

Iraq

Update on the context and situation of children

Over the past year, Iraq has made noteworthy strides towards the realization of child rights. Yet, the benchmarking of child-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) findings illustrated that the expected effort is not uniform across outcome areas. Of 48 child-related SDG indicators; five are met; 12 have no trend data; and a majority of indicators are based on older data (UNICEF DAPM, August 2023).

Iraq stands at a crucial crossroads in its path of development, characterized by the lingering effects of three decades of political unrest. Although there has been a decrease in armed conflicts with the establishment of a new government, this progress remains fragile, facing numerous challenges that could potentially undermine these advancements.

Iraq's economy is heavily dependent on oil, accounting for 99% of exports and 85% of the government budget. The social sector has benefited from some increased investments, but more is needed to build efficient and inclusive child friendly Iraqi systems.

20.7 million or 46% of Iraq's 45.5 million population are children (UN, 2022) and nearly 60% of the population is under 25 years of age. The country is becoming more urban with over 70% of the population now living in urban areas which has implications, such as the increased cost of services across the board.

Child poverty in Iraq is multifaceted. According to the Child Multidimensional Poverty Index (CMPI), nearly half of Iraq's children grapple with multidimensional poverty, with a higher prevalence (60.6%) living in rural areas compared to 40.3% in urban areas. 1 in 4 children are both multidimensionally poor and deprived in child protection and 1 in 5 are poor and deprived in schooling (CMPI, 2023). Additionally, 377,950 children live on less than US\$3.65 a day (World Bank, 2023).

Iraq's adolescent and youth population are expected to reach 16.4 million by 2030 (Second Decade Strategy, UNICEF Iraq, 2022). Although the government increased efforts to improve access to quality education, skilling, and training, in 2023 job opportunities and engagement platforms for young people remained limited. There are stark gender disparities in female labour force participation favouring men with only 10.6% females versus 68% male labour force participation. This is coupled with a female unemployment rate of 28.2% twice that of their male counterparts (ILO, 2022).

Internal displacement has dramatically reduced from six million in 2016, to an estimated one million, noting that this figure includes people who live in informal settlements following the closure of IDP camps. The UN system and the government of Iraq have in 2023 worked on a plan to transition from emergency to development, exploring options to hand over essential service provision to the government. While this process has been completed for water and sanitation, a parallel education system remains and protection services have not been fully handed over.

The Government of Iraq (GOI) continues the gradual return of an initial 30,000 Iraqi citizens from northeast Syria, mostly children and women. So far, 7,000 people have returned to Iraq. The GOI co-owns the "One UN Plan" with the UN to facilitate return, but more work is needed implementing legislative frameworks that will benefit all displaced children including climate migrants.

Iraq is the fifth most vulnerable country to water and food shortages and extreme temperatures according to the United Nations Global Environment Outlook 6. This reflects the significant climate

change risks facing children, particularly girls, in Iraq (CLAC, 2023).

In Iraq, 3 out of 5 people lack access to safely managed sanitation; and 2 in 5 lack access to safe water services, resulting in 10.3 million cubic meters of daily wastewater, of which only 2.6 million undergo proper treatment (UNICEF WASH, Environmental Survey). The lack of proper water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure in Iraq is a breeding ground for waterborne diseases. In 2023, 1337 lab confirmed cholera cases were reported by MOH. A 20% reduction in water availability coupled with rising temperatures could lead to a staggering 3.9% decrease in GDP in the medium term. By the end of 2022 and earlier 2023, non-oil GDP growth was muted due to the drought and associated water shortages (World Bank- Economic Monitor, July 2023).

