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UNICEF MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGIONAL OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT 2018

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The UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO) Annual Report 2018 covers the first year of implementation of the Regional Office Management Plan (ROMP), 2018–2021.

In 2018, the regional office supported all offices in the region to achieve significant results for children around the three core functions identified in the ROMP (enhancing programming excellence; generating, promoting and leveraging public goods; and strengthening organizational management effectiveness and efficiency), in the cross-cutting areas of work, and through the Whole of Syria humanitarian programme for the Syrian Arab Republic.

PART 1: Situation Update and Regional Trends

In 2018, large-scale protracted crises continued to generate significant humanitarian needs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where conflict affected 36 million children.¹ MENA is home to only 6 per cent of the world's population, but accounts for 40 per cent of the global population that requires aid, the highest concentration of people affected by conflict or disaster in the world.² Key developments in 2018 have included the recovery and reconstruction efforts in Iraq after the improved security situation, and the economic and social reforms undertaken in several countries in the region, specifically Egypt and Saudi Arabia³.

Economic Developments

The World Bank estimated that economic growth in the MENA region reached 1.7 percent in 2018 rebounding from a sharp deceleration in 2017. Such improvement is mainly due to increased oil production and eased fiscal stance in the Gulf Cooperation Countries, as well as economic growth among oil importers supported by policy reforms. Economic growth is forecast to improve modestly in 2019, reaching an average of 1.9 per cent in 2019 and 2.7 in 2020.⁴ Yet, this is well below the level required to bring about the accelerated progress needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for children, particularly given the region's demographic changes and the relatively short window of opportunity available to realize a demographic dividend.⁵ It will not be enough either to lift the estimated 29 million children (one in four) facing acute poverty as reported in the Multidimensional Poverty Report covering 11 Arab countries published in January 2018⁶.

A recently completed analysis⁷ by MENARO on social sector expenditure trends in health, education and social protection shows a worrying decline in education expenditure as percentage of GDP particularly in oil-poor countries, and yearly high fluctuations in social protection expenditures. Most countries have continued to run a fiscal deficit, despite the high prevalence of austerity programmes.⁸ While the gradual recovery of the price of oil has lightened the burden on oil-producing countries, importers are experiencing a negative impact on their fiscal balance. Austerity programmes have led to protests in several countries this year, notably Jordan and Tunisia. New sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran have provoked economic and fiscal crises. Sudan, too, is facing challenging economic circumstances triggered by various internal and external developments, while the reform programme in Egypt is showing early results. Further reforms envisioned by a number of countries in the region are likely to spark further domestic social and political tensions in 2019. It will be critical for MENARO to monitor the impact of these reforms on children and families and to work with governments to scale up social protection measures.

¹ The number of people in need, including children, in 2018 was calculated based on 2018 UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children appeals and updated Syrian refugee numbers drawn from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data portal, accessed 4 November 2018.

² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Global Humanitarian Overview 2018: <https://interactive.unocha.org/publication/globalhumanitarianoverview/#> accessed 17 December 2018.

³ World Bank, Annual Report 2018, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/630671538158537244/The-World-Bank-Annual-Report-2018>

⁴ Global Economic Prospects, World Bank, January 2019-<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31066>

⁵ UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO), *MENA Generation 2030*, forthcoming.

⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/child-poverty-arab-states>

⁷ Public Finance for Children (PF4C): Comprehensive Analysis of status quo and trends in Middle East and North Africa (MENA Countries

⁸ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2017-2018*, 2018, https://www.unb.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/survey-economic-social-development-arab-region-2017-2018-english_0.pdf

Gender inequality continues to severely curtail economic growth in the region. Low female labour force participation rates have resulted in an underutilization of human capital.⁹ There is a great potential to unlock a gender dividend if a larger share of women had the opportunity to participate in their economies.¹⁰ The combination of a highly educated female population with widespread adoption of digital and mobile technologies provides a unique opportunity to a number of economies in the region.¹¹

Humanitarian Context

The conflicts in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, volatility in Libya and upsurges of violence in Iraq and the State of Palestine continue to expose children to extreme risks, including death, injury and displacement, as well as forced recruitment into armed groups and child marriage. The situation is exacerbated by natural disasters and infectious disease outbreaks, including in Djibouti and Sudan, growing economic and gender inequality and high rates of youth unemployment and poverty in several countries. In countries witnessing conflict, civilian lives and key facilities—including for water, power, health and education—have been subject to daily attacks, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, depriving already vulnerable people of access to their most basic needs. As a result, more than 71.3 million vulnerable people, including almost 36 million children, required humanitarian assistance in 2018 in the MENA region.¹²

As family resources wane, children have been forced into negative coping strategies such as child labour, child marriage and recruitment into armed forces and groups. In the region, 14 million children aged 5-14 years old are out-of-school, and 7.6 million children currently in school, are at risk of dropping out. Around 17 per cent of adolescents (aged 12-14) and an estimated 35 per cent of youth (aged 15-18) in MENA are not in school, most of them living in countries affected by crises.¹³ In the Syrian Arab Republic, years of conflict have left 3.3 million children exposed to explosive hazards.¹⁴ The Syrian refugee crisis remains the largest displacement crisis in the world, with over 5.6 million registered refugees, including over 2.5 million children, living in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.¹⁵ Among Syrian refugees, women, girls, boys, adolescents, youth, the elderly, unaccompanied and separated children and persons with disabilities are the most at risk. In Yemen, where the response has been challenged by the collapsing health system, millions are facing acute food insecurity. The country is confronting one of the largest cholera outbreaks on record, and nearly half a million children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition. In Iraq, as of 15 December, over 1.86 million Iraqis, including over 900,000 children, remained internally displaced. More than half, 54 per cent, have been displaced for more than three years.¹⁶

The shrinking humanitarian space and donor fatigue and restrictions have been additional burdens that affect the delivery of humanitarian aid to people and children in need.

⁹ Purfield, C. et al., 'Opportunity for All: Promoting Growth and Inclusiveness in the Middle East and North Africa', International Monetary Fund, July 2018.

¹⁰ UNICEF MENARO, *MENA Generation 2030*, forthcoming.

¹¹ World Bank, *MENA Economic Monitor*, October 2018.

¹² People and children in need numbers are based on UNICEF's 2018 Humanitarian Action for Children appeals for the Middle East and North Africa region.

¹³ UNICEF Out-of-School Children and Generation 2030.

¹⁴ UNICEF, 'Disabled Children, Enabled Futures: Seven years of war in Syria - facts and figures', UNICEF, March 2018.

¹⁵ UNICEF, Year-end Syria crisis Humanitarian Situation Report, December 2018.

¹⁶ UNICEF, Year-end Iraq Humanitarian Situation Report, December 2018.

Child Protection

Concerns about the child rights agenda in the region is expanding in both complexity and scale. The United Nations continued to document grave child rights violations in conflict-affected countries. As highlighted in the 16 May 2018 Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (A/72/865–S/2018/465), in 2017, the impact of conflict on children was especially high. The number of verified cases of the recruitment and use of children persisted at alarming levels: Syrian Arab Republic (961), Yemen (842) and Iraq (523). After Afghanistan, globally the highest number of verified casualties were recorded in Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic, with 1,316 and 1,271 cases respectively, whereas in Iraq spikes of violence led to a substantial increase in the number of child casualties (717). In the Syrian Arab Republic, 24 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence were verified, in Iraq, nine cases were verified, and additional cases were documented in Libya.

High levels of violence at home: A UNICEF report revealed that 85 per cent of children aged 2–14 years in the region experience violent discipline at home.¹⁷ In MENA, around 106 million (more than 8 in 10) children aged 2 to 14 are regularly subjected to violent discipline at home; 87 million (around 7 in 10) are punished by physical means, although only 1 in 4 caregivers think it a necessary form of discipline. Violence at home also cuts the humanitarian to development divide. Some countries such as Egypt and Tunisia have among the highest levels of violent discipline in the world. Further, only three countries (Egypt, State of Palestine and Tunisia) have adopted legislation that fully prohibits the use of corporal punishment against children, meaning that of the 172 million children and adolescents under 18 in the region, there are around 127 million without full legal protection.

