Executive summary

The year 2017 marked the second year of implementation of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Serbia Programme of Cooperation 2016-2020. The context within which progress was made for children under this Programme between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF Serbia remains promising overall, yet still challenging. Implementation of activities was somewhat delayed with presidential elections held in April 2017. With a continued focus by the Government on economic reforms and investment in more sustained economic growth, UNICEF Serbia maintained its advocacy for the inclusion of social development – especially for the most vulnerable children and young people – in the new economic vision as an essential element of sustainability. UNICEF Serbia’s solid engagement with multiple actors helped preserve the initial investment in policy reforms and systems strengthening, and work continued with the new Government to further build upon it.

In January 2017, the Committee on the Rights of the Child considered the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia on the status of the Convention of the Rights of the Child implementation. It was noted that Serbia has taken positive steps to create the conditions to achieve its obligations for children. There is indeed a higher degree of political will to fulfil the rights of all children. Notable efforts have been initiated with the development of the new violence against children strategy, and a renewed commitment to develop the new National Plan of Action for Children and to support the coordination and monitoring of other policies relevant for children. UNICEF Serbia actively supported these efforts.

It must however be stated that despite progress, much of the social sector in Serbia continues to operate in an environment of constrained financing. More specifically, the Committee noted that urgent and substantive steps need to be taken in specific areas, including preventing violence against children, promoting inclusive education (IE), ensuring accessibility and availability of services for vulnerable children (children with disabilities, Roma children), accelerating access to quality maternal and child health services, and guaranteeing the effective administration of juvenile justice.

UNICEF Serbia continued to advocate for and provide strong technical support to the development of national policies and strategies in sectors relevant to children: education, early childhood development (ECD), child protection and social protection. UNICEF Serbia’s work in 2017 focused strongly on the youngest children, universal access to early childhood services and interventions, preschool, improving the skills of parents of young children and ensuring that all children can grow up in a supportive family environment.

While continuing to respond to the refugee and migrant crisis, UNICEF Serbia invested heavily in strengthening its preparedness capacity for any future humanitarian response. Guided by its Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF Serbia continued to implement a two-pronged approach, whereby humanitarian assistance supports the enhancement of the national response systems for the medium and longer term in the areas of child protection, education and infant and young child feeding (IYCF).
Strategic national and global partnerships continued to be critical to the achievement of results for children, and UNICEF Serbia continued to play a brokering role in the further development of collaborative partnerships between different state and non-state organizations to advance the dialogue on child rights. Of particular importance is the partnership established with the National Association of Persons with Disability that resulted in the first comprehensive situation analysis of children with disabilities. UNICEF Serbia’s coordination and advocacy with the Government also resulted in a confirmed commitment from Serbia to join the We Protect Global Alliance to End Online Child Sexual Exploitation and sign the 2015 Statement of Action. Following UNICEF Serbia’s advocacy, the Government also initiated action to join the Global Partnership for the Protection of Children from Violence as a Pathfinder country in 2018.

Evidence generation also remained a priority to ensure proper planning and allocation of resources for children. Underpinning much of UNICEF Serbia’s work in 2017 was the strong public commitment of the Government and the United Nations (UN) system to the Sustainable Development Agenda. The preliminary commitment from the Government to undertake a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in 2019, which will provide key disaggregated data on the situation of children in a number of sectors, will enable more systematic monitoring of equitable progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Humanitarian assistance

Despite the de facto closure of the Balkan route in March 2016, a continuous stream of refugees and migrants continued to arrive in Serbia. With a smaller number of refugees/migrants able to cross to Hungary compared to those crossing from Bulgaria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Serbia, the numbers of refugees/migrants in Serbia fluctuated between 4,800 and 8,000 throughout 2017, making it a very fluid crisis to respond to.

The complex political situation in Europe, the lack of effective information-sharing systems for refugees and migrants, as well as physical barriers between countries, have left refugee and migrant children and their families facing great uncertainty. The steady increase in the numbers of refugees and migrants and the longer periods of stay created additional needs for services for children.

In line with its Core Commitments for Children, UNICEF Serbia continued to implement a two-pronged approach, whereby humanitarian assistance supported the enhancement of national response systems for both the medium and longer term, especially in the areas of child protection, education and infant and young child feeding.

UNICEF Serbia was actively engaged in regular Government and United Nations (UN) country team coordination mechanisms on the refugee/migrant crisis in the country. UNICEF took the lead in mobilizing all relevant stakeholders to raise awareness of the rights of refugee/migrant children, adapt the response to their needs and improve assistance to children and their families.

UNICEF Serbia in partnership with the Danish Refugee Council, Divac Foundation and SOS Children’s Village continued to operate and/or establish child-friendly spaces in Presevo, Dimitrovgrad, Bujanovac, Vranje, Sid (closed in May), Adasevci, Principovac, Obrenovac, Sjenica, Klisina and Krnjaca to support children of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers and their families. In addition to the provision of psychosocial support services through recreational and educational activities, child-friendly spaces served as spots for identification of child protection concerns. A total of 3,558 children (1,296 girls, 2,262 boys) benefited from mother-
baby corners (MBC) and child-friendly space services in 2017. UNICEF Serbia further supported the centres of social work in different municipalities to deploy social workers to identify and respond to the needs of unaccompanied and separated children.

Together with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs (MoLEVSA), UNICEF Serbia co-chaired the child protection sub working group at the national level. The working group focused on a coordinated use of resources to respond to child protection needs as well as exchanging information, knowledge and experience among the different actors. An information management system continued to play a crucial role in data collection and analysis. Data on activities and available capacities were collected from all actors and presented regularly at the working group. This ensured better coordination and allocation of resources among the child protection actors.

UNICEF Serbia, in partnership with the Danish Refugee Council, Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre, Balkan Centre for Migration and SOS Children's Village, continued to operate MBCs in Krcnaca, Principovac, Adasevci, Presevo, Bujanovac, Vranje, Sid (closed in May), Dilvjeta, Sjenica and in the Belgrade centre, where mothers who were lactating could continue to breastfeed, while mothers of children under two years of age received counselling and support on infant and young child feeding, health, development and the hygiene of babies. Referrals were also provided to appropriate services as required. A total of 1,540 children under two years of age and 1,000 mothers benefited from the mother-baby services in 2017. In addition, 9,473 children up to the age of 12 were provided with appropriate winter and summer non-food items either in reception centres or through mobile teams.

With UNICEF Serbia's support, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) developed a strategic approach to the education of refugee and migrant children based on a review of international practices. UNICEF Serbia specifically supported MoESTD and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration to provide access to education to refugee and migrant children through access to formal and non-formal education, support to coordination and system development at the national level, and capacity building of schools and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as development of the monitoring framework. As a result, 2,035 children participated in structured education activities. Since September 2017, around 85 per cent (443) of all primary school-aged refugee and migrant children have been attending primary schools, around 15 per cent (52) of all secondary school-aged children in Serbia have been attending secondary schools, and around 8 per cent (29) of secondary school-aged children who have never been enrolled in education have been attending second chance schools.

**Equity in practice**

Serbia has sound universal services in education and health and a fragile social welfare system in place to support the most vulnerable. However, evidence has shown that the most marginalized populations experience difficulty in accessing and appropriately benefiting from services. This includes Roma families living in substandard informal settlements, families with members who have a disability, families with parents who are battling with substance abuse or experience mental health problems as well as families who are simply struggling to make ends meet and live in absolute poverty. It is these families that can benefit from “an extra hand” and use such support to make transformational changes in their lives – ultimately improving the well-being of and prospects for their children.
In supporting the development of education, health, early childhood development and child protection services, UNICEF Serbia systematically ensures services reach those children in families experiencing multiple deprivations, and those at higher risk of experiencing health problems, being subject to school drop-out or experiencing abuse, neglect or bullying.

UNICEF Serbia supported the development of two family support services, discussed below, that have a strong evidence base and demonstrate how the most marginalized families can be supported to make tangible changes in their own lives, contributing to better child well-being. This experience showed that vulnerable families need extra support to be fully included in the community. The extra support also needs to be time-bound, outreach-based, and tailor-made for the needs of the specific circumstances of an individual family. The experience also showed that services focusing on the inclusion of the most marginalized act as a bridge to accessing universal support as well as specific entitlements. They also act as mechanisms for addressing discrimination that can act as a barrier to access and inclusion. As such, professionals working in these services act as advocates for particular families in communities and need to have a strong rights approach.

The first family support service is the Roma health mediators (RHM). These mediators are Roma women and mothers who are trained to provide targeted support to Roma communities in substandard settlements that are familiar to them with a focus on maternal and child health care. They are “attached” to the patronage service in primary health care centres (PHCs), however, beyond health, they substantially support Roma families in fulfilling all their rights and entitlements. They address issues including birth registration and citizenship, immunization and access to primary health care, enrolment in preschool and support accessing social protection support, as well as provide referrals to social services in cases of domestic violence. Since their establishment in 2009, they have reached 146,108 Roma (48,508 women and 52,832 children).

Following intensive capacity building in ECD in 2016, the Roma health mediators have increasingly engaged in promoting adequate nutrition for women who are pregnant and infants, advising parents on positive practices and providing a supportive environment for child development, particularly in the first three years of life, highlighting the power of communication and play and the damaging effects of abuse, neglect and exploitation. Roma health mediators have also demonstrated good practices in encouraging parents to seek support when developmental delays or concerns are noticed and in providing adequate referrals, as well as in reacting more decisively in cases of violence in the family.

Despite high national and international recognition of their work and its contribution to Roma social inclusion, their sustainability is not yet assured. In 2017, UNICEF Serbia conducted an independent assessment to support the development of options for their sustainable functioning. Implementation of the selected option is expected in 2018.

The second service that has proven to impact well-being of the most marginalized families is the family outreach worker. This service was piloted for families where children are at high risk of maltreatment. In this case, progress was achieved with respect to reducing violence and improved child well-being in 80 per cent of all families. A second piloting of the service focused on families affected by poverty with children with disabilities, and progress was also recorded in terms of improved family relationships, better health outcomes and improved education access and attendance. The service provided in the home and centres focus on three types of support: a) practical support in meeting administrative and other requirements for accessing services and transfers; b) acting as an advocate in the community for members of a family experiencing discrimination and excluded from community-based service provision; and c) providing systems-
based counselling to address domestic conflicts and improve relationships between family members.

**Emerging areas of importance**

**Refugee and migrant children.** UNICEF Serbia has been responding to the refugee and migrant crisis since 2015. Although a repetition of the 2015 summer-autumn events, namely uncontrolled, disorganized mass irregular movement of people across the borders, is unlikely, a continuous stream of refugees and migrants has continued to arrive in Serbia from Bulgaria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia since 2016. As such, the issue of refugee and migrant children features prominently into the implementation of UNICEF Serbia-supported interventions, as the steady increase in numbers of refugees and migrants and their longer period of stay has created additional needs for services for children. UNICEF Serbia’s response is guided by the Core Commitments for Children.

Based on its comparative advantage and the presence of other partners, UNICEF Serbia provided technical support in the areas of child protection, education, nutrition and non-food-items. UNICEF Serbia continued to implement a two-pronged approach, whereby humanitarian assistance supported the enhancement of national response systems for both the medium and longer term, especially in the areas of child protection, education and infant and young child feeding.

**Accelerate integrated early childhood development (ECD).** Building on achievements made in 2016, UNICEF Serbia continued its efforts to sustain and further develop ECD initiatives focusing primarily on mobilizing an inter-sectoral national response, strengthening existing partnerships and establishing new ones, increasing public/parental awareness of ECD and building cross-sectoral evidence to inform the development of integrated ECD services.

