africa, UNICEF supported the Southern African Development Community to launch a regional gender-responsive hygiene strategy that prioritizes gender and MHH in all WASH programming.

53. Education and awareness-raising about puberty and menstruation are essential to challenge negative stereotypes and promote health-seeking behaviour among adolescents. Activities to commemorate Menstrual Hygiene Day reached 687 million people globally in 2022, significantly more than ever before. The Oky app, a period tracker and puberty education mobile application co-created by UNICEF and adolescent girls in Indonesia and Mongolia, has been adapted for use in Burundi, India, Kenya, Mexico, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania. Large-scale awareness campaigns in India and Pakistan focused on breaking taboos, including the claim that women and girls cannot conduct normal daily activities while they are menstruating. In the Gambia and Lesotho, UNICEF-supported puberty training and

community dialogues are engaging boys and men to promote behaviour change about menstruation.

## **IV. Institutional strengthening**

54. The Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025 commits UNICEF to an organizational change strategy for gender equality across its internal policies, practices and accountability mechanisms to drive transformative structural change across the organization. No longer solely the purview of gender experts, this is a whole-of-institution approach that requires that the promotion of gender equality be the responsibility of everyone at UNICEF, regardless of organizational role.

55. In this context, UNICEF is investing in strengthening institutional enablers to support an inclusive environment, including: stronger gender analysis, gender evidence measurement and monitoring; adequate financing to deliver results; strengthened availability and use of gender expertise; accountable leadership at all levels; and wider and deeper partnerships, especially with other United Nations entities and with networks of women and girls. Investments have helped UNICEF to remain high performing in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, achieving 88 per cent of all benchmarks in 2022.

### **1. From gender-responsive to transformative programming**

56. UNICEF uses the revised Gender Action Plan institutional standard, a composite indicator with benchmarks for country offices to track their efforts to programme in increasingly transformative ways. New benchmarks have been added for 2022–2025 and more thorough, ambitious criteria applied in areas such as resourcing, partnerships with other United Nations entities and networks led by girls and women, and management accountability for gender programming. Country offices must now achieve 70 per cent of benchmarks to meet the standard, compared to 60 per cent previously. In 2022, 12 per cent of countries met the standard, compared to 77 per cent in 2021, a result that is reflective of the more stringent criteria. These more ambitious measures are helping to advance programming that aims to tackle systemic barriers and bottlenecks. Globally, more countries are reporting transformative programmatic results – 60 in 2022 compared to 43 in 2021. Gaps remain in effective programme planning and monitoring and gender-targeted expenditures, however, where 53 per cent and 24 per cent of all offices, respectively, met benchmarks. To support country offices in 2023, UNICEF is developing an additional suite of tailored learning initiatives on the revised institutional standard for gender focal points and planning specialists.

57. In humanitarian contexts, country offices stepped up implementation of gender equality commitments in the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. Efforts were supported by critical guidance and training tools on integrating gender perspectives throughout emergency response and preparedness planning. Consequently, there has been marked progress in engaging with women- and girl-led organizations and in implementing gender-based violence risk-mitigation efforts. Further, a significant number of countries (49) are carrying out rapid gender analyses to inform programming priorities across sectors. Nevertheless, technical support is needed to strengthen staff and partner capacity for gender analysis and data-disaggregated reporting in crisis settings.

## **2. Data, research and evidence to support gender equality results**

58. UNICEF continued to advance innovative methodologies, gender analyses, technical support and data dissemination to improve the evidence base for gender policy and programming. Highlights in 2022 include country guidance on strengthening administrative data systems for gender statistics and making advances in developing household survey modules to close gender data gaps in the areas of children's time use and adolescent mental health. Additionally, informed by the work of Governments and civil society partners, UNICEF is testing a new household survey module on girls' empowerment – which is the first global measurement – to inform the development of key indicators to advance the new UNICEF agenda for adolescent girls.

59. A number of innovative research initiatives across sectors are under way. For example, the Gender Solutions project analysed the impact of UNICEF gender-evidence investments since the first Gender Action Plan, 2014–2017 to provide a baseline for further learning and to incentivize quality evidence. Nutrition research in four countries (Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Madagascar and the United Republic of Tanzania) is examining how shifting from iron and folic acid to multiple micronutrient supplements can improve pregnancy and birth outcomes, while also improving access to and uptake of quality antenatal care services.