While nine in every ten children completed their basic immunization schedule and more than 90% of births were attended by skilled attendants; the quality of these services remains low with zero-dose children clustering in remote, conflict affected, and urban poor communities. New-born deaths are estimated at 14.1 death per 1,000 live births (UN IGME, 2023). Over the last five years, the proportion of GDP expenditure on health has increased to 5%; paralleled by increasing out-of-pocket expenditure on health, currently at about 50% (WHO, GHE 2023)

Despite good access to primary level schooling with net enrolment 94%, challenges remain in equitable access to education: the early childhood education (ECE) enrolment rate is only 9%, secondary 70.3% with girls suffering more from drop out and transition to secondary education (Ministry of Education (MoE) Data 2022-2023). The average school-size in 2021 was just under 400 students with more than 50% of schools sharing facilities and the MoE indicates these numbers have not shifted significantly in 2023. (Iraq National Education Strategy (INES), 2021). However, strides have been made to serve the most vulnerable, in which at least 158,557 vulnerable children & adolescents (71351 girls) in humanitarian situations were provided support to access and continue their education.

National Identification Card (ID), including for Internally Displaced Person (IDP), North-east Syrian (NES) Returnees and other vulnerable children is a necessary step in attaining essential services. A positive indicator is that 98% of births in Iraq are registered which is needed for obtaining IDs. However, 470,000 IDP children still lack ID, including some who need birth certificates. UNICEF has documented 2,665 children returning from Al Hol through Jeddah1 Rehabilitation Centre in need of documentation in order to obtain IDs during the period from 2021 to December 2023.

Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2023, UNICEF adapted to new and evolving policies and priorities under the recently formed government (October 2022); the end of the emergency cluster system; pockets of violence and instability; a changing donor landscape due to regional crises and Iraq's financial profile; and realigning UNICEF programmes based on the December 2021 UNICEF Strategic Moment of Reflection in the key areas of Climate, ECD, Gender, Public Financing for Children (PF4C), Digitalization and the Peace Nexus.

Every child survives and thrives

UNICEF supported 325 health service delivery points, serving a catchment population of 3.5 million people including an estimated 490,000 children and women with essential MNCH and nutrition services, including access to 21 kangaroo mother care centres (KMC) in new-born care units reaching 2,520 mothers. On-the-job training of 2,506 health workers on ECD, Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI), and early essential new-born care was supported to ensure a well-trained cadre of professionals to advance the government's ECD and KMC implementation plans; and improve SDGs on access to primary health care (PHC) which remains unmet.

Improved data generation, analysis, and use to inform decision-making was an overarching priority for

systems strengthening in 2023. Training and hardware for district HIS was completed in all PHCs to enhance readiness for digital birth registration and reporting adverse immunization events. UNICEF supported MoH PHC geo-mapping to facilitate tracking of vaccination services for more than six million children.

Childhood immunization coverage surpassed 90% in 2023 due to a strengthened digital immunization platform. There was a 50% reduction in the number of zero-dose children and 96% of infants received their third dose of pentavalent vaccine, and all infants in high-risk areas were vaccinated against measles. UNICEF supported the GOI to provide measles outbreak response vaccinations and cholera control interventions to over 500,000 people in areas affected by health emergencies or at risk of experiencing outbreaks.

UNICEF supported the training of 1,076 health care workers nationally on social behaviour change principles and interventions and on interpersonal communication for immunization and to institutionalize these, two training toolkits were finalized, contributing to cholera control and RI coverage.

UNICEF supported vaccine management through a web-based electronic logistics management information system (eLMIS) in all districts and completion of a immunization supply chains centre for excellence master plan. No vaccine stock-out occurred, and a defaulter-tracing mechanism to detect and vaccinate children who missed their vaccination appointments in four governorates in the south with dropout rates below 5% was successfully implemented with UNICEF technical support.

Investment in building capacity of 650 frontline workers on infant and young child feeding practices addressed gaps in early initiation of breastfeeding and improved access to diverse diets for over 500,000 children. Together with WHO, UNICEF provided technical support to Ministry of Health (MoH) for the development of a National Nutrition Strategy 2024-2030.

