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UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025

Summary

The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, the first of two sequential, coherent plans towards 2030, charts a course towards inclusive recovery from the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the realization of a society in which every child is included and has agency, opportunity and their rights fulfilled.

This Strategic Plan sets out measurable results for children, especially the most excluded, including in humanitarian crises and fragile situations, and defines the change strategies and enablers that support their achievement.

Elements of a decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section VIII.

* Reissued for technical reasons on 1 September 2021.

** [E/ICEF/2021/23](#).



I. Overview

1. The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 comes at a time when the human rights of all children are under threat to a degree that has not been seen in more than a generation. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic struck as most of the Sustainable Development Goals were already off track, fuelling a global crisis that threatens progress for children and hitting hardest wherever systems are most fragile or in crisis, communities poorest, and discrimination and exclusion most compounded. Achieving the Goals requires that the world not only regain lost ground, but accelerate progress two- to sevenfold, reaching children in the poorest countries and the most discriminated-against, underserved communities, and building back more-sustainable, accessible, inclusive and equitable systems that are resilient against future shocks.

2. The Strategic Plan is geared towards seizing development opportunities amid crisis and uncertainty, to reimagine responses and galvanize the meaningful change that is needed. Anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Strategic Plan reflects the UNICEF universal mandate to secure the rights of all children, everywhere, and the organization's unreserved commitment to prioritize those most at risk of being left behind. It is informed by lessons from the experiences of UNICEF and partners, especially during the response to COVID-19, and reflects the voices of more than 200,000 children and young people across the world who were consulted during the development of the plan. The Strategic Plan charts a course towards inclusive recovery from COVID-19, the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of a society in which all children are included, without discrimination, and have opportunities and agency in accordance with their rights.

3. As the first of two sequential Plans in a strategic approach to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the Strategic Plan focuses on driving sustainable change to make a measurable difference in children's lives throughout the Decade of Action and beyond. Across its work in the five interconnected Goal Areas established in the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, UNICEF will focus on systemic changes that are critical to addressing the underlying causes of children's mortality, poverty, vulnerability, gender inequality and exclusion in all settings, including humanitarian crises and fragile settings: leveraging financing for children; supporting rights-based policies and legislation; market shaping and equitable access to essential supplies and services; brokering global partnerships for children; transforming the landscape of data on children; supporting families and parenting; and influencing social behaviours and norms.

4. In the midst of the pandemic, the global recession and the climate crisis, UNICEF is shifting its focus beyond what the organization can do alone, towards using its mandate to mobilize other actors to maximize collective impact, rally support around development opportunities and advance human security globally. UNICEF will lead the momentum for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, drive equity-based agendas around the world and leverage financing to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including from countries' domestic resources and those of the United Nations development system, international financial institutions and the private sector. The transformative partnerships on which UNICEF strategies are premised include strengthened engagement with businesses, communities, parents and caregivers, children and young people. In line with global movements for social justice, the organization is shifting towards a transformative, intersectional approach to inequality and discrimination to address their underlying drivers by transforming structures and norms with national partners. Gender equality remains at the core of

all UNICEF work, and disability rights is being made a focus of more cross-cutting programming as well. Operationalizing these programmes over the coming years will be critical to the redoubled efforts of UNICEF to ensure that no child is left behind.

5. Humanitarian action is integrated throughout the Strategic Plan as critical not only to saving lives and promoting dignity during crises, but also to building resilient systems, accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and realizing children's rights. New cross-cutting programming on resilience, peacebuilding and climate action orient UNICEF work in all contexts towards addressing fragility and the root causes of conflict, crisis and displacement, while building capacities to prevent, prepare for and respond to crises. Increased rigour and a more systematic approach to programming in this area will be key to UNICEF work on ensuring that no child is left behind, regardless of their environment.

6. It is not only crisis that drives the urgency of this moment, but also opportunity. How economies and societies are reimagined and how we catalyse new development opportunities or take advantage of emerging ones will have intergenerational significance. UNICEF will work to galvanize global transformation and create a world in which every child is included, without discrimination, and has agency, opportunity and their rights fulfilled.

II. Introduction

A. Context

7. In recent years, the world has come a long way in advancing children's right to survive, thrive and grow up to contribute to their societies: The under-5 mortality rate fell by 59 per cent between 1990 and 2019. Since 2000, stunting among children under the age of 5 years has dropped by one third. Most children now attend school. Child marriage has declined, from one in four girls married in childhood a decade ago to one in five today.

8. But today, in support of national partners, UNICEF must fight harder than ever to protect children's rights and provide opportunities to grow and thrive. The global pandemic is putting decades of progress in jeopardy and aggravating the impacts of deep-rooted poverty, inequality and discrimination; fragile systems, conflict and protracted displacement; and a worsening climate crisis. Children's futures hang in the balance.

9. While the direct impact of COVID-19 on children's health is relatively low, the socioeconomic impact on child poverty that it has caused is hitting them hard. Interruptions to health and nutrition services, including immunization and HIV prevention, were projected to reverse the long downward trend in under-five mortality – and recent evidence shows that more children are dying from preventable causes: across six countries in South Asia, for example, under-five deaths are estimated to have increased by 14 per cent between 2019 and 2020. Other long-term impacts come from the massive interruption in education, with 214 million schoolchildren having missed more than three quarters of their in-person classroom instruction due to school closures in the one-year period between March 2020 and March 2021.

10. Climate change and environmental degradation continue to compromise children's environments, unleashing natural disasters, contributing to food insecurity and water scarcity and increasing the risk of local epidemics or yet another pandemic. One in three children has elevated levels of lead in their blood. Sanitation services used by 4.2 billion people, including 673 million people who have no toilets at all, leave human waste untreated, threatening human and environmental health. Around

half a billion children live in areas at high risk of flooding. By 2040, one in four children will live amid extreme water stress.

11. Nearly 1.2 billion children – almost double the number in 2019 – now live in countries with complex emergencies¹ driven by inequality and fragility. Trapped in cycles of conflict and displacement, they face acute risks of deprivation and exclusion, while violent conflicts increasingly drive grave violations of children’s rights and hinder their development.

12. Multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities continue to underpin the rights and development challenges facing children around the world, including a heightened risk of discrimination and neglect related to disability, racism, xenophobia, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity, urbanization, migration and displacement, natural disasters and armed conflicts. While not all these factors are manifest or combine in the same way in every country in which UNICEF operates, realizing the vision of leaving no child behind is dependent on building a better understanding of the interplay between them. The COVID-19 pandemic has made that even more evident.

13. The global recession sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated economies and livelihoods, especially in the poorest countries, among women and in the most vulnerable, discriminated-against communities, including in poor urban areas and among those working in the informal sector. More than 200 countries and territories across diverse contexts expanded their social protection measures, together spending around \$750 billion to alleviate these impacts. Still, the crisis has created a new generation of poor children, pushing 150 million more children into multidimensional poverty, and has wiped out gains in reducing inequality. Around the globe, extreme poverty is on the rise again, after a quarter century of steady declines.

14. As countries continue to reel from the effects of the pandemic, the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and treatments is proceeding with huge disparities. The world is facing a two-tiered recovery. Without swift, concerted action in a spirit of global solidarity, justice and human rights, the poorest women and children in the poorest countries will be left far behind, and the trend towards a convergence in income levels between low- and middle-income countries and advanced economies will stall indefinitely.

15. This will have potentially devastating impacts on children. The 46 least developed countries are among the world’s fastest growing, and it is estimated that some 63 per cent of all children will be living in low- and lower-middle-income countries by 2030. Even with efforts through the COVID-19 Global Access (COVAX) Facility and other initiatives, getting the COVID-19 vaccine to all of these countries could take two or more years.² The slower their recovery, the higher the risk of serious, lasting repercussions on children’s development and well-being.

16. The global crisis has taken a harsh toll on children and adolescents, turning their lives upside down and bringing hardship and loss. Heightened racism, discrimination and gender inequality, and the violence they give rise to, wear heavily on their mental health. Children see their families struggle, their societies shaken by unrest and mistrust. As responses to crisis accelerate pre-existing trends, the civic space they need to make their voices heard is shrinking, under threat from rising surveillance, encroachment on civil liberties and misinformation.

