

Syrian Arab Republic

Update on the context and situation of children

The impact of nearly 13 years of sustained conflict, continued displacements, unprecedented economic crisis, climate-related shocks and disease outbreaks were further aggravated when the earthquakes hit Türkiye and Syria in February 2023. The number of people requiring humanitarian assistance increased from 14.6 million[1] to 16.7 million by December 2023. This includes 7.5 million children - of which 3.4 million are girls; 2.8 million persons with disabilities; and 5.5 million internally displaced people.[2]

When the deadly earthquakes struck, approximately 5,900 people, including children, in Syria were killed and more than 12,800 injured.[3] An estimated 8.8 million people were affected. The infrastructure already weakened by the conflict was severely damaged and the damages and losses, caused by the earthquakes, were estimated at the total value of US\$9 billion.[4] Widespread economic and trade disruption also occurred. Since February 2023, the Syrian pound (SYP) lost about half of its value against the US\$, averaging around SYP 14,200/US\$ in the parallel foreign exchange market in November 2023.[5] The World Food Price reference food basket for a family of five surged by almost 100 per cent since the start of the year and more than quadrupled over a two-year span.[6] Some people in the northeast and northwestern regions reportedly resorted to selling household items and productive assets to cope as price increases on essential goods and limitations on purchase quantities challenged consumption patterns.

Of the 3,249 UNICEF beneficiaries interviewed as part of an internal Child Well-Being Monitoring (CWM) exercise conducted in the second half of the year, less than half (43 per cent) received water from a network once a week or less frequently or had no network access. Of the participants, 80 per cent were not able to provide their children with enough meals daily and 94 per cent were not able to provide minimum dietary diversity.[7]

Countrywide, more than 40 per cent of hospitals and health facilities were only partially functional or completely non-functional in 2023.[8] Public health emergencies – including the ongoing cholera epidemic with 189,374 suspected cholera cases and 105 associated deaths reported in 14 governorates [9] – further burdened the healthcare system already weakened by the departure of at least 50 per cent of health workers since the start of the conflict.[10]

Preliminary findings of 2023 Standard and Monitoring Assessment for Relief and Transitions (SMART) survey concluded that national prevalence of Global Acute Malnutrition is 4.8 per cent, while the national stunting prevalence is close to 17 per cent, an increase from 12.6 per cent in 2019, as only 6 per cent of children 6-23 months old access minimum acceptable diets. Exclusive breastfeeding rate increased to 45.5 per cent, from 28.5 per cent in 2019.

Some 6.9 million children need emergency education services, including 3.2 million girls, due in part to poverty and affordability issues and to the damage and or destruction of 7,000 schools. Around 2.4 million children remain out of school, while another 1.6 million are at risk of dropping out.[11] The high transportation fees and increasing education expenses reportedly prevent many children from going to school, and hinder teachers' access to schools across the country. With the start of the 2023/24 academic year, many media and local sources reported that the cost of preparing one student could exceed SYP700,000 (US\$52) including the uniform and stationery. Many families cannot afford these costs as the monthly average salary is approximately SYP250,000 (US\$18)[12]

Six million children lacked protection services, with 84 per cent of communities reporting cases of

child marriage while 96 per cent report cases of child labour.[13] UNOHCHR documented incidents across Syria in which 115 children were killed between January and October[14] and the risk of violence remains high, with unexploded ordnance contamination being of major concern.

Nearly 13.6 million people (61 per cent of the population), including children, required access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services[15]. This represents a 2.6 per cent increase from 2022. The protracted conflict, lack of routine maintenance, shortage of experienced staff, drought and water scarcity combined with weak water management, drastic budget cuts, inflation, and the earthquake, contributed to the reduction of access to basic WASH services.

