The Eleventh National Development Plan (2019-2023) was adopted in July. It covers social aspects of development, including education, health, the family, women, children and youth.

Turkey continued to host the world’s largest refugee population. Of the almost 3.7 million Syrians under temporary protection, about 1.7 million are children. Children also make up about a third of the approximately 400,000 non-Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers. The Government continued to lead the humanitarian response, with the majority of services for refugees being provided through national systems. Migrants, including children, continued to attempt to reach Europe via Turkey.

In October, Turkey increased its military intervention in northern Syria. The stated goals were security and establishment of a safe zone to facilitate an eventual return of Syrian refugees from Turkey. However, the Government reiterated its commitment to the principles of voluntary return and non-refoulement, and no large-scale return movements were noted.

Turkey entered 2019 in recession following the lira’s sudden depreciation in 2018 but GDP growth resumed in the third quarter with a year-on-year increase of 0.9%. Inflation fell to 10.56% in November. Unemployment and youth employment remained at 14.0% and 27.4% in November.

SDG1
2018 data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) put the relative poverty rate (below 60% of median equivalised household income) at 21.2%, with the relative rate for children at 32.1%. Surveys conducted to monitor the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) found that 11.7% of ESSN beneficiary refugee households were living in extreme poverty while 59.18% were living in moderate poverty.

SDG 2, 3
2018 TurkStat data put infant and under-five mortality rates at 9.3 and 11.4 per thousand live births respectively. Regional disparities persisted. For Syrian refugees, the 2018 Turkey Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS) put infant and under-five mortality rates at 22 and 27 respectively.

For the Turkish population, the Ministry of Health reported 98% overall immunisation rate for major communicable diseases in 2018. TDHS 2018 reported 60% for Syrian refugee children with all age appropriate vaccinations, whereas 8% didn’t receive any vaccination.

According to the TDHS, stunting (age 0-5) fell further to 6%, albeit with regional variations. Among Syrian refugees, the rate was 17.4%.

The Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities drew attention to issues in the identification of disabilities, limitations in access and quality of relevant services, and negative attitudes and social norms affecting children with disabilities.

SDG4
According to TDHS 2018 data, about 74% of children (36-59 months) were developmentally on track in four domains (literacy-numeracy, physical, social-emotional, learning) for both the resident and the Syrian refugee population. Girls tend to do better than boys.

For the 2018-19 school year, data from the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) shows net enrolment of Turkish children at 68.3% for age 5 (preschool), over 98% for 6-9 and 10-13 and 88.22% for 14-17. Among Syrian refugee children, 63.3% (684,728) were enrolled by October 2019, compared to 61.39% (643,058) in the 2018-2019 school year. 27.19% in preschool (age 5), 89.27% in primary, 70.50% in lower secondary and 32.88% in upper secondary.

In the 2018 PISA tests, the scores of Turkey’s students improved compared to 2015. Among 79 countries, they ranked 40th in reading, 42nd in mathematics and 39th in science.

SDG5
The gender gap in education is closing overall, including at upper-secondary education level, although in some provinces
the divide persists in favour of girls and in others of boys. Among Syrian refugees, girls are more likely to be enrolled than boys. The gender gap in participation in economic and educational life for adolescents and young people persists, with data for mid-2019 showing that 33.6% of females and 19% of males (age 15-24) were not in employment, education or training.

According to the 2018 TDHS, 14.7% of Turkish women aged 20-24 had married before turning 18 (unchanged from 2013), while 2.0% had married before turning 15. Child marriage affects Syrian refugee women at a significantly higher rate, with percentages of 44.8% and 9.2% respectively.

SDG8

While updated data is expected soon, TurkStat’s 2012 survey reported 15.6% of 15-17 year-olds and 2.6% of 6-14 year-olds engaged in economic activities. Child labour is understood to be widespread among refugees and is cited as one of the major causes of non-participation in education.

