

**UNICEF EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL OFFICE**

**UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional  
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## List of Acronyms

C4D	Communication for development
ECARO	Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
ECD	Early childhood development
GBV	Gender-based violence
HACT	Harmonized approach to cash transfers
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HQ	Headquarters (UNICEF)
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoH	Ministry of Health
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PBR	Programme budget review
SDC	Human resource development committee
SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

## 1 Situation update: regional trends that affect children and women

The year 2018 saw relatively stable economic growth across the region, above 3 per cent in the Western Balkans and around 4 per cent in the Caucasus and Central Asia.<sup>1</sup> Most countries retained their middle-income status, with Croatia regaining high-income status. However, Tajikistan fell back into the low-income group. The improving economic climate over the past two years has facilitated some improvements in children's rights, with indications that poverty continues to fall, albeit slowly.<sup>2</sup> However, policy decisions in some countries, such as the removal of utility subsidies in Turkmenistan and the imposition of taxes on Serbian imports in Kosovo<sup>3</sup>, are expected to have significant impacts on disadvantaged families and children, and so mitigating actions are required.

Inequality continues to be a concern, with the incomes of the poorest deteriorating in Armenia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> Child poverty is a key driver of inequity and social exclusion across the region, contributing to high rates of family separation and institutionalization. Social safety nets continue to be of concern, with only 10 per cent of the region's social protection expenditure invested in child and family benefits, the benefits usually too small to lift families out of poverty, and many in need remaining entirely excluded. The region has also seen increased and proliferating anti-migration discourse impacting national legislation, budgetary allocations and social inclusion programmes.

Countries in Europe and Central Asia have reduced child mortality, with under-five deaths more than halved since 1990. Access to quality obstetric, antenatal and post-natal care and early initiation of (and exclusive) breastfeeding continue to be challenging; in 2018 only 32 per cent of infants in the region were exclusively breastfed during their first six months – one of the lowest rates in the world.<sup>5</sup> More than 500,000 children have missed out on routine measles vaccination, and many countries across the region continue facing outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases that threaten children's lives and well-being. In 2018, approximately 50,000 cases of measles were reported in the region.

Eleven million children of pre-primary, primary and secondary school age are out of school and out of learning in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region. Meanwhile the region continues to have the highest rate of children in institutional care (664 per 100,000), with children with disabilities over-represented in institutions across nearly all its countries.

The European Union (EU) and European institutions, international financial institutions (IFIs), the private sector and the Russian Federation are key players influencing and supporting programmes to overcome political and social-economic challenges. The negotiations between the EU and the United Kingdom on Brexit continued in 2018, with the expected separation by the end of March 2019 anticipated to cause a 14 per cent reduction in total funding for EU next year. Meanwhile, the EU is preparing its next Multi-Annual Financial Framework for post 2020, which will promote the 2030 Agenda in both EU external and internal action, support Western Balkans countries towards EU accession and develop closer relations with the eastern neighbourhood and Central Asia. The EU is currently focusing more on economic development and growth and increasingly on migration and security: this could potentially lead to diversion of more official development assistance to these areas.

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank, Regional Economic Outlook Europe and Central Asia

<sup>2</sup> New poverty lines introduced for lower middle income and upper middle-income countries show that there are still 26 million people in the region who are poor by the LMIC standard, and 68 million who are poor by the UMIC standard, World Bank, Poverty and Shared Prosperity, 2018

<sup>3</sup> All references to Kosovo in this report should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

<sup>4</sup> World Bank, Poverty and Shared Prosperity, 2018

<sup>5</sup> State of the World's Children database, 2017.

In-depth partnerships will be required with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, and with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, to reinforce the principle of leaving no one / no child behind. In recognition of this, in 2018 the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO) actively engaged in establishing new partnerships with other United Nations entities, including the International Labour Organization's Regional Office, to address the young people's agenda. EU accession is high on the political agendas of many countries in the region, and country offices are advocating for child rights to be included in the accession criteria. Meanwhile ECARO has started reinforcing its relationship with the EU for fundraising, for joint efforts and for leveraging resources for children within the accession countries. Similarly, ECARO has started strengthening its partnerships with the World Bank and regional development banks, with foundations, and with key influencing countries in the region such as the Russian Federation.

Humanitarian needs for children and their families are growing in the region because of the continuing conflict in eastern Ukraine, which is affecting over 3.5 million people including 500,000 children, as well as the arrival of refugees and natural disasters. Primarily from the Middle East, South Asia, East and West Africa, children on the move in Europe continued to flee conflict and deprivation. In 2018, 141,500 additional refugees and migrants, 25 per cent of them children, entered Europe. This included an estimated 6,000 unaccompanied and separated children. While arrivals decreased in the Central Mediterranean, a spike on the eastern and western routes resulted in worsening situations on the Greek islands and in southern Spain. This influx is in addition to the 1.8 million refugees and migrants, including 433,000 children, who arrived in Europe between 2014 and 2017. Turkey is hosting some 3.9 million refugees, including 1.7 million children. Although many eventually reach northern and western Europe, 45,000 children were stranded in Greece, Italy and the Western Balkans at the end of 2018. Despite progress across the region, refugee and migrant children continue facing violence, including gender-based violence, in countries of arrival, transit and destination. While much progress was made in 2018, with the development of Global Compact on Migration and Refugees (GCMR) and its adoption by a large majority of countries, new challenges also emerged in application of the Compact, with hardening political stances in some countries.