In October 2023, northern Syria and the Deir-ez-Zor governorate experienced the most significant escalation of hostilities since 2019, resulting in the displacement of over 120,000 people in northwest Syria. Almost 40 health facilities, 27 schools and 20 water systems were impacted by shelling. [16] In the northwest, 4.1 million people have multilayered humanitarian needs. Of the 2.9 million internally displaced people, 2 million live in overcrowded camps. Some 3.8 million people need health care and 3.7 million are food insecure.[17] Protection risks are paramount, and children need support to realize their right to education. In the northeast, children and women face arbitrary detention, extensive violence and forced relocation.[18]

[1] OCHA, HNO, 2022

[2] OCHA, Summary HNO, 2024

[3] Syria Earthquake Recovery Needs Assessment (SERNA), 2023

[4] Ibid

[5] OCHA, Summary HNO, 2024

[6] WFP, Market price watch bulletin, November 2023, Issue 107. The standard food basket is a group of essential food commodities.

[7] 30 of 62 districts in all the 14 governorates of Syria, covering the period between Jul-Dec 2023

[8] OCHA, HNO, 2023

[9] Whole of Syria Cholera Outbreak Situation Report no.20, Issued 23 October 2023

[10] OCHA, HNO, 2023

[11] OCHA, HNO, 2023

[12] OCHA, Humanitarian Update, September 2023

[13] OCHA, HNO, 2023

[14] OCHA, Summary HNO, 2024

[15] OCHA, HNO, 2023

[16] OCHA, Summary HNO, 2024

[17] OCHA, North-West Syria: Situation Report, 13 September 2023.

[18] OCHA, HNO, 2023

Major contributions and drivers of results

In close collaboration with the Government of Syria (GoS), UNICEF's rapid earthquake response reached 1.8 million people with vital emergency services and supplies. Together with the Ministry of Health (MoH), UNICEF provided basic health services including vaccination and nutrition. In the northwest, 311,076 vulnerable women and children were reached in shelters and assembly points. UNICEF procured 33 prefabricated clinics that provided primary health care (PHC) services in Aleppo, Latakia, Hama, Deir-ez-Zor and Damascus governorates, in addition to 18 prefabricated storage facilities to Aleppo and Damascus.

The MoH and other partners were supported to expand the infant and young child feeding (IYCF) programme reaching 1,265,873 primary caregivers (84 per cent females) with counselling focused on

promoting, protecting, and supporting exclusive breastfeeding. More than 900,000 units of ready-to-use infant formula (RUIF) benefitted 1,469 infants (53 per cent girls) in Latakia, Hama, and Aleppo.

In close collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE), UNICEF supported 568,050 children (49 per cent girls) in earthquake-affected governorates with psychosocial support (PSS) and non-formal education (NFE) activities, and undertook the rehabilitation of 197 schools, and training of 5,844 teachers (68 per cent females) on PSS. The learning cinema was rapidly rolled out to support learning continuity. It consumed low energy and uses affordable technology to provide interactive digital content reaching 1,577 children (61 per cent girls). Catch-up sessions benefitted 30,103 children (52 per cent girls) and 364 out-of-school children (OOSC) in preparation for the new school year.

Approximately 446,565 girls, boys and women accessed critical services to prevent family separation, violence, exploitation, and abuse; as well as mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and awareness raising on safety issues, including Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE). Around 1,234 unaccompanied and separated children (49 per cent girls) received protection, family tracing and reunification services, and 3,730 frontline staff (71 per cent females) benefitted from the launch of the Frontliners Wellbeing Programme to strengthen their coping strategies.

UNICEF and the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR) collaborated to replace 1,400 meters of damaged pipeline and water networks that restored access to drinking water for 1.6 million residents of Aleppo. UNICEF rehabilitated 36 damaged sewer systems, enabling safe sanitation services for 1.4 million people. To 'build-back-better', UNICEF is reconstructing 10 elevated tanks using seismic-resistant engineering designs.

