

Syria

Part 1: Situation update in the country

In 2018 the Syrian Arab Republic witnessed rapid and continuous change. As the crisis – entering its eighth year – evolved, the areas under Government of Syria control increased dramatically. As of December 2018 besieged areas no longer existed. With the scaling down of hostilities, displaced Syrians gradually began returning to their areas of origin: it has been estimated by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) that 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and almost 50,000 refugees returned to their area of origin in Syria during the first 10 months of 2018 (Syria Factsheet, Jan.–Oct. 2018). Comprehensive access by humanitarian partners continued to represent a major challenge in several parts of the country: UNOCHA estimated that 9 per cent of the population was still living in hard-to-reach areas (UNOCHA, Population dataset, October 2018) – equivalent to over 1.7 million people, compared to almost 2 million people reported at the beginning of 2018.

The overall evolution of the situation in 2018 deeply impacted UNICEF’s modus operandi in Syria, as it complemented the short-term delivery of supplies with longer-term interventions with an increased focus on resilience. A major challenge to evidence-based programming, however, was the limited space for data collection and evidence-generation in the country, so that overall human need continued to be based on estimates, small-scale assessments and secondary data.

The political scene was dominated by discussions of a possible constitutional committee that might provide a final political solution to the conflict, in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254. However, the outcome of these discussions was still unclear at year’s-end. The economic landscape was dismal; gross national income per capita kept decreasing, and in 2018 the World Bank updated Syria’s economic status from lower-middle-income to low-income country. This change had important implications for UNICEF programming, as the country became eligible to receive support from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) beginning in 2019.

Despite a slow return to normalcy, reports of tension continued in many areas. In Idleb, where a de-militarized buffer zone was created in September 2018 (agreement reached on 17 September 2018 between Russia and Turkey), violence continued, affecting some 3 million residents, including over 1 million internally displaced persons. Tensions also continued in Western Aleppo and Afrin, where the United Nations still had limited access. More than 300,000 people living in this area could only be reached with partial humanitarian assistance since February 2018 (through cross-border partners), while the internally displaced residing in reception areas were reached from inside Syria. UNICEF was continuously engaged in advocacy to obtain greater access.

Access was also limited to the city and neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa, with a population of

140,000, due to security reasons and heavy contamination by explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance. Although the situation remained fluid and population movement continued – including returnees from neighbouring countries – restrictions on the freedom of movement by those internally displaced persons remained; many used informal routes and reportedly paid large sums to reach other areas. Access by local UN humanitarian partners to the affected area, including camps and host communities, remained a major challenge. In addition, Turkey maintained a strong presence in the northwest and a strong influence over Afrin District, where only 21 NGOs were authorized to work. The situation also remained tense in the southeastern region of the country, where fighting continued.

Rukban posed a special concern; some 40,000–50,000 internally displaced persons remained in dire need of humanitarian assistance. UNICEF was able to reach them twice in 2018, from Amman in January and through an inter-agency convoy within Syria in November. The southwest also received UNICEF support during the first half of the year via cross-border operations.

Movement of civilians remained fluid in Syria's northeast, mainly due to ongoing conflict, resulting in small-scale displacements from Rural Deir-ez-Zor to camps in Al-Hasakeh Governorate. Reports showed that the Syrian Democratic Forces-led campaign against the last ISIL-held enclave in rural south-eastern Deir-ez-Zor continued at unprecedented intensity, resulting in the displacements. OCHA's latest reports showed that 30,000 internally displaced persons came from the ISIL-held Hajin enclave since June 2018. The affected population is reportedly living under dire humanitarian conditions with insufficient access to drinking water, food and health services. Also, in the northeast of the country, tensions between Kurdish authorities and the central Government resulted in violation of children rights, such as limitation on access to education. The situation was further complicated in December 2018 when the United States announced the withdrawal of its troops from Syria, which is expected to significantly impact the political scenario in the northeast and south of the country.

Humanitarian needs inside the formerly besieged enclave of Eastern Ghouta (under siege from 2013 until April 2018) remained high. Despite the ongoing response it is estimated that around 300,000 people remain in dire need of humanitarian assistance, with the highest concentration in Duma, Harasta and Kafer Batna.

Grave child rights violations continued to be reported. Children were killed and injured by the persistent use of explosive weapons in civilian areas, recruited and used in armed conflict and subjected to torture, detention, abduction, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access. Of the estimated 8.35 million children living in the Syrian Arab Republic, 5.6 million required humanitarian assistance in 2018, including 493,000 living in hard-to-reach areas (Humanitarian Needs Overview/HNO, UNOCHA, 2018). Children continued to experience daily violence in their communities, schools and homes, along with repeated displacements, loss of or separation from family members and friends, dramatic deterioration of living conditions, divisions in their community and lack of basic social services (Chemonics International, Status of Early Primary Education in Syria, 2017).

Mines and unexploded ordnance continued to pose a challenge. An estimated 8.2 million people (3.3 million children) were living in contaminated areas in 2018 (HNO, 2018). Child labour was another major challenge: 40 per cent of the households in 2,010 communities surveyed considered the need for children to work or help the family as one of the key reasons for not attending school (Whole of Syria Child Protection Area of Responsibility, 'Overview of

Child Protection Needs in Syria', 2018). In 82 per cent of assessed communities, respondents reported that child labour was an issue of concern, with boys more likely to be involved in hazardous forms of labour and girls in domestic work. Early marriage for girls also remained a concern. In 69 per cent of assessed communities, respondents reported that child marriage was an issue; 20 per cent reported it as 'common' or 'very common'. In addition, obtaining civil documentation such as birth certificates remained a major challenge: in 83 per cent of assessed communities respondents reported that the lack or loss of civil documentation was a concern; 31 per cent reported it as 'common' or 'very common'. Family violence was a concern for 51 per cent of the communities surveyed, 'common' or 'very common' in 25 per cent of cases, equally affecting girls and boys of all ages.