Partnerships established with three sectoral ministries for implementing the national ECD campaign and national ECD conference were crucial to ensuring the highest level of commitment to develop an inter-sectoral ECD policy in 2018. UNICEF Serbia, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health (MoH), MoETSD and MoLEVSA, launched a national campaign “Early Moments Matter”, focusing on the period up to three years of age. Through strategic partnerships with key print and broadcast media and wide distribution of education materials prepared for parents (both mothers and fathers) and professionals, awareness was raised and knowledge strengthened about the importance of investing in ECD, and the significance of positive ECD practices to children’s futures. The campaign mobilized various web platforms for parents (including parental associations), bloggers and public figures who have given their voices to support campaign messages. To complement these efforts, UNICEF Serbia and the three ministries organized a national ECD conference that brought together over 500 participants, including high-level policymakers and ECD professionals and practitioners to share and learn from examples of ECD policies, programmes and research. The conference served as a platform for sharing new developments as well as for introducing stakeholders to new initiatives related to early years’ policy and programming. As a result, all three ministries committed to the development of an inter-sectoral ECD policy in 2018.

As part of the comprehensive ECD package, UNICEF Serbia focused particularly on the strengthening of early childhood interventions (ECI) to respond to the unmet needs of the most vulnerable families, primarily those with children with developmental difficulties and disabilities and socially vulnerable families, i.e. Roma. Evidence was generated to inform programming or strengthen existing services, with situation analyses completed on patronage nurses service,
developmental counselling units (DCUs) for children with developmental difficulties, ECI and preschool inclusion. Technical support was provided to develop, introduce and scale-up new tools (developmental screening and monitoring), guidelines (e.g. new preschool curricula frameworks and a professional guide for supporting children with autism) and mechanisms for developing and implementing new models of ECI based on evidence and principles (such as child-outcome oriented, family centred and applied in child’s natural environments). Further support was provided to strengthen existing services (RHM, patronage nurses, paediatricians, neonatal intensive care units, DCUs, inclusive preschools, family outreach services) covering 16 per cent of all PHCs and 13 per cent of preschool institutions. Finally, new informal partnerships were developed in 2017 with the involvement of associations of parents of children living with disabilities, as they are critical partners in developing models for ECI services with government and professionals. Partnerships with civil society organization (CSOs) and local communities will be further emphasized in 2018.

Summary notes and acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>CMT</td>
<td>country management team</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>civil society organization</td>
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<td>CSR</td>
<td>corporate social responsibility</td>
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<td>DCT</td>
<td>direct cash transfer</td>
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<td>DCU</td>
<td>developmental counselling units</td>
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<td>ECD</td>
<td>early childhood development</td>
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<td>ECI</td>
<td>early childhood intervention</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>HACT</td>
<td>harmonized approach to cash transfers</td>
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<td>IE</td>
<td>inclusive education</td>
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<td>IYCF</td>
<td>infant and young child feeding</td>
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<td>MBC</td>
<td>mother and baby corner</td>
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<td>MODS</td>
<td>Network of Organizations for Children</td>
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<td>MoESTD</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development</td>
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<td>MoH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
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<td>MoLEVSA</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organization</td>
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<td>PHC</td>
<td>primary health care centre</td>
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<td>RHM</td>
<td>Roma health mediators</td>
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<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<td>UN</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
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Capacity development

UNICEF Serbia’s approach to capacity development at national and local levels is at the core of its Country Programme. To ensure a comprehensive approach to capacity development, UNICEF Serbia attempted to the extent possible to promote systemic changes and the strengthening of partnering institutions and to emphasize local ownership. Information on results achieved in 2017 is included below.

Support to improve the quality and harmonization of national and local policies in preschool education included training, mentoring and horizontal exchanges on implementation of the new curriculum for preschool education (108 practitioners), quality early learning for children with disabilities (240 practitioners) and evidence-based local policies (350 practitioners).
The capacities of 1,080 teachers were strengthened to improve education quality, and a system for horizontal learning was set up (with 98 advisers trained). Some 550 professionals from preschool and primary and secondary schools were trained on IE.

Continued support to the social welfare system to prevent child/family separation included training for case managers on risk assessment for placement in institutional care (124 practitioners), application of the handbook on permanency planning (511 practitioners) and culturally competent practices addressing the over-representation of Roma children in formal care (334 practitioners).

Strengthening capacities for prevention and protection of children from violence in 12 municipalities included mentoring and thematic training for inter-sectoral teams (85 participants). An additional 134 professionals from key sectors attended advanced multidisciplinary courses on sexual abuse, while 57 professionals from centres for social work were trained on early identification and coordination of support to child victims of violence.

In order to strengthen the health system to support children and parents in improving child development outcomes, ECD elective courses and developmental pediatrics was introduced into university curricula. In-service training on using a developmental guide reached 125 paediatricians in 15 Belgrade-based PHCs.

**Evidence generation, policy dialogue and advocacy**

The study on drivers of violence against children was conducted in cooperation with the UNICEF Office of Research to systematically review available information concerning prevalence, drivers, prevention and other violence-related issues. Findings were used to develop the national strategy for protection of children from violence, under public debate.

The qualitative research on child marriage in Roma communities initiated a vibrant national-level discussion on the need to address social norms influencing the perpetuation of child marriage, offer institutional support to Roma children and their families and form a nationwide coalition to end child marriage.

The study on outcomes of piloted diversion measures to juvenile offenders showed that children benefited from the interventions. Knowledge generated through piloting translated into a handbook on interventions for juvenile offenders and guidelines for social work professionals when reporting to judicial bodies.

The robust evidence-based approach and the final evaluation of piloting of the Family Outreach Worker service demonstrated tangible outcomes to improve the well-being of children living in families experiencing multiple deprivation. While the service evaluation will prove useful for advocating its institutionalization in 2018, the piloting was also useful during the development of the rule book on intensive family support.

UNICEF Serbia, in cooperation with the MoH, MoESTD and MoLEVSA, organized a national ECD conference that brought together over 500 participants, including high-level policymakers and ECD professionals and practitioners to share and learn from examples of ECD policies, programmes and research. The conference served as a platform for sharing new developments as well as introducing stakeholders to new initiatives related to early years’ policy and
programming. Thus, all three ministries committed to the development of an inter-sectoral ECD policy, which remains a priority in 2018.

**Partnerships**

UNICEF Serbia’s coordination and advocacy with the Government and particularly with the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunication (responsible for coordinating cyber development and safety) resulted in a confirmed commitment to join the We Protect Global Alliance to End Online Child Sexual Exploitation and sign the 2015 Statement of Action. A collaborative platform will be developed in 2018 with the Government, the private sector and CSOs to harness the power of digitalization to benefit the most disadvantaged children.

The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government in cooperation with UNICEF Serbia and with support from the national Statistical Office launched a revision of national social inclusion and poverty reduction indicators including the “investing in children portfolio”, which is intended for designing adequate measures and policies for a more inclusive society.

UNICEF Serbia’s engagement to promote child rights and business principles (CRBP) contributed to increased knowledge and technical capacity of the business sector to respect children’s rights, based on the results of a corporate survey conducted by UNICEF in 2017. Forty-six per cent of companies were very familiar with the principles in 2017, compared to 11 per cent of companies in 2015.

UNICEF Serbia partnered with the European Union (EU) Delegation to support national partners in mainstreaming child rights in policies, programmes and programming of development assistance. As a result, child rights mainstreaming was included in the EU development assistance programming workshop for governmental officials.

Together with MoLEVSA, UNICEF Serbia co-chaired the child protection sub-working group consisting of representatives of UN agencies, international and national NGOs and government institutions working in child protection. In addition to exchanging information, knowledge and experience among actors, a particular focus in 2017 was on coordination in the area of capacity building (including assessment of needs, capacities and resources).

**External communication and public advocacy**

The national public awareness ECD campaign “Early Moments Matter”, focusing on children up to three years of age, was implemented in 2017. Renewed strategic partnerships with the influential national weekly “Nedeljnik” and the daily “Politika”, and two three-year partnership agreements with public broadcasters, contributed to expanding the media coalition for enhancing public advocacy efforts related to ECD. Through these partnerships with key print and broadcast media and wide distribution of education materials prepared for parents and professionals, awareness was raised and knowledge strengthened about the importance of investing in ECD, and the significance of positive ECD practices to a child’s future. The full results will be available in Q1 of 2018.

Serbian media published or broadcast 4,054 articles and videos about UNICEF Serbia’s work for children and families. There were 216,775 page views on www.unicef.rs and 10,412 on www.unicef.org/serbia, and an increased success rate on social media in 2017 compared to 2016 (increase on Facebook: 12 per cent, Twitter: 230 per cent, YouTube: 49 per cent, LinkedIn: 76 per cent, Instagram: 234 per cent).
Social media influencers mobilized new audiences, promoted ECD and contributed to fund-raising activities. National ambassadors amplified fund-raising and programme messages, contributing to the expansion of the key messages’ reach and support.

UNICEF Serbia contributed to global, regional and national communication and advocacy efforts on the refugee and migrant crisis, ECD, SDGs, World Children’s Day, and State of the World’s Children with multi-media assets and media engagement in Serbia through events and activities. These efforts were amplified through celebration activities organized to mark UNICEF’s 70th Anniversary in Serbia, which included a photograph exhibition hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was shown in five cities, and the publication of a special edition of the Diplomacy and Commerce In Focus magazine highlighting UNICEF Serbia’s results for children over the last seven decades. A telethon was organized to raise awareness and funds for children with disability and their families.

**South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation**

A two-day meeting on “Sustainable models of institutionalizing Roma health mediators: perspectives and regional experiences” was attended by delegations from Bulgaria, Montenegro, Romania, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The discussion highlighted the solutions applied by different governments in the region, which provided relevant inputs for the Roma health mediators institutionalization process in Serbia.

UNICEF Serbia invited a neonatologist from Croatia to facilitate a two-day seminar for maternity and neonatal departments in Serbia on “Establishing and Implementing the Principles of Natural Nutrition and Family-Oriented Development Care in Maternity Homes and Neonatological Health Care Departments”. The workshop resulted in strengthened teams of health workers equipped to initiate changes in their work environment and spread the acquired knowledge and skills to colleagues from other maternity/neonatology departments.

UNICEF Serbia hosted a sub-regional technical meeting “Violence against Children and Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities: Administrative Data - Why it is Important, When it Works and for What?” with the aim of understanding elements of an effective administrative data management system. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were represented by implementing governmental and non-governmental partners, and this allowed for cross-country exchanges of experience.

A conference on quality development in ECD was organized by UNICEF and government/CSO partners aimed at sharing key initiatives in preschool education in the region. Examples of modern preschool education curricula from Belgium, Croatia and Ireland were presented, along with the EU quality framework. Delegations from Croatia, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia attended.

With the aim of disseminating lessons learnt in Serbia, a knowledge-exchange workshop and study visit to UNICEF Serbia’s drop-out prevention project was organized with representatives from two think-tank organizations from Slovenia and Turkey.

A round table was organized in Belgrade with KulturKontact Austria, at which experiences on the right to education of refugee and migrant children in Austria, Bulgaria and Serbia were exchanged.
**Identification and promotion of innovation**

The protection of child victims of crime is defined by a series of measures stipulated in a “lex-specialis” law: a child can be questioned by the authorities a maximum of two times; a child victim must not be confronted with the perpetrator; and a child victim/witness is supported by a child protection practitioner.

The justice system has struggled to apply these protection measures and children have often been exposed to multiple hearings where they met their perpetrator and did not understand the criminal procedure.

