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Update on the context and situation of children

In 2019, the number of children in Morocco reached 11.2 million (55% girls), representing 31.4% of the overall population, compared to 33.5% in 2014, reflecting a progressive inversion of the population pyramid and confirming the demographic transition towards the late-dividend stage. Economic growth slowed to 2.3% (versus 3% in 2018), due mainly to decreases in rain-fed agricultural productivity. Unemployment rates among youth continue to be of great concern with 26.7% of 15-24 years-olds unemployed at the end of the third quarter. [1]

Throughout 2019, Morocco continued its social reform agenda aiming at reducing social and geographic disparities and strengthening social protection mechanisms. Overall, relevant progress in all sectors were achieved for children, despite remaining challenges, as highlighted in the new Situation Analysis published by national partners, with support from UNICEF.

The country continues to invest significant resources in the reform of the Education sector with an increase of its budget by 16.8% planned for 2020 (Education budget already increased by 4.63% in 2019). These efforts have resulted in the improvement of some indicators: a) preschool education coverage reached 55.8% in 2018-19 compared to 49.6% the year before; b) enrolment rates have registered progress for primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education, respectively from 99.5%, 89.7% and 65.8% in 2017-18 to 99.8%, 91.6% and 66.9% in 2018-19; and c) dropout rates declined slightly between 2017 and 2019, from 1.1% to 0.6% for primary, 12% to 10.7% in lower-secondary and 10.1% to 9.1% for upper-secondary. [2]

Despite these improvements, major challenges remain: 44% of 4-5-year-olds are not in preschool; quality of education is still a major concern affecting learning outcomes and retention; almost two third of children with disabilities are not in school, including in primary education; access and school drop-out are still an issue in rural areas, and mostly for girls. Published in 2019, the OECD's 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment, Morocco, assessed for the first time, ranked 75th out of 79 countries globally - with 27%, 24% and 31% of children attaining the minimum level of proficiency in reading, mathematics and science respectively.

In health, the Government continued efforts towards strengthening the health system based on equity principles. Of note is improved access to maternal and child healthcare services. Following the publication of preliminary results last year, the publication of the full results of the National Survey on Population and Family Health (NSPFH) in 2019 confirmed a reduction by 35% of maternal-mortality as well as the decrease of child-mortality from 28.8 deaths in 2011 to 18 deaths for 1,000 live births in 2018, with neo-natal phase continuing to be the major source of mortality.

However, several challenges remain and mainly for children and pregnant and postpartum women, especially in rural areas: 20.4% of pregnant women are not accessing antenatal services, 25.8% of deliveries are not assisted by qualified medical personnel, with only 22% of women who delivered accessing postnatal services. Stunting stagnates at 15%, while exclusive breastfeeding practices remain very low at 35%. Some reasons underpinning these challenges: (i) inequitable access to care due to insufficient human resources especially for maternal and child health and in rural areas; (ii) deficiencies in quality of reproductive and child health services at primary healthcare level; (iii) insufficiency of specialized adolescent health and mental health services and (v)insufficient/ ineffective strategies for changing negative social norms and unhealthy practices. [3]

In accordance with Royal instructions, Morocco adopted in 2019, with UNICEF support, the first integrated and child sensitive Social Protection Policy 2020-2030, which aims at reducing poverty and inequalities and strengthening the resilience of vulnerable families. The government also adopted the draft law on effective targeting of beneficiaries for social protection programmes by establishing a national registry agency.

Efforts continued to be made towards the full implementation of the Integrated Public Policy for Child Protection 2015-2025, through the development of a Repository of Jobs and Skills for social workers, the development of a positive parenting framework and the official launch of regional intersectoral referral systems in seven pilot regions to address the protection and care of vulnerable children and their families.

However, many challenges persist related to the situation of orphans, abandoned children or children living in residential care, or in the streets and migrant children who have only sporadic access to effective care. According to the Ministry of Social Development, more than 10,000 children (3,000 girls) are placed in institutions and more than 103,000 children (51.5% girls) in welfare centres. 13.7% of women aged 20-24 were married for the first time before the age of 18. The figure is 16.7% for women aged 20-49. [3]

Recognizing the persistence of inequalities, in November 2019, the King of Morocco set up a special High Commission of 35

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experts, who were appointed in December 2019, to work on a new model of development to accelerate the reduction of socio-economic disparities and strengthen social justice, including for children. This process aims to be inclusive, competitive while positioning Morocco as an emerging economy. The commission will submit its report by the end of June 2020.

