

## Syria

### Update on the context and situation of children

After almost nine years of crisis, the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has continued to witness change, with additional areas coming under government control. Over 11 million people remain in humanitarian need across the country, including 5 million children<sup>[1]</sup>. Ongoing hostilities in northeast and northwest Syria are having devastating consequences on the already vulnerable population. According to UNHCR, 96,253 refugees, mainly from Turkey and Jordan, returned to their areas of origin in 2019, while UNOCHA recorded 494,000 spontaneous returns by internally displaced persons, the majority returning to Dar'a. In other parts less affected by hostilities, the protracted conflict and displacement has eroded host communities' and the displaced people's ability to cope, making timely and principled provision of humanitarian assistance critical.

The country's economy was affected by stagnation and saw increasingly high levels of inflation, driven also by the drastic devaluation of the local currency and the impact of sanctions. In November, the national average price of essential food commodities increased by 11 per cent since October<sup>[2]</sup>, making it extremely difficult for many Syrians to afford basic items; poverty levels continued to increase. The most vulnerable are the hardest hit, especially female or child-headed households and people with disabilities.

During the last quarter, the Syrian currency lost over half of its value against the US Dollar. This compounded by a deteriorating security situation and the reinforcement of the sanctions on oil exports from Iran resulted in higher fuel prices<sup>[3]</sup>. In the 2020 budget bill, further reductions in the subsidies for fuel, oil derivatives and other essential items are foreseen.

The political environment also evolved, marking important milestones. In November, the constitutional committee for Syria was launched after lengthy negotiations throughout the year. Participants included 150 people from the Government, the opposition Syrian Negotiations Commission and the so-called "middle third", including society activists, experts and other independents from inside and outside Syria. UNICEF continues to advocate that the child rights are at the center of this process and work with partners on the areas of specific support.

Syria continued to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through a package of reforms that focus on building an institutional and regulatory framework for the transition to a social market economy. After years of stagnation, slow progress was recorded towards SDG 2.9 (ending all forms of malnutrition), as indicated by the results of the Standardized Monitoring & Assessment of Relief & Transitions (SMART) survey. Progress was recorded towards SDG4 (quality education), as enrollment increased. Efforts were made concerning SDGs 16.3 and 5.3 to reduce crimes of violence against children, criminalizing the recruitment of children and adopting national programs for the rehabilitation and integration of children.

The ongoing crisis contributed to the deterioration of the social fabric. Young people, especially, have been deprived of many forms of engagement important for their holistic development, including lack of learning, decent job opportunities and reported a feeling of disengagement from society.

The situation in northeast Syria remained complex, due to a combination of hostilities, weather-related hazards and population movements. At the beginning of 2019, the Government, International Coalition Forces and Syria Democratic Forces pushed Islamic State out of the Hajin sub-district. Yet over 1.65 million people or 55 per cent of the total population in the region, remained in need of humanitarian assistance<sup>[4]</sup>. UNICEF and its partners continued to deliver assistance to Al Hol camp, which hosted over 66,000 people (90 per cent of whom are children and women) as of November<sup>[5]</sup>; the camp was originally designed for 20,000 people. Also, after the escalation of the military operation led by Turkey in October, approximately 200,000 people, including 80,000 children were forced to flee<sup>[6]</sup> and critical infrastructure was damaged, including water stations and medical facilities. Most of the collective shelters used to host displaced people are schools, affecting education for 30,861 children in Al-Hasakeh<sup>[7]</sup>. UNICEF opened an office in Deir-ez-Zor City and started working with partners assessing the situation and delivering required services.

Similarly, in northwest Syria, an estimated 2.7 million (67.5 per cent of the total population in the region) remained in need of humanitarian assistance. The recent escalation of hostilities between the Government of Syria forces and its allies and non-state armed groups compounded an already dire humanitarian situation, where an estimated two million people were internally displaced since the beginning of the year. Following an increase in violence that began in late April, almost 586,000 people<sup>[8]</sup> remain displaced. The widespread destruction of vital infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and water stations hampered the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance and the return of displaced people. Areas controlled by the Government in 2019 in northern Hama and Idlib are still hard to access due to ongoing hostilities.

In the south of the country, the movement of civilians towards their areas of origin started in March, from the desert

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settlement of Rukban on the Syrian-Jordanian border. As of September, 20,000 people left the settlement to five shelters in Homs. Meanwhile, 12,000 people remaining in Rukban continue to face harsh living conditions, which keep deteriorating as food and medication become scarce, with delivery humanitarian assistance significantly hindered.

