

ESARO, Kenya

Update on the context and trends

Africa is asserting itself on the global stage, bringing opportunities to advance the agenda for children. In 2023, UNICEF witnessed significant macro-level openings for improving child wellbeing in the Eastern and Southern Africa region (ESAR). Growth projections are expected to rise in the coming years. ESAR governments are increasingly committed to investing in children by improving social sector spending and reforming public financial management despite fiscal space constraints exacerbated by high debt burden and inflation. Thanks to sustained government endeavors, the proportion of children living in extreme poverty is gradually declining.

Nevertheless, challenges persist. In 2023, children experienced overlapping humanitarian crises: multiple Level-3 (L3) and Level-2 (L2) emergencies, including L3 drought in the Horn of Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia) and the L2 cholera and Tropical Cyclone Freddy crisis (Malawi, Mozambique). Many countries faced cholera (14 overall), polio, Ebola and Marburg outbreaks, and spillover effects of violence in Sudan. Climatic events, including El Niño, drove drought, flooding and food insecurity. Major conflicts included the L3/L2 emergency in Northern Ethiopia, while political and electoral tensions affected several countries. Some 120 million people, including 67 million children, needed humanitarian assistance. Internally displaced person (IDP) and refugee numbers rose from 3.91 million in 2022 to 4.4 million in 2023.

ESAR's population of children and young people is fast-growing, reaching 360 million. A WHO-UNICEF report found Africa has the highest prevalence of developmental delays and disabilities among children and young people. ESAR is home to 28.9 million children with disabilities—the majority face little-to-no access to services and multiple deprivations. Over 66 per cent of children in sub-Saharan Africa are at risk of not attaining their full development potential. Young children need conditions that promote early learning opportunities, health, nutrition, protection and responsive caregiving; yet public spending on holistic early childhood development (ECD) falls short. The price is high—a greater burden on education, health and welfare systems; reduced learning and earning potential; and intergenerational cycles of disadvantage that hinder equality and prosperity.

Education access increased, with nearly half of eligible children participating in pre-primary, but 42 million children aged 6–17 remained out of school, including 3 in 7 children with disabilities. Learning poverty persists, with 9 in 10 children unable to read by age 10. Transition to upper-secondary remains low at 23 per cent. Twenty-two per cent of youth are not in employment, education or training. While some ESAR governments spend within recommended thresholds, overall investment is inadequate to enhance educational quality and address inequalities in learning access and outcomes.

2023 was the warmest year on record for Africa, which is disproportionately affected by the climate crisis despite being the inhabited continent that has contributed the least to global carbon emissions. ESAR is already experiencing devastating effects of slow onset temperature changes. Overall progress toward Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13—limiting and adapting to climate change—is minimal in Africa.

ESAR countries are off track to achieve universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services by 2030 (excepting Botswana's water target). Most countries have declining WASH service levels linked to factors including climate stress or conflict. Population growth, climate change, increased displacement and migration due to drought and conflict have strained WASH service delivery, resulting in increased public health emergencies.

The latest United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation report indicates ESAR accounts for 18.1 per cent of neonatal deaths and 18.6 per cent of under-five deaths globally. In a multi-hazard context with weak primary health care resilience, seventeen of ESAR's 21 countries experienced at least one public health emergency in 2023; these disproportionately affected children. Reducing the number of zero-dose children in 2024 by accelerating the immunization rate in line with population growth and addressing COVID-19 setbacks are urgent priorities. In 2023, 202 circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus cases were reported across 11 countries, an increase in countries versus 2022, hence demanding additional focus.

Alarming 2023 food insecurity levels were accompanied by increased child admissions for wasting. In 2023, over four million children were affected by severe wasting, with some 2.1 million children admitted for treatment, slightly over 2022 numbers. Twenty-six million children remain stunted, with a UNICEF report on undernutrition among adolescent girls and women highlighting the serious situation in the Horn of Africa. Southern Africa countries have demonstrated the triple burden of malnutrition—wasting, stunting and obesity—in children. More innovative programming is needed to reflect the full scope of nutrition.

ESAR's overlapping emergencies exacerbated violence against children and women, mental health risks, child marriage and female genital mutilation. ESAR remains the region with the lowest level of birth registration. Deepening human resource gaps in already fragile national child protection systems, with limited social service workforce investment, negatively impacted prevention and response services for vulnerable children. Differentiated treatment according to gender during adolescence drives child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and gender-based violence (GBV). Girls and women carry most of the care and domestic burden, are less likely to be formally employed and are often unable to influence government policy.

