

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

(North Macedonia as of January 2019)

Part 1: Situation update in the country

In 2018 The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia finally overcame its most severe political crisis of recent years, highlighting the detrimental effects of political instability and the urgent need to ensure accountability, transparency and effective rule of law. Since the second half of 2017, the new, reform-oriented Government initiated steps to gradually restore checks and balances and strengthen democracy and the rule of law. The country is now undergoing fundamental changes in a more inclusive and open political atmosphere. Throughout 2018 the Parliament continued to function, with opposition parties chairing key committees. The Government has also shown commitment to increasing trust among communities.

The country took decisive steps toward resolving a long-standing dispute with Greece about its official name; the two countries reached an agreement to be confirmed in early 2019. Resolution of the name issue – which has been inflicting political and economic damage since 1991 – is essential to consolidate the country's European Union (EU) and NATO accession process and enable it to become more deeply integrated with regional and global markets.

Throughout 2018 national human rights institutions, especially the Office of the Ombudsman, continued efforts to advocate for children's rights and shed light on specific cases where their rights were violated or institutions did not act in the best interest of certain groups of children. Similarly, many civil society organizations (CSOs) continued to provide services to children in need and help them voice their concerns and issues across different topics, such as: disability and inclusion, child protection, justice for children and others. After a significant delay in the reporting cycle, through an action led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government prepared its report on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and shared it with a group of CSOs for their comments and inputs. Civil society continued to play a constructive role in supporting democratic processes and ensuring greater checks and balances. The climate in which these organizations operate has improved, and the Government has shown commitment to dialogue and inclusion. Still in terms of governance, the country trails others in the region in relation to political stability, accountability, rule of law and controlling corruption.

Despite a limited decline in poverty rates during the last 10 years and improvements in living conditions of the less well-off, poverty and inequality are still high when compared with other countries in the region and most EU countries. According to official statistics, the latest reported relative child poverty rate was 29.9 percent (Survey on Income and Living Conditions, SILC 2017). This indicates that almost a third of all children lack resources for the lifestyle and living conditions perceived as 'normal', leading to their exclusion from society. The State Statistical Office (SSO) reports a Gini coefficient of 32.5 per cent, implying high inequality in wealth distribution.

Jobs, the main route to prosperity for majority of the population, are scarce: only 50 percent of working-age Macedonians are employed. Youth unemployment is a serious constraint to growth; over half of the population aged 15-to-24 is jobless. In addition, there is a strong disconnect between the skills developed by the education system and the needs of the private sector, which is why companies often complain about the unavailability of skilled workers, despite high unemployment rates. Low birth rates and high emigration are shrinking the workforce. Gender imbalance is noticeable: in 2017 the employment rate was 39.2 per cent for women and 60.8 per cent for men, mirroring an overall gender imbalance in society.

While social exclusion can be measured across different dimensions, reports often state that too many women and girls, persons with disabilities and minorities (such as the Roma population) in the country remain economically marginalized or socially excluded. Notably, ethnic minorities account for 67 percent of all households in the bottom income quintile, but just 23 percent of those at the top. At the same time, coverage of the poor and vulnerable population by the main social assistance programmes has been shrinking since 2010, which results in gradual exacerbation of these groups' exclusion.

Roma children and their families continue to suffer from significant stigma and discrimination. MICS data confirm that child marriage is common among this group: young Roma women aged 15-to-19 are five times more likely to be married or in union. Access to basic health services remains difficult for Roma. Differences persist in pre-school and school enrolment and completion rates between Roma and non-Roma children. According to a 2017 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Bank regional survey, the adjusted net pre-primary enrolment rate (for ages 3-to-6) was especially low among marginalized Roma children: standing at just 14 percent–15 percent lower than that of neighbouring non-Roma, and 10 percent lower than the rate in 2011. Unemployment rates for Roma are much higher than those of non-Roma, particularly for Roma women, whose unemployment rate stood at 58 per cent in 2017 compared to 45 per cent for their male counterparts.

Intensive national dialogue around inclusion of children with disabilities occurred during 2018, leading to a visible positive shift in societal attitudes towards children with disabilities and the removal of attitudinal barriers that prevent them from taking their rightful place in society, as demonstrated by a recent UNICEF survey. Almost all people surveyed find it acceptable for their child to be a neighbour, acquaintance, classmate or friend of a child with disabilities. A growing number of citizens interact with children with a disability on a regular basis and believe that these children should be learning in mainstream schools together with their peers. The process of de-institutionalizing persons with disabilities was reinvigorated, and the Government established a national coordinating body to oversee implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Moreover, a national de-institutionalization strategy for 2018-2027 was adopted, and the Government pledged to end institutional placement of all children by 2020. In line with this commitment, no children under the age of 18 remain at the Special Institute for Persons with Disabilities in Demir Kapija – the largest institution of its kind in the country –and the overall number of children in institutional care was reduced by more than 60 per cent compared to 2017.

