

## Iraq

### Update on the context and situation of children

In 2019, the Iraqi people's transition into a post-conflict era has been uncertain. As of December 2019, at least 1.41 million people, of which around 664,800 children under 18, remain displaced in formal and non-formal camps or in host communities, while nearly 4.6 million people (over 2.1 million children) have returned to places of origin ('returnees') (IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix [DTM]). Although numbers of people requiring humanitarian assistance dropped from 8.7 million in 2018 to 6.7 million in 2019 (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], Humanitarian Needs Overview [HNO], 2018 and 2019), international support is still required to deliver or re-start basic services across much of the country. Child poverty is a persistent issue, curbing educational attainment, generating poor health outcomes, and preventing realization of children's rights (UNICEF and Ministry of Planning: Analysis of Child Poverty Trends and Policy Recommendations). As per the national line, poverty was estimated at 22.5 per cent in 2014 (Poverty Reduction Strategy, Government of Iraq, 2017). Multi-dimensional poverty was even higher, with 39 per cent of children suffering either income poverty or deprivations in two or more of their rights.

Children and women, whether refugees, displaced, returnees, or living in multi-dimensional poverty, continue to face significant risks. In 2019, 4.5 million people were assessed to be in need of at least one type of protection assistance, and higher prevalence of poverty-related protection risks were observed among IDP and returnee children compared to past years (UNOCHA, HNO, 2019). Since 2016, there has been significant reduction in the percentage of girls and women aged 15 and 49 who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife (around 40 per cent compared to the baseline of 55.9 per cent), and UNICEF considers this key progress. However, according to MICS-6 (2018), 81 per cent of children aged 1 to 14 years have experienced some form of violent discipline; this is 1.9 per cent higher than in MICS-4 (2011). Despite reported improvements in attitudes towards violence in other areas, it appears more children are reporting actual experience of violence than in previous years.

Experiences of violence, displacement, conflict or loss leave deep and lasting negative impact, especially on children. As many as one million people in Iraq were estimated to be in need of some kind of mental health and psychosocial support services (HNO, Health, 2019) and Child Protection partners reported more than 15 districts across Iraq with 30 to 50 per cent of children showing signs of psychosocial distress (Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment-VI, 2018). In parallel, health actors identified a need to increase Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), physical and mental rehabilitation and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention and response programming (HNO, Health, 2019).

Children's chance of survival have improved in Iraq - the under-five mortality is 26 per 1,000 live births (MICS-6) a sizable reduction since 2011, when the estimate was 37 per 1,000 (MICS-4 2011). Nonetheless, mortality among children remains higher than in other MENA countries and, although mortality has declined, inequity has not; Iraqi children from poorest families are twice as likely to die by their fifth birthday than the richest (MICS-6). Maternal health services improved - delivery by skilled birth attendants increased from 90 to 96 per cent and institutional delivery from 87 to 97 per cent between 2011 to 2018 - but vaccination coverage stagnated, with only half of children aged 12-23 months vaccinated against the main preventable diseases (MICS-4; MICS-6). Gender inequity also persists - families report being more inclined not to seek outside care when a girl is ill (44 per cent) than when a boy is ill (38 per cent). In addition, overall access to basic healthcare remained limited - in Salah al Din, health partners reported 60 per cent of health centres as damaged/destroyed, and only half of facilities in Ninewa were considered 'fully functional'. Even when open, services are frequently of poor quality - a recent Quality of Care survey showed that in camp Primary Healthcare Centres (PHC), 54 per cent of patients cited only partial availability of prescribed medications (HNO, Health, 2019).

Health outcomes are also impacted by limited access to or poor quality of water and sanitation services. More than 2.3 million people, half of them children, needed water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) support in 2019. Water quality and quantity, and national management of water resources, is a countrywide challenge that goes beyond humanitarian crisis. Only 39 per cent of households have access to a safely-managed drinking water source on their premises, free of E. coli and available when needed. Less than 24 per cent of the population uses safely-managed sanitation services (MICS-6). In Baghdad governorate alone, 1.5 million tons of untreated sewage are reportedly dumped in the Tigris river every day, and nine of the country's 26 central wastewater treatment plants are either non- or partially-functioning (HNO, WASH, 2019).