The Syrian health system continued to be compromised due to the destruction of healthcare infrastructure, flight and killing of healthcare professionals and the collapse of the pharmaceutical industry. The decline of Syria's health system as a public service network translated into diminishing services for the population, especially for vulnerable groups. Among adolescent girls, early marriage was reported to be a widespread practice in 57 percent of communities (HNO 2018); girls under 18 years of age accounted for 12–15 percent of deliveries in health facilities (UNFPA Syria, 2018). More than 3 million children under five years required nutrition support, including nearly 20,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM). National routine immunization coverage declined from 90 per cent in 2010 to 70 per cent in 2017. This deficit in service provision is clearly illustrated by the recurrent outbreak of communicable diseases. Syria's northeast and northwest were significantly impacted by measles outbreaks. Outbreaks of food- and water-borne diseases have also been rampant in camps for the internally displaced and host communities due to the breakdown of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure.

UNOCHA estimated in 2018 that some 14.6 million people required access to safe water, including 7.6 million in acute humanitarian need, partly due to heavy infrastructure damage. Despite some investment in water treatment systems and provision of disinfectants, the main challenge countrywide was with water quality, particularly at point of use. This was a result of deteriorating secondary infrastructure (e.g., water networks and sewage systems), as well as limited regular operational and maintenance of water treatment stations. Sanctions limited the import of critical water supply equipment such as water treatment and disinfectants, further complicating the delivery of effective WASH programming. Moreover, an estimated 70 per cent of sewage remained untreated, while at least half of the sewage systems affected by conflict were not functional, posing high health risks to communities, exemplified by an outbreak of acute watery diarrhoea in April/May 2018 in Deir-ez-Zor. The WASH situation in the camps for internally displaced persons continued to be critical, requiring the provision of full WASH service packages, while promoting a transition towards more sustainable solutions (such as establishing connections to existing water networks or simplified water and sewer networks). Due to deterioration, the WASH infrastructure at existing camps required additional repair and maintenance to support the response to increased reports of incidents of water-borne disease (e.g., at Al-Hole and Areesha camps). Although water and sanitation services and hygiene supplies were available, internally displaced people and returnees were often not able to afford them. The highest need for WASH services was reported for those internally displaced living in informal settlements, and for health facilities and schools.

Eight years of acute crisis has had a disastrous impact on Syria's national education system, forcing millions of children and youth out of school and leaving many more at risk of dropping out. According to the Ministry of Education (MoE) statistical digest for 2010–2017 (launched in

September 2018) fewer than 60 per cent of the pre-crisis 22,000 schools were functional as of June 2018. Enrolment figures from 2010 compared to the end of the 2017/2018 school year indicated that the number of children who attended basic school in 2017 decreased by approximately 30 per cent compared to pre-crisis levels. Multiple factors accounted for low enrolment, including lack of available learning spaces, socio-economic pressure on families who have lost their livelihoods, conflict-inflicted disabilities and psychological trauma. For those children and youth who managed to remain in school during the crisis, the quality of education was severely compromised, and they faced significant risks of dropping out as a result. It is alarming that 29 per cent of children drop out by the end of primary school (MoE, May 2018). Comparing the results of 2010 and 2017 national examinations, the pass rate for grade 9 and 12 examinations declined significantly: by 6 and 22 per cent, respectively. The overall domestic budget allocation to education decreased from 15 per cent in 2010 to 8 per cent in 2016. Despite some progress in overall school enrolment in recent years, an estimated 2 million children remained out of school in Syria (school-age populations estimated for beginning of 2017/2018 school year using data from census, OCHA and UNDP). Although exact numbers need to be confirmed through an ad hoc survey, these children remained vulnerable and at increased risk of exploitation and abuse, including child labour and early marriage, in certain geographical areas. Also, enrolment of children in public and private kindergartens further declined – from 12 per cent in 2011 to 8 per cent in 2018.

Youth and adolescents (10–24 years old), representing over 30 per cent of the entire population, struggled to access learning opportunities, vocations and to have meaningful engagement in their communities. Many adolescents had no access to schooling during the height of the crisis, and are now unable to return to school and in desperate need of alternative pathways. Most adolescent girls and young women lacked information about the physical and psychosocial changes they experienced during puberty. In some situations, girls and boys—including recruits and those with disabilities—were also at risk of additional and multiple forms of violence due to their economic vulnerability.

The experience of children with disabilities in Syria is often one of marginalization and disempowerment. They are exposed to higher risks of violence, and face difficulties in accessing basic services that accommodate their needs, including education. During conflict and crisis, families of children with disabilities often lack the means or ability to provide their children with needed equipment.

A several-fold increase in the price of essential commodities, combined with households' deteriorating economic situation, left many Syrian families unable to meet basic needs, including decent clothes for their children. This is particularly true for families that were displaced several times during the conflict and continue to live under dire conditions.

In this complex environment, UNICEF worked to deliver short-term assistance within the framework of the Whole of Syria approach – following the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions 2165, 2191, 2258, 2332 and 2393 – and in alignment with the 2018 humanitarian response plan and Syria strategic framework. UNICEF Syria partnered with implementing partners (both humanitarian actors and public sector) and targeted the most vulnerable children affected by the crisis, focusing on a multi-sectoral response to their health, nutrition, WASH, education and protection needs. UNICEF has been progressively strengthening its focus on the longer term by scaling up resilience-building interventions, and will continue to move in this direction in the coming year.

Part 2: Major results, including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the Country Programme Documents

Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

UNICEF continued work at the upstream level to reorient the health and nutrition sector from short-term response towards early recovery. A key step in this direction was support given to two major data collection exercises that will enhance evidence-based planning for health and nutrition in coming years. The first, starting in the third quarter of 2018, was a study of the causes of under-five mortality. Its findings are expected to support the development of a new child health policy in 2019. Second, preparations for a comprehensive standardized monitoring and assessment of relief and transitions nutrition survey were finalized; data collection is expected by January 2019. The survey will inform processes leading to finalization of Ministry of Health (MoH) strategies on nutrition and infant and young child feeding. To intensify programmes for preventive nutrition services for women and children, a pool of 50 master trainers was constituted to support governorates' scale-up plans.