60. UNICEF inter-agency participation on gender statistics remains significant. UNICEF is a member of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics (IAEG-GS), the coordinating and guiding body of the Global Gender Statistics Programme of the United Nations Statistics Division. Further, UNICEF chairs the IAEG-GS Advisory Group on Strengthening Administrative Systems to Close Gender Data Gaps and is a member of the Expert Group on Innovative and Effective Ways to Collect Time-Use Statistics, which is developing international guidance to produce such statistics.

## **3. Financing**

61. UNICEF uses a gender equality marker and gender tags for a nuanced tracking of the allocation and expenditure of resources related to results that promote gender equality. This allows for reporting on expenses used for both gender-transformative programming and for gender-integrated activities across development and humanitarian contexts. In 2022, an estimated 33 per cent of total expenditure contributed to gender-integration activities across UNICEF.

62. The new UNICEF formula for what constitutes transformative expenditure means that expenditures on gender-transformative programmes are currently 6.2 per cent, and in emergency contexts 8.5 per cent. UNICEF will continue to expand technical capacity to assist country offices to apply quality controls to their gender-related financial reporting and monitoring.

## **4. Strategic partnerships and communications**

63. UNICEF deeply values its partnerships with other United Nations entities, national partners, global organizations, civil society and the private sector to fulfil its mandate on gender equality and advance the United Nations reform agenda.

64. UNICEF continues to be a member of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Task Team on Gender Equality, the United Nations Task Force on Violence Against Women and IAEG-GS, among others. At the country level, UNICEF is an implementing partner in all Spotlight Initiative countries; works with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance on HPV,

gender and equity; and is represented in the United Nations Joint Global Programme on Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control, and in the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases.

65. Since 2020 when, as part of COVID-19 response and recovery, UNICEF expanded its partnerships with women- and girl-led organizations, engagement has gathered momentum. In 2022, 105 country offices engaged with such groups in programme design, delivery and monitoring. In emergency settings, UNICEF transferred \$87 million in humanitarian funds to approximately 647 local women's organizations. UNICEF partnered with women- and girl-led networks in Afghanistan, Iraq, Mozambique and Nepal to improve access to gender-based violence prevention, response and risk-mitigation services; and in Zambia to expand the reach of HIV testing and treatment services for adolescent and youth mothers and their infants.

66. Private sector collaboration is growing in many areas, including adolescent girls' skills-building, digital and mobile systems access and family-friendly policy interventions. For example, UNICEF partnered with telecommunications companies in Kenya on campaigns on immunization and ending violence; with companies in Bangladesh, China and Ghana to expand family-friendly policies for working parents; with women entrepreneurs in Romania to reduce teenage pregnancy; and with the Ethical Tea Partnership in Indonesia to address child marriage, gender-based violence and early childhood development.

67. Communication and advocacy efforts in 2022 highlighted in particular the sobering impact of the pandemic globally on adolescent girls, as well as their resilience and leadership in creating solutions to 'build back equal'. For example, UNICEF co-produced videos with girls in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Senegal and the Sudan, reaching millions on social media channels. UNICEF also helped to amplify the voices of adolescent girls through a global U-Report survey of 17,000 girls across 29 countries, which captured their views, experiences and recommendations on climate change in the lead-up to the twenty-seventh Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

## **5. Organizational culture, leadership and accountability**

68. Driven by strong senior leadership support and guided by the UNICEF Gender Policy and the Economic Dividends for Gender Equality Action Plan, UNICEF continued to enhance flexible work modalities and strengthened gender-equitable family-friendly policies, including expanded parental leave, towards becoming a more transformative workplace. Proactive efforts to enforce zero tolerance for harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse, and to promote a healthy workplace culture in each office, are also under way. Positive gains are visible. By the end of 2022, 50 per cent of country offices had a relevant system in place to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. At the same time, recent staff surveys have shown that perception gaps between male and female staff persist, with women more likely than men to be concerned about ethical behaviour, psychological safety, retaliation for reporting misconduct and career prospects. In response, more in-depth, intersectional analysis of the findings and comprehensive discussions to address these issues are taking place at both the global and country levels.

