

Armenia

Part 1: Situation update in the country

In 2018, the World Bank raised Armenia's rank from lower-middle-income to the upper-middle-income category of countries, following an increase in the gross national income (GNI) per capita from US\$3,770 in 2016 to US\$3,990 in 2017 [1]. The population of Armenia as of the beginning of 2018 was estimated at 2,972,732, out of whom 698,905 were children aged 0-17 years [2]. Over one-third of the population is concentrated in the capital city of Yerevan.

The landmark change of 2018 in Armenia that affected everybody's lives was the political transformation known internationally as the 'Velvet Revolution', culminating in arguably the nation's most transparent and trusted elections ever. This led to the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General lauding Armenia in the UN General Assembly for "progress towards democratic transition and greater openness" [3].

Mass protests started in response to the President's factual third consecutive term, due to Constitutional changes that allowed him to become the Prime Minister (PM). The spring 2018 events were the escalation of a long-lasting dissatisfaction and low trust towards the authorities that brought a large number of citizens of different ages to the streets. These processes eventually resulted in the resignation of the President and the Government, followed by election of the opposition leader as the Prime Minister and formation of a new cabinet. However, the minority government scenario was not sustainable and resulted in a demand for snap Parliamentary elections, which took place in December 2018.

As reported by media outlets and the Human Rights Defender's Office (HRDO) of Armenia, school children were also part of mass protests during the spring of 2018, triggering ambivalent reaction by different groups of society. Some argued that they were predominantly adolescent children who were expressing their views and exercising their right to be heard in all matters affecting them; others considered that their participation was contradicting children's rights to protection and education, due to the risk of violence during protests and their absence from school.

The political changes and main demands of protesters largely set the agenda for 2018 making the fight against corruption, greater transparency and accountability of public institutions the central topics. This resulted in stricter regulations and monitoring of public institutions and processes, including social services, educational institutions and medical facilities.

An important change for children reported by the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia (ArmStat) was an improvement in the child poverty rate by 3.4 per cent compared to 2017. This was in line with the decrease in poverty in general (3.7 per cent), which is being explained by the unprecedented 7.5 per cent economic growth in 2017 [4]. As per the report, 30.8 per cent of Armenian children lived in poverty and 2.1 per cent in extreme poverty in 2017, as compared to 25.7 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively for the general population. However, child poverty levels were still higher than the lowest recorded level in 2008. Urban-rural disparities continued to persist (32.0 per cent poor in rural areas, 29.9 per cent in urban

ones). In the region of Shirak, every second child continued to be poor. Girls were likely to be poorer (32.4 per cent) than boys (29.4 per cent). The poverty rate in children aged 15-17 years was higher than in other age groups (33.9 per cent), followed by those aged 0-5 years (31.7 per cent) and 6-9 years (30.4 per cent). Households with three or more children under six years old had 1.9 times higher poverty risk (49.6 per cent). Those with two adults and two children had 1.6 times higher poverty risk (40.7 per cent) than the national average (25.7 per cent).

The poverty rate of female-headed households - comprising 32 per cent of the poor population and 28 per cent of the total population - was higher than the poverty rate of male-headed households (29.2 per cent versus 24.4 per cent). Female-headed households with children up to six years of age have 1.6 times higher risk of poverty compared to the national average. The marital and employment status and educational level of parents are other predictors of child poverty. Poor households receive social transfers to address effects of poverty and deprivation. The percentage of families with children receiving family benefits within the total number of beneficiary families remained at 75 per cent due to changes in the targeting formula, making it oriented towards families with more children, but issues of coverage still exist.

The Republic of Armenia is due to submit its next fifth and sixth joint report on fulfilment of their commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its protocols in January 2019 and provide information on the implementation of the recommendations covered in the Concluding Observations of 2013. With this important milestone coming up, the HRDO prepared and published the ad hoc public report on the state of fulfilment of commitments under the Convention and its optional protocols by Armenia in 2018 [5]. The report concluded that most of the recommendations are not met at all or are met only partially.

One of the observations of the ad-hoc report by the HRDO was the concern about decreasing budget allocations, in particular in the areas of health and education. Since 2013, health and education allocations have not shown any noteworthy progress. Health allocations stood at around 1.5 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), education allocations dropped to 2.3 per cent of the GDP, and the share allocated from the GDP to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) for the improvement of the child rights protection system also decreased. The Analysis of Child-focused Public Expenditure Measurement (C-PEM) in Armenia published in 2018 and covering the period 2013-2015, concluded that the increase in overall public spending since 2012 has not benefited children proportionately [6]. Expenditure on children has been rising more slowly than overall expenditures, although the proportion of children in the population has not changed.