ESAR has two-thirds of the global HIV burden. In 2023, leveraging progress in preventing 2.15 million child HIV infections since 2010, ESAR pushed to fully eliminate vertical transmission; reach treatment coverage equity for children and adolescents (64 per cent) compared to adults (83 per cent); and promote service access, agency and equality to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) outcomes among adolescent girls, who represent 86 per cent of adolescent HIV acquisition.

Social protection investments are slow to increase in several countries, with more attention needed on evidence-informed policy advocacy and systems strengthening. Inclusive and nationally owned policy reform to address child poverty, including national shock-responsive social protection systems, must be a focus.

Operational challenges in 2023 included increased reports of aid diversion in ESAR that seized UNICEF attention, with recognition of the need for strong internal controls, monitoring systems and supply management. ESAR countries also experienced fierce fundraising challenges, while an upsurge in emergencies heightened demand for unplanned assistance and priority shifts.

Major contributions and drivers of results

2.1 Key achievements and results

2023 marked the mid-point of the UNICEF Strategic Plan (2022–2025) and ESA Regional Office Management Plan (ROMP) (2022–2025). The ESA Regional Office (ESARO) continued to mobilize country offices (COs) in the region to accelerate progress for children through the UNICEF ESA Regional Collaboration for Children (C4C) approach that identifies 'learning' and 'climate resilience' as the regional flagships, while continuing to push to move the needle on 'reducing maternal, neonatal

and under-five mortality through primary health care'; 'reducing stunting'; 'addressing violence against girls, boys and women'; 'ending AIDS and improving SRHR'; and 'expanding national cash transfer programmes'.

To address the learning crisis, ESARO supported 12 countries to scale foundational learning and assisted 15 countries to expand digital learning. ESARO intensified its focus on the learning-to-earning agenda, helping to reach nearly 9 million young people—including those with disabilities—with learning and skills development, and concretizing the Youth for Children agenda to engage young people around learning crisis reversal. With partners, ESARO made strides in thought leadership and evidence generation with more than 15 public resources on promising education practices, such as a digital module for teacher training on gender-responsive pedagogy. The 2024 African Union (AU) Theme of the Year being education will be a major accelerator.

ESARO provided technical leadership and convening support that contributed to an improved environment for young children and caregivers. For example, assisted by UNICEF advocacy, multi-sectoral ECD policies were adopted in 16 countries and public and bilateral ECD investments are increasing. Events and workshops organized by UNICEF and partners, including the Africa Early Childhood Network, convened stakeholders and increased the capacity of over 2,000 government stakeholders to plan, monitor and implement cross-sectoral ECD. With UNICEF support, interventions to support the holistic development of young children are increasingly part of routine service delivery. Key enablers of this progress included a clear vision; enhanced partnership and collaboration; and newly developed tools and guidance, such as the ESARO-authored Methodological Guide on Estimating Government Spending on ECD, among others.

The KfW Development Bank-supported UNICEF Climate Hub based in ESARO worked with all 21 COs to increase climate resilience and adaptive programming capacity. ESARO completed mappings of climate financing and sustainable energy for programmes and operations in all COs. ESARO guidance helped four COs initiate actions to improve climate financing for social sectors. Cross-sectoral collaboration resulted in completion of an initial framing of strengthening shock-responsive social protection systems from a climate resilience and adaptation lens, as well as initiating the development of a climate-nutrition strategic framework and climate-nutrition financing narrative spotlighting nine high-risk countries. With partners, ESARO fostered climate-resilient WASH programming through the Regional WASH Programme for Refugees, IDPs and Host Communities in East Africa, prioritizing seven refugee-hosting sites for climate-resilient WASH systems. ESARO supported progress on innovative ground water mapping work that is critical for water security, climate resilience and sustainable water supply programming in the Horn of Africa.