Children represent around 48 per cent of the population; youth aged 15-24 years account for a further 20 per cent. The country has the fastest growing population in the region, projected to reach around 45 million people by 2050. Between 2018 and 2030, this translates to a 30 per cent increase in school-aged children aged 5 to 17 years, and a 35 per cent increase in adolescents aged 10-19 years. Even now, before this anticipated 'youth bulge', Iraq's state systems are struggling to ensure basic services for children and young people, including education, vocational training, and livelihood opportunities. This perceived and actual lack of opportunities is compounding pre-existing social, political, and economic tensions that have re-asserted themselves in the post-ISIL age, most notably in large-scale civil protests in the final quarter of 2019 that saw hundreds of thousands of Iraqis take to the streets. In early November, the Prime Minister and

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his Cabinet resigned; discussions on forming a new Government were ongoing as of December.

Uncertain political circumstances at national level were reflected at the local level. In 2019, a decision by local authorities to close IDP camps in Ninewa without prior discussion with other actors caused disorganized movement of over 30,100 households (181,100 individuals, of which 377,400 children) from north-western Ninewa to Anbar, Kirkuk, and Salah al Din. Movements raised concerns about safety of children and families being returned to areas where pockets of active armed conflict remain. UNICEF, with UNOCHA and humanitarian partners, adjusted programming to ensure services were started or scaled up in new locations.

Also in the year, political insecurity in the wider region continued to impact Iraq. In October 2019, departure of U.S. military forces from North East Syria and subsequent armed action by the Government of Turkey caused an increase in new refugee arrivals. By end-December, more than 19,000 Syrians – half of them children – had crossed the informal border near Sahela, northern Iraq. As of December, partners were adjusting Syrian refugee response planning for 2020 to ensure adequate services for new arrivals are budgeted for and integrated into existing plans.

More broadly, national ability to respond to risk is weak, and Iraq's children continue to be at risk of environmental, social, and political shocks. Unusually heavy rains in Iraq resulted in floods in April and May – flooding in Missan, southern Iraq, left over 100,000 people without clean water and sanitation. In May, crop fires affected agricultural areas in at least 11 out of Iraq's 18 governorates, with heavy rainfall contributing to greater than average combustible fuel in fields. Further, there remains a notable risk of earthquakes – since 2017, Iraq has seen seismic events of varying strengths, up to 6.3 on the Richter scale, mainly along the north-eastern border with Turkey and Iran. While flooding, earthquake, and fire damage has been relatively limited, Iraq does not have coherent preparedness or response capacity for the range of environmental challenges it faces; and there remain associated risks to children and young people.

UNICEF remains committed to risk-informed programming as part of humanitarian response, as well as longer-term capacity development under its 2020 to 2024 Country Programme of Cooperation, the UNSDCF, and Agenda 2030. The UNSDCF, also covering 2020 to 2024, emphasizes increased UN cooperation through not only joint planning and monitoring, but through increased joint programmes, aiming to leverage a combined advantage to support positive, accelerated change for Iraq's women, young people, and children.