In collaboration with the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF continued its engagement with GAVI, through UNICEF's Middle East and North Africa Regional Office, securing vaccine supplies for the entire country as well as targeted technical assistance. GAVI extended its support for vaccines and cold chain infrastructure with the provision of 724 solar and electrical refrigerators.

UNICEF was able to provide cross-sectoral support in health, WASH and increased community awareness in response to outbreaks of food- and water-borne diseases. UNICEF also worked closely with WHO to respond to other outbreaks, ranging from typhoid fever and hepatitis to diarrhoeal diseases, across IDP camps and communities. This collaboration also extended to the revitalization of routine immunization and conducting vaccination campaigns. A series of supplementary immunization activities in response to the 2017 polio outbreak led to the formal closure of the outbreak this year. Interventions to control measles in high-risk governorates in northeast and northwest Syria were also intensified, leading to vaccination of more than 2.5 million children between the ages of six months and 12 years. Surveillance reports soon showed a significant decline in the incidence of cases. A small outbreak of acute watery diarrhoea (835 cases) was reported in Deir-ez-Zor, in the country's northeast, between April and May 2018. The outbreak was effectively contained through an integrated response focused on the delivery of hygiene promotion messages, WASH and communication for development (C4D) interventions, in close partnership with WHO and through strategic use of C4D.

Routine immunization coverage for Penta 3 was reportedly 67 per cent as of end-October, down from 72 per cent at the same time in 2017. Performance was significantly constrained by the loss of access to most parts of the heavily populated Aleppo Governorate in April. In response to limited access to service delivery and challenges in immunization and primary care persisting in Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor, UNICEF increased its field presence.

A C4D strategy to promote routine immunization was developed; community systems-strengthening, through engagement strategies, was initiated to complement the focus on service delivery. Community systems-strengthening involved several elements: empowering local community members through participatory approaches to engage them in immunization-related community-level planning, delivery and referrals; engaging community volunteers in

awareness activities, especially in camps; engaging religious leaders in immunization advocacy and awareness activities; investing in capacity development for health staff and community health volunteers on C4D micro-planning and interpersonal communication skills; and finally, analysing training needs in the country and developing contextualized communication for immunization training manuals to be used by trainers and for cascade-type training.

Another key feature of the polio response was the integration of a strong C4D campaign to support behaviour change and mobilize communities— especially in north-eastern Syria – which was successful in reaching more than 600,000 households. UNICEF strongly invested in preventive interventions, through infant and young child feeding and micronutrient supplementation across 13 governorates (Damascus; Aleppo; Rural Damascus; Homs; Hama; Latakia; Al-Hasakeh; Deir-ez-Zor; Tartous; Ar-Raqqa; Dar'a; As-Sweida; Quneitra). A total of 1,736,456 women and children were reached with micronutrient supplements (79 per cent of target as of November 2018), and 418,275 caregivers were reached with messages on optimal feeding practices. With regard to SAM, 3,711 children received treatment (55 per cent of target as of November 2018) through Government- and NGO-run health services. UNICEF maintained close collaboration with WHO and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to scale up preventive and curative interventions on acute malnutrition. Wherever possible, the same communities were targeted to address moderate and severe malnutrition by UNICEF and WFP, while WHO support was required to create stabilization centres for severe cases with complications. Special attention was paid to screening campaigns for children in newly accessible areas and camps for the internally displaced, which resulted in 870,735 women and children screened this year (67 per cent of the total target). It should be noted, however, that over all global acute malnutrition rates were not found to be above emergency thresholds at these high-risk locations.

UNICEF continued to implement part of its short-term response through outreach and ad hoc convoys, contributing significantly to the first inter-agency mission to reach the Rukban Camp from within Syria in November 2018. With UNICEF support, a multi-antigen campaign was implemented; more than 5,000 children were vaccinated against polio, around 3,000 children under five years of age received routine vaccinations and 245 women received tetanus vaccine. In addition, essential health and nutrition supplies were delivered to cover the needs of the more than 13,000 people displaced in the area.

In 2019 UNICEF will refocus its interventions to strengthen support for comprehensive health and nutrition programming in 40 of the country's 96 districts. Quality and scale improvements in infant and young child feeding and routine immunization strengthening will be the critical entry points in 2019.

UNICEF continued to lead the nutrition sector in Syria, with the goal of improving the effectiveness of humanitarian nutrition response programming by ensuring greater accountability and partnerships. In that regard, the nutrition sector succeeded in attracting new partners to provide a comprehensive package of nutrition services to affected populations, to improve their nutritional status through an appropriate and coordinated response that was predictable, timely, effective and at-scale.

In partnership with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the General Administration of Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR) and the Palestinian Red Crescent (PLS RC), UNICEF supported over 57,000 vulnerable Palestinian refugee children and women to access maternal and paediatric care services and nutrition

services in the neediest areas of Rural Aleppo and Damascus.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

UNICEF engaged in education strategy work, supporting the development of a transitional sector plan involving several ministries. This plan represents a key element for shifting from ad-hoc humanitarian interventions towards a longer-term, nationally owned strategy that clearly defines roles and responsibilities of each partner within the education sector. The plan also defines the pathways for reintegrating children previously out of school who are over-age and need to catch up with missed learning. In this context UNICEF established and maintained critical inter-agency collaboration on the UN joint programme in support of education for all in Syria and on new initiatives, such as a community dialogue project with UN-Habitat. In 2018 the first phase of the joint programme, which seeks to holistically address the needs of children in crisis using schools as entry points, was concluded and a second phase started with a focus on rural Damascus, Eastern Goutha, Homs and Hama.