High-level regional partner engagement, including with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, contributed to enhancing joint technical and strategic support, advocacy for health care financing and public health emergency response. UNICEF and partners reinforced coordination, helping to interrupt wild poliovirus type 1 transmission in Mozambique and Malawi. To improve primary health care efficiencies and promote community health, an effective avenue for increasing equity, 17 ESAR countries have national community health strategies. UNICEF demonstrated commitment to global child survival and immunization agendas, supporting countries hosting over 80 per cent of zero-dose children in ESAR through the Big Catch-Up—a global interagency effort to vaccinate children and restore immunization progress lost during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ESARO-supported nutrition response included integrated services in the most-affected and hardest-to-reach areas through scaled-up field presence and a no-regrets approach to severe wasting management; infant and young child feeding; micronutrient actions; regional and country coordination; and nutrition information systems to improve programming. ESARO also contributed to malnutrition prevention acceleration. For example, ESARO helped fifteen countries engage in food systems transformation for children, improving children's foods, food environments and food practices; 19 countries used the

regional maternal nutrition framework and landscape analysis to strengthen a minimum service package for maternal nutrition; and 16 countries, including South Africa, engaged in school-age and adolescent nutrition and overweight prevention agendas.

ESARO focused on multi-sectoral engagement to end violence against children, including contributing to at least 13 ESAR countries promoting gender-equitable norms as central to supporting non-violent relationships. ESARO launched a joint publication with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) that profiles the large scale and scope of violence against girls, boys and women in Southern Africa and calls for stronger protective measures. ESARO finalized a framework and cross-sectoral workplan to address six priority areas for improving the mental health of children and families and collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO) to address these at scale.

ESARO and Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria support enabled 13 COs to strengthen capacity to improve adolescent girls' HIV and SRHR outcomes. ESAR's youth HIV and SRHR partnerships empowered 14 country networks to launch and roll out the UNITED! Movement to improve connections with other similar networks. ESARO and partners advanced six countries on the path to elimination of vertical HIV transmission and supported data mentoring of government managers in 14 countries towards triple elimination of vertical transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B. With partners and communities, ESARO contributed leadership toward launching and monitoring the Global Alliance Regional Hub to support accelerated action on ending AIDS in children and adolescents by 2030. ESARO identified and amplified programme learning and new evidence to improve HIV/SRHR programming, including through Radio 4000.

ESARO strengthened COs' institutional commitment to gender equality by supporting gender programmatic reviews in five countries that informed the development of their respective country programmes. ESARO created space for women- and youth-led advocacy in high-level regional, continental and global platforms such as the Youth Connekt Africa Hub, with a focus on the intersection of climate, gender and SRHR. ESARO designed a novel training on gender in emergency preparedness with women- and girl-led organizations, piloting it in Zimbabwe, and conducted a regional evaluation on ESAR's investment in adolescent girls as a means of shaping gender-transformative programming.

ESARO social policy work supported CO development of strategic visions for delivering cash and engaging in social protection, while also reorienting public finance and child poverty efforts to be more focused on outcome and advocacy-for-change. ESARO contributed to national budget allocations increasing in two or more sectors in 14 countries. ESARO co-authored a sub-Saharan-wide publication on child poverty and supported seven countries to analyze child wellbeing. ESARO support assisted seven countries to expand child grants or advance key reforms and 11 COs to increase cash-plus approaches, such as cash plus nutrition.

ESARO prioritized social and behaviour change (SBC) in emergencies support for affected ESAR countries. To enhance capacity building, ESARO delivered regional workshops and training on key topics such as social norms and human-centred design. ESARO contributed SBC expertise to regional programming on child protection, gender, nutrition and SRHR, and implemented a new social and community listening strategy to support comprehensive evidence generation for effective programming. ESARO SBC work also leveraged regional partnerships for expanded reach, including with faith-based organizations.

In 2023, ESARO supported procurement effectiveness, including timely forecasting and planning, as well as monitoring supply and logistics key performance indicators to facilitate expeditive and corrective action. ESARO and the UNICEF Supply Division supported COs with supply and logistics audits and post-aid diversion assessments in the Horn of Africa. ESARO promoted national supply chain systems strengthening to ensure sustainability and completed national supply chain assessments

and action plan development in eight COs. ESARO oversaw a regional supply input totaling US\$1.2 billion that ultimately enhanced programme implementation and emergency response.

ESAR had the highest number of evaluations of all UNICEF regions in 2023. ESARO contributed to emergency-focused evaluations, including the L3/L2 evaluation of UNICEF's drought response in the Horn of Africa, L2 evaluations in Madagascar (drought) and Uganda (Ebola), as well as the L2 Evaluative Review in Malawi. These evaluations provided key recommendations to improve UNICEF emergency response strategies. ESARO contributed to regional knowledge creation around good practices for embedding programme sustainability across various programme sectors by producing the Regional Synthesis on Sustainable Programming. With the World Food Programme, ESARO developed a virtual five-week course for United Nations country teams and national counterparts on national evaluation capacity development.