### Major contributions and drivers of results

UNICEF programming works to integrate and support a 'life course' approach to programming that addresses the needs of the whole child. After MICS-2018 data indicated a stagnation in vaccination coverage in the country, significant efforts have been made in 2019 to support improved vaccination coverage for children in Iraq through systems building and analysis interventions. In 2019, Iraq was the first country in the world to conduct an Effective Vaccine Management (EVM) assessment using the '2.0 version' World Health Organisation (WHO) tool. This was undertaken by the Ministry of Health (MoH) with UNICEF and WHO support. This has enabled development and costing of a continuous Improvement Plan (cIP), covering 2020 to 2022, which identifies roles and responsibilities for improvement at all supply chain levels. A national Bottleneck Analysis workshop in March 2019 identified barriers facing 30 low-performing districts in six governorates (Anbar, Kirkuk, Najaf, Ninewa, Qadissiya and Thi Qar) using the WHO standard tool. This was followed up by district-level analysis workshops, with financial and technical support by UNICEF and WHO, to develop costed action plans; as of December 2019, implementation of plans has started, with encouraging results. To ensure uninterrupted availability of pre-qualified vaccines at competitive prices, UNICEF Iraq and its Global Supply Division supported procurement services and, jointly with WHO and the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group, supported adjustment of the national routine immunization schedule to suit country requirements and resource availability; these efforts are expected to assist in cost-savings of more than US\$70 million dollars per year, freeing resources to be re-directed to other essential health and nutrition services. Further, UNICEF supported the MoH to introduce mobile vaccine arrival (VAR) reports; this helped enhance quality of supply chain system. UNICEF and John Hopkins University (JHU) supported a 'cost of vaccinating a child' study in 2019; the report is under preparation and will be ready in 2020. Despite outbreaks of measles in previous years, including 2018, there has been no outbreak in Iraq in 2019 either for measles or other vaccine-preventable diseases.

As part of health system strengthening, UNICEF supported the MoH to introduce a global online tool called Equitable Impact Sensitive Tool (EQUIST). A total of 30 MoH and Ministry of Planning (MoP) staff (five females) completed a seven-day workshop, facilitated by UNICEF global experts. EQUIST seeks to health policy-makers and program managers to make better-informed and targeted decisions. In support to newborn nutrition, an official Ministerial Order was issued placing financial penalties on local suppliers in case of any violations of the Code of Marketing for Breastmilk Substitutes.

In addition, UNICEF continued to support health and nutrition services delivery as part of humanitarian programming. In the year, UNICEF alongside WHO and the MoH in federal Iraq and the KRI, contributed to the vaccination of more than 264,000 IDP and Syrian refugee children under one year old (134,600 girls) against measles, and vaccination of more than

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1.2 million children under five (612,000 girls) in conflict-affected areas and in Syrian refugee camps against polio. Over 6,600 newborn babies in camps (3,300 girls) benefitted from newborn services delivered by trained healthcare workers, and 81,800 children (41,700 girls) were monitored for growth.

A key highlight of system building was the completion of the first ever National Learning Assessment (NLA), undertaken by the Ministry of Education (MoE) with technical and financial support from UNICEF, in the federal and Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and focusing on maths and sciences. An analytical report is under preparation as of December 2019 and will guide improvements to the education system in 2020 and beyond. As a result of the full engagement of the MoE, the process has been institutionalized – a fully-capacitated core team now exists in the MoE, to lead and manage similar assessments in future.

As part of further capacity development UNICEF, with technical support from Cambridge Education, is working closely with the MoE and relevant Directorates of Education (DoE) to develop Education Sector Plans in 11 (of out Iraq's 18) Governorates. This is in line with the Government's stated goal to move towards greater decentralization of authorities. UNICEF and UNESCO continue to work closely to support the Government; in 2019, the Government requested UNICEF, the World Bank and UNESCO support for development of an updated National Education Strategy (NES) 2020-2030 to align with SDGs; for this, technical support is being provided by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). Efforts to support establishment of a functional Education Management Information System (EMIS) expanded in the KRI through the 'e-Perwerde', a locally-developed EMIS system piloted in over 700 schools with support from UNICEF. The KRG has informed UNICEF it will expand the system to 4,000 schools through its own direct funding – this is a clear indication of national ownership over, and full buy-in to, the system and of its relevance in the local context.

The School Based Management (SBM) programme was expanded to 306 additional schools in 2019, with more than 1,463 schools countrywide now using the approach. Interventions benefitted 123,234 children (50,148 girls). In 2019, UNICEF undertook a review of the SBM programme, and will integrate key recommendations for its improvement for the next phase. UNICEF advocacy to integrate Life Skills Education in Iraqi education systems continued; as of December 2019, the KRG MoE has developed a curriculum, textbooks and teacher guidebooks covering Grades 1-9. Rollout started in 200 pilot schools through a cascade training of teachers; this will continue into 2020. Progress was also made with the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee (PMAC) related to the development of an integrated Early Childhood Development Strategy.