Ensuring equitable socio-economic growth will be key to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Morocco will present its 2nd SDG national voluntary review at the 2020 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development convened under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council. It would be of strategic importance to invest additional efforts in the contextualization of SDG targets by adopting national targets and putting in place appropriate monitoring and governance systems to effectively track progress.

Seizing the opportunity of the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an integrated evidence-based advocacy roadmap was implemented together with all partners, children and young people. This process culminated on the 23rd November with the government and Parliament commitment renewal and the adoption of a new Compact for Children's Rights.

[1] Information note – High-Commission of Planning – Labour Market indicators – Q3/2019

[2] Ministry of Education - 2019

[3] All health-related indicators are from the "National Survey on Population and Family Health" – 2018

Major contributions and drivers of results

2019 marked the third year of the 2017-21 Government of Morocco-UNICEF programme of cooperation. The programme emphasizes systems-building and policy dialogue at the national level and provides support to making decentralization most effective for children via development of models for scale-up at local level. The major results for the year - responding to national priorities and the UNDAF goals - are described in this report.

Health and Nutrition

Following the publication of preliminary results last year by the Ministry of Health (MoH), with support from UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA, published the full the results of the National Survey on Population and Family Health in 2019. The results confirmed that key coverage indicators have shown significant progress and heightened continuing areas of concern. Across all indicators, urban-rural disparities persist (see context section).

With this context in mind, UNICEF continued to support the MoH to accelerate child mortality reduction by addressing the bottlenecks that prevent full coverage of quality perinatal health care, nutrition and immunization services. In 2019, over 19 million doses of vaccines and nutrition materials reaching a value of \$7.6 million were secured by MoH via UNICEF procurement services. 11,143 new-borns benefited from neonatal screening for congenital hypothyroidism in the target region of Beni-Mellal-Khenifra with UNICEF support. UNICEF continued to support capacity building of health service providers through an online course focusing on tuberculosis which was accessed by 1,374 health service providers.

At the policy level and following the royal instruction on Primary Healthcare (PHC) given on World Health Day, the MoH, WHO and UNICEF co-organized in December 2019 the PHC Forum. Attended by over 200 representatives the forum led to the definition of actions that shall feed into an ambitious reform process of PHC. Nine regional health plans focusing on the elimination of preventable death of mothers and new-born were produced and plans for all regions were disseminated.

New partnerships were developed, focused on rural areas, via a tripartite agreement between the MoH and the National Human Development Initiative (INDH), through which UNICEF will offer technical support to model community health care interventions at community-level in three priority regions with concerning child health and nutrition indicators.

Morocco remains one of the countries with the lowest levels of adequately iodized salt, affecting negatively the cognitive and physical development of children. Thanks to UNICEF's advocacy, a nutrition taskforce with the INDH and National Office for Nutrition and Food Security was established, and awareness was raised at the MoH which led to the inclusion of the fight against iodine deficiency in its strategy for Early Childhood Development (ECD). This has resulted in the inclusion of nutrition as one of the key components of the tripartite program mentioned above.

Access to Education

In 2019, UNICEF continued to contribute to education policies and strategies to ensure equitable access and completion at

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all levels of education for the most marginalized children, in line with the Ministry of Education's (MoE) Strategic Vision for 2015-2030 and related action plan, and the UNDAF education results area, which UNICEF and MoE co-preside.

Supporting the scale-up of preschool education remained a primary focus, contributing to an enrolment rate increase of 8% (from 49% to 57%) nationally in 2019. UNICEF directly supported the training of 4,914 teachers among 11,000 trained nationwide on preschool standards and supported imbedding initial and continuous training within the MoE training centres. Moreover, advocacy efforts supported budget allocation for preschool education through MoE, which has budgeted in 2019 a three-year budget allocation of \$513 million for preschool services scale-up, with a first allocation of \$173 million focusing on primary schools within rural and suburban areas.