The share of government spending allocated to health was 6 per cent (and 1.5 per cent of GDP) in 2017 and is among the lowest in the region. Armenia achieved almost a halving of the infant mortality rate during the last decades, from 15.4 per 1,000 live births in 1997 to 8.2 in 2017 [7]. The age structure of infant mortality has changed notably. Neonatal deaths accounted for over 70 per cent of infant mortality in 2017 compared to over 45 per cent in 1990s. The main causes of neonatal mortality are premature births, congenital malformations, birth asphyxia and sepsis/ pneumonia. The 2015-16 Armenia Demographic and Health Survey (2015-16 ADHS) highlighted a high prevalence of overweight among children aged under 5 years at 14 per cent, an increase from 11 per cent in 2008 [8]. Contrary to recommended practices, supplementation of breast milk with other liquids or foods starts at an early age, with just under 45 per cent of children under six months of age exclusively breastfed. However, this was an improvement compared to 35 per cent registered by ADHS 2010.

In Armenia, child injuries and accidents were the leading cause of mortality of children aged 1-5 years, being responsible for one-quarter of deaths. They account for more than 20 per cent of deaths amongst children aged 0-18 years. In all age groups, mortality is higher among boys [9].

The Armenian National Immunization Programme continued to be one of the best performing programs in the Europe and Central Asia region. Coverage against most of the antigens was above 90 per cent and continuing to increase, as confirmed by World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF coverage estimates, disease surveillance and epidemiology data [10]. Differences in immunization coverage by sex are minimal: 90 per cent of girls and 89 per cent of boys have received all the basic WHO-recommended vaccinations. By residence, 88 per cent of urban children have received all the basic vaccinations, compared with 92 per cent of rural children. There is no clear association between either the mother's education or household wealth quintile and vaccination status [8].

General education (1-12 grades) is compulsory and fully funded by the state, while pre-school education is not mandatory and funded from local community budgets. In 2018, there were 368,722 school-aged children (52.7 per cent boys, 47.3 per cent girls) attending 1,367 public (93.7 per cent students) and 50 private (2.3 per cent of students) schools [11]. The total number of teachers was 38,556.

The gross enrolment rates in general education during recent years has been around 90 per cent on average, while upper-secondary enrolment is around 74 per cent. The adjusted net enrolment rate for basic education (grades 1-9) was 89.2 per cent in 2017, while data for upper secondary is not available [7]. Armenia has a relatively low pre-school enrolment rate of children aged 0-5 years at 30 per cent (37 per cent in urban areas and 21 per cent in rural areas), while enrolment of children aged 3-5 years. increased to 56.4 per cent in 2017. The goal to increase enrolment of 5-year-olds to 70 per cent was achieved in 2017. However, insufficient access to kindergartens and shortages of educational resources affect the quality of education. About 300 rural communities, especially the remote and smaller ones with less than 500 people, do not have any early childhood education services. An estimated 71 per cent of children with disabilities do not attend kindergartens (80 per cent in rural areas) [12].

Despite the Government's commitment to promote a culture of safety and resilience of children, the structural safety of schools and safety of children remain a big challenge for the country. Over 80 per cent of school buildings do not comply with national and international building codes, and school administrations and teachers are not well prepared to manage risk reduction and respond to shocks and stresses [13].

Political changes in the country and lack of funds due to changed donor commitments slowed down the roll-out of inclusive education in all schools, however the new Government confirmed their commitment to the process. Inclusive education is fully operational in only four regions of Armenia: Syunik, Lori, Tavush and Armavir. A planned roll-out in Yerevan was delayed until 2019, due to the education system not being properly equipped and prepared. In 2018, about 500 secondary schools provided inclusive education services supported by a network of 12 pedagogical psychological centres, under the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), three child and family support centres (under MoLSA), local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development partners.

Important developments in the child protection sector included formulation of an agenda to end violence against children with Armenia's accession to the Global Partnership to End Violence

against Children as a Pathfinding country. In June, the Family Code was enacted creating legal conditions for better protection of the right of the child to live in a family environment. A further 20 per cent reduction was registered in the number of children in residential care, from 2,900 to 2,400.

A review of social assistance schemes impacting children started in 2018. The Government tripled the amount of the childbirth grant for the second child to around US\$309 (150,000 drams) aiming to increase the birth rate which, at 37,700 births in 2017, has declined from 80,000 in 1990. The average total fertility rate has been around 1.6 births per woman of reproductive age during recent years.

Regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the nationalization process was delayed due to the changes in the Government. Nevertheless Armenia submitted an SDG Implementation Voluntary National Report in 2018 as planned, where references were made to progress towards SDG targets in child and maternal health, while poverty, including child poverty was mentioned as an area where further efforts are needed. The analysis by ArmStat with UNICEF was also referred to as a baseline for child-focused SDG indicators.