In order to address the challenge, UNICEF Serbia designed a highly specialized service that is organized through four regional units. Each unit is composed of well-trained child protection specialists and equipped with a car and a laptop/camera and are available to prosecutors and judges upon request.

The services they offer include preparation of the child and parent/carer for the hearing; support during the hearing in terms of adapting questions posed to the cognitive capacity of child; providing technical expertise in forensic interviewing to get the evidence required to bring the perpetrator to justice; and providing and managing the technical equipment that records the hearing and enables the child to give his/her statement from a separate room/location.

The video recording is then used in later phases during the judicial process and the child is no longer exposed to the traumatic experience of repeating the story of the crime. In addition, the child protection specialists also provide post-hearing counselling to the child and carer. This service has been identified as innovative because it is tailor-made to the needs of its clients, the child and the judicial authorities; it is illustrative of how inexpensive technology can be used to protect children; and it is holistic.

**Support to integration and cross-sectoral linkages**

In 2017, UNICEF Serbia continued to bring different sectors, such as social welfare, health, and education, together on child-related issues that require integration and cross-sectoral collaboration. These included violence against children, support to children with disabilities and ECD.

The national ECD campaign and ECD conference were jointly organized with three sectoral ministries, resulting in a commitment to develop an inter-sectoral ECD policy.

UNICEF Serbia also supported the three sectors together with representatives of organizations of people living with disabilities to develop two cross-sectoral situation analyses on one, children with disabilities and, two, ECI services. Key recommendations call for the establishment of more effective national and local cooperation in developing integrated services across sectors to meet comprehensively the needs of children with disabilities and their families. At the local level, in six out of eight municipalities where memoranda of understanding on ECD were signed in 2016, improvements were recorded in terms of increased coordination among sectors for the benefit of the most vulnerable children. In one municipality, there were improved and coordinated ECD individualized services for children and their family.

UNICEF Serbia continued to provide support to strengthening a national violence against children policy and regulatory framework as well as its implementation at the local level. With
UNICEF Serbia’s technical support, the Government’s inter-sectoral working group guided the process of drafting the new violence against children strategy, which was being debated publicly at the end of 2017. Local inter-sectoral coordination was supported through capacity building of all sectors in 12 municipalities, while local NGOs led advocacy campaigns in an additional 20 municipalities, resulting in the signing of inter-sectoral protocols that will support a more coherent approach of local actors in preventing and protecting children from violence.

Service delivery

Some 441 children and 227 families benefited from family outreach services that aim to provide holistic support to families at risk of separation.

In order to improve quality and reduce recidivism through direct work with children and their families, diversionary schemes and alternative sanctions reached 351 children.

Child victim protection units provided support to 85 child victims who testified in criminal proceedings.

A total of 2,600 children were reached with improved ECD services (specifically ECD stimulation and early identification of developmental delays) as a result of capacity-building efforts of health professionals in 15 primary health care centers in Belgrade.

As a result of UNICEF Serbia’s support to strengthening capacities of local self-governments and preschool institutions for planning and diversification of preschool education at the local level, 350 children were enrolled for the first time in kindergarten.

A total of 140 children with disabilities attending 45 mainstream schools, with 394 teachers and 49 parents, benefited directly from enhanced support provided by UNICEF’s partner Network for Inclusive Education. Capacities of teachers were strengthened through diverse activities, such as mentoring and coaching of teachers for individual education planning, strengthening parenting skills and peer support, in an effort to increase learning and social outcomes of these children.

To promote social inclusion, 990 children with disabilities in Belgrade benefited from improved and inclusive regular indoor and outdoor recreation and sport activities together with children without disabilities, in partnership with the Belgrade Association of Sport Associations for Persons with Disabilities.

As a result of UNICEF Serbia’s response to the refugee and migrant crisis, 3,558 children (2,262 boys and 1,296 girls) received psychosocial support in child-friendly spaces and mother and baby corners, 4,717 at-risk children (including unaccompanied and separated children) were identified through screening by outreach teams, 2,035 children participated in structured education activities and 9,473 children received non-food items to protect them from weather conditions and were assisted with health and hygiene items.

Human rights-based approach to cooperation

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted the concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. UNICEF Serbia partnered with the Office for Human and Minority Rights in charge of the monitoring of implementation of UN treaty bodies’ recommendations to support the development of an action plan for the
implementation of Convention recommendations in partnership with CSOs working on child rights.

UNICEF Serbia provided inputs to the UN Country Team submission for the Review of Serbia at the upcoming 29th Session of the Universal Periodic Review as well as to the List of Themes for the review on Serbia by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which issued recommendations to Serbia in November 2017.

UNICEF Serbia supported the National Association of Persons with Disability to conduct a situational analysis of children with disabilities. The analysis revealed high levels of discrimination, difficult economic position of families with children with disabilities and low access to many services, particularly in remote rural areas. The findings generated a lot of public attention and created space for advocacy efforts aimed at improving health, education and the overall social inclusion of children with disabilities.

UNICEF supported MoESTD to develop a bylaw on conduct in cases of discrimination, with a particular focus on education segregation, as an important addition to a previously adopted bylaw recognizing modes of discrimination in education. In parallel, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality was supported to develop complementary manuals for teachers, pupils and parents that translate bylaw provisions into user-friendly language to make implementation easier.

In order to ensure the maximum possible protection of refugee and migrant unaccompanied and separated children in line with international standards and national regulations, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and UNICEF Serbia advocated for the need to develop a comprehensive plan for adequate care and accommodation options meeting the needs of each single child in line with her/his best interest. To support government efforts and planning, a guide and criteria for care and accommodation of unaccompanied and separated children was developed and shared with MoLEVSA.

**Gender equality**

Following the 2016 situational analysis on child marriage, in 2017 UNICEF Serbia finalized a qualitative study on child marriage in the Roma population in Serbia. The study focuses on understanding the influence of different social, cultural and economic factors on child marriage among the Roma population in the country. The launch of the report on child marriage among the Roma population initiated a vibrant national-level discussion on the need to address social norms influencing the perpetuation of child marriage, offer systemic institutional support to Roma children and their families and form a nationwide coalition to end child marriage. The study will inform the development of future programmatic interventions for which UNICEF Serbia is currently fund-raising (planned budget: US$35,000; expenditures: US$35,000).

Under the overall umbrella of violence against children, UNICEF Serbia put a particular focus on gender-based violence in 2017 across different sectors. UNICEF Serbia supported the development of a new violence against children strategy and initiated revision of all relevant sectoral protocols, all addressing gender-based violence. In addition, UNICEF Serbia initiated interventions aimed at increasing gender awareness and supporting social norms that respect gender equality and oppose gender-based discrimination and violence in preschool and school settings. (planned budget: US$159,000; expenditures: US$144,000).
Four master trainers of visiting nurses were trained in implementing a training module on gender and gender-based violence. In 2018, it will be rolled out through in-service training, while efforts are ongoing to introduce parts of the package in the pre-service training curricula in nursing schools.

UNICEF Serbia’s response to the refugee and migrant crisis constantly adapted to the changing needs of both transiting and stranded populations. To answer specific concerns related to unaccompanied and separated children, UNICEF Serbia initiated the development of gender-based violence protection and prevention services that will be provided to identify and refer children and women survivors and those at risk. An assessment of stakeholders’ capacity was ongoing at the end of 2017 to develop a tailor-made multisectoral capacity building plan that will be implemented early in 2018. (planned budget: US$295,000; expenditures: US$4,500).

**Environmental sustainability**

UNICEF Serbia does not systematically conduct environmental impact assessments of its interventions. This is mainly due to the nature of its work in the middle-income country, where the primary focus is on policy development, system strengthening, social mobilization and advocacy.

In order to identify its environmental footprint, UNICEF Serbia conducted energy and water audits in August and September 2017. Subsequently, the office initiated the replacement of decade-old air conditioners, and finalized procurement of 25 new energy-efficient Type A+ units that will be installed in January 2018, with expected reduction of electricity consumption for cooling and heating of 30 per cent per year. The office achieved a reduction of electricity usage of 30 per cent as a result of the replacement of all incandescent and compact fluorescent bulbs by more energy-efficient LED (light emitting diodes) bulbs. Water usage was reduced by 10.4 per cent compared to 2016, and in Q1 of 2018 the office will install water-efficient toilets, faucets and a dishwasher. In addition to decreasing both the carbon footprint and eliminating capital investment, UNICEF Serbia leased multifunctional energy-efficient printer/photocopier devices that require onsite pin code entry for each printing, which should reduce paper and toner usage and power consumption.

**Effective leadership**

Progress towards the 2017 Annual Management Plan key results was reviewed on a quarterly basis, while specific issues were discussed at regular country management team (CMT) and programme meetings. Furthermore, the performance appraisal system work plan outputs were prepared by each staff member with their supervisors, and closely linked to annual programme and management priorities and results. Day-to-day priorities were shared and discussed through regular programme and operations meetings. The country management team met eight times and took significant steps to improve operations and programme management by: 1) revising the 2017 Annual Management Plan; 2) improving office committees membership; 3) regularly monitoring the main performance indicators; and 4) addressing issues identified in the Global Staff Survey through a teambuilding/coaching programme.

Implementation of the harmonized approach to cash transfers (HA CT) assurance activities was given high priority in 2017 as a follow-up to the audit recommendation. As part of the HACT assurance plan implementation, in 2017 the office conducted one scheduled audit, five micro-assessments, four simplified financial management checklists, 18 spot checks, and 68 programme visits. No major risks were identified. Management indicators were tracked regularly through monthly management meetings and grants utilization and outstanding direct cash
transfer (DCT) reports. Progress was reviewed at country management team meetings, and corrective actions taken when appropriate.

The Risk Control Library was revised in August 2017, and three risks were rated as high. An action plan for mitigating the high risks was duly prepared. The emergency risk assessment section of the Early Warning/Early Action website was updated in November 2017, and key actions identified. The business continuity plan was updated in June 2017, after the testing exercise was completed.

The PCA Review Committee reviewed 29 cases in 2017, which were approved by the Representative. Furthermore, 17 were reviewed by the contract review committee and further approved.

**Financial resources management**

Reports on budget utilization were prepared monthly, distributed to budget owners and management, and reviewed regularly by the country management team. UNICEF Serbia was in compliance with the segregation of duties policy and procedures. Bank reconciliations were completed, uploaded and approved in VISION within deadlines, with regular follow up of reconciling balances. Monthly financial closure and review of accounts were performed. Under HACT, one audit, four micro-assessments, four simplified financial management checklists, 18 spot checks and 68 programme visits were carried out, ensuring 100 per cent compliance with requirements. Training on HACT was provided to UNICEF Serbia staff, implementing partners and UN staff from other agencies. The total Regular Resources and BMA funds utilization as of 31 December 2017 stood at 100 per cent, while Other Resources stood at 95 per cent. Other Resources expiring by the end of 2017 were 100 per cent utilized.

Appropriate actions were initiated to have all audit recommendations closed by mid-2017. By the end of 2017, eight of nine recommendations were closed. The open one related to signing of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Joint Annual Work Plan by the Government of Serbia. DCT status was reviewed at CMT meetings and by the Deputy Representative at meetings with budget owners. As a result, 99.2 per cent of DCTs were liquidated within six months of disbursement. There were two outstanding DCTs over nine months by the end of 2017, amounting to 0.6 per cent of total DCTs to implementing partners. UNICEF Serbia took all necessary steps with the implementing partners in this regard, but these outstanding DCTs were only liquidated on 10 January 2018. It is worth noting that the weakening of the US dollar against the Serbian dinar negatively impacted the operations budget by 13 per cent and the programme budget by 3 per cent.