Harmful social practices: Female genital mutilation (FGM) remains prevalent in several countries in the region. The latest data indicate that some of the highest FGM prevalence globally are among girls and women aged 15–49 in Djibouti¹⁸ (93 per cent), Egypt¹⁹ and Sudan,²⁰ (both 87 per cent). The Iraq Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2018 shows that the national prevalence rate of FGM for girls and women is around 7 per cent but rises to 38 per cent in the Kurdistan region.

Child marriage: MENA is home to nearly 40 million child brides, a number that includes women who were first married in childhood.²¹ Child marriage has become less common in the region over the past 25 years, with the proportion of children getting married dropping from 1 in 3, to 1 in 5 from 1990 to 2015. Yet the early progress during that period slowed in the past decade. The current rate of progress will be insufficient to meet the SDG target of eliminating child marriage by 2030. Regionally, the prevalence of child marriage varies from a high of 1 in 3 in the Sudan and Yemen to a low of 1 in 50 in Tunisia. Child brides are more likely to live in rural areas, come from poor households and have low levels of education.

Detention of children in contact with the law: There has been an alarming rate of security and immigration detention of children in the region. In Israel and the State of Palestine, many children continued to be arrested and detained; by the end of December 2017 at least 352

¹⁷ UNICEF HQ with UNICEF MENARO, A Profile of Violence against Children and Adolescents in the Middle East and North Africa, published

¹⁸ Djibouti MICS 2006

¹⁹ Egypt DHS 2015

²⁰ Sudan MICS 2014

²¹ UNICEF, A Profile of Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa, UNICEF, New York, 2018

children had been detained.²² In Libya, children as young as 10 years old have been deprived of their liberty and used in prisoner exchanges by parties to the conflict. In the Syrian Arab Republic, 72 children were detained by government forces (46 boys, 26 girls; some aged as young as 10) for their alleged association with armed groups.²³ The juvenile death penalty is still practiced in four countries, while, on average, the minimum age of criminal responsibility is low. Lebanon has the lowest minimum age of criminal responsibility (age 7), followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (age 9) and Algeria (age 10).

Millions of children uprooted: Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and migrants continued to face heightened protection risks. By December 2018, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon were still hosting over two million Syrian refugees, and there were over six million IDPs in the Syrian Arab Republic and two million in Yemen. The year saw over 117,000 people – 21 per cent of them children – migrate from African countries to Europe through eastern (from Turkey), central (from Libya) and western (mainly from Morocco) routes.²⁴

Adolescents and Youth

The 124.89 million adolescents and youth (10-24 yrs) in MENA provide a promise and a positive energy to lead change for a better future. At the same time, adolescents and youth in the region are facing tremendous challenges to reach their full potential. The MENA region is one of the most dangerous places in the world for adolescents to live - 70% of adolescents who died in 2015 due to collective violence were living in this region.²⁵ Girls are more likely to be out of school than boys, especially as the education level rises. However, when young women make it into secondary school, they have greater chance than young men to staying in school.²⁶ For those children in school, international assessments of learning outcomes show that more than half do not even meet the low benchmark set for mathematics, science and reading.²⁷ By 2030, the countries in the MENA region will face an increase of 25 million (+23%) additional students to be accommodated in the education system - the burden on the national education systems is projected to be highest among adolescent populations at lower and upper secondary education level.²⁸

Youth unemployment (15-24 years) in the MENA region is the highest in the world, with 29.3% in Northern Africa and 22.2% in the Arab States.²⁹ Unemployment among young women is even higher, with about 40.3% in North Africa and 36.5% in the Arab States, despite their relatively higher levels of academic qualifications, and not considering the low female labour force participation in the region. It is estimated that women currently contribute to less than a fifth of GDP in the region, which is the lowest contribution worldwide after India. Due to demographic changes and increasing numbers of adolescents and youth during the next 15

²² United Nations, Children and armed conflict – Report of the Secretary-General, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2018/465&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC

²³ United Nations, Children and armed conflict – Report of the Secretary-General, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2018/465&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC

²⁴ UNHCR portal: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>, accessed 20/12/2018

²⁵ UNICEF. (2017). A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents. MENA Region

²⁶ UNICEF (2018): Out of School Children Initiative – Middle East and North Africa Regional Factsheet 2017

²⁷ IEA (2015): Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS): International Results in Mathematics 2015, International Results in Science 2015; International Results in Mathematics; and previous reports from 2003 and 2007; IEA (2016): Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)

²⁸ Upcoming: UNICEF (2018): MENA Generation 2030 – Investing in children and youth now to take advantage of demographic change; Calculations on youth unemployment and labor force are based on the most recent ILO STAT data; Calculations on youth population are based on UN DESA World Population Prospects, 2017 Revision.

²⁹ ILOSTAT, 2017

years, an additional 39 million (+27%) young people will enter the labor force till 2030 creating additional stress on an already weak economy.³⁰

Climate Change and Water Scarcity

MENA is the world's most water scarce region; it includes the 15 most water-scarce countries in the world. While home to 6 per cent of world's population, the region has access to a mere 2 per cent of the world's renewable fresh water. The total average renewable fresh water per person amounts to as little as 1,200 cubic meters/person/year, around six times less than the worldwide average of 7,000 cubic meters/person/year. If continued, suboptimal water management practices and use in the region will reduce the supply of renewable freshwater to alarming levels in the coming decades. It is predicted that by 2050, two thirds of MENA countries could end up with less than 20 liters per person, per day.

The drought affecting MENA over the past decade is considered to be the worst in the region's history in nearly a millennium.³¹ Climate change is already affecting the region and the predictions for its future effects are dire. It will cause extreme heat to spread across more of the land for longer periods of time, making some regions unlivable and agricultural lands arid. Cities will feel an increasing "heat island" effect and most capital cities in MENA could face four months of exceedingly hot days every year.

The scarce water supply and rising temperatures will increase food insecurity and droughts, contributing to more displacement and tensions in already fragile and conflict-ridden countries.³² This will increase the number of children and women in need of humanitarian assistance and deepen the plight of those already affected by conflict.

³⁰ Upcoming: UNICEF (2018): MENA Generation 2030 – Investing in children and youth now to take advantage of demographic change; Calculations on youth unemployment and labor force are based on the most recent ILO STAT data; Calculations on youth population are based on UN DESA World Population Prospects, 2017 Revision

³¹ Ghassan Hasbani, presentation at the World Economic Forum, 2015.

³² Ibid.

PART 2: Key Results Achieved

The first year of implementation of MENARO's 2018-2021 Regional Office Management Plan (ROMP) reflects an "alignment to core functions" approach with an explicit prioritization of resources to support country offices to more effectively deliver more results for children, through: (1) enhancing programme excellence; (2) generating and disseminating public goods; (3) strengthening organizational management effectiveness and efficiency; and (4) the Whole of Syria regional office-managed response.

Enhancing Programme Excellence

In 2018, explicit focus under this result stream was to prioritize regional office (RO) resources to effectively support country offices (COs) in delivering results for children in an intersectoral way. Multiple entry points were used to increase the demand-focused country support, in particular the request from COs which had identified the need for technical assistance. In addition, the mid-term reviews and the process of country programme document (CPD) formulation were important milestones for integrated strategic support from the RO. The network/regional meetings, which previously were moments in which RO and headquarters (HQ) communicated down to the COs were designed with a bottom-up approach, using a more active co-creation approach to be taken forward in 2019.

Child Protection

Through its focus on strengthening child protection systems to address violence against children, addressing harmful practices and improving justice for children, MENARO made substantive progress advancing cross-sectoral work at the country level towards achievement of Goal 3 of the Strategic Plan, "every child is protected from violence and exploitation" and hence contributing to global progress on SDG 16 "Peace, Justice and Stronger Institutions".