In partnership with the private sector and the Government, UNICEF Syria supported an analysis of the need for rehabilitation of education infrastructure, highlighting the agency's role in ensuring that schools are utilizing child-focused learning criteria and accessible by children with disabilities.

Strategic collaboration was maintained with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), which provides e-vouchers for children attending non-formal education. Closer relations were established with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to fill in missing information on informal education initiatives and coverage, internal displacement and joint planning for refugees' return.

UNICEF increased its focus on children in hard-to-reach areas, applying a gender lens, and could reach 1.7 million children with education services, mostly through formal education, contributing to the enrolment of 3.6 million children. This result was possible thanks to effective coordination with cross-border operations – which provided school books for 121,000 children in non-accessible areas (such as Ar-Raqqa)– and closer collaboration with the Government to reach all children, especially the most vulnerable (such as in Afrin, Ar-Raqqa and Idleb). UNICEF and partners ensured that 23,000 children living in hard-to-reach areas could be transported to schools and sit for their examinations, a critical step for their education to be recognized.

Despite these efforts, an estimated 2 million children remain out of school in Syria (the actual figure needs to be assessed through surveys, but is estimated at between 1.75 and 2.25 million). More data are needed to better understand the root causes and key drivers of this phenomenon. In this context, UNICEF supported the scaling-up of the education information management system (EMIS), which resulted in the use of children IDs to track their school attendance; this will pave the way for an in-depth assessment of out-of-school children in 2019.

The need for infrastructure rehabilitation remained huge throughout 2018. UNICEF supported light rehabilitation, in coordination with other UN partners and the private and public sectors, while increasingly investing in quality education. The focus for light rehabilitation was on hardest-to-reach areas and newly accessible areas, as they were most affected by the crisis. UNICEF provided 80 per cent of the overall rehabilitation within the country, while trying to

mobilize a wider partnership to address the significant gaps in this area. UNICEF has invested in teacher training to specifically equip teachers with skills to deal with children affected by trauma (life-skills and citizenship training was incorporated into the teacher training strategy).

UNICEF also invested heavily in C4D through the 'back to learning' campaign, which included: analysis of barriers for out-of-school children, door-to-door community mobilization and messages disseminated through media channels, with a focus also on girls. The campaign sought to changing perceptions about the value of education and to bring vulnerable children back to school. The key education messages delivered were focused on the importance of education, especially in emergency, and introduction of Curriculum B and self-learning programmes. Curriculum B is an accelerated programme for children who dropped out and remained out of school for few years. The programme enables them to graduate to the normal curriculum in a specified period of time, based on the number of years they have not been in school. The campaign reached an estimated 10 million people through outreach activities, radio, TV, billboards and flyers, including over 122,000 door-to-door visits.

To address early childhood education UNICEF equipped primary schools with kindergarten classrooms (for children aged three-to-five years) that are accessible by children with disabilities and invested in capacity building for teachers and supervisors. UNICEF is looking into scaling up partnerships with the private sector and local communities to further sustain the response. However some challenges remain, including finding a way to better tailor the programme to specific areas, especially in the northeast of the country.

UNICEF organized a workshop on setting standards for WASH in schools, including access for children with disabilities and a focus on girls' needs. While data availability has improved, future work will need to focus on monitoring and ensuring that the agreed standards are effectively applied in all schools. While UNICEF's approach to WASH in schools was hard driven at the beginning of 2018, from mid-year it progressively shifted toward hygiene promotion and hygiene management, including menstrual hygiene management for girls.

UNICEF continued to lead the education sector, supporting improved coordination structures at the national and sub-national levels and ensuring a coordinated response by partners. As a result of UNICEF leadership in the sector, several response plans were developed (for East Ghouta, Rural Damascus, the southwest and northeast of the country). Three training sessions for education partners focused on improving reporting quality, proposal writing and better understanding of cross-cutting issues (gender/age marking).

The programme for Palestinian refugees met its annual targets, including in early childhood education for pre-school age children, in close partnership with UNRWA. Specifically, UNICEF reached 29,000 Palestinian children with education services (20,000 with non-formal education and 9,000 with early childhood education), and strengthened the capacity of 627 teachers and supervisors to provide psychosocial support, conduct remedial education and implement inclusive learning.

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

During the reporting year UNICEF invested heavily in the integration of child protection services, specifically: psychosocial support for children impacted by the conflict, mine-risk education/awareness sessions to prevent future injuries and casualties and prevention of gender-based violence. These services were provided using both dedicated child protection

sessions as well as inter-sector entry-points, such as immunization campaigns and religious facilities.

A major result was the beginning of operationalization of the case management system with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL), a key milestone and entry point for stronger future partnership in child protection. Case management remained a key activity in child-friendly spaces and drop-in centres, linked to cash assistance programs and child protection units. Drop-in centres provide a safe, supportive and normalizing environment for children living on the streets. A pilot project was also launched in Aleppo involving a mobile application that provides details on various services available in the governorate, including specialized child protection services.

In cooperation with 16 national partners across 13 governorates (Damascus; Aleppo; Rural Damascus; Homs; Hama; Latakia; Al-Hasakeh; Deir-ez-Zor; Tartous; Ar-Raqqa; Dar'a; As-Sweida; Quneitra) UNICEF provided child protection services with structured psychosocial support (PSS) through both fixed (child-friendly spaces) and mobile modalities and through multi-services platforms, reaching more than 192,752 children (51 per cent girls) and 66,000 caregivers (78 per cent women). In addition, awareness sessions using an integrated package including child protection, mine-risk education and gender-based violence reached 150,793 children and adolescents (51 per cent girls).

UNICEF engaged in a partnership with UNFPA, UNHCR, WHO and civil society organizations aiming at breaking the silence on gender-based violence. In Homs, children and adolescents were provided with a safe environment to express their views and concerns on the topic through artwork, poems, quotes, skits and games.