Politically, major events included a popular uprising in Armenia that culminated in the election of a new government in December 2018 with hopes of addressing longstanding social grievances; a disputed presidential election in Georgia and a referendum on changing the name of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which is expected to pave the way towards opening negotiations on EU membership next year, along with Albania.

In this context, it is increasingly important to ensure that UNICEF's comparative advantages and contributions are well recognized in the region. ECARO has developed a focused set of four regional flagship results that make a clear, concise and compelling argument to strategic partners about UNICEF's role and comparative advantage in the region. It will continue to deliver results for children at scale based on application of validated innovative models and using an inter-sectoral approach.

## **2. Key results achieved against the ROMP**

The ECARO Management (ROMP year 2018-2021) adopted four Regional Flagship Results formulated in line with the principles and priorities in UNICEF's Strategic Plan.

### **Goal Area 1: Thriving: Health, Immunization, Nutrition and Early Childhood Development (ECD)**

In contributing to strategy plan Goal Area 1, ECARO focused on system strengthening for pre-natal care, immunization delivery systems, and promotion of iodine, nutrition, ECD and supply capacity management.

A system strengthening approach is being employed through several key initiatives. ECARO supported development of the Every Newborn Action Plan (ENAP) strategy in eight countries in

Central Asia and Caucasus, with a special focus on quality improvement, care for sick and premature newborns (Tajikistan), harnessing the power of parents and communities (Armenia, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan), and improving the quality of data and analytics through perinatal mortality audits (Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) and data related to maternal and newborn health (Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan). Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were supported to cost national MNCH programmes/ plans. Thanks to capacity building of government representatives and UNICEF health staff, six countries in the region have applied health system strengthening HSS diagnostic tools and developed draft HSS road maps. However, further work is required to take the products beyond their current narrow scope.

UNICEF ECARO actively contributed to the coordination, planning and conducting of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Alma Ata Primary Health Care Declaration. The conference was held in the new capital, Astana, with the government of Kazakhstan serving as the principal host and was co-hosted by WHO and UNICEF. Following the conference in October 2018, UNICEF is moving forward with steps to strengthen and advance Primary Health Care at country level. A joint letter from DG Tedros and ED Fore of 20 December 2018, highlights three elements: Meeting people's needs through comprehensive and integrated health services; Systematically addressing the broader determinants of health; and Empowering individuals, families and communities. As a follow up, UNICEF ECA region committed to following action points: Development of a 5th workstream through the Issue-based Coalition (IBC) to work collaboratively with WHO PHC Centre (Almaty) and other UN partners to advance PHC; Supporting countries to improve social protection towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC) – supporting the development of benefits packages to address maternal and childhood health needs; Development of a Nutrition Partnership Platform to improve country capacity to identify and address nutrition-related challenges; and Development of budget brief guidelines to support improved allocation of financial resources.

To improve immunization delivery systems, in partnership with Gavi and the World Health Organization (WHO), ECARO supported countries to enhance evidence generation and influence national plans and policies: Expanded Programme on Immunization reviews in Georgia (Abkhazia region) and Uzbekistan, an effective vaccine management assessment in Ukraine, and a knowledge, attitudes and practices study in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. As a result of strengthening governance capacities for budgeting, procurement, planning, forecasting and improving supply chain systems, the number of countries with vaccine stock outs fell from six to three.

ECARO efforts to promote iodine nutrition in priority countries saw the number of countries requiring further support fall from nine in 2016 to six in 2018. Over 3.6 million children and their mothers benefited from this programme through systems and policy capacity development around the Universal Salt Iodization approach. In addition, policy advocacy for mandatory salt iodization in Ukraine and mandatory flour fortification in Azerbaijan resulted in governments committing to putting national legislation in place on these food fortification programmes.

ECARO developed a comprehensive ECD Strategy to support the regional operationalization of the Nurturing Care Framework and ECD programmes towards achieving regional flagship results. ECARO ECD recommendations and resource modules are supporting 17 countries in the region to train health care professionals and other frontline workers.

ECARO, in partnership with UNICEF Supply Division, built the capacities of 10 Gavi countries in the Vaccine Procurement Practitioners Platform and has developed action plans to strengthen vaccine procurement systems to increase and sustain immunization coverage. With John Hopkins University, ECARO developed an Interpersonal Communication for Immunization (ICI) module, which will be rolled out in the region in 2019 and contribute to demand creation for immunization.

## Goal Area 2: Learning: Education

UNICEF ECARO's contribution to Goal Area 2 mainly focused on the need to expand and promote Inclusive education, quality of education, and evidence generation for strengthening capacity building and advocacy efforts.

A need to strengthen capacity for education sector planning became evident in several countries to enable improved quality and inclusiveness in education. ECARO supported education sector planning capacity development in several countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,) and, based on the experiences and lessons learned, it launched an initiative including development of a regional resource package of tools and methodologies for education sector analysis, planning and implementation.