In partnership with the Global Social Services Workforce Alliance, a regional mapping of the social services workforce was initiated for eight countries (Djibouti, Iran, Sudan, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, State of Palestine, Tunisia), and will generate evidence to help make the case for long-term investment in the sector and with each country adopting a road map to strengthen its social service workforce as a key pillar of its work on national systems strengthening. It is expected that this work will have an impact across a number of sectors and ministries at country level.

With support from MENARO, Egypt adopted a multisectoral national strategy to address violence against children, while United Arab Emirates became the first 'pathfinder' country within the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. MENARO established a new partnership with End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT) to complete a stocktaking of available regional data on sexual violence against children.

Under the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)/UNICEF global programmes on child marriage and FGM, social norms and behavioural change programming contributed to the global agenda, especially for child marriage in humanitarian settings. Tools to guide the measurement of social norms/behaviour change are already in use in three countries (Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan), with formative research on child marriage ongoing or scheduled to begin in early 2019.

With UNFPA, UNICEF led the development of the Regional Accountability Framework (RAF) of Action to End Child Marriage in Arab States. The main purpose of the RAF is to bring

together numerous UN agencies, civil society, donors and academia across different sectors around one common strategy and action plan to action these priorities. In 2019, UNICEF and UNFPA will continue to work with partners to monitor the operationalization of the RAF.

MENARO led the first regional initiative on gender-based violence (GBV) risk mitigation and integration in 2018 developed to respond to the need to accelerate UNICEF's institutionalization of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) GBV guidelines across MENA. The aim of this initiative was to build capacity of a cross-sectoral team in country offices, focusing on improving access to safe programming which both contributes to better sector outcomes and GBV risk mitigation. With funding from the US State Department's Bureau of Refugees and Migration, HQ and MENARO worked with Women's Refugee Commission and Columbia University on a project to increase adolescent girls' access to sexual and reproductive health information and services through GBV safe spaces. The baseline information collected in 2018 will be used to strengthen programming and develop innovative, virtual approaches in 2019.

High-level and expert consultations on children affected by armed conflict generated important learning and recommendations for strengthening the efforts across the region. Aiming to enhance the regional capacity to provide a continuum of services for children on the move, and to complement country-specific programming, MENARO, with the funding from the Government of the Netherlands, initiated a new programme aiming to establish cross-border children protection mechanisms.

Adolescent Development and Participation, and HIV

MENARO strategically positioned the adolescent and youth agenda across countries and at the regional level by working with COs to create safe spaces and forums to ensure the voices of the most vulnerable adolescents and youth are listened to and acted upon through cross-cutting advocacy and at-scale programme for adolescents as outlined in the Strategic Plan. This has led to the creation of an evidence base including the identification of solutions in education and employment and strengthened alliances with UN agencies, NGOs and vulnerable adolescents through the existing regional platforms such as UN Inter-Agency Technical Task Team on Young People and UN:NGO team.

Together with Save the Children, UNICEF co-chaired an annual evidence symposium, during which more than 40 young people from countries across the region sit down with 110 regional policymakers, donors, researchers and practitioners to discuss key obstacles faced by adolescents and youth across the region. The youth focused their messages on finding bold solutions that address their socio-economic constraints and enhance the quality and relevance of their education.

MENARO guided COs in the development of adolescent- and youth-responsive emergency preparedness plans. Efforts in increasing focus on adolescent and youth programming within the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan will better inform advocacy and resource mobilization for 2019. Working across sectors in Gaziantep (Turkey) and Jordan, MENARO worked with education, child protection and other sector partners improve their capacity to programme for and with adolescents and youth.

The Voices of Youth Arabic platform continued to expand, with more than 280 blogs from 10 MENA countries posted in 2018. The *MENA Generation 2030* report was instrumental in making a strong investment case for adolescent and youth programming. The publication which will be formally launched in spring 2019, already resulted in generating a momentum for evidence-based policymaking and programming.

In partnership with UNAIDS and WHO, UNFPA, a joint regional publication on HIV and children and pregnant women is being finalized, and the regional Elimination of mother-to-child transmission (eMTCT) validation team revitalized.

MENARO, with partners, established a regional knowledge and dialogue platform for adolescents and youth, and the Regional Adolescent and Youth Advisory Majlis (RAYAM) which engages vulnerable adolescents and youth in regional programming and advocacy.

Health and Nutrition

In 2018, the health and nutrition programme had a sharper focus on achieving results during the first 1,000 days of life, and to adopt the life cycle approach to programming, using integrated and multisectoral interventions. Attention was galvanized towards improving early childhood nutrition and further reducing childhood stunting.

MENARO supported operationalization of Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan, “every child survives and thrives”, and contributed to SDG 2 and 3. In 2018, the Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development, jointly developed by UNICEF with global and regional partners, was introduced in MENA. Together with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF took the lead in convening national governments through multiple strategies both at country well as regional levels.

MENARO supported a robust response to the outbreak of polio in the Syrian Arab Republic. Algeria achieved the status of Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus Elimination and efforts continue in the two remaining MENA countries on the global list of priority countries for elimination with RO technical assistance.

In order to strengthen UNICEF staff capacity across COs, twenty-five CO staff were trained on health systems strengthening approaches and MENARO continued the use of regional networks of public health and nutrition practitioners and regional centres of expertise to take on technical support roles. Global and regional forums involving key partners were increasingly used to ensure quality assurance of country programme implementation.

In humanitarian situations, MENARO supported COs to strengthen their provision of life-saving health and nutrition interventions for large numbers of children and families, supported health systems to prevent their collapse, and helped to rebuild national systems in post-conflict contexts. In countries affected by chronic needs, such as Djibouti, Sudan and Yemen, MENARO continued to collaborate with USAID’s Food for Peace to ensure the scale up and improved quality of treatment of children with severe acute malnutrition. Through its partnerships with USAID, UNICEF continued to support the elimination of iodine deficiency disorders and to ensure sustainability through enhanced monitoring of salt iodization programme.

To contribute to cholera control in high risk countries in MENA and to operationalize the Ending Cholera Global Roadmap to 2030, MENARO facilitated consensus amongst regional stakeholders to launch the Regional Cholera Platform for the Middle East and North Africa/Eastern Mediterranean region, which will become operational in 2019.

Improving the evidence base on the health and nutritional status of children, MENARO assumed leadership of the Regional Working Group for Immunization in GAVI-supported countries (Yemen, Sudan, Djibouti, Syrian Arab Republic); worked together with Lebanon Country Office and partners to establish a regional iodine laboratory in Lebanon; partnered in

collaboration with Yemen Country Office with the World Bank to leverage International Development Association resources for health and nutrition needs in Yemen; and enhanced regional collaboration with World Food Programme (WFP) and WHO on nutrition messaging.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

In line with Goal 4 in the Strategic Plan and SDG 6 “clean water and sanitation”, MENARO advanced a safe and clean environment for children by positioning areas central to survival, including water scarcity and climate change.

UNICEF MENARO also prioritised water scarcity within the wider climate change agenda in its regional partnership and dialogue within the League of Arab States and regional UN agencies and World Bank. The dedicated joint working group identified the following areas for collaboration: a) evidence generation for policy advocacy; b) identification of partnerships and good practices for programming and developing guidance and tools; and c) resource mobilisation for country level initiatives. In addition, MENARO took the opportunity of Mid Term Reviews (MTR), Strategic Moment of Reflection (SMR) and Programme reviews to encourage country offices to integrate the water scarcity dimension in their own programming.

To respond to the diverse needs in the countries including support to reducing the risk of cholera outbreaks, MENARO established an intersectoral task force – including WASH, Health and C4D- focused on providing strategic guidance to COs on fighting cholera. MENARO supported capacity strengthening initiatives for COs, including a training of trainers for government counterparts on the WASH bottleneck analysis tool in Iraq. This resulted in establishing a pool of resource persons in Iraq for rolling out bottleneck analysis in respective governorates. MENARO conducted training on WASH in emergencies, water safety programming and cluster operational leadership, reaching 70 staff total, with a regional pool of master trainers established to replicate the training within and across countries. This will allow the region to further strengthen and professionalize WASH Cluster Coordination capacities and skills across all countries. This has already borne fruit as rolling out took place for Whole of Syria in 2018.