Humanitarian support continued for displaced, returnee, and refugee children in the year. Through UNICEF financial and technical support to school rehabilitation provision of learning spaces, and other interventions, nearly 161,200 children (80,800 girls) accessed formal or non-formal education (NFE) opportunities. Educational supplies were delivered for over 272,000 children (121,200 girls), and over 4,600 teachers (1,975 females) completed trainings on topics including updated pedagogy, Education in Emergencies (EiE), and identifying and supporting students experiencing psychosocial distress. Sustained Education Cluster advocacy resulted in an increased MoE commitment to pay incentives for teachers on 'volunteer' contracts, including teachers working in Syrian refugee schools, from the start of the 2019 to 2021 academic year. However there remain challenges; despite advocacy, Ninewa authorities could not deploy the minimum required teachers. UNICEF extended support on an exceptional basis to hire 345 volunteer teachers (65 female) helping keep 29,065 children learning in 25 formal schools in IDP camps until the end of the 2018-2019 academic year. In the year services in IDP camps were disrupted due to short-notice closure and consolidation.

As of 2019, the legal and policy framework for child protection and prevention and response to GBV in Iraq has continued to improve, although there remain legislative gaps. UNICEF supported legislative review of the rights of children, using its convening power to engage stakeholders working on legal reform to collaborate in the child law process, facilitate consultations, and build consensus on the need for a new Child Rights Law. UNICEF supported the of the framework for review of the law in line with the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child. Review revealed gaps between domestic laws and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and made recommendations to address gaps. Efforts built on the 2017 milestone of the first ever National Child Protection Policy (2017) and in 2019., the review of domestic child-related laws was completed at federal and KRI levels and drafting of the new KRI Child Rights Law began.

Iraq's justice system is becoming increasingly child-friendly, and better aligned with international standards. Use of diversion and alternatives to detention have increased; from 2019 figures, 74 per cent of children in conflict with the law were diverted or given alternatives to detention, and as of November 2019, more than 1,240 children were in pre- or post-trial detention representing a 45 per cent reduction against UNICEF Iraq's baseline. Finally, as part improving child-friendly systems in a sustainable manner, UNICEF trained 'master trainers' to lead integration of child-focused response into law enforcement, security, and justice sector workforce programmes; in total more than 4,250 individuals (2,180 female) across these sectors were trained in 2019.

UNICEF's significant role in child protection and GBV humanitarian response continued, with UNICEF-supported partners contributing 71 per cent of IDP Child Protection Sub-Cluster (CPSC) response, and 58 per cent of Syrian refugee child protection response in 2019. Nearly 209,000 children (98,500 girls) accessed child protection services aimed at improving

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their safety, well-being and resilience while over 708,100 children and adults took part in preventive interventions aimed at addressing social norms that perpetuate violence against children and women. Almost 327,000 individuals, including 255,800 children, participated in activities delivering life-saving messages aimed at preventing exposure to explosive hazards.

The Iraq Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism continued to support timely and accurate reports on grave violations of children's rights in conflict, helping to inform programming and advocacy. As of 2016, verification rate stood at 59 per cent, with a target of 75 per cent by end-2019; as of end-2019, the actual verification rate 84 per cent. Improvements were supported by a strengthened monitoring and reporting technical working group. UNICEF has also partnered with local organizations to support young people associated with armed actors to reintegrate through a Community-Based Reintegration and Security (CBRS) programme. The programme supported 400 adolescents and youth (128 females); among them 100 boys formerly associated with armed actors. UNICEF monitoring post-intervention confirmed that, more than six months after the end of the project, 100 per cent of these 100 boys remained disengaged from armed actors.

Service delivery to marginalized and vulnerable communities has been prioritized to ensure availability of safely managed water and sanitation, with progress made towards fully safely-managed (based on MICS-VI 2018, results of safely managed water and sanitation are respectively 42 per cent and 25 per cent while benchmarks are respectively 39.2 per cent and 23.6 per cent). In 2019, as part of systems-strengthening efforts, more than 250 local authority staff (127 female) involved in water safety have been trained on water quality monitoring, Water Safety Planning (WSP) principles and approaches, and International Standardization Operation (ISO) related to water quality. Of these, 78 senior technical staff (24 female) were trained on the WASH Bottleneck Analysis Tool (BAT), which is used to analyse constraints and develop costed action plans.