ECARO's support to country offices for the Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) included development of a thematic brief on early warning systems, and peer learning launched through webinars to present best practices from Romania and Serbia. In addition, an Out-of-School Children toolkit was expanded with a Brief of *Monitoring Education Participation*, which was co-published with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Albania, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Serbia and Ukraine were provided with technical assistance for data collection on out-of-school children and dropout prevention programming for vulnerable children.

ECARO evidence generation support to country offices included; evaluation of the Safe Schools programme in eastern Ukraine and – in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) – the development of an education brief that provides the latest data on access and learning of refugee and migrant children in Europe. To support expansion of pre-primary education provision, countries in the region continued to model low cost alternative arrangements for young children. In collaboration with Headquarters), a newly developed tool was applied for pre-primary education sub-sector analysis to diagnose bottlenecks and barriers to accessing quality education opportunities and plan for sub-sector strengthening in Kyrgyzstan, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. A study was concluded in one country from each of Europe and Central Asia's four sub-regions on the implications of decentralization for children's participation in quality, inclusive pre-primary education (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Serbia).

ECARO also organized a regional conference on early childhood intervention (ECI) attended by 16 country delegations and developed guidance on ECI. ECARO explored and support the development and piloting of technology-enabled innovative solutions, including an application that supplies providers with a digital version of the child development-monitoring tool.

ECARO advocated with the EU for ECD within the framework of the Bulgarian Presidency: key messages were incorporated in two sets of Council Conclusions. ECARO successfully mobilized US\$2 million from a bilateral donor for ECD in six Western Balkans countries and Moldova.

To help achieve and monitor the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ECARO's Education Section represented the education thematic area in three Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Programme Support (MAPS) country processes in Kyrgyzstan and Serbia (on-site) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (remote).

Regional Disability-Inclusive Programming was developed to ensure alignment with international normative framework and research, as well as to create linkages and synergies in programming across regional priorities. Five country offices conducted situation analysis on children with disabilities as part of the Regional Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) project, and the Education Section engaged in development of country reports and regional synthesis, as well as

advocacy-related and media material, launched in Brussels on 3 December 2018 to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

### **Goal Areas 3 & 5 Protecting: Protection, Social Protection and Migration**

ECARO's contribution to these goal areas mainly focused on supporting country offices to address children in institutional care (particularly children with disabilities), social inclusion, child poverty analysis, children in contact with the law, strengthening the social service workforce, positive parenting and migration.

Given the EU's strategic importance in the area of children in institutional care, ECARO convened a high-level forum with the Government of Bulgaria – President of the European Council – in Brussels to highlight the importance of transitioning from institutional care to family and community-based care, and the EU's role in assisting countries to achieve sustainable results. Thanks to this and other advocacy efforts, the EU made clear references to this area in its draft Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027). In addition to this high-level advocacy, ECARO supported seven countries across the region to increase their strategic analysis and positioning around child care reform, and will expand its support to analysis, strategic planning and positioning at country level in 2019.

To support implementation, in 2018 ECARO developed a guidance note to ensure that countries comprehensively address institutionalization of children with disabilities; and a set of tools to assess the attitudes, beliefs and norms of children with disabilities and their peers, parents and service providers and decision makers. In partnership with the EU and the European Disability Forum, UNICEF launched a situation analysis of children with disabilities across the Western Balkans and Turkey, drawing policy-makers' attention to the work that is still required to fulfil their rights to protection and social inclusion.

During 2018 ECARO made considerable advances in analysing child poverty, developed clear joint United Nations advocacy messages on social protection systems, and initiated work around public budgets for children in several countries. Earlier analysis and advocacy is also beginning to filter through to policy change and, in some cases, to improvements in social protection provision for children and families. Montenegro and Tajikistan have published new child poverty figures; Georgia, Kazakhstan and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have announced reforms to increase the number of children benefiting from social transfers or the value of transfers; and Armenia, Kosovo, Moldova, Tajikistan, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine have generated evidence to improve budgetary allocations and expenditures for children.

While the overall number of children in detention has fallen significantly over the past 15 years, the number of children in contact with legal systems – as victims and witnesses of violence and in administrative and family law proceedings – is increasing. ECARO finalized guidelines for child-friendly legal aid and developed a toolkit in partnership with the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) intended for use by national human rights institutions undertaking work on children's rights, children's units or children's commissioners, and other independent specialized institutions working on children's rights. In 2019 a regional conference is planned on access to justice to take stock, consolidate partnerships, and ensure that boys and girls continue benefitting from legal reform efforts across the region.

A regional conference was convened with the Government of Romania in 2018 to highlight the role of the social work and social service workforce. Over 21 countries committed through a Call to Action to strengthen the workforce across sectors in their efforts to tackle social exclusion and violence. Participants recognized that the core competencies of the workforce overlap and include important fundamental communication for development (C4D) elements, including inter-personal communication and community engagement and mobilization skills. All national statistical offices

from across the region also gathered in 2018 to advance and strengthen national administrative data systems for justice and violence against children indicators.

In 2018, migration continued to affect children in the region, albeit on a reduced scale. Reception conditions, case management, and access to health and education services for refugee and migrant children have mostly improved through development and roll out of protection minimum standards, capacity building of frontline workers, child rights monitoring and overall national systems strengthening in Bosnia, Bulgaria, Germany and Serbia, in partnership with national authorities and civil society organizations. In Greece and Italy, the development of guardianship and community-based care modalities (supported independent living, foster care and small-group homes) has improved the identification, care and protection of unaccompanied children.