With UNICEF support, a national evaluation on education for children with disabilities was conducted, which enabled a national debate and helped to develop a national policy for inclusive education by the MoE. UNICEF contributed to the development of decentralized plans to implement inclusive education within 700 targeted schools nationwide for 2019-21. In parallel, UNICEF continued direct support at sub-regional levels to improve access for disabled children by expanding inclusive education model and training to 1,022 teachers. Such efforts reached 10,200 children in 98 primary schools in 2019. Finally, UNICEF supported development of training modules for teachers, head of schools, parents and trainers and imbedding inclusive education in initial and in-service teachers training. Building on previous results, UNICEF supported MoE scale-up of the national program for tracking of out-of-school children. The "Child-to-child" program, a national program for tracking out of school children, has been implemented in three regions and strengthened through a school-based approach and large social and community mobilization.

Education Quality and Governance

While considerable progress has been made in improving access to education at all levels, the quality of education remains a major concern. This is evidenced by drop-out rates at the secondary-level and difficulty in school-to-work transition. Building on previous results, UNICEF continued its work towards improving quality through the development of Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) based curriculum and approaches within lower secondary education.

Twenty-eight subject-based teams of experts and teachers from the MoE were supported to develop LSCE-based teaching tools and pilot them in 168 lower-secondary schools. A national technical framework was developed to harmonize, and mainstream LSCE-based teaching methods covering all lower-secondary education subjects, including monitoring tools, and was adopted by MoE in 2019. This benefitted more than 21,000 children in 2019. Harmonization of approaches was supported by a second phase of piloting within lower-secondary schools with standardized observation and evaluation tools, aiming at reviewing national guidance and reform lower-secondary teaching manuals. To improve school-to-work transition, UNICEF supported the finalization of second-chance schools' management guides as well as a national LSCE-based curriculum for second-chance schools. The modelling was finalized in 2019 and 36 second-chance schools (11 with direct support of UNICEF) were subsequently opened. In 2019, 3,665 adolescents and youth benefited from new second-chance model. Advocacy efforts supported the extension of second-chance school coverage through a national plan with 88 new schools planned and budgeted for three years period (2019-2021). In November 2019, a national action plan was developed and adopted by MoE to develop a national LSCE para-curricular program through a comprehensive approach integrating counselling programs and expending para-curricular activities to support in-classes learning covering citizenship, health, and empowerment.

UNICEF also continued its support to extend INSAF approach (school-level monitoring and action tool) to more districts and schools within Sous Massa region – reaching 43 schools in 2019 and enabling the development of technical framework for schools-based indicators. Strengthened advocacy enabled including school-based governance reform under INSAF approach within MoE strategy and action plan, and in October, governance aspects were included with a focus on improvement of schools' boards management, including a road map to develop a school-based management framework at sub-regional level. In parallel, UNICEF continued developing school-based tools for action including violence in schools' response and emergency-preparedness kit which was institutionalized in 2019 by the MoE. The school preparedness kit is being integrated in national multi-sectoral program for risk reduction via the Ministry of Interior and the MoE with support of UNICEF.

Justice for children

UNICEF supports the strengthening of the justice for children through legislative advocacy, capacity-building and intersectoral cooperation, particularly for diversion and alternative measures to detention, the treatment of child victims and their reintegration. In 2019, UNICEF contributed to the following results:

- 977 justice actors – judges, prosecutors, social assistants, probation officers, directors of child protection centres, directors of juvenile prisons, educators, managers of civil society organisation - trained on child-sensitive procedures and capacity building of the Higher Institute of the Judiciary to review the curriculum in line with the

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- international norms and the incorporation of a specific module on child right into the initial training course.
- publication of the First Circular of the Public Prosecution Office on how to give primary consideration to the best interests of the child in judicial cases;
- creation of two Child-Friendly Spaces within family courts as a new generation of services to humanize the conditions of children;
- Support to the Public Prosecution Office to organize two seminars on the civil protection of children and the eradication of child marriage, attended by 200 magistrates and judges in charge of family affairs, to bring national practices in line with international standards and to present good practices.

Such efforts contributed to the continued increase in the number of children in conflict with the law who benefited from non-residential alternatives to detention - from 11,359 in 2018 to 13,537 in 2019 (66.4% of children in conflict with the law benefited from non-residential alternatives to arrest and detention at pre-trial, and 55.3% at trial).