- [1] New country classifications by income level: 2018-2019
- [2] De Jure Population of the Republic of Armenia, by sex and age as of January 2018
- [3] Secretary-General remarks to the Informal Session of the General Assembly, 16 Jan. 2019
- [4] Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia, 2018
- [5] The ad hoc public report - commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols: the state of fulfilment by Armenia in 2018
- [6] The Analysis of Child-focused Public Expenditure Measurement in Armenia, Yerevan 2018
- [7] The Demographic Handbook of Armenia 2018
- [8] The 2015-16 Armenia Demographic and Health Survey
- [9] Statistical Yearbook: Health and Health Care 2018, Yerevan, Armenia, National Institute of Health
- [10] Armenia: WHO and UNICEF estimates of immunization coverage: 2017 revision
- [11] Education Management Information System, Armenia, Data 2017-2018, <https://emis.am/>
- [12] It's about Inclusion: access to education, health and social protection services for children with disabilities in Armenia, 2012
- [13] School Safety Assessment, Yerevan 2015
- [14] SDG Implementation Voluntary National Report Armenia, Report for the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, July 2018

Part 2: Major Results including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the Country Programme Documents

As referred to in the analysis of the situation and living conditions of children, women and their families, the spring of 2018 brought about major transitions in the politics of Armenia. The peaceful protests ultimately led to a change of the Government and Prime Minister in May, and a demand for election of a new Parliament, which was held in December 2018. The implementation of the UNICEF Country Programme was very complex in the first half of the year, as well as at later in the year due to these reasons. Despite the challenges, with strategic reprogramming and flexibility, many positive changes and results were achieved for boys and girls and their families in Armenia in 2018.

The 2016-2020 UNICEF Armenia Country Programme was in its third year of implementation in 2018. To analyse the status of the country programme implementation and progress an internal Strategic Moment of Reflection (SMR), in December 2018. The SMR process helped to adjust the output levels in line with new developments in the country and the needs of girls, boys and women, which will be integrated in the rolling workplan for 2019-2020. The SMR, together with a Gender Programme Review, also conducted in 2018, and a new situation analysis, will inform the drafting of the new country programme for 2021-2025.

The current Armenia Country Programme is of a cross-sectoral nature, with four outcomes:

Outcome 1. By 2020, disadvantaged girls and boys aged 0-6 years and their families will make progress in realization of their rights to quality and inclusive health care, nutrition and early learning;

Outcome 2. By 2020, statutory needs-based services to disadvantaged families are in place to realize the right of a child to live in caring, protective and resilient family environments;

Outcome 3. By 2020, children with disabilities progressively realize their rights to education, rehabilitation and social protection and to participate in community life;

Outcome 4. By 2020, justice and human rights institutions better serve, protect and monitor the rights of all children, especially the most vulnerable, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The country programme was developed prior to the 2018-2021 UNICEF global Strategic Plan (SP), the Gender Action Plan, UNICEF Europe and Central Asia's regional results areas, and the Sustainable Development Goals. As such, the programme structure is not in line with the current SP goal areas, however many areas overlap. As far as possible, the programme results have been aligned and reported on according to the SP's goal areas. Below are the main results achieved by UNICEF in Armenia in 2018.

Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

Survival, health, nutrition and development of children aged 0-6 years were addressed through the health and education systems, as well as through public advocacy and parenting education. The learning part of early child development is reported on under the Goal Area 2, however it is important to mention that these elements are interlinked.

In 2018, UNICEF continued the interventions to strengthen neonatal intensive and paediatric care services in the country through:

- 1 Providing essential equipment to regional and central health facilities;
- 2 Enhancing healthcare providers' skills and knowledge in the delivery of quality neonatal care services in accordance with international standards;
- 3 Ensuring continuity of quality services at primary health care level, and;
- 4 Establishing strong partnership with a specialised health facility in Russia for technical assistance and for exchange of experiences.

Strategic approaches and actions in neonatal care were articulated in the Every Newborn Action Plan (ENAP), which will be the basic guiding document for the Government and partners over the coming years. UNICEF helped to foster consistent approaches in the management of health issues among newborn children and the continuum of care after discharge from the maternity wards. This was through supporting the introduction of new standards in newborn care and building the capacity of 400 health providers from the maternity wards and primary healthcare facilities. Another important document developed in the reporting period was the

Child Injury and Trauma Prevention Strategy and Action Plan for 2018-2023.

Both documents address the issues through an intersectoral approach at policy, service delivery and community levels, and will be supported by disaggregated data on the causes, age, sex and other factors on a continuous basis. The newly-developed statistical reporting form on child injuries and trauma is being incorporated into the e-Health system to ensure the continuous availability of disaggregated data on the causes, age, sex and other patterns. UNICEF built the capacity of relevant staff on how to record and report data via the e-Health system and how to analyze them. A special web-resource on child injuries was developed to deliver reliable information to parents on injury and trauma prevention.