UNICEF supported the procurement and delivery of vitamin A to 3.5 million children. Collaborative advocacy efforts helped improve access to iodized salt to about 18 million children and adolescents in need of this micronutrition for physical and mental development.

Every child learns

Education policies, governance structures, and leadership capacities were strengthened through the launch of the INES 2022-2031 in May 2023. Under the leadership of Prime Minister implementation began to fulfil the country's commitment to equitable access to quality education towards SDG 4.

Supporting the Prime Minister and Ministry of Education's call for digitization during the UN Transformation Education Summit, UNICEF accelerated the implementation of Education Management Information System in Iraq, reaching 4,514 schools through the EU-funded programme in partnership with UNESCO and the private sector to facilitate reduced costs. A comprehensive evaluation was carried out, emphasizing the need for sustainability.

Restoring educational access for the most vulnerable is a key priority outlined in the INES. UNICEF support to children impacted by conflict provided learning continuity. Over 455,967 children (205,185 girls) benefitted, including in humanitarian settings, and participated in formal and non-formal education in support of the INES. Expanding access to learning led to more than 158,557 most vulnerable children (71,351 girls) in humanitarian situations continuing their education.

Implementation of the Refugee Education Integration Policy was extended to cover grade five, allowing Syrian refugee children to continue their learning in schools in KRI.

Recognizing the importance of school leadership, UNICEF supported the GOI to demonstrate school-based management in 1,061 schools benefiting at least 241,868 children (108,143 girls) including capacity development of 2,819 new school management committee members (1,195 female). Fifteen Directorates of Education (DoE) have their own Governorate Education Sector Plans and 13 established sector coordination to improve quality and access to education for children.

Overall, in Iraq 3,805 pre-primary and primary education teachers (2,192 female), received technical

pedagogical skills capacity building and training on psychosocial support, positive discipline, life skills citizenship education, e-pedagogy, and ECE, benefiting 95,125 children (40,903 girls) with improved inclusive child-focused education.

UNICEF's social behaviour interventions supported the re-enrolment of 10,000 out-of-school children. 25 million individuals were reached nationally through media and social media campaigns on Back to Learning (B2L) and girls' education thus having a direct impact on increased level of knowledge and awareness on the specific key messages on importance of education and back to school.

National Learning Assessment findings for grade 4 mathematics and science were launched in 2023 showing that 39.5% of students passed math, with girls scoring slightly higher than boys; and for science, 34.1% of students passed; boys scoring slightly higher than girls, informing MoE on children's foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

Aligned with the Iraq National Youth Vision 2030's commitment supporting young people's transition from learning to earning and INES, UNICEF supported the integration of Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) into formal education through training of 200 teachers (100 women) in two governorates providing 45,000 adolescents with essential skills. Strategic partnerships with the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) amplified learning and skills delivery for 39,651 young people (18,882 girls) through 24 government-supported youth centres that were leveraged as free and safe spaces.

Sixteen young people (6 girls) participated in the COP28 per the National Multi-Sectoral Youth Vision 2030 and developed a follow-up action plan. The Iraqi government signed the Declaration on Children, Youth, and Climate Action at COP28, acknowledging the crucial role that youth play in shaping sustainable and resilient communities. For example, around 1,000 young people in Dohuk, Ninawah and Basra were empowered with green skills as part of PROSPECTS skills building programmes and supporting them with green social and business initiatives, such as solarization, planting, recycling, etc.

Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

The end of the child protection cluster-led humanitarian response system marked a significant transition in 2023 in which UNICEF technically supported the GOI to build and strengthen the institutional mechanism and services to progressively realize child rights. To date, child marriage has the widest disparity of any child-related SDG indicator (of those with data).

