

Iran

Part 1: Situation update in the country

In 2018 there were no significant changes in the national indicators related to health, education and social protection. Based on the official data released by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, neonatal mortality was 9.5 per 1,000 live births and exclusive breastfeeding for newborns remained 53.1 per cent. The official stunting rate among children under five remained 7 per cent (2010) until full endorsement of the latest data generated from national anthropometry research conducted in 2018, which shows improvement.

Iran experienced a concentrated HIV epidemic. In 2018, 2,097 new cases of HIV were reported, compared to 1,959 new cases reported in 2010. The cumulative statistics reflect a higher prevalence among men (84 per cent) than women (17 per cent). The latest official report of the Center for Disease Control of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (based on the Iranian fiscal calendar covering March to June 2018) reflected an increasing number of new cases reported among women (31 per cent) compared to men (68 per cent). The report also suggested a shift toward sexual transmission of HIV versus transmission by injecting drugs with shared needles. Less than 2 per cent of the reported cases were in people below the age of 20. Due to a sustained national HIV testing screening program for pregnant women, the mother-to-child transmission rate among reported HIV positive pregnant women remained at 2 per cent.

National enrolment in primary education remained high and showed an improvement in pre-primary education. Challenges remained with regard to transition from primary to secondary school and subsequently the retention of secondary level students, especially among disadvantaged children in rural and sub-urban areas. Based on the official data for the school year 2015-2016, 777,862 children (438,036 girls – 56 per cent) were out-of-school, including 152,225 children aged 6-11 years (76,846 girls – 50 per cent) at primary level, 215,854 children 12-14 years (135,639 girls – 63 per cent) at lower secondary level, and 409,783 children 15-17 years (225,551 girls – 55 per cent).

Out-of-school children were not equally distributed throughout the country. Poverty and disability, immigration, distance from school and certain cultural barriers were among the major factors contributing to out-of-school children being concentrated in certain provinces.

In 2018 several legislative initiatives and changes took place that are expected to have a long-term positive impact on the lives of children in Iran. In the second half of 2018, the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran approved the Bill for 'Protection of Children and Adolescents' which defines key risks for children, introduces mechanisms for protection of children and defines punishments for crimes against children. UNICEF provided technical support to this initiative.

In September 2018, the Parliament approved review of a plan to amend Article 1041 of the Civil Code on the age of marriage. Prior to introducing this new plan, marriage of girls under 13 and boys under 15 was legally possible under certain conditions, including consent of parent, respect for interest of the child and a competent court's judgment. Under the new plan,

marriage of a girl before the age of 13 or a boy before the age of 16 would be fully prohibited. The new plan also would increase the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys to 16 and 18, respectively. The new plan would not fully prohibit marriage of a girl between 13-16 or a boy between 16-18, but it would limit this choice under the same conditions noted above.

The Bill for amending the 'Act on Determining Nationality Status of Children Born to Iranian Mothers and Foreign Fathers' was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers and submitted to the Parliament for review and approval in November 2018. This Bill states that children born to Iranian mothers and foreign fathers can be given Iranian citizenship at the request of their mothers. These children can apply for Iranian citizenship upon reaching the age of 18 in cases where their mother has not done so before, and they can be given Iranian citizenship unless there are specific concerns brought forward by the Ministry of Intelligence.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's new Law for Protection of the Rights of People Living with Disabilities, which is in line with Convention of the Rights of People Living with Disabilities, was ratified in March 2018.

Iran continued to host one of the largest refugee populations in the world. According to the Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs' latest reports, a total of 950,000 registered (documented) Afghan refugees and an estimated 1.5 million undocumented Afghan refugees live and work in Iran. There are approximately 800,000 Afghan school-age children in the country and, regardless of their documentation status, they are allowed to enrol in and benefit from the public education system based on the All-Inclusive Education Decree of the Supreme Leader issued in 2015. The population of Afghan children enrolled in formal education increased to 470,000 in the 2018-2019 school year, up from 420,000 in the 2017-2018 school year.

Iran's changing social, political and economic context resulting from the tightening of sanctions and the associated economic pressures will lead to increased vulnerability of certain population groups, including children. The national currency, the Iranian Rial (IRR), fell to record lows and economic activity slowed dramatically since the U.S. withdrew from the nuclear deal in May 2018. Along with declining investment in the private sector, which led to a decrease in companies' revenues and contributed to an increasing unemployment rate, there was a decline in household incomes. It is expected that by end of the Iranian fiscal year in March 2019, 500,000 to 1 million Iranians may be out of a job. This will likely have a disproportionate effect on the lower deciles of income distribution, as low skill jobs are likely to be most affected. The economic downturn also affected government revenues and the increasing social protection needs put additional strain on existing programmes.