UNICEF Syria continued to implement its short-term response to the country's elevated level of humanitarian need. It was able to deliver minimum child protection responses and establish child protection units in collective shelters for internally displaced persons. The focus was on basic psychosocial support for children and care-givers, family tracing and reunification of unaccompanied and separated children, including measures to prevent separation and reduce children's exposure to further risks through awareness initiatives. The minimum standards of child protection and child protection units were applied in all collective shelters and major locations for the internally displaced.

The conflict in Syria has been characterized by widespread use of explosive weapons in populated areas, resulting in both immediate and long-term risks of indiscriminate killing and/or injury of civilians by mines and unexploded ordnance. As an estimated 8.2 million people are living in contaminated areas (2018 HNO data), UNICEF maintained its efforts to prevent and respond to this threat by prioritizing mine-risk education interventions that promote safe behaviour and provide children with skills and knowledge to protect themselves from risks associated with these dangerous devices. Using an integrated approach involving child protection, education and health, UNICEF and implementing partners delivered risk education at child-friendly spaces, schools, camps and reception centres for internally displaced people as well as major community-based events such as polio and vaccination campaigns, to ensure the sustainability of mine-risk education programme and achieve behaviour change,

UNICEF supported the MoE to integrate mine-risk education into the official school curriculum in different grades. Approximately 1 million people (including children and caregivers) benefited from lifesaving messages and direct mine-risk education sessions.

UNICEF continued to co-chair the country task force on monitoring and reporting, taking the lead for data collection, response and advocacy on the grave violations committed against children during armed conflict. UNICEF remained a key actor in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in Syria, systematically gathering accurate, timely, objective and reliable information on the six grave violations committed against children during the conflict. In this context, UNICEF effectively contributed to the 2nd Secretary-General's country report on Children and Armed Conflict in Syria, released on 30 October 2018, documenting grave violations against children between November 2013 and June 2018. Overall, 12,537 grave violations were verified, the most prevalent of which was killing and maiming; 706 cases involved other issues of concern affecting children. (The full report is available at <http://undocs.org/en/s/2018/969>). The scale, severity and recurrence of these violations illustrate the growing erosion of compliance by all parties to the conflict with their child protection obligations under international law.

Significant progress was achieved toward implementation of the national work plan to prevent and respond to underage recruitment, initially endorsed in February 2017. UNICEF agreed with the Government of Syria to conduct an assessment of the justice for children system, including services provided inside juvenile rehabilitation centres, which also host recruited children. The assessment is expected to start in early 2019. Moreover, UNICEF organized seven training sessions on violence against children, including gender-based violence, in Damascus to enhance the skills of 200 members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), case managers and front-line and social workers.

UNICEF continued to lead the coordination of the child protection area of responsibility in Syria. Dedicated capacity-building improved gap analysis and strategic planning, while also contributing to greater sector visibility and accountability. Key 2018 achievements included: finalizing the "Whole of Syria child protection needs overview" and operational strategy, joint mapping of protection capacity across Syria, establishment of the risk education technical working group, mapping of Syria's case management systems and joint analysis and emergency response operations in various newly accessible areas throughout 2018.

As part of the Palestinian programme, community-based child protection programmes and PSS reached 1,968 children in settlements in Damascus, rural Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Daraa and Lattakia and awareness-raising activities on child protection issues and mine-risk education were scaled up, reaching some 38,775 Palestinian children and caregivers. As part of the minimum child protection response, UNICEF began supporting children's access to specialized services by working on case management by strengthening the capacity of social workers from GAPAR and UNRWA.

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

UNICEF Syria's strategy called for preventing further degradation of the WASH system through support for enhancing Government capacity in maintenance. This proved successful in achieving continuity of service provision and restoration of donor confidence. The main approach was to support the restoration of basic services to prevent further degradation and collapse of existing infrastructure. This approach proved to be cost-effective and more sustainable, while at the same time reducing aid dependency. For example, in Eastern Aleppo the rehabilitation of wells and repair of pipe networks, along with capacity building for operations and maintenance of the network, allowed a shift away from water trucking (which is

neither cost-effective nor sustainable) after the first few months. Building from the successful Aleppo experience, a similar approach was initiated in Deir-ez-Zor during 2018. This approach of interventions to slow down service degradation was welcomed by donors, leading to significant funding support for 2019 and beyond.

Evidence was collected to confirm that safe drinking water was available to households in most of the country. The findings of a study commissioned by UNICEF showed that 90 per cent of targeted households had been regularly receiving chlorinated water at their home throughout the year (Household level WASH Assessment, UNICEF Syria, June 2018).

Another successful approach that enabled significant cost reductions and a rapid response to new or emerging crises was the establishment of long-term agreements with stand-by partners in the private sector for water trucking, construction of emergency showers and latrines and distribution of hygiene kits. A 2018 breakthrough was the establishment of a partnership with a major private sector consortium that will continue and be scaled-up in 2019.

UNICEF Syria also remained engaged in upstream work, as well as investing in capacity building and further sector strengthening to ensure greater ownership and sustainability of interventions. A call for equitable access to minimum basic services for all was at the core of the WASH team's advocacy efforts, and formed the basis for developing an internal Excel-based tool for transparent prioritization of partner requests, in line with the equity agenda. UNICEF also supported practical training for technical staff of water establishments in the southern governorates on the use of software applications for the design and repair of sewer networks, financial management and operation and maintenance of electro-mechanical equipment.

In addition, UNICEF advocated for conducting a WASH bottleneck analysis in late 2018, aimed at identifying the root causes and main determinants of lack of access to water and sanitation services. The results of this study are expected to be available in early 2019 and will provide a strong foundation for evidence-based programming in the future.

Partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent proved to be very successful, given the organization's capacity to mobilize human resources and access targeted areas, allowing an early start for restoration work (such as in Eastern Goutha) and reducing the use of water trucking. It should also be noted that UNICEF engaged in an informal partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross for all major emergency responses. Despite these achievements, community and youth engagement in WASH projects remained limited in 2018, and UNICEF plans to invest more in this area in 2019, moving away from the top-down approach used in the past.