MENARO supported the WASH emergency response through continued quality assurance of various country-level emergency plans and helped to identify surge staff for deployment to countries including the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and Yemen. The establishment of a regional WASH and WASH in Schools network promoted South-South cooperation, leading to cross-fertilization for example in sharing knowledge, adoption of successful models, learning between countries and sharing readymade packages (i.e. national WASH in Schools standards, lessons learned). Water safety programming was piloted in the Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and the State of Palestine.

Public engagement and advocacy for WASH included presentations on work in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen during the Stockholm World Water Week where the opportunity was used to call attention to the life-saving work of WASH action in both countries, which resulted in commitments by senior most government officials; participation in the resource partners meeting on the sidelines of the global WASHNet meeting; and participation in the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development.

Education

MENARO contributes to Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan, “every child learns” and to the achievement of SDG 4 through operationalization of the Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) initiative, bringing together Governments, UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector. The initiative puts learning, employability, active citizenship and personal empowerment at the core of the education agenda.

Strategic results achieved by various COs within the framework of LSCE include the development of quality life skills content; mainstreaming life skills in curriculum reforms (Tunisia and Egypt); creating enabling environments (Libya and Jordan); development of specific life skills modules (Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq) and scaling up multiple pathways to life skills development (Morocco, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia). To inform further LSCE programming, a measurement instrument is being developed in close collaboration with the World Bank, through a pilot involving Egypt, the State of Palestine and Tunisia.

In 2018, MENARO organized a joint UNESCO/UNHCR/ UNICEF training session on monitoring of SDG 4 and specific support to conducting out of school children studies and data analysis contributing to a wider knowledge base and better monitoring of the SDG indicators.

Generating, Promoting and Leveraging Public Goods

In 2018, explicit focus under this result stream was on prioritizing resources and creating partnerships to support country offices to more effectively deliver results for children, through “advocacy and evidence-informed leadership and broadened partnerships” that is attained through MENARO contributions under outcome 2.

Public Engagement

MENARO continued to be the lead voice for children in the region: their plight, their needs and their aspirations. The office used a combination of public and private advocacy to highlight the situation of children in need and to emphasize what needs to change to improve their lives and well-being.

Given the multiple conflicts, grave protection issues and escalation in violence in several countries in the region, especially the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, in 2018 there was a continued focus on children and armed conflict. Working with various country offices, RO helped to ensure that data on the six grave violations against children, and on health and nutrition were widely disseminated.

More than 80 statements, press releases and news notes were issued during the year, including clear advocacy asks, in particular, calls for those fighting and those with influence to stop the bloodshed, protect children and increase life-saving humanitarian access. MENARO also helped to raise awareness of funding gaps that hinder implementation of programming across the region, thus depriving children of their basic rights.

Two key advocacy highlights were the “[blank statement](#)” on the war on children in the Syrian Arab Republic, which was widely mentioned in the media – and in some cases replicated. The statement was referred to in key diplomatic interactions, including at a Security Council emergency session on Syria. Work undertaken by MENARO to raise public awareness of malnutrition among children amid the conflict in Yemen (see, for example, [remarks](#) made by

the Regional Director on 4 November 2018) generated widespread coverage and a sense of shock, and led to key political decisions towards putting an end to the conflict.

In cooperation with the World Bank, MENARO operationalized a communication strategy to increase awareness and visibility of the Emergency Cash Transfer Project in Yemen, generating high levels of attention.

Communication and advocacy challenges included finding space to tell children's stories amid competition for headlines and the continued media dominance of the regional political and military agenda. Access challenges in conflict zones also constrained broader communications coverage.

Harnessing Partnerships and Resources for children

In line with change strategy as outlined in the Strategic Plan, “developing and leveraging resources and partnerships for children” and SDG 17, MENARO used new, multi-partner regional platforms to leverage the capacities, resources and expertise of others towards the achievement of results for children in 2018.

Within the broader context of the UN reform and the common chapter, UNDP and UNICEF senior management for MENA met to agree on a few strategic directions to encourage country-level cooperation. These areas include a) youth engagement and employment with a focus on the transition from school to work; b) strategic joint research and joint prospect analysis; and c) harmonized positions for joint advocacy along the humanitarian – development - peace nexus. In preparation for the Agadir consultation on children on the move, IOM and UNICEF agreed on priority actions at the country level, such as; a) reducing duplication of data within referral and case management mechanisms; b) developing standardized indicators; and c) formulation of guidance and reference materials to strengthen child protection in assistance to vulnerable migrants.

MENARO actively participated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) regional cooperation mechanism, catalysing the establishment of a Working Group on Water Issues in MENA and actively participating in the youth working group, the data and evidence group and the social protection. The collaboration with ESCWA has been multi-faceted, including through the Arab Forum for sustainable development in April 2018. This has allowed for influencing the regional UN agenda setting.

Several regional level thematic partnerships strengthened coordination, facilitated the sharing and production of evidence, and progressed joint planning with key partners. This included a regional working group for immunization in GAVI-supported countries, a regional level partnership on Life Skills and Citizenship Education, and an Interagency Task Team on Adolescents and Young People and a UN-NGO Group on Adolescents and Youth.

Collaboration was also deepened with WHO - particularly on coordinated responses to outbreaks, early childhood development (ECD) and violence against children -and with WFP and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), on nutrition messaging and alignment of areas of responsibility. UNICEF and WHO will participate in Regional Management Team meetings to further strengthen collaboration.

A new global partnership with the Government of the Netherlands enabled MENARO, together with the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, to jointly raise seed funding of \$5.8 million for ground-breaking programming in support of children on the move.

MENARO continued to lead the No Lost Generation (NLG) initiative, working with operational partners in the region and the donor community to ensure high levels of visibility for children and youth affected by the crises in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. A cohort of NLG Champions, including the UN Secretary-General's Humanitarian Envoy and the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis used their platforms to promote investment in children affected by the crises in Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. Donors hosted three NLG briefings, the European Union organized a side event during the second Brussels conference on the Syria crisis, and NLG partners-initiated collaborations with four technology companies to address the challenges faced by young people in the region.

In 2018, a first-ever resource mobilization workshop brought together UNICEF global experts and CO resource mobilization focal points, to strengthen capacity, facilitate knowledge-sharing and produce an action plan for fundraising support to COs. Fifteen of the 16 COs in the region received new knowledge and intelligence from the global level and other regions, shared successful and promising practices, and established an informal professional peer network. MENARO continued to support the Gulf Area Office (GAO) as it strengthened its partnership presence in the Gulf – including by supporting negotiations of significant contribution agreements for crisis-affected countries in MENA.

MENARO supported COs on managing risks and ensuring a coherent approach to donor requirements in a context of increased funding conditionalities, including establishment of a knowledge hub on partnerships and resource mobilization. A regional partnership strategy was developed in conjunction with a renewed resource mobilization strategy.

Leveraging Resources and Markets for Children

MENARO contributed to progress towards Goal 5 of the Strategic Plan, “every child has an equitable chance in life” and SDG 1, by providing technical assistance and oversight in the areas of child poverty measurement, social protection and public financing for children. MENARO guided several COs conducting or disseminating child poverty studies, including Egypt, Iraq, Libya and Morocco. Twelve of 16 country programmes now have child poverty data to inform programming and advocacy.

Through the regional mechanism established with the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, MENARO continued to support social protection reform processes across the region to ensure they become more child-sensitive and pro-poor. While active in these processes in 13 of 16 countries, in 2018 MENARO technical support was focused on eight countries.

In humanitarian settings, social protection solutions and technical support were provided to cash and voucher programmes. The evidence base on social protection was strengthened with a mapping of non-contributory social protection programmes and studies on the legal provisions for social protection and the shock-responsiveness of systems in the region.