UNICEF continued supporting health authorities in transforming the existing home visiting system into a risk-based progressive model that addresses the vulnerability and the needs of children and families through collaboration between health and social protection sectors. Training modules were developed and delivered to 725 primary healthcare providers in five regions, focusing on the prevention of violence against children, providing support to vulnerable families, and strengthening intersectoral collaboration.

UNICEF continued support to sustaining the previous achievements in reduction of stunting and improvements in the breastfeeding rate. During the reporting period, UNICEF and the Ministry of Health (MoH) identified new strategic directions, including the issue of overweight among under-five children (14 per cent among under-five, with a tendency to increase during adolescence), and expanding programmatic interventions in nutrition to school-age children. A new standard protocol was introduced for healthcare providers on how to assess the social and household risk factors in a family, which might have a negative effect on children's nutrition, including counselling packages for healthcare providers to address the revealed problems. Approved by the MoH, the protocol was integrated into the home visiting system. In parallel, UNICEF supported education sessions for 3,500 parents across the country to improve their knowledge and skills in child care and nutrition, to strengthen local collaboration and trust between families and community-based healthcare services. Two educational videos on child health, home care, development, nutrition and prevention of child trauma and injuries were developed and will be used in 2019.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

Programme interventions on early learning focused on three priority areas: 1) universalization of one-year of preschool education for all 5-6-year olds; 2) inclusive preschool education, and; 3) reaching children in small remote settlements.

The modelling of preschool services for small rural communities was documented in a cost-benefit analysis, including recommendations for replication of the model in other communities. Several policy and technical meetings were organized for policy makers, main stakeholders and development partners. After policy advocacy efforts, the MoES included the need for expansion of alternative preschool services into the government plans for 2019-2021. The ecological model of young child development was used to advocate for including early intervention for children with developmental delays and disabilities into a community-based multi-disciplinary process, and for establishing services that support families and are based on individual child needs. UNICEF provided technical assistance to the MoES to revise or develop policies, standards and educational materials. The Law on Preschool Education and the 2011 Early Learning Development Standards were revised, and a Manual on Multi-Age Teaching

and Learning for teachers was developed.

The work on the operationalization of the national Early Warning Electronic System to prevent school dropout was slow. The adoption of the regulation for addressing out-of-school children was hampered due to the political changes, unsynchronized data and information systems, as well as a lack of clarity in the roles of different ministries.

While in 2018 the country was making steady reforms in making secondary schools inclusive and transforming the special education system, major gaps persisted in the availability of community-based resources and facilities versus the actual needs among children with disabilities. These needs include specialized staff, pedagogical techniques, flexible curricula in schools and conducive social norms and attitudes. UNICEF facilitated a partnership between the Armenian State Pedagogical University and the US University of Minnesota to offer professional development opportunities and sharing of best practices. Many exchange consultation meetings and discussions were held with disabled people's organizations to better understand the challenges. Technical assistance was provided for the development of a concept note and programme for the transition of the general education system in Yerevan into a fully inclusive one.

UNICEF focused on the improvement of the monitoring of participation of all children with disabilities in education. This is a priority in the framework of the child care reform and transformation of special education schools, which posed a risk of children with disabilities to be left out of schooling. UNICEF conducted a study on data collection, processing and exchange of information on children with disabilities between key ministries and supported improvements in data collection on disability, and a special education needs assessment. This included appropriate disaggregation in line with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) framework.

In 2018, 477 secondary schools in four regions provided inclusive education services, supported by a network of 12 pedagogical psychological centres by the MoES. Three child and family support centres were supported by the MoLSA, local NGOs and development partners. UNICEF continued to provide technical advice and worked closely with the Government with a clear focus on system strengthening.

Goal area 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

The key role of UNICEF in the child care reform was maintained, particularly in advocating for the Government to further advance the results achieved to date. The Government, with support from UNICEF and other partners was able to decrease the number of children in residential care from 2,900 in January to 2,400 in December 2018. Most children were returned to their biological or extended families, while smaller numbers were provided with alternative family and community-based options.

Continued support was provided in the development of quality foster care services, and a small group home was established to cater for children with special needs. For this new service, UNICEF supported the development of a legal framework and advocated for long-term commitment from the Government to support the service, with funding from the Government of Bulgaria. Small group homes are a temporary alternative suitable for a small number and specific group of children, such as children leaving care who cannot return to their biological family, children with behavioural challenges, children with severe disabilities, and bigger groups

of siblings in order not to separate them.

Among the residential care institutions closed in 2018 were two residential special schools for children with disabilities, and two more are in the process of closing. UNICEF partnered with the MoLSA and MoES in a gap analysis of the legal framework to examine the delivery, access, and funding for community-based services for children with disabilities, resulting in the development and adoption of relevant legal acts. In addition, UNICEF supported skills development of 227 professionals in 11 community-based social support centres across Armenia, which provide support to children with disabilities returning to their communities.