¹ “Complex emergencies” are defined as countries with a Humanitarian Action for Children appeal. In 2019, some 650 million children lived in countries with complex emergencies.

² Irwing, A., “What it will take to vaccinate the world against COVID-19”, News Explainer, *Nature*, 25 March 2021.

17. And yet, out of the constraints and challenges of global crisis, new solutions and collaborations are emerging. UNICEF came into being in just such a moment as this, 75 years ago – when the world emerged from a devastating world war to create the United Nations, dismantle colonialism, build new social welfare and health systems and drive a revolution in child rights, survival and development.

18. Today, Governments, scientists, entrepreneurs, thinkers and advocates are devising innovative vaccine technologies in record time, strengthening health systems, scaling up digital learning and health care, expanding social protection and reinvigorating the push for climate-resilient infrastructure and sustainable livelihoods. Current technologies make it possible to leapfrog traditional development trajectories, to make life better for more children faster than ever. People across the world, with children and youth at the forefront, are mobilizing to demand an end to social injustices, including racism, xenophobia and the legacies of colonialism.

19. The Strategic Plan sets UNICEF on a course for working with communities, Governments, businesses, civil society and other key partners to strengthen the programmes and systems related to the survival, health and well-being of children and adolescents, including immunization, nutrition, early childhood development, mental health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). UNICEF will continue to reimagine education, including through new digital delivery platforms, to provide every child and young person with the education and skills they need.

20. UNICEF will also continue to protect children from all forms of violence, discrimination, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices. UNICEF will expand its work on social policy and social protection, to ensure that children live free from poverty, and that national budgets prioritize children and support families in new and innovative ways as they cope with the ongoing economic fallout of the pandemic. As the organization stays and delivers during humanitarian crises, it will continue to improve the timeliness and quality of its humanitarian preparedness and response, save lives and protect rights in a way that builds a foundation for lasting development.

B. Lessons learned

21. The Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 builds on the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and the evaluation of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. The Strategic Plan incorporates key findings from the formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming, the evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plans and other evaluations and reviews. It incorporates the concerns and expectations of more than 200,000 children and young people around the world, drawn from an unprecedented process of wide-ranging consultation, including through U-Report and Voices of Youth.

22. Developed alongside the new UNICEF gender policy and Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025, the Strategic Plan responds to the evaluation of the Gender Action Plans and the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, by emphasizing structural and norms change to transform the underlying drivers of gender inequality, with a greater focus on tackling gender inequities across the humanitarian-development nexus. With this new, transformative approach, UNICEF will integrate gender equality commitments throughout its programming and systems, while increasing investments in sex-disaggregated data and analysis as well as targeted, differentiated programming in such areas as the empowerment of adolescent girls as a means of ensuring that no child is left behind.

23. The UNICEF response to COVID-19 and the socioeconomic impacts of mitigation measures have highlighted opportunities that can be built upon and gaps that must be addressed to tackle pressing challenges. Remote service delivery – especially through digital means – and flexible, community-based approaches emerged as essential adaptations for service continuity during the pandemic. They are also potential game changers in leaving no child behind by making health, education and social service systems more effective, efficient and equitable, and expanding access to children unreached by more traditional approaches.

24. Public and private partnerships, not least within the United Nations system, have been key to scaling up pandemic response interventions and ensuring they reach the most vulnerable communities. Life-saving risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) campaigns, for instance, have leveraged relationships with businesses and the media to disseminate messaging, and engaged local leaders and trusted influencers to counter misinformation and encourage health-promoting behaviours. Building on this engagement, UNICEF can make its programming more responsive to local needs and agency, and extend its reach, by strengthening the approach to civil society partnerships while making systematic efforts to gather and apply community feedback. Recent evaluations and reviews of UNICEF humanitarian action have noted accountability to affected populations and working with local partners as areas for improvement. They are key to meeting human rights-based commitments, building trust and strengthening local capacities to save lives and alleviate suffering, and contributing to sustainable, long-term development.

25. The COVID-19 response has reinforced a critical lesson from the Strategic Plan evaluation and the humanitarian review: To strengthen coordination, coherence and collaboration (where contextually appropriate) between its humanitarian and development work, in line with its dual mandate, UNICEF must overcome bottlenecks in programming, supply availability and accessibility, reporting, resource mobilization and staff capacity, and include activities that contribute to social cohesion and peace. UNICEF has developed this Strategic Plan not only to integrate the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, but also as the first Strategic Plan to systematically integrate a humanitarian lens into the analysis shaping its theories of change and consequent results framework.

26. The midterm review and the evaluation of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 highlighted that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, good progress by UNICEF in delivering its outputs was not translating into proportional and sustainable outcome-level change for children. Pivoting to a stronger focus on driving that change, the organization has built this Strategic Plan around a focused set of systemic outcome-level changes tied to key child rights-related Sustainable Development Goals, which have been selected for their potential high impact on the multidimensional root causes of child poverty, deprivations and rights violations. This creates a flexible framework that empowers country programmes to align with national priorities, better support families, parents and caregivers of vulnerable children and respond to emerging threats to children.

C. Guiding principles

27. In striving to promote child rights and well-being, the Strategic Plan is driven by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which anchors all of the work of UNICEF, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and other United Nations human rights instruments. UNICEF humanitarian action adheres to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and

independence.³ In all contexts, UNICEF ensures that its work, and that of its partners, protects children and does not harm them, intentionally or inadvertently.

28. Non-discrimination is a guiding principle of all UNICEF work. It underlies the pledge set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind, guiding the core focus of UNICEF on equity and inclusion. The organization actively seeks out and supports children from the poorest, most marginalized and excluded groups, including children living in extreme poverty; children with disabilities; indigenous children; children belonging to racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups and migrant communities who experience discrimination; and children who are discriminated against for any other reason.

29. Gender equality is at the heart of everything UNICEF does. The organization aspires to spark bold, systemic change to redress gender inequalities and empower girls, women and marginalized people. It strives to understand the root causes and intersections of all child rights violations, and to support parents and caregivers while transforming institutions and social norms so that no child is left behind.

30. With universality as a defining feature and with a strong anchor in human rights, the Strategic Plan focuses on elements of the 2030 Agenda that bear special relevance for children, namely Sustainable Development Goals 1 to 6, 10 and 16. While UNICEF develops its country programmes under the framework of this Strategic Plan, those programmes are designed and informed by local contexts, national development priorities and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). UNICEF recognizes that closing gaps in progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals so that no child or community is left behind requires equitable access to essential supplies and services for all children, including those who live in countries with special development situations, such as landlocked countries and Small Island Developing States.

31. In collaboration with industry, Governments and partners, UNICEF works to create a global public good for children through its global leadership in market influencing, strategic procurement, global logistics and last-mile delivery, innovative financing to expand government fiscal space, health system strengthening and product innovation.

III. Strategic approach

32. The Strategic Plan is geared to seizing opportunities amid crisis and uncertainty, galvanizing transformation for children and urgency for rapid action at scale. It acts upon the realization that no one is safe and secure until everyone is safe from the pandemic, and that multilateralism provides the best pathway to transformative global recovery.

33. Realizing children's rights, pursuing development opportunities and accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals will require global solidarity and synchronized action to support the most vulnerable. With its sister United Nations agencies, UNICEF will build a United Nations system that truly delivers as one. UNICEF will expand its collaborations with the private sector and civil society, focusing on leveraging all they have to offer, from financing to expertise and influence. In the coming years, the organization will lead the momentum for equitable vaccine access as the single greatest driver of an equitable and just socioeconomic recovery for the world's poorest children and their communities. In working with children, adolescents and young people, UNICEF will continue to take

³ The humanitarian principles' centrality to the work of UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations is formally enshrined in General Assembly resolutions [46/182](#) (1991) and [58/114](#) (2003).

their lead, in line with their right to be heard on decisions that affect their lives, and will engage with them as allies and problem-solvers, to make sure the organization works on the issues that concern them the most.

34. Responding to a global context of increasingly constrained resources, the Strategic Plan reflects the criticality of strategies to leverage financing for children, including countries’ domestic resources and those of the United Nations development system, the international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector. UNICEF is looking beyond its own resources towards using its mandate to leverage financing to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and drive equity-based agendas around the world, engaging in discussions and advocacy around debt relief to make sure that the most vulnerable children are protected. UNICEF will direct its talent, drive and passion – honed over decades of mitigating the effects of poverty, injustice and inequality on children – to tackle the systemic and structural causes of those problems.