MENARO maintained its engagement, together with other UN agencies in an innovative partnership with the World Bank's International Development Association. As a result of this partnership nearly 1.5 million of the most vulnerable families in Yemen – an estimated 9 million people - received regular emergency cash transfers from UNICEF during 2018.

Through its work with governments to optimize public expenditure for children, MENARO provided technical support to country programmes in Egypt, Iraq, Oman and Sudan. In this

relatively new area of social policy work, the focus was on raising awareness, building capacity and gathering evidence on the state of public finance in the region.

A 2017 child poverty study covering 11 Arab States and its accompanying policy briefs on education and nutrition was adopted by the League of Arab States Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs and informed its work. MENARO worked with the governments of Egypt and Jordan in the conceptualization of a regional poverty centre; in 2019, further support will be provided to Jordan, which will host the centre.

Strategic Information, Research and Knowledge Management

The generation of evidence on the situation of children and women across the region enables MENARO to inform policies, guide COs to better target their programmes, and determine and disseminate information on the interventions that will be most effective.

The concluded Gen2030 MENA report provides an in-depth analysis of demographic projections for children, adolescents and youth in MENA countries and recommends urgent and significant investment to benefit from the rapidly closing demographic dividend through the creation of opportunities for meaningful learning, social engagement and work, particularly for young women and the most vulnerable.

In 2018, MENARO supported implementation of the Iraq Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). Results of the survey – the country’s most comprehensive analysis of children’s well-being in seven years – were officially launched in November. Demonstrating their commitment to generate data on the situation of women and children through MICS, Algeria, Lebanon and the State of Palestine signed memorandums of agreement with their respective national counterparts.

MENARO made technical contributions to studies and research commissioned by COs across the region, including a regional data strategy. As part of its pilot, three countries (Lebanon, Djibouti and State of Palestine) completed the initial diagnostic phase and drafted action plans.

Additionally, MENARO also completed a thematic analysis of child discipline practices across the region; contributed to a strategy for the validation of measurement tools for behavioural change; helped improve calculations of people in need numbers; and supported training for humanitarian data analysis. A knowledge-for-children strategy was developed and introduced to staff at regional and country level.

Strengthening Organizational Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

MENARO is enabling transparent and accountable governance systems; supporting COs to promote efficient operational management systems and processes; promoting a more enabling inclusive working environment; ensuring staff well-being, safety and security; and maintaining and ensuring effective utilization of knowledge and information systems.

In 2018, MENARO supported four COs (Lebanon, GAO, Oman and Libya) to finalize their country programme management plans and supported all COs in the region to update their risk management libraries.

To ensure that the MENARO contributed to better risk management, development and training on the new UNICEF Anti-Fraud Strategy, including through training implementing partners of the Lebanon CO was undertaken. MENARO supported the Egypt, Libya and Yemen COs to

identify bottlenecks and to simplify their payments under the harmonized approach to cash transfers. MENARO continued to provide support to COs in advance of, during and after audits and all MENA audited offices were able to close the recommendations within 18 months.

Key staff from COs in the region attended training sessions on monitoring the supply chain, procurement services and health financing to improve supply chains. MENARO recruited a dedicated staff member to work with COs to influence national systems towards achieving value for money in procurement.

MENARO strengthened oversight of the information and communication technology connectivity infrastructure. Modernization of the Data Centre and network upgrades were completed. An online repository of regional technology for development innovations was established, with almost 40 initiatives recorded by COs.

Four countries Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon Jordan and Iraq are already Business Operations Strategy (BOS)-compliant, Algeria is on track, and others will be supported in the development of their workplans in 2019. MENARO advocated for the revision of the BOS, and, with the support of the Global Shared Services Centre and other United Nations agencies, the revised framework will be rolled out by the UN HQ Business Innovation Group (BIG) in early 2019.

Quarterly operations key performance indicators were closely monitored, with follow-up actions taken and escalated through the relevant senior management groups when necessary. Steady improvements were noted in the areas of concern.

A dedicated unit was established to streamline budget monitoring and reporting. A new travel management system that includes a simplified Country Office Support Matrix was released and staff trained.

The targets for gender diversity of professional staff and participation in online learning were achieved. However, the RO fell short of the targets for recruitment time and gender diversity of general service staff. Through all-staff meetings, induction sessions, country office support missions and various senior management platforms, MENARO raised awareness of the organization-wide effort build to a culture of care, respect, integrity and trust in all offices, and to end all forms of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and abuse of power. In the Maghreb, MENARO conducted Women's Security Awareness Training. Tailored psychosocial workshops were conducted in nine countries and relevant resources and materials disseminated.

In 2018 MENARO boosted its investment in staff leadership and management skills, most notably through the enrollment of 60 UNICEF staff in the Master Class Management and Essential Skills Programme. Furthermore, MENARO conducted two career management workshops which proved to be an innovative way to engage with staff about career options in the future.

MENARO continued to support COs on inclusive accessibility and promoting greening and eco-efficiency initiatives, with Greening Teams established in all COs except Oman and Gulf Area Office. With MENARO support, all main offices in the region meet the minimum standards of accessibility and inclusive design. MENARO provided technical support to COs to access Greening and Accessibility Funds, with six offices receiving a total of \$353,000 in funding.

MENARO conducted tailored psychosocial workshops in 12 out of 16 MENA COs. MENARO delivered regional basic and advanced trainings for Peer Support Volunteers (PSVs) and

organised psychosocial workshops in various settings, such as regional network meetings, section retreats, the induction programme for new staff, and the global HR gathering.

In support to COs across the region, MENARO also conducted onsite visits, providing guidance and oversight to emergencies and crisis management, with a focus on COs that do not have security staff. To support staff safety and promote greater risk-mitigation – particularly in very high-risk areas – MENARO invested more than \$2 million on premises and equipment across COs in the region.

Whole of Syria Programme

The verified grave violations against children (killing, maiming, recruitment and use) by all parties to the conflict active in Syria shows a devastating impact on children welfare in Syria. In the first nine months of 2018, 2354 incidents were reported through the MRM. Grave violations verified also include detention, sexual violence, military besiegement and attacks on education, medical facilities and humanitarian actors.

Within this context, MENARO continued to support Syrian children through cross border humanitarian operations in coordination with the Syria Country Office and aligned with the Whole of Syria (WoS) 2018 programmatic Joint Operational Plan and UN Security Country Resolution No. 2449 (Dec. 13, 2018)³³. The response also benefitted from the support of the Jordan CO for the response at the Berm in Rukban and for the IDPs at Jaber-Nasib during the southwest Syria operation in Q2. These operations held in June and July 2018 led to a total suspension of UNICEF cross border programmes in Dara’a and Quneitra by end of September. Prior to the operation in Eastern Ghouta in February to March 2018 UNICEF had several cross-border partners operational in Eastern Ghouta, but when the area was retaken by the Government all services were closed.

Following the Turkish Operation ‘Olive Branch’ to remove the Kurdish forces from Afrin district, UNICEF engaged in partnership opportunities to respond to immediate WASH, health and protection needs in this area, noting the limitation to scale up due to the lack of partner capacity. UNICEF continued to deliver humanitarian interventions for the conflict affected populations in Idleb, Western Aleppo, and Northern Hama where humanitarian access remained possible despite increasing pressure from non-state armed groups. UNICEF had significantly scaled up its contingency capacity in northwest Syria to respond to the expected escalation in humanitarian needs based on potential developments and variety of scenarios in Idleb province.

Given that the cross-border programmes are managed remotely, UNICEF has maintained rigorous risk mitigation procedures to minimize the risks to the programmes. Financial and programmatic assurance under the HACT framework has included third party monitoring of programme implementation, of cross border partners, financial spot checks and audits. With the change in control, UNICEF has worked within the inter-agency framework to ensure that partner staff are supported under a Duty of Care to promote their safety to the extent possible given the continuing insecurity in the areas they live. In addition, as a result of the government of Syria regaining control of important geographic areas, UNICEF has set in place an internal coordination mechanism which allowed the transfer of knowledge of types of programmes, beneficiaries, locations, and supplies (when possible) to the Syria CO.