Emergency cash assistance, rolled out within 96 hours of the earthquake in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MoSAL), reached 36,471 affected families. It benefitted 184,657 beneficiaries, including 93,740 children (49 per cent girls) in Aleppo, Hama and Latakia Governorates. Robust social protection platforms enabled the rapid scaling up and expansion to existing and new beneficiaries.

Around 6,125 youth volunteers (51 per cent girls) and networks were mobilized and trained to conduct needs assessments, shelter management, packaging and distribution of food and NFIs, delivery of Psychological First Aid, and dissemination of social behaviour change (SBC) messages, reaching more than 18,000 people. An additional 650 volunteers delivered self-protection and earthquake mitigation messages to more than 15,000 people through interactive theatre and storytelling.

Caregivers in 695 communities participated in critical lifesaving, risk mitigation SBC activities and another 782,308 people (18 per cent girls) were engaged through different approaches. In addition, 858,451 people (40 per cent children) were empowered to mitigate the risks of repeated aftershocks through social media platforms.

Every child survives and thrives

The Health and Nutrition Programme helped increase equitable access to, and use of quality, resilient, gender sensitive health and nutrition services reaching 1,296,502 adults (85 per cent females) and 3,919,651 children (50 per cent girls), including 107,273 internally displaced (IDP) children and 10,827 children with disabilities. UNICEF prioritized the elaboration of the national PHC strategy, systems strengthening, capacity development of doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers on maternal, newborn and child health and on the prevention and control of communicable diseases in collaboration with the MoH, WHO and other UN and NGO partners.

WHO and UNICEF supported MoH to procure 12.5 million doses of vaccines and conduct 5 rounds of COVID-19 and childhood vaccination campaigns, reaching 190,750 adults and 609,950 children. The

campaigns increased DPT3 coverage to 84 per cent and triggered a 4-percentage point reduction in the number of DPT zero-dose children. In response to the on-going measles outbreak, the two agencies supported two vaccination campaigns reaching 394,146 at-risk children under the age of 5 and reduced the number of cases from 128 to 2. GAVI's support enabled UNICEF to rehabilitate and solarize 16 PHCs, and install 18 autoclaves for environmentally friendly immunization waste management. Efforts to increase the demand for routine vaccination services continued despite additional obstacles.

WHO and UNICEF joint action on “newborn care at home” enabled 24,805 visits to 6,923 pregnant women and 3,706 newborns and support the extension of the Early Newborn Action Plan (ENAP) in 10 sentinel hospitals. Collaboration with 19 local NGOs enabled treatment of common childhood and maternal illnesses affecting the most vulnerable communities and IDPs unable to afford the high cost of pharmaceuticals due to inflation, currency devaluation, and limited local manufacturing capacity. Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) coverage expanded to reach 176,456 children through 708 PHC centres through the upskilling of 228 doctors and nurses.

UNICEF's implementing partners screened 1,171,914 children under the age of five (50 per cent girls) and 401,082 Pregnant and Lactating Women (PLW), achieving 100 per cent and 94 per cent respectively of the annual targets. Early detection at facility, community, and household levels resulted in the admission and treatment of 9,708 children 6-59 months old (58 per cent girls) suffering from severe wasting, with a cure rate at 81 per cent. Exclusive breastfeeding reached 125,828 caregivers (6 per cent males) while 250 nutrition staff were trained on IYCF and another 100 received training on Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM).

Every child learns and acquires skills

In collaboration with the MoE and partners, UNICEF's interventions strengthened systems and institutions and produced policies, strategies, and guidelines that improved access, quality and inclusive child-centred learning and wellbeing. Over 2.67 million conflict and earthquake-affected learners accessed multiple pathways to education. UNICEF undertook the rehabilitation and retrofitting of (250) schools, classrooms, and WASH facilities; provided essential learning supplies and materials; and supported curriculum design and adaptation, teacher resourcing and training, among others.