2.2 Cross-cutting area results

2.2.1 Normative principles

ESARO supported COs to develop gender action plans and/or CO-wide strategies to engage adolescent girls and implement related multi-sectoral programming. ESARO also supported COs in applying a gender lens to child poverty analysis and advocacy, as well as integrating gender into cash transfer programmes.

Aligned with the UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (2022–2030), ESARO finalized its Regional Plan of Action for Accelerating Results for Children with Disabilities (2024–2025) to identify joint priorities and guide related implementation. To increase internal capacity, ESARO provided training on disability-inclusive programming and operations for seven COs. To promote South-South learning and exchange, ESARO supported four cross-country disability inclusion learning sessions.

ESARO technically supported implementation of the European Union-UNICEF-UNHCR Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration Programme, including producing related briefs, and completed a regional situation analysis on the mental health and psychosocial support needs of children on the move to inform a regional mental wellbeing training package.

UNICEF is scaling up work on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), including staff and partner capacity building and transition to the United Nations Common Partners Assessment PSEA Tool, among others.

ESARO participated in efforts to strengthen the United Nations Reform agenda at the regional level, including through the Africa Regional Coordination Platform (RCP) meetings and annual retreat, focusing on the United Nation's value offer in Africa's transitional pathways towards the SDGs and the AU's Agenda 2063. ESARO also contributed to various opportunity and issue-based coalitions under the RCP mechanism, including supporting the Africa United Nations Knowledge Management Hub development and launch.

2.2.2 Humanitarian situations

In 2023, ESARO and partners, including the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, helped sustain and/or accelerate effective response to multiple L3 and L2 emergencies. Notable achievements relate to the L3 drought in the Horn of Africa, where UNICEF supported concerted efforts that diverted a famine in Somalia; and response to the needs of children affected by the L3/L2 emergency in Northern Ethiopia. ESARO strengthened regional humanitarian capacity building and coordination, including through the UNICEF-UNHCR Strategic Collaboration

Framework to assist refugee and host community children.

2.2.3 Influencing global/regional discourse and policy

With ESARO leadership, the Youth Agency Marketplace (Yoma) expanded its reach, using an ecosystem of partners and mobile technology to provide transformative learning-to-earning pathways and a platform for youth to achieve results for children. The digital pathway, developed with South African non-governmental organization Umuzi, focuses on upskilling youth. In 2023, Yoma's various pathways enabled over 90,000 young people to access job and entrepreneurial opportunities, with 10 providers delivering 150 courses linked to market demand. ESARO contributed to Green Yoma being active in South Africa and Nigeria to train youth as citizen scientists on their green learning-to-earning journey.

In 2023, ESARO leveraged partnerships for information and communications technology and innovation. This included working with the Mastercard Foundation to leverage opportunities presented by its Young Africa Works Strategy, which aims to help 30 million young people secure employment by 2030. The work also included partnerships with Amazon Web Services to sensitize ESAR governments on data sovereignty and hosting digital solutions in their cloud, and with USAID and the Health Electrification and Telecommunication Alliance on health center electrification and connectivity.

In 2023, ESAR mobilized US\$1.2 billion in direct donor contributions (8 per cent more than 2022), including US\$1.1 billion from the public sector and US\$104 million from the private sector. ESARO pursued various pathways to attract public and donor attention for multiple crises, resulting in stronger partnerships with donors including Germany and the World Bank, and expansion into new engagements and partner bases, such as the African Development Bank. ESARO prioritized expanding the private sector portfolio; developing strategic engagement action plans with foundations and high-net-worth individuals; and unpacking targeted and strengthened dialogue with key UNICEF National Committees to better position ESAR. The Airtel Africa partnership connected over 1,000 schools and reached more than 1 million children through learning platforms, including in Rwanda and Uganda. ESARO supported influencing and political advocacy in high-profile global and continental forums, strategically spotlighting ESAR's priority issues in engagements ranging from the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference to events with regional economic communities. For example, UNICEF participated in the SADC Ministers of Education and Training and Science, Technology and Innovation Meeting held in 2023 to review progress on implementation of the 2022 Joint Ministerial Decisions on Education and Training, Science, Technology and Innovation. UNICEF contributions included presenting progress on support provided to Member States on digital learning, such as through scaling up the UNICEF-Microsoft collaborative effort the Learning Passport and Giga in the region.