Child Protection System

UNICEF supports the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality, and Family (MDS) to implement the Integrated Public Policy for Child Protection (PPIPEM) and its action plans. Building on recent political commitment, the MDS launched the territorial child protection system (*Dispositif*) in seven pilot regions with EU and UNICEF support.

As part of its support to the PPIPEM, and its objective related to the promotion of protective social norms, UNICEF supported in 2019:

- 139 organizations and public institutions benefited from capacity building (70 institutional and civil society organizations on social norms and Communication for Development and 69 institutional and civil society organizations on positive parenting)
- The launch of a national campaign of long-term communication around violence and social norms.

To combat sexual violence and child marriage, UNICEF supported the MoH to improve its information systems to better manage and monitor the declarations of children victims of sexual violence and to reinforce access of victims to quality health services and support units. As part of its programming on children on the move (CoM), UNICEF, partnered with the Foundation Orient Occident (FOO) to identify, provide protection and education services, reference to essential services and ensure appropriate follow up to CoM in targeted areas. More than 150 CoM have been supported through coordinated education, protection and referencing services. Through outreach and awareness campaigns, about 200 migrants have received information on their rights and access to services

Child rights monitoring

Further to the adoption of law no. 76-15 in February 2018 enabling the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) to establish an independent child rights monitoring/appeal mechanism, the General Assembly of CNDH approved in September 2019, the creation of the appeal mechanism. The new mechanism established has the mandate to receive complaints submitted directly by children victims of violations, their legal representatives or third parties, to carry out all inquiries related to complaints received and review and decide on them. As a direct result of years of collaboration and partnership between UNICEF and CNDH, this is the first appeal mechanism for children established in the MENA region. Upon the creation of the mechanism, UNICEF supported CNDH to provide spaces with access to the mechanism for children and will soon offer a model to be extended to all regional commissions of CNDH.

In addition, UNICEF worked with the Inter-ministerial Delegation in charge of Human Rights (DIDH) to foster coalitions capacities to draft the parallel reports monitoring the implementation of the Child Rights Convention and facilitate cooperation between civil society and the Government to exchange with the Committee of Child Rights. Technical support was also provided to CSOs to provide the capacity to influence the institution's priorities, to be a source of knowledge and expertise. UNICEF supported CSOs to deliver on the following activities: mapping on child protection systems/actors in their respective regions, linking services providers, actor's roles and ability and resources with the specific conditions and forms of vulnerability that encounter children at local level. The process included also a series of training on techniques of reporting of child rights violation.

Alternative care

UNICEF continued to support the adoption of national alternative care standards and norms, emphasizing deinstitutionalization. Capacity for implementation was enhanced via support to the standardization of the social work profession and the development of social care mechanisms that support the ongoing reforms in the sector. UNICEF in cooperation with its Regional Office, supported the MDS to complete the MENA Multi-Country Review of the State of the

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Social Service Workforce (SSW). Key results are the development of a multi-sectorial roadmap with a three years action plan for the SSW strengthening. This also contributed to the activation of the social workers law, that is being validated by the Government council.

In improving the alternative care policy and social welfare services, UNICEF developed a partnership with the Moroccan League of Child Protection, a national CSO leader in alternative care services delivery. Key results were the launch of a mother-and-baby services pilot program in one region aiming at preventing new-born abandonment, especially out of wedlock new-borns and vulnerable (young) mother.

In support of prevention efforts, UNICEF in partnership with National Observatory on Child Rights (ONDE), Ministry of Justice, CSOs, including foster care coalition, developed SOPs and training kits for Foster Care. In close collaboration with the social inclusion section, cash transfers for vulnerable care leavers, for transition to active and adult life have been included in the recently developed national social protection policy.