**Fund-raising and donor relations**

In 2017, UNICEF Serbia managed US$3,355,444 of other resources funds, of which 95 per cent was spent. UNICEF Serbia further mobilized US$2,717,904.72 of other resources funds in 2017.

A total of US$8,861,709 of other resources was available for the implementation of the country programme at the end of 2017, representing 52 per cent of the board-approved ceiling.

Good collaboration was maintained with UNICEF National Committees. UNICEF Serbia successfully hosted visits from National Committees in support of partnership building and resource mobilization from Belgium, the Netherlands and South Korea.
In order to respond to the refugee and migrant crisis, US$2,462,988.28 was raised. The main donors were the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the Spanish Committee for UNICEF and the US Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration.

In 2017, UNICEF Serbia submitted 14 quality donor reports, including a number of human interest stories. None were late or overdue. Specific standard operating procedures on donor reports to ensure quality included: peer review or Regional Office review when appropriate, review by an external editor before submission to the Deputy Representative and final clearance by the Representative.

Total private sector fund-raising income reached US$829,894, which is 90 per cent of the planned annual gross income in 2017. Pledge income, as the key income stream, increased by 52 per cent compared to 2016. UNICEF Serbia recruited 25,520 new pledge donors and achieved 99 per cent of the planned income from the pledge channel. Private sector fund-raising continued to play an important role in resource mobilization for the country programme, representing 33 per cent of the total other resources income.

With the support of PFP investment funds, UNICEF Serbia conducted a direct response TV campaign for pledge recruitment through recurrent payment SMS and managed to recruit 22,938 pledge donors, which is 20 per cent more than planned.

**Evaluation and research**

Ten initiatives planned by the 2017 Integrated Monitoring and Implementation Plan were entered into the planning for research, impact monitoring and evaluation (PRIME) system, and regularly monitored, reviewed and updated as a part of the quarterly, mid-year and end-year programme reviews. As initially planned, eight of ten initiatives that were implemented in 2017 were finalized. The management response of the previous year’s evaluation was updated and followed up.

Two countrywide summative evaluations were completed in close partnership with the Government. The evaluation on strengthening the justice for children system identified significant improvement with respect to implementation of diversionary schemes for juvenile offenders and with respect to the role of child practitioners in protecting the best interests of the child in civil proceedings. The services developed for protection of child victims who act as witnesses in proceedings were identified as innovative, but their sustainability remains a challenge to be addressed, which is also the case with free legal advice.

The evaluation of the Efforts to Strengthen the Social Welfare System to Advance Child Protection with a Focus on Child Care Reform demonstrated valuable UNICEF Serbia input with respect to number of children in institutions, the strengthening of kinship care, the development of emergency fostering and the development of timely family support interventions for children who are at risk of maltreatment at home. At the same time, concerns were still voiced about the quality of care in large-scale institutions for children with disabilities, where their fundamental rights are violated. The ability of centres for social work to upgrade the quality of work with respect to case management and decision-making for children at risk of maltreatment, in a context of unsustainably high case ratios, is another challenge that needs to be urgently addressed.

Recommendations will be used for advocacy and development of new interventions, if funding permits.
Efficiency gains and cost savings

In 2017, savings were achieved in office premise security, with a decrease of 64 per cent in costs (US$6,490) as a result of an upgrade of the office security system. The use of a common UN tender for mobile telephony led to a 35 per cent saving (US$4,832). Additionally, the cost of electricity was reduced by 18 per cent (US$968) due to installation of more efficient light bulbs, expenditure on water was reduced by 3 per cent (US$25), and the office procured 28 per cent (US$168) less printing paper in 2017. The savings in KW of electricity, and cubic metres of water in term of usage greatly exceeded the monetary savings due to unfavourable exchange rate fluctuation in 2016 that led to an increase in the contract cost of 12 per cent. The office achieved a 30 per cent savings in electricity consumption (43.8 MW in 2017 vs. 62.2 MW in 2017), and a saving of 10.4 per cent in water used (553 cubic metres in 2017 vs. 616 cubic metres in 2016).

The MyCase tool with its quick links and guidelines considerably reduced the timelines for some processes such as education grants (six working days versus one to two months in previous years) and rental subsidies. Most supplies were procured locally, supporting local markets and enabling procurement of quality supplies at competitive prices.

UNICEF Serbia continuously considers cost savings in all possible areas and in 2017 continued to use common UN services and contracts for travel agents, conference organization logistics and procurement of stationery, cleaning supplies and courier and hotel services. As there were no new tenders for common UN services undertaken by another UN agency in 2017, gains related to cost reductions in this regard are expected in 2018.

Supply management

The total value of institutional procurement of goods and services amounted to US$1,048,383. UNICEF Serbia completed 24 requests for quotation, 4 invitations to bid and 22 requests for proposal processes for local procurements. Of 273 purchase orders for institutional procurement of goods and services, 37 were for procurement of services amounting to US$533,593. Emergency-related supplies from Copenhagen Supply Division amounted to US$8,208.

| Total institutional local procurement of goods | US$514,790 |
| Programme supplies                               | US$451,450 |
| Operational supplies                             | US$63,340 |

Procurement was related to programme activities, private sector fund-raising activities, emergency response and office supplies. In response to the refugee and migrant crises (summer and winter clothes for children up to 12 years of age, food and milk), the value of emergency-related procurement was US$371,923. Furthermore, there were regular office supplies throughout the year (IT equipment, hygiene supplies, toners and miscellaneous supplies).

Major building repairs were finalized in 2017, including new electricity installation, parquet refurbishment, and painting of walls and doors. UNICEF Serbia had institutional service contracts for on-call driver services, designer services, travel, conference organization, equipment, security services and internet connectivity.
The total value of programme supplies in the UNICEF Serbia warehouse (warehouse number 229) as of 31 December 2017 was US$8,197.

Good collaboration with other UN agencies in the country was demonstrated through the usage of existing UN long-term agreements with service providers for hygiene supplies, photocopy paper, travel services, mail services, mobile telephony and toners for printers-photocopiers. UNICEF Serbia took the initiative for a selection process of service providers for micro-assessments and spot checks of implementing partners, and for establishing long-term agreements for printing services. Furthermore, UNICEF Serbia used the common roster for translators, for which the selection process was completed by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Serbia with UNICEF Serbia assistance.

**Security for staff and premises**

Safety and security of staff and premises were maintained throughout the year. The warden system tree, and emergency lists were updated regularly. The warden exercise was conducted twice and there was one satellite phone test and two fire drills. The exercise indicated a functional warden system, in which 90 per cent of staff can be reached within 20 minutes if needed. All fire extinguishers were regularly checked and maintained. All alternative exit routes in the building were clearly indicated, regularly checked and maintained clear of obstruction. All staff and consultants are provided with UN identification documents (ID cards) with expiration dates aligned to their contract end date. Additionally, in order to upgrade office safety, and bring the security level up to the Minimal Operating Security Standards (MOSS) standards, the outdated electrical wiring system in the building was replaced. The new system was further tested, and no fire risk was detected.

**Human resources**

The core staffing structure remained unchanged in 2017 compared to 2016. However, additional institutional budget for post, which will become effective as of January 2018, was approved in August 2017. The office will benefit from establishing a new human resources assistant post, as well as converting the information and communication technologies (ICT) assistant post from part time to full time. UNICEF Serbia recruited one temporary appointment driver (GS2). Additionally, two United Nations Volunteers (UNV) were engaged in the areas of education in emergencies and child protection in emergency. Furthermore, two international UNVs were recruited, and they will come on board in 2018. The selection process for a supply and logistics UNV started.

Furthermore, job descriptions of ICT, finance and admin/supply associates were harmonized with the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office generic job profiles. Sixty-seven contracts were issued for engagement of individual contractors and consultants for a total US$ 836,625. Performance planning in accordance with the new performance appraisal system was completed online for all staff within the set timeframe. Performance discussions were held throughout the reporting period. Performance appraisal reports for 2016 were finalized by 1 March 2017. The staff’s ability to respond to emergencies was further improved by strengthening their capacity for emergency preparedness and response. The programme and operations staff participated in a simulation emergency exercise, led by an external consultant, with the aim of testing UNICEF Serbia’s capacity to respond to a potential large-scale emergency in the country, identify gaps and take corrective measures. In response to the main issues identified in the recent Global Staff Survey, UNICEF Serbia post-retreat exercise for all staff was conducted to assess progress. The joint consultative committee periodically reviewed
follow-up recommendations. All UNICEF Serbia staff participated in the UN-for-All Training: Dignity and Inclusion in the United Nations Workplace.

Effective use of information and communication technology

The continued availability of information communication technology resources and infrastructure and efficient user support were ensured in 2017, through effective technical maintenance and in accordance with global objectives and standards.

A long-term agreement is in place for leasing of multifunctional printer devices, which will decrease carbon footprint/toner usage and paper and power consumption. The number of printers will be reduced from 12 to 4, while toner replacement will be fully handled by the vendor. The implemented solution will provide more secure printing for any type of printed materials by using existing UN ID cards, and personal ID number-protected printing. This eliminates the need to procure new multifunctional printers in the future to replace obsolete ones.

Seventeen new laptops were procured for staff and UNVs as per UNICEF’s latest hardware standards, and 46 workstations migrated to the new Windows 10 operating system, boosting laptop performance and functionality, while enhancing security by implementing new BitLocker technology for disk encryption. Microsoft Office suites were upgraded. Online documents co-authoring in real time should boost organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

The cloud-based team site space on SharePoint was redesigned in line with the global Enterprise Content Management initiative, which is expected to be further piloted in 2018.

Staff training was organized on Windows 10 and OneDrive to enhance office and staff efficiency and effectiveness.

Technical advisory and support services were provided to programmes for implementation of the UReport pilot programme based on RapidPro technology.

UNICEF Serbia increased its social media reach, with 216,775 page views on www.unicef.rs and 10,412 on www.unicef.org/serbia. There was a 12 per cent increase on Facebook, 230 per cent on Twitter, 49 per cent on YouTube, 76 per cent on LinkedIn and 234 per cent on Instagram. Social media influencers including national ambassadors mobilized new audiences, promoted programme-related messages contributing to the expansion of the key messages’ reach and support and contributed to fund-raising activities.

Programme Components from RAM

ANALYSIS BY OUTCOME AND OUTPUT RESULTS

OUTCOME 1 UNICEF-supported programmes are efficiently designed, coordinated, managed and supported to meet quality programming standards in achieving results for children

Analytical statement of progress

Serbia continued its implementation of the Country Programme 2016-2017. Interventions in each sector initially agreed in 2016 with partners, including line ministries, CSO partners and academia, were reviewed and adjusted if necessary, based on available evidence to address specific vulnerabilities of children. Good progress was noted, despite presidential elections that slowed programme implementation for five months. However, sustainability of interventions
remains an issue with proper institutionalisation within the Government’s system. Regular programme meetings and bilateral discussions were held between sectors to ensure a better synergy of programmatic interventions. Progress was made in that regard, and will remain a priority in 2018 and beyond with the development of internal ECD and disaster risk reduction strategies. Synergy was also created between sectors and the communication unit, with more engagement of the latter in programmatic interventions. Communication for development will remain a priority for 2018 and beyond to initiate changes in social norms as envisaged in the country programme document.