The partnership with the Ministry of Justice focused on awareness-raising of professionals working with and for children on the amendments of the Family Code, on the determination of the best interests of the child, adoption, foster care, visitation rights, and grounds for termination of parental rights. UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Justice in developing a draft legislative framework to improve the administrative data collection on criminal aspects of violence against children.

Armenia was supported by UNICEF to make important steps towards the goal of ending violence against children by 2030 by successful accession to the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children as a Pathfinding Country. The multi-sectoral Council on Justice for Children, led by the Ministry of Justice, was further strengthened to become a platform for coordination of reforms related to access to justice for children, as well as planning, implementation and monitoring of the roadmap and action plan to end violence against children. The scope of the members of the Council was expanded to include all the stakeholders working for and with children. Its procedures were refined and the capacity of the Secretariat of the Council was enhanced. A first high-level national conference to end violence against children was organized in September with the participation of the UNICEF Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, representatives from the Global Partnership and international experts. The conference was well covered through digital activation and wide coverage by mainstream media. The first phase of analysis of the existing data and conceptualisation of the roadmap will inform the development of a National Action Plan to End Violence Against Children, to be adopted in 2019.

UNICEF organized capacity building of professionals working with children in the field of access to justice, with the social service workforce, judges, prosecutors and staff of the Human Rights Defender's office. In partnership with Save the Children Armenia, 180 social workers were trained on early identification, prevention and response to violence against children and referral mechanisms. Seventy-eight judges and prosecutors successfully completed a distance learning course on the rights of children in contact with the law for justice professionals, available at the Justice Academy of Armenia. The capacities of the HRDO staff were strengthened in monitoring and reporting on the state of child rights in Armenia. This resulted in the Human Rights Defender's ad hoc report on the state of implementation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations on Armenia's state party report

UNICEF initiated institutionalization of the comprehensive capacity building interventions with partner institutions – the Justice Academy, HRDO and MoLSA - through developing manuals and guides for professionals. These included a manual for judges and prosecutors on dealing with children in the justice system, a training module on violence against children for the social service workforce, and a practical guide on monitoring spaces where children are deprived of liberty, to be used by the HRDO and NGOs.

Cooperation with the University of Zurich, ArmStat and the Women's Resource Centre on an experimental research study on prenatal sex selection aimed at measuring the social norms related to son preference and the value of the girl child. The research faced challenges in field implementation, delaying presentation of results to 2019.

UNICEF also commissioned a study aimed at outlining media consumption behaviours among couples of reproductive age. The study used the Gender Equitable Scale to analyze attitudes towards stereotypical perceptions about gender roles and to understand intra-household decision-making dynamics. The experimental research and the study, along with other evidence, will be used to design communication for development interventions and better targeted media campaigns to transform perceptions and gender norms, particularly targeting the practice of prenatal sex selection.

Goal area 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

In 2018, UNICEF contributed to a notable change in the state budgetary allocation for disaster risk reduction (DRR). Technical support to the Government on DRR resulted in adoption of a state budget programme for safer schools. More than 400 remote rural schools in Armenia were excluded from the National School Seismic Improvement Programme because they had less than 100 students. In 2018, the Government decided to invest in small, remote and rural schools due to UNICEF technical assistance and advocacy through programme budgeting. The new National Safer School budget programme will be launched in 2019. The Government also used the 2013-2017 UNICEF-supported nationwide school safety assessment to shortlist the 46 most urgent at-risk schools for retrofitting or construction, out of 425 vulnerable schools.

The new programme will enable MoES to receive vital funding for school disaster management, and for implementing a small-size secondary school approach complying with the construction principles of the Universal Design and Child Friendly School requirements. In addition, this will promote inclusion, health, safety, and energy efficiency, as well as an educational environment that serves the wider community development.

The School and Preschool Disaster Management plans and guidelines were revised with the support of UNICEF and Save the Children. However, the adoption of these updated plans was delayed due to the political changes in 2018. The Government also advanced community resilience through embedding a monitoring mechanism for sub-national authorities to report on progress in child-sensitive local level risk management.

UNICEF Armenia supported the introduction and integration of cash transfer approaches in its own and in the Government's preparedness planning processes within the wider context of strengthening the national system for cash-based responses in emergencies. A cash preparedness assessment was conducted, and the staff of key Armenian government partners observed promising practices in Nepal during a study tour organized with UNICEF in Armenia, Nepal and Tajikistan. In addition, more than 50 national and subnational public officials, social workers, case managers and rescuers enhanced their capacity on cash transfers in emergencies.

Goal area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life

In 2018, UNICEF acted as a convener and built a strong partnership in the organization of a

high-level conference with the World Bank, MoLSA, the Armenian Association of Social Workers and other stakeholders on social protection, child poverty and Leaving No One Behind in the context of the SDGs. The conference resulted in a call for policy action, which will be taken forward with the new leadership of the country, to find sustainable solutions in reducing the effects of poverty, including child poverty, through adequate social protection services and human capital development.

