Update on the context and situation of children

In 2019, Algeria witnessed important political changes triggered by the popular protest movement that started in February. Following the resignation of the former Head of State, an acting President took office until December 2019 when a new President of the Republic was elected. Several reforms were announced in the economic, social, and political arenas. The promotion of inclusive social and economic development was confirmed as a strategy to realize social justice, equity and dignity. Significant commitments were reaffirmed towards children and youth in the sectors of education, health, employment and innovation.

Despite the prevailing political context, public institutions continued to deliver social services to children and adolescents, and increased attention was devoted to them with key related issues raised as national priorities. The development of a national strategy for the protection and the promotion of child rights was discussed and initiated by the Government of Algeria. The government revitalized the child protection system and the related case reporting system. The work on strengthening early childhood care and youth programmes was initiated by adopting new legal frameworks and undertaking reviews of existing programmes.

The burden of the oil sector in the economy and low prices on the international market continue carry the risk of a long-lasting reduction in public revenues. The real economic growth rate for 2019 was 1.3 per cent, slightly lower than in 2018 (1.5 per cent). This decrease was driven by the negative real economic growth in the hydrocarbon sector. The unemployment rate was at 11.7 per cent in 2018, confirming the need to diversify the economy and to create productive jobs. The application decrees of the organic law related to finance laws are in the making to set the framework for the implementation of the results-based management and performance-based budgeting starting 2023.

In July 2019, Algeria presented its first Voluntary National Report to the High Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The report covered the 17 SDGs and highlighted areas of progress and challenges, including those related to enhancing the country’s information system ability to adequately reflect the contribution of national policies to advancing SDGs. The government emphasized the need to enhance public care for the poor and vulnerable, and to reinforce the economic integration of youth.

Multidimensional child poverty was estimated at 21 per cent (based on the National Multiple Overlapping Analysis, 2017) reflecting the situation of deprived children who are left behind despite the efforts of the government to deliver free and universal social services. For 2019, Algeria allocated about 8.4 per cent of its GDP to social transfers, of which 22 per cent was for social housing and 33 per cent to support families and vulnerable individuals. The government also decided to increase the monthly disability benefit amount reaching more than 500,000 disabled persons, and the annual school allowance reaching about 3 million children. The government finalized the review of energy subsidies and modelled a compensation cash transfer programme to reduce the anticipated impact of the removal of those subsidies and ensure an equitable redistribution among the targeted population.

The government maintained its strong commitment to the health sector. Infant mortality was about 21 per 1,000 between 2016 and 2018 and has decreased by one point since 2014–2015. About 22,000 infants have died every year since 2012. Neonatal mortality share in infant mortality reached 81 per cent in 2018. The national perinatal programme (2016–2020) aims to reduce the under-five mortality rate from 24 in 2016 to 20 per 1,000 in 2020. The new Health Act (2018) has prioritized child and maternal health, including the acceleration of mortality reduction. In 2019, the Ministry of Health (MoH) enhanced the capacities of audit teams to collect and analyse data in preparation for Algeria’s quinquennial report on maternal deaths. As part of efforts to enhance the quality of early childhood care, Algeria adopted a new decree on the creation, organization, functioning and control of early childhood services.

Regarding education, despite the high gross enrolment rate (97 per cent in primary education, 96 per cent in lower-secondary education), the priority, given the increasing demographic pressure until 2030, remains to offer adequate infrastructure, quality and equitable education to children. Increasing pre-school education coverage is another priority with an enrolment reported in 2019 reaching 70 per cent in preparatory education. The government invested human and financial capacities in setting up a national learning achievements assessment system to systematically address and strengthen quality of education. The government also decided to increase the coverage of school transport and canteens for the most vulnerable children throughout the country by prioritizing those living in remote and isolated areas. To prevent drop-outs from school, the professional baccalaureate was introduced targeting adolescents who reached the last grade of lower-secondary school.