In support of the Government of Iraq's decentralization efforts, in 2019 UNICEF has prioritised sub-national capacity building, using entry point of Water Safety Planning (WSP) focusing on community-based water and sanitation interventions. UNICEF also supported establishment of a new online digitalized system comprised of a 'smart' water meter, online billing system, and digitalization of Water Laboratory System through procurement and delivery of IT equipment, and high quality and harmonized laboratory equipment for water testing and sampling, supporting the Mayoralty of Baghdad Central Laboratory and the Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) with standardised equipment for water quality monitoring. This is helping to support a stronger water supply quality assurance system for over 10 million inhabitants in Baghdad and Kirkuk Cities as of end-2019.

In 2019, 55 per cent of the UNICEF humanitarian WASH services targeted in-camp IDPs; however, as the number of camps decreased during the year, UNICEF underachieved water supply targets (reaching 313,800 IDPs in UNICEF-supported camps). Small-scale UNICEF support (hygiene kits, bottled water, water pipes, pre-fabricated latrines/showers) reached 3,719 flood-affected families in Missan and Salah al Din in April and May. As part of efforts to ensure re-start of basic services in return areas, UNICEF upgraded 33 water supply systems in Ninewa, Anbar, Kirkuk and Salah al Din. Where possible, sustainability and environmental concerns were considered – an example is the UNICEF-supported water supply system in Sheikhan, Ninewa, which includes solar panning to support water pumping. In the year UNICEF provided financial support and technical oversight of rehabilitation of WASH facilities in 250 schools in six governorates (Ninewa, Dahuk, Salah al Din, Anbar, Kirkuk, and Baghdad), improving access for more than 128,100 children (68,600 girls). Support to WASH in health facilities included rehabilitation works in 61 health centres and 2 hospitals in four governorates (Ninewa, Dahuk, Anbar, Salah al Din) improving access for an estimated 1.15 million people (589,400 females) living in catchment areas. In five governorates (Anbar, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Sulaymaniyah) UNICEF supported 264,554 individuals (at least 124,340 children) to access hygiene information or supplies.

UNICEF provided technical support to review the Social Protection law to further enhance its child focus and shock responsiveness; at end-2019, the law is awaiting the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs' approval. UNICEF assisted MOLSA to install firewall security for the main Management Information System (MIS), covering 1.2 million households, and trained staff on maintenance. UNICEF continued support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) to enhance the child-focus of the social safety net. In 2019, UNICEF and the World Bank supported continued implementation of a pilot Incentivized Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) pilot offering cash 'top-ups' to poor families with children and pregnant women in support of health and education outcomes. UNICEF continued humanitarian cash assistance that reached 5,605 children (2,587 girls) to remove financial barriers to school enrolment and retention among vulnerable IDP, refugee and returnee children; post-distribution monitoring revealed a majority (98 per cent) of children at risk of drop-out continued their education; however, due to lack of funding, UNICEF-supported humanitarian cash assistance ended in May 2019.

In the year UNICEF, with UNESCWA and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), supported the Ministry of Planning (MoP) to strengthen routine measurement of child poverty; this has included supporting development of a national Multi-dimensional Poverty Index. In 2019, two consultations with line ministries and Parliament Members

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developed methodologies and identified policy entry points to reduce child poverty. The Central Statistical Organization (CSO) and Kurdistan Region Statics Office (KRSO) participated in training on calculation and analysis of multi-dimensional poverty. An advocacy plan is in place to continue engagement with senior decision makers, and work will continue into 2020.

Since 2018, UNICEF has been piloting an innovative evidence generation approach using mobile data, satellite imageries and crop mapping to verify information on child poverty; this is being done in collaboration with WFP, UNDP, Zain Mobile Telecommunication, and the Ministry of Planning (MoP). The model was built using socio-economic indicators and maternal mortality data, and results will be validated against the Iraq Food Security Survey (2016) and MICS-6 (2018). The MoP will lead a dissemination event to release final results.