UNICEF's policy advocacy, technical leadership, and collaboration with the National Center of Curriculum Development (NCCD) empowered 53,000 children (48 per cent girls) who missed 2 years of schooling to continue learning. The Empowered Learning Materials (ELM) strategy equips OOSC with adequate knowledge and skills to sit national exams and transition to accredited education. UNICEF's support also enabled the Ministry of Culture (MoC) to offer learning opportunities to 5,700 disadvantaged OOSC and children at risk of dropping out (50 per cent girls).

Review and adaptation of the Better Learning Program (BLP) to align with the Syrian curriculum on social-emotional learning (SEL) were completed and followed by training of over 1,000 teachers (96 per cent females) who reached close to 8,000 children (48 per cent girls). Similarly, UNICEF supported the training of 384 trainers and over 7,000 teachers (90 per cent females), counsellors, and principals on PSS, life skills and learning assessment.

The Learning Passport, a repository of digitized self-learning materials and assessments designed by skilled teachers from across Syria, was expanded to reach 6,501 children (54 per cent girls) in targeted governorates. To expand access, UNICEF procured 104 prefabricated classrooms and solarized 21 schools. Additionally, 380,498 children (50 per cent girls) benefitted from new furniture and 47,512 received backpacks and stationery to incentivise school return and retention. Alternative and distance learning opportunities, including digital learning platforms such as the Learning Cinema, helped children mitigate learning loss and facilitated their return to school.

Efforts to finalize and commence implementation of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Strategy continued with consultations, elaboration of implementation plans and reinforcement of commitments in coordination with the Syrian Commission for Family and Population Affairs (SCFAP).

A contextual, holistic learning assessment strategy was developed, incorporating placement, pre and post-tests as well as summative sample-based and formative assessments designed to improve the quality of education and to monitor children's learning achievements. Over 24,000 children in cross-line/cross-border areas were supported to sit exams. UNICEF also strengthened the Education Management Information System (EMIS) for effective policy, planning, and management decision-making.

Every child is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices

The Child Protection programme targets the strengthening of laws, policies and strategies, capacity, and systems to improve preventive, responsive, and promotive services at scale. UNICEF's collaboration continued with MoSAL and the University of Damascus to develop a social work programme at bachelor's and master's degree levels. It also successfully advocated for the adoption of the Primero Information Management System to improve case management.

Capacity building initiatives were undertaken to equip frontline workers and service providers with knowledge on child protection minimum standards, case management, Gender Based Violence (GBV), EORE, MHPSS and positive parenting. The MHPSS and Parenting manuals were developed with the Government, and over 1,200 trained child protection personnel received on-the-job coaching and real-time monitoring and feedback to boost their capacities and confidence.

Empowered frontline workers reached 354,737 children between the ages of 6 and 17 years (51 per cent girls) with structured activities based on the approved national MHPSS manual. Around 65 per cent of participants exhibited enhanced psychosocial wellbeing, including improved emotional understanding, strengthened parent-child relations, and heightened awareness of healthy and unhealthy relationships. Similarly, parenting improvement sessions reached 72,334 adults (84 per cent females). Engaging men continues to be a challenge.

UNICEF supported dedicated EORE training for 209 staff of partners in direct contact with children and caregivers, who, in collaboration with the MoE, MoH and implementing partners, reached 669,960 people (82 per cent children) with crucial risk education messages aimed at improving awareness and safety practices of communities exposed to explosive remnants.

With support from UNICEF, the National Committee on Child Rights, led by SCFAP is finalizing the drafting of a child protection strategic plan and a response plan for the concluding observations and recommendations of the Convention of the Rights of the Child Committee.

Every child has access to safe and equitable water, sanitation and hygiene services, and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment

Approximately 13.55 million people, including children, are in dire need for WASH support with around 2.6 per cent increase from 2022. The protracted conflict, lack of routine maintenance, shortage of experienced staff, drought and scarce water resources combined with absence of integrated water resources management, drastic reduction of budget allocations and inflation as well as the impact of the earthquake, have contributed to the reduction of access to basic WASH services.