Adolescents and young people (15–24 years) represented 14 per cent of the population in 2018. This population group needs to be equipped with the right skills and knowledge to find meaningful employment and contribute to society. In 2018, 26 per cent of young people aged 16–24 years were not in education or employment. The unemployment rate of this
age group was 29 per cent. Projects funded by the national agency for youth employment (ANSEJ) have decreased from 41,000 in 2014 to 11,000 in 2016. These projects created 23,000 jobs for youth in 2016 against 93,000 in 2014. Youth programmes, including employment schemes, are now being reviewed by the government to enhance effectiveness and coverage.

The child protection sector is still suffering from the absence of an information system which limits access to regular and organized data. The National Organ for Child Protection and Childhood Promotion (ONPPE) led by Algeria National Delegate for Child Protection was, however, able to report continuously on cases of children at risk collected through the national child helpline. More than 2,000 cases were reported between January and November 2019 and transferred to juvenile judges and social services.

### Major contributions and drivers of results

UNICEF embarked on a mid-term review (MTR) of the country programme 2016–2020, initiated under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was the opportunity to take stock of the progress and challenges, enhance partnerships and understanding of the country programme results in line with Algeria priorities for children, and for better alignment with the SDGs. This exercise built upon the outcomes and the recommendations of the United Nations Strategic Cooperation Framework MTR undertaken in 2018–2019.

The programme priorities of the 2019 Annual Management Plan focused on strengthening: (i) the quality of UNICEF programming via enhanced analysis and evidence generation (ii) the collaboration with UN agencies and (iii) the integration of interventions conducted in refugee camps with the other components of the UNICEF country programme in order to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus. Annual management priorities increased attention on: strengthening the office’s emergency preparedness capacities, improving governance and systems supporting operations and programme implementation, improving the work place, strengthening team work spirit and ensuring well-being at work.

### Child Development and Education

Evidence-based advocacy and provision of technical support to relevant institutional partners were intensified, to improve access to high quality maternal and neonatal health services, and equal educational and developmental opportunities and services.

#### Early Childhood Development

Capitalizing on challenges encountered in the early childhood development (ECD) policy development, national partners and UNICEF advocated for investing and supporting the quality of ECD services, alongside the ECD campaign #EarlyMomentsMatter and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 30th anniversary celebrations. The focus was on the first 1,000 days of life, nurturing care, quality services for young girls and boys and promoting the role of parenting. The importance of an integrated ECD policy continued to be raised with the government.

ONPPE and UNICEF convened stakeholders from key line ministries, civil society organizations (CSOs) and national experts among others to debate on “ECD, an investment for a whole life”. ONPPE, positioned at the Prime Minister’s Office, played a strategic role in terms of advocacy and in mobilizing relevant partners. During the CRC celebrations, CSOs reaffirmed their commitment in promoting ECD as a central theme, making them potential future partners for ECD promotion, especially when it comes to targeting parents. A key achievement was the adoption of a new executive decree setting conditions of creation, organization, functioning and control of ECD centres.

The capacities of MoH were strengthened to accelerate neonatal mortality reduction. Medical simulation trainings were used as an innovative approach to train trainers in order to contribute in improving the quality of neonatal health services. An approach to scale up the piloted Electronic Software on Immunization (DEVAC) was discussed, including the training of a national pool of trainers and the costing of the generalization plan.

MoH actively participated in the regional Child Mortality Estimates workshop jointly organized by WHO and UNICEF, and decided to move forward with the elaboration of a strategy on the acceleration of maternal and newborn mortality reduction in partnership with UNICEF and WHO. The UN Health (H6+) group was revitalized under WHO leadership, and invested in maternal health to jointly support MoH in enhancing the quality of maternal mortality audit system.