UNICEF Iran will use the opportunity of the midterm review of the country programme in 2019 to reinforce the focus on equity issues in all sectors and integrate strategies and programmes to support the Government's efforts to shield children and families from the effects of the economic downturn. UNICEF began consultations with partners and the UN Country Team in 2018 around a technical assistance package to protect the most vulnerable and is leading the UN Country Team in ensuring this package also will be integrated in the midterm review of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in 2019.

During 2018, UNICEF Iran continued to support national partners to achieve the objectives set out in the Country Programme Document (2017-2021) aligned to the Sixth National Development Plan (2016-2020), with a specific focus on disadvantaged areas. The results achieved directly contributed to UNICEF strategic goals as listed below.

Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

Improved quality of maternal and neonatal healthcare services and immunization

UNICEF Iran intensified support to improve the quality of neonatal care by assisting in the development of maternal and neonatal essential and life-saving service packages, as well as capacity development activities. UNICEF provided technical support to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education to develop the national service package for high risk pregnancy, with a focus on the two most common complications occurring during delivery and post-partum.

Twenty-five gynaecologists, anaesthesiologists and relevant service providers received training as part of an effort to build a network of national trainers-of-trainers with hands-on experience in the practicality of the package. In a second series of workshops, 16 midwives and gynaecologists received hands-on training using simulators. UNICEF Iran procured 60 Mama-U, 60 Mama Natalie, 130 Neonatalie moulages, and 10 non-pneumatic anti-shock garments for 14 disadvantaged provinces to be used as training equipment.

UNICEF enhanced the capacity of 62 health service providers (nurses, midwives, neonatologists, paediatricians, and physicians) of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education from 16 medical universities on 'kangaroo mother care' through a five-day workshop facilitated by an international consultant. Two key neonatal programme managers were supported to participate in the 37th conference on Kangaroo Mother Care and priorities in perinatal care in Southern Africa in March 2018.

UNICEF supported publication of the Newborn Individualized Developmental Care and Assessment Program minimum service package with the objective of standardizing services in all national neonatal intensive care units (NICUs).

UNICEF enhanced the capacity of 16 midwives and health workers on how to 'Help Babies Survive' through a workshop facilitated by an international expert. This capacity training will be cascaded sub-nationally through a series of workshops in areas with high prevalence of neonatal mortality and morbidity.

Improved provision of early childhood health and development

UNICEF enhanced the capacity of approximately 200 paediatricians, general practitioners, Ministry of Health and Medical Education service managers and experts from the provincial medical universities on the integrated management of childhood illness (IMCI) and well child care through a three-day training of trainers workshop organized during the National Congress of Children on 'Health, Well-being and Development of Children.'

UNICEF enhanced the capacity of 35 paediatricians, nurses and midwives specialized on breastfeeding counselling selected from a larger group of experts. An internationally certified breastfeeding counsellor provided training over the last two years with the objective of cascading knowledge and skills to sub-national level. The training included roundtable discussions, field visits, theoretical and clinical sessions resulting in adoption of the recommendation to include designation of the breastfeeding trainers within primary health

centres (PHC) as a way forward.

With UNICEF support, knowledge was enhanced on child and adolescent psychiatry in the 8th National Congress organized for teachers and social workers on developmental disorders. A forum was created for knowledge exchange with two international lecturers and panels of child and adolescent psychiatric experts.

UNICEF provided technical support for localization of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire Social Emotional (ASQ3SE), including determination of cutoff scores for Iranian children. This resulted in the phase one report, which includes revision and publication of questionnaires, reports of national and provincial workshops and development of a data entry software. The capacity of 35 provincial programme managers and experts from universities was enhanced on applying the questionnaire and an educational package for parents was developed, printed and disseminated.

UNICEF supported development of a self-learning package to enhance capacity of vaccinators at different primary health centre levels, based on the national immunization plan.

UNICEF provided support to Ministry of Health and Medical Education for the procurement of 1.5 million doses of inactivated poliovirus vaccine from overseas.