## 2.1 Gender dimension

In 2018, all the regional flagship priorities, thriving, learning, protection and participation included focuses on gender analysis, capacity building, partnerships and leveraging resources.

ECARO supported the publication of **Making the Connection** and its launch at the Commission on the Status of Women in March. This highlighted the co-occurrence and inter-generational nature of intimate partner violence and violence against children. The regional conference on Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response, as well as the regional conference on Social Service Workforce/Social Work, provided opportunities to advance the policy agenda and programming priorities around an integrated multi-sectoral response and investment in ECD and gender equality.

In 2018, in addition to gender integration in the regional Adolescent Parenting Study, Emergency Preparedness Capacity Building and Social Service/Social Workforce strengthening, ECARO completed a mapping of **Gender Socialization programmes**. The mapping revealed promising Thriving, Learning and Participating programming, often related to ECD and Communication for Development (C4D). As a result, Gender Thematic Funding will be available to support 1-2 country offices that have identified a promising programme in a particular area of gender socialization.

Building on the launch of the **Adolescent Girls' Empowerment Initiative** and Generation Unlimited, country offices have led national awareness raising and given visibility to programming related to protecting and participating, from the International Day of the Girl to 10 December, the last of 16 Days of Activism to end Gender-based Violence. Next year, this investment will be augmented with further development of a regional social media platform to highlight programming and policy that promote both girls and boys equally.

ECARO supported five countries (Armenia, Belarus, Croatia, Moldova, and Turkmenistan) in **Gender Programme Reviews**. Next year's priorities will be Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

## 2.2 Humanitarian situations

Led by the Special Coordinator, UNICEF's ongoing support for refugee and migrant children in Europe continued responding to critical emergency needs while strengthening national systems for children. As of 31 October, the US\$34.2 million appeal for refugee and migrant children in Europe was 72 per cent funded. Overall, UNICEF reached 28,000 children with child protection services while 19,000 children participated in structured formal and non-formal education activities. Although the on-going movement towards Northern Europe makes it challenging to calculate exact ratios, it is estimated that 39% of the 44,600 children on the move in the Balkans, have had access to UNICEF supported essential services in child protection, education, GBV prevention and health. In Italy, where recent legal reforms are already pushing children out of the care system, it is 22% of the 14,900 unaccompanied children registered that have been reached with child protection services, outreach and referral, and/or access to education.

The ECA RO provided technical support to country-level emergency response including support missions, communications and advocacy including strategic outreach with Geneva-based member states. The global Emergency Preparedness Platform (EPP) roll out was achieved in the region within the 30 June deadline by which time all 21 country offices completed and uploaded their emergency preparedness and response plans. Through remote technical support, CO performance in meeting the EPP minimum preparedness standards increased from an average regional score of 79% compliance as of 1 July, to 89.5% by 1 January. In addition, technical assistance missions were undertaken to train country office staff members on emergency preparedness and response standards in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

A regional standard operating procedure was established to expedite immediate response scale up within the first 24 hours of a major emergency. The regional Rapid Response Mechanism was updated, and training was facilitated on emergency supply and logistics planning in cooperation with UNICEF Supply Division for key staff from the Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey country offices. Regional funding enabled the restocking of pre-positioned emergency supplies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Cash-in-emergencies feasibility assessments were completed in Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and a related peer-to-peer learning exchange was organized between the Armenia, Nepal and Tajikistan offices.

A joint capacity assessment exercise was launched with UNDP to support the regional Centre for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction (CESDRR) in Almaty. National counterparts for emergency response were sensitized on child-risk informed emergency response and country-level cooperation was strengthened with National Red Crescent/Red Cross Societies for preparedness and early action in new emergencies.

Migration continued affecting children in the region, albeit on a reduced scale. Research has resulted in a better understanding of some of the drivers of anti-migrant discourse and a mapping of promising practices on which to build effective interventions towards social inclusion.

In 2018, ECARO also invested in strengthening its knowledge about children left behind by migrating parents, a phenomenon affecting an estimated three million children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. A review of UNICEF programmatic experience in this field was also carried out to produce technical guidance to concerned country offices on mitigating the negative effects of migration and building inclusive cross-sectoral interventions.

## 2.3 Influencing global and regional discourse and policy

### Partnerships

In 2018, ECARO shifted to a more strategic and purposeful approach to partnerships and pro-actively sought opportunities for partnership on a larger scale within countries and across clusters of countries. The Regional Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Strategy for 2018-2021 was finalized in coordination with Private Fundraising and Partnerships/Public Partnership Division with the aim to support country offices to further develop their own strategies and plans and also pitch new opportunities with donors. The approach focused on four key pillars: **the European Union and European institutions, IFIs, the private sector and the Russian Federation.**

Throughout the year ECARO engaged with the EU Presidencies (Romania and Croatia) as a unique opportunity to leverage the Presidency's role in setting political priorities and coordinating EU work to promote children's rights with a key focus on de-institutionalization, children with disabilities, ECD and adolescents. Active advocacy and engagement was continued with the EU Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations to stimulate collaboration and address the key challenges around social inclusion, education, youth and reconciliation in the Western Balkans. The

momentum of the Sofia Declaration<sup>6</sup> of the EU-Western Balkans summit, and the opportunity of the EU accession process will certainly provide more opportunities for joint advocacy and collaboration on the agenda for children and adolescents in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

UNICEF's engagement with the Bulgarian Presidency of the European Union (EU) in the first half of 2018 was key to leverage the Presidency's role in setting political priorities and coordinating the work of the Council of the EU to promote children's rights at national and EU level. The strategic engagement was at EU and the country level.