The Government submitted the Fifth Periodic Report, following the one from 2012, to the Committee on the Rights of the Child with a specific action plan aiming at improving the protective environment for children. The report identifies as priority actions to adopt the Child Rights Bill, to amend the Penal Code, the Nationality Law and the Personal Status Law, and conduct a comprehensive assessment of the budget needs of children in Syria.

[1] UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), 2019

[2] WFP Syria Country Office, Market Price Watch Bulletin, November 2019

[3] <https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2019-08/The%20Syrian%20Oil%20Crisis.pdf>

[4] North-east Syria Humanitarian Snapshot-20 June 2019

[5] UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: North East Syria-Al Hol camp (13 January 2020)

[6] UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: North East Syria Displacement (12 November 2019)

[7] UNOCHA, Humanitarian impact of the military operation in northeastern Syria, November 2019

[8] UNOCHA, Recent Developments in Northwestern Syria - Flash Update - 6 February 2020

### Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2019, UNICEF continued to provide life-saving services to vulnerable children and to address their urgent needs, while supporting systems strengthening to ensure sustainable programming in view of the protracted crisis. Through its field presence and seven international and 39 national partners, UNICEF was able to stay abreast of the situation of children, which enabled programmes to respond to the fluid operating environment and to address the evolving needs of children. UNICEF demonstrated the impact and value of its programmes and highlighted advocacy priorities by strong communication and advocacy efforts, appropriately pitched to different audiences, including donors. Strategic and innovative communication materials were produced and disseminated while the multiple advocacy statements were widely taken up despite being in its ninth year of crisis. Thanks to these efforts, the programme was funded at 73 per cent in 2019 compared to 58 per cent funding of the Humanitarian Response Plan. Not being fully funded and the conditions of most funding meant that UNICEF needed to adjust its programming, leading nevertheless to considerable results as outlined below.

### Health and nutrition

UNICEF prioritized the restoration of basic services, with a focus on under-served and high severity [1] areas. The expansion of vaccination services reached 398,242 children with DPT3 [2] as of December, exceeding 2018 results, thanks to support from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, among others. The coverage increased considerably in Deir-ez-Zor (from 9 to 53 per cent) and Ar-Raqqa (from 25 to 46 per cent) as compared to 2018, as several areas in those governorates became newly accessible. Through Communication for Development over 1.8 million caregivers (55 per cent women) were reached with polio and routine immunization educational messaging, while 60,871 health workers and mobilizers were trained on social service awareness. These efforts plus the increased quality services prevented outbreaks in communicable diseases and contributed to strengthening resilience among the people reached.

As gains were made in some areas, however, challenges were faced with access to services in several heavily-populated areas, such as Aleppo. UNICEF continued to advocate at all levels for full and unrestricted access to the affected population. Following an all-population approach, over 3 million children were reached with polio immunization.

Overall, UNICEF supported 1.4 million health consultations for women and children, responding to their basic health needs. Contributing to this, 61 equipped, prefabricated clinics were installed in deprived communities and IDP camps across 10 governorates. In collaboration with WHO these clinics were further supported with staff capacity building and supplies, benefiting over 56,000 vulnerable people, including over 20,000 children previously lacking access to health services.

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For nutrition, UNICEF continued preventive interventions for women and children to improve Infant and Young Child Feeding with a focus on complementary feeding and promotion of diet diversity, a proven strategy. Over 385,000 caregivers were reached with messages through community outreach and awareness-raising sessions, local-level media campaigns and social mobilization activities. As of December, 1.3 million women and children were screened for malnutrition and 5,116 children under-five (55 per cent girls) were identified as affected by Severe Acute Malnutrition without complications and received life-saving treatment, while WFP supported children affected by moderate acute malnutrition.

Micronutrients supplementation, another important intervention to ensure proper nutritional status of children, was planned jointly with a measles campaign. In a very positive development, there was no measles outbreak, therefore the measles campaign did not take place. Consequently, only a third of the annual target was achieved, with 685,130 women and children benefitting. In early 2020, micronutrients supplementation is planned to be linked to the polio campaign.