69. Accountability for delivery of quality results is vital to advance gender equality. There has been notable improvement in management accountability in 2022 – 75 per cent of country offices had appropriate oversight to support gender implementation. Global and regional accountability mechanisms, such as the Gender Equality Steering Committee, help to provide guidance to UNICEF country offices and ensure adherence to minimum standards. There is still work ahead, however: in 2022, only about 40 per cent of offices had clear accountabilities defined in their country

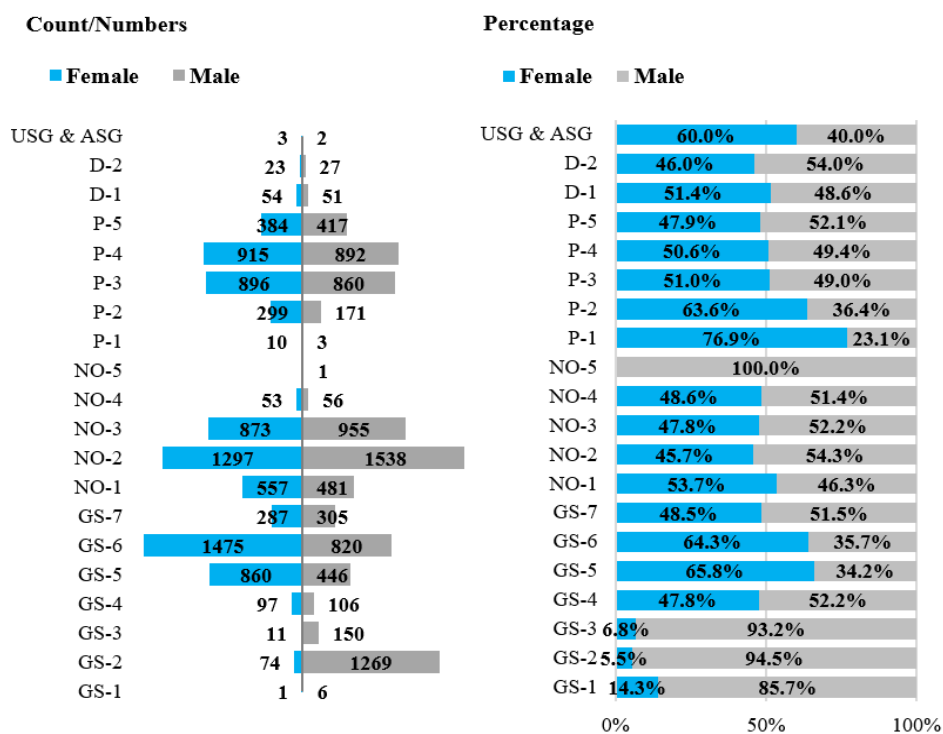
management plans, or held regular meetings to discuss gender priorities. Additionally, although all country offices are required to develop their own gender action plan, only one quarter had done so by the end of 2022. To meet these shortfalls, UNICEF will continue to strengthen corporate monitoring and accountability systems and the ability of staff to use them; establish clearer requirements for gender integration in programming processes; and invest in creative, low-cost options for providing technical assistance to country offices where there are gaps.

## 6. Gender capacity and gender parity

70. Building on recent progress resulting from targeted actions to improve gender-related recruitment, career progression and access to opportunities, UNICEF is focusing on advancing equity in staffing across all sectors, while also emphasizing greater representation of women in senior management, and investment in the mentoring of young, female and gender-diverse staff.

71. In 2022, UNICEF maintained gender parity globally in its staffing, with 48.9 per cent women and 51.1 per cent men, in line with virtual gender parity (53/47) as defined in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan. The temporary special measures enacted by UNICEF in 2020 to achieve gender parity at the P-5 level – a protracted challenge – were removed in June 2022, signalling a key milestone reached. Gender gaps persist at certain levels, however, especially at D-2, P-1 and P-2 levels internationally, and among General Service staff at GS-1 to GS-3 levels (see figure II), although there are continued positive movements over time.

Figure II  
UNICEF staff composition, by sex, December 2022



Note: USG/ASG = Under-Secretary-General/Assistant Secretary-General; D-1 and D-2 = Director level; P-1 to P-5 = Professional level; NO-1 to NO-5 = National Officer level; GS-1 to GS-7 = General Service level.



72. A range of measures to address gender disparities and to recruit and retain female talent are in place across UNICEF. Flexible work options are being expanded, and are intended to counter the negative impact of mobility and relocation on women's retention. UNICEF offices are using strategies such as targeted talent outreach, improvements to workplace culture, relocation of families closer to emergency duty stations, and the creation of paid trainee positions to build pipelines of female talent. In Nepal, for instance, women from historically marginalized groups are being hired as trainees in an annual formative programme. More attention is needed to address staffing imbalances in emergency settings where women's representation tends to progressively decrease as hardship increases due to security concerns and care responsibilities that reflect gender norms. In 2022, women comprised 31.5 per cent of staff in emergency settings, rising slightly from 30 per cent in 2021. This imbalance requires concerted leadership attention and action in recruitment, retention and talent management strategies.