Advocacy and systems strengthening efforts resulted in legislative reforms including submission of Child Rights Act to the Council of Ministers; revisions to the Child Protection Law by the Parliamentary Committee on Women, Family and Childhood; and draft amendments to the Juvenile Care Law with recommendations to increase the age of criminal responsibility from 9 to 13 years. As a milestone, the government signed the Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations (MRM) Action Plan on Children Affected by Armed Conflict and with UNICEF support the Child Protection Directorate in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) was fully functional with social service workforce. UNICEF launched the National Child Data Portal in partnership with the Child Welfare Commission (CWC) to help monitor the SGD targets and the implementation of child focused laws and policies.

UNICEF continued to demonstrate implementation of the National Child Protection Strategy by supporting SOPs for social workers and their scaling-up and roll out of the CPIMS (Primer) in Iraq. UNICEF trained 1,000 social workers/para social workers on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), child protection case management and dissemination of child rights messages to families and communities.

UNICEF protection and GBV programmes reached 406,683 individuals (89,470 women; 154,539 girls) to demonstrate scale; and collected data to improve programming and support the attainment of the child related SDGs on child protection, especially violence, exploitation and harmful practices. In support of national efforts to reduce violence, 60,492 individuals (28,431 girls; 21,716 women) accessed GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response services across child protection, health, education, and WASH

In total, 290,871 individuals were reached with child protection prevention and response services including 85,595 children (42,790 girls) with structured individual and group MHPSS 17,455 parents and caregivers (10,996 women) with parenting education programme and 15,444 children (9,266 girls) with specialized child protection services.

UNICEF delivered results for children in detention and those lacking civil documentation and birth registration (IDPs and NES returnees). A child justice system mapping and assessment was conducted in 2023 with GOI, promoting alternatives to detention and fair treatment of children in the justice system. The continuation of direct service delivery for children in contact with the justice system included specialized legal aid; diversion and alternatives to detention reaching 4,731 children (645 girls).

About 4,731 children (645 girls) in detention centres availed of UNICEF-supported juvenile justice services and 2,386 children/juveniles (540 girls) were released. Furthermore, 5,751 children had their births registered with UNICEF support.

UNICEF and IOM co-chair the Technical Working Group (TWG) which coordinates implementation of the One UN Plan for NES Returnees; and UNICEF also co-chairs the Child Legal Task Force with GOI to ensure safe, dignified and sustainable return and reintegration of children and their families/caregivers. UNICEF provided an integrated package of humanitarian services to facilitate the return and reintegration of over 3,000 children and families in Jeddah1 Rehabilitation Center into the host communities. A total of 7,050 conflict-affected children (2,820 girls), benefitted from reintegration services in areas of return.

As co-chair with UNAMI of the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), UNICEF supported verification and reporting of grave child right violations, verifying 54 grave violations against 47 children (12 girls) between January and October 2023. In support of the UN Security Council resolution (1612) UNICEF continues to provide technical guidance to GOI on the implementation of the signed MRM Action Plan.

UNICEF Iraq strengthened reporting mechanisms for sexual exploitation and abuse, ensuring accessible channels for recording incidents and participated in drafting the Iraq UN PSEA joint action plan, referral pathways, and initiatives.

Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

In collaboration with GOI, UNICEF published the Climate Landscape Analysis for Children (CLAC); WASH surveys to inform decision-makers in the Ministry of Construction, Housing and Public Municipalities (MoCHPM) and identify gaps to improve SDG WASH indicators. A 60% increase in access to WASH services in focus governates informed the draft GOI three-year costed action plan supported by the UN Water Task Force, which UNICEF co-chairs.

Findings from the Social Sector Financing Review for Iraq helped MoCHPM identify financial gaps to attain SDG 6 targets and inform strategic solutions in partnership with UNICEF (costed plan).

In a continuing effort to support the GOI attain the SDGs, UNICEF supported increased access to safe water and sanitation for 1,612,846 people (820,500 women; 758,037 children), including those in

humanitarian settings of which 528,246 (269,400 women; 248,275 children) improved their means to safely managed water. While 1,257,615 people (640,384 women; 591,079 children) gained access to basic sanitation services, 547,070 (75,000 women; 69,122 children) of these improved access to safely managed sanitation.