UNICEF shared a proposal developed for a pilot study on early childhood development by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education with the UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office and incorporated their feedback. UNICEF Iran will work to support implementation of the pilot study in 2019.

Enhanced nutritional status of the children, adolescents and women with a specific focus on the prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), micronutrient deficiencies and undernutrition in national priority provinces

Technical support from an international expert on micronutrient food fortification enabled Iran to identify the most appropriate food vehicle for vitamin D fortification. Approximately 30 stakeholders from public and private sectors, including high-level managers and officials from the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, discussed the importance of fortification and the chosen vehicle. This resulted in initiation of a national action plan on the way forward in February 2018.

UNICEF supported a study on the effectiveness of the national 'Vitamin D mega-dose supplementation' programme on the Vitamin D status of adolescent boys in Iran. The study serves as a baseline for further discussions to assess effectiveness of the national programme.

Increased capacity to provide quality prevention-of-mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) and services to adolescents through Adolescent Well being Clubs (previously referred to as All-in Centres) with a specific focus on the most at-risk populations

UNICEF supported assessment of the prevention-of-mother-to-child transmission services. PMTCT coverage in pilot sites reached 85 per cent.

Strategic areas for improvement were identified, including data collection and analysis, partnership with private sector service providers, and linkages with the existing voluntary

counselling and testing (VCT) services.

UNICEF supported enhancing national technical knowledge of PMTCT experts on communication and management skills. Two national consultation meetings were organized with participation of maternal and HIV experts, family health staff and Managers of the Center for Communicable Diseases of Ministry of Health and Medical Education from 13 medical universities. The national consultation meetings discussed the findings of the assessment of the PMTCT pilot phase and suggestions to improve the PMTCT programme and the way forward for national scale up. The 13 universities are considered 'Head of Cluster Universities' as they will provide support to other universities and will upscale the knowledge.

UNICEF provided technical support to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education to monitor implementation of the second phase of national PMTCT programme. UNICEF also supported production of an animation video on mother-to-child transmission of HIV, which was widely aired during the week-long national campaign on World AIDS, and a process to develop a roadmap to achieve elimination of mother-to-child transmission (eMTCT) validation.

Promotion of the health and social well-being of children, adolescents and youth, with a specific focus on prevention of risky behaviours, substance use disorders and NCDs

There were seven Adolescents' Well-being Clubs (the terminology used in Iran for 'All-In Centres') operational in six provinces, covering 8,926 adolescents with high-risk behaviours. Services and support provided included HIV tests, risk reduction counselling, drug use prevention, HIV prevention, psycho-social interventions, safe rooms, recreational activities, life-skills training, psychological evaluation and vocational training. A total of 14,404 at-risk adolescents were reached through outreach teams in selected areas.

UNICEF enhanced the technical capacity of 280 staff of Adolescent Well-being Clubs and focal points of Universities of Medical Sciences on Risk Reduction Counselling for adolescent and youth, drug use prevention among at-risk adolescents, and adolescent development programme and procedures. Technical capacity also was enhanced on outreach to hard to reach adolescents.

Advocacy and fund raising for AWBCs, documentation and reporting, and adolescent peer leadership

A transition plan for adolescent well-being clubs was developed and initiated. Technical support was provided to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education to assess the mental health promotion and physical activity programme in one of the districts of Tehran as a pilot site to further analyse the situation and provide recommendations to improve planning.

UNICEF expanded its partnerships with relevant national counterparts working with adolescents and youth and signed two new workplans in the second half of 2018 with the Drug Control Headquarters (DCHQ) and Ministry of Sports and Youth. Under the new Programme of Cooperation with DCHQ, technical capacity of focal points from DCHQ, Ministry of Education and State Welfare Organization of 31 provinces was enhanced on the school-based programme 'Family and Schools Together.' The capacity of 120 practitioners from the University of Medical Sciences, Iran Red Crescent Society and Drug Control Headquarters Coordination Councils from 31 provinces was enhanced on Selective Drug Use Prevention among at-risk adolescents. Educational packages were developed for students and their parents on school-based drug use prevention.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

UNICEF enhanced equity in access for all children, with a focus on girls, refugees and children with special needs. A training was conducted in support of the national strategy on inclusive education toward integration of children with special needs in regular schools. This training of trainers included 12 separate workshops, covering 10 disability groups, in four clusters, organized and conducted in partnership with the Special Education Organization. A total of 160 hours of training was provided to 128 special education teachers from all provinces. Special education teachers who participated in the multi-skills teachers' training analyzed the state of education services for children with special needs to help the Special Education Organization identify areas of intervention to build capacity toward inclusive education.