During the past 12 years, the decline of the WASH sector has been reduced by following a 'shock

therapy’ mode of interventions, avoiding a major breakdown.

The devastating earthquake that hit in February 2023 added an extra layer of disrepair to the already crippled sector. Tens of elevated water tanks collapsed, and hundreds of meters of water pipes and sewer lines were broken, increasing the potential of cross contamination during power outages.

During 2023, UNICEF provided 2.9 million people (52 per cent females) with access to safe drinking water through the rehabilitation of 48 water networks, 18 wells, and 23 pumping stations, systematically targeting locations where the need is higher. UNICEF disinfectants supply water facilities countrywide. Unlike 2022, there was no outbreak of cholera and other water-borne diseases. UNICEF was able to support access to basic sanitation services for over 1.4 million people (52 per cent females) by restoring 36 sewage systems. UNICEF focused on providing emergency services to around 905,000 (55 per cent females) who were displaced by the earthquake in northwestern governorates of Syria, as well as the IDPs affected by the conflict and residing in camps, such as Al-Hol and Areesha, in northeast Syria.

In parallel, UNICEF has embarked on a nationwide water facility assessment to define the infrastructure efficiency and operational dependability in addition to measure the effect of electricity/power availability on the infrastructure efficiency. Upon completion, the assessment will avail a solid set of data that could be used in identifying priority needs and consequently enhance planning, targeting and resource allocation. It is also seen as a ‘state of preparedness’ for a macro level planning exercise.

UNICEF was also successful in getting a ‘Readiness’ proposal approved by the Green Climate Fund for US\$1 million, shared with UN-Habitat. This fund will be used to undertake a climate risk analysis in support of sector planning from a climate lens.

Every child has access to inclusive social protection and lives free from poverty

Delivery of the Integrated Social Protection Programme – Children with Disabilities (ISPP-CwD) and the Cash Transfer for Basic Needs (CTBN) winter and earthquake response benefited 334,540 people, including 174,839 children (48 per cent girls). Of the targeted 17,000 children, UNICEF reached 10,039 children (42% girls) with quarterly transfer of cash amounting to US\$120 per family. To respond to the educational needs of CwD enrolled in the programme, UNICEF invested in the rehabilitation of five specialized centres. This improved access to tailored education services for CwD. The ISPP was formally recognized as a priority by the GoS, leading to the inclusion of Latakia Governorate in December 2023, with payments starting in the first quarter of 2024.

UNICEF produced the third version of the Budget Brief series to analyse the public sector budget estimates approved for the 2023 fiscal year. The analysis, which focuses mainly on priority areas for children, simplifies the budget information and suggests key advocacy messages for various stakeholders.

The limited number of Financial Service Providers (FSP) continues to be a critical constraint. Some FSPs face difficulties in ensuring timely cash delivery to beneficiaries, causing stressful delays. UNICEF continues to explore flexible options, including better planning and advance outlays to selected FSPs. Joint UN advocacy continues with Government for a preferential exchange rate to boost the purchasing power of beneficiaries since 30 – 40% of what they currently receive is lost to the official exchange rate.

Adolescent Development and Participation

During 2023, UNICEF reached 556,877 of the most disadvantaged 10–24-year-old youth and adolescents (53 per cent females); 4 per cent youth with disability) with inclusive and gender

transformational opportunities designed to build their capacities, self-confidence, and resiliency, as well as to prevent violence, child marriage and child labour. Among them, 235,436 (55% females, 6.5% YWD) benefitted from life-skills, citizenship education, and employability skills. Another 495,786 (52% females, 4% YWD) were engaged in youth-led initiatives, sports for development, and awareness-raising campaigns. UNICEF supported initiatives designed and led by youth in social, economic, environmental, cultural, and sports and cross-sectoral awareness campaigns (covering child protection, education, WASH, health and nutrition, and SBC).