Nearly 50% of schools in Iraq do not have access to water and the WASH programme has addressed this by working in a multisectoral way to address multiple disparities, including gender. Through UNICEF support, 135,520 people (92,635 women; 63,694 children) used basic hygiene services (MHM) including an additional 78,502 people with disabilities in 10 governorates; with 1,870 female students in primary schools receiving information on MHM, climate change and sustainable energy. UNICEF also leveraged the government and private sector to co-finance solar powered systems in 290 schools and 25 health care facilities as well as 400 government buildings.

A national seminar to tackle climate change effects on children and youth was held with the Urban Planning Centre at the University of Baghdad, where work on solarization and innovations to address climate change were presented. UNICEF promoted basic knowledge and information for 53,000 school children (25,725 girls) and 50 young people (22 female) through job training on solar powered systems in schools and health facilities; development and endorsement of annex curricula on the importance of renewable energy and its impact on lowering carbon footprint.

UNICEF supported transition to government owned WASH responses for IDPs, refugees and NES returnees, noting some gaps remain. In this context, 21,445 people (10,937 women; 10,080 children) gained access and use of safe water; 6,945 people (4,167 women; 1,958 children) used appropriate and gender-sensitive sanitation services; and 2,600 people (1,325 women; 1,220 children) benefitted from limited hygiene supplies and services.

UNICEF greening initiatives such as the installation of solar panels in field offices were completed in Duhok and in the Basra Southern Region office (Common Premises) with funding from the greening unit in UNICEF DFAM. Smart meters in all UNICEF offices facilitated exploration of solutions and alternative technologies in the market.

Every child has an equitable chance in life

The launch of the National Multidimensional Poverty Index in 2023, revealed that 46.9% children endure multidimensional poverty. However, only 33% are currently covered by the government's SSN programme, pointing to a critical gap and necessitating increased coverage measures. The findings are informing the formulation of the social protection strategy and poverty reduction plan, hence attainment of the SDGs on poverty.

The completion of a gap analysis for Social Safety Net (SSN) social workers and subsequent training of 324 MoLSA social workers (136 female) significantly enhanced competencies in critical areas of case management, SBC and GBV response.

Three comprehensive reports (2023) advocated for the delivery of government-led social services and reallocation of domestic spending towards more efficient services for children. Two investment cases on ECE and improved sewerage were produced to support ongoing sectoral reform. UNICEF continued PF4C capacity building at central and subnational level to improve budget management. Fiscal space and budget analysis identified financing gaps and policy recommendations to enhance the management of the Public Financial Management system within social sectors and 105 government officials were trained in child-focused budgeting.

As part of the flagship EU-UN joint programme, with ILO and WFP, UNICEF supported the development of the draft social protection strategy while also supporting the adoption of the new Social Security Law for Private Sector Workers in May 2023. UNICEF invested in capacity building

and awareness raising to build knowledge and consciousness around social security to move these policies forward.

UNICEF focused on four behavioural studies including community engagement effectiveness/impact assessments to identify perceptions and practices to support sustainable behaviour change efforts and community and human centred designed interventions. The results were used to inform capacity building, social and mass media mobilization in terms of designing, targeting, and identifying priority groups (pregnant women, young people) and SBC interventions.

UNICEF finalized a comprehensive situation analysis for children and young people with disabilities focusing on vulnerable and marginalized girls and young women. The establishment of a management information system geared towards the Persons with Disability Commission and gender-sensitive social and behavioural change (SBC) interventions centred on disability inclusion were designed to promote inclusivity for children with disabilities.

Three national training toolkits/manuals on immunization, community engagement and working with faith leaders were designed in English, Arabic and Kurdish leading to more defined and systematic capacity building approaches. Over 150 focal points attended a training of trainers gaining skills in advocacy for SBC in various local government structures across the country.