Violence continues to be widely used and accepted as a discipline method. A 2017 UNICEF survey showed that a large majority (79 per cent) of parents reported using at least one violent method (i.e. psychological aggression; minor or severe physical punishment), compared with just 21 per cent who used only positive parenting and non-violent methods. The survey also

revealed that a large majority of surveyed respondents (73 per cent) did not report violence against a child that they witnessed. Violence in schools is not sufficiently monitored and is underreported. Although data is scarce, it is believed that as many as 40 per cent of boys and 15 per cent of girls were involved in violent confrontations with their peers. Children on the street and children cared for in an institution are considered to be at even greater risk of violence. Currently, it is estimated that there are some 1,000 children on the streets throughout the country, while more than 100 live in institutions.

Over the last decade the country experienced a fluctuating neonatal mortality rate, which reached its peak in 2016 with 11.9 deaths per 1,000 live births. In 2015 the country had a neonatal mortality rate of 8.6 deaths per 1,000 live births compared to 3.6 average of EU member states (Serbia, 5.3; Croatia, 4.1). While the EU and neighbouring countries continued to witness a decline in neonatal mortality rates, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia experienced an increase. In addition, data from 2013 suggests higher neonatal mortality rates among the Roma population (17.4 compared to the national average of 10.2), which is often associated with unemployment, low income, inappropriate living conditions and weak health-seeking behaviour that negatively affects accessing or using health services. The percentage of children immunized against infectious childhood diseases is high; over the past years it was consistently over 95 per cent for children under one year of age. However, measles, mumps and rubella vaccination coverage showed a downward trend (from 97.8 per cent in 2008 to 82.6 per cent in 2017), with some areas recording coverage as low as 65.8 per cent (Veles and Kavadarci); most of the unvaccinated children (41.2 per cent) reside in the capital, Skopje.

Pre-primary education gross enrolment rates (29 per cent) are still well below the regional average of 73 per cent. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, just 35 per cent of children aged 3-to-6 years are enrolled in pre-primary education. The State Statistics Office reported that of all children enrolled in 2016, only 2.6 per cent were Roma and 0.5 per cent were children with disabilities. Some 4,155 children could not enrol in pre-primary education due to limited capacities of kindergartens. The Government has acknowledged the importance of early learning in improving outcomes for children and is working with UNICEF and other stakeholders to improve access to early learning throughout the country.

National averages for primary and secondary school enrolment rates remain high, but not for Roma and children with disabilities. The primary education gross enrolment rate is almost 94 per cent, and the primary completion rate is 91 per cent. The secondary gross enrolment rate is almost 82 per cent. In the 2016-2017 school year, of the 1,534 children with disabilities who enrolled in primary school 47 per cent attended regular schools. Of the 459 children with disabilities enrolled in secondary school, 50 per cent went to regular schools. There has been an increase in enrolment and completion of compulsory education among Roma: 78 per cent of Roma school-age children enrol in compulsory education and 69 per cent complete compulsory education. Still, the majority of the children not in school are Roma, coming from families with low educational backgrounds and unfavourable living conditions. Although the country's public spending on education (4.1 per cent of GDP) is among the highest in the region, all education performance indicators are below the regional average. Results from the 2015 Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development OECD Programme for International Student Assessment puts the country at the bottom of the list (66th of 70 countries tested); more than 70 per cent of 15-year-old children are functionally illiterate and innumerate.

Throughout the years 2015 and 2016 the country became enmeshed in Europe's refugee and migrant crisis as an unprecedented wave of migrants and refugees crossed over its southern

border from Greece. Borders were closed in early 2016, as was also the case in neighbouring countries. However, the movement continued, relying on illegal smuggling networks. Between January and November 2018 authorities registered a total of 3,050 migrants – seven times the number reported in the same period in 2017 and a significant contrast to the more than 89,000 registered in 2016. However, based on information and observations from the field, it is estimated that the number of crossings into the country from Greece and out of the country to Serbia was higher than the 3,050 reported this year. This is corroborated by information from field staff of the United Nations International Organization on Migration in Serbia, who report increased arrivals and transit **from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**. More than half of all registered migrants in 2018 were of Iranian origin (56 per cent), followed by those from Afghanistan (10 per cent), Iraq (9 per cent) and 15 per cent of other nationalities. Twenty per cent of all registered migrants were children.