As part of programming on CoM and in collaboration with two CSOs, two residential care pilot facilities were implemented to offer a full and integrated support to 22 CoM without family protection in targeted cities. This support includes lodging, psycho-social, administrative, legal and educational services, as well as restoring family links. The process is pursued in coordination with the education, protection and health local government institutions and with local authorities to provide protection to the CoM regardless of their status and to ensure sustainability of the results and coordination mechanisms put in place

Data and Evidence-Based Advocacy

2019 saw the publication of an updated Situation Analysis for Children in Morocco (SitAn) by the ONDE, the National Observatory of Human Development (ONDH), and UNICEF. Based on the most recent studies, measures and surveys available on children's well-being, the 2019 SitAn was the result of a highly participatory approach, actively involving children, youth and parents both at national and regional levels, and was presented at the National Congress for Children's Rights on 20-22th November, chaired by Her Highness Princess Lala Meryem, with a high-level participation. This event led to the signature of the National Compact for Children drawing the roadmap for child rights' commitments toward 2030 and marking the 30th anniversary for the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Social protection

In 2019, a major step towards the reduction of child poverty and inequality was the adoption of a child-sensitive Integrated Public Policy for Social Protection (PPIPS 2020-2030). Taking a life-cycle approach, the PPIPS was prepared by the Department of General Affairs and Governance, with UNICEF support. Building on the National Conference held in 2018, the scenarios of the social protection reform were finalized and provided a review of existing social protection policies and possible options to improve social protection for the different target groups, including children. Existing policies and reforms were budgeted, and a financial model was developed specifically to support decision-making on family cash-transfers. The scenarios also provide different options to improve governance, targeting and funding systems. The scenarios for social protection reform and the PPIPS were developed after a long process of discussion and consultations with all the relevant national departments and international organization under the leadership of the Department of General Affairs and Governance, and therefore creating a strong interest on the topic of social protection which enabled additional coordination.

Gender

To strengthen its gender programming and better align with the Gender Action Plan (GAP), the office undertook a Gender Programme Review (GPR) in 2019. This participatory process gathered contributions from UNICEF staff, partners, and donors and resulted in the identification of Adolescent Girls' Learning and Skills and Violence Against Girls as the most strategic GAP results to prioritize. Informing the GPR, the update of the Situation Analysis of Children, published in 2019, included a stand-alone unit on the girl-child. The GPR also contributed to the office being added to the cohort of countries involved in the global Chloe partnership on "A Skilled Girl force: Innovative Learning for 21st Century Success" to begin in 2020.

The country office played an active role in the UN Joint team on Gender and, along with UNFPA and UN Women, in collaboration with the Embassy of Belgium, supported national advocacy efforts to end child marriage. A round table was organized in the scope of the 16-days of activism to fight violence against women and girls with the participation of relevant institutional and CSO partners as well as key donors. This joint advocacy, supported by digital communication campaigns, contributed to the Government announcing a review of the family code articles that currently allow judges to authorize marriage of children under 18.

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Office Management

The office conducted an internal mid-term review of the 2017-21 programme of cooperation in 2019, including a Gender Programme Review. The programmatic shifts are described in the Lesson Learned section of this report. The review process was highly inclusive, involving all staff, and resulted in a total of 15 posts being changed or created. The office also begun making more use of Temporary and UNV positions for filling project-specific posts. The use of proper chains of accountability and work flows within programme and operations to ensure resources are efficiently and effectively used remained a management focus. As a result, throughout 2019 the Country Office continued to largely meet global office performance indicators.

Acknowledgments

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Lessons Learned and Innovations

In 2019, the office conducted a mid-term review (MTR) of the 2017-21 programme of cooperation. While the MTR concluded that the programme continues to be relevant, effectively contributing to national priorities/reforms and well-aligned with the sustainable development agenda, the persistence of inequities, especially in rural areas, calls for adjustments based on lessons learned, as summarised below.

Balancing National/Regional/local

While national reform processes (particularly in education, social protection and child rights monitoring) have generally provided for opportunities to advance child rights and strongly position UNICEF as the guardian of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, their slow pace affects the achievement of some targets and brings to the surface the need for more strategic investment in national and local capacity strengthening in order to address broader governance challenges.

The ongoing decentralization reform and sectoral deconcentration of services offer opportunities for the State and UNICEF to better tailor programmatic responses to specific contexts and address equity gaps. The estimated 100,000 community-based organizations which can potentially expand the outreach of government services and administration through what already appears as a strong understanding in their complementary roles in service delivery, especially to most vulnerable communities, is solid ground for further strengthening of a strategic compact at regional/local-level in support to the most vulnerable children. The strategic approach the office adopted and implemented to support migrant children has shown the relevance of maintaining a balanced approach between a state-driven leg - able to influence and monitor the broader implementation of the National Strategy on Migration and the Global Compacts, as well as contribute to enhance multi-stakeholder coordination - with a more tailored equity-based approach in coordination with local administrations and civil society organizations (CSO) able to find solutions to the immediate needs.