³³ For detailed progress and achievements of WOS operations, please refer to the following link:
<https://insight.unicef.org/apps01/perfasmnt/Pages/Reporting.aspx>

UNICEF is the cluster lead agency for the WASH, education and nutrition clusters, and the child protection area of responsibility. UNICEF has ensured capacity is in place for the Whole of Syria cluster coordinators based in Amman, as well as for each of the hubs in Damascus, Amman and Gaziantep. For each of its cluster leadership accountability, UNICEF led the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) for the development and review of the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and the Humanitarian Response Plan. Key products that the UNICEF-led clusters have developed include the 2018 WASH needs assessment, the 2018 CP Operational Strategy, 2018 CP Needs Overview, and the SMART nutrition surveys in Eastern Ghouta, and northeast Syria.

The continuity of the UNICEF cross-border programme in 2019 will be mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 2449 which is currently valid until January 2020. In this context and based on the change of control that took place mid-2018 in southern Syria plus on existing needs highlighted by 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, the focus of UNICEF cross border operations from Amman will shift in 2019 from southern Syria towards northeast Syria. Cross border operations from Gaziantep will continue to be essentially directed in 2019 towards Idleb and part of Hama and Aleppo governorates.

Humanitarian Response

The region has the world's greatest concentration of humanitarian needs, with two Level 3 emergencies (in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen), two Level 2 emergencies (in Iraq and countries hosting Syrian refugees)³⁴, and several countries facing protracted conflicts, civil unrest and/or political transition.

The 2018 contributions geared towards strengthening UNICEF's analysis, advocacy and learning in MENA to inform humanitarian strategies and improve outcomes for children in humanitarian situations; trained COs on engagement with non-State entities and on access analysis; and enhanced emergency planning and target-setting through quality assurance of CO Emergency Preparedness Plans, contingency plans and Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeals. MENARO also supported COs to improve gender and adolescent programming in the humanitarian response, and to enhance resource mobilization and the timely allocation of funds.

The community of practice among humanitarian practitioners was strengthened through the sharing of updated policy developments and guidance on critical issues and the exchange of experiences, best practices and lessons learned. Research and analysis provided MENARO management and COs with timely, quality analyses of events with humanitarian implications and guidance on humanitarian and public advocacy. The quality of humanitarian responses has improved through better communication, participation and feedback from affected populations. All HAC countries now have feedback mechanisms in place as well as improved policies on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

MENARO contributed, through consultation with relevant COs, to global initiatives, including the review of the UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action; the rollout of the Guidance for Risk-Informed Programming; and review of the L2/L3 Simplified Standard Operating Procedures and the Global Access Framework. MENARO exceeded the Grand Bargain target related to localisation by reaching 38 per cent, on average, of all funds provided

³⁴ L2/L3 Status as of December 2018. A Level 3 emergency activates a system-wide mobilization of capacity (leadership, staffing and funding) to enable accelerated and scaled-up delivery of assistance and protection to people in need. In an L2 emergency, the magnitude of the emergency is such that a country office needs additional and prioritized support from other parts of the organization to respond, and where the regional office must provide dedicated leadership and support.

to partners, including funds provided to governments in MENA, by the second quarter of 2018. MENARO and 16 COs completed emergency preparedness plans, and the humanitarian team supported COs in enhancing evidence-based advocacy and highlighting grave violations of children's rights and their urgent needs. The RO also provided support to the COs to improve gender and adolescent programming in humanitarian settings, and to enhance resource mobilization and the timely allocation of funds.

MENARO helped to develop stakeholder mapping for Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen to develop advocacy strategies that would influence the parties to conflict to better protect children direct and indirectly affected by the conflict. Staff training on humanitarian policies, laws and principles and best practices were shared by regional operations. To strengthen risk analysis, a technical review of CPDs and situation analyses was completed for some countries leading to better conceptual integration. Quality assurance was done for humanitarian situation reports from all countries in the region.

Efforts by MENARO to strengthen the linkages between humanitarian action and development programming in the region were highlighted in both internal and external forums and especially within the Syria-crisis affected countries.

Cross-cutting Programming Areas

In accordance with UNICEF's mandate to deliver results to children more efficiently and effectively, MENA worked on cross-cutting and integration of programming as well as streamlining of support to CO through gender focus, communication for development (C4D), ECD, and life course programming to ensure reaching the unreached and deliver better results for children.

Programme Planning

MENARO supported GAO, Libya, Morocco and Syria, Egypt, Libya, Oman, Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia and Iraq for country programme planning and monitoring through quality assurance, coordinated technical support and oversight in programmes highlighting UNICEF's comparative advantage while advancing the strategic plan and results across the region. MENARO supported COs in strengthening the implementing strategies by applying the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers to implementing partners. Capacity building of staff and partners was organized covering the full programme cycle, e.g. Results Based Management (RBM), HACT and Etools while an internal peer review prepared Iraq, Sudan, State of Palestine and Syria for the audits. With the start of the new UNICEF Strategic Plan, MENA actively contributed to attempts to strengthen and streamline UNICEF Corporate systems in planning, programming, monitoring and reporting.

Gender

In 2018, MENARO accelerated the rollout of the UNICEF global Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021, with programming and advocacy intensifying the focus on the girl child agenda; building staff gender capacity; addressing child marriage; and strengthening the gender-responsiveness of the humanitarian response.

MENARO supported the enhancement human resource capacity for gender programming across the region, with six countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic) upgrading their gender focal point posts; two countries (Iraq and Sudan) broadened representation of their focal points; and recruitment of a dedicated gender specialist for Yemen is under way. Some 30 sectoral staff benefitted from regional training on applied gender analysis, and 50 additional staff from Sudan and Yemen were trained on gender in humanitarian action. Gender sessions were incorporated in humanitarian, ADAP and WASH network meetings, and an orientation module was introduced across the region.

The Regional Accountability Framework of Action to End Child Marriage in the MENA Region was finalized, in collaboration with the UNFPA Arab States Regional Office, and a regional research advisory group was established. A regional road map for rollout of the menstrual hygiene management programme was developed through a cross-sectoral approach involving WASH and gender specialists, a first for the organization. In Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Oman, to strengthen public-private partnerships for girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers, MENARO supported initiatives on girls' empowerment through alternative pathways to education.

MENARO conducted the gender responsiveness of the humanitarian response in 10 countries and developed practical tools to incorporate gender in risk analyses and proposed humanitarian responses.

MENARO supported the documentation of best practices and lessons learned in integrating gender in programme design and results, with five case studies developed on: social protection (Egypt), menstrual hygiene management (the State of Palestine), FGM (Djibouti), girls' education (Morocco) and nutrition (Yemen).

Communication for Development

The regional office utilizes C4D as an entry point to integrate programming across the sectors in which it is engaged. In 2018, C4D focused on building capacities and enforcing quality standards to strengthen social and behavioural change programming excellence in COs.

Collaboration agreements for mentoring were signed with Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen COs, based on strategic deliverables throughout the year, in the fields of parenting practices, social norms, evidence generation and capacity building of counterparts. MENARO supported the design, testing and implementation of innovative, in-depth formative research focusing on social norms, parenting and harmful behaviours, to generate quality evidence for programme design and baselines for monitoring.

MENARO provided C4D strategic guidance, surge capacity, technical support and quality assurance to outbreaks in humanitarian crises in Yemen and Sudan. MENARO facilitated CO participation in key global events, including the Social and Behaviour Change Communication Summit in April, and the Religions for Peace/UNICEF global workshop in July, which launched the joint Global Faith for Social and Behaviour Change initiative. Both events informed the Regional C4D Network Meeting, the first of its kind ever organized in the region, with 27 participants from 14 COs.

MENARO created strategic collaborations to leverage expertise in social norms programming, including with Girls Not Brides, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, FHI 360, and the Institute for Reproductive Health. Active collaborations were undertaken with academic institutions (the American University of Beirut, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Edinburgh), consultancies with businesses and NGOs helped to promote joint understanding of UNICEF social and behaviour change priorities and standards.