UNICEF supported the capacity development of 40 teachers working with autistic children. Under the trilateral training-of-trainers initiative with UNESCO and the Ministry of Education/Special Education Organization, in August 2018, two international experts from Australia and Chile facilitated this capacity building initiative for teachers.

UNICEF advocated for integration of refugee children in formal education and supported enabling education environments through procurement of equipment for all children in public schools in areas that experienced an increase in the number of students due to the integration of Afghan refugee children in the disadvantaged provinces of Khuzestan, Bushehr, Hormozgan, and Sistan and Baluchistan.

Quality education at all levels, with a special focus on pre-primary education, holistic life-skills education and effective integration of education on the natural environment and disaster risk reduction, was improved. UNICEF enhanced retention capacity of 32 boarding schools, with special attention to the needs of girls' schools, in the most disadvantaged areas of Sistan and Baluchistan, Kerman, and Hormozgan, which have the highest percentage of out-of-school children in the country. UNICEF also supported integration of Afghan children into formal education by organizing a three-day, high level knowledge sharing workshop on multicultural education in June 2018. The workshop aimed to coordinate legal, administrative and multicultural approaches on provision of education services to Afghan children in Iran. High-level officials from the Ministry of Education, and relevant government entities, Focal Points for Education of Refugee Children from 17 provinces and academics discussed the results of a multicultural education survey (2017-2018) and aspects of educating Afghan children in Iran. This event was followed by a two-day workshop in Mashhad in December 2018 to further brainstorm opportunities for and constraints to providing quality education services to refugee children in Iran.

In March 2018, a technical conference was organized to introduce the Life-skills and Citizenship Education framework to 70 staff of the Ministry of Education and to identify the main areas of intervention. Subsequently, 224 Ministry of Education teachers and experts from 31 provinces were trained in two separate training-of-trainers workshops on Life-skills and Citizenship Education for pre-primary and primary levels.

A brainstorming workshop on citizenship education was conducted, with participation of senior experts from Ministry of Education, the Judiciary and prominent academics. Building on past initiatives on citizenship education, the discussion concluded with adoption of recommendations for future activities to include mapping of national curricula.

A brainstorming meeting was held on the needs, challenges and opportunities of girl students ages 7-17, with a focus on communication skills to enhance dialogue and peace. UNICEF supported knowledge management on education indicators and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals through a workshop with experts from the Budget and Planning Organization and Human Resource Planning and Information Technology Department of the Ministry of Education.

UNICEF built national capacity on Educational Planning for Disaster Risk Reduction by organizing a training workshop in November 2018 for Ministry of Education experts, in partnership with UNESCO, the National Commission for UNESCO and the Ministry of Education. Participants included Provincial Education Department representatives and staff from the Iranian Red Crescent Society from the six provinces with highest risks of natural disasters.

UNICEF enhanced the capacity of key actors to adopt evidence-based approaches to improve retention levels of children at primary and secondary levels, with a focus on disadvantaged children. UNICEF advocated with the Ministry of Education on retention and system building through improved education financing both at macro- and micro-levels. UNICEF supported a study visit in December 2018 by an Iranian delegation of five senior officials, including Deputy Minister of Education, to learn from Sweden's experience on financing for education. UNICEF also provided technical contributions to an event organized by the Ministry of Education focusing on enhanced statistical and knowledge management capacity and supported the Ministry of Education to conduct a joint pilot activity on employability/entrepreneurship skills for girls. This initiative included designing a package of soft skills covering students, teachers and parents, and production of content. The programme will be implemented as a pilot in selected girls' schools in Tehran in 2019.

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

In 2018, UNICEF Iran continued to work closely with key national partners (namely the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and the State Welfare Organization) to support national efforts to strengthen prevention and response to child maltreatment, with a focus on enhancing quality of services, promoting preventive measures, developing models, and strengthening case management systems. These initiatives aim to promote and strengthen an inter-sectoral approach to prevention of child maltreatment at all levels.

With UNICEF support, a pilot was initiated by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education to establish specialized health centres for referral and provision of specialized services to children at risk of and/or subjected to child maltreatment in four selected provinces (Tehran, Semnan, Hormozgan, and Golestan). One important component of the pilot builds capacities of health professionals at the targeted centres, including paediatricians and physicians working in emergency rooms. The pilot was designed in a way to ensure alignment with Iran's 2014 Health Reform Plan.