Part 2: Major results, including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the country programme document

Developed based on data from the 2014 situation analysis on women and children, UNICEF's 2016–2020 Country Programme (CP) has a cross-cutting focus on the most vulnerable children: child victims of violence, children with disabilities, children from minority groups (in particular the oft-excluded Roma population), that are often left behind by wider development initiatives. With the onset of the European refugee and migrant crisis, which saw close to 1 million people crossing the country's borders, the focus expanded to include refugee and migrant children. In addition to radically changing programme focus, the crisis also highlighted wider concerns about systemic gaps across key sectors and institutions. Throughout the same period, the country faced a political crisis, with, in many sectors, a virtual impasse on forward momentum. Further to this, the country has some of the worst indicators in education sector performance, infant mortality, child poverty and pre-school coverage in Europe, and significant efforts were invested in policy dialogue, demand-creation and technical support in these areas.

With the resolution of the political crisis in mid-2017, the subsiding of the refugee crisis and the overall change in the political and development context, in 2018 UNICEF Macedonia conducted a light strategic review of the 2016–2020 Country Programme, together with the Government and civil society partners. As a result, in 2018, the Programme accelerated support to reforms addressing major systemic bottlenecks to child well-being, capitalizing on the accelerated pace of reform in most areas of the social sector. Key bottlenecks identified included institutional capacity, public sector workforce motivation, poor use of evidence in policy formulation and the absence of integrated strategic engagement across sectors. Opportunities and momentum for change in the local context and with government partners led UNICEF to expand its programmatic activity significantly during the reporting period.

Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

The **former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** has the second worst infant mortality rate in Europe –the only one that appears to have worsened over the past decade. UNICEF collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Population Fund to assist the Government in assessing the causes of infant mortality and design a joint action plan to reverse neonatal mortality trends, while improving pregnancy outcomes and child health. UNICEF's role in this joint work resulted in the definition of short- and long-term activities, including mapping of health institutions and their resources, developing standards for maternity

wards, establishing a system for regular perinatal and maternal mortality audits and developing transportation guidelines for newborns and mothers. Moreover, UNICEF developed a comprehensive methodology for auditing, documenting and addressing root causes of child deaths, delivered training for a newly formed national task force and aided in the establishment of the national audit body and national new-born transportation unit.

Efforts also focused on enhancing home-visiting services to ensure better and earlier identification of developmental delays, as well as to promote positive parenting, attachment and the prevention of violence and neglect. UNICEF worked with partners to establish linkages between patronage nurses, family medicine practitioners, paediatricians and gynaecologists. An area of particular concern and focus was the Roma minority, who have a 25 per cent higher infant mortality rate than other children in the country. Advocacy continued throughout the year to support country efforts to sustain the Roma health mediators' programme, which provides assistance in accessing the health, social and education sectors and enables about 10,000 children and their families in municipalities with high-density Roma populations to benefit from an integrated model of health, social and early childhood development services.

As part of a 'Learning Together' program, UNICEF developed and implemented a training module for patronage nurses on early attachment, positive parenting and recognition of mothers at risk of child abandonment, neglect and abuse. This programme helped patronage nurses to support children's potential to learn and develop, through greater knowledge of children's physical, social, cognitive and emotional development, enabling identification of children with developmental difficulties and appropriate referrals. This was paired with training for general practitioners and family medicine specialists on early identification and intervention services, reporting and response for victims of violence, as well as prevention of unnecessary referrals to higher levels of healthcare. By the end of 2018, a total of 350 doctors (22 per cent of the total workforce) had been trained in early detection and intervention for children with disabilities and to utilize the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) and M-Chat tools.

Measuring statutory data against WHO estimates of general prevalence rates revealed a significant proportion of children with disability who are either hidden or have not had their disability assessed and identified, and therefore do not receive basic services or support. Campaigns to de-stigmatize disability yielded a considerable change in public attitudes toward disability. For example, in 2014, a mere 4 per cent of the population believed that children with disability should be included in mainstream education; this has now increased to 24 per cent.