Overall, in 2018 UNICEF Syria was able to reach nearly 2.6 million people with improved and sustained access to safe water through infrastructure interventions, while approximately 800,000 people were reached with sanitation services. Since the beginning of the year, UNICEF provided water disinfectants to over 14 million people, allowing them to drink safe water. In addition, UNICEF completed the development and rehabilitation of water and sanitation facilities and hygiene promotion activities in 185 schools throughout the country, benefiting over 100,000 school children. UNICEF also reached over 1 million people with non-food items WASH items, such as family hygiene kits, soap and aqua purification tabs. In 2018 WASH/C4D interventions successfully reached almost 200,000 beneficiaries in 11 governorates with hygiene promotion and awareness-raising messages, in collaboration with

five partners.

UNICEF also continued to deliver timely and effectively short-term WASH assistance, as a first-time responder (such as in Afrin and Eastern Goutha) and as a provider of last resort – when no other humanitarian partner was able to step in– using a multi-sectoral approach (such as in Homs and Hama). In addition, UNICEF continued to ensure the availability of drinking water supply for households in Idleb, supporting the functionality of the water system through repairs to water pumps and generators.

Gender issues were mainstreamed in WASH's work, especially in the areas of sanitation and hygiene promotion, where the needs of girls and women were given special attention. In line with the principle of accountability to affected populations, UNICEF used its expertise from WASH, education and protection, and with support from C4D, to develop an end-user survey to collect feedback on the use of toilets in schools in Quamishli. After analysis of survey results, changes were made to the standard hygiene kit provided to women and girls in camps and shelters for internally displaced persons to better manage their menstrual hygiene, benefiting some 24,757 women and girls (for example more sanitary pads were included in the new kits).

WASH sector coordination, under UNICEF's leadership, proved an effective forum for information-sharing and joint planning of the response. In terms of sector coordination, the emphasis was on encouraging more partners to support the implementation of the WASH-sector hygiene promotion strategy (endorsed in 2017) and support sanitation interventions, including the restoration of basic wastewater treatment services.

In partnership with UNRWA, the programme for Palestinian refugees was also effectively implemented; nearly 2,000 school-aged children gained access to an improved school environment, contributing to enhancing their learning potential.

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

UNICEF's social policy programme employed a systems approach, involving a focus on coordination and harmonization at the policy, programme and administrative levels to increase the effectiveness and impact of national social protection schemes. In 2018 UNICEF also facilitated a discussion on improving the integration of social services across line ministries, under leadership by MoSAL.

UNICEF and the Ministry embarked on a partnership for building the national social work workforce supply, including an initiative to support the development of a graduate-level academic programme for social workers. Further, as part of efforts to enhance coordination at the administrative level, UNICEF provided MoSAL with technical support to develop an integrated social protection information management system.

UNICEF strengthened its engagement in upstream policy advocacy with the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour. As a result, building on the experience of the emergency cash transfer programme, a dialogue on child-focused social protection was initiated and a policy brief will be developed to provide carefully studied options, costs and benefits to inform policy decisions for a national social protection scheme responsive to children's needs.

Under the short-term response component, UNICEF's enhanced engagement and strengthened partnership with MoSAL led to a key achievement: expansion of the cash transfer

programme for families of children with disabilities from two to six governorates: the programme was implemented in Rural Damascus, Lattakia, Tartous, Homs, Al Hasakeh and Aleppo Governorates. A key element of the cash transfer programme was use of an integrated approach in a humanitarian context, whereby the cash-transfer scheme was complemented by case management services, in close coordination with child protection interventions, to enhance the inclusion of children with disabilities in available services.

In response to heightened poverty levels across the population, UNICEF also provided seasonal support to meet the basic needs of vulnerable children, especially those affected by crisis and displacement, through the provision of children's clothes and e-vouchers. In addition to regular seasonal assistance, UNICEF successfully mobilized resources for a timely response to multiple emergencies (such as those in East Goutha and Afrin). These efforts allowed UNICEF to fully reach its annual target for in-kind distribution of children's clothes to the most vulnerable children from the internally displaced, returnee and host communities.

UNICEF also used e-vouchers in areas where markets were reasonably accessible to reach the most vulnerable children in impoverished urban areas. However, implementation of the e-voucher programme was hampered by delays in official approval of the implementing partners, so the programme only partially achieved its annual target.

UNICEF continued to use post-distribution monitoring surveys to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its emergency response under the social policy programme. In 2018 UNICEF thoroughly revised and improved its post-distribution monitoring of the cash transfer programme, which led to higher quality evidence on the programme's impact on the well-being of the targeted children.

Adolescents and youth remained a key priority for UNICEF Syria; programmes aiming to enhance their well-being and empowerment are a core pillar of the regional and inter-agency 'no lost generation' initiative, which further strengthened integration and collaboration with the education and the child protection sectors. UNICEF provided training on 21st century skills such as digital literacy, critical thinking and collaboration to adolescents and youth, as well as safe spaces and opportunities for girls and boys to practice these skills in their communities through adolescent-led social and civic initiatives or entrepreneurship programmes. UNICEF also responded to existing vulnerabilities by strengthening resilience and social cohesion, through enabling psychosocial support and sports for development activities for young people. During 2018 UNICEF reached over 200,000 adolescents and youth with its dedicated programmes. Adolescent girls were provided with access to safe spaces where they can participate, expand their knowledge and break down gender-related barriers to their development and participation opportunities.

At the same time, UNICEF and partners established and enhanced networks and services for internally displaced adolescents and youth in Syria. More than 1,000 young girls and boys (aged 15–24 years) benefited from entrepreneurship training courses and 121 young people started their own business or social project after receiving seed funding.

In terms of operational approaches, UNICEF identified an international NGO, referred to as 'mother NGO', able to work with young people and to mobilize smaller national NGOs to replicate the intervention, reaching out young people in every community and ensuring capacity building and increased sustainability of the response.