To integrate OOSC, UNICEF supported the establishment of 40 youth-friendly spaces and integrated centres (2 in IDP camps). 156 mobile teams across 14 governorates were enabled to build foundational, job-specific and digital literacy skills to prepare young people for the job market. Emphasis was placed on girls to reduce their vulnerability to violence and coercion, child labour and early marriage as well as to challenge stereotyping that limits their exposure and participation. Around 296,071 young girls were empowered to safely learn and apply digital literacy, on-line safety and employability skills as well as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics skills.

UNICEF implemented integrated interventions with six other UN agencies as part of the UN Joint Programme in Deir-ez-Zor and Dara'a governorates. A total of 11,982 young people (64 per cent females) accessed vocational education and training, employability skills, and various engagement opportunities in communities severely impacted by the conflict. Around 131,399 young people (50 per cent females) participated in various sports activities designed to improve their physical and mental wellbeing, build social cohesion and remove barriers for girls. In northeast Syria, 2,000 young girls participated in sports events traditionally restricted to boys, promoting a positive change in socio-cultural stereotypes.

Programme and Operational Effectiveness

More than 40 human interests' stories, 30 videos and nearly 2,000 high-quality photos were produced for the public, including donors, coupled with strong messaging, packaged into compelling communication products, and disseminated to advance advocacy on children's rights, bolster contributions and investments in life-saving assistance for children's long-term recovery.

Evidence and gender-based SBC initiatives reached 20,543,611 people (19 per cent girls) and engaged 4,661,079 more (11 per cent girls) across the country, prioritizing demand for routine immunization services, especially targeting zero-dose children. Around 54 focus group discussions were conducted in which 85 per cent of participants supported vaccination, reflecting an overall positive attitude necessary to achieve national and SDG targets. The back-to-learning media campaign reached more than 2,918,316 people (47 per cent females) and an additional 131,242 people (23 per cent girls) participated in programme activities. SBC is expanding its partnership to work with Ministry of Religious Endowments which has a large network of religious leaders across the country that could reach inaccessible families in need. The partnership includes a cross regional collaboration with Al Azhar University for sharing of experience between Syria and Egypt.

Overall, 446,664 people (48 per cent women, 21 per cent girls) were reached with Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) messages, including information on safe and accessible channels to report SEA.

UNICEF continued to strengthen evidence generation, analysis, and their strategic use in 2023. The completion of Child Wellbeing Monitoring (CWM) rounds 2 and 3 generated child-focused, gender-disaggregated evidence enabling UNICEF to target specific areas for integrated programming. The Multi-cluster Initial Rapid Assessment also allowed flexible data collection of earthquake-related needs to inform the response plan.

Operations support enabled the delivery of results by upholding value for money principles, addressing operational bottlenecks, effectively managing risks and ensuring staff safety and wellbeing. Operations efficiency remained strong during the earthquake response, reflected by timely processing of implementing partnerships and surge support requests. Effective management of cash transfer risks was ensured through quality, simplified and timely assurance activities and transparent processes including strengthening staff and partners' capacities for the management and accountability of resources.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

Through the United Nations Strategic Framework for Syria 2022-2024, UNICEF strengthened its partnership with the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) to implement the UN Joint Work Plan, Joint Programme and support the Voluntary National Report process in collaboration with five UN agencies, namely Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN-Habitat, and the World Food Programme (WFP). These partnerships delivered tangible and measurable resilience and recovery-oriented results across all results areas. In addition to helping UNICEF to tackle multiple barriers to national targets, strategic plan goals and SDGs, collaboration with the UN Country Team also helped to find solutions for cross border problems.

While UNICEF is the designated leader in the procurement and delivery of all vaccines and supplies on behalf of Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), joint UNICEF and WHO technical and financial support resulted in the submission of quality proposals, the leveraging resources for vaccine procurement, and macro and micro planning with the MoH and the EPI programme. The MoU signed recently between UNICEF and WFP and the consequent joint support to the MoH have paved the way for the country to conduct annual SMART surveys and to expand the coverage of the nutrition programme to the most vulnerable communities.