35. To focus on the transformations that are required to come closer to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure that no child is left behind, UNICEF will develop its capacity to track systemic outcome-level changes, such as leveraging financing for children; supporting child rights-based policies and legislation; shaping markets and promoting equitable access to essential supplies and services; brokering global partnerships for children; transforming the landscape of data on children; supporting families, caregivers and parenting; and influencing social behaviours and norms. These areas of change have been identified across all UNICEF theories of change as critical to protecting child rights, maximizing the benefit of development opportunities and addressing the underlying causes of children’s vulnerability, gender inequality and exclusion in all settings, so that no child is left behind.

Figure I
Towards 2030: An ambition renewed



Abbreviations: LNOB: leave no child behind; CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child; CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; CRPD: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

36. Building on the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, UNICEF will continue to work towards achieving long-term results in five interconnected Goal Areas linked to children’s rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (see the results framework architecture in figure II). This will help to ensure that, in all contexts, including humanitarian crises and fragile settings, every child, including adolescents, (1) survives and thrives with access to nutritious diets, quality primary health care, nurturing practices and essential supplies; (2) learns and acquires skills for the future; (3) is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices; (4) has access to safe and equitable WASH services and supplies, and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment; and (5) has access to inclusive social protection and lives free from poverty.

37. Responding to the concerns of children and young people and aligning with global movements for social justice, UNICEF is shifting towards a transformative, intersectional approach to inequality and discrimination, to address their underlying drivers by transforming structures and norms. Because children with disabilities remain among the most excluded, discriminated-against and invisible members of every society, UNICEF is elevating programming on disability rights within this Strategic Plan to advance disability rights in everything it does, including through support to the families, parents and caregivers of children with disabilities. The organization is also starting to address racial injustice and to make anti-racism an explicit focus of its work to leave no one behind.

38. Gender equality remains at the core of the work of UNICEF, as a cross-cutting principle, core value and change strategy across the life cycle. UNICEF will continue to address sexual and reproductive health and rights, promote inclusive and equitable service access and engage men and boys as allies and partners, while renewing the focus on gender-based violence and the deep-rooted social and economic inequalities that have placed a double burden on the world’s women and girls during the global COVID-19 crisis. The UNICEF approach to gender equality is a key pillar of its work on leaving no child behind.

39. Living through a global crisis has taught UNICEF that it must prepare for the next one now, address the fragility that undermines children’s rights in so much of the world and continue to meet its commitments to protect children growing up amid humanitarian crises. That means strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity across its humanitarian and development programming and its contributions to social cohesion and peace. In a key evolution for UNICEF, the Strategic Plan does not separate out humanitarian action, but rather situates it within the pathways to systemic change that have been envisioned. Principled, timely, quality, child-centred humanitarian action not only saves lives and promotes dignity during crisis, it is also critical to building resilient systems, accelerating progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and realizing children’s rights. UNICEF is embedding specific programme and operational commitments to implement the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, its core policy and framework for humanitarian action, throughout the Strategic Plan.

40. While UNICEF is not part of the United Nations peace and security pillar, it continues to make substantial contributions to peacebuilding and sustaining peace through actions focused on creating a conducive environment for peace within societies. Its contribution is focused on addressing known drivers of conflict and grievances through equitable and inclusive delivery and the effective management of such social services as education, health, water and sanitation, social protection and child protection. It also contributes through supporting responsive and accountable

institutions and inclusive participation in decision-making at all levels, in particular by children and young people.

Figure II
Result areas of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025



41. New cross-cutting programming on resilience, peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and climate action will orient UNICEF work towards addressing fragility and the root causes of conflict, crisis and displacement, while building the capacity of families, parents, caregivers, communities and institutions to prevent, prepare for and respond to crises. UNICEF will design and implement conflict-sensitive programmes that contribute to social cohesion and peace, in accordance with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR)⁴ mandate (para. 36 (b)), in accordance with national plans, needs and priorities, building trust and collaboration among communities and between State and society, including through its role as an implementing partner for the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund.

A. Goal Areas

42. **Goal Area 1** is aimed at ensuring that every child, including adolescents, survives and thrives with access to nutritious diets, quality primary health care, nurturing practices and essential supplies. This means that all children, including those living in humanitarian crises and fragile settings, are free from illness, malnutrition and death from preventable causes, including HIV, and benefit from access to adequate diets, services, supplies, practices and enabling environments that support survival and good physical and mental health, nutrition and development through adolescence and into adulthood. Children's right to survival and development is recognized in article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, while articles 24 and 27 set out their right to health and nutrition.

⁴ General Assembly resolution [75/233](#).

43. UNICEF work under Goal Area 1 is shifting to recognize the centrality of primary health care as the key to attaining universal health coverage (in accordance with paragraph 27 of the QCPR) and delivering integrated, prevention-focused services and support across the life course, enabling children not only to survive, but also to thrive. At the core of planned work under Goal Area 1 is a strategy aimed at strengthening national health, food, WASH, education, child protection and social protection systems – and families and communities – to achieve health, nutrition, development and well-being outcomes that contribute to Sustainable Development Goals 2, 3, 4 and 5.

44. While tremendous progress in maternal and child health and nutrition has been achieved over the past two decades, the pandemic has compounded inequalities that were already leaving behind many groups of children: those living in the poorest households and underserved communities, in both urban and rural areas; children affected by humanitarian crises and fragility; and children in least developed and low-income countries, which have the highest burdens of child disease, malnutrition and mortality. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that the world is dramatically unprepared for major public health emergencies, and has highlighted the extent to which the cost of vaccines, medicines and other health products represents a disproportionately high barrier to access for low- and middle-income countries.

45. Children under the age of 5 years, especially newborns, continue to die from preventable causes stemming from inadequate maternal and newborn health care and nutrition, or treatable infectious diseases. Progress in immunization has stagnated, while the end of HIV/AIDS is still a distant vision for children and adolescents. Gender norms and cultural barriers, which intersect with poverty, compromise the rights of girls and women to access health care. As many as one fifth of adolescents suffer from mental health conditions, with suicide being the third leading cause of death among those aged 15 to 19 years old.⁵

46. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the crisis of early childhood care and learning, interrupting services and further straining the capacities of families, communities, parents and caregivers to provide responsive care and feeding. Meanwhile, children face a triple burden of malnutrition – undernutrition in the form of stunting and wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, and a rapidly increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity. Malnutrition leaves one in three children under 5 years old, or 200 million children, not growing well, while at least two in three children aged 6 to 23 months are not fed the minimum diet they need to grow, develop and learn to their full potential.

47. UNICEF work under Goal Area 1 will be guided by its Strategy for Health 2016–2030 and its Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030 and aligned with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. To build sustainable results, the organization will focus on strengthening resilient primary health care systems – especially in fragile contexts – that deliver a package of services, supplies and support that holistically address health, nutrition, development and well-being. Alongside maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition, including immunization and HIV/AIDS, this package will cover early childhood development, non-communicable diseases, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, violence and injury prevention, and environmental health. In addition, UNICEF will strengthen the accountability of national systems to provide nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable diets for children, adolescents and women.

⁵ World Health Organization, Key facts – Suicide, 2 September 2019, accessed on 31 March 2021. Available from www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide.

48. UNICEF will work to support and empower caregivers, communities and service-delivery systems, such as schools and learning spaces, to provide the environments, care, protection and education that enable children's health, nutrition and development. This includes scaling up social and behaviour change interventions, parenting and family support, and child, adolescent and youth engagement and empowerment.

49. To strengthen public health emergency preparedness and response, UNICEF will pursue strategies that support national health security and build resilience, encompassing all sectors of society and addressing socioeconomic impacts, including their disproportionate effects on children, girls and women, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The organization will advocate for and influence preparedness and response through the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board and in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), including by creating a global stockpile of immunization and health products for future pandemics. Towards climate-resilient health and food systems, UNICEF will promote climate-smart health-care facilities and climate- and environmentally-responsive primary health care; embed environmental health into school health and nutrition programmes; and influence national and global policies to support sustainable food production.