SDG 16

Latest Ministry of Justice data point to some decline in the numbers of child offenders, court cases against children, and children in detention. About 2,500 children (approx. 95% boys 5% girls) are in prison. About half of all children who went on trial were tried in specialised courts.

The new Judicial Reform Strategy foresees alternatives to imprisonment for first-time offenders and a conciliation model specific to children.

The number of child-friendly Judicial Interview Rooms in courthouses increased from 59 to 65, and arrangements for examining and questioning child victims were strengthened.

Concern persisted about violence against children (VAC), including child sexual abuse (13,894 convictions in 2018). Among PISA test participants, 24% reported being bullied frequently – similar to the OECD average. A national VAC strategy and action plan for 2018-2022 was drafted. In July, Parliament established a commission of enquiry on suspicious child deaths.

According to MoFLSS data, there were almost 157,000 children supported by the Government care services. Of these, approximately 14,000 (9%) were in residential care; 16,809 (10.7%) were adopted; and 6,468 (4%) living in foster families. The remaining 119,537 (76%) remained in their families but received economic support (SED).

Although minimum standards are in force, there is room for further professionalisation in the child care system and improvements in arrangements for children living permanently or temporarily without parental care.

Irregular migrants including children are given the opportunity to apply for protection in Turkey, but they also risk deportation, and in certain cases may be placed in administrative detention pending deportation, often together with their families.

The Deputy Ombudsperson in charge children’s rights continues its efforts towards strengthening children’s right to access to justice. A new parliamentary sub-committee for children’s rights was established in July.

Major contributions and drivers of results

Overview


The CPD focuses on four outcomes: equity through social inclusion and resilience-building; quality data, knowledge and advocacy for child rights; gender equality among children and adolescents, and Turkey-UNICEF expanded partnership beyond borders. These outcomes contribute from a child rights perspective to seven of the eight outcomes of the UNDCS, particularly those dedicated to social inclusion, gender, migration and international protection, human rights and good governance, and sustainable economic development. UNICEF chairs the UNDCS Results Group on Social Inclusion and the Monitoring for Strategic Results Working Group and is an active member in other relevant inter-agency groups.

The CPD priorities are aligned with four of the five Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and contributes to eight Sustainable Development Goals.

This year, UNICEF Turkey continued to respond to the refugee and migrant crisis and maintained a balance between addressing the specific and urgent needs of refugee children and working to uphold the rights of all vulnerable children in the country. The humanitarian response is fully integrated in the Country Programme and refugee and migrant children are seen as one of the vulnerable groups of children who are at risk of being left behind – albeit a group which remains very large and continues to face particular vulnerabilities. Other vulnerable children at risk are children with disabilities, children involved in economic activities, children in contact with the law, and vulnerable adolescent girls and boys.

In line with the gender-responsive programming guidelines of the Gender Action Plan 2018-2021, the CPD addresses three of the five targeted gender priority areas under Outcome 3 (child marriage, gender-based violence in emergencies, and girls’ secondary education), while mainstreaming gender in the remaining outcomes.

As in previous years, a wide range of strategies were employed to implement the Country Programme, ranging from delivery of services to provision of technical support and engagement in policy dialogue. The draft report of the recently conducted Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) states that "UNICEF has risen well to the challenges involved in working in Turkey over the past four years. It adopted the right strategy from the outset, including that of integrating its humanitarian and refugee-related work into its wider Turkey programme, and of working closely with government to help ensure that national and local systems were better able to meet the needs of all children, Turkish and refugees".

The achievement of at-scale results for all children has owed much to a strategy of strengthening systems at national and subnational level in ways which ensure that the most vulnerable children benefit on a sustainable basis from the support and services they need in order to exercise their rights. This approach is in line with the UNICEF global strategic objective to promote the ‘humanitarian-development nexus’.