UNICEF coordinated with MoE, SCFAP and NCCD to develop and strengthen national strategies, guidelines, capacity building, tools and systems including EMIS. UNICEF also worked with the Norwegian Refugee Council and MoC to expand children's access to education, enhancing the multi-sectoral aspect of programming while leveraging the strengths of various partners. At the national level, the SBC cultivated impactful partnerships with national organizations such as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and SCFAP to bolster health and hygiene promotion initiatives.

UNICEF resumed engagement with MoSAL and academia such as University of Damascus to develop and strengthen social workforce. The Child Protection Area of responsibility (AoR) which convenes 52 UN, national, local and international organizations, helped UNICEF to mobilize new resources through the increased focus on results, removal competition for funding and increased impact and value for money for its donors.

Contribution to WASH achievements came from central ministries such as MoWR and Ministry of Local Administration and Environment in addition to local authorities to increase and expand coverage of WASH services, especially in areas with low to moderate humanitarian access.

UNICEF also continues to be the Education, Nutrition, WASH sectors and Child Protection AoR lead agency engaging with partners at national and sub-national levels providing coordination leadership and continue to deliver results for children including through negotiation for access and delivery of life-saving services.

UNICEF also advanced in building cases for investment to attract new public and private sector

investors. The collaboration with Aleppo and Alfouurat Universities; the Chambers of Commerce, tourism, and Industry, and the Industrial City in Aleppo to provide on-the-job training and internship opportunities for graduates from TVET programmes is an example of this. The partnership with FSPs to scale up, timely cash transfer and UNICEF's willingness to seek and adopt solutions to problems are reflective of a more flexible risk appetite for effective operational models in crisis settings.

UNICEF continued to develop and consolidate engagement with adolescents and young people as positive agents of change. UNICEF invested and took action to ensure that adolescents and young people in Syria are increasingly empowered and networked to participate more systematically in interventions designed to meet their needs and aspirations, as well as those of their peers and communities. The youth and adolescent volunteers and their networks were fundamental to the earthquake response, particularly as it related the conceptualization, design and implementation of information and awareness raising, such as to increase demand for life-saving services and back-to-school.

UNICEF demonstrated confidence in the comparative advantage of its NGO, CBO and civil society partners was catalytic and contributed significantly to respond to the demands created by the complexities of the protracted conflict, compounded by the 2023 earthquakes. Partnership with 63 implementing partners enabled UNICEF to deliver integrated results and advance UNICEF's commitment to 'leave-no child behind' in collective settings, camps and in areas where services are absent.

Partnerships with stakeholders enabled UNICEF to unblock important legal and policy bottlenecks, aided by UNICEF's high-level policy, technical assistance and advice, critical materials and supplies as well as targeted, timely financial support.

Donors, both public and private, enabled UNICEF to achieve results for children. The contributions helped UNICEF to rapidly respond to the needs of the population affected by the earthquake and made the humanitarian-early recovery nexus real in the lives of children and their families. UNICEF looks forward to continuously partnering with donors to ensure more predictable contribution patterns, commensurate with the extent and depth of the challenges children face in Syria.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

The internal After-Action Review of UNICEF's Earthquake response conducted in May 2023 provided an opportunity for an office-wide reflection on the overall response and helped identify key areas for future actions. The findings pointed out to strengthen preparedness, drawing on good practice and viewing crisis as an opportunity to implement strategic objectives. It also called for further reflection on opportunities for multi-sectoral and integrated interventions with more efficiency, building on existing good practice and thinking about the mechanisms that could provide further opportunities to maximize synergies among programmes. Strengthening operationalization of the organizational key accountability and commitment on PSEA, along with Accountability for Affected Population (AAP), are also recommended for appropriate prioritization, including building the capacities of UNICEF and partners for effective implementation in future emergencies.