UNICEF provided technical support to enhance the quality of Ministry of Health and Medical Education positive parenting programmes through development of specialized materials to be used for building capacities of mental health professionals and counsellors providing services to children and families. The programme aims to reduce the prevalence of child maltreatment in family settings by enhancing parent-child relationships and promoting non-violent discipline.

To help strengthen case management and the capacity of the social service workforce, the State Welfare Organization was provided with the latest knowledge, standards and global experiences on case management. This enabled the organization to identify gaps and explore opportunities to strengthen current case management practices in Iran..

UNICEF provided technical support to the State Welfare Organization to initiate development of national protocols for provision of comprehensive care and support to children without effective caregivers in nurseries (0-3 years), residential centres and family-based foster care. The objective was to establish national minimum standards and ensure effective supervision of the well-being and development of children placed in alternative care.

As a complementary measure, material support was provided to nurseries caring for children aged 0-3 years in several disadvantaged provinces. As a result, 109 children (49 girls, 60 boys) residing in those nurseries benefited from improved living conditions and quality of care.

UNICEF partnered with the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRSC) to sharpen the child protection focus within wider national emergency preparedness and response efforts and to strengthen national Child Protection in Emergency (CPIE) coordination.

UNICEF strengthened the capacity of IRCS Psycho-social Support (SAHAR) teams for provision of community-based Psychosocial Support (PSS) to children and families affected by the November 2017 Kermanshah earthquake. The SAHAR teams worked with and mobilized communities in the most-affected areas of Kermanshah, thus promoting engagement and empowerment of local communities to deal with the aftermath of the earthquake.

In 2018, UNICEF Iran continued to support the Judiciary in enhancing specialized knowledge on protecting children during judicial proceedings through in-service training and integration in academic programmes. UNICEF also advocated for legal reform for children and raised public awareness on child rights.

A UNICEF Iran-supported Masters programme on Social Work for Children and Adolescents was approved by the High Council for Medical Sciences Planning and will be launched in relevant academic centres in 2019. This programme is the first of its kind in Iran (as a Masters-level qualification in social work) and includes components on child rights, school social work, children in judicial proceedings, children with disabilities and children affected by disasters.

In partnership with the Judiciary, UNICEF supported establishment and implementation of a training programme for counsellors and juvenile judges on provision of specialized counselling services. The knowledge of judges and social workers from nine provinces (Tehran, Isfahan, Fars, Kerman, Bushehr, Yazd, Hormozgan, Sistan and Baluchistan, and Hamedan) was increased on application of diversion and alternatives to arrest, detention and imprisonment, as per article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and child-related provisions of the revised Islamic Penal Code (2013).

Achievements of the long-standing UNICEF Iran-Judiciary partnership for protection of children were documented for public awareness-raising and educational purposes. The documentary produced highlights the judicial system's achievements for protection of children without effective caregivers and children at risk, as well as respect for the best interest of the child and application of juvenile justice standards. The documentary is regularly shown at events organized by the Judiciary.

UNICEF partnered with the Judiciary, Ministry of Justice, and Mofid University, Qom in a summer school programme focused on promoting the best interests of the child. The University's students of law and related disciplines participated. Many of the law students were actively engaged in legal clinics where legal counselling and services are provided free of charge.

UNICEF provided the Judiciary with technical support in establishing the groundwork and evidence base for development of Iran's Comprehensive Child Act, drawing on examples of similar laws in other countries.

As part of the joint UNICEF Iran - UNICEF Afghanistan initiative funded by the European focused on 'Children on the Move,' a cross-border mission to Herat, Afghanistan took place in October 2018. The mission provided a valuable opportunity to discuss and determine priority areas for cooperation and coordination between UNICEF Iran and UNICEF Afghanistan on child protection interventions for Afghan children on the move. Discussions focused on the issue of unaccompanied minors moving between Afghanistan and Iran and immediate and longer-term measures to be undertaken by both UNICEF offices to support their respective government partners to ensure better protection of those children. The measures were included in the joint action plan developed as a result of the mission.