As part of its strategic upstream work, UNICEF played an instrumental role in the completion and ongoing dissemination of two major evidence-generating initiatives with national reach, namely the Standardized Monitoring & Assessment of Relief & Transitions (SMART) survey and the study on under-five mortality rates and their determinants. These studies represent a major breakthrough and the data, being finalized, will serve to increase evidence-based investments. The findings will inform the development of 1) the Infant and Young Child Feeding Strategic Plan, 2) Nutrition Sector Strategy, 3) National Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Strategy, and 4) the Primary Health Care Revitalization Plan. UNICEF will leverage the data to respond strategically to the realities of children in Syria and assist the most vulnerable children.

### Education

Feedback from Ministry of Education and field observations note that a significant number of out-of-school children in Syria returned to school and enrollment has improved. This progress is partly related to increasing stability in large parts of the country. UNICEF's program has responded to the positive change by diversifying its approaches in addressing the learning challenge and reaching the children who are not in school.

UNICEF supported over 1.4 million children<sup>[3]</sup> through direct service provision, improving access to education and quality of learning. The priority was placed on the high severity areas, especially in the northeast, northwest and southwest, which host 86 per cent of the population in need. Specialized learning, including remedial education, self-learning programmes and life-skills training, were provided for IDPs living in shelters and camps in the northeast and northwest, reaching over 105,000 children. Additionally, 250,000 children were reached<sup>[4]</sup> in non-formal settings with education services, providing children with learning opportunities. To capitalize on the temporary learning centers as platform for multiple services, deliberate investment was made to reach adolescents (13-17 years), especially adolescent girls and boys at-risk, through temporary learning centers with life-skills, psychosocial support services and protection, including mine-risk-education.

In 2019, aiming to contribute to systemic improvements, UNICEF supported policy development, strategic planning and the formulation of education guidelines. One noteworthy milestone supported by UNICEF and education sector partners is the Ministry of Education's (MoE) Transitional Education Sector Plan, a comprehensive sector analysis which proposes an overarching, gender-sensitive education sector policy for 2020 – 2022. With the initial roll-out of the School Integrated Management Information System in 250 schools in Damascus, UNESCO and UNICEF already supported a crucial part of the strategy, namely data and information systems for evidence-based planning.

An important step toward increased investment in Early Childhood Development (ECD), was the development of a 2020-2026 ECD cross-sectoral strategy initiated by the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs (SCFAP) and UNICEF. UNICEF facilitated participation from the Ministries of Health, Nutrition, Education, Social Affairs, Administration, Culture and the Environment as well as NGO partners. This new strategy is expected to pave the way towards more focused and effective investments in ECD.

### Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

UNICEF delivered timely and effectively WASH humanitarian assistance, in coordination with Syrian Arab Red Crescent and WASH sector partners, but also as a first responder and as a provider of last resort when no other partner was able to step in. In 2019 efforts increasingly focused on more sustainable solutions to strengthen the capacity of local partners and build the resilience of water and sanitation systems in cooperation with the Government. Through this approach, UNICEF was able to achieve its targets in a cost-effective manner while building on the emergency response to include resilience-based services.

In 2019, over 6 million people benefited from emergency WASH interventions, restoration of water and sanitation basic services, hygiene promotion and WASH in schools. UNICEF reached over 4 million people (including an estimated 1.4

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million children)[\[5\]](#) with improved and sustained access to safe water through infrastructure interventions. Approximately 200,000 children plus their families were provided with sanitation services[\[6\]](#). UNICEF completed the development and rehabilitation of water and sanitation facilities and hygiene promotion activities in 221 schools across the country, benefiting over 120,000 children[\[7\]](#).

In addition to addressing immediate, life-saving needs, the impact of UNICEF interventions has contributed to the prevention of major waterborne disease outbreaks. This is a significant achievement considering the vulnerability of Syria's general population due to the protracted crisis and continued deterioration of WASH infrastructure and systems. Given that holistic progress on WASH requires appropriate hygiene behavior, a strategy was developed capitalizing on the constructive role of WASH interventions in areas such as nutrition and menstrual hygiene management. The immediate follow-up is the accelerated work on promotion of hand-washing with soap, water conservation and hygiene promotion in schools as these identified as the most prominent knowledge/practice gaps.

In 2019, UNICEF continued its strategy of preventing further service degradation of the WASH systems, focused on ensuring the continuity of service provision and supporting the enhancement of national structures' maintenance capacity. This approach proved to be cost-effective and more sustainable. Another successful shift that enabled significant cost reduction and timely response to emerging crises was the engagement with stand-by private-sector partners for water trucking, construction of emergency showers, latrines and distribution of hygiene kits. In terms of upstream work, as well as investing in capacity building and sector strengthening, UNICEF initiated a bottleneck analysis, aiming at identifying the root causes behind the lack of access to water and sanitation services and the main determinants which will provide a strong foundation for evidence-based programming in line with the SDGs.