**OUTPUT 1** UNICEF staff and partners are provided timely, appropriate, pertinent and necessary guidance, tools, technical assistance, financial resources and supplies to effectively design, manage and evaluate programmes in an optimal manner to deliver results for children

**Analytical statement of progress**
UNICEF continued to implement its 2016-2017 workplans for each programme component. The 2016-2020 United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) was signed in May 2017 by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. UNICEF Serbia, as chair of Pillar 2, and as a participating agency in Pillars 1 and 4, finalized its contribution to the draft UN joint workplan. Approval of the workplans was pending at the end of 2017 by the Joint National Steering Committee after review by the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

By the end of December 2017, nine programme meetings had been held, fostering more in-depth discussion between programme components on key issues such ECD, UNICEF Serbia’s engagement with local-self governments and disaster risk reduction. A specific programme meeting was also dedicated to cooperation between the operations and programme sections, resulting in the timely submission of programmatic inputs to the Annual Management Plan and other key documents such as the supply plan, and a simplification of some templates for business processes.

UNICEF Serbia held mid and end-year reviews with counterparts within all programme components. The implementation of the workplan was on track overall, although some unexpected delays were encountered across programmes. Refinement of strategies to overcome these delays/challenges was continuously undertaken to ensure the best results for children.

Through good planning and quality assurance, 14 donor reports (100 per cent) were submitted on time and with high quality by the end of December 2017. Reports due in 90 days were checked regularly through the dashboard and reviewed by the country management team. There is a clear process in place to ensure timely submission and quality assurance of donor reports.

**OUTPUT 2** UNICEF staff and partners are provided tools, guidance and resources for effective advocacy and partnerships on child rights issues with stakeholders

**Analytical statement of progress**
Apart from partnership agreements with the national weekly “Nedeljnik” and the daily “Politika”, three-year agreements with two public broadcasters were signed, expanding the media coalition for enhancing public advocacy efforts related to ECD and strengthening UNICEF Serbia’s brand.
positioning.

Online and off-line reporting on child rights issues and UNICEF Serbia activities were monitored, analysed and reported on against the key performance indicators. There was an 11 per cent increase in off-line coverage compared to 2016.

In 2017, there were 216,775 page views on www.unicef.rs and 10,412 on www.unicef.org/serbia. UNICEF Serbia’s social media communication in 2017 resulted in an 120 per cent increase in the success rate compared to 2016 (increase in percentages: Facebook, 12 per cent; Twitter, 230 per cent; YouTube, 49 per cent; and LinkedIn, 76 per cent), while the number of Instagram followers increased from 1,850 in 2016 to 6,177 (a 234 per cent increase).

UNICEF Serbia contributed to global, regional and national communication and advocacy efforts on the refugee and migrant crisis, ECD and World Children’s Day, with multi-media assets and media engagement through events and activations.

The State of the World’s Children: Children in the Digital World was launched. This initiative will be followed up in 2018 with a conference that will gather government, civil society and private sector partners to tackle online safety.

Sixteen media products were produced and disseminated locally, regionally and globally through digital channels.

Communication support was provided for public and media events with donors, the NY Headquarters mission for the “Uprooted” campaign, four UNICEF national committee visits and all fund-raising initiatives.

UNICEF Serbia participated in the global UNICEF, UN and UN Foundation campaign “Small Smurfs Big Goals”, to raise awareness of seven SDGs.

In cooperation with the MoH, MoESTD, and MoLEVSA, UNICEF Serbia launched the national Early Moments Matter campaign to increase awareness about the importance of the first 1,000 days of a child’s life and the impact of early experiences on development.

Six multi-media packages were produced on the situation of refugee/migrant children and UNICEF Serbia’s response, and were featured on the UNICEF Serbia, Regional and NY Headquarters digital platforms.

An exhibition commemorating 70 years of UNICEF in Serbia was exhibited at national and municipality levels. The retrospective showed UNICEF actively providing humanitarian and development assistance, and supporting health, education and social protection systems since 1948.

**OUTPUT 3** Effective and efficient operational support to achieve an optimum level of programme delivery and strategies to address cross-cutting issues related to child rights are developed and applied
**Analytical statement of progress**

UNICEF Serbia is developing a geographic mapping of UNICEF’s ongoing interventions that will contribute to planning joint initiatives cross-sectorally and to ensuring a focus on the most vulnerable children.

In light of the UNICEF core role of knowledge generation, a number of cross-sectoral data policy briefs were developed (two on education, five on ECD, one on justice for children and one on child marriage) to inform advocacy and programming and further leverage resources for children.

UNICEF Serbia also developed two key internal cross-sectoral strategies, the ECD strategy and disaster risk reduction strategy, to inform more convergent actions on these two key priorities.

Recognizing that comprehensive training on emergency preparedness and response for all UNICEF Serbia staff was essential for ensuring a adequate and effective emergency response, a simulation exercise was organized to test staff capacity to respond to a potential large-scale emergency in the country. The exercise, as conceptualized, was intended to encompass both programme and operational concerns in an emergency and to test understanding of the Business Continuity Plan. Further, with support from the UNICEF Regional Office, a country-specific plan was developed to roll out the new Preparedness Procedure, effective as of 31 March 2018, to ensure UNICEF Serbia compliance with global requirements.

**OUTCOME 2 All children have enhanced access to justice and benefit from strengthened mechanisms for monitoring and addressing human rights violations**

**Analytical statement of progress**

This outcome is aimed at strengthening capacities of the justice and child protection system professionals to refer and implement diversionary schemes and alternative sanctions, implement newly defined protection procedures for child victims/witnesses in criminal justice proceedings and secure the best interests of the child in civil proceedings. It further includes support and strengthening of CSOs in Serbia as well as collaboration with independent institutions aimed at active promotion of child rights as well as monitoring of and acting upon child rights violations.

The implementation of diversionary schemes is increasingly becoming routine practice across the country, with 28 per cent of reported juvenile offending cases being referred to diversionary schemes in 2016. The countrywide evaluation on justice for children showed that progress was also made on increasing the quality of implementation of diversionary measures and alternative sanctions. However, this is still limited to the regions where the implementation of these measures was piloted.

The knowledge that has been acquired through supporting child victims who act as witnesses in criminal proceedings was translated into draft procedures for service provision in this area. The Government plans for developing a new Law on Juvenile Offenders and Protection of Minors in Criminal Justice Proceedings was postponed until 2018. This remains an opportunity to clarify the accountability of the justice sector and define the monitoring of practices for protecting child victims/witnesses.

The countrywide evaluation on justice for children marked the progress made in protecting the
“best interests of the child” in civil proceedings that address custody, care and protection. However, the evaluation indicated that more in-depth training of justice professionals is needed to ensure uniform application of defined practices. The fact that there is no national data on civil proceedings makes it impossible to monitor practice on a routine basis and remains a major challenge.

The free legal aid network that was initiated with the support of UNICEF Serbia continued to be supported by the Centre for Child Rights, which acts as a network-facilitator. Capacities of network members were built with respect to addressing violations related to child protection, health and education. The planned legislation on free legal aid had not been endorsed by the end of 2017.

The Network of Organizations for Children (MODS) supported by UNICEF further expanded and managed to effectively advocate for the inclusion of child rights in the agenda of the new government and into several policy development initiatives that took place in 2017. Following the latest Concluding Observations and Recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child received in 2017, the Government of the Republic of Serbia began to develop a monitoring system for the implementation of recommendations in partnership with UNICEF and child rights CSOs.

The Commissioner for Equality continued to support implementation of anti-discrimination legislation through development of manuals to guide pupils, parents and teachers, and committed to produce a special report on the state of discrimination of children in 2018. The first situation analysis of children with disabilities, launched by the National Association of Persons with Disability and UNICEF Serbia, increased visibility of children with disabilities and reiterated the importance of the availability of data and evidence as a precondition to improve the status of this highly vulnerable group of children. The findings will help sharpen the focus of collaborative actions with disabled person’ organizations aimed at social inclusion of children with disabilities.

The launch of the qualitative research report on child marriage among the Roma population initiated a vibrant national-level discussion on the need to address social norms influencing the perpetuation of child marriage, offer systemic institutional support to Roma children and their families and form a nationwide coalition to end child marriage.

In terms of improving availability of administrative data, legal changes in education legislation allowed for collection of data on personality and opened up a possibility for continuing with the development of new modules of an information system with data on children and pupils. Thanks to UNICEF Serbia support, this will integrate preschool education as well. The Registry of Children with Disability based on a functional assessment and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) will enter the piloting phase in early 2018 and allow for collection of data on children with disabilities.

A new framework for the monitoring of social inclusion and poverty at national and local levels, developed in cooperation with the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU), includes the “investing in children” portfolio. This is based on EU and national policy frameworks and SDGs and has been a basis for policy making and monitoring in this area.

Together with the EU Delegation in Serbia, UNICEF Serbia organized a Child Rights Toolkit expert to provide training to support national partners in mainstreaming child rights in laws,
policies, programmes and international assistance in Serbia. As a follow-up, child rights mainstreaming was included as a topic in the IPA programming workshop for governmental officials.

Knowledge generated through research and evaluations began to make an impact in 2017. A study on the drivers of violence against children served as a basis for conceptualization and drafting of the National Strategy for Protection of Children from Violence. Research on child marriage facilitated the opening of a national dialogue and conceptualization of a project intervention, while the knowledge, attitudes and practices survey on immunization created a strong basis for development of messages and materials for public advocacy campaigns and social mobilization.

OUTPUT 1 National Government and other stakeholders have increased capacity to ensure application of diversionary schemes and alternative sanctions for juvenile offenders, and to ensure the protection of children involved in criminal, civil and administrative proceedings, in line with international standards

Analytical statement of progress
A total of 1,070 juvenile offenders benefited from the piloting of diversionary measures and alternative sanctions in four cities. Sustainability of these services remained a challenge, and a systematic solution to financing diversionary schemes is yet to be put in place. However, four of five service providers are likely to continue implementing these services in 2018. A study evaluating the outcomes of piloting diversions for juvenile offenders completed by the University of Political Science showed that offenders have benefited from the interventions, but that service provision varies from one provider to another. The piloting was used to extract knowledge on implementing interventions with juveniles, and this was translated into a handbook on interventions for juvenile offenders and their families and guidelines for centres for social welfare professionals when reporting to judicial bodies. These products, together with previously developed standards and accredited training programmes, will be the basis to continue capacity building in 2018 in other municipalities wishing to develop such services.

A total of 167 child victims who testified in criminal proceedings were supported by specialized services since the beginning of the piloting of child victim protection units. UNICEF Serbia continued to support service provision and specialized supervision provided by the child victim protection polyclinic from Croatia. These highly specialized practitioners were also provided with legal-technical support from the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research to draft the procedures and standards for providing support to child victims/witnesses. A completed analysis of cases where support was provided demonstrated that the majority of cases were violence related (97 per cent), whereas 45 per cent of the cases included victims of sexually related crimes. Government plans to amend the law regulating child offenders and protection of child victims had not been realized by the end of 2017.

A national conference on justice for children held in the autumn of 2017 attracted significant attention (and participation) from other UNICEF country offices. The conference conclusions drew particular attention to the challenges related to acting in the "best interest of the child" in cases related to custody, care and protection. The countrywide evaluation on justice for children demonstrated that the information sessions and the published guidelines for centres for social work had contributed to improved practice by social workers. However, securing more uniform practice by judges requires more in-depth training and a monitoring system whereby justice
professionals fill in check-lists for protecting the best interests of the child. Much greater awareness now exists on how to enable child participation in these cases, but their uniform application is yet to be achieved.

The network for free legal aid is now “self-sustainable”, with the Centre for Child Rights continuing to act as secretariat and foster horizontal exchange. The publications on children’s access to education, health and social protection and the capacity-building events helped increase the knowledge of free legal aid providers.