The evaluation of the strategy for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV was completed. This evaluation was conducted by UNICEF, UNAIDS and WHO, with the support of MoH, to inform future engagements in line with the National HIV Strategic Plan.
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In collaboration with local authorities and partners, health interventions in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf (a southern Wilaya of Algeria) benefited 21,000 children under 5 and about 6,000 pregnant and lactating women. Vaccines were provisioned for eight antigens (including BCG, DT, Tetrac Hib haemophilus B, OPV, IPV, MMR and Hepatitis B) to cover a one-year period, and were procured through the Algerian Pasteur Institute. The Expanded Programme on Immunization was strengthened with the assessment of capacity building needs for vaccinators through a large-scale diagnostic. In partnership with Enfants Réfugiés du Monde, UNICEF strengthened the capacities in the area of neonatal care of health trainers from the Paramedical School in the refugees camps. The trainers benefitted from internships in the neonatal department of a central hospital in the north of Algeria.

Education

UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Education (MoE) to improve equitable access to quality education and the institutional environment of the education system. To this end, the UNICEF contribution to system strengthening included enhancing evidence generation and analysis with the generation of additional knowledge necessary to address exclusion and drop-out. The analysis of qualitative surveys conducted in 2018 to better understand barriers to retention and completion of primary and secondary education was completed by MoE. The results should contribute to the development, with UNICEF assistance, of a response plan to address school drop-out. In addition, the assessment report on life skills and citizenship education (LSCE) initiatives was finalized and will be instrumental for advocating for an education curriculum review. To increase the integration of LSCE in education and training initiatives for children and adolescents, UNICEF expanded its partnership with other institutions, such as the National Organ for Education and Training (ONEF) and CSOs, including the Algerian Muslim Scouts (SMA), which has a strong capacity for outreach to the most vulnerable groups across the country. It is noteworthy to highlight that the partnership between UNICEF and SMA on the integration of life skills is helping to promote life skills training for adolescents with focus on the most vulnerable. In addition, UNICEF Algeria, SMA and UNDP took part in the second cohort of countries engaged in the Generation Unlimited (GenU) Youth Challenge.

In 2019, MoE, with UNICEF support, implemented the promotion of the World’s Largest Lesson (WLL) initiative in 20,000 basic education schools nationwide targeting almost 5 million children and adolescents aged 8–16 years. Taking part in WLL provided children with the opportunity to participate and discuss children’s rights on the occasion of CRC@30 anniversary.

Regarding education governance systems strengthening, UNICEF continued to support MoE with quality technical assistance. In 2019, progress was made in the implementation of the first national large-scale learning assessment. Underway since 2018, UNICEF assistance to the set-up of a students’ learning assessment system will help to improve students’ learnings and skills, reinforce educational staff capacities to monitor the impact of education reforms, look at inequities and inform decision makers on policy adjustments.

System strengthening included enhancing the capacity of education staff in evidence-based strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation. For the first time, UNICEF supported the training of 32 MoE senior staff on RBM with the aim to achieve inclusive and equitable education. The participants were introduced to the main modules on the situation analysis and importance of data, strategic planning, theory of change, monitoring, evaluation and management of the whole project and operations cycle. This renewed collaboration with MoE – particularly on governance – paves the way to strengthened strategic partnership on planning and budgeting.

As part of the humanitarian intervention to the Sahrawis children, UNICEF continued supporting the education of 39,000 children in the camps – with continuous support to sector governance as lead of the Education Coordination Group.

Distribution of individual school kits continued in 2019, covering the needs for three yearly quarters. The refurbishing of nine primary schools, one lower-secondary school, one kindergarten and the reconstruction of one kindergarten were completed through partnerships with Triangle Génération Humanitaire and the International Committee for the Development of People (CISP). This improvement of infrastructure, including WASH facilities, benefits 6,254 children, 52 per cent of whom are girls. UNICEF recruited an international consultant in civil engineering to provide technical assistance to the WASH in School interventions, to review school construction and rehabilitation standards, and help update the education sector five-year infrastructure construction and rehabilitation strategy.