Adolescent development and participation programming with the federal and KRG Ministries of Youth and Sport UNICEF in partnership contributed to ensure over 65,000 young people (31,900 girls) from 13 new governorates accessed a holistic package of age and gender-responsive multi-sectoral services supporting social cohesion through participation in initiatives across Iraq. This targeted most-vulnerable girls and boys, including those out of school, those with disabilities, young people of mixed religious and ethnic backgrounds and young people who have been affected by lack of access to education, job opportunities. 2019 saw a significant acceleration of engagement and co-creation with young people across sectors and programs. Specifically, young people identified and addressed issues affecting them and their communities and served as community volunteers and promoted social awareness on key UNICEF outcome areas, such as climate change, child protection concerns, waste collection and recycling across the country. Other examples were seen the 2019 Back to Learning campaign, and events promoting the 30th Anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

UNICEF, with UNFPA, provided financial and technical support to the MoP CSO and (KRSO) to run a national adolescent and youth survey. This included four training sessions for field staff on quantitative data collection; UNICEF support was instrumental in covering the cost of data collection in 15 of Iraq's 18 governorates. As of 2019, the analytical report is under way. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) evolved, with 10 NGO partners engaged as of end-2019 – a total of 175 young researchers (88 female) collected research on aspirations of young people, well-being, and young people's positive contributions. U-Report was launched successfully in May 2019, and now serves as a social messaging platform for young people and other community members, to strengthen citizen engagement. A private sector partnership with the Korek telecommunications company in the KRI, is supporting free SMS and promotion activities – as of end-2019, over 20,000 U-Reporters are enrolled on the platform, and nine polls were produced on issues such as youth aspirations, mental health, the rights of children, online/media safety, and substance abuse.

In 2019 the UNICEF-led WASH and Education Clusters, Child Protection Sub-Cluster and Nutrition Working Group (as part of the wider Health Cluster led by WHO) continued to actively track the evolving humanitarian situation and system-wide emergency preparedness and response capacity in Iraq. As in 2018, focus has continued related to strengthening national counterpart involvement in coordination, aiming to transition to sectoral coordination by end-2020. As a step towards this, after significant advocacy in 2018 and 2019, Education Cluster partners, led by UNICEF, successfully advocated for Government to take over incentive payment for teachers and support staff in IDP and refugee schools from the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year.

Multi-sectoral integrated response continued at Cluster level, through work to integrate psychosocial support in learning spaces and updating the Terms of Reference and actions plans under the joint Task Force for cholera prevention. The Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) Consortium, co-led by UNICEF and the World Food Programme with the UN Populations Fund (UNFPA) had planned that the rapid response function would be handed over to government in 2019, alongside integrated capacity development; the plan included an initial feasibility study to review government counterpart capacity and identify the most likely department, unit, or committee to take the lead in the function; however, recruitment for the dedicated consultant was slower than anticipated, and assessment findings were presented to counterparts only in December 2019. Due to this, the Consortium plans to maintain a 'back up' RRM capacity in 2020 while plans for capacity development are finalized, also to allow integration with wider UN and development partners' efforts under the UNSDCF.

Risk-informed emergency preparedness was strengthened through a dedicated UNICEF workshop on risk-informed programming in early 2019, based on existing Emergency Preparedness Platform (EPP) scenarios: armed conflict, natural disaster, election-related violence and epidemics. At the end of 2019, the office decided to review the EPP to include civil unrest, acknowledging the shifting context in central and southern Iraq in the final quarter of the year. Accountability to affected populations is a central principle of UNICEF humanitarian action, and feedback is enabled in Iraq through the Iraq IDP hotline, run by United Nations partners, with information shared to UNICEF via the Cluster system, through implementing partners and field monitoring missions, as well as through UNICEF-supported structures such as the WASH Service Centres.