The successful shift and experience gained in the implementation of mutually reinforcing early recovery and delivery of humanitarian assistance also helped UNICEF to more seamlessly mainstream emergency response in the aftermath of the earthquakes. For example, despite the challenges faced to deliver cash transfers and earthquake in 2023, UNICEF's initiation of humanitarian cash transfers within the first 96 hours is evidence of the deliberate actions taken to integrate shock responsiveness into the existing cash transfer system.

Interventions must be tailored to the local context for health and nutrition programmes and there is no “One Size Fits All”. Looking ahead to 2024, increased attention to engaging communities through human-centred design will maximize the interventions’ effectiveness in specific contexts and will foster adaptability and build trust between UNICEF and the community. This also applies to advocacy efforts including with MoH, resulting in the revision of the minimum PHC package tailored to level of care and the availability of human resources.

Actions such as the empowerment of MoE content developers to upgrade curriculum materials and to facilitate the materials’ adoption for self-learning will help to deliver and maintain acceptable standards and diversify options for many children, adolescents, and young people. Innovative approaches such as alternate and distance learning opportunities, learning cinema and learning passport have contributed to mitigate learning loss and bring children back to school including those from camps and crossline locations.

UNICEF’s commitment to coordination and harmonization has enabled it to mobilize and leverage other partners to support child-oriented issues and targets, and move beyond disjointed coordination to a more ambitious, integrated, and systemic approach across sectors. For example, child protection AoR reached children, adolescents, and their families with targeted services based on the diversity of expertise across the range of services that this platform of 52 national, local, international organizations offer. There is also the continued importance of working with government institutions to advance child protection systems, and to hold duty bearers and national institutions accountable for the protection of children.

WASH is a critical sector that impacts the health of the entire population and critically depends on the infrastructure delivering the service, human resources planning, constructing, maintaining and operating infrastructure, and all sustainable activities that keep this system operational. To sustain the sector performance and avoid a major breakdown, combined and continuous investments from UNICEF and other sectors is required. The sector assessment also indicated that energy efficiency reduced from 53 per cent to 20 per cent because of limited power supply, exacerbated by climate change and the fuel and electricity crisis plaguing the country. Therefore, integrating energy availability and efficiency considerations into future WASH and infrastructure interventions has become a necessity.

UNICEF’s support and investment in adolescents and young people’s participation in finding solutions to existing and emerging climate change problems in collaboration with the Regional Office has already proved instrumental in connecting local adolescents and youth with their peers from other countries with whom they have been able to exchange ideas, lessons, experiences possibly, to collaborate on innovative solutions. UNICEF supported science and youth clubs to empower youth in Astronomy, Health Awareness, Robotics, 3D printing and Artificial Intelligence (AI), among others. The approach also included end-of-course entrepreneurship projects, launching exhibitions and job fairs to create incubators for young innovators and to connect graduates with the job market. UNICEF plans to resume support of the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) initiative launched in 2022 to drive youth-led initiatives including on climate change.

While demand for ‘routine’ services continues to be optimal, outreach and campaigns may no longer be considered alternatives for catch-up and to periodically reach the otherwise unreachable, but might become part of a multi-prong, durable-solutions strategy to ensure sustained access to, and coverage of basic services particularly, as economic, and financial barriers in 2023 pushed services further out of reach for many. UNICEF’s investment in building integrated skills and capacities including on-the-job training of NGOs, frontline workers and volunteers across an important range of skills necessary for delivering SBC, social protection, education, health, immunization, nutrition, and MPHSS, among others is the basis for a ground-level network of social services providers that transcend its usefulness

to the emergency/humanitarian crisis.

UNICEF's use of technology and improved evidence generation and analytics is increasingly building the office's capacity to identify and map all children furthest from accessing key life-saving interventions, for example, the completion of CWM generated child-focused and gender-disaggregated evidence.