At EU level:

- The "High level Forum on Family and Community Based Care for Children across Europe: Lessons Learned & Commitments for Action at National and EU Levels", hosted by the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and UNICEF, was key to advocate for EU policymakers to promote human rights-based and socially inclusive care through EU internal action and EU external action. This was a key milestone in UNICEF's policy-advocacy engagement with the EC around the next phase of their budget and policy cycle.
- UNICEF's contributions to the informal Social Protection Committee Meeting in Sofia in March 2018 were incorporated on the Council Conclusions on Integrated early childhood development (ECD) policies, as a tool for reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion.
- UNICEF significantly contributed to the formulation of the EU Youth Strategy through supporting the identification and formulation of its key priorities and goals.

At Country level:

- By building on the Bulgarian government's success in reducing the number of children in institutional care, UNICEF supported the Bulgarian Government to highlight the progress made on lessons learned from child care reforms advocate for focus on preventative services.

Active collaboration with the EU Special Representative for Central Asia led to development of a draft strategy to be operationalized in mid-2019 to refocus priority areas, respond to the diverse challenges faced by children and adolescents, and eventually develop a stable and prosperous region.

ECARO continued to strategize the work with the **private sector** to harness the power of business and markets for children and foster innovation, including business's networks and capacity for driving change, in order to seek more innovative and effective solutions. In coordination with UNICEF's Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division and the country offices in Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Serbia, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Plans (PSFPs) have been developed and approved for 2018-2021. The PSFPs will serve as bases to ensure sustainable and unrestricted funding for the implementation of UNICEF country programmes, generate growing levels of resources from the private sector, expand engagement with individual supporters and businesses beyond fundraising, and hence support country offices to achieve results for children. The Country Offices strengthened their partnerships with private sector in 2018 and intensified fundraising efforts resulting in number of considerable achievements such as follows:

- In **Serbia**, doubling the number of pledge donors.
- The fundraising efforts allowed UNICEF to fully fund the country programme in **Croatia**, while contributing with 25 per cent (US\$1,02 million) of total funds raised to UNICEF regional and global initiatives.
- In **Belarus**, 40 Prior Bank new branches joined the campaign, with visibility in ATMs on the importance of families and social inclusion, attracting around 8,000 repeating and one-time donors. The partnership has directly benefitted children with disabilities and opened doors

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<sup>6</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/44794/sofia-declaration-eu-western-balkans-summit\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/44794/sofia-declaration-eu-western-balkans-summit_en)

for UNICEF to use the network of Prior Bank offices and ATMs across the country for advocacy and brand building.

Given the growing importance of virtual communication in the lives of children, UNICEF in Serbia, with support from Telenor, continued to support the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological development to strengthen digital competences of children aged 4–8 and their parents to decrease exposure to online risks, while at the same time, implementing gender awareness and violence prevention programmes.

Finally, partnership with Viber and Facebook in coordination with Office of Innovation, helped to promote U-Report platform and accelerate the recruitment of U-Reporters in Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Italy (children on the move). Additionally, free messaging channels were set up by Viber on U-Report, and free promotion was provided generating around 20,000 new U-Reporters in Western Balkans, playing a critical role in the scale up in the region.

### **Communication**

In 2018, ECARO continued prioritizing the enhancement of communication and public advocacy actions across digital and social media platforms. The websites, with user-adaptable functionality, have served as a key channel to advocate for the rights of children across the region, engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including young people; and amplify emotive, powerful content generated by country offices and ECARO to reinforce UNICEF's role as the leading children's rights organization in the region. Concerted focus was placed on building a critical mass of content to repurpose and promote on ECARO's social media channels, including Facebook (English and Russian), Twitter (English) and YouTube (English and Russian).

Building on the momentum using the websites and social media channels, ECARO also completed some foundational work towards reinforcing UNICEF's message to the region's Russian-speaking audiences, largely unreached to date, and expanding ECARO's digital/social media footprint. A desk-review was completed of 24 "comparator" organizations (20 international, 4 Russia-based) to understand their social media presence and activities across six channels, as a first effort to gain a snapshot of the landscape and related data to inform the upcoming (2019) development of the expansion strategy and tactics. The recruitment of a Russian-proficient digital communication consultant, and the creation of an in-house "advisory group," comprising native-tongue and proficient colleagues in Programmes and Operations, further contributed to the regularization of ECARO's Russian-language communication and quality assurance capacities.

In 2019, building on the progress attained in 2018, ECARO's Communication Section will invest significantly towards expanding its digital and social media footprint, including in Russia and countries in the region where Russian is spoken. This will comprise the uptake of a social media listening tool, the tactical use of social media promotion modalities, and the development of a strategy to expand ECARO's social media reach in Russian language, with focus on audience analysis, risk analysis, channel expansion (or not), and consolidating a list of key influencers in the region.