The Education sector, with UNICEF support, has balanced well a national reform vision with strategic modelling at local-level under the leadership of local education administrations as well as in partnership with CSOs. As a clear step forward, it is key that UNICEF continues to support national and regional/local partners to accelerate the scaling up of 'modelled' interventions (preschool education, second chance schools), and quality assurance for the appropriate application of recently approved norms and standards. Equally important, UNICEF will need to exercise a strategic (informal) convening role by facilitating coordination/dialogue among main stakeholders contributing to the preschool universalization so to ensure accelerated coverage, impact and opportunities for all, especially the most vulnerable. Following a Gender Programme Review, UNICEF will step up efforts to improve access and completion of secondary education, and transition to active life for girls, especially those living in rural areas.

Moreover, the MTR highlighted the need to adjust and prioritize rural communities to accelerate progress on child health related indicators given significant urban/rural disparities. Despite the progress made by Morocco, significant challenges remain to fully benefit particularly girls and women in rural communities. Efforts to further reduce mortality and high stunting prevalence will require to adopt a multidisciplinary approach promoting community health systems. The successful partnership with the National Initiative on Human Development and the ongoing support to the modelling of an integrated

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community-based health system will offer the opportunity to strengthen local multi-sectoral/multi-partner approaches and synergies.

Improved Integration/Coordination

As highlighted by the evaluation conducted in 2019 of UNICEF's multi-sectoral programme in support of adolescence and youth (FORSA), the office needs to reinforce internal coordination mechanisms. The FORSA project demonstrated great potential for complementarity between CSO and institutional partners in the development and integration of adolescent girls, adolescents and vulnerable young people into working life. This potential however has remained underutilized, despite many attempts to mobilize successful institutional-CSO partnerships. The general implementation strategy of FORSA could have been expanded to establish a harmonized approach between stakeholders, promote the establishment of bridges between components/sectors, and enhance complementarities.

A more integrated approach and improved convergence of UNICEF-supported programmes becomes of capital importance to influence child-centred and equity-based regional development plans. A more strategic and coordinated approach to address the complex structure of regional administrations needs to be put in place, potentially resulting in enhanced integrated and well-coordinated approaches at local-level, particularly around horizontal/cross-cutting thematic issues such as youth, early childhood development, and migration.

Diversified Partnerships, Improved Evidence-Based Advocacy, and Leveraging

Constrained results areas required diversified and strategic partnerships in 2019. Especially for Child Protection system strengthening, the office diversified its partnership to accelerate results and will need to look at the potential of strengthening support to CSOs in providing services at local-level. This would benefit further from appropriate guidance and technical support, in partnership with subnational actors, and other partners present on the ground. The recent opening for the office's work on public finance for children, the progress made in the social protection reform with UNICEF support, and the ongoing decentralization reform, call for a more strategic, right-based advocacy function and a clear/consistent partnership analysis and strategy in support to the important role to play in leveraging resources for children.

Given this, the development of an all-Office advocacy strategy, planned for early 2020, will help the Office prioritize its strategic partnerships to make public money work for children, address social norms, improve legislation, and strengthen child rights monitoring, and assess and mitigate risks in taking bolder approaches to sensitive issues, such as child marriage, including decisions on public and private advocacy, and best messengers. Evidence, data and analyses arising from the recently completed Situation Analysis can also best be capitalized upon from an advocacy perspective.

The office continued to have positive results in establishing financial partnerships, mobilising in 2019 a record level of annual income. This included, for the first time this cycle, mobilising domestic resources in support of UNICEF programmes. The potential long-term impact of this is significant as it opens a new avenue for resource mobilisation for UNICEF's work in Morocco. Nevertheless, the office will need to be strategic in how it engages with domestic resources and ensure that UNICEF's added value is focused on technical assistance for innovations and solutions applied to accelerate results at scale.