Goal area 4: Every child has an equitable chance in life

In 2018, the United Nations (with the lead of UNICEF Iran) worked closely with Member States and other development partners to support government-led action to assess and formulate country-specific responses to economic and social challenges. The United States' withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on May 8, 2018 and the unilateral sanctions against Iran exacerbated the challenges. Based on Iran's own economic resilience in the face of sanctions as well as global experiences during times of economic challenge, UNICEF Iran identified and advocated for particular policy focus areas that address poverty and vulnerability, especially in the context of sanctions. This advocacy led to the establishment of a more strategic fit of the 2019-2020 workplans with the needs of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the face of economic downturn. This UN technical assistance package will help mitigate the worst impacts of the sanctions.

UNICEF strengthened national and sub-national capacities for data collection and analysis of the situation of child poverty, as well as evaluation of social programmes and policies. A roundtable technical meeting was organized in late December 2018 with high level officials of the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare, other relevant stakeholders, and experts from academia. A technical discussion was held with international experts at Bristol University and the World Bank on the challenges and the way forward to operationalize multidimensional poverty measurement in Iran. (A multidimensional poverty measurement study supported by UNICEF Iran was completed in 2017). Following this roundtable, UNICEF Iran agreed to support the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare and the Statistical Centre of Iran to apply multidimensional poverty measurement in the next household income/expenditure survey.

In partnership with Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare, UNICEF supported an impact evaluation of one of the State Welfare Organization programmes on cash transfer to child care centres in one of the most disadvantaged provinces. The national evaluation

identified that, in parallel to child benefit social protection programmes and policies, other key factors such as the level of knowledge for child care centre caregivers need to be considered.

The evaluation also provided evidence for challenges in financial management of such programmes. The findings of this impact evaluation were fed into the 2019-20 UNICEF Iran and Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare workplan. Findings also led to supporting the Government to work on solutions for existing problems in Early Childhood Development programmes, as well as in the implementation process of social protection policies.

UNICEF enhanced national and sub-national capacities in the design and implementation of integrated child-sensitive social protection programmes by supporting the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare to assess the Iranian Social Protection System by mapping out existing social protection programmes. The mapping exercise confirmed the existence of parallel social protection schemes by different national actors, which reduces the efficiency and inclusiveness of programmes. Although social protection programmes have been successful in achieving sectoral goals, they have faced challenges in creating a well-functioning holistic social protection system capable of generating synergies between different programmes. Responsiveness and financial sustainability were the main bottlenecks to programme efficiency. The study created the base for an ongoing social protection needs assessment initiative jointly carried out by the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare and UNICEF Iran.

Through a partnership with the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare, a feasibility study was conducted for child-focused cash transfer schemes. The study created a base to support the Government to improve the effectiveness of the national social protection system. This feasibility study was used as an advocacy tool to target the universal subsidies toward a Child Cash Grant programme. UNICEF will follow up on those efforts in 2019.

UNICEF Iran's achievements in 2018 to increase programme effectiveness included crosscutting partnerships, communication for development (C4D) and community engagement efforts. UNICEF Iran supported the first national comprehensive conference on children with disabilities and special needs by organizing a three-month communication campaign in partnership with the State Welfare Organization called 'children have different abilities.' The campaign began in November 2018 and was designed to engage with the general public to reduce stigma against girls and boys living with disabilities and to make the abilities of those children visible to society. Nine high profile and online influencer celebrities were featured with children in public service announcements (PSAs) and they shared the PSAs through their Instagram accounts to further promote the campaign's messages. A concert by people living with disabilities was held on 14 December 2018 and in the week following, its video ranked as one of the top five viewed videos in Iran on various social media channels. The campaign also contributed to increasing the number of UNICEF's Instagram followers from 6,000 to 30,000.

A two-day national conference organized by the State Welfare Organization focusing on girls and boys living with disabilities was held 16-17 November 2018 and included 400 participants from all sectors, including government, civil society, artists, activists, children and academics. The conference ended with a multi-party action statement focused on four main thematic priorities for girls and boys living with disabilities. The priorities were: equitable access to health services; inclusive education; equitable access to protection services; and social engagement and participation. The statement emphasized participation of children living with disabilities as a

key implementing strategy. The statement also draws upon the recommendations of Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Iran's Citizenship Charter, national child rights documents and Iran's law for people living with disabilities.

A multi-sectoral coordination committee was established and included stakeholders from government disability organizations, disability NGOs, IRCS, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) and Tehran Municipality. The establishment of this committee provided an opportunity for dialogue among civil society, government and people and children living with disabilities. This committee will further coordinate and monitor development of a multi-sector, multi-year action plan for implementation of the four focus areas of the national conference on children with disabilities and special needs.