### Child Protection

The Child Protection Programme focused on strengthening the child protection system, while ensuring a prompt response to continuing and newly arising humanitarian needs. In 2019, over 220,000 children and women[\[8\]](#) were provided with structured and sustained psychosocial support, mostly in stand-alone centers. To increase reach in a cost-effective manner, mine risk education was integrated in other interventions such as immunization, polio campaigns and the school curricula in 2018-2019. Over 1.6 million people[\[9\]](#) were reached with explosive hazards risk education, covering all 14 governorates. Out of around 900 children killed in Syria in 2019 due to hostilities, approximately 21 per cent were killed or maimed due to landmines/unexploded ordnances/explosive remnants of war explosions, reflecting an urgent, increased need for this programme[\[10\]](#).

In coordination with UNFPA as gender-based violence (GBV) sub-sector lead, interventions preventing GBV are also mainstreamed within other programmes, reaching over 70,000 people with GBV prevention and empowerment activities. Furthermore, behavioral change communication messages on violence against women and children targeted some 450,000 people in 12 governorates

Responding to the dire situation of children and women in camps remained a priority. Child protection teams worked with UNHCR and other partners on registration of separated and unaccompanied children, family tracing and reunification, facilitation of repatriation and specialized services for children and women of foreign nationality in the camps. A total of 582 unaccompanied and separated children were identified, 277 of them were reunified with their families of origin while 78 children remain in the interim care centers managed by UNICEF, and 227 are living with other relatives or foster families. This area of work demands close collaboration with all partners and stakeholders involved and will remain a priority in 2020. UNICEF continued to co-chair the Country Task Force on the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and document grave violations against children which had continued to increase in 2019, the highest number of violations (3,021) ever verified in the country.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) in strengthening child protection systems that are both preventive and responsive to the needs of at-risk children, including developing a sustainable professional social workforce and establishing dedicated structure and capacity for case management. Upstream advocacy work contributed to the development of a national plan to operationalize the recommendations of the UN Child Rights Committee to create an enabling policy and legal framework. This national plan is already providing an opportunity for UNICEF to work on legislative reform and is an important entry point for further work at policy level.

### Social Policy

In 2019, UNICEF's Social Policy programme reached 530,000 displaced children in settlements across Syria through its humanitarian social protection response[\[11\]](#). Priority was given to knowledge management, evidence generation and advocacy for policy strengthening as part of upstream efforts to ensure that the most vulnerable children in need are reached in optimum manner. The feedback received from the monitoring surveys of the Cash Transfer Programme for children with disabilities showed that the programme had positive effects on the well-being of the children and their families

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in terms of the households' investment in education and health, as well as reducing school drop-out rate by 70 per cent on average. This evidence has been used by MoSAL in support of their efforts to explore other similar social protection schemes for the most vulnerable people.

The basic need support programme provided over 525,000 children with seasonal clothing and new born baby kits in hard-to-reach, and newly accessible areas of the country. The post distribution surveys recorded overall satisfaction with the quantity and quality of the items distributed, distance and accessibility of the distribution sites, with around 90 per cent of the surveyed beneficiaries registering satisfaction. Positive feedback on the E-voucher Programme which covers over 65,600 children in the most impoverished urban areas in Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Al-Hasakeh, Homs, Hama, Lattakia governorates, was reported from the beneficiaries with 81 per cent satisfied with the value of the e-voucher they received, up from 57 per cent last year as well with the adjusted timeline.

The establishment of the national Social Protection Integrated Management Information System marked a milestone in UNICEF's upstream work in support of the national social protection system, since it addresses fragmentation that exists in the country's social protection system. During 2019, UNICEF continued its advocacy for a child-focused national social protection scheme which led to a study to assess the feasibility of a national child grant, planned for 2020. The study will provide an analysis on budget implications, medium and long-term benefits for poverty reduction and productivity, as well as conditions for the successful implementation of a national child grant in Syria.

### Adolescent Development and Participation

The Adolescent Development and Participation programme continued to invest in adolescents and youth (10-24) to improve their capacities for personal development and to contribute to enhancing resilience and social cohesion in their communities. For this, UNICEF worked to ensure equitable access to a comprehensive package of services and opportunities for adolescents and youth, especially the most vulnerable.