In partnership with CISP, UNICEF finalized the first phase of the development of the Education Management Information System software, which is an improved version of the basic tool used by the local authorities to generate indicators; the expansion of its use at regional and local levels was planned together with education authorities. In partnership with CISP, UNICEF also continued working on increasing awareness of children on appropriate hygiene behaviors by expanding the use of the hygiene promotion manual developed in 2018. Through its partnership with Association Femmes Action Développement, UNICEF started to train 475 education staff (headmasters, teachers, trainers and inspectors; 84 per cent female) on pedagogical and training engineering and conducted an assessment of teachers’ didactical training needs.
To support inclusive education, UNICEF partnered with Humanity and Inclusion to develop teaching modules for education staff that will be integrated in the curricula and training modules to be used by the Sahrawi refugee-run Teachers Training Institute.

Based on the assessment of LSCE initiatives in the camps, UNICEF supported the reinforcement of youth life skills through cultural activities. A first intervention mobilized interactive theatre methodologies and reached more than 100 adolescents and youth who learned new sensitization methods through interactive and lively engagement. The beneficiaries’ enthusiasm led UNICEF to explore opportunities to expand the reinforcement of youth life skills through a variety of activities related to culture such as audio-visual, theatre and fine arts – with a two-year funding proposal submitted to the Government of Netherlands.

Child Protection

UNICEF supported national efforts to improve the institutional environment for child protection, to ensure greater effectiveness of protection services and better coordination of the accompanying multisectoral response. In this regard, the most significant result in 2019 was the organization by ONPPE, with UNICEF technical assistance, of a high-level seminar on the importance of referral mechanisms. This seminar allowed an inter-sectoral national consultation on the topic and an exchange of experiences with similar referral mechanisms from Belgium, France and Tunisia. Through the initiative, main stakeholders, representatives from various ministries and the public were provided with an opportunity to share their experiences and best practices about the mechanisms in place or actions required for reporting individual cases of children at risk. The seminar recommendations will provide an opportunity for ONPPE to draw a coordinated roadmap with all child protection stakeholders represented by the ONPPE permanent committee of coordination.

Regarding child protection services, the government has made a strong commitment to the development of alternative care through the promulgation of two decisive application decrees of the Child Protection Law (2015). This significant progress in the legal framework of the child protection system in Algeria gives the opportunity to achieve new results for children by ensuring the availability of several alternative care options that are compatible with the child’s needs. The new decrees open the possibility to advocate with the Ministry of National Solidarity (MoNS) to develop guidelines for alternative care for children.

Another relevant result in line with the recommendations of child protection actors was the decision taken by the Prime Minister to develop a national strategy for child protection initiated by MoNS. The ministry has indeed decided to review the National Plan of Action for Children 2008–2015 to inform the upcoming strategy.

Furthermore, MoNS benefited from an initial training on RBM, which focused on planning and implementing inclusive social development, in accordance with the 2018 organic law on finance laws. This training paves the way for a strengthened strategic partnership in governance and planning.

Adolescent and youth participation

In the area of adolescents and youth participation, important progress was achieved in 2019 with increased investment in LSCE through the diversification of interventions and partnerships. The partnership agreement concluded with SMA helped to further strengthen the promotion of adolescent and youth participation with enhanced life skills. This partnership allowed to empower more than 200 adolescents and youth, and to test several educational activities in the field. In the framework of the GenU Youth Challenge 2.0, meaningful adolescents and youth participation in designing programme and activities content was promoted through Communication for Development (C4D) interventions. Leverage of community leaders, mass media (radio, national television), local authorities and academia contributed to the outreach of the Youth Challenge and the promotion of positive social norms and practices that encourage the protection and participation of children and adolescents.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), with a support from UNICEF, selected four youth-friendly centres to serve as models for ‘effective youth participation’ in the design and the management of the centres’ activities. This selection was based on a national competition launched in 2018.

A consultation gathering was organized by MoYS with the participation of decision makers and senior officials from the ministry. The consultation resulted in recommendations to inform important reform around adolescent and youth services and pedagogical programmes. The integration of life skills in youth programmes was one of the main decisions.