50. A multisystem approach will aim to improve linkages among systems at the household and community levels, in order to bring children and caregivers closer to the systems they rely on. UNICEF will continue to generate and consolidate evidence in support of an integrated approach, and engage strategically with Governments, United Nations entities, the private sector, civil society, young people and other partners to strengthen policies, programmes and services, the staff capacities of systems, national standards and service quality. UNICEF will advocate for and support countries to expand the availability and allocation of domestic and international resources for primary health care at scale, prioritizing the most vulnerable.

51. The private sector will also be a key partner. Shared-value partnerships will leverage businesses' capital, know-how, innovation and other core assets to strengthen systems at scale, ensure access to services and supplies, and influence societal demand and behaviours relating to health and nutrition. Public-private sector collaborations on innovative financing, family-friendly policies, and products, services and market practices for health and nutrition will be strengthened. UNICEF will invest in health and nutrition innovations and take to scale those already proven to be effective, including product and process innovations for diagnostics, care and treatment, data collection, analysis and decision-making. The organization will use its comparative advantage with Governments, partners and communities to leverage digital technologies to benefit the most marginalized children and families and strengthen data for health service, programme and system improvements.

52. **Goal Area 2** is aimed at ensuring that every child, including adolescents, learns and acquires skills for the future. It is closely aligned with paragraph 38 of the QCPR, which calls on the United Nations "to improve and ensure support and assistance to programme countries, upon their request, in developing their national capacities to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". Quality education, a right enshrined in articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, empowers children and adolescents, contributes to reducing poverty, inequality and injustice, and promotes sustainable economic growth, better health, environmental sustainability, peace and resilience.⁶

⁶ Spurling, G. and R. Winthrop with C. Kwauk, *What works in girls' education: Evidence for the world's best investment*, Brookings Institution Press, October 2015.

53. UNICEF work under Goal Area 2, including in humanitarian crises and fragile contexts, contributes to advancing Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5 and 8. It will focus squarely on addressing the global learning crisis, shifting to increase the emphasis on early learning, including in emergencies; holistic skills acquisition; multiple learning pathways; and creating safe and supportive school environments. It will place priority on girls and the most marginalised children and adolescents, including children with disabilities, children affected by humanitarian crises, children on the move, and children from the poorest households.

54. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the world was struggling with a learning crisis, with the worst levels of learning poverty (the proportion of children unable to read and understand a simple text by 10 years of age) and the largest skills gap in low- and lower-middle-income countries and those affected by conflict, displacement and fragility. Significant inequalities persist even in upper-middle-income and high-income countries, with racial discrimination a key underlying factor. Approximately 6 in 10 children of primary and lower secondary school age are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics.⁷ Pre-pandemic trends indicated that 43 per cent of primary-school-aged children in low- and middle-income countries would still be learning-poor in 2030.

55. The pandemic caused the largest education disruption in history, affecting up to 1.6 billion children (or 94 per cent of all learners) at its peak in April 2020,⁸ with more than 30 per cent of them unreached by remote learning solutions, notably as a result of the digital divide.⁹ Children missed out not only on education, but also on school-based health, nutrition and protection services and psychosocial support from their peers and teachers. Twenty-four million students are at risk of not returning to educational institutions.¹⁰

56. In line with the UNICEF Global Education Strategy and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF will work with partners to strengthen national systems to better address inequalities, build resilience and ensure access to safe and quality learning, skills acquisition and participation opportunities, including through its coordination role in humanitarian crises. UNICEF will support evidence-based policies, programmes and products to support inclusive education for children with disabilities; migrant, ethnic minority, refugee and displaced children; and other children with special needs. The organization will strengthen government and partner capacities on risk-informed programming, in relation to climate, conflict and disaster risks, and integrate mental health and psychosocial support and social protection to create more supportive school environments.

57. Informed by current learning poverty trends and skills gaps, UNICEF programmes will also incorporate gender programming in a transformative way and strengthen the capacity of education systems to support student-centred teaching, measure and improve learning outcomes, and develop multiple learning pathways to institutionalize holistic skills development that supports learning, personal empowerment, active citizenship, employability and entrepreneurship. UNICEF will prioritize foundational literacy and numeracy; transferable, digital and job-specific skills; age-appropriate and culturally relevant comprehensive sexuality education; and cognitive and social-emotional skills from early childhood through to

⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics, "More than one-half of children and adolescents are not learning worldwide", Fact Sheet No. 46, September 2017.

⁸ UNESCO, Education: From disruption to recovery, accessed on 31 March 2021.

⁹ UNICEF, "COVID-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures?", New York, 2020.

¹⁰ UNESCO, "UNESCO COVID-19 education response: How many students are at risk of not returning to school?", Advocacy Paper, 2020.

adolescence, while strengthening mechanisms for participation and civic engagement to empower children and adolescents and contribute to inclusive, peaceful and environmentally sustainable communities. Generation Unlimited will be a key partnership in this area. UNICEF will continue its longstanding work on climate education, including through the World's Largest Lesson and within the framework of safe schools programming and education for peace.

58. To preserve and increase education funding despite economic contractions, UNICEF will advocate with Governments to prioritize education, remove gender and other biases and improve efficiency and effectiveness in public spending, while leveraging funding from supporting agencies at the country and global levels, civil society organizations, academia, foundations and the private sector. UNICEF will support Governments and other partners to better produce, share and use data to strengthen systems and address the needs of the most vulnerable children and adolescents.

59. Building on efforts to reimagine education in the wake of COVID-19, UNICEF will focus on equitable access to digital learning solutions and connectivity, while engaging children, families, parents and communities to strengthen accountability. The organization will support teachers' development and the scale-up of accessible, online and offline digital content and platforms, including through partnerships with mobile companies and other relevant business sectors, as well as improve in-person learning opportunities. It will also ensure that interventions remain appropriate to context, and that low- and no-tech solutions better suited to reaching the most vulnerable student populations are not deprioritized or overshadowed by tech-heavy and expensive interventions.

60. **Goal Area 3** is aimed at ensuring that every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices. The right to protection is articulated in numerous articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF work under Goal Area 3, including in humanitarian crises and fragile settings, addresses the mandate set out in paragraph 39 of the QCPR to protect youth and children from violence and discrimination, and contributes to multiple Sustainable Development Goals, including Goals 3, 5, 8 and 16. In situations of armed conflict, UNICEF is mandated by Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) to implement the monitoring and reporting mechanism on six grave violations against children in partnership with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other United Nations bodies.

61. Under Goal Area 3, UNICEF is shifting towards a greater focus on preventing violence and harmful practices, including by better understanding children's particular, intersecting vulnerabilities; by transforming negative social norms using social and behavioural change interventions informed by social science research; and by enhancing the capacities of the social service workforce as an integrator between health, education, protection and other systems, to strengthen protective environments for children and address the multidimensional nature of child protection issues.

62. Despite the progress made over the past two decades, including a rise in the rate of birth registration and declines in female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, significant acceleration is required to achieve the child protection-related Sustainable Development Goals. More than three in four of the world's children aged 1 to 14 years experience violent forms of punishment by their caregivers. One in three adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years have been victims of emotional, physical or sexual violence committed by an intimate partner. Across conflict zones in all regions, armed actors conduct deliberate campaigns of violence against children, including targeting schools, abducting and exploiting girls and boys, and exposing them to sexual,

physical and emotional violence. Worldwide, 160 million children are engaged in child labour,¹¹ an increase of 8.4 million children in the past four years.

63. The pandemic has exacerbated the many intersecting vulnerabilities faced by children, with disruptions to the caregiving environment, schooling and work, and social and justice services increasing pressures that can send children and women into a spiral of harm and violence, with heightened risks of negative coping mechanisms and negative effects on mental health and well-being.

64. In line with its forthcoming child protection strategy and aligned with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, the work of UNICEF under Goal Area 3 will advance three objectives: prevention, so that all children grow up in a protective environment, online and offline; leaving no one behind, so that children in situations of heightened risk receive targeted support; and response and prevention of recurrence, so that children experiencing violations receive services. Work under this Goal Area will follow three core, interlinked programming strategies – addressing the behavioural, social, cultural and economic determinants of child protection violations at scale; strengthening inclusive child protection systems; and addressing child protection in humanitarian crises.