Families with children with a disability, however, continue to contend with stigma, discrimination and struggle to have their children benefit from basic, normal childhood activities. UNICEF supported reforms aimed at addressing disability exclusion through the newly translated Classification, to enable medical practitioners, education professionals, social workers and parents to collaborate on finding optimal immediate and long-term support for enabling all children to flourish and overcome discriminatory barriers. UNICEF worked with partners at the national and local levels to pilot a new rights-based disability assessment model that will effectively link children and families with appropriate support and care services. The overarching goal is to make ICF a common language for all disciplines and sectors when describing health and health-related states, to improve communication between different users, such as health care workers, social workers, researchers, policy-makers and the public, as well as people with disabilities.

A study on micronutrient deficiencies in pre- and primary school children led to amendments to existing legislation aimed at improving child nutrition and schools' capability to plan and procure appropriate food items. Two additional studies were designed to collect data on the growing prevalence of obesity, provide evidence on the economic costs and behavioural drivers behind obesity that should shape future policies in the health, education and social sectors.

UNICEF provided technical assistance to the MoH for addressing a measles outbreak in the last quarter of 2018. In 2019, continuing medical education for health workers (refresher training), development of a communication for development strategy and a module for real-time monitoring of immunization are planned.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

Less than a third of children between three and six years of age attend pre-school, and a child from the bottom income quintile is 200 times less likely to go to pre-school than one from the top quintile. Up to half of all children with a disability are either out of school or in school without having had their disability identified and accommodated in their learning.

In late 2017 UNICEF used econometric data to successfully advocate for pre-school expansion. The Government is committed to expanding pre-school coverage by 50 per cent within the current government mandate and will use funding from a World Bank loan and UNICEF technical support to realize this. A key intervention during 2018 was the organization of a diagnostic workshop bringing together national and local government, the World Bank and the EU in defining priority areas to be addressed in early childhood education reform. The outcome of the workshop has enabled UNICEF, the World Bank and the EU to align their support to the reforms and ensure complementarity of the interventions which would lead to maximum support to pre-school expansion and quality of learning.

UNICEF supported the development of pre-school teacher competencies in early childhood education that will serve as a building block in setting a common ground for pre-service and in-service teacher professional development. An integral part of the work under this component is enhancing the technical capacity to teach and model social and emotional learning in the classroom. UNICEF will continue to work with teacher training faculties to adjust their curricula based on the new teacher competences. Social and emotional learning is now recognized as being as critical for school and life success as subject learning.

An essential element in improving outcomes for children is providing teachers and parents with practical tools to nurture children's cognitive, linguistic and socio-emotional development. A 'hackathon' organized as part of the late-2017 quality education conference focused on creating solutions for key issues in early learning and education, such as the introduction of play-based learning in preschool, designing inclusive classrooms, teaching character education and socio-emotional learning. These topics were further explored at a 19-day 'Innovation Education Camp', which brought together young people and teaching professionals to learn and come up with innovative ideas on quality education and learning environments. The camp proved to be an excellent tool to showcase the importance of inclusive education, as well as to develop capacities of teachers and adolescents in innovation and creative problem-solving. As a next step, the online web applications designed for pre-school and character education will be tested and further developed into a national platform for educators, parents and teachers, to enrich learning opportunities for children from pre-school to the first cycle of primary education.

In early 2018 UNICEF engaged a team of consultants specializing in behaviour insights to assess attitudes and motivation of teachers and social workers in the country, in an effort to identify operational bottlenecks to their success. The study revealed that for teachers, motivation is critical to impeding success. Overburdened by administrative demands and paperwork, and feeling only a limited sense of achievement, teachers burn out quickly. Study findings were being used by relevant ministries to design reforms in their respective sectors that focus on positive motivation and encouragement of teachers. This represents a significant shift in past policies and approaches, which focused heavily on punitive measures.

UNICEF partnered with the OECD on a review of the evaluation and assessment in the education sector, to be finalized in January 2019. Its purpose is to incentivize evidence-based, strategic leadership of the sector and thus improve overall outcomes in teacher performance, learning environment and student achievement. To this end, UNICEF Macedonia supported the Ministry of Education and Science to establish an analytical unit to advise on education policy and analyse local data, resource utilization and international trends and practices in education reform. This was based on a shared perspective by OECD and UNICEF that the absence of analysis and evidence in the previous round of education reforms had been a major causal factor in the country's declining education performance. The new unit will become operational in March 2019, after a completion of a functional analysis. The unit is expected to produce analyses essential for setting priorities, providing policy options and guidance for shaping decision-making and monitoring policy implementation and evaluation.