The long-standing collaboration between government institutions and UNICEF were essential to the achievement of programme results. As indicated in the draft report of the CPE, “UNICEF’s relationships with Government at senior management level and the respect accorded to the agency by partners have considerably facilitated progress”. In 2019, UNICEF expanded its partner portfolio to include new CSOs, municipalities and other entities such as private sector organisations and the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat). UNICEF Turkey also continued to facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as the collaboration between the Ministry of Family Labour and Social Services (MoFLSS), Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and UNICEF under the Conditional Cash Transfer in Education (CCTE) programme for refugee children. UNICEF’s capacity to convene and leverage is recognized in the CPE draft report, which concludes that UNICEF “has played a role that perhaps no other international organisation could play in working across sectors and ministries”.

In 2019, the annual financial throughput reached USD205 million and the number of staff in Ankara and Gaziantep reached 125 in total. The Country Programme has now completed its fourth year of implementation and UNICEF Turkey, together with the rest of the UN system, has initiated the planning process for the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and CPD.

GA1: Every child survives and thrives

In 2019, UNICEF continued to advocate for attention to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the national agenda and for a more integrated and multi-sectoral approach to ECD. Partly as a result of UNICEF’s advocacy, the 11th National Development Plan identifies ECD as one of the key priorities. With technical support from UNICEF, results from the newly released 2018 Demographic and Health Survey provided data on ECD for the first time, which will be used to inform policy-making. Capitalizing on this momentum, UNICEF established a new partnership with a national NGO, the Association for Child Development and Education Specialists, to provide policy analysis and support in the development of a draft national ECD policy in collaboration with relevant stakeholders including MoH, MoFLSS, MoNE and the Strategy and Budget Office under the Presidency (SBP).

In part as a result of UNICEF’s advocacy and technical support, the new Children’s Special Need’s Health Report’ legislation
was adopted by MoH and MoFLSS. It is expected that with this new legislation, children with disabilities will have improved and more timely access to early detection and care services.

Policy dialogue was initiated with MoH and the Parliament on prevention of tobacco use among adolescents.

**GA2: Every child learns**

The collaboration between UNICEF and MoNE continued to produce positive results in increasing the number of refugee children in formal education and integrating them into the national education system. At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, 684,728 refugee children (336,722 girls and 348,006 boys) were enrolled in formal education, bringing gross enrolment to 63% as compared to approximately 35% in 2016 at the beginning of the Country Programme. 96% of the refugee children in formal education are now studying in Turkish public schools (TPSs) rather than refugee-only temporary education centres.

Aware of the obstacles faced by children whose education has been interrupted for several years, UNICEF also continued to support alternative pathways to learning for refugees including the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) and Turkish language classes (TLCs). Since its launch in 2018, 17,492 children (47% girls) benefitted from the programme and 48% of them have already successfully completed the relevant ALP cycle and were referred to the formal school system. TLCs provided with UNICEF support at MoYS youth centres reached 11,937 (Age 6-13: 8,275; Age 14-17: 3,662) children (47% girls) since the programme started in 2018.

In partnerships with various national and sub-national government and CSO actors, outreach campaigns were conducted in 24 provinces and allowed to identify 54,274 refugee out-of-school children (48% girls) and referred them to relevant available education opportunities.

In 2019, UNICEF continued to support the implementation of the jointly developed Education Personnel Management Strategy (EPMS), which "was a key contribution enabling systems to respond to the [refugee] crisis", according to the evaluation of UNICEF's support to education personnel in response to the Syria refugee crisis in Turkey conducted in 2019. As part of the EPMS, this year, the Syrian Volunteer Education Personnel (SVEP) programme provided monthly financial incentives to 12,245 SVEP (50% women). The programme aims to retain qualified SVEP, improve motivation, and provide sustainable and protective learning environments for refugee children. The evaluation cited above also found that "the introduction of a system of incentive payments for all SVEPs served to regularise a system for payments which until then had been inconsistent (...). There was widespread agreement that the incentives served to stabilize the cadre of SVEPs".

Progress in access to education is also the result of cross-sectoral interventions, particularly in the child protection and the social protection sectors. An example of such interventions is the extension of the Conditional Cash Transfers for Education programme for refugee children (see also GA5).