Gender-sensitive programming was supported by a Gender Programmatic Review (GPR) in late December 2018. The GPR detailed recommendations by sector, which UNICEF is taking forward to improve alignment with, and contribution to, the

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GAP 2018 to 2021. Recommendations related to improving availability of gender-disaggregated data for planning purposes, development of plans to focus on identified problematic areas – for example, a targeted plan for adolescent health and nutrition, or malnourishment in girl children – as well as to leverage the development of ongoing systems, processes, or tools, such as the Education Management Information System (EMIS) to support analysis and advocacy on persistent issues, such as low rates of girls' transition from primary to secondary education in certain areas of the country, or to ensure that a gender-focus is adequately maintained in ongoing efforts related to multi-dimensional poverty measurement. Undercutting all of these efforts is need to consistently and coherently work on the social norms and beliefs that negatively affect the participation of girls, boys, women, and men in various areas of personal and professional life. In addition, a dedicated workshop for UNICEF staff took place in November 2019, bringing UNICEF Headquarters gender experts to focus on gender responsive and gender sensitive Education, but also on the intersection of Child Protection, GBV prevention and response, Social Policy, and Health programming as relevant areas to support girls' and boys' full access to their rights.

UNICEF recognizes the importance of non-discrimination in inter-sectoral work on disability, gender-related, and other forms of discrimination. UNICEF used accessible classrooms in schools and sensitized teachers on inclusive education, needs identification, and referral of children with specialized needs. Inclusive WASH services for people with disabilities are part of UNICEF interventions at camp level, with accessible models for latrines and showers provided. Wherever possible, WASH facilities in schools included separate latrines for children with disabilities. Child Protection interventions focused on inclusive access to psychosocial and other support services by making sites disability-friendly. Case management services worked to reduce barriers to access, including those caused by disability. UNICEF and relevant partners also promoted interventions that respond to specific needs of adolescents with disabilities.

### Lessons Learned and Innovations

In 2019 UNICEF built on the comparative stability in Iraq to streamline partnerships and processes, consolidate gains, identify areas for improvement in 2020 and beyond, and identify joint UN programming opportunities under the upcoming UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (SDCF).

As in previous years, prolonged political uncertainty continued with several key UNICEF counterpart line Ministries, such as Education, remaining without a Minister until well into 2019. Timeframes for UNICEF interventions had to be lengthened to allow newly-formed governments at federal and Kurdistan levels to become active. Mass civil protests from October 2019 led to the resignation of the federal Cabinet; and, as of end-2019, UNICEF anticipates similar political uncertainty in 2020. To some degree, UNICEF has been able to mitigate delays by focusing on relationship-building and coordination at decentralized levels with Governors or Directors-General. This has proven effective, although there remain areas - for example Ninewa where in 2019 three Education Directors-General were in post - where even decentralized efforts were slow. UNICEF continued targeted capacity development interventions for technical government staff, to support Government constitutional provisions towards decentralization of administrative and financial authorities (Articles 121 and 122) as well as enhance local authority service delivery capacities in line with good practices and international standards.

In 2019, UNICEF increased life course- and convergence-focused programming. Parenting skills programmes, delivered by Child Protection Sub-Cluster and government social workers, worked to increase parents and caregivers' knowledge of positive discipline techniques, increase inter-generational communication, and contribute to reducing violence against children and women in the home; trainings for teachers and education staff focused on pedagogical skills to reduce corporal punishment, enhance learner-centered approaches, and improve school staff's ability to identify, manage, and refer children who are experiencing psychosocial distress or child protection issues at school or at home. Iraqi young people's energy for social change has been a driving force; in 2019; in UNICEF-supported programmes, youth groups have delivered key health, hygiene, and 'Back to School' messaging in multiple parts of the country, as well as engaging through social media, such as Facebook, and through the newly-rolled out 'U-Report' platform that amplifies young people's voices and supports them to engage on civic issues

U-Report is one example of an innovative platform newly-introduced to Iraq in 2019. Further examples include pilot efforts to use mobile data to triangulate and validate measures of child poverty – the final report is available, and technical consultation with government partners took place in Oxford, U.K., in late 2019, as part of overall efforts to improve understanding of, and capacities to address, multi-dimensional child poverty through application of technology. Digitalization of Iraq's water laboratory system has been ongoing in 2019, alongside installation of 'smart' water meters that are now supporting an estimated 9,500 users in Baghdad to access real-time information about their water use and water losses.