UNICEF substantially increased its presence and advocacy in public finance for children in 2018 building on the work of previous years. The evidence generated by various analytical and costing exercises, and the provision of information on spending on children through a child-focused public expenditure measurement report has been increasingly used by the Government including as a basis for reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. As a follow-up to the report, UNICEF Armenia directly supported social line ministries in the development of the 2019 child-related budget programmes in education, health, social protection and the justice sectors.

Eight years after the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the progressive alignment of state policies with its requirements, children with disabilities in Armenia have a considerably improved access to education, health and child protection services. As part of a joint UN project, under the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, cross-sectoral working groups were established to harmonize procedures, plans and practices in disability assessment, certification and development of individual service delivery plans. A major achievement was the agreement reached between MoLSA and MoES for data exchange, cross-sectoral coordination and harmonization of the ICF, application for disability assessment in the social sector, and for special education needs assessment in the education sector. This development was essential for advancing the general education system towards inclusive education.

All interventions on promoting inclusion for girls and boys with disabilities were well supported by a communication campaign on social inclusion of children with disabilities. This successfully engaged Armenia's top footballer and UNICEF National Goodwill Ambassador Henrikh Mkhitaryan. The campaign, which is ongoing until the end of 2020, served as a platform to elevate the voices of girls and boys with disability, engaging teachers and students in the events. The campaign was later amplified through the World Children's Day activation, and on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and was linked with the 16 Days Campaign to End Violence against Women and Girls. These events are implemented every year in November and December.

UNICEF's close partnership with the ArmStat continued. This included support to the development of disaggregated data on child poverty, including multi-dimensional poverty, and information on child needs in Armenia, as part of ArmStat's Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia report. UNICEF commenced the situation analysis of women's and children's rights in Armenia, the results of which are expected in the first quarter of 2019.

Although the process of nationalization of the SDGs is stalled in Armenia, UNICEF supported ArmStat to take stock of available data that can serve as a baseline for child-focused SDG indicators. In the framework of TransMonEE 2018, ArmStat, with support from UNICEF Armenia, developed a country analytical report aimed at identifying data gaps on key indicators of child well-being throughout the life cycle, and identifying good practices in collecting and reporting on child-related SDG indicators disaggregated by age and sex.

The independent monitoring function of the HRDO was the focus of UNICEF's support in 2018. UNICEF Armenia compiled a report summarizing international best practices of the child rights monitoring function in national human rights institutions and held consultations with the HRDO and other stakeholders to develop recommendations and a training methodology to be used in 2019.

Emerging issues: Second decade

Efforts in adolescent programming intensified in 2018. UNICEF continued to engage in policy dialogue with the Ministry of Sports and Youth, discussing the best ways to support adolescents. The Council of Europe's joint ministerial committee's recommendation on Access to Rights was published with UNICEF support for the Together Have Your Say training course developed for civil society and state institutions. The new Youth and Sports strategy is still a draft, pending approval in 2019.

The UPSHIFT model was introduced for testing in Armenia. UPSHIFT has two main approaches, which can build on each other. One is focused on skills development; the other on social entrepreneurship. It started in Armenia with the training of trainers, delivered by two staff from UNICEF Kosovo. The project targets the 12-19 age group and will reach approximately 400 adolescent girls and boys through outreach activities, while directly involving 50 adolescents, in equal numbers of girls and boys, in community-based interventions. The first cycle is expected to take seven months and takes place in Gyumri and Spitak.

Lack of funding for adolescent programming significantly hampered efforts to engage larger numbers of young people and contribute to the global and regional UNICEF objectives. There is a somewhat improved outlook for 2019 with a possibility of relatively modest European Union funding.

UNICEF created multiple communication platforms for adolescents and youth to voice their opinions on issues of concern, such as quality education, disability rights, child poverty, violence and gender-based discrimination, and suggest ways for improvement. On World Children's Day, around 150 adolescents met with the President of Armenia, UNICEF Representative, the acting Minister of Education and Science, as well as chief executive officers of leading corporations with socially responsible programmes to talk about issues that concern them. They also amplified their voices through mass media and social media platforms.

During the 16 Days Campaign to End Violence against Women and Girls, UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organized a #HearMeToo - Let Me Be the Solution workshop, with the support of the UN Department of Public Information, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Seventy participants, including adolescent and youth speakers, discussed gender equality and solutions to end violence against women, girls and boys, while also ensuring inclusion and participation under the umbrella of the SDGs, published in a manifesto. This generated approximately 24,000 hits of digital engagement. On the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, a #HearMeToo panel discussion was organized with participation from UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the UN Resident Coordinator, as well as persons with disabilities, including adolescents, their parents, representatives of the Government and civil society. They shared their individual experiences, discussed good practices and further joint

activities to promote inclusion in Armenia.