### **Knowledge Management, data, research and evaluation**

ECARO continued partnering with knowledge entities and academic institutions to combine intellect, resources, reach and impact. With Drexel University, an operational research model for measuring social norm change related to children with disabilities was designed. Other partnerships with universities resulted in the development of new training courses e.g. C4D skills for government and implementing partners; child protection for frontline workers in Italy; new evidence on child poverty and a new approach to gender analysis in education. UNICEF and the Almaty-based CESDRR collaborated to promote child-centred humanitarian action strategies for Central Asia.

An analysis of Nordic country responses to asylum-seeking children, the Children Uprooted campaign and the Initiative for Child Rights in the Global Compacts have raised the profile of refugee and migrant children, while prioritizing issues of child immigration detention, returns and access to health and education with key partners such as the EU.

In 2018, ECARO has demonstrably contributed to improving the generation and use of quality evidence to improve children's rights in the region. A compendium of high quality research conducted by UNICEF was published. The quality of evaluations conducted in the region continued to improve and a Kazakhstan evaluation was acknowledged globally as one of the most influential evaluations in 2018. Joint technical work and advocacy efforts by UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM to improve data on migrant children in the EU contributed significantly to the revision of the EuroStat Regulation on Community Statistics and International Protection. The evaluation of the refugee and migrant crisis response was completed in 2018, as well as a synthesis of Country Programme Evaluations in ECA 2014-2017.

### **United Nations Reform**

ECARO continued to strengthen its relationship with the United Nations Regional Commission for Europe, actively participating in the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018 and in the organization of the next Forum in 2019. Along with other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, UNICEF participated in several Issue Based Coalitions (IBCs – United Nations inter-agency working groups), including on data, gender, youth, social protection, health and migration. These IBCs contribute to increased coordination and cooperation between United Nations entities working in these areas. The Regional Directors of UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNICEF also discussed implementation of the Common Chapter at regional and country levels and agreed that active engagement on such implementation would be led by the IBCs on gender, youth and data. ECARO also actively contributed to efforts to realign the United Nations' regional presence, implementing activities in phase one of this exercise and supporting implementation of the reinforced United Nations Resident Coordinator function at country level. ECA is the region with the highest number of MAPS Missions, a total of twelve countries. UNICEF has participated in ten MAPS missions (6<sup>7</sup> in 2018 and 4<sup>8</sup> in 2017). UNICEF Participation in MAPS missions has been mainly through representation of the Issue Based Coalitions (IBCs) for data, gender, social protection and youth.

### **2.4 Internal Management**

ECARO Operations Section continued providing oversight, strategic guidance and technical support to country offices on all operational areas (internal control, finance, administration, audit, the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT) and Implementing Partner Management). This also included network meetings (e.g. Operations, Deputy Representative and Operations (DROPS), human resources and HACT Network Meetings in Budapest, on-site technical support missions in Greece, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and remote support to all country offices to ensure efficiency gains, monitor operational performance and use good practice approaches to guide other countries in the region.

In 2018, ECARO supported country offices to build the capacity of operational staff and strengthen operational measures for improved budget management, financial monitoring and travel management, to better link resources to results. With the IT Solutions and Services Division at headquarters and Finance Section in the Common Services in Geneva, ECARO conducted nine online sessions for 120 country office operations and programme staff to equip them with the required knowledge on key areas. In addition, 115 national implementing partner staff were equipped with

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<sup>7</sup> Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan

<sup>8</sup> Azerbaijan, Belarus, Turkmenistan

knowledge on CSO and HACT procedures through on-site visits conducted by the ECARO's Implementing Partner Management Specialist.

ECARO supported two country offices with their Strategic Moments of Reflection and Country Programme Management Plan (CPMP) processes, through a mix of face-to-face support and Skype meetings. This resulted in effective revisions of the CPMPs, alignment of resources with the ongoing country programmes and successful programme and budget reviews (PBR). The Regional PBR reviewed and approved eight other submissions from country offices.

ECARO Operations supported the 2018 audit of one country office, through regular Skype calls with the Representative, Deputy Representative and the Chief of Operations. The Regional Director and Regional Chief of Operations supported the office audit entrance and exit meetings and finalization of the audit recommendations and responses. ECARO worked very closely with Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI) on all other outstanding audit reports and recommendations.

ECARO Operations continued monitoring the programme and operations performance of ECARO and the country offices through dissemination of a regular and other ad-hoc regional reports on key performance indicators (KPIs). Overall, 2018 saw excellent fund utilization results in the region. By the year-end, the region managed US\$300 Million in its portfolio with 100 per cent utilization of the institutional budget, regular resources, and other regular and emergency resources. This was accomplished through consistent follow-up with country offices and the various ECARO Sections and outposts in Istanbul, Almaty, Greece, Italy and Brussels.

**Enterprise Risk Management.** ECARO updated its risk profile to reflect the current programme and operating environment, focusing on specific risks that may hinder achievement of the 2018 Annual Management Plan priorities. Risk management is an integral part of the office management practices and in March, ECARO convened an all-staff meeting to review and update its risk profile. In addition, ECARO worked closely with the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations and provided strategic inputs to its annual risk assessment exercise.