UNICEF played a key role in assisting the Central Statistical Organization in launching Iraq's inaugural National Child Data Platform, providing sex-disaggregated data for evidence-based policymaking. UNICEF also initiated the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in 2023 after securing government financial and non-financial commitments.

Humanitarian response

UNICEF supported transitioning from the emergency cluster system. During 2023 most IDP camp WASH services transitioned. The Refugee Education Integration Policy is being implemented in stages, integrating refugee children and teachers into the regular education system leading to increased enrolment of refugee children. UNICEF has advocated for a permanent solution for IDP children, who continue to receive their education in a parallel system supported by the Federal government using the Federal Arabic curriculum. UNICEF has worked with authorities to gradually hand over child protection services; however, this process has been slowed down by the Kurdistan budget crisis.

Two Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeals in 2023 sought funding for the most vulnerable displaced, refugees and children returning from northeast Syria; only 23 and 19 per cent respectively of the HACs were mobilized, therefore UNICEF focused on increased advocacy efforts; but risks for protection are highest due to the lack of institutional mechanisms to transition the cluster system.

UNICEF and IOM established, and co-chair the TWG for Return of Iraqis from NES which was responsible for drafting the One UN Plan. UNICEF established the Child Legal Task to raise the profile of NES child returnees which constitute 60 per cent of all NES returnees. UNICEF supported the GOI on the safe return of 7,000 Iraqis; and Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA) and Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to support third nation returnees; and drafted a brief on the managing child civil documentation for complex cases which informed ONSA on options for addressing NES child returnees 'without caregivers'.

UNICEF engaged in the establishment of the Joint Coordination Forum (JCF) under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator to help to coordinate the needs assessment for the most vulnerable groups, in informal settlements and areas of return to funnel more government support in this direction. This includes co-chairing the JCF in Ninewa and Basra; Ninewa is one of the largest areas of return for IDPs and NES returnees; while Basra is heavily affected by climate change.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF remained a key partner in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020-2024, co-chairing 2 of 5 priority working groups (PWGs). To accelerate PWG results for children, UNICEF led key coordination mechanisms with partners: the Technical Working Group for Return of Iraqis from northeast Syria; Water Task Force; Digital Transformation Working Group; Disability Inclusion Working Group; UN Inter-Agency Working Group on Adolescents and Young People, and EU Steering Committees on Social Policy and Education.

The Water Task Force, co-chaired by UNICEF, UNDP and FAO supported the GOI and the Supreme Water Council to implement the Baghdad Water Conference; engagement in the UN Water Conference, noting that Iraq was the first country in the Middle East to sign the UN Water Convention; supported the drafting of a three-year costed plan for internal water management; and facilitated international technical partnerships, together with the Stockholm International Water Institute, to develop an improved and renewed regulatory framework for water and sanitation services.

UNICEF continued close collaboration with UNESCO, under the EU-funded programme which ended in May 2023. Tangible results were demonstrated in the expansion of the EMIS which will be expanded upon in the second phase. UNICEF also worked with the World Bank to launch the Iraq National Education Strategy 2022-2031 under the Prime Minister's leadership.

UNICEF partnered with IOM to co-chair the TWG and promote the rights and protection of NES returnees in support of the ONSA and the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD). UNICEF chaired the Child Legal Task Force with the High Judicial Council supporting the dignified return of 7,000 Iraqi citizens from NES in 2023.

Joint efforts with UNHCR and Save the Children continued with intensified efforts to advocate for the implementation of the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP) in its second year and expanded to the development of a joint fundraising strategy supporting implementation of the REIP; and a blueprint for UNICEF UNHCR collaboration was cleared by MENARO and NYHQ.

UNICEF, as co-lead of the UN Disability Inclusion Coordination Group with ILO, strengthened disability inclusion policies and collaboration among UN agencies. Further EU-funded programming efforts with ILO and WFP were instrumental in steering social protection reform initiatives bringing together expertise to exchange best practices and technical knowledge.