Flagship innovative initiatives in 2018 included a transtheoretical conceptual framework that was developed is being tested. MENARO C4D will led a cross-regional initiative involving UNICEF ROs in West and Central Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa and MENA for the development of corporate guidance for social norms programming and social and behavioural change design and measurement.

Early Childhood Development

Substantial progress was made to advance ECD at country level, with results achieved contributing primarily to Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan, and, through integration of ECD across the life course of a child. Progress also contributed to the education and protection goals (2 and 3).

MENARO partnered with WHO and other organizations to strengthen CO capacity to support implementation of the Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development, which was launched in May 2018.

Algeria, Egypt, the Gulf Area Office, Jordan and the State of Palestine, are implementing interventions to address the holistic ECD of children aged 0–59 months, in line with UNICEF programme guidance. MENARO identified and is working with these focus countries to plan

the adaptation and roll-out of the ECD multisectoral package through a series of initiatives that began prior to the launch of the framework, a joint planning meeting with all COs linked to the Life Course Network Meeting, and regional training on the Care for Child Development Package in partnership with WHO.

MENARO led a collaboration with the Doha International Family Institute to hold its first international conference on parenting, child well-being and development. This work was part of an ongoing regional partnership with the Jordan CO, UNICEF New York and Maestral International to strengthen the evidence, knowledge and guidance accessible to countries on at-scale parenting programmes. Other notable partnerships with Dubai Cares and NLG facilitated continued emphasis by MENARO on the urgent need to accelerate ECD investments and implement global ECD standards in humanitarian contexts.

Given the paucity of ECD resources in the region, MENARO accelerated its efforts to address capacity gaps in targeted countries. Dedicated funds for ECD were mobilized, including \$200,000 from the 7 per cent set aside funds, to support regional ECD work and ongoing efforts to strengthen dedicated ECD capacity.

Life Course Programming

The life course approach aims at increasing the effectiveness of interventions throughout a child's life. It focuses on a healthy start to life and targets the needs of people at critical periods throughout their lifetime. Recent experience in the region has shown that its application requires multisectoral programming, and that it is most effective and efficient when sector responses are integrated rather than running in parallel.

During September 2018, MENARO conducted review of the life course approach with colleagues from COs in the region and HQ. One of the main outcomes of the review was that COs in the region will use life course lens to analyse current work and approaches across several sectors, as well as gaps, to address priorities for children at different periods in their lives and the root causes of the challenges they face. Following the review, commitments were made by the COs to define concrete steps that would systemize and institutionalize multisectoral collaboration across the life course approach.

Supply Management

MENARO procurement services offer potential options and a repertoire of tools that can be used for system efficiency on public sector spending on services essential to the well-being of children and families.

MENARO is supporting COs to overcome vaccine procurement challenges and suggesting practical options to bridge financing gaps. Domestic resource mobilization for sustaining immunization services in countries transitioning out of GAVI support, remained a priority. Sudan, which is expected to enter the GAVI accelerated transition phase by 2020, and to fully finance all its vaccines by 2030, received specific support in developing a road map to ensure that vaccine supplies are not impacted as the country moves towards reduced external financing from donors. Discussion was also initiated with the Government of Djibouti to support the Vaccine Independence Initiative (VII) subscription process, through technical assistance in drafting the VII Plan and with the strategic planning and forecasting to ensuring sufficient and timely funding for procurement of vaccines and other essential commodities.

The governments of Sudan, State of Palestine, Morocco, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Djibouti and Oman, procured through UNICEF Procurement Services: vaccines, nutrition, pharmaceutical, and water and sanitation supplies for over 40 million USD.

A May 2018 regional workshop on Procurement Services and Health Financing involved almost 30 participants from eight MENA countries to enhance the understanding of procurement services and pre-financing mechanisms.

In the State of Palestine and Sudan, procurement services staff positions were established to improve the efficiency of transactions, while within MENARO, staff were equipped with the knowledge and skills required to support COs to influence national systems towards achieving value for money in procurement.

Evaluation

The revised UNICEF global evaluation policy responds to calls for rigorous evidence informed by high-quality, accessible, timely and reliable country-led evaluations, and strengthening national evaluation capacity. As a response to this policy and to contribute to accountability and learning in the region, evaluative activities were strengthened by making evaluation a separate workstream during the year, appointing a senior adviser dedicated to the function.

The workstream supports country level evaluations through backstopping and quality assurance. In 2018, work on a regional evaluation strategy started, a community of practice was created, and a first capacity building event organized in collaboration with EvalMENA, that trained country focal points from 10 MENA countries.

Eight country-level evaluations have been completed by the end of the year: one “fair” three “satisfactory” two “highly satisfactory” and two not yet rated. In addition, COs updated their costed evaluation plans to bring them more in line with the policy. The first RO led evaluation (NLG) is on track with the draft report expected in the first quarter of 2019.

Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

In early 2018, MENARO developed a PSEA strategy and work plan to accelerate the PSEA agenda, detailing accountabilities on PSEA for UNICEF staff and partners and for country offices. Concrete progress has been made across the four objective areas – Prevention, Reporting, Response, and Knowledge Management – within the regional office and across country offices. Work is ongoing to ensure that PSEA is addressed as a whole-agency accountability. The MENARO Programme Partnership (HACT) Unit has been actively engaged to ensure implementing partners are aware of contractual obligations on PSEA. MENARO conducted capacity building on PSEA with RO staff at various occasions and included it as a standard module in induction sessions. PSEA has been consistently included in regional network meetings, including RMTs, HACT training, Humanitarian network meeting, and DROPs, as well as in RO governance meetings including the ROMT.

MENARO is supporting country offices to improve accessible reporting mechanisms, to improve access to survivor assistance, and to strengthen accountability. In several inter-agency initiatives MENARO has played an active role to strengthen PSEA across the humanitarian system, including co-facilitation of trainings with IOM, support to development of PSEA networks, and formulate standard operating procedures.

PART 3: Lessons Learned and Constraints

The ROMP 2018-2021 identified seven key areas of lessons learnt from the previous cycle which have guided the work in 2018, including: (1) more explicitly link MENARO priorities to the SDGs and the five Goals of UNICEF's new Strategic Plan; (2) realign the RO to primarily focus on the core functions of a regional office; (3) increase efficiency and effectiveness of the RO through cross sector planning, collaboration between sections, and streamlining support to country offices; (4) give greater emphasis to evidence generation, data quality and its strategic dissemination; (5) position MENARO as the authoritative voice, knowledge broker and strategic partner of choice for children; (6) more deliberately leverage the work, technical capacity and resources of others for children, and; (7) the constrained funding environment will necessitate a continuous review of RO priorities, staffing and expenditure.

In October 2018, MENARO undertook an exercise which allowed the ROs in its entirety to reflect on the intended shift of the new ROMP, to identify potential bottlenecks and accelerators for further progress. The ROs also reached out to the COs to learn their feedback. The overall conclusion was that the intended shift initiated in 2018 has delivered more concerted support from the RO towards the COs and that further consolidation would be required in 2019. Key lessons learned, and an analysis of constraints are elaborated here.

Cross-sector Planning and Collaboration with COs

In 2018 the main focus was to improve cross-sector, multi-sections collaboration to better support COs. For COs to receive coherent comprehensive strategic guidance, the key moment of the planning cycle, notably the CPD development, the MTR and to a certain extent the HAC development were utilized to the fullest extent. The RO invested more deliberately in inclusive coordinated preparation and follow-up of these planning moments which resulted in consistency of advice at strategic level, thinking with the CO and exploring options jointly. Despite receiving support from the emergency team from New York headquarters in the preparation of the HAC, it is clear that further efforts are needed to simplify internal and review processes in order to expedite the launch of these requests for critical funding in affected countries.