OUTPUT 2 Independent institutions and civil society effectively monitor, advocate and report on realization of child rights

Analytical statement of progress
In 2017, UNICEF Serbia continued to support and strengthen CSOs in Serbia and foster collaboration with independent institutions aimed at active promotion of child rights as well as monitoring of and acting upon child rights violations.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted in 2017 its concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. Subsequently, the Government began developing a monitoring system for the implementation of recommendations in partnership with UNICEF Serbia and child rights CSOs.

MODS, supported by UNICEF Serbia, effectively advocated for the inclusion of child rights issues, particularly of the most vulnerable children, into the agenda of the new Government. MODS provided valuable inputs into the legal revision processes in the area of education and social welfare. In order to support mechanisms aimed at education inclusion, MODS conducted an analysis of capacities of Inter-sectoral Commissions with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities to strengthen their work, and produced a mapping of local resources for IE. In partnership with the Government, UNICEF Serbia and Eurochild, MODS also organized an international conference on investing in children, at which the Government committed to increase allocations for children.

The Commissioner for Equality, in close cooperation with MoESTD, worked on developing manuals to guide pupils, parents and teachers on how to recognize and act in cases of discrimination in education. These manuals should support practical implementation of bylaws on identification of discrimination, which have been adopted, and bylaws on acting in case of discrimination in education, which are expected to be adopted in 2018.

Roma communities from 40 settlements in 10 municipalities were supported by the Roma Women’s Network to advance knowledge and skills related to ECD, to access cash benefits and to submit complaints on rights violations. A total of 2,025 Roma parents (82 per cent women) notably increased their knowledge on each of the topics covered. In addition, thanks to free legal aid and direct support, more than 90 families accessed monetary benefits. Roma communities submitted 192 complaints for violations, and independent institutions responded in 85 per cent of the cases.

The first-ever situation analysis on children with disabilities was finalized and published in partnership with the National Association of Persons with Disability. To further promote social
inclusion and challenge social norms contributing to discrimination of children with disabilities, a partnership with the Belgrade Association of Sport Associations for Persons with Disabilities resulted in around 990 children with disabilities benefiting from improved and inclusive regular indoor and outdoor recreational and sport activities together with children without disabilities.

The launch of a qualitative research report on child marriage among the Roma population initiated a vibrant national-level discussion on the need to address social norms influencing the perpetuation of child marriage, offer systemic institutional support to Roma children and their families and form a nationwide coalition to end child marriage.

OUTPUT 3 National data collection and management systems strengthened to collect, analyse and disseminate data on the most vulnerable children

Analytical statement of progress
UNICEF Serbia support to strengthening data collection and management systems is gradually building sustainable system changes that will result in better availability and use of data on the most vulnerable children.

With UNICEF Serbia’s support to the development of an information system for preschool education and the analytical unit of MoESTD, changes in the recently adopted umbrella law on education enabled collection of personal data about children. Two modules for preschool education on institution and employees were developed.

A new framework for the monitoring of social inclusion and poverty at national and local levels, including the “investing in children” portfolio, based on EU and national policy frameworks and SDGs, was developed in cooperation with the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, and should assist policy making and monitoring.

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia was supported to upgrade the DevInfo platform, enabling easier access to data for end users. Promotion of the database and its use in partnership with the NGO Secons resulted in a considerable increase in the number of visitors to the database and data downloads. The Statistical Office continued to promote the database by sending user-friendly posts about available data with a view to increasing its usage for planning purposes.

UNICEF Serbia continued its support to the Institute of Public Health, which was tasked to develop a registry of children with disabilities based on the World Health Organization (WHO) International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Disease-Children and Youth. The expert working group developed methodological guidance for the functional assessment for practitioners who will populate the data in the registry. Piloting will start in 2018.

Summative evaluations of childcare and juvenile justice reform efforts, conducted by UNICEF Serbia and the Government, provided critical guidance for future interventions in these areas.

A study looking at the drivers of violence against children was finalized and served as a basis for the development of a National Strategy for Protection of Children from Violence.

To overcome the challenge of designing a programme that firmly addresses the key drivers of child marriage in Serbia, UNICEF Serbia undertook ethnographic research among communities
where the practice is prevalent to gain a first-hand understanding of how they reached decisions about marriage.

A survey on immunization generated evidence on existing knowledge, attitudes and practices towards immunization among caregivers/parents from the general population and Roma communities. Findings will be used in 2018 for the development of public advocacy and social mobilization campaigns.

Capacities of UNICEF research partners were strengthened on ethics in evidence generation, including tools to enable their true implementation in practice and increase compliance of research undertaken with ethical standards.

Together with the EU Delegation in Serbia, UNICEF Serbia organized training on the Child Rights Toolkit that provided guidance on how to support national partners in mainstreaming child rights in policies, programmes and development assistance programming. As a follow-up, child rights mainstreaming was included as a topic in the EU development assistance programming workshop for governmental officials.

**OUTCOME 3** Increased percentage of young children, particularly Roma and children with disabilities, benefiting from equitable, gender-sensitive, quality health and other ECD services and supportive parental practices

**Analytical statement of progress**

As a result of UNICEF Serbia advocacy and technical support, ECD has been increasingly recognized as a priority in the health and education sectors, but also at the inter-sectoral level nationally and locally. The health, education and social welfare systems committed to the development of an inter-sectoral ECD policy that will remain a priority for 2018. At the local level, in six of eight municipalities where memorandums of understanding on ECD were signed in 2016, improvements were recorded in terms of increased coordination among sectors. In one municipality, ECD individualized services for children and their family were improved and coordinated.

A national ECD conference and a national ECD campaign implemented with three sectoral ministries significantly increased the public visibility of ECD and ensured the engagement of public figures and new partners. It also strengthened the knowledge and expertise on ECD among professionals and parents.

Although the MoH secured funding from the 2017 national budget for some of the recommended measures of the National ECD Programme developed with UNICEF Serbia’s support, its systemic implementation and monitoring was not ensured. Following UNICEF Serbia advocacy, the MoH Expert Committee for Children established a sub-committee on ECD. Its role is to support and monitor the implementation of the ECD programme, coordinate and guide initiatives of various partners, and advocate and technically support policy changes to enhance quality and access of improved ECD services.

To further strengthen the quality and access of ECD and ECI services, three situation analyses were completed assessing the overall provision of ECI, patronage nurses and DCUs. All three services need additional investment. Insufficient access and utilization of early detection and intervention services and lack of systematic planning and holistic evidence-based approaches
were some of the key areas of concern, in addition to existing policies that lack implementation and budget. For example, the research on patronage nurses revealed that the workforce is aging. There is good coverage of visits to newborns but an inability (due to the workload, lack of staff and organizational weaknesses) to meet objectives for pregnant women and young children and provide increased support for vulnerable families. In 2018, efforts will be invested to reflect these recommendations in the relevant policies, professional guidance (e.g. finalization of the draft national technical guide for patronage nurses) and capacity-building support.

Capacity building of professionals continued on various levels within the health care system and in selected local communities. Learning from international experts helped UNICEF Serbia advocate for new evidence-based practices, as well as changes in the university curricula and the organization of services. While the implementation of ECD elective courses for medical students is ongoing at two medical schools and the introduction of developmental pediatrics into university curricula was initiated, the changes for the curricula for nurses was being discussed with relevant nursing schools at the end of 2017. Twenty-five new trainers for visiting nurses were trained. The ECD training package for visiting nurses was adapted to Serbia and finalized, and will be implemented in 2018. The new bylaw on documentation for the work of visiting nurses was approved, integrating key ECD areas (such as developmental outcomes, mother-child interaction, parenting competencies, environmental stress factors, postnatal depression as well as fathers’ engagement in upbringing).

Building on previous achievements, UNICEF Serbia further supported capacity building for improved ECD/ECI services through regular paediatric and patronage nurses’ services and DCUs. Fifteen primary health care centres in Belgrade subsequently reached 2,600 young children with improved ECD services.

Following the recommendations from the ECI situation analysis, two municipalities were selected to pilot a recommended ECI model. The full implementation of the model is expected in the second half of 2018. Quality ECI provision will also be supported through the newly developed national guidance for screening, diagnostics and early interventions for children with autism.

Assistance to MoH continued towards mainstreaming planning for Roma into the national health system through the support of the work of Roma health mediators, although the programme faces numerous challenges. In cooperation with the Government, UNICEF conducted an independent assessment to support the development of options for a sustainable functioning of the mediators, following the MoH’s inability to institutionalize them. A regional conference on Roma health mediators was also organized by UNICEF Serbia with neighbouring countries (Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Slovakia) to share experiences and lessons learnt to inform decision-making.

Quality of services in maternities and neonatal units began to be addressed with the implementation of newly adopted accreditation standards for maternities and neonatal units and the provision of equipment and support to the affected regions. One maternity was accredited and one maternity and one neonatal unit were in the process at the end of 2017. The staff at 11 institutions were trained and began implementing standards, while an additional 26 were approached to join this process in 2018.

UNICEF Serbia’s response to meet the needs of refugee and migrant children included a broad range of activities to address health, hygiene and nutrition needs. Since March, 2016, the
response has reflected the needs of both transiting and stranded populations. In coordination and collaboration with national and international partners, age-appropriate food was distributed in government shelters, and counselling on nutrition, growth monitoring and childhood development was provided to mothers and women who were pregnant or lactating.

**OUTPUT 1** Increased quality of and access to ECD services, especially for Roma children and children with disabilities

**Analytical statement of progress**

In 2017, UNICEF Serbia continued its efforts to sustain the innovative ECD and ECI services introduced in previous years.

UNICEF Serbia, in cooperation with the MoH, MoESTD and MoLEVSA, organized a national ECD conference that brought together over 500 participants, including high-level policymakers, ECD professionals and practitioners, to share and learn from examples of ECD policies, programmes and research. The conference served as a platform for sharing new developments and introducing stakeholders to new initiatives related to early years’ policy and programming. All three ministries committed to the development of an inter-sectoral ECD policy, which will remain a priority in 2018. To complement these efforts, a national campaign “Early Moments Matter”, focusing on the period up to three years of age, was launched. Through strategic partnerships with key print and broadcast media and wide distribution of education materials prepared for parents and professionals, awareness was raised and knowledge strengthened about the importance of investing in ECD and the significance of positive ECD practices to a child’s future.

Evidence was generated through three situation analyses focusing on patronage nurses, DCUs and ECI. Recommendations will be a priority to improve access and quality of services in 2018.

The quality of ECD services was strengthened with UNICEF Serbia’s support by various capacity-building initiatives. Building on 2016 achievements, elective courses on developmental paediatrics in medical schools in Belgrade and Novi Sad are available every semester (an average of 20 students per semester). The integration of developmental paediatrics into graduate and postgraduate paediatric curricula is ongoing. All 125 paediatric residents of the University Children’s Clinic in Belgrade were trained to use the guide for monitoring child development in their work with young children. More than 30 professionals passed the internationally led training on infant motor profile for assessment of motor functions in children 3-18 months of age. An additional 15 Belgrade primary health care centers initiated training in ECD for paediatricians, visiting nurses and DCU teams. Some 2,600 young children and their parents benefited from improved ECD services.

UNICEF Serbia and Autism Speaks organized a national conference on autism and the newest developments regarding ECI and IE programmes. The MoH subsequently established a working group that developed national guidance for screening, diagnostics and early interventions for children with autism.

In cooperation with the Government, UNICEF conducted an independent assessment to support the development of options for a sustainable functioning of Roma health mediators, following the MoH’s inability to institutionalize them. A regional conference on Roma health mediators was also organized by UNICEF with neighbouring countries (Bulgaria, The former Yugoslav
Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Slovakia) to share experiences and lessons learnt to inform decision-making.