65. UNICEF work will focus on legal identity; access to justice; prevention of family separation; mental health and psychosocial well-being; harmful practices; the intersections of violence against children and violence against women, including gender-based violence in emergencies; and grave violations in armed conflict. With United Nations entities and other partners, UNICEF will support Governments to strengthen policies, legislation and regulatory frameworks; build the capacities of the social service workforce; and increase financing to scale up services and strategies. The private sector will be a key partner in work on online safety, including through the WePROTECT Global Alliance to combat online child sexual exploitation, and on child labour.

66. UNICEF will mainstream disability inclusion in all its child protection work, alongside targeted programming focused on children in residential care, violence in the home and mine action. The organization will continue to address the root causes of migration and displacement; combat xenophobia and discrimination; ensure access to basic services without discrimination based on a child's migration status; prevent and mitigate harmful practices like child immigration detention and family separation; and ensure that migrant and displaced children are engaged and empowered to reach their potential. Goal Area 3 will contribute to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, an organization-wide responsibility, by scaling up safe and accessible reporting channels, survivor-centred assistance, and strengthened accountability for child survivors, including in humanitarian crises and fragile settings.

67. **Goal Area 4** is aimed at ensuring that every child, including adolescents, uses safe and equitable WASH services and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment. Work under this Goal Area, including in humanitarian crises and fragile contexts, contributes to environmental, resilience and gender components of the 2030 Agenda, including Sustainable Development Goals 5, 6, 7, 12 and 13, and is linked to sustainable progress in numerous other Sustainable Development Goals, including Goals 3 and 4. The work on climate and environment reflects paragraph 29 of the QCPR.

68. UNICEF is making strategic shifts under Goal Area 4 to strengthen WASH service delivery as well as broader WASH systems, including in humanitarian crises

¹¹ UNICEF and International Labour Organization (ILO), “Child labour: global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward”, June 2021.

and fragile settings. The organization is expanding its private sector engagement and seeking innovative financing to reach the most vulnerable communities at the scale needed to meet Sustainable Development Goal 6 and to make WASH systems climate-resilient. UNICEF is increasing its focus on safe water for children and communities in water-insecure contexts and scaling-up WASH in schools and health facilities, along with community-level capacities for infection prevention and control, as critical elements of public health emergency preparedness and response. The organization is also expanding child-sensitive programming to address climate change, disaster risks and environmental degradation, in partnership with other United Nations agencies.

69. Children, especially the most vulnerable, bear the brunt of the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, including increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters, air pollution, hazardous waste, and water and food scarcity that contribute to violence, conflict and displacement. The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed global momentum on climate action, even as it has demonstrated the need for inclusive, environmentally sustainable solutions that drive economic recovery, guard against future pandemics and address the grave long-term threats posed by climate change.

70. Progress made since 2000 in expanding access to basic drinking water and sanitation masks huge gaps, with the poorest children in both rural and urban communities, and children with disabilities, among those left behind. While the pandemic has spotlighted WASH as key to infection prevention and control, including for safe school reopening, its economic impact will make it even harder to achieve universal access to WASH services. Girls and women bear a disproportionate share of the impacts of poor WASH, climate change and environmental degradation, as do children belonging to groups affected by racial discrimination. Poor WASH service provision exacerbates public health emergencies and disease outbreaks, including COVID-19, Ebola and cholera, and can worsen social tensions and heighten the risk of gender-based violence.

71. UNICEF will continue to support national Governments to improve monitoring, leadership and accountability for coordination that results in predictable, effective and high-quality WASH service delivery, including in humanitarian crises and fragile settings. The organization will work to meet the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action while embracing the programming experience gained to strengthen resilience, and will enhance peacebuilding approaches. Strengthening the WASH sector to make systems climate-resilient and address the full ambition of Sustainable Development Goal 6 for safe sanitation and hygiene, including menstrual health and hygiene, will require increased financing, human resources capacity, innovative approaches, and strong advocacy, communication, youth engagement and strategic partnerships, including with civil society. Expanded engagement with the private sector will be critical to the work on both WASH and the climate.

72. The work of UNICEF to prevent and address the impact of climate change on children is built around four closely linked areas: climate change adaptation; low carbon growth and climate change mitigation; disaster risk reduction; and environmental sustainability, including reducing pollution and safeguarding natural resources. UNICEF will enhance the availability of data and evidence across these dimensions, to inform its work and that of its partners; integrate child-sensitive solutions to localized vulnerabilities into national and subnational legislation, policies, strategies and budget allocations; deliver child-focused, risk-informed programmes; and engage children and young people as agents of change in environmental and climate action.

73. Achieving social and behavioural change to promote an environmentally sustainable economic model will be critical to climate action, as will both responding

to the vulnerabilities of girls and women, and intentionally addressing their economic roles and equitable participation, leadership and decision-making. The UNICEF integrated response will include humanitarian crises and fragile contexts, in line with the updated Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, organizational guidelines for environmental sustainability and incorporating climate adaptation into recovery efforts.

74. **Goal Area 5** is aimed at ensuring that every child, including adolescents, has access to inclusive social protection and lives free of poverty. The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the rights to social security (article 26) and an adequate standard of living (article 27). The 2030 Agenda recognizes eliminating child poverty and ensuring access to social protection as critical priorities towards achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 10 and as critical accelerators of multiple goals, including Goals 2 through 5, 8, 11, 16 and 17. Work under this Goal Area reflects paragraph 26 of the QCPR on supporting countries to implement social protection systems.

75. UNICEF has sharpened the focus of Goal Area 5, which will be dedicated to reducing child poverty and expanding access to social protection, including in fragile contexts and humanitarian crises, while programming gender in a transformative way that removes structural barriers. The organization is increasing the emphasis on inclusive programming that supports shock-responsive social protection systems as a driver for supporting the poorest families, and integrating the most disadvantaged and excluded children.

76. Despite critical commitments, progress on child poverty reduction has been slow, with extreme poverty among children falling from 19.5 per cent in 2013 to 17.5 per cent in 2017, at a slower rate than among adults.¹² The socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, compounding those of climate change and conflict, are reversing this progress and increasing inequality within and between countries. The situation of already poor and vulnerable children is worsening, children who had emerged from poverty in recent years are being pushed back into it, and the numbers of newly poor children are increasing, notably in urban areas and among families working in the informal sector.

77. Social protection has been a leading response to the COVID-19 crisis, with more than 200 countries expanding coverage. But this expansion has highlighted significant gaps in coverage, adequacy, financing, gender-responsiveness and inclusion of children with disabilities and children on the move; limited investments towards risk-informed and shock-responsive systems; and the urgent need to scale-up elements beyond social assistance and cash, including health insurance, parenting support, childcare and family-friendly policies. Only 35 per cent of children globally have social protection coverage, with significant regional disparities.¹³

78. UNICEF will continue to support Governments to routinely monitor child poverty, address its critical drivers, and reflect explicit commitments to reduce it in policies, legislation, budget allocations and socioeconomic and sectoral strategies, including in humanitarian crises and fragile contexts. To mobilize financing for child poverty reduction, UNICEF will advocate to protect social spending; enhance governments' capacities to use domestic resources efficiently, effectively and equitably; leverage private sector resources, and work with partners, including civil society, at the global, regional and country levels to identify new and innovative financing options towards sustainable, child-sensitive and inclusive national fiscal

¹² Silwal, A.R. et al, "Global estimate of children in monetary poverty: An update", Discussion Paper, World Bank Group, October 2020.

¹³ UNICEF and ILO, "Towards universal social protection for children: Achieving SDG 1.3", ILO-UNICEF Joint Report on Social Protection for Children, 2019.

responses. The organization will enhance the capacity of local governance structures to effectively plan, budget and deliver child-sensitive social services, tailoring approaches to different contexts, including urban areas and informal settlements, and enhancing structures to engage children, adolescents, parents and caregivers, and communities to participate and help to shape pathways out of poverty and exclusion, and support responsive, inclusive and participatory decision-making at all levels.