In 2019, UNICEF continued to support MoNE to strengthen the education system's capacity to provide quality inclusive education for all children. The Remedial Education Programme was revised to support children unable to reach the expected 3rd grade learning achievement levels. Implementation started with the 2019-2020 academic year, covering 302,000 3rd graders across the country. The Inclusive Education Teacher Training Programme was further developed and new modules were delivered to approximately 24,000 education personnel to enable them to create a more inclusive school environment, provide counselling and teach the Turkish language. All counselling teachers at vocational training centres in Turkey received training in a programme to help ensure that vulnerable adolescents benefit from learning opportunities.

A review of the student assessment system was completed in partnership with the OECD and MoNE, and a study on out-of-school Turkish and refugee children is underway.

UNICEF continued to support capacity development to improve the quality of counselling and special education services in schools, with 732 Turkish counsellors and 170 SVEP trained. MoNE and UNICEF also completed an assessment framework to underpin efforts to provide higher-quality ECE and primary education services for children with disabilities.

**GA3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation**

MoFLSS and UNICEF continued to collaborate to further strengthen national systems for child care and justice for children with the aim to serve all children living in Turkey.
A child development training programme was developed to improve the quality of residential care, reaching 2,688 children, 20% of all children in residential care, with scale-up planned for 2020. UNICEF also continued to technically support MoFLSS for the development of a short-term foster care system. In collaboration with NGO partners, psychosocial support (PSS) and case management was provided to over 100 children in residential centres, including best interest assessments for unaccompanied and separated children, who are among the most vulnerable children in Turkey.

UNICEF contributed to strengthening the statutory child protection system through extensive capacity building for MoFLSS at national level and helped provide additional Family Support (ASDEP) teams in the fifteen provinces with the largest refugee populations. These teams have so far assessed 9,395 children and referred over 900 of them to specialized services.

The child protection component of the Conditional Cash Transfer in Education (CCTE) programme reached 18,844 children (48% girls) and 1,654 were referred to specialised services. This component complements the cash transfer component of the CCTE (see GA5). The draft report of the CPE highlighted that “the inclusion of a child protection component into the CCTE is innovative and potentially path-breaking”.

In consideration of the specific child protection needs of refugee children and vulnerable Turkish children living in the same communities, national systems are complemented by UNICEF-supported community-based services delivered by municipalities, NGOs and other partners through a network of safe spaces, community centres, outreach services and mobile teams. The draft report of the CPE and stated that “community-based child protection has significantly extended scope of local child protection services”. In 2019, a total of 253,787 children were reached, 50% girls. Responses to gender-based violence (GBV) are integrated into these efforts and awareness raising activities on GBV risks reached 40,653 (girls - 23,946; boys - 16,706) children. UNICEF support for case management processes contributed to identification, assessment and individual support planning for 62,201 children, of whom 35,609 were referred to specialized services and legal counselling. A total of 4,063 children with disabilities (42% girls) benefited from multi-disciplinary services.

Starting in 2019, Syrian and Turkish adolescents participating in social cohesion activities (see GA5) or Turkish language courses (see GA2) were given access to PSS and individual counselling services, with 3,019 benefitting so far.

UNICEF continued supporting the implementation of the National Plan for Eliminating Child Labour, by strengthening the capacity of various actors including MoFLSS, vocational and training schools and apprenticeship centres, municipalities, the Confederation of Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen (TESK), and civil society. 90% of the MoFLSS labour inspectors nationwide received training on child labour and business principles. Support to CSOs contributed to awareness raising, psychosocial support and referrals to social services for thousands of working children and their families.

UNICEF continued to partner with MoFLSS, UN agencies and CSOs to address child marriage. UNICEF is leading a UN Joint Programme for the prevention of child marriage which involves support for national and local action plans, communication for social and behavioural change, data generation, and services for survivors. Trainings on identification, referral and case management of child marriage reached directly 700 officers from security forces and 100 NGO staff. MoFLSS cascaded the training and reached 16,000 service providers.