In addition to a poorly performing education system, the country was ranked 4th in the world for youth unemployment in 2017. At 46.95 per cent, youth unemployment is twice as high as the rate for the general population. All of this is set against a background of negative demographic trends, large-scale outward migration and a brain-drain, further depriving the country of the skilled staff needed to reverse these trends. During the reporting period, the Government launched a youth guarantee scheme to promote universal access to employment, training or education. UNICEF partnered with the national Innovation Fund and the start-up community in the country to deliver Upshift and Generation Unlimited activities. In both cases, the goal was to stimulate and develop social innovation and entrepreneurial skills among young people and break the cycle of passivity. Within less than a year, close to 200 young people aged 13–24 had participated in activities under these two programmes. At the same time, UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Development of Education are seeking ways to incorporate the techniques, methods and approaches used in these in programmes in the regular education system. The inherently global nature of innovation and tech culture pivots against the ethnic and/or rural vs. urban fault-lines that undermine social cohesion. Uniquely, the pedagogy of learning entrepreneurship and innovation through the Upshift programme will inform development of primary and secondary education curriculum in the country.

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

With UNICEF support, a two-thirds reduction in the number of children living in large-scale institutions was achieved through the expansion of foster care, opening of small group homes and strengthening of prevention mechanisms. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy pledged to bring an end to the placement of children younger than three in large-scale institutions by 2020. The nationwide campaign 'Every Child Needs a Family', designed to mobilize new foster families and support community-based alternatives to institutional care, resulted in a 20 per cent increase in the number of foster families.

A nationwide campaign on #ParentingIsAlsoLearned was launched to promote positive parenting and prevention of adverse childhood experiences, including violence against children, through digital platforms, mainstream media and— for the first time in the country’s history – through public discussions on parenting and violence against children in communities.

UNICEF supported reforms to strengthen the design and quality of the country’s foster care system for children with disabilities, as well as preventive measures for early intervention, family support and legal aid and assistance to families. These interventions targeting children in the largest institution for people with a disability resulted in all children being resettled in family-like care. With a ban on new admissions, this institution no longer accommodates children, and the de-institutionalization of young people and adults is underway. In addition, current community-based services (e.g., daycare centres for children with disabilities) are being updated and restructured to provide improved support to children and families, based on individual needs, and 51 day-care centre staff were trained on how to support parents/guardians in the process of inclusion of children with disabilities.

UNICEF supported alignment with international standards and reforms to ensure that child victims, witnesses and suspects are treated in a way that does not create secondary trauma or push children towards a life of crime. These efforts are led by an inter-institutional coordination mechanism supported through local, multi-agency teams. UNICEF successfully advocated for increased investment in reforms to the justice system for children through the European Union accession process.

UNICEF contributed to increasing the capacity of the national coordination body for protection of children from abuse and neglect, to ensure a sustainable mechanism for monitoring violence against children. The data gathered provided insights into the situation of child victims, while also providing evidence on gaps in the system, informing the Government on key areas requiring intervention. Due to increased understanding of the complexity of the issue, the national coordination body decided to develop a national strategy for ending violence against children.

UNICEF developed practical manuals for health workers and education professionals that incorporate provisions and regulations aimed at protecting children from violence. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science will utilize the manuals in their national-level programmes. Both education and health sector professionals (gynaecologists and paediatricians) were trained to better recognize and report cases of violence against children, and professionals from the centres for social work, police and NGOs were trained on providing protection to children with disabilities when they are victims of violence. In addition, UNICEF, the Ministry of Justice, the Bar Association and a local NGO signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing to provide capacity development for lawyers, ensuring that no child is left without legal protection by the justice system. UNICEF also worked with legal professionals to develop and implement a training module (a handbook and manual) for judges and prosecutors on the treatment and protection of child victims of, or witnesses to, violence and crime in criminal and civil proceedings.

While the number of migrants and refugees crossing through the country has dwindled since the official border closure in 2016, unofficial movement of migrants continues – usually economic migrants from Asia and Africa seeking to enter Europe through the so-called ‘Western Balkan’ migration route. UNICEF supported Red Cross mobile units that provide support to mothers and small children on the move. By December 2018 the Red Cross, as an

implementing partner, had provided food and non-food items for 262 boys and 171 girls in both transit centres, as well as 898 children on the move (582 boys, 316 girls).