79. UNICEF work with all levels of Government will include leveraging digital technologies and partnerships, promoting family-friendly policies, and strengthening links with key sectors to deliver a comprehensive set of social protection interventions, including child grants, school feeding, childcare and health insurance.

80. In humanitarian crises and fragile contexts, UNICEF will fulfil its commitments in accordance with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action to provide social protection, including humanitarian cash transfers, to marginalized, poor and excluded children, parents and caregivers, while supporting Governments to strengthen shock-responsive social protection systems. Where such systems do not exist, the organization will continue to deliver effective cash-based support in ways that help to build them. Where the reach of central authorities is limited or non-existent, UNICEF will engage with local governance structures to enhance social protection interventions.

B. Change strategies and enablers

1. Change strategies

81. UNICEF has identified nine change strategies as key to accelerating progress towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and realizing children's rights, as follows:

82. **Risk-informed humanitarian and development nexus programming** across all contexts will contribute to crisis prevention and preparedness, building strong, resilient systems and strengthening social cohesion and accountability to affected populations. With its partners inside and outside of the United Nations system, UNICEF will work to make health facilities and schools climate-resilient and prepared for natural disasters and public health emergencies, and will use conflict analysis to inform its programmes in education, health, child protection, social protection and WASH, so that they do not exacerbate inequalities and rights violations that can lead to social tensions.

83. **Programming for gender equality in a transformative way that removes structural barriers** will focus on redressing gender inequalities, removing structural barriers, changing harmful gender norms and empowering girls, women and disadvantaged people from diverse population groups. UNICEF will work to improve the health, well-being and education of adolescent girls, in ways tailored to addressing the particular vulnerabilities of poor and marginalized girls; promote positive gender norms across the life cycle, including through gender-responsive parenting; end harmful practices like FGM; and prevent gender-based violence risks across all its programmes.

84. **Partnerships and engagement with public, private and civil society stakeholders** – including United Nations entities, Governments, international human rights mechanisms, businesses, community-based organizations and individuals – will enable UNICEF to leverage financing, influence, innovation and expertise to realize children's rights sustainably and at scale. This includes working with Governments and businesses to put in place family-friendly policies, expand connectivity to bridge the digital divide and influence markets to increase access to life-saving commodities,

including vaccines, health, nutrition, education and WASH supplies. (See section IV for additional information on partnerships.)

85. Evidence-driven **advocacy and communications** will play a pivotal role in UNICEF work in every country, to foster change on strategic priorities by influencing decision-makers and others to take positive action to advance children's rights and their development opportunities. UNICEF will enhance its evidence-based advocacy using a range of approaches, including policy dialogue, strategic influencing, engaging with children and young people and working in partnerships and coalitions. UNICEF will continue to strengthen its leading voice for children and to grow its supporter base through traditional and digital media and state-of-the-art content and engagement strategies, and by building awareness of and trust and affinity with the UNICEF brand in all countries.

86. Recognizing fragility as one of the most significant challenges to children's rights, UNICEF will make **systems strengthening to leave no one behind** a priority strategy. This will entail strengthening the components, functioning, responsiveness and accountability of systems, prioritizing the capacities of the social service workforce to better support communities, parents, caregivers and children by ensuring access to timely, quality essential services and supplies, without discrimination. Priorities will include strengthening primary health-care systems to reach more children and families, especially in fragile settings; building countries' capacities to operate effective supply chains, including budgeting for preparedness to mitigate health-system shocks from emerging diseases; strengthening education systems to address the global learning crisis; promoting a whole-of-society approach to pandemic and epidemic preparedness; and strengthening national statistical and data systems.

87. **Community engagement and social and behaviour change** will combine programmatic approaches addressing the cognitive, social, cultural, economic and structural determinants of rights violations, inequality, discrimination, mistrust, social divides and broken social contracts, and harmful social norms and behaviours. This strategy will respond to the growing importance of people-centred approaches, as demonstrated during the pandemic, and will embody UNICEF efforts to contribute to positive social transformation and address challenges that cut across and go beyond sectoral programming.

88. **Data, research, evaluation and knowledge management** will be key to linking upstream and downstream work to ensure that the policies UNICEF promotes are in fact changing lives on the ground and that UNICEF is providing critical information that can further inform policy and programme design. UNICEF will accelerate its investments in this strategy, with a reinvigorated commitment to make better use of evidence to inform policies and programme delivery, and a continued emphasis on evaluation, data collection and analysis – including through co-creation with partners. These efforts will be anchored in strengthening robust national monitoring systems and frameworks; enhancing capacity in predictive analytics, the use of frontier data and data governance and ensuring the availability of disaggregated data, in line with paragraph 32 of the QCPR, in fragile contexts and humanitarian crises.

89. UNICEF work on **innovation** focuses on creating new or improved solutions that address the most pressing problems facing children, adolescents and their families, taking them to scale and driving demand in collaboration with partners, including businesses and Governments. The organization's portfolio approach aligns resources with programmatic priorities, focusing on new technologies, product and process innovations, as well as new approaches in policy, financing and business models. UNICEF is also investing in **digital transformation** to improve

programming and operations, while addressing the opportunities and risks for children that are inherent in an increasingly digital world.

2. **Organizational performance enablers**

90. Through its organizational performance enablers, UNICEF will continuously invest in becoming a more agile, values-based, effective and efficient organization that can respond effectively to change and uncertainty.

91. **Accelerated resource mobilization** for UNICEF programmes will focus on maximizing flexible and predictable income, to enable faster, more effective and at-scale delivery of results for children and humanitarian response. UNICEF will grow and sustain income from private and public sector partners as well as public-private sources – including Governments; bilateral and multilateral partners; United Nations joint programmes and pooled funds; individuals, including pledge, cash and legacy donors, and philanthropists; businesses; public-private pooled funds and innovative financing arrangements. Engagement with partners to close the funding gaps in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 will be accelerated, including advocacy for Member States to meet funding compact commitments of at least 30 per cent of core resources (regular resources) by 2023, and increases in thematic funds.

92. **An agile and responsive business model** will enable UNICEF to adapt more nimbly to changing and increasingly complex operating contexts to strengthen its organizational resilience, while maximizing results for children. A number of operational, programming and partnership processes and systems will be simplified and automated; planning and budgeting processes revised; and global technical teams and multifunctional technical teams established to enhance networked ways of working. The UNICEF Global Shared Services Centre and the United Nations reform of business operations in-country will be further leveraged to reduce the administrative overhead of UNICEF offices. These initiatives will increase the organization's capacity to achieve more results for children and adapt more quickly to changing environments while better managing the associated risks.

93. **Strategic internal, two-way communication with and for staff** will enable UNICEF to foster inclusive, transparent, constructive and authentic exchanges between staff at all levels of the organization, for enhanced awareness, agile collaboration and connectedness – advancing programmatic priorities and co-creating a values-based organizational culture. UNICEF will build staff capacities and create a user-friendly, accessible and relevant digital enabling environment, with multiple real-time communication channels, high-quality virtual meetings and events, and analytics.

94. **Decentralized and empowered governance and decision-making** will strengthen the accountability of individual staff members to deliver results for children. Oversight and decision-making will follow the principle of subsidiarity (i.e., making decisions closest to where they need to be made). Decisions will be informed by a common set of principles, including strong and rigorously enforced protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, ethical standards, transparency and environmental sustainability. Governance mechanisms will be streamlined for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

95. **Dynamic and inclusive people and culture:** UNICEF will work to ensure that its workforce is dynamic and empowered to perform at its best for the world's children, and that all employees model the core values of care, respect, integrity, trust and accountability. There will be zero tolerance for any form of misconduct.

96. Inclusion and representation will be prioritized, so that every member of the UNICEF workforce can count on feeling safe, respected and valued. A key part of this

is ensuring adequate representation of marginalized groups across all functional areas. Strategies will look beyond numbers and targets and strive to ensure an inclusive, respectful workplace for all. Efforts will be made to raise awareness of all UNICEF personnel about conscious and unconscious bias, microaggressions and other behaviours that undermine a values-based, inclusive workplace.

97. Various measures will be put in place to further enhance the effectiveness of the workforce. In particular, the performance management system will be improved, and there will be an increased focus on outcome- and competency-based performance assessments and continuous feedback. Flexible working modalities will be further expanded to introduce more modern, agile ways of working that optimize organizational productivity while enhancing staff well-being and career growth. These measures will help to enable more deliberate and innovative talent management throughout the employee life cycle, making UNICEF an employer of choice.