ESARO developed two cross-sectoral advocacy strategies and activity plans on learning and climate resilience, the two regional flagships. This foundational work proved invaluable to create opportunities to amplify and reach audiences, including decision makers, influencers, young people and others, through the media. A key moment was the Africa Climate Summit, where leaders and climate activists came together over a week-long programme of activities. UNICEF led and participated in eight events and supported two UNICEF high-level speakers in plenary sessions. The dual objectives were to position UNICEF in the climate space and to amplify voices of young people, many of whom UNICEF supported to attend. In addition to participation in key regional events, including the UNICEF State of the World's Children report launch and Women Deliver, UNICEF published pieces on immunization and digital learning. Through the UNICEF Africa Services Unit media hub, ESARO managed 120 media interviews for ESAR, and maintained a 24 per cent share of voice in relation to key comparators. Reaching new audiences is crucial in advocating for change; UNICEF spoke on leading media channels and ESARO saw growth on UNICEF Africa social media channels, including by 100

per cent on Instagram, representing an additional 2,000 followers.

In 2023, ESARO worked through its Regional Evidence Committee, making significant strides in leveraging evidence to advocate on urgent issues affecting children, particularly through partnerships with region-based academic institutions and regional economic communities. Highlights include the Time to Act report launch, spotlighting African children's vulnerability to climate change, as well as advocating for increased climate financing at the Africa Climate Summit. ESARO's research on the challenges facing children with disabilities contributed evidence aimed at enhancing disability inclusion. Partnership for intellectual leadership expanded, including with universities to integrate social norms and behavioural insights into curricula and publishing research on adolescent HIV and health acceleration.

ESARO continued to provide guidance and oversight on CO strategic planning, monitoring and review of country programmes while promoting knowledge management as an enabler of programme learning and adjustment. Aiming for greater programme effectiveness, ESARO supported COs to adopt global digital platforms, including for work planning, improved harmonized approach to cash transfer transactions and electronic programme documents. ESARO significantly expanded partnerships for strategic data for children. For example, with the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, ESARO organized a multi-partner panel discussion on creating demand for data for children on the sidelines of the 54th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. Also with PARIS21, ESARO led the development of a toolkit for mainstreaming child rights in the national statistics development strategies, engaging a plethora of new partners in the process.

2.2.4 Internal management

ESARO exercised close CO operations oversight and support, including through 10 regular programme budget review processes, peer reviews for three COs to strengthen their internal processes and support for five CO audits. To reduce risk and increase inclusion, ESARO supported COs with annual risk assessments and environmental footprint and accessibility assessments. Consistent monitoring and reporting on ESARO travel continued; these efforts have resulted in efficiency gains, with ESARO recording a 19 per cent reduction in trip costs in 2023 compared to 2019.

ESARO completed 54 ESARO recruitment cases within an average time of 54 days, supporting optimum regional staffing levels and enhancing results delivery capacity. To improve workplace culture, ESARO developed and implemented Global Staff Survey and diversity, equity and inclusion action plans for ESARO to address areas of concern. Recognizing the importance of UNICEF Standard Code of Conduct adherence and the need to equip personnel with skills to manage ethical dilemmas, appointed ESARO Ethics and Culture Champions facilitated webinars for ESARO staff, increasing awareness of integrity and bolstering skills needed to handle ethical dilemmas in the workplace. ESARO also enhanced COs' human resource capacity for emergencies by coordinating surge personnel and aided them in incorporating duty of care minimum standards into humanitarian response plans.

ESARO integrated a trauma-informed approach to personnel mental health and staff counselling in the region to maximize staff wellbeing. This included development of a comprehensive mental health referral network in ESAR and piloting a mental health for managers training aimed at enhancing inclusive, diversified and respectful UNICEF office culture.

ESARO provided sustained and effective security risk management support to all COs to enable the optimal implementation of UNICEF activities. Added security analyst capacity in ESAR in 2023 was instrumental in ensuring that security risk management remained central to UNICEF programming, and that risks were considered from a forward-looking perspective.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

The ESA ROMP (2022–2025) mid-term review initiated in 2023 identified lessons learned to inform adjustments for the remainder of the implementation period. Several common themes specific to ESARO’s 2023 learning emerged, the majority of which align with UNICEF Strategic Plan (2022–2025) change strategies.