73. On organizational learning and capacity, in 2022, UNICEF continued to roll out actions to address its gender priorities, including expanding capacity for all UNICEF staff beyond gender-designated staff positions. Updated staffing guidance outlines minimum standards for gender expertise and capacity in all offices to support Gender Action Plan implementation, including mandatory training requirements for all staff through GenderPro (the UNICEF globally accredited course on gender equality). In 2022, 100 countries met staffing guidance requirements, especially with regard to appointing gender focal points. Challenges remain in meeting the demand for dedicated gender expertise, however, with impacts not only on the ability of country programmes to report results, but also on the quality of results. In 2022, 29 country offices did not meet the staffing guidance (i.e., they did not employ any gender specialists despite annual expenditure above the \$20 million threshold). Many country offices struggle to identify flexible funding for these positions. In 2022, good practices to address this challenge included adding mobilization of sector gender specialists to donor proposals, and gender expertise secondments and surge capacity in emergency response efforts. It is more important than ever to increase investment in strengthening UNICEF gender architecture to drive its gender priorities, not least because of the ambitious agenda and targets of the Gender Action Plan and Strategic Plan. Analysis shows that countries that reported gender-transformative results in 2022 were more likely to have met the staffing guidance than not. Leadership, coupled with the right technical expertise, is helping to increase organization-wide capacity, accountability and partnerships across the United Nations system. For example, in Guinea, UNICEF has a dedicated gender specialist reporting to a UNICEF Representative and a gender task force that tracks progress against agreed gender targets.

## V. Lessons learned and the way forward

74. The UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025, along with the UNICEF Gender Policy, renews commitment to and accountability for achieving gender equality and improving the lives of children and women globally. Building on important progress and harnessing lessons from previous cycles, the plan aspires to a collective vision of inclusion and equality in UNICEF programmes, workplaces and practices towards achieving transformative results.

75. Lessons learned from adjustments made as a result of the pandemic and other recent crises have shaped more transformative programming, including: (a) the use of technology platforms and innovative solutions to extend reach and impact; (b) the need for simultaneous, multipronged strategies in programmes, especially in the area

of adolescent girls; (c) the roll out of more ambitious, and more stringent, measures for monitoring gender results; (d) flexibility in adjusting programming and allocating resources; and (e) expanded, diverse partnerships, including with women- and girl-led organizations, especially in humanitarian contexts. This has helped UNICEF to make important progress on its gender equality goals while navigating complex global crises. Programmatically, gains continued in areas such as maternal care, menstrual health, girls' skills development and agency, gender-responsive social protection and gender-based violence risk mitigation. There is an emerging momentum around adolescent girls' leadership, voice and agency and in harnessing the potential of social protection systems to tackle discriminatory norms and accelerate key outcomes for girls and women, including reducing gender-based violence, malnutrition and caregiving burdens. At the institutional level, targeted measures for gender equality have led to gains in gender parity in staffing, more gender-transformative policies such as expanded parental leave, and mechanisms to monitor and address gender-related concerns in the workplace. Importantly, progress on gender results has also benefited from stronger partnerships, including with girls and women as leaders and agents of change.

76. Looking ahead, UNICEF is redoubling efforts on lagging programmatic areas, not only to stay the course on global targets, but also to prevent a broader reversal of progress. In this context, addressing the gender disparities facing adolescent girls is a key priority, as is harnessing their potential as changemakers by elevating their agency, leadership and solutions. Working closely with partners, UNICEF will continue to fill gender-related research and data gaps to strengthen evidence-based programming and advocacy. Institutionally, UNICEF will address ongoing gaps in gender parity in sectors and duty stations, programme monitoring and accountability, and increase technical support options for monitoring and reporting on the Gender Action Plan institutional standard. UNICEF will also prioritize 'walking the talk' by addressing equality and inclusion concerns among staff and implementing measures that target talent retention, career progression and mobility of female staff, especially in sectors lagging behind.

77. Finally, UNICEF will continue to seek out all avenues to expand investment and partnerships to keep attention on gender inequalities. The prioritizing of gender results is unfortunately slipping within the global community.<sup>2</sup> Resource allocations have slowed amid rising demand for service delivery, placing constraints on the scale-up of promising programming. Furthermore, as humanitarian crises continue to escalate each year, gender investment is even more strained, with funding often stretched towards more immediate action instead of more transformative responses. The demand for galvanized action – to ensure positive and lasting change for the most vulnerable children and women – is both urgent and great if the global community is to solidify progress towards meeting the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

---

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2022*, UN-Women, New York, 2022, p. 20.