Cross-sectoral situation analyses on child maltreatment and on disability were conducted. The ongoing analyses include social norms and behavioural analysis with a gender lens and will be finalized in 2019 to inform future programming.

Gender was mainstreamed into existing programmes within all sectors to the extent possible. UNICEF Iran also focused on gender institutional capacity building by conducting a gender knowledge assessment among UNICEF Iran staff, to be followed up by gender training in 2019. UNICEF's Gender Action Plan (GAP) was introduced by the Regional Gender Advisor to the Ministry of Education and the State Welfare Organization and a brainstorming session was organized on potential areas of cooperation to promote gender equality within UNICEF/government joint programmes.

In 2018 UNICEF established a first-ever partnership with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which allowed UNICEF to support high-profile national media, art and cultural events for children as well as to actively engage with the public using web-based and social media.

UNICEF Iran linked the Digital Media Department of the Ministry to the Global Kids Online project to adopt and translate the survey as a baseline for developing a national policy document on child protection in the online space.

UNICEF awarded a feature film and a short film which best portrayed children's issues in major Children's Film Festivals.

UNICEF engaged with the public, the Government and other stakeholders using web-based and social media as well as through participation in child-focused public events to advocate for UNICEF's mandate. The number of followers on Instagram increased from 6,000 to 33,500 in 2018 and the number of Twitter followers doubled in the second half of 2018. UNICEF global advocacy campaigns, including Early Moments Matter/Father's Day and Longest Goal were localized for the Iran context and posted on social media. All UNICEF Iran social media accounts were verified in 2018.

UNICEF Iran developed and implemented an internal workplan for the National Goodwill Ambassador for her engagement in advocacy events. UNICEF also developed an on-boarding plan for a famous soccer player and coach with millions of fans to serve as the second National Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF Iran.

UNICEF Iran actively participated in the United Nations Communication Group chaired by United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) and contributed to implementation of joint UN agency visibility campaigns and events such as United Nations Day, Children's Day, Tehran International Book Fair, and World's AIDS day.

UNICEF Iran produced electronic one page factsheets and a concise country programme brochure to advocate for UNICEF's mandate in various fora and to raise awareness on UNICEF Iran's programmes. UNICEF Iran also produced a branded desk calendar and notebooks with key messages on children.

UNICEF Iran obtained clearance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to publicly announce UNICEF Iran's bank account for public fundraising. UNICEF received US\$100,000 from Saman Bank as the first instalment of a three year agreement. UNICEF's logo will soon be included in Saman Bank ATM machines and other digital banking systems. UNICEF also received US\$50,000 from Sanam Trading Company as the first instalment of a three year agreement. A partnership with Espinas Palace Hotel Chain resulted in UNICEF Iran receiving a 75 per cent discount on rooms and reduced costs for conference rooms.

UNICEF collaborated with the Iran Chamber of Commerce and the bilateral chambers to exchange of knowledge about child-focused corporate social responsibility (CSR). Four high-level CSR events were co-organized by UNICEF Iran and different Chambers of Commerce.

In May 2018, UNICEF Iran secured a new partnership with Refah Chain Stores Company. UNICEF supported Refah's 'For Mothers' campaign, which lasted eight weeks and resulted in an in-kind contribution of US\$241,200 through customer fundraising to provide 20,000 food packages delivered by Iranian Red Crescent Society volunteers to disadvantaged pregnant women across the country. The 'For Mothers' campaign used national communication channels including state national channels, social media, radio, billboards and posters.

A first-ever workplan with the Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology on Innovation for Children was in its final stages of development at year end. The Innovation for Children in Iran Initiative had a soft launch in June 2018 at a workshop attended by 140 experts. The Head of UNICEF's Global Innovation Centre participated. The workshop was followed by a one-day brainstorming session in September 2018 with participation of nearly 60 interested young innovators to introduce and establish an Innovation for Children Fund in Iran.

UNICEF Iran began to explore opportunities to expand on technology for development (T4D) through an internal brainstorming session on T4D concepts and good practices. Health and nutrition was identified as an entry point to work with national counterparts. A briefing package was prepared to share with implementing partners to explore possible use of the technologies across all programme areas.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

During 2018, UNICEF Iran was able to strengthen existing partnerships and cultivate a number of new partnerships, which will help it to achieve the results laid out in the country programme 2017-2021 and to expand its partnerships for children in the future. An additional three

partnerships with private corporations were signed in 2018. UNICEF Iran now has nine official corporate partners. UNICEF Iran also received clearance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to use its local bank account for domestic fund raising from the public.