The knowledge, attitudes and practices study on immunization among parents, including Roma parents, and qualitative research on malnutrition among Roma children, were finalized and will be used to inform programming and awareness-raising campaigns in 2018.

OUTPUT 2 Maternal and neonatal services apply family-centred approach and support continuum of care in service provision, with a specific focus on Roma and other vulnerable children and mothers

Analytical statement of progress
Although Serbia possesses a well-developed network of local maternity units and inter-regional centres for neonatal intensive care that provide health care coverage for almost every mother and newborn infant in the country, the continued high rates of perinatal and neonatal mortality in some regions with national rates above the EU average clearly indicate the persistence of ineffective health care practices and inadequate quality of care.

Building on achievements made in 2016, with the endorsement of accreditation standards for maternities and neonatal units that incorporate international baby and mother-friendly standards, UNICEF Serbia supported the strengthening of the capacities of 43 accreditation inspectors on the new standards. These inspectors will be in charge of carrying out assessments of maternities and neonatal units wishing to obtain accreditation. In this way mother-baby friendly and neo-baby-friendly international initiatives can be fully integrated into national regulatory processes. In 2017, one maternity was accredited, one maternity and one neonatal unit were undergoing accreditation at the end of 2017, while seven institutions were planning re-accreditation and 26 had been approached to join this process in 2018.

To further support the quality of their work, UNICEF Serbia supported the strengthening of the capacities of 47 health professionals from 11 maternities and neonatal units in specific areas of the accreditation standards, i.e. promotion and protection of breastfeeding, and family-oriented and developmental care. This was further supported by South-South cooperation, with the involvement of an expert from Croatia. This support will enable higher-quality implementation of the accreditation standards in these institutions.

Although maternity and neonatal care units in Serbia have benefited in recent decades from investment in commodities, modern equipment and upgraded facilities, the quality of care has lagged behind international standards. A recent assessment of maternity and neonatal units by the MoH and UNICEF Serbia identified an acute lack of capacity in some regions to provide adequate maternal and neonatal care. The MoH identified neonatal intensive care units in Nis and Kragujevac as priorities for action to improve the quality of care. These units provide specialist neonatal care services to patients across southern, eastern and western Serbia, where perinatal and neonatal mortality rates are above the national average.

UNICEF Serbia supported the neonatal intensive care unit in Kragujevac with equipment and further capacity building, which is expected to improve the quality of care in these institutions.

The development of the new national guide for neonatology and perinatal indicators was postponed to 2018, pending finalization of European guidance in this area.
UNICEF Serbia’s overall support to maternal and neonatal health was hampered in 2017 by a drastic lack of funds.

OUTPUT 3  Health system is strengthened for disaster risk reduction and emergency response

Analytical statement of progress
UNICEF is the leading partner of the MoH in providing infant and young child feeding support to refugee and migrant children and their mothers. To respond to this need, UNICEF Serbia continued to support the establishment and functioning of MBCs across the country. Kikinda, Adasevci Principovac, Krnjaca and Mixaliste in Belgrade, Presevo, Vranje, Bujanovac, Divljane, Sjenica were active in 2017, while Sid and Dimitrovgrad closed in May and the outreach service in Subotica in February.

Mother baby corners, organized in partnership with the primary health care centers, offer support and safe spaces to pregnant and lactating mothers and their babies. Trained nurses support breastfeeding mothers and counsel them on infant feeding, health, development and the hygiene of babies, and refer them to services if needed. Provision of daily portions of age-appropriate feedings for infants and young children was also organized as well as support to non-breastfeeding mothers and infants. Mothers also received support for themselves: safe, private space to relax, rehydrate and get warm, and hygienic items for their babies (including opportunities to give them a bath) as well as clothes. Various preventive care messages were also provided depending on time availability.

Following UNICEF Serbia’s technical support and advocacy, the national recommendations for an IYCF in emergencies food basket and for the nutrition of children over two years of age were endorsed by the Institute of Public Health of Serbia in 2017. UNICEF Serbia continued to have regular consultations with food actors in the government shelters on reviewing distributed food in order to provide age-appropriate food for children in the majority of locations and ensure that national recommendations were fully respected.

The mother baby corners in Serbia have been recognized as a good practice in the region and have been presented at regional UNICEF meetings for learning purpose.

Despite consistent advocacy from UNICEF Serbia and other actors, immunization of refugee and migrant children remained a critical issue. While immunization (with some obstacles) is ensured for refugee and migrant children born in Serbia, immunization of all other children is still not resolved. This will potentially hamper further the enrolment of refugee and migrant children in formal education at all levels.

The MoH with support of the World Health Organization (WHO) initiated the process of preparing the National Health Sector Emergency Response Plan, and has called upon UNICEF Serbia to support the development of national procedures for nutrition as part of this process in 2018.
OUTCOME 4 Increased percentage of vulnerable children and adolescents participating in relevant, quality and inclusive pre-university education with improved learning outcomes and competences

Analytical statement of progress
Following UNICEF Serbia’s provision of technical advice and advocacy efforts, a number of recommendations related to IE, anti-discrimination policies and the education information system were successfully introduced in the new Law on Foundations of the Education System.

Strategic technical support was continuously provided by UNICEF, with the financial support from SDC, to MoESTD to ensure that capacities of the Group for Social Inclusion are strengthened to lead, implement and monitor the agenda of IE, at both the policy and implementation levels. MoESTD re-organized its institutional capacities for IE, merging the groups for social inclusion, human and minority rights, antidiscrimination and violence prevention into one structure. The Group for Social Inclusion remained the main resource in the government for strengthening institutional capacities for the coordination, development and implementation of IE, antidiscrimination and violence prevention.

Progress was made in increasing access to quality inclusive preschool education of vulnerable children and strengthening of the preschool education sub-system, through the provision of technical expertise, piloting of a new ECD curriculum, support to diversification of the preschool programme, policy and practice analyses and capacity building of local authorities and preschool education professionals. These results and lessons learnt paved the way for a comprehensive reform of preschool education led by MoESTD and the strengthening of legal and institutional frameworks, with support from the World Bank’s upcoming investment in the sector.

UNICEF Serbia also launched an initiative to develop a model for providing quality inclusive preschool education for children with disabilities. The aim of the project is progressive implementation of IE through transformation of developmental groups (in which children with disabilities are traditionally segregated and lack everyday interaction and peer learning in the most critical and most sensitive developmental period) into a transitional mechanism for children with severe disabilities towards their inclusion into mainstreamed education. As a result of UNICEF Serbia work, changes were introduced in the law on preschool education.

The final study on a school-based model for drop-out was selected among the best UNICEF research initiatives in 2017. With EU funds, UNICEF Serbia will continue to technically support the MoESTD in scaling up the school-based model on drop-out prevention to all schools in Serbia now that it has been systematized with the new Law on Foundations of the Education System. During the next reporting period, a final proposal for a joint response mechanism of the education and social protection systems for combating school drop-out will be developed. UNICEF Serbia supported the MoESTD Working Group for revisions of a rulebook on anti-discrimination to include the tools and mechanisms to prevent, detect and respond to acts of discrimination. An analysis of legislation on anti-discrimination in Serbia and a review of international experience were developed and informed legal changes and the related bylaw.

Horizontal learning between low and high-performing schools for improvement of quality of education was continuously supported. Horizontal learning proved to be a transformative, low-cost, and sustainable mechanism to improve the quality of education in schools. It focused on optimizing the performance of educators by fostering a culture of collaboration and knowledge exchange to increase capacities, motivation and a heightened sense of community. As a result
of UNICEF Serbia’s support, a pool of 98 advisers for school improvement was created by the MoESTD and the relevant institute.

The education system was strengthened in terms of disaster risk reduction and emergency response. A framework was developed for the response of education in emergency and continuous capacity building of education institutions to include migrants and asylum seekers as well as partner organizations working on non-formal education in the field. As a result, since September 2017, approximately 85 per cent of all primary school-aged refugee and migrant children have been attending primary schools, approximately 15 per cent of all secondary school-aged children situated in Serbia have been attending secondary schools, and approximately 8 per cent of secondary school-aged children who have never been enrolled in education have been attending second chance schools.

**OUTPUT 1** Access and quality of preschool education are increased through improved legal framework, diversified programmes and services and inter-sectoral cooperation aiming at improving equity

**Analytical statement of progress**

The new Preschool Curriculum Framework, introducing key systemic change to preschool education, is being developed and piloted, through a partnership between MoESTD, the Institute for Improvement of Education and the Institute of Pedagogy of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade and UNICEF Serbia. A set of training packages supporting implementation of the new curriculum was prepared and delivered to three pilot preschool institutions along with extensive mentoring and on-site coaching. Standards of competencies for preschool teachers were under development at the end of 2017, along with a review of the initial preschool teacher training aimed at harmonization of core functions of the preschool education system.

In order to prepare relevant human resources for the roll-out of the curriculum, 50 professionals in preschool education (preschool assistance network) are enrolled in a capacity-building programme focused on modern preschool pedagogy.

To support preschool system strengthening in the area of quality assurance (self-evaluation, external evaluation), UNICEF Serbia initiated a technical dialogue focused on monitoring the quality of preschool education and assessing child outcomes. This discussion is expected to contribute to harmonization of systems for quality assurance and new pedagogical concepts promoted within the new curriculum. Further, research on early childhood education quality in Serbia conducted by UNICEF Serbia based on the EU quality framework was finalized and will serve for further work on quality improvement of early childhood education.

Enhancing the quality of preschool education for children with disabilities in Serbia requires competency building of education professionals, identifying strengths and challenges of existing practices, and designing training for practitioners to enhance the inclusiveness of preschool education. UNICEF Serbia launched an initiative to develop a model for providing quality inclusive preschool education for children with disabilities. The pilot aims to develop the best model for transforming developmental groups, which correspond highly to segregated education where children in the most critical developmental period lack valuable everyday interaction and peer learning.

An analytical review of governance, provision and quality of early childhood education services
was conducted in partnership with Yale University and will be presented in 2018 to stakeholders at national and local level in order to initiate system-level changes related to governance in preschool education.

Further support in harmonization of national and local preschool education policies was implemented through capacity building of three municipalities and 350 professionals for evidence-based planning and development of local preschool education policies, identification of barriers for increasing equity, local partnerships and diversified preschool service provision. As a result, approximately 350 children were enrolled in kindergartens for the first time.

In order to implement national policies in preschool education and to strengthen its quality, equity and efficiency, the City of Belgrade developed the first strategic document for the development of preschool education at the local level.

To support the further roll-out of developed and piloted models for diversification of preschool education, UNICEF Serbia prepared policy briefs, including kindergarten for every child as a right and the best investment, and five steps to better coverage in preschool education. UNICEF Serbia also organized two international conferences for over 700 international, national experts and practitioners.

**OUTPUT 2** The capacity of pre-university education system - teachers and professional staff / schools is empowered for drop-out prevention and provision of quality and IE enabling better learning outcomes and achievements of the most vulnerable

**Analytical statement of progress**

The MoESTD re-organized its institutional capacities, merging the three groups for social inclusion, human and minority rights, antidiscrimination and violence prevention into one, serving as the main resource for strengthening institutional capacities for the coordination, development and implementation of IE.

Following successful implementation of piloted models on school drop-out prevention and diversified preschool provision and UNICEF Serbia’s advocacy, the new Law on the Foundation of the Education System September 2017 stipulates new provisions related to such issues as drop-out prevention, diversification of preschool offer, IE and anti-discrimination data management.