To strengthen national capacities, the programme worked upstream at strategic and policy levels, enhancing the skills and capacities of staff in key-ministries resulting in the provision of quality services. These services were diverse and accustomed to the requirements of the youth and reached 150,000 young people<sup>[12]</sup>. The highest demand was for skill-building opportunities, such as Basic, Advanced and Functional Literacy and Numeracy, Life Skills and Citizenship Education, Technical Vocational Education and Training/TVET. In addition, 167 youth received seed-funding for the implementation of social and business entrepreneurship projects. The programme was mainstreamed at national and decentralized levels to ensure sustainability and scalability through a comprehensive approach.

Due to the protracted crisis, many youth and adolescents have been missing out on social and civic engagement opportunities, including sports and other types of clubs. This is a clear gap in their daily lives, impacting their overall development. To provide access to such opportunities, UNICEF and its partners organized activities related to sports for development and social mobilization, including youth-led initiatives, to improve social, civic and digital engagement for 240,927 youth (50 per cent girls)<sup>[13]</sup>. Of notable success were the youth-led community dialogues, volunteerism opportunities and cultural activities that empowered the participants to contribute to their communities and have fun through 500 initiatives.

UNICEF also partnered with an international NGO to develop standardized life-skills tools and to conduct capacity development to ensure quality services of all partners working with adolescents. This has proven a worthwhile initiative, harmonizing the minimum standards of the civil society organizations. To increase the feedback channels with beneficiaries, a Youth Advisory Board consisting of 241 adolescents was established in five governorates (Aleppo, Damascus, Homs, Tartous, Lattakia) to guide UNICEF and partners on programme needs, participation and advocacy. Pertinent feedback included the need to establish better linkages between the skills trainings and the job market, increase the number of scholarships and increase partnerships with the private sector. A linked study was conducted on the "Role of Private Sector in Skills Development and Employment", recommending the design of pilot projects and partnerships that provide linkages to on-the-job training, apprenticeship and internships, in line with Generation Unlimited strategy and in partnership with UNDP. This feedback will be further incorporated into 2020 programming.

### Humanitarian coordination for life-saving actions

UNICEF continued to lead the WASH, Education and Nutrition sectors and Child Protection sub-sector, working closely with partners and UN agencies. UNICEF advocated for and took part in Syrian Arab Red Crescent and United Nations (SARC/UN) inter-agency convoys delivering life-saving humanitarian assistance to the Rukban settlement, twice in 2019 for approximately 12,700 individuals including nearly 7,000 children. In addition, UNICEF represented Nutrition and WASH in an inter-agency convoy to Manbij city, Aleppo, in March to deliver humanitarian aid to over 50,000 people (including over 20,000 children), in addition to assessing the situation in the town, which was previously inaccessible.

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### Challenges

The short-term funding with conditionality remained a major challenge and did not always allow the necessary flexibility to address urgent or fast-evolving needs. UNICEF continued to advocate with donors and the humanitarian community for more flexible, longer-term and predictable support. Also, delays faced by implementing partners in receiving operational approvals by the Government affected programme implementation. The enhanced coordination with MoSAL, combined with its own efforts for simplifications, led to a reduction of the approval time by half.

[1] This follows UNOCHA classification based on a mix of indicators to identify the most in need.

[2] Combined vaccine for Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus.

[3] 63 per cent of the target, 52 per cent funded for education.

[4] 81 per cent of the target.

[5] Target achieved.

[6] Half of the target achieved. WASH programme was 56 per cent funded, and access to safe water was prioritized.

[7] 67 per cent of the target. WASH was 56 per cent funded.

[8] Target achieved.

[9] 80 per cent of the target.

[10] Data for 2019 are under review at the time of reporting and will be available in mid-February.

[11] 93 per cent of the target.

[12] 51 per cent of the target, 47 per cent funded.

[13] Target achieved.

### Lessons Learned and Innovations

The protracted nature of the Syrian crisis has become the norm, demanding responsive programming implying that when undertaking short-term, singular responses to the sudden surge of humanitarian needs, mid- and longer-term impact on resilience must be considered. Hence, 2019 embodied a continued shift in programming towards more resilience-based interventions, both in humanitarian response and development programming.

While implementing programmes in a highly complex, volatile context, UNICEF Syria Country Office recognized the need to systematically promote the generation, dissemination and use of knowledge. The first knowledge management strategy adopted in 2019 produced four case studies. Two of these cases, namely Participatory Action Research and the Integrated Communication Initiative in Der-ez-Zor, are introduced later in this section.