Important progress was made toward approval of a national framework for engaging young people in Syria that is both gender- and need-sensitive, taking into consideration the specific needs of girls, boys and those living with disabilities. However, the need for a broader strategic partnership clearly emerged, and UNICEF continued working to engage other partners (e.g., from academia and the private sector).

UNICEF's support to young people was well integrated in education and used C4D strategies to effectively deliver messages to schools on hygiene promotion, gender-based violence and other key areas. Overall, mainstreaming proved to be an effective strategy for the adolescent development and participation programme, especially within UNICEF's education and child protection programmes.

Regarding the programme for Palestinian refugees, targets for social policy and for young people were fully achieved through an integrated approach that permitted UNICEF to reach 3,429 Palestinian children with essential winter clothes kits, while enhancing the capacity of service providers to include children with disabilities. In addition, 11,729 conflict-affected Palestinian adolescents and young people (50 per cent girls) benefited from a comprehensive package of age-appropriate services and opportunities, including skill-building and engagement opportunities.

The life-cycle approach in Syria

UNICEF Syria has relied on the life-cycle approach, through a variety of activities, with the aim of modelling a continuum between the first and the second decade.

Before the crisis almost all of Syria's children were enrolled in primary school and literacy rates were 95 per cent for 15–24-year-olds. Eight years into the crisis, almost 2 million children are no longer in school and the country is estimated to have one of the lowest enrolment rates in the world, wiping out decades of investment in education. Many Syrian school-age children have never seen the inside of a classroom, and those in school continue to be at risk of dropping out. Older children have experienced first-hand the consequences of deep fractures within their communities, the breakdown of the social contract between citizens and the State and the crumbling of livelihood opportunities for themselves and their families.

In this context, UNICEF Syria is working on two underlying variables: supply (access to education and safe spaces for youth and adolescents) and demand (the perceived value and prioritization of education), using a life-cycle approach to ensure that children have not only adequate access to quality education but are also given opportunities to develop skills and become active and productive participants in their communities. During 2018 UNICEF increasingly focused on expanding access to quality education and knowledge through interventions spanning from early childhood education to primary school and certified alternative learning pathways for adolescents and youth, and spaces (or 'multi-sectoral platforms') that allow adolescents and youth to access services and information.

A key component of this approach was the availability of sufficient learning spaces for both formal and non-formal education. This included ensuring sufficient capacity of the school system to enrol and accommodate both in- and out-of-school children, especially in areas where the destruction of schools and infrastructure has limited access to education. To achieve this, schools and learning spaces were rehabilitated and non-formal education alternatives (considered as a last, but necessary, resort for children who have no access to regular schools)

were developed. The provision of learning spaces and non-formal education alternatives was complemented by relevant curricula and ad-hoc training for teachers and education professionals who can provide pedagogically engaging and high-quality education tailored to address children's specific needs, including those who have suffered from trauma and need psycho-social support.

The life-skills and citizenship-based education approach maximizes the potential of all children and equips them with the ability to navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood, from education to work and on the path to responsible and active citizenship.

Gender

In 2018 UNICEF Syria continued to invest in mainstreaming gender throughout its programme from planning phase, to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. UNICEF also continued to advocate with the Government and partners in favour of an enabling environment and programming that enhances opportunities for young people to gain gender-sensitive, innovative opportunities for education, skills development, employability and meaningful engagement.

UNICEF worked to ensure that all the WASH facilities built or rehabilitated at schools and learning centres takes into consideration girls' specific need for privacy and support for menstrual and hygiene management, through the provision of hygiene kits tailored to their needs. To promote school enrolment, UNICEF ensured that the back-to-learning campaign maintained a specific focus on girls, as they are more likely to drop out of school when households do not prioritize children's education.

As part of the adolescent development and promotion programme, girls were provided with access to safe spaces where they could participate, expand their knowledge and break down gender barriers to their development and participation opportunities.

Moreover, during 2018 UNICEF initiated an intervention engaging children and adolescents, especially girls, with the aim of breaking the silence around gender-based violence. Children and adolescents were provided with a safe environment to express their views on gender-based violence in artistic form. An advisory committee was then established, comprising members from UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR, WHO and civil society, to review the results and prepare responses in simple, but informative and child-friendly, language. The resulting artwork was used for the design of several print materials, such as the 'question and answer booklet', advocacy pamphlets, posters on good touch/bad touch and board games.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

UNICEF Syria learned several lessons during 2018, mainly on: the humanitarian/development continuum nexus, innovation, community engagement, preparedness of the emergency response and programme evaluation.

Some of these lessons were learned due to challenges faced by the organization in Syria, such as: restricted access to some areas of the country, limited operational capacities and additional bureaucratic layers required by local NGOs that had been UNICEF implementing partners and earmarked funding (both geographically and thematically), which did not provide the office with the necessary flexibility to immediately shift resources in response to continuously emerging

new crises. Other key challenges faced in 2018 included politicization of the funding stream; large-scale destruction of basic services, infrastructure and human capital; widespread poverty (a majority of the population is living below the poverty line); deepened fractures in the social fabric; internal complexity, due to the presence of non-state actors and foreign forces in the country; and lack of clarity on the institutional framework, especially regarding the future of the United Nations strategic framework with the Government of Syria, which was delayed.

An important lesson learned in 2018 was that a properly designed short-term response provides a natural entry point for more long-term, resilience-focused interventions (establishing a continuum/nexus between humanitarian and development interventions). Within this context, UNICEF Syria considered two interconnected elements to be more strategic in intent and operational efficiency.