A key partnership in 2023 was with children and young people in schools and universities through the initiative of "Climate Ambassadors" who will continue to advocate peers in their learning spaces on the negative impact of climate change, water scarcity and poor quality of water sources. The UN Inter-Agency Working Group on youth and adolescents served as a pivotal platform for strengthening these collaborations, leading to joint initiatives with government counterparts, particularly evident during significant events like COP28, where joint advocacy efforts with governmental partners facilitated youth engagement in climate action. UNICEF also spearheaded the integration of the LSCE tool and Learning Passport in universities for digital entrepreneurship, in collaboration with WFP.

UNICEF focused on supporting the government in establishing sector coordination mechanisms which led to solidifying government leadership as well as inclusion of children in the financing of government planning and budgeting. During this process, the Joint Coordination Forum under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator was established to help coordinate service delivery among service providers and local authorities.

UNICEF also engaged civil society across many programmes. Academic institutions including the University of Baghdad and University of Salahuddin in the Kurdistan Region enriched the social protection reform process through collaborative research studies on multidimensional child poverty;

SBC activities for health promotion were run by the MoH with Shia and Sunni endowments supporting, along with International and national organizations.

New windows of collaboration and partnership were initiated with UNAMI through the UN2UN agreement to improve climate resilient projects in four locations within UNAMI compounds in Baghdad and Kirkuk, while expansion of agreement for replication and scalability got underway. Involving DFAM's ISO unit identified greening projects that qualify for funding support such as smart meters which help to calculate and monitor the electricity consumption for each office.

UNICEF has also worked to leverage government and private sector investments, including US\$14 million allocation from the government budget to install solar powered systems in all schools to reduce the impact of climate change and overall carbon footprint; US\$100 million for the MoCHMP internal water management strategy, and working with Zain Telecommunications, to track children who missed vaccinations; expanded opportunities for young people to transition to the labour market through internships, apprenticeships, and other forms of organized on-the-job-training; and four joint campaigns that served to amplify UNICEF messages on social media. UNICEF also collaborated with Daewoo in support of quality education for every child, including ECE and climate action in Basra.

Joint programming and resource mobilization was a key pillar of engagement with resource partners resulting in three multiyear joint programmes supported by the EU that generated over US\$60 million and continuation of the joint programme under PROSPECTS phase 2 with financing of over US\$48 million from Netherlands; while coordinated fund raising through the TWG on NES Returnees has provided visibility to donors to prevent duplication.

UNICEF engagement with photographers and journalists worldwide resulted in a report being published in El País, the main Spanish-speaking media outlet, reaching 785,000 daily readers and 75 million unique browsers per month.

Cost-saving and cost-sharing partnerships with other UN agencies led to efficiency gains such as the establishment of a long-term arrangement for the provision of spare parts for armoured vehicles which reduced spending on vehicle maintenance as well as co-sharing a UN guesthouse in Basra.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

National leadership and governance for sustainability

In 2023, UNICEF worked with GOI to improve service delivery, coordination, and sustainable programme implementation under national ownership, which had varying degrees of success that require reflection, noting specific examples: A) Health service digitalization yielded lessons which demonstrated how government ownership on the selection digital solutions was a key for success and sustainability. C) UNICEF leadership in the implementation of the Global Framework in Iraq under the "One UN Plan" emphasized the need to place protection interventions at the center, drawing on UNICEF's role as an advocate for the UN Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) with the GOI. D) Cross-sectorial coordination among the legislative, judicial, and administrative bodies of Iraq is essential for providing the comprehensive services that meet children's needs. The Prime Minister's office has created the CWC which passed the Child Protection Policy Plan and has supported efforts to transition from humanitarian to development. E) Coordination between the Ministry of Finance and the line Ministries is challenging. The channels of communication are not institutionalized within the GOI so fostering collaboration will take innovative means to drive improved communications on PF4C.