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

In a direct follow-on from work to support the education of migrant children, as part of UNICEF's response to the refugee and migration crisis, UNICEF continued to address the long-term issue of access by migrant and vulnerable children to education systems. From initial work to ensure quality early learning and education opportunities for refugee and migrant children, with diminishing numbers of children passing through the transit centres in 2017, this collaboration transitioned to encompass learning needs for vulnerable children and communities and promote legislation to ensure that all children will always be able to enjoy their right to education. As a complement and follow-up to this work, UNICEF supported the development of a child-centred risk assessment and a revised and upgraded disaster risk reduction (DRR) curriculum that reflects local needs and is implemented at all levels of education, as well as enhanced school safety. This work will continue through the preparation of evacuation plans, training for staff and pupils on emergency preparedness and simulation exercises. A special working group was established within the Ministry of Education and Science to oversee all disaster risk reduction activities in the education sector, identify training priorities and involve the donor community in supporting these initiatives.

Another area of environmental vulnerability in the country is climate and climate change – with impacts ranging from flooding and erosion to litter and air pollution. To assess these realities, UNICEF conducted a climate landscape analysis for children. The report played a pivotal role in initiating dialogue with partners around this important issue, and will serve as the foundation for new work on the impact of air pollution on children and child health.

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

With poverty still impacting close to 30 per cent of children in the country and a Gini coefficient of 32.5 per cent– signalling substantial inequality– there is a need for urgent action to support the right of all children to an equitable start in life.

UNICEF worked closely with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and other partners (such as the World Bank and UNDP) on a comprehensive reform of the country's social protection system. A new law on social protection was finalized and is expected to enter into force in early 2019.

Once the reform is completed, it is expected that more than 60,000 children (a nearly 20-fold increase) will benefit from poverty-targeted child grants and enhanced, quality social services. Preliminary analysis suggests that the reform will make a marked contribution in the fight against poverty in the country– particularly child poverty.

To support the full operationalization of the new social protection system, UNICEF will continue to engage with the Government to develop and adopt protocols for the implementation of cash benefits for children, and to implement case management at Centres for Social Work (CSW). The 30 Centres are the country's main social protection hubs, administering all cash benefits and delivering social support and care services, including psycho-social support. The Centers are also responsible for the administration of foster care. Currently, the social welfare workforce operates on outdated procedures that are overburdened with administrative demands and

allow for very limited outreach work. To support the overall reform of the social protection system, UNICEF commissioned an assessment on how to improve the performance of the social work profession in the country, using behavioural insights. The assessment identified five motivational barriers relevant for professionals in the sector: a heavy administrative burden, invisibility of social outcomes, low salaries and little chance of progression, inadequate working conditions and lack of discretion in decision-making due to a rule-bound culture. Specific recommendations, based on behavioural insights, were then provided for review and incorporation by the Government.

UNICEF also partnered with Columbia University to develop a module introducing case management in the country, which will be introduced gradually over the next two years and is expected to greatly enhance the capacity of the Centres and their teams to more effectively and holistically support their clients – children and families at risk. In 2018 UNICEF worked with partners in Government and civil society to ensure that every social welfare professional in the country is trained and equipped with tools to effectively manage cases involving children and families at risk.

UNICEF also assisted the Government and civil society to measure child-focused expenditure, resource gaps and spending performance, and link them to child outcome data on social inclusion. The main achievement under this action was engagement and dialogue with key financial and policy decision-makers at all levels of Government to raise awareness around child rights and the case for investing in children. UNICEF's analytical work in public finance for children highlighted the decline in public expenditures for children over the years in areas such as education, social protection and health. This brought together high-level decision makers, including ministers, to publicly highlight the importance of work together to increase public investments for children in social sectors.

Evidence and data analysis are essential across all areas of child development. However, as the last census was nearly two decades ago, there is a dearth of accurate data about children to develop appropriate and focused policy. UNICEF is supporting the Government to address this by conducting a Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) to provide a wealth of data on health, nutrition, child and adult functioning, early child development and poverty. Comprehensive, up-to-date data is fundamental for bridging data gaps that curb effective strategic planning and decision-making. Beyond informing decisions and feeding into ongoing and planned reforms, however, data is also a key ingredient for achieving transformation – irreversible changes for the better – for boys and girls. MICS field work will be concluded in the first quarter of 2019, with preliminary data available shortly afterwards enabling the Government and its partners to assess and address the actual situation of children through policy and action. The separate survey of the Roma population being conducted as part of the MICS will offer a clear snapshot of the situation of Roma children and families in the country.

Cross-cutting and change strategies

UNICEF's partnerships have broadened to include not only Government and UN sister agencies, but also to encompass a wider array of civil society partners, academia, development cooperation partners and the dynamically developing private sector and start-up community.