As reflected in all programmes and advocacy results of 2019, UNICEF increased its partnerships across the spectrum: the faith-based organizations have proven to be very effective implementing partners with far reach and strong ties to the communities. UNICEF will continue working with them in 2020 and will invest in their capacity across the board. The Community-Based Organizations have proven to be vital in engaging adolescents, youth and community at large. In the areas of academics and research institutions some collaboration occurred but will need to increase in 2020.

Within the humanitarian context, UNICEF continued to work within its mandate to lead the WASH, Education and Nutrition sectors and the Child Protection area of responsibility, working closely with implementing partners and other UN Agencies. Through sector coordination, UNICEF was a key contributor to the development of the 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview and the subsequent Humanitarian Response Plan, initiating innovative ways of mapping information.

In addition to a more deliberate method of programming for resilience in the ongoing Syrian crisis, key innovative

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approaches in 2019 included:

Building on a research conducted in 2016 in the Middle East and North Africa region, UNICEF and its partners conducted Participatory Action Research (PAR) to generate evidence with and for young people. The objective of PAR is to empower youth to lead community-based research, to support them in becoming change-makers and to advocate on issues relevant to them. By partnering with young people, PAR fosters empowerment and gives members of marginalized and vulnerable groups a voice. It also allows young people to maximize their everyday knowledge, networks and personal experiences to bring new perspectives.

The initiative, which took place in Aleppo, Rural Damascus, Hama and Tartous was led by 37 young researchers who engaged 461 peers. The initiative was notable in that youth empowerment and PAR is not widespread in Syria, and that evidence was generated on the situation of children which resulted in recommendations made by the young researchers.

Observing that that the most vulnerable youth had the least access to opportunities, the young researchers recommended: increasing financial support to young people and their families to positively influence their choices; increasing decent job opportunities for young people and linkages with training; improving access to educational opportunities for boys and girls; and increasing scholarship opportunities. UNICEF supported the dissemination of the report and is advocating with the Government for the implementation of these recommendations.

In the past, UNICEF in Syria has had to respond to urgent needs, focusing on the delivery of life-saving assistance and messages through a sectoral approach. This year, the County Office made an explicit effort to achieve results via an Integrated Communication for Development approach.

In partnership with the Government and partners, and through community engagements, UNICEF created public awareness and demand for Health, WASH and Education services in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The initiative identified children who dropped out of school or missed immunization and referred them to relevant services (e.g. nearest health center or appropriate education pathways). This allowed partners to carry out comprehensive and integrated community awareness on issues related to Health (immunization), Nutrition (IYCF), Education, WASH (hygiene promotion) and mine risk education.

The initiative included house-to-house visits, awareness sessions in schools and mosques, meeting with key influencers and community leaders, distribution of information, education and communication materials. This reached over 276,000 people (51 per cent female), including 165,000 children. All children identified as missing education or health services received referral cards to be shown at the nearby school or health facility, which also served as a monitoring mechanism. A total of 10,344 referral cards for health and 4,848 cards for education were distributed. By collecting the cards from the health facilities and schools, UNICEF found that at least 18 per cent of the referred children were enrolled in school, while 24 per cent of the children referred to the health centers for immunization and other reasons visited them. This is a positive development, given that much of the population had been restricted from accessing these basic services for several years and that trust in services needed to be repaired. In the future, more efforts will be undertaken to have these children benefitting from health and education services.

In 2019, UNICEF invested in enhancing Accountability to Affected Populations to promote and facilitate active engagement of communities and affected populations. This is to ensure that participants' feedback informs programme interventions and that they have access to a grievance mechanism. Surveys and focus group discussions were conducted to monitor satisfaction levels of the beneficiaries of UNICEF-supported services such as health and immunization, child protection centers, life-skills development for young people, cash transfers for families with children with disabilities, education and hygiene promotion.

Analyses of results yielded recommendations for improved service provision, including the need to reinforce the local communities' participation in defining the needs, to enhance the effectiveness of the programmes. For example, on the skills development courses for young people, service providers were encouraged to proactively receive inputs from youth on the type and content of the courses. Further, an example of initial results included that UNICEF started to reimburse the transportation fee for vulnerable population, such as young people attending learning activities, based on their attendance records, as supporting transport costs for learning activities can facilitate increased attendance.