The SHARE project, designed to increase the capacities of teachers and improve education quality by facilitating support for a school-wide culture of innovation and collaboration through horizontal learning proved to be successful. Ten high-performing and 10 low-performing schools were included in the project with a total of 1,080 teachers and 12,665 students. Twinning of high and low-performing schools has proven effective in countries with limited resources for providing an environment for the advancement of learning, but also in fostering the acceptance of modern pedagogical approaches. As a result, a pool of 98 advisers for school improvement was created by the MoESTD and the Institute for the evaluation of education quality and it will serve for continued support to schools.

The final study on a school-based model for drop-out was selected among the best UNICEF research initiatives in 2017. UNICEF Serbia developed a resource package to support scaling up of the drop-out prevention model to all schools in Serbia. It consisted of the Guidebook for Schools for the Implementation of the Drop-Out Prevention and the Guidebook on a New
Approach to Remedial Teaching. With EU funding, UNICEF Serbia will continue to support the MoESTD in scaling up the model on drop-out prevention to all schools in Serbia using a prepared resource pack and different capacity-building methods, such as online and classical training.

UNICEF Serbia’s partner, the Network for Support to IE, provided capacity development (on-the-job instruction, mentoring, coaching and advisory services) to 45 educational institutions serving approximately 24,079 students and 394 education practitioners. Further, 140 children with disabilities in regular schools and 49 parents benefited directly from enhanced support through diverse activities (mentoring and coaching of their teachers for individual education planning, strengthening parenting skills, peer-support) aimed at increased learning and social outcomes of these children.

Capacities of 550 education professionals from preschools and primary and secondary schools were strengthened on IE. The training (derived from a UNICEF Regional Office training package contextualized by the University of Nis and UNICEF Serbia) was accredited and is part of the national list of professional development training activities for schools. To further support implementation of IE, UNICEF Serbia translated, adapted, published, disseminated and promoted 14 thematic booklets prepared by the UNICEF Regional Office. A study visit was also organized in Portugal to learn from Portugal’s experience on IE.

Procedures and mechanisms in cases of discrimination in education are being developed in cooperation with the MoESTD and other relevant institutions and inputs for a new legal framework were prepared.

**OUTPUT 3** Education system is strengthened for disaster risk reduction and emergency response

**Analytical statement of progress**

*Strengthening education system for disaster risk reduction*

Based on the analyses of disaster risk reduction in primary and secondary school curricula, UNICEF Serbia supported the mainstreaming of related content in the first four grades of primary school in cooperation with the national Primary School Teachers Association. A pool of 20 trainers delivered training to 496 teachers from 224 schools from 56 municipalities, reaching 60,000 children. A guidebook for teachers with materials for children was developed in cooperation with experts from the Institute for Geography.

*Emergency response*

With UNICEF Serbia’s support, the MoESTD developed a strategic approach to the education of refugee and migrant children based on a review of international practices. UNICEF specifically supported the MoESTD and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration to provide access to education to refugee and migrant children through access to formal and non-formal education, support to coordination and system development at the national level, capacity building of schools and NGOs and the development of a monitoring framework.

Based on the experience of enrolment in the school year 2016/2017, with UNICEF Serbia support the MoESTD issued in May 2017 a professional instruction for the inclusion of refugee and migrant children in mainstream education (defining enrolment procedures, support plans at school and student level, evaluation mechanisms and school documentation) and established a
working group for support to refugee and migrant inclusion consisting of relevant departments of the MoESTD, institutes, UNICEF Serbia and partner CSOs.

During the summer, UNICEF Serbia supported the preparation of enrolment of all children at the mandatory school age in Serbia. Support was provided to regional school administrations of the MoESTD and municipalities to develop enrolment plans in cooperation with other stakeholders, provide material support, engage ten school mentors and enable horizontal exchange between schools.

As a result, since September 2017, approximately 85 per cent (443) of all primary school-aged refugee and migrant children have been attending primary schools, approximately 15 per cent (52) of all secondary school aged children situated in Serbia have been attending secondary schools, while approximately 8 per cent (29) of secondary school aged children who have never been enrolled in education have been attending second chance schools.

Primary and secondary schools from municipalities hosting government centres were supported through training on the implementation of professional instruction (300 professionals) and accelerated learning of Serbian as a language of instruction (around 250 teachers). A guidebook for the implementation of professional instruction was developed and a website (http://remis.rs/) launched aimed at capacity building and sharing of experience between schools engaged in the education of refugees and migrants. Schools received small grants for implementation of support plans. Four thousand backpacks with school supplies were distributed to refugee and migrant children and vulnerable Serbian children.

UNICEF Serbia continued to provide critical technical assistance on non-formal education activities aimed at the development of key competences for life-long learning, including activities supporting regular and safe school attendance. UNICEF Serbia provided expert technical assistance on quality development and implementation of programmes for children at preschool and primary and secondary school age in all government shelters.

**OUTCOME 5** Child rights are advanced through public advocacy, partnerships and social mobilization that promote non-discriminatory and gender-sensitive practices

**Analytical statement of progress**

Building on progress made in 2016, UNICEF continued its efforts to foster non-discriminatory social norms supportive of social inclusion, especially of children with disabilities, positive parenting and zero tolerance of violence against children.

To better integrate external communication, advocacy, public engagement, fund-raising and promotion of UNICEF Serbia’s brand to reach key audiences and motivate them to action, a 2017-2020 Communication and Public Advocacy Strategy and a 2017 Digital Strategy were developed.

A knowledge, attitudes and practices survey on immunization was completed. The findings will be used for communication for development and social change initiatives to combat anti-immunization attitudes and for stimulating a dialogue between the health system and parents.

A national campaign Early Moments Matter was implemented in 2017. Through strategic partnerships with key print and broadcast media, and strong digital media initiatives, awareness
was raised and knowledge strengthened about the importance of investing in ECD, and the significance of positive ECD practices to a child’s future and ways of implementing them. Education materials developed for parents and professionals (16 videos and 20 brochures and posters) were widely shared through digital media, while maternities and PHCs began using them for instructing parents about positive parenting practices. The campaign also helped increase the interest of the business sector to support UNICEF’s work around ECD, resulting in financial contributions to the ECD programme.

Local advocacy initiatives in 20 municipalities were launched to ensure improved response to violence against children. Advocacy efforts to end child marriage practices began through sharing the findings of a situation analysis among the general public and key stakeholders from governmental and non-governmental organizations, academia and representatives of the Roma community.

Continuous promotion of business principles and children’s rights, as well as increased advocacy on violence prevention, resulted in an increased number of companies adopting zero tolerance policies towards violence and discrimination against children. According to a corporate survey conducted among the biggest companies in Serbia, 42 per cent of companies adopted these policies in 2017, while in 2015 the figure was only 17 per cent.

OUTPUT 1 Increased use of evidence-based and innovative communication approaches to address selected social norms and behaviours in relation to inclusion of children with disabilities, Roma children and violence against children and women

Analytical statement of progress
A 2017-2020 Communication and Public Advocacy Strategy and a 2017 Digital Strategy were developed to better integrate external communication, advocacy, public engagement, fund-raising and promotion of UNICEF Serbia’s brand to reach key audiences and motivate them to action.

A knowledge, attitudes and practices survey on immunization was completed. The findings will be used for a campaign to combat anti-immunization attitudes and for stimulating a dialogue between the health system and beneficiaries.

Serbia’s end violence programme, targeting the most vulnerable children from Roma communities, was featured among the best country examples in the global End Violence against Children Report. UNICEF launched local advocacy initiatives in 20 municipalities to ensure improved response to violence against children. Advocacy efforts were initiated to end child marriage practices.

Strategic three-year media partnerships were established through signing of memorandums of understanding with two public broadcasters, while the partnerships with the national weekly “Nedeljnik” and daily “Politika” were strengthened. These partnerships helped raise awareness and increase knowledge about ECD, and the significance of positive parenting practices to a child’s future and ways of implementing them.

A national campaign Early Moments Matter focusing on the period up to three years of age, was launched. An average of 5.1 million people saw the campaign videos more than once, while 4.5 million people saw them more than three times. The campaign billboards covered 65 highly visible locations in 19 cities across Serbia, while key visuals and messages were displayed
inside 25 buses in 7 cities. The preliminary results of the digital part of the campaign showed that the reach of the posts on UNICEF Serbia digital platforms was as follows: Facebook 660,017, Twitter 181,275, Instagram 19,182, LinkedIn 8,327, and YouTube 24,884. This part of the campaign was amplified by the strong pro bono support of several of the most relevant digital influencers in Serbia. The campaign was augmented by a partnership with the Ringier Axel Springer media consortium. The reach on their websites was 1,293,661 while the reach on their Facebook page was 705,060. The number of impressions in traditional media was as follows: print - 4,488,237, TV and radio - 20,723,879, web-based media - 17,691,147. Final results will be available in the first quarter of 2018.

Media capacity on ECD was strengthened through briefings of journalists and editors. In addition, a journalist of the weekly "Nedeljnik" participated in training at Columbia University in New York.

Marking World’s Children Day, children took over a Parliamentary session and news programmes to present their views on violence and how to prevent it.

OUTPUT 2 Increased use of evidence-based corporate social responsibility (CSR) focused on children within the business sector to address protection and promotion of children's rights

Analytical statement of progress
UNICEF Serbia engaged to advance children’s rights on the agenda of the business sector, including influential multi-stakeholder platforms and initiatives.

UNICEF Serbia participated in leading business conferences and presented its CSR framework. UNICEF representatives were among the key speakers at the Kopaonik Business Forum, the business conference CSR Serbia and other major business networks meetings, CSR conferences and forums.

UNICEF Serbia used different media outlets to create visibility and to advocate for children’s issues with the business sector. In a special edition of the Diplomacy and Commerce In Focus magazine, which was dedicated to 70 years of UNICEF’s work in Serbia, UNICEF Serbia engaged business influencers to strengthen advocacy priorities for children.

The publication Children in Humanitarian Crisis, produced by UNICEF and the UN Global Compact, was translated and widely disseminated through business networks in Serbia with the objective of informing the business sector about the opportunities for business to invest in the strengthening of the resilience, safety and well-being of children, from philanthropy and leveraging core assets to engaging with UNICEF as a voice for children.

UNICEF Serbia conducted a corporate survey among the biggest companies in Serbia to check their performance on prioritizing children in their CSR strategy and operation. Forty-three companies participated in the survey. It examined corporate commitment to CSR and attitudes towards child-focused CSR, corporate engagement and investment in CSR activities focused on children, understanding and implementation of business principles and children’s rights initiative and perceptions and expectations of UNICEF’s role on child-focused CSR.

The survey showed that CSR focused on children represents an important segment of their CSR strategy for 82 per cent of companies, and that 60 per cent of the companies have well-defined objectives and initiatives focusing on children within their CSR strategies.
UNICEF Serbia’s engagement to promote business principles and children’s rights contributed to an increased knowledge and implementation of the initiative. Forty-six per cent of the companies were very familiar with the principles in 2017, compared to 11 per cent in 2015. The progress of the implementation of the principles in comparison to the survey results from 2015 is significant related to principle 4 (25 per cent increase), principle 5 (16 per cent increase) and principle 9 (27 per cent increase).

The survey also showed that 73 per cent of companies consider that collaboration with UNICEF Serbia contributed to a better understanding of responsible business practices towards children. A full 92 per cent of companies think that UNICEF Serbia plays an important role in raising awareness of the impact of the business sector on children.

The corporate survey will be widely disseminated through the media and business networks at the beginning of 2018 with the objective of advocating that businesses take sustainable action to respect children’s rights in all business activities and relationships.

### Document centre

#### Evaluation and research

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