Cross-sectoral collaboration and proactively **leveraging partnerships** must be the default:

- Internal and external collaboration were key in accelerating efforts across all Strategic Plan goal areas and change strategies. High-level political engagement was similarly catalytic.
- Investing in areas of convergence, such as adolescent girls, can rally sectors around issues ranging from addressing violence to girls’ education.
- Noting how the Government of Norway’s multi-sectoral support was critical to nurturing disability inclusion in ESAR, UNICEF should continue pursuing cross-/multi-sectoral funding opportunities.
- ESAR’s homegrown private sector presents untapped potential for supporting local emergencies but UNICEF must invest in digital fundraising infrastructure to fully benefit from it.
- Achieving greater community-level digital connectivity, including in schools and health centers, could be catalytic in creating even more public demand for connectivity and subsequently increasing government and private sector investments in the needed infrastructure, such as electrification and mobile network expansion.

Sharpening UNICEF’s **strategic focus, prioritization** and **use of comparative advantages** proved critical in 2023:

- Developing a common regional immunization framework helped COs rally around a shared focus and apply tailored approaches while maintaining equity and health systems resilience lenses.
- Internal competing priorities can prevent the scaling of ECD interventions; focused discussion within ESARO is needed on this in 2024. The traditional parenting programming approach is producing limited results; UNICEF will shift its focus to promoting family-friendly policies to allow parents more time and resources to provide proper caregiving.
- To accelerate programming for digital transformation, ESARO will aim to rebalance the investment in innovation versus adoption of proven digital solutions to 20 per cent novel methods and 80 per cent proven solutions.

With more predictable risks in ESAR, **greater investment in preparedness and resilience building, including child-sensitive disaster risk reduction**, is non-negotiable:

- As evidence suggests that investment in preparedness and resilience building results in less demand for humanitarian resources, it is strategic for UNICEF to use its multi-sectoral programming capacity and field presence to scale up related support to governments and other local actors.
- Shedding light on the humanitarian crises in ESAR required additional effort given the concurrent high-profile emergencies in other regions. Developing strong narratives to attract donor attention and funding was a challenge. In 2024, UNICEF will prioritize developing narratives around the need for resilience and preparedness funding for recurring crises.

Generation and use of evidence and learning enables efficiency and resource optimization:

- Data use in policy formulation and implementation remains a gap in the region, presenting an opportunity for UNICEF technical leadership.
- There is greater opportunity to use evidence to influence policies and programmes, particularly when engaging high-level officials in middle-income settings, those with growing fiscal space or results-driven governments.

- Improved HIV and SRHR data analysis and use through a multi-country data mentoring programme illustrated how UNICEF can do less while influencing more.

Targeted **internal and external capacity building** is key to enhancing results for children:

- **ESARO's 2023 experience demonstrated that** dedicating additional public health emergency capacity is important to ensure continuity of support.
- It is crucial to maintain dedicated disability inclusion capacity at the country level to ensure systematic inclusion of children with disabilities; the source of this capacity can range from in-house CO resources to partnership with local experts.
- More mature youth-led organizations, provided with the resources and space, can excel at building the capacity of less-developed youth-led organizations.
- Targeted, sustained capacity building involving critical reflection and experiential learning is the most effective way to increase knowledge and awareness of gender-transformative programming.

Systems strengthening investment accelerates progress and reduces risk:

- UNICEF must increase its strategic focus on ECD systems strengthening given related opportunities to fortify essential parts of the social system, such as management, workforces, information systems and community engagement.
- Lack of systematic institutionalization of disability inclusion remains problematic. Despite widespread efforts on and interest in disability inclusion, the related results don't yet reflect actualization of intent due to numerous factors such as a lack of disaggregated data and insufficient capacity to plan and deliver for children with disabilities. As one step forward, UNICEF should assess the status of inclusion in ESAR countries and facilitate related peer learning.
- Addressing aid diversion requires systems strengthening. This involves concrete measures such as action plans, task force formulation and digital solutions to improve supply and programme monitoring.

UNICEF must continue prioritizing the **localization agenda**:

- Effective emergency response should consider ESAR's diversity, including in socio-political and economic situations. This requires strengthened internal and external engagement to increase localization, including enhanced regional United Nations collaboration to conduct more effective advocacy for localization.
- Public and private sector partners are driving the localization agenda, with pooled funds emerging as an approach in the strategies of many global foundations. UNICEF needs to strategically align with this.
- UNICEF should continue supporting and encouraging local production and market shaping, such as for ready-to-use therapeutic food, egg powder, fish powder and water purification supplies.