Humanitarian response

Armenia did not face any major emergency nor humanitarian crisis in 2018 and therefore had no humanitarian response actions.

Gender mainstreaming

UNICEF Armenia continued to make efforts to mainstream gender equality in its programme and develop staff capacities, through programmatic discussions with a gender lens, ensuring that relevant indicators are gender specific, and ensuring the engagement of both girls and boys in the programmes in line with the Leave No Child Behind principle. The office has a gender focal team, with a focal point, a gender officer, the child rights monitoring specialist and the deputy representative all with gender expertise. In 2018, a Gender Programme Review was conducted and informed the SMR and will be a reference document in the drafting of the new Country Programme for 2021-2025.

Emergency preparedness

To address the political situation in Armenia in 2018, UNICEF developed a contingency plan describing the immediate response in case of an escalation of the civil unrest situation, which took place in April and May, including the operation capacity, staffing requirements and supply plan. The earthquake preparedness plan and contingency plan for an armed conflict scenario were updated and comply with the requirements of the minimum preparedness standards.

UN coordination

Throughout the year, UNICEF in Armenia was an active player in the United Nations Country Team coordination and in the implementation of United Nations Development Framework (UNDAF). UNICEF led the implementation of the UNDAF Results Group on Social Services and Inclusion, co-facilitated the Donor Coordination Group on Social Services and participated in the UNDAF Results Groups on Environmental Sustainability and on Governance. UNICEF also co-led the Extended Gender Thematic Group. All coordination groups struggled to ensure Government co-leadership due to the political instability during the year.

UNICEF took part in the implementation of three UN joint programmes and contributed to development of two new programmes, to be finalized in 2019.

External relations

In the spring of 2018, UNICEF ran a small brand study as part of a larger media consumption survey in the capital city of Yerevan and in Gegharkunik marz regions. The study revealed that there is on average 56 per cent recognition in the general population of UNICEF as an organization dedicated to children.

Throughout the year, eight multimedia content packages were developed, contributing to advocacy on children's right to grow up in a family environment, social inclusion of children with disabilities, early childhood learning, disaster risk reduction, neonatal mortality, child poverty, and UNICEF's Together4Armenia platform. The visit of UNICEF's Regional Director for Europe

and Central Asia supported high-level advocacy with the Government and other stakeholders around ending violence against children and galvanized support for inclusive education, among other issues, which resulted in a shift in policy dialogue.

On the World Children's Day, adolescents took over the morning show of Armenia's leading 'Armenia TV' channel. They interviewed the Human Rights Defender of Armenia and the Acting Minister of Education and Science, while in the evening adolescents reported the weather forecast and sports news.

The high number of digital and media activations in the fall provided UNICEF with strong visibility and contributed to the lead national advocacy campaign. This campaign called for a positive behavioural change for social inclusion of children with disabilities and was endorsed by Armenia's leading footballer, UNICEF National Goodwill Ambassador Henrikh Mkhitaryan.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

In 2018, the programming environment in Armenia was marked by major political changes brought about through mass protests in the spring. A change of Government Cabinet was expected from the beginning of the year due to previous Constitutional changes and elections, which created an uncertain environment for policy development. However, after the appointment of the Prime Minister in April, Armenia erupted into peaceful mass protests, bringing the country to a standstill. Finally, in May, the opposition leader was given the mandate to form a new Cabinet where almost all officials were replaced. This required quick and focused action by UNICEF to present its mandate and reaffirm joint commitments with the counterparts. While this was to a significant extent successful and prevented major deterioration of the ongoing reform processes, it was difficult to engage on a longer-term vision given the temporary nature of the Government, whose main task was to prepare for snap elections. The pre-elections campaign marked the end of the year, again hampering some of the programme progress. In this rapidly changing environment, much effort was directed to position UNICEF and keep focus on previously agreed priorities, which was successful.

During the time of mass protests an issue on the participation of children and adolescents emerged, with strong pressure on UNICEF to take a public position in favour or against. Balancing the participation right and protection from harm was a challenging task, especially in a very polarized environment. UNICEF worked with the Human Rights Defender's Office and leading child rights organizations to monitor the situation and respond when necessary, with an agreement that a continued debate on the participation of children and adolescents needs to take place in times when risks of misinterpretation are lower. In relation to the civil unrest in Armenia, UNICEF's preparedness was strengthened internally through the activities of the emergency management team. The Emergency Preparedness Platform and Business Continuity Plan were updated based on lessons learned.

The reporting year revealed again several challenges in child rights coordination and monitoring. These included coordination of data collection, policy and delivery of services between different government agencies in the country. While there are some good examples, such as the cross-sectoral work of the Council of Justice for Children, in most areas coordination is insufficient. Notably, the need for better coordination and coherence in the data collection was evident in the cross-sectoral work on the protection of rights of children with disabilities, identifying and finding solutions for out-of-school children, and early childhood

development.