**HACT.** In 2018, ECARO prioritized capacity building for implementing partners and translated key procedural and training materials into Russian to better support country offices. Overall, the region surpassed the HACT KPI targets, completing 119% of the minimum required programmatic visits and 114% of the minimum required spot checks.

**Procurement Services.** With the establishment of the ECARO Procurement Services, Financing and Supply (PS/F) position, ECARO worked with country offices to ensure compliance with co-financing obligations for procurement of vaccines. This included capacity building through a webinar on the VIVA vaccine pipeline visualization tool, which was also translated into Russian language. Emergency preparedness and response for supply and logistics capacities within ECARO and all country offices were enhanced to ensure compliance with minimum preparedness standards for supply and logistics. Entry points were identified to strengthen preparedness for development of the regional Supply and Logistics Strategy and Supply Plan.

#### **Staff Counsellor**

The Regional Staff Counselling section was established in February. A strategy to promote and further develop conducive work environments to enable staff to produce the best possible results for children in the region was initiated in collaboration with key stakeholders in human resources, security and operations. Support was provided to 24 well-being support missions, 205 individual sessions and 465 staff members were trained, including on prevention of harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority. A region-wide network of Peer Support Volunteers (PSVs), covering all 21 country offices, was re-established, with 56 trained PSVs as first line responders and

wellbeing advocates. Critical incident support was provided to staff and dependents in accordance with the standard operating procedures for such incidents.

### **Security**

During 2018, security management in the region was enhanced by the appointment of a Regional Security Advisor and the training of country office Security Focal Points, as well as specific training for women Operations and Deputy Representative. ECARO supported a review of country offices' security compliance. Given the complex political context in the region, country elections were closely monitored, and contingency plans reviewed. A UNICEF security officer was deployed to support the Ukraine Country Office given the risk in the country.

### **Human Resources**

ECARO Human Resources Section during the course of 2018 continued to provide strategic guidance, quality assurance, oversight and technical support in the matters related to human resources to the ECARO and 21 country offices in the ECA region. This was managed through implementation of the business partnering model where a dedicated RO HR business partner was assigned for each country office. This allowed for a customized delivery of HR business solutions, introduction of innovations and best practices, which were successfully implemented across the region. ECRO HR also pursued and nurtured strong partnership with DHR to ensure that the introduction of innovations and best practices were aligned with the global HR agenda.

During 2018 the key priority areas of engagement for the ECARO HR focused on: implementation of the Global HR reform in the area of Recruitment; strengthening of the HR capacities in the region; strengthening the business partner model that engages with clients and uses HR analytics to support meaningful HR change is available; and ensuring a systematic leadership development in the region.

As aligned with the ECARO 2018 AWP, in 2018 ECARO HR introduced and rolled out the following new HR practices across the region that supported RO and CO teams in making sound HR decision to impact the business:

- a. Successful piloting and roll out of new candidate assessment methods to better identify talent was fully implemented and this was recognized as best practice by HQ. Region wide, during 2018 approximately over 200 recruitments at all levels were successfully completed. Sixty-three recruitments for international and local positions were facilitated by the ECARO HR. Additional quality assurance was provided for one hundred seventy-seven national recruitments and sixty-two consultancy contracts. This ensured that the most suitable talent across the region could be deployed at the right time in the right place. ECARO jointly co-led with NYHQ and other HQ the global KPI on recruitment (49 days to recruit as compared to the global KPI of 60 days).
- b. Another significant accomplishment was the recruitment and onboarding of the CO HR newly established positions, while also ensuring that a sequenced HR capacity building plan was launched to consolidate the regional HR business model. This plan was also noted as best practice for expansion to other regions.
- c. The effective management of performance and its impact on teams was at the center of the Regional HR engagement. CO and RO teams handling performance cases received timely and dedicated support from the ROHR team. Additionally, ECARO disseminated best practice to other regions on facilitation and implementation of Performance Review meetings serving as a guide in how to strike a close alignment between individual and team performance against results.

- d. Within the framework of ECAR newly developed regional learning strategy and in partnership with DHR, progress has been made in identifying, consolidating and making available the leadership development offerings. The ECAR learning strategy will embed the global and regional leadership development offerings which will be pursued in 2019 as part of the ECAR 2019 learning priorities.

### 3. Lessons learned and Constraints

#### 3.1 Constraints

- ECARO efforts contributed to a slight increase in DTP31 coverage from 90 per cent in 2016 to 92 per cent in 2018. However, eight countries still have DTP3 coverage at sub-national level lower than 80 per cent, and 400,000 children did not benefit from DTP vaccination. In this context, ECARO developed a Regional Flagship, to increase and sustain immunization coverage. The system strengthening focus will continue to ensure sustained improvements to the provision, utilization, quality and efficiency of the health system as a whole and contribute to universal health coverage and the SDGs.
- ECARO supported country offices to design and conduct research, and to develop and implement C4D strategies on immunization, ECD, inclusion of children with disabilities and prevention of violence against children. However, key challenges continue to be weak C4D capacity at country level, limited off-line engagement platforms at national and sub-national level, and little integration of C4D/demand creation into government programmes and budgets.
- While progress has been made in promoting child rights and gender equality in the region, more remains to be done to advance gender equality, and prevent and address violence against women. These concerns have been highlighted in a EU strategy paper, which stresses that... “Governments also need to address discrimination against persons with disabilities, minorities and other vulnerable groups as a matter of priority”.
- The region reached its coverage target of 12 completed evaluations but not the organizational expenditure target of 1 per cent (including humanitarian response), indicating a need for bigger, more strategic evaluations.