In addition, technical moments and other opportunities were used for promoting cross-sectoral collaboration. The Life Course Network meeting used a life course lens to analyze UNICEF's current work and approaches in MENA in health and nutrition, child protection, education, engagement, C4D, social policy and gender. The exercise revealed that there are synergies between sectors which have not yet been exploited, and gaps in the approaches taken to address priorities for children and their root causes at different periods in their lives. Several 'take aways' were formulated, shared across the region and some were already taken forward.

The subsequent regional gender training, for example, focused on cross-sectoral staff learning together how to conduct a gender analysis and on strengthening gender programming in the humanitarian response. The latter highlighted the need to shift humanitarian programming from focusing on women and children as vulnerable groups towards women and children as actors and agents of change across the sectors.

The work on ECD was used as an important trigger to promote inter-agency and inter-sectoral communication and coordination. The link between ECD and programming for children with disabilities was made, highlighting the need for education and health to coordinate their work vis-à-vis different service platforms, such as clinics, nurseries and social services. Although conceptually there is agreement on such an integrated way forward, it remains challenging within COs, and beyond, to move on shared accountability between sectors including

establishing a comprehensive monitoring framework for ECD outcomes that builds on existing sector specific information systems. Public financing for children approaches will be also used to cost multi-sectoral services for children and embed them in national budgets. The area of the social determinants of disease saw a conceptual break through which promoted working with other sectors to address these social determinants while maintaining a ‘whole child’ perspective. Progress on the Life Skills and Citizens Education (LSCE) initiative in 2018 has opened more opportunities to support prevention work in child protection. Increasing linkages between education and social policy programming should be explored to achieve child protection outcomes more intentionally. For example, UNICEF assessments on social protection, which currently have a strong focus on school-age children, could be strengthened to create a space for adolescents and youth to ensure voice, participation and ownership, more closely examine their situation and provide solutions.

While overall progress towards multi-sectoral programming in MENA can be observed, several structural constraints hinder the adoption of a cross-sectoral collaboration: UNICEF sections are setup by thematic area, which echoes the traditional line-ministries, and consequently, the technical expertise, supervision and mobilization of funds. MENA continues to strive to overcome the silos approach generated by this setup.

In addition, although the conceptual thinking behind the SDGs (reflected in the CPDs) is promoting synergies and connectivity between sectoral initiatives and investments, the humanitarian Response (reflected in the Humanitarian Response Plan) focuses on service-delivery according sectoral clusters. In a region where most of countries face vast humanitarian needs, in a protracted crisis, the challenge is to deliver sectoral results for children at the short term while comprehensively working on strengthening of systems and community resilience to achieved equitable holistic development in the long term.

Programming for Social Cohesion

In the context of the region, the concept of social cohesion is relevant when designing UNICEF programme and advocacy. The SMR conducted in preparation of the 2020-2024 Iraq country programme, as well as the sub-regional discussions around the return of Syrian refugees to their home country showed a need and momentum for strengthening UNICEF’s contribution in this area. The issue of social cohesion is complex and ranges from a minimum standard of ensuring that programming is sensitive to existing tensions, to more ambitious endeavours purposively aiming at improving social capital and the social contract with governments, while providing basic and equitable human security.

The issue of social cohesion will constitute yet another focus in 2019, for which MENARO will support COs in leveraging some of UNICEF’s comparative advantages (e.g. downstream engagement, work across sectors, advocacy for inclusive policies, empowerment of young people, etc.) as part of UNDAF and as a joint drive with strategic partners (including UNDP, the World Bank and civil society).

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)

The integration of the AAP framework into CO programming, has led to improved quality of humanitarian responses, with better communication, participation and feedback from affected populations. The latter includes establishing complaints mechanisms and policies to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse in all HAC countries. Yet, the global guidance needs to be further contextualized so that the MENARO can focus what will best deliver the greatest impact in countries across the region. The AAP business case was hampered due to delays in the HQ

dissemination of policies and benchmarks, however, the operationalization of AAP at the CO level is progressing. A MENA compendium of good practices and lessons learnt across the region is being finalized by end of 2018, for better implementation in 2019.

Emphasize Evidence Generation, Data Quality and Reporting

Throughout the year, MENARO produced numerous advocacy, thematic briefs and other knowledge products, and facilitated knowledge exchange between COs. In order to streamline, the operational plan for implementation of the knowledge-for-children strategy few planned activities were out on hold, allowing MENARO to rethink its knowledge management function and its future direction, taking into account the feedback from COs.

Generating, sharing and using of 'Knowledge-for-Children' require continued and concerted commitment from across UNICEF in the region. Most programme sections in COs and RO are producing knowledge on issues of strategic importance for children, aiming to feed it into policy advocacy dialogues. In order to capitalize on these efforts and to make full use of the evidence and knowledge products, more concerted approaches need to be adopted to ensure that the intended audience are aware and use the data and analysis. Especially within a complex environment, investing more in dissemination strategies linking MENARO's initiative to wider (UN) initiatives is required and will be followed in 2019.

MENARO commissioned research on the drivers of children's involvement in armed groups to inform its programming. The evidence proved critical to challenge some of the prevailing narratives around prevention of violent extremism. The research offered concrete recommendations on possible programming shifts required to address the complex needs of children associated with armed forces/groups.

Over the last years, there have been wide variances in the quality of reporting in the humanitarian situation reports across emergency countries, despite capacity-building and technical support provided to the COs. These critical gaps have a significant impact since the humanitarian reports are influencing the level of attention and resources devoted to particular countries and contexts. An internal review of the MENA Humanitarian Situation Reports was carried-out in the final quarter of 2018 and the findings and recommendations on ways to improve and address the identified bottlenecks will be shared in the first quarter of 2019 for final decision-making.

In close collaboration with the regional office and HQ, the overall implementation of RapidPro for Real Time monitoring for the three countries in MENA proceeded with delays as it faced few challenges in implementing the protocol, securing aggregator services, ensuring confidentiality and changes in partners and having a dedicated in-house resource to support Rapid Pro. To address some of these challenges going forward, the Regional Office in coordination with HQ recommended a number of measures for 2019, including: Documentation for RapidPro and products (for both technical and programme audiences); Capacity building to strengthen CO skills for implementation and support of RapidPro instances; Competitive pricing for RapidPro services at global scope; RapidPro product Roadmap.

Leadership on Strategic Issues

Children on migratory routes posed a major challenge this year. A staggering number of children and families in MENA have been uprooted as a result of conflict in several countries in the region or have entered the region through one of several migratory routes. MENA has recognized the importance of cross-country and sub-regional approaches in addressing the

protection needs of these children. In 2018, MENARO initiated an assessment of national child protection systems along the parts of the North-East migration route with the aim to assess the feasibility of establishing cross-border child protection mechanisms. This work is conceptualized as a blueprint for further work covering a larger area in the region.

In several countries in the region, such as Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic, the outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases such as cholera and polio and the unavailability of the appropriate vaccines posed challenges to achieve programme results. Consequently, ensuring sufficient and timely funding for procurement of vaccines and other essential commodities for children and families remains a priority in which MENA will actively engage.

While UNICEF remains a leading voice for children, globally and regionally, fierce competition for headlines was a reality, given the media dominance of the military and political agenda in MENA. Finding “space” for communication and advocacy messaging on the situation of children in the region remained a challenge. Identifying and adopting ‘non-traditional’ approaches to forge a stronger link between media and advocacy work proved to be effective. For example, MENARO initiated a first-of-a-kind project that involved working with children impacted by the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic on recreating children’s songs. This planted the seeds for a longer-term vision of social cohesion and re-stitching the diverse social fabric in the affected countries and is the first phase of a unique project that is expected to reap dividends in 2019 and beyond.

The MENARO communication team continued efforts to demonstrate the impact of conflict on children by personalizing their stories, including those who UNICEF met and who subsequently perished. Beyond the initial sense of shock generated by such stories, they contributed to increased public awareness and – as demonstrated by UNICEF coverage of the crisis in Yemen – ultimately heightened concern for children in political and security decisions.