Social inclusion of children and adolescents

In 2019, the government undertook important steps to review national programmes and public policies. The subsidies review led by the Ministry of Finance was completed and a compensation programme to the most vulnerable households
was proposed. This favourable context was a key leverage to continue and increase the advocacy work around child poverty and child-sensitive social protection.

The government-owned data and analysis around child poverty contributed to the national efforts in contextualizing the SDGs. The government formally recognized child poverty as part of the country’s SDG agenda. This was reported in the Voluntary National Report of Algeria presented at the July 2019 session of the High Political Forum on the SDGs. The National Economic and Social Council (CNES) reaffirmed its central role in promoting equity-focused research and policies by intensifying knowledge generation around social equity and poverty. CNES produced several thematic analyses addressing key issues for children and youth with an equity lens and proposed policy recommendations for social sectors and institutions to tackle child and youth poverty. Among others, the thematic papers covered ECD and issues around the transition from childhood to adulthood. UNICEF played a major role in supporting CNES and the multisectoral equity cell set-up by CNES, to produce a child poverty measure through capacity development, critical review, and policy dialogue interventions.

UNICEF intensified the dialogue and collaboration on social protection for children with the government, including the Ministry of Finance and MoNS, as well as the United Nations (UN) system, and the World Bank. UNICEF supported the Government of Algeria’s participation at the international conference on universal child benefits. Analysis is ongoing to gather evidence on the effectiveness of such universal benefit in the Algerian context as a solution to increase social protection coverage for children with equity, thus participating in optimizing public spending in social transfers.

As a concrete contribution to the UN reform, UNICEF convened UN agencies to discuss universal social protection for children and youth was discussed and debated among UN agencies as a common challenge as well as an opportunity for the UN system to accelerate results in Algeria. The SDG fund processes also presented an opportunity to work together and think about a strategic approach for the UN system to support the government in achieving SDGs 1 and 8 by focusing on NEET (neither in education, employment nor training).

In 2019, UNICEF supported the initial steps of MoNS to digitize the social assistance system as a contribution to the broader government effort to increase efficiency and effectiveness of social protection in Algeria. The recent establishment by the government of a National Digital Agency offers an enabling environment to making this shift a reality in the future.

UN working together

In 2019, UNICEF steadily collaborated with UN agencies and UN Resident Coordinator’s Office in pushing forward the implementation of the UN Strategic Cooperation Framework. Placed under UNICEF leadership, the Results Groups on Social Development valorized existing undertakings and stimulated new dynamics around information sharing and planning together, particularly is the areas of neonatal, maternal and child health, gender equality and the fight against violence.

As a contribution to UN system thinking on social protection in Algeria – as a means to achieving SDGs 1 and 8 – UNICEF organized a mini-forum for UN agencies where it featured its experience on analysing children and youth multidimensional poverty.

UNICEF also took part in the UN Strategic Cooperation Framework MTR, including the review of the Results and Resources Matrix. Among other benefits, this allowed better convergence of efforts under the Governance result with regards to evidence generation, data management, evaluation and RBM. UNICEF provided a concrete contribution to the UN joint SDG programme as well, particularly in the all-partners workshops facilitated by Ministry of Foreign Affairs on SDGs 3 and 5.

UNICEF also contributed to the roll-out of the UN Development System reform by taking part in the Resident Coordinator’s Office recruitment of new expertise for the benefit of all. UNICEF had throughout the year meaningful contributions to the UN Country Team, like animating a session dedicated to out-of-school children. UNICEF also associated with the Resident Coordinator and other UN agencies in exploring ways to have Algeria benefit from SDG funds, particularly in addressing the needs of adolescents and youth falling under the NEET category.

Finally, UNICEF continued working closely with UNHCR and WFP on the joint humanitarian operation in support of Sahrawi refugees living in refugee camps in Tindouf. Noteworthy contributions in 2019 were the organization of two major multi-donor missions to the camps, improved joint advocacy, and running a joint training on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse for UN implementing partners operating in the camps.