#### 3.2 Lessons learned

##### **Evidence for increased advocacy**

UNICEF has a key role in advocating and highlighting the plight of the region’s most excluded and disadvantaged children. This include mainly ‘children on the move’/ refugees, Roma children, and children with disabilities. ECARO advocacy efforts were strengthened with increased evidence generation: ECARO invested in strengthening its knowledge about children left behind by migrating parents, which affects an estimated three million children in the region. A review of UNICEF programmatic experience in this field was also carried out to produce technical guidance to concerned country offices on mitigating the negative effects of migration and building inclusive cross-sectoral interventions. Increased coordination and engagement with the EU presidencies, the EU Special Representative, the European Network of Ombudsman Offices and other key influencers in the region, can help advance advocacy work on children’s rights.

##### **Leveraging funding**

As previously mentioned above, the EU is UNICEF’s most significant partner in the region, in terms of mobilizing funding for UNICEF programmes. ECARO will continue leveraging resources for children and ensure the post-2020 EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework has a strong focus on children. Recognizing the role and influence of other regional actors such as the Asian Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank and Russia Federation, as well as private partners, in advancing child rights, ECARO is actively expanding its collaboration and engagement with **IFIs** across the regions to support the achievement of SDGs for children and jointly focus on addressing disparities and

promoting sustainable growth. The finalized Regional Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Strategy for 2018-2021 will play a significant role in supporting country office funding efforts.

### **Operations compliance**

The establishment of the Regional Staff Counselling Section and the enhancement of security management was instrumental in enabling ECARO to support country offices to improve staff wellbeing, critical incident support and ensure security compliance. In addition, establishing ECARO Procurement Services supported compliance with minimum preparedness standards for supply and logistics.

### **3.3 Cross-cutting strategies**

#### **Programme planning and monitoring**

As a result of UNICEF advocacy and technical assistance, and in response to governments' identification of important SDG data gaps, more than three times as many countries will implement multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS) in round 6 than round 5. At the end of 2018, nine countries are implementing MICS6; with three countries having finalized data collection, and four to finalize it in Q2 2019, with several other countries scheduled to start MICS in 2019.

ECARO contributed with SDG dashboards for use by five countries and chaired the regional IBC on SDG Data and Monitoring, therefore enhancing United Nations synergies on data and statistics. More than 100 national statistical experts benefitted from cross-learning and expert presentations at a regional meeting of statistical offices (data on access to children and violence against children).

#### **Communication for Development (C4D)**

In 2018, ECARO C4D focused on developing an evidence-based training package to support and improve behaviour and social change work in the region and regional capacity building for C4D and explored entry points to further scale up and integrate communication for behaviour and social change in state systems.

ECARO developed a resource pack on communication for immunization (containing guidelines, SOPs, toolkits, templates, and other materials) to help countries strengthen routine immunization programmes and demand for immunization; introduce new vaccines; build the capacities of health professionals and understand and address vaccine hesitancy. ECARO and the John Hopkins Centre for Communication Programmes supported Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia to develop an evidence-based training package on interpersonal communication and community engagement for immunization. The package will build front line workers' capacities to understand, identify and address vaccine hesitancy, including in vulnerable and marginalized groups. The resource package includes a facilitator's guide, a participant manual and resource materials for frontline workers. ECARO and UNICEF HQs Polio Unit supported outbreak emergency preparedness and response capacity building in 10 countries: five of these now have improved communication plans in place.

With UNICEF HQ's child protection and C4D units, ECARO built 15 country offices' capacity to develop comprehensive and evidence-based strategies and action plans to address violence against children and child marriage. As a result, eight roadmaps were developed on prevention of violence against children and promotion of positive parenting, and six on preventing child marriage.

ECARO has developed tools to measure attitudes, beliefs and norms of children with disabilities and their peers, parents and parents of children with disabilities, and service providers and decision makers around three distinct age groups: children aged 0-3 years, 3-7 and 7-11 years. The tools were pretested in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and will be finalized by March 2019.

With UNICEF's Albania and Azerbaijan country offices, ECARO initiated development of training modules for teachers on interpersonal communication and community engagement. The new

modules will complement and update the current training package for teachers, address teachers' biases, negative attitudes and beliefs and strengthen their IPC skills and capacity to reach out to community stakeholders to support and promote inclusion.

### 3.4 Future actions

- Position childcare reforms, with country level support for strategic analysis and planning for addressing childcare reforms.
- Intensify C4D efforts across all key programme issues, including for children with disabilities. Finalize development of tools to measure attitudes and social norms around children with disabilities. Work around demand creation for increased and sustained immunization, ECD, inclusive education and ensure integration of C4D-related modules into pre-service and in-service training of professionals.
- Invest significantly in expanding ECARO's digital and social media footprint, including in Russia and countries where Russian language is spoken.
- Technically assist country offices to prepare 13 Common Country Assessments, United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and new Country Programmes Documents.
- Work with country offices to consolidate a partnership with local urban governments to leverage political will, institutional commitments and resources to contribute to policies and interventions for achieving regional results.