Recent years' newly-generated evidence continues to bolster UNICEF work in Iraq. In addition to the MICS-VI (2018), which helped inform 2019 programming and 2024 to 2024 planning, in 2018 a pilot Community Based Reintegration

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Strategy (CBRS) was designed based on evidence from a 'Push and Pull Factors' study (2017) on child recruitment by armed groups. The pilot took place in two districts where recruitment had been found to be high, and completed in April 2019; in late 2019, UNICEF noted all 100 boys (project participants) previously associated with armed actors remained disengaged (100 per cent), indicating the evidence-informed design had been relevant and effective. Evidence on multi-dimensional child poverty continued to pave the way for stronger child-focused government engagement including via the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). Gender-sensitive programming was supported by a Gender Programmatic Review (GPR) in late December 2018. The GPR detailed recommendations by sector, which UNICEF is taking forward to improve alignment with, and contribution to, the GAP.

Funding constraints remained for Syrian refugee response, similarly to previous years; UNICEF adapted programming strategies to work through government partners wherever possible, supporting more cost-effective programming and systems-building as part of humanitarian-development nexus efforts. UNICEF continued to advocate with resource partners for funding based on vulnerability, rather than specific populations, and appreciates key resource partners, such as Germany, who have agreed that Syrian refugee and IDP children can be supported through its funding, as well as flexible multi-year contributions from the Government of Denmark and via UNICEF National Committees from Germany, Switzerland, and France under global thematic Humanitarian, Education, Child Protection, and WASH funding pools. UNICEF Iraq WASH programming was subject to a dedicated Humanitarian Action Review (HAR) in September 2019, in coordination with government, led by UNICEF and Global WASH Cluster experts. The HAR reviewed quality of WASH programming and coordination following recent years' response to large-scale and complex emergency. The team produced several recommendations; one key and timely observation was related to transition from Cluster coordination to a more sustainable sector-led mechanism – this is already underway in certain locations, such as Dahuk Governorate, but will be a central focus in 2020 for WASH but also for other UNICEF-led Clusters and Sub-Clusters (Education and Child Protection).

Despite progress, there remains room for improvement in life-cycle based, convergent programming for children and young people. In late 2019, UNICEF drilled down on cross-cutting themes for the new programme cycle 2020 to 2024. This forms a key push towards more meaningful and consistent integration and will also inform inter-sectoral and external communication efforts across the broad range of UNICEF federal and regional line Ministries, Directorates, governorate-level counterparts, as well as Iraqi and international media and public. The key areas agreed as relevant for children in Iraq, and in which UNICEF has a unique comparative advantage supported by its global mandate and country-level expertise are 1) Early Childhood Development (ECD), 2) Adolescent Development and 3) Social Norms and Behaviour Change. Of these, ECD interventions exist in UNICEF's Education, Child Protection, and Health and Nutrition programming, but synergies have not been fully leveraged – in 2020, UNICEF will use the opportunity of the five-year ECD Strategy and costed action plan being developed under the Prime Ministerial Advisory Committee to better define interlinkages and contributions. For Adolescent Development, momentum will be carried forward to 2020, building on the recently-finalized UNICEF Iraq Second Decade Strategy. Operationally, the office is considering a standard 'youth engagement' clause in NGO partnership documents, as well as leveraging the country's existing Youth Advisory Group, UNICEF's 'Friends of UNICEF' group, and a recently-finalised UNICEF WASH youth-focused behaviour change action plan, as clear entry points. This would be in addition to continuing the UNICEF Iraq internship programme (inaugurated in 2019) to develop young Iraqi talent in areas relevant to UNICEF programming for children. Finally, related to Social Norms, UNICEF recognized a need to strengthen and better strategize this work noting that, although critical, it can also be labour-intensive and costly. During the comprehensive review of the UNICEF Iraq human resources structure for 2020 to 2024, it was agreed a dedicated international expert would be brought on board to lead Communication for Development (C4D) behaviour change communication coordination. Recruitment will take place in early 2020