Quality investments in system strengthening across programme

The year 2023 marked the period in which programmes focused more on upstream work to drive government ownership in a post emergency context. Programmes worked to align all their system strengthening strategies across four areas: a) evidence generation, analysis, and use; b) governance and policy making; c) quality of services; and d) financing. Good practices include the support for the CWC's overall role as the main GOI governance body for child rights, and investing in the Child Data

Portal as the overall resource for child rights monitoring. However, a lesson learned was that programmes need to work more closely together to maximize investments in the four areas and amplify the impact of their investments collectively.[CJ1]

Optimized data generation, analysis and use

UNICEF's collaboration with the CWC and MoLSA on the establishment of the National Child Data Portal which integrates related data platforms to inform policy and practices has elevated the child protection profile and must continue to create momentum among government and non-government actors. Social Policy data has generated data multidimensional poverty; WASH has produced the CLAC; MoE has a database on out-of-school youth and MoH has a database on zero dose children both supported by UNICEF and help to facilitate improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of programming. However, while generation of data is being promoted by UNICEF, better analytical methods and application of data to programme and policy planning is needed.

Decentralisation to governate and district levels

UNICEF supported the governorates to implement Governorate Education Sector Plans. Health worked to strengthen digital supply chains and DHISII in all PHC facilities; while WASH has implemented projects with governates to address water scarcity issues relevant to context, i.e. rainwater catchment in Kurdistan. Recognizing the unique needs of individual governorates, decentralisation underscores the importance of local-level collaboration and ownership to address the specific needs of children, particularly for the most vulnerable children to achieve government priorities. The challenge will be to plan and implement according to governate level priorities rather than nationally scaling Federal priorities. This will entail basic programme planning interventions to be conducted at governate level.

Private sector engagement and new models of partnership and innovation

Engagement with the private sector in Iraq has tremendous opportunity to catalyse innovative benefits for children. The health programme benefited from partnership with telecommunication companies to track unvaccinated children, and uptake antenatal and postnatal services. Schools have been a main area of private sector collaboration. Zain communications facilitated reduced internet pricing in EU-funded project sites. UNICEF also demonstrated how the private sector can bring water to schools, with the private sector investing in 20 schools to scale solar powered systems, while also educating young people about solarization jobs in Basra. This work informed the ICO innovation strategy in collaboration with the Office of Innovation, while capitalizing on UNICEF staff who demonstrated a passion for innovation to identify these opportunities. However, to accelerate private sector engagement, UNICEF will need to systematically work toward defining business models that promote 'win-win' scenarios for both profit and results for human capital investments and reflect on demonstrated innovations outside of Iraq.

Post-emergency cluster system responses for children

Deactivation of the cluster system for emergency response led to coordination challenges among different agencies and organizations involved in key programme areas, emphasizing the importance of exploring alternative service delivery models, such as NGOs, CBOs, or the private sector to help extend services to areas where government capacity is limited. Child protection faced the most challenges, but the CWC serves as a good example of how to coordinate transition of protection services to the government. Many challenges remain to bring government owned services to scale, such as building the capacity of social workers, but UNICEF is supporting the government by partnering with the International Association of Social Workers. The establishment of the TWG, co-chaired by UNICEF and IOM, has the GOI Supreme Committee on NES Returnees as its main counterpart to coordinate emergency related programming and has serves as a good practice for UN/GOI coordination and partnership with donors to amplify results in a resource constrained setting.

Operating in a gender-sensitive context

Investment in staff capacity building on gender-responsive and transformative programming is critical. The approach was done in a culturally sensitive manner in dialogue with UN Task Force on Gender and MENARO to develop products such as, the “Do’s and Don’ts” brief and the Iraq UN PSEA joint action plan. UNICEF is also working with all implementing partners to ensure continuity of services that promote justice between boys and girls; and will continue to work in support of the government to realize its commitments to the SDGs and the CRC.

[CJ1]To revisit