Data and evidence generation

A major investment was made in implementing the sixth round of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in 2018–2019 by MoH. This important source of updated socio-economic data on children, youth, women and families came at a strategic time to inform the announced reforms in social sectors by the newly elected President of the Republic. In this
Lessons Learned and Innovations

Important lessons were learned from the MTR of the 2016–2020 country programme. Drawn from the experience gained so far from programme implementation between 2016 and 2019, these lessons learned will inform the remaining period of the programme cycle.

The availability of up-to-date data and indicators for children in Algeria remains a constraint for assessing the country’s progresses and UNICEF interventions. While the existence of large data gaps is a fact, an important lesson learned has been the need to better use data from MICS and other existing good quality national sources for effective policy advocacy and communication efforts. Certain opportunities are lost by not capitalizing on the previous cycles of MICS and rich evidence generated so far. To address these challenges, UNICEF will intensify its support to MoH and other partners in terms of capacity building in data analysis and in various approaches to data dissemination across different audiences. Meanwhile, UNICEF is currently preparing a brief data diagnostic that will serve as basis for Data for Children action plan and contribute to improving the data culture. It is also planned to develop a guide of the ongoing MICS 6 to capitalize the experience gained in the training, the fieldwork and the quality review process.

At the same time, there are some good examples of capacity building in terms of evidence generation, particularly in the social inclusion area. The actual use made by Algeria in its first Voluntary National Report of the results from the child and youth multidimensional poverty analysis conducted by the CNES stands out as a positive outcome from the steady investment made by UNICEF in capacity building and advocacy for innovative solutions to address children and youth vulnerability.

UNICEF continued to strengthen partnerships with its main government counterparts, other UN agencies, CSOs and academia to accelerate results for children. Despite the prevailing political context in 2019, capacity building efforts helped to revitalize partnerships with line ministries such as MoE and MoNS. Indeed, in the context of the SDGs, strengthening national systems through the application of RBM for inclusive social development was relevant. The initial series of RBM training was instrumental in deepening UNICEF understanding of institutional needs and capacities and in turn, MoE and MoNS understanding of the UNICEF programming approach and procedures.

Another important lesson learned was the need to further strengthen UNICEF work within the UN joint SDG programme. The SDG framework was used to leverage social inclusion of children and youth thanks to a substantive collaboration with the UN SDG task force and the government SDG steering committee. A key contribution was made on monitoring the SDG 1 related to child poverty and social protection. In addition, active participation during the preparation of the all-partners workshop in SDG 3 on good health and well-being and SDG 5 on gender equality and female empowerment carries promises for enhanced convergence, as well as improved systems and policies to achieve the SDGs.

An additional lesson learned was the opportunity of working with CSOs in adolescent and youth participation on matters that impact their lives and the life of their communities. Thanks to the recent partnership with SMA, UNICEF is in a better position to promote the integration of the LSCE approach and contribute to moving forward mechanisms for actual participation of adolescents and youth.

A major finding from the MTR is that C4D has been so far poorly mobilized, except limited interventions in key parenting and community practices in support to ECD interventions. C4D interventions played a key role in supporting programme results in terms of leveraging community and mass media platforms (radio, national television), local authorities and academia. With simultaneous involvement of External Communication and C4D teams, UNICEF Algeria is learning about the importance of fully integrating its approach to communication.

Since the onset of the current country programme, UNICEF has been supporting innovation by using technology, following different streams and working with different partners. UNICEF Algeria has supported an Innovation Lab since 2014 with the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Informatique (ESI). It has come clear that innovative digital solutions developed by students for children, parents and other rights holders should be reviewed and the partnership assessed so that its potential for results can be better realized. Indeed the experience built with ESI would be enhanced from making it converge with other initiatives and partnerships like the GenU Youth Challenge 2.0. under development with SMA and UNDP.