UNICEF and partners used locally developed and globally adapted digital content to engage audiences on violence, disability inclusion and fostering. 'Every child needs a family' was designed to support government efforts to put an end to placement of children younger than

three in large institutions by 2020, by mobilizing support for community-based alternatives to institutional care and recruiting new foster families. The campaign visited 30 municipalities and shared multi-media content through various media platforms, garnering a 20 per cent increase in the number of foster parents in the country and contributing, along with other reforms, to a two thirds reduction in the number of children in institutional care. Work also continued on the multi-year campaign on inclusion of children with disabilities. A knowledge, attitudes and practices survey was conducted in 2014 as a baseline for social change interventions to advance the rights of children with disabilities. The 2018 follow-up survey shows that progress was achieved in the removal of knowledge and attitudinal barriers to inclusion, including a six-fold increase in the number of people who believe children with disability should be included in mainstream education. It should be noted, however, that this progress is from a very low baseline. A clear majority – 86 per cent in 2018) compared to 58 per cent in 2014 – understand that society and environments should be adapted to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

Perhaps the most widely covered and impactful campaign of the year was the #ParentingIsAlsoLearned campaign. Initially conceived as a campaign on violence, through internal discussions UNICEF decided to promote positives rather than challenging negatives. Thus the campaign focussed on nurturing caregiving, stimulation, love and attachment. Digital media materials were widely disseminated, resulting in over 50 reports in mainstream media, over 1 million people reached through digital communication channels and events held in five major municipalities with far greater participation and engagement than initially expected. It was the first time that issues such as emotional neglect and child abuse had been discussed in public at a local level, and the response informed a decision to continue with a new phase of the campaign in 2019.

UNICEF Macedonia continued to strengthen its digital presence, making the most of new trends and opportunities. The website was shifted to a new platform that ensures greater interconnection with social media and increased accessibility, including for people with disabilities.

New partnerships with the private sector, youth organizations and the national Innovation Fund added innovative ideas and directions to programming, and are laying the groundwork for wider impact in 2019.

While UNICEF's direct involvement in humanitarian emergencies waned throughout 2018, programme focus is still on the most at-risk children, considering not only the ongoing movement of migrant children and families through the country, but also other groups of at-risk children at the centre of programming, including child victims of violence and neglect, children with a disability and those who are economically vulnerable, including Roma children.

Gender considerations are cross-cutting, and UNICEF's advocacy and partnerships – in maternal and child health, violence prevention, education and adolescent programming make a marked contribution. UNICEF works to ensure that all children – both boys and girls – have the best start in life and the best chance for long-term opportunities and development.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

Human rights programming

As with many countries in the region and beyond, the human rights agenda has come under direct attack from emerging populist movements, getting particular traction in rural and post-industrial towns and communities. It is widely assessed that this is the outcome of a growing perception that human rights are not universal, but primarily in the interests of urban populations, and that they prioritize disadvantaged minority groups over majority communities affected by poverty. This had the effect of narrowing support for protection of minorities and undermining a broader human rights agenda.

Throughout the reporting period, UNICEF sought to re-universalize human rights for children in the perception of the public, by reaching out to traditional religious leaders to garner support for its campaigns and reforms, and by reaching out and listening to communities outside the capital.

The first example is the #ParentingIsAlsoLearned campaign which sought to break the taboo and open up a public discussion on violence against children, including neglect and sexual abuse – topics never before been discussed publicly. UNICEF briefed key stakeholders on plans beforehand and presented evidence from global and national research on adverse childhood experiences to raise awareness of the costs to society of violence against children. Upon field testing with diverse review groups, digital materials were launched. The language was changed from the preachy “ENDviolence” or stop hitting children to a narrative of “Parenting is Also Learned” – which recognizes that parenting is difficult and challenging, that there is good evidence on which approaches are better for our children, and that if are applied them children will do better.

The most innovative approach, however, was the convening of public town hall meetings in five locations, which were very well attended (several hundred people at each) and represented the first time that people had ever participated in a public discussion on parenting, violence, abuse and neglect. The events were designed as an engaging combination of entertaining facilitation, emotionally compelling—yet positive—children’s performance, followed by Ted Talk style presentations by the UNICEF Representative and two or three national experts on parenting, attachment and social and emotional development of children, and finally, a panel, comprising all speakers, fielding questions from the audience. This proved to be an essential contribution to the success of the events, as it demonstrated willingness to be in communities far from the capital and engage with people who very rarely feel that their voice is heard. This honest conversation approach seemed to win popular support for what could have been a controversial campaign, allowing conservative or populist forces might to argue that the sovereignty of the family was being violated. Another lesson learned was that when attachment, adversity and violence are discussed in a non-threatening way, people really identify with it and recognize it in themselves, their family and their community. This may be the way to gain momentum and advance #ENDviolence.