The role of child rights monitoring and policy coordination on behalf of the Government has been assigned to the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, which remained inactive for more than five years. Because the National Commission is led by the MoLSA, focus in the past was mostly on protection issues, failing to reflect all rights. This was also demonstrated in the attempt to draft a new Law on Child Rights in 2017-2018, which was withdrawn primarily because it was seen as prioritizing one set of rights over many others. It's drafting process will restart in 2019. While UNICEF successfully supported establishing the Child Rights Unit in HRDO and its capacity development, the independent monitoring body has a different role and cannot replace the lack of monitoring and coordination by government bodies. Policy advocacy on child rights monitoring needs to continue with the newly-formed Parliament and Government Cabinet to find a viable solution.

In 2018, UNICEF led the finalization and launch of the child-focused public expenditure measurement report, and a number of costing, capacity development and evidence generation initiatives on budgeting for children. The knowledge exchange facilitated by UNICEF Argentina enabled a change of perception in measuring public expenditure on children. Having the Argentine Ministry of Treasury representatives directly sharing their expertise and knowledge, including challenges and opportunities, with their counterparts in the Ministry of Finance of Armenia allowed for a shift in understanding and attitude towards the importance of measurement of expenditure on children from the state budget. The exercise mobilized other partners with more experience than UNICEF in public finance management activities, such as the European Union, the German Development Aid agency (GIZ) and the World Bank and allowed for aligned advocacy on the budgeting process. The C-PEM exercise conducted in Armenia was comprehensive, covering national, local, and sectoral budgets and all types of expenditure (direct, indirect, expanded, public goods). However, the complexity of the analysis had a two-fold effect. On the one hand, it generated solid evidence for advocacy, and showcased that such information can be obtained based on existing budgetary and statistical data. On the other hand, its comprehensiveness was an obstacle for full adoption by the Ministry of Finance. A more step-by-step implementation in further institutionalization of C-PEM would be a more desired approach for the Ministry, including intensified work with the methodological department.

The programme-based budgeting reform implemented in 2018 offered more opportunities to improve budget allocations for children, which was accomplished with UNICEF-provided training and technical support to four line ministries. Working directly with sectoral ministries with which UNICEF has ongoing programme engagement and focusing on budgeting offered greater returns, compared to targeting only the Ministry of Finance. The lesson learned was that budgeting for children initiatives should be advanced from both sides – with the Ministry of Finance as the agency setting the overall financing framework and guidelines and the line ministries as those responsible for programme planning and implementation. Moreover, the Parliament, which has an increased role in Armenia regarding budget oversight, should become a more active stakeholder in UNICEF's public finance work.

Over the years UNICEF has supported major changes in the society regarding the rights of children with disabilities, combining efforts in changing public attitudes, legislation, policies, capacities and practices on all levels and across sectors. While this was done with modest funds, sustained efforts year after year led to changes in the views of the general public and professionals. In 2018, UNICEF launched a multi-platform public campaign, with support of the

National Goodwill Ambassador, which reached over three million individuals through different channels. Policy advocacy was sustained with the MoLSA, MoES, and the MoH tackling, among other issues, the disability assessment model based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. Capacities of professionals were built through facilitated cooperation of the University of Minnesota and Yerevan State Pedagogical University. Direct changes in the lives of children were brought about through the closing of two residential special schools followed by the return of the children to their communities and mainstream schools.

However, important lessons can be drawn from the progress in the realization of rights and especially inclusive education of children with disabilities. More children with disabilities are attending the Armenian public schools, but so far, few teachers have taken part in quality training to improve specific skills and provide good support to these children in general education classrooms. This shortcoming often leads to either inferior quality education or even to exclusion within the classroom. Thus, the focus on inclusive education should shift from physical presence of children with disabilities in mainstream schools to the quality of learning and development.

Although the Armenian Government has considered education for teachers a most urgent priority for ensuring equity and quality in access and learning, the existing teacher training programmes offered by the State and different development partners are fragmented and do not necessarily prioritize teaching methodologies and an inclusive learning environment. It is clear that the education system requires stronger support, not only by UNICEF and a limited number of civil society partners. The interest of other significant development partners in the education sector, such as the European Union, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, mostly focuses on other aspects of education improvement, such as science and technology education and vocational training. While these are important areas of improvement, attention to inclusiveness is not always present. UNICEF's efforts should be further directed towards advocacy and leveraging, making sure that all education sector support programmes are disability-sensitive, and consider the requirements of the universal design of the learning materials and environments, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment no. 4. Armenia will only be able to address the equity gaps in education that children with disabilities continue to face, by bringing together all actors engaged with education in a coordinated manner.

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