IV. Partnerships and financing

98. Partnerships are at the heart of everything UNICEF does, allowing the organization to expand its reach and influence, and to leverage resources to advance its universal mandate for children. In the context of global crisis and recession, declining official development assistance and constrained fiscal space to fund social services for children, the outcome-oriented Strategic Plan sees brokering partnerships and leveraging finance for children from a range of public and private sector partners as critical to narrowing the projected gaps on progress towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. UNICEF will continue its long-standing practice of building capacity, leveraging resources and influencing policies and programmes through partnerships with national and local governments, other United Nations entities, businesses, civil society, and children and young people.

A. United Nations working together

99. Collaboration with United Nations entities is a cornerstone of UNICEF work. UNICEF continues to be fully committed to enhancing the effectiveness and coherence of the United Nations development system, including during the upcoming phase of transition from implementing the remaining mandates of General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) – a new regional architecture, a strengthened system offer in multi-country offices and bolstered system-wide evaluations – towards monitoring what works and addressing gaps and challenges. UNICEF is committed to our common agenda, as a United Nations system-wide vision for a new global deal in which the United Nations can act as a central agent of change for a new social contract – to give a strong impetus to the Decade of Action and beyond. Most of the 12 themes of our common agenda are closely linked with the UNICEF mandate.

100. To enable better, more coordinated support by the entire United Nations development system to host Governments in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, UNICEF will contribute to the system-wide, coherent implementation of mandates outlined in the new QCPR, especially in areas that align with the UNICEF mandate and comparative advantages.

101. The organization has systematically ensured, even prior to the development of the QCPR monitoring and reporting framework, that QCPR mandates have been integrated into the Strategic Plan. Further to discussions on cooperation, coordination and coherence held with counterparts across the United Nations system in the development of the Plan, UNICEF continues to consult extensively with other United Nations entities in response to elements of the QCPR, particularly the new mandates.

UNICEF is also working with other agencies to integrate a range of common indicators set out in the QCPR monitoring and reporting framework. Furthermore, UNICEF looks forward to substantive engagement with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, particularly on education, gender, data and efficiencies.

102. UNICEF will work with other United Nations entities, notably the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations Development Coordination Office, including through joint programmes, to align UNSDCF and country programme documents. Such alignment is key to prioritizing the acceleration of results in individual outcomes with respect to related Sustainable Development Goal targets. Working within United Nations country teams within the context of the high-level Sustainable Development Goal-focused UNSDCF gives UNICEF the opportunity to elevate the level of results achieved for children within its goal framework through strengthened linkages between national development plans, strategies and budgets and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. UNICEF can benefit from drawing on the expertise of non-resident United Nations entities and leveraging other entities' existing interventions.

103. UNICEF will continue to achieve efficiencies by addressing operational aspects of United Nations reform as critical facilitators for embedding child rights issues in national development agendas. The organization will continue to support the enhanced resident coordinator system and coordination structures at the headquarters, regional and country levels, and to implement the Management Accountability Framework. UNICEF will advance stronger business operations and greater efficiencies, including through the Business Operations Strategy, common back offices, common premises and mutual recognition, and through joint United Nations tenders for procurement, where UNICEF is the lead agency for vaccines, cold-chain equipment and installation, educational items, long-lasting insecticidal nets, nutritional treatment and WASH items.

104. UNICEF will take forward its commitment to the programmatic component of the United Nations development system reform through a series of strategic partnerships with relevant United Nations entities, organized by their strategic contribution to Goal Area outcomes, in support of the Sustainable Development Goals and efforts by national Governments. These partnerships will focus on areas that can accelerate results and impact at a large scale, including through South-South and triangular cooperation; leverage existing capacities and build on ongoing work with the greatest potential; yield efficiency gains and savings; maximize the convening role of national partners; and help to build systems. The outcome focus of the Strategic Plan will afford UNICEF the flexibility to partner with other United Nations entities at the country level, as needed, to advance national priorities. Results will be monitored at the local level and reported and aggregated globally through the UN INFO planning, monitoring and reporting system.

105. UNICEF will continue to work through the H6 partnership with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNFPA, UN-Women, WHO and the World Bank, and to co-sponsor UNAIDS with 10 other United Nations entities. With the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF will continue to work on the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting, and on school health and nutrition. A new strategic collaboration framework with WHO will accelerate country-focused efforts towards universal health coverage and support countries to prevent, detect and respond to public health emergencies. UNICEF will also work with WHO on the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network and the International Health Regulations

(2005) monitoring and evaluation framework; the RCCE Collective Service; the Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene; the Global Task Force on Cholera Control; and the Hand Hygiene for All initiative, also with the World Bank. The United Nations Environment Programme will be a key partner on environmental protection; the International Organization for Migration (IOM), on migration; and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), on urban data and WASH.

106. UNICEF hosts the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative and co-convenes SDG4-Education 2030 together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and six other entities. Through the Blueprint for Joint Action with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF will aim to reach up to 10 million refugee children, families and host communities with education, WASH and child protection services, and to include them in national systems. Also with UNHCR, the Humanitarian Education Accelerator programme will aim to identify and grow innovations in education in emergencies. With UNFPA, UNICEF continues to co-lead two of the largest joint United Nations programmes, on FGM and child marriage. UNICEF works with the International Labour Organization on child labour; with the International Telecommunication Union on Internet connectivity (GIGA) and child online protection; with 14 United Nations entities, including UNDP and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, on legal identity; and with IOM, UNHCR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and others on access to justice. The Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and Sexual Violence in Conflict, and for Children and Armed Conflict, are important allies.

107. Work with the United Nations system will be key to mobilizing financing to lift children out of poverty and spark an inclusive recovery. UNICEF works on financing for development with UNDP, including within the Secretary-General's initiative on Financing for Development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond, and through a flagship initiative that encompasses regional development financing ideas in areas that leverage existing country-level partnerships. This collaboration builds on the strengths of UNDP on the macroeconomic level and in innovative financing, and those of UNICEF on financing and budgeting for the social sectors. UNICEF works with UNFPA, UN-Women and WHO on the sustainable health financing accelerator, and with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, WFP and the World Bank on shock-responsive social protection linked to climate change. UNICEF will continue to play a leading role in the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board, including on strengthening use of national systems for humanitarian cash transfers.

108. As a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance, UNICEF is committed to support humanitarian coordination along with the United Nations and national and local stakeholders, and to improve the collective impact of humanitarian response. UNICEF is lead of the global nutrition cluster, the global WASH cluster and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility within the global protection cluster. The organization serves as co-lead, with Save the Children, of the global education cluster. Whether the cluster approach is activated or not, UNICEF plays a key role in both global and country-level inter-agency coordination for its areas of programmatic responsibility.

B. Other partnerships

109. The National Committees for UNICEF are longstanding partners and part of the wider UNICEF organization. Under the oversight of their Boards of Directors, they serve as the face and voice of UNICEF in their countries. UNICEF works closely with the National Committees as they support delivering on the UNICEF Strategic Plan and universal mandate, including through resource mobilization and advocacy for children's rights domestically and globally. UNICEF will continue to optimize opportunities to deliver together with National Committees on results for children.

110. UNICEF will increase collaboration with international financial institutions including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and regional development organizations such as the Asian Development Bank. Opportunities for collaborations with the World Bank include the International Development Association IDA19, which supports the world's 74 poorest countries, and the World Bank's fast-track initiative for COVID-19 vaccine readiness, procurement and delivery. The fast-track initiative runs parallel to the efforts of the COVAX Facility, in which UNICEF will continue its leadership, working with industry to finance and procure COVID-19 vaccines, local production of personal protective equipment, essential medicines and oxygen for 92 low- and middle-income countries, and supporting countries to prepare for and deliver the vaccines and essential commodities.

111. To leverage resources and action for children, UNICEF plays active leadership roles in various global partnerships and hosts some of these partnerships. Global partnerships are continuously increasing in their strategic and financial significance, with donor-committed funds rising exponentially since 2016 and with UNICEF experiencing a record year in 2020, driven by funding for the COVID-19 response.