A similar experience brought a sea-change in the disability inclusion debate in the country. In mid-2018, inhabitants of Timjanik, a semi-rural village in the south of the country, protested against the opening of a small group home for children with severe disabilities, as part of de-institutionalization reforms. A government minister and the UNICEF Representative visited the community and were met by a very vocal crowd of about 500 people. For about three hours, the people of Timjanik voiced their concerns, while the UNICEF Representative and the minister carefully listened and tried to respond, at times in the face of aggressive and angry protests. This played out on national media and inspired a huge movement in support of the

de-institutionalization process on social media. At this point, other mayors came forward offering to host the small group home in different municipalities. The next day the minister and the UNICEF representative were asked at a media event what they thought about the protests. Instead of criticizing the protesters, both articulated the very real concerns that rural communities affected by poverty and poor services have and pointed out that the protests were more about questioning why the home is a spending priority rather than discrimination against people with disability. This built very strong trust with community members, who collectively reversed their decision and agreed to host the small group home, which is now flourishing in that community. Turning up, braving the protest and listening and demonstrating that their concerns had been heard and understood, turned around what seemed to be a populist, anti-minority action in a community. More importantly, however, it sparked a significant national debate on disability in which human rights values prevailed. The Government adopted a UNICEF-supported strategy on child welfare reform called Timjanik – in honour of what happened in that community and what it meant for the wider society.

Finally, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is affected by a persistent child poverty rate of almost 30 per cent, worsening health and education sector performance and high levels of family violence. During the reporting period, UNICEF re-framed the way it addresses vulnerability, seeking a stronger balance between universal issues like education and health reform and vulnerability issues such as disability inclusion or migration, to ensure that these issues do not compete in the way that they did in Timjanik.

System-strengthening

While UNICEF Macedonia continued the crucial work of capacity development of staff in key sectors to accompany reforms, it also concluded that the Government needs to review staff motivation, as well as drivers and barriers to good staff performance. Research on the psychology of motivation suggests that the main drivers of a well-motivated and high-performing workforce are: sense of purpose, autonomy, growing competence and a sense of belonging. A visit by a pioneering behavioural insights team from the United Kingdom was arranged to review work-flow processes and rules and regulations in the education and social welfare workforces, and to evaluate the extent to which they motivate and improve performance. The team's recommendations will be piloted in early 2019, in collaboration with the national Innovation Fund, and could become a model for overall public administration reform.

Similarly, UNICEF's work to support the education sector to strengthen social and emotional learning and capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship in secondary schools, it was recognized that within the teacher workforce, conditions for building a pedagogy around these issues was compounded by the inherently non-entrepreneurial way that the sector currently functions. Thus, the #Upshift and #GenerationUnlimited programmes were established, and agreements were reached with the national Bureau for Education Development that the pedagogy and learning for teaching children innovation and entrepreneurship would be fed back into the education sector, as part of efforts to mainstream the core content of #Upshift into schools for all children.

During the reporting period, the OECD, UNICEF and other partners concluded that one of the key bottlenecks contributing to poor education outcomes was that the Ministry of Education and Science lacks the capacity to adequately analyse data collected from schools, rationalize education sector resources and measure ideas for reform against international evidence. A similar gap exists in other ministries, preventing reform-minded ministers from pursuing an

evidence-driven strategic path. In this regard, in 2018 UNICEF supported the development of an analytical unit that will use evidence to determine policy. If successful, this model could be used in other sectors.

A key constraint during the reporting period was delays in UNICEF-supported legislative changes in the Parliament, due to extended parliamentary debate and political campaign activities related to the 2018 referendum on the country's name. Moreover, as in previous years and like other countries in the Western Balkan region, the public agenda was often dominated by ethnicity-related and nationalistic rhetoric. This limited the possibility for productive debate on key social policy issues such as child poverty, quality of education and improved health services. To this end, UNICEF sought to promote a coherent and integrated national public narrative on childhood by: promoting simplified and localized global evidence and research on child development, assisting local experts to develop public communication skills and using social media. This approach led to a three-fold increase in mainstream and social media coverage of these issues, creating more demand and policy space for reforms for children.

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