First, given the presence of 5.3 million children in need of immediate humanitarian aid in the country, it is important that the delivery of supplies be accompanied by the strengthening of local capacities in all areas. This was the case in key areas of intervention, such as health (through strengthening immunization capacity), child protection (through psychosocial support and mine-risk education) and education (through self-learning). Second, eight years of conflict have had a devastating impact on Syria's economy and social fabric; the conflict eroded several decades' worth of human development achievements and led to the reversal of all key child well-being indicators. The country experienced the degradation of public services at an unprecedented rate and scale – both in terms of infrastructure destruction and, more importantly, erosion of the social fabric. Within this complex backdrop, UNICEF Syria supported programmatic interventions that contributed to restoring services and their functionality, while also aiming to reassemble the social fabric. The programme had a two-pronged approach: to immediately address war's repercussions on various sectors and halting the continued deterioration of systems by developing qualitative strategies for government services. This approach is more efficient in the long run than rebuilding systems from the ground up after they have **totally collapsed**.

UNICEF Syria engaged in a series of innovative initiatives in 2018, especially for young people, such as the 'raise your voice – Syria', an initiative framed as a competition between young people (aged 14–24) interested in publishing stories, blogs, photos and videos. This competition was the first of its kind in Syria, and was hosted in the cities of Tartous, Al-Hasakeh and Quamishli, to promote a culture of blogging in the community, improve young people's blogging skills and encourage them to express themselves. This also enhanced their digital participation on UNICEF's Voice of Youth (VoY) Arabic platform and other similar platforms. Over 300 young people (60 per cent females) applied from the governorates of Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Hama, Tartous, Latakia, Al-Hasakeh and Deir-ez-Zor. From these, 112 were short-listed to participate in a five-day challenge event from 25–30 July 2018. All participants were trained on blogging, writing and presentation skills and at the end of the five days three were declared winners. About 100 blogs were written by young participants during this competition, nine of which were published on UNICEF's global VoY platform to date, although more are planned to be published in upcoming months. In addition, three young bloggers from Tartous took the lead on promoting the initiative by creating the digital event and managing a dedicated page on Facebook, designing the visual identity for the event, preparing a Google-document application and managing the Facebook event and page for more than 15 days. The Facebook page of the event <https://www.facebook.com/syrian.bloggers/> was 'liked' and followed by more than 700 people, while 500 were going or interested in going to the event, which was 40 times shared on social media. A media article on the competition is

available at: <https://www.facebook.com/222321052599/posts/10156038809742600/>.

Also, within the context of access constraints UNICEF optimized the use of third-party monitoring and facilitators to conduct timely multi-sectoral assessments at sites for the internally displaced and newly accessible areas, in order to identify main needs and respond accordingly. The facilitators were critical in supporting UNICEF monitoring on the ground and data collection for effective and evidence-based programme delivery.

UNICEF invested in capacity development for national implementing partners on the use of the harmonized approach to cash transfers. UNICEF selected 13 national NGOs and provided them with training in financial management and internal control capacity.

UNICEF also promoted integrated community engagement initiatives throughout the reporting year, such as the one in Deir-ez-Zor, where the majority of the population is represented by returnees who fled the country during the crisis in 2012 and 2013. The primary scope of the initiative is to generate awareness among the communities on services available for health, nutrition, WASH, child protection and education, to improve utilization of these services. With the same motive, an integrated initiative at household level was launched in Deir-ez-Zor in July 2018 through consultation meetings with four ministries and six NGOs, followed by training and the development and implementation of micro-plans. As a result, by the end of November 615 children under five had been identified as defaulters from immunization and 418 as out-of-school children. Community workers were able to reach the parents/caregivers of these children and provide them with necessary information about immunization and school enrolment, in addition to referral cards for health centres and schools. UNICEF will scale up this intervention in other geographical areas in 2019.

Another important lesson learned from the continuous emergency response that UNICEF promptly undertook all over the country was the importance of investing time and resources in the development of a high-quality preparedness response plan. Overall, the integrated response to the countless sudden emergencies that took place in 2018 was a success for UNICEF Syria made possible as a result of the preparation of 15 plans for short- and long-term preparedness for emergency response. For example, the emergency response in Goutha was based on an integrated response plan that represented outstanding coordination among sectors, sections and field offices. This successful experience was then replicated for other crises, including the complex organization of delivery of short-term assistance to Rukban. Moreover, as part of the 'Whole of Syria' operation UNICEF Syria developed a preparedness plan permitting support for up to 400,000 displaced people (200,000 from Syria and 200,000 through cross-border operations) in case of escalation of the conflict. A key element of all UNICEF emergency interventions was to ensure a sustainable response, linked to the longer-term (such as the intervention in Eastern Goutha).

UNICEF was also constantly engaged in ensuring respect for the principle of accountability to affected populations. UNICEF ensured that populations were involved in all stages of its interventions, from planning through implementation, and that feedback was collected to make sure that needs had been addressed in the best way. One example is the response in East Goutha, where UNICEF engaged in a consultation with the communities specifically to identify the most appropriate hygiene items to be provided through the response. Several focus group discussions were organized with community members, which resulted in a series of practical recommendations for fine-tuning the response in line with actual needs. Consultations with the affected populations contributed to better inform the response and helped UNICEF to respond

to actual need, as perceived by the affected populations, which expressed strong appreciation for the discussions and consultations.

UNICEF supported a programme evaluation of the back-to-learning initiative in Syria from 2013–2016, covering key components of the programme such as the provision of school supplies, C4D and support for school rehabilitation. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the programme’s relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coverage, coordination, sustainability and impact over a four-year period. The evaluation is expected to provide evidence for decision-makers regarding the extent to which BTL contributed to a change in the number of children enrolled in school and recommendations for adjustments or new approaches for the initiative. The final report is expected to be available in Q1 of 2019.

In addition, UNICEF continued to work on the management response and implementation of recommendations from the national survey on disabilities in Syria conducted in 2017.

In October 2018 UNICEF initiated a situation analysis on children in Syria as an important contribution to shaping national development strategies to accelerate equitable achievement of the child-related Sustainable Development Goals and support risk-informed programming. A zero draft was available by end-December; the final version is expected to be available during the first quarter of 2019.

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