The first-ever partnership with the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance on issues relating to communication and children and the partnership with the Drug Control Headquarters on children and substance abuse are now fully operational. Additional partnerships with Statistical Centre of Iran on child-specific data and analysis, with the Budget and Planning Organization on Public Finance for Children, and with the Ministry of Sports and Youth on youth and adolescents, were being negotiated and are expected to start in 2019. A new partnership with the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology on Innovation for Children also was negotiated and is expected to start in 2019. The partnership with the Ministry of Interior was renewed and covers, among other areas, cooperation on child-friendly cities, sub-national engagement and emergency preparedness. In 2019, UNICEF Iran will work to further strengthen and develop these partnerships.

While many policies and standards were in place at the national level regarding all areas of child well-being and key indicators at the national level showed sustained progress, some provinces and population groups exhibited higher levels of disadvantage. On the basis of the strengthened partnerships and per the original intent of the country programme 2017-2021, UNICEF Iran intensified discussions with partners to explore the potential for more provincial-level engagement of UNICEF Iran. This would allow UNICEF to provide more targeted support in health, education, social policy and child protection. One example that UNICEF Iran will build on is the child-friendly city initiative, which will be launched in Isfahan in January 2019 and will provide a platform for more sub-national engagement by engaging with municipalities. UNICEF Iran also started to discuss such opportunities with relevant ministries in all sectors. Provincial-level engagement will be a priority in 2019.

Multi-sectoral initiatives such as early childhood development, children with disabilities, and adolescents were a priority and UNICEF Iran was able to achieve some important milestones in those areas in 2018. UNICEF organized a high-level conference on children with disabilities and secured partnerships with the major stakeholders in adolescent development and participation. In 2019, UNICEF Iran will focus its efforts on supporting partners to advance cross-sectoral cooperation in those priority areas. This will require putting in place effective mechanisms within the programme team to provide comprehensive, well-coordinated and timely assistance. Since all three of these areas of work are at different stages of discussion at the national level and of engagement with partners, UNICEF Iran will develop dedicated mechanisms for each of them.

Constraints

The withdrawal of the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the reinstatement of sanctions have begun to substantially impact UNICEF Iran operations, both directly and indirectly. The sanctions imposed on financial flows into and out of the country affect the capacity of UNICEF Iran to transfer funds needed for programme implementation and office operations into Iran, and affect the capacity of Iranian government partners to transfer funds from Iran for the purchase of vaccines to UNICEF's Supply Division. The substantial exchange rate fluctuations associated with the reinstatement of the sanctions, as well as the sanctions on shipping to and from Iran, affect UNICEF Iran's capacity to procure supplies and services required for programme implementation and office operations. The capacity of

UNICEF Iran to fundraise locally from the private sector may also be affected by the sanctions.

Through UNICEF Headquarters, UNICEF Iran, together with the other resident agencies of United Nations in Iran, advocated with the United States Treasury to grant OFAC licenses for the United Nations activities in Iran. The UN is actively exploring alternative ways to make financial transfers.

Given the complex socio-political context, negotiations and preparations of workplans and activities sometimes experienced substantial delays. While this is a challenge in terms of programme implementation, it is crucial for UNICEF Iran to continue to focus on building and strengthening its partnerships in close coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The way ahead

In 2018 UNICEF Iran took the lead on developing a technical assistance package to protect the vulnerable during the economic downturn associated with the re-imposition of US sanctions. UNICEF Iran will continue to prioritize this effort in 2019 and work to provide support for real-time monitoring of the situation of children and families and government programmes to mitigate the impact of the downturn on the well-being of children and families.

Lessons learned will be discussed during the midterm review in 2019. The review will focus on strengthening multi-sectoral work and engagement at sub-national level, as well as on ensuring a focus on the most vulnerable is sufficiently integrated within all programmes. The midterm review also will examine adjustments in terms of program and office structure that may be required to ensure that UNICEF Iran is ready to address challenges effectively during the remainder of the country programme. The expected economic downturn and difficult operating environment and its effects on UNICEF Iran programming and operations will feature prominently in the review. The midterm review discussions for the UNDevelopment Assistance Fund are expected to start in April. The UNICEF Iran midterm review will be planned in a way that it can feed into that process.

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