112. UNICEF recognizes that the monumental change and results at scale needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda require expanded engagement with the private sector, beyond transactional partnerships, as a supplier of goods and services, an employer, innovator and investor, on its impact on communities and the environment, and as an advocate for children's rights. The organization will integrate business for results as a programming strategy to leverage the value of private sector stakeholders, where and when strategic, to achieve results for children.

113. Engaging and influencing government budgets through the public finance for children framework will be another key means to achieve sustainable domestic financing for child-focused social services, including through capacity-building and advocacy to ensure that resources are used effectively, efficiently and equitably. UNICEF will work with partners, including research institutes and the United Nations Capital Development Fund, to strengthen national and subnational planning and budgeting tools and approaches. UNICEF will also support financing mechanisms for essential supplies for children in low- and middle-income countries, with a focus on increasing domestic and domestically-mobilized financing and partnership solutions.

114. Partnering with children, adolescents and young people as agents of change is a key cross-sectoral strategy to accelerate programmatic results, a QCPR mandate (para. 15) and a human rights imperative, as children have the right to be heard in matters that affect them, in line with their evolving capacities. UNICEF will strengthen engagement with adolescents and young people, through digital platforms and in-person strategies, as resources and problem-solvers who offer valuable perspectives and insights for more effective policies and programming, and as change agents.

115. UNICEF will scale up its volunteer and U-Report engagement, focusing on country-level constituencies of youth volunteers and U-Reporters, as part of a people-centred vision of development that highlights the importance of local actors, building

ownership of development outcomes and enhancing social solidarity, social capital and social inclusion. Meanwhile, UNICEF will enhance its efforts to become a trusted partner for families, parents and caregivers, as the key architects of children's experiences and opportunities, by providing quality parenting and family support as a critical driver of results for children.

V. Risk management

116. UNICEF has identified several risks that may negatively affect the implementation of the Strategic Plan and the realization of its ambition. A likely long-term economic recession will limit the ability of UNICEF to not just raise flexible resources, but also to leverage the financing needed more broadly to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for children. Meanwhile, ongoing threats to multilateralism and the shrinking space for civil society in many parts of the world create risks for the entire United Nations system and its partners around the world.

117. As the world emerges from the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that sudden-onset global crises and their impact on access to essential supplies and services will need to be more directly addressed as specific risks to any efforts to advance long-term development goals. This is in addition to ongoing risks posed by the escalation of more localized humanitarian crises due to natural disasters and conflict, and their potential impact on fragile states. Other lower-level and long-term risks that UNICEF manages on an ongoing basis include fluctuating levels of Government commitment to child rights and investments in children's well-being, gaps in the capacities of implementing partners, constraints on humanitarian access, and risks related to prioritizing children who are being left behind, rather than larger numbers of children who are easier to reach.

118. The change strategies and enablers outlined earlier in this document represent the first line of defense in mitigating these risks. Partnerships and engagement across humanitarian and development systems are critical to UNICEF risk management, as working with others and building coalitions enhance the scale, reach and sustainability of the organization's actions. Advocacy and communications allow UNICEF to manage risks more strategically by making a compelling case for global action. Equipping UNICEF staff with fit-for-purpose skills will be key to addressing the changing world and evolving programmes in countries.

119. Investments in better quality and more accessible data can serve as a bulwark against regressive policy decisions and, as demonstrated during the pandemic, an unparalleled resource in making the case for children and showing that social and economic shocks affect them disproportionately. A more detailed discussion of the risks and assumptions is described in a separate paper on the theory of change that accompanies the Strategic Plan.

VI. Monitoring, learning, reporting and evaluation

120. Drawing on lessons learned from the evaluation of the current Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and the experience of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the move to a more outcome-focused Plan with a longer-term planning horizon has necessitated a revised approach to results management. Moving forward, UNICEF will be more focused on tracking the extent to which its efforts catalyse transformative and systemic change at the outcome level, in addition to monitoring and reporting on how efficiently and effectively it delivers on its own outputs.

121. To that end, the strategy framed within the Strategic Plan has a 2030 horizon, with two consecutive four-year strategic plans that will be subject to ongoing and

regular review. The results framework will set out impact-, outcome- and output-level indicators, some derived from the Sustainable Development Goals. These indicators represent only a subset of the indicators that UNICEF uses internally to track programmatic effectiveness. The annual report of the Executive Director will be the means for reporting on Strategic Plan progress, including the indicators drawn from the QCPR and those shared with other United Nations entities.

122. UNICEF will undertake more-regular internal policy, budget and performance reviews to make it more responsive to risks and more agile in systematizing programmatic learning, particularly at the outcome level. These regular internal reviews will assess the extent to which outcome-level progress is indicated; the ongoing alignment of programmes and resources behind outcomes; the effectiveness of change strategies in catalysing change in varied operational settings; which children continue to be left behind and where; and trends in global, regional and country-level performance.

123. UNICEF will accelerate work to connect and make data available in real time, bringing the power of data innovations and open data to enhance both knowledge-informed programming and integrated policy support. A renewed focus will be placed on quality, learning, feedback and use of monitoring information, with enhanced coherence, collaboration and coordination across development and humanitarian programming.

124. Outcome monitoring will be further strengthened, supporting national, partner and cluster monitoring systems, as well as United Nations joint monitoring at the country level, to assure the commitment to leave no one behind and the UNICEF contribution to collective global outcomes. UNICEF monitoring systems and capacities will be reinforced to enable more adaptive programming, with a greater emphasis on accountability to affected populations, applying evaluative methods for strategic decision support, and responsiveness of country monitoring systems to context.

125. UNICEF will aim to continually learn and improve its approaches throughout the Strategic Plan implementation period, by continually adapting and refining its theories of change, strategies and country programmes based on programme monitoring, lessons learned from programme implementation, emerging evidence from data collection and research, innovation to identify breakthrough approaches, and feedback from partners.

126. UNICEF will continue to strengthen the evaluation function, and strive to more systematically update and integrate evaluative learning into programmatic and resource-allocation decisions. The organization will work with its independent Evaluation Office to ensure that the schedule and scope of forthcoming evaluations will be responsive to the organization's key areas of need, particularly with respect to the effectiveness of strategies in accelerating outcome-level progress.

VII. Looking ahead to 2030

127. This Strategic Plan represents the commitment by UNICEF to work tirelessly to fulfil its mandates and galvanize global action to accelerate progress towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the full realization of child rights. The Strategic Plan charts a course for UNICEF and its partners for this Decade of Action and embodies a vision of the transformation that is possible even amid the crisis and uncertainty that mark the present moment – premised on expanded, innovative engagement with a diverse range of partners, including Governments, United Nations entities, civil society, businesses, communities, families, caregivers, children and young people.

128. By applying their collective knowledge, experience, ingenuity, resources and drive, UNICEF and its partners can alleviate the shocks of COVID-19, ensure equitable access to COVID vaccines as a pathway to reach unreached communities and strengthen local systems, bridge the digital divide, prevent further reversals of progress for all children, and enable the world to move forward into an inclusive and environmentally sustainable recovery that puts children first. By protecting children living amid humanitarian crises and fragility, delivering the kind of support that empowers communities, and investing in the resilience of children, families and systems, the global community can be better prepared for emergencies, prevent the next global crisis and build sustainable progress and peace.

129. Intentional shifts towards sustainable economies and behaviour can be drivers of progress on the 2030 Agenda, halt environmental degradation, mitigate climate change and enable the world to adapt. If societies make the choice to protect social spending, prioritizing the most excluded children, and work to transform structures and norms that perpetuate gender inequality, racism, ableism and other forms of discrimination, children and communities can be lifted out of poverty, the cohesion of societies strengthened and human rights secured for all children.

130. The agenda is ambitious, but so is UNICEF. Children and young people are demanding change, for the childhoods that are theirs by right and a future that belongs to them. UNICEF has an imperative, and a chance, to help to lay the foundations of the new social contract our common agenda calls for. Together with its partners, UNICEF can build a future in which every child is included in society and has their rights fulfilled, opportunities to thrive, and the agency to shape their future according to their own identity and vision.

VIII. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Endorses the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 ([E/ICEF/2021/25](#) and [E/ICEF/2021/25/Add.1](#)).