874 children in conflict with the law benefited from the Juvenile Probation Programme, developed by MoJ with UNICEF support. The programme will now be implemented in all 81 provinces. UNICEF also contributed to increased use of child-friendly interview rooms for child victims and witnesses. Specific goals for child-friendly procedures, alternatives to imprisonment and restorative justice practices for children were included in the updated national Judicial Reform Strategy, and related legislation reduced the maximum durations of pre-trial detention, expanded some diversion measures for children, and clearly regulated the child-friendly interview rooms, which became mandatory for child victims of sexual abuse.

With regards to child rights monitoring systems, a Parliamentary sub-committee on the Rights of the Child was established in July. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in December between UNICEF and the Sub-Committee to further enhance collaboration in the areas of legislative review, violence against children and child-friendly budgeting. The draft report of the CPE recognizes this as an important step that is the result of UNICEF’s advocacy. The Sub-Committee is mandated to monitor child rights concerns and to translate them into legislative actions. Following last year’s adoption of the Child Rights and Outreach strategies by the Ombudsperson’s Institution, UNICEF contributed to their implementation through newly designed tools and awareness raising activities.

**GA5: Every child has an equitable chance in life**

Under Goal Area 5, the Country Programme addresses some of the root causes preventing realization of rights by all
The availability of disaggregated data increased with the publication in November of the 2018 TDHS conducted by the Hacettepe Institute of Population Studies and SBP. With UNICEF support data was also collected in Syrian refugee households. This is the first nationwide survey in Turkey to generate official data disaggregated for the Turkish and Syrian population. UNICEF also technically supported the integration of a module to measure ECD indicators for the first time in Turkey, thus contributing to reducing the data gap for SDG monitoring. In August, UNICEF signed its first agreement with TurkStat for the implementation of the National Official Statistics Programme 2017-2021 with respect to child statistics. UNICEF contributed to the design of the upcoming national child labour survey, and is working with TurkStat to visualise and disseminate statistics on children.

Besides the collaboration on national statistics, research by civil society was conducted with UNICEF support to inform advocacy on the most vulnerable groups of children. In 2019, the Network on the Rights of Children with Disabilities finalized a Situation Analysis of Children with Disabilities, the basis for the Network’s report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Support was also provided to the NGO Development Workshop in conducting a study on the Socio-Economic Profiles of Seasonal Agriculture Worker Households and to the Partnership Network for Prevention of Violence against Children for their report to the Universal Periodic Review.

Through the Child Friendly Cities initiative, UNICEF continued to build capacity of local administrations to promote policies in favor of the most vulnerable children. UNICEF and the Union of Municipalities of Turkey trained staff of 29 municipalities and provided follow-up technical assistance to 20 of them on child participation, child rights, prevention of child marriage and child labor, and child focused strategy development and budgeting.

UNICEF also implements multi-sectoral workplans with three municipalities whose combined population is over 1.4 million Turkish citizens and about 600,000 refugees. In June, UNICEF renewed its partnership with Kilis Municipality to expand integrated social services, create platforms, and provide skills based trainings to ensure meaningful engagement and social cohesion of adolescents and their families, key for the province with the highest ratio of refugees to Turkish citizens in Turkey (almost 50%). UNICEF continued to support Yuregir Municipality, which has a large population of seasonal agricultural workers, in combating child labour and expanding early childhood education, and Gaziantep Municipality, in addressing child marriage and child labour, expanding services for GBV survivors, and increasing refugee children’s access to education.

Collaboration with local administrations also promotes adolescent participation through the provincial Child Rights Committees, whose members this year organised the 20th Children’s Forum as part of the World Children’s Day and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)’s 30th anniversary. Together with MoYS and other partners UNICEF also continued to support implementation of its social cohesion programme with 91,593 adolescents and young people (52% girls) participating in 2019.

Together with MoFLSS, MoNE, and TRC, UNICEF continued to support the CCTE programme, which extended to refugee families a national program to encourage regular enrolment and attendance among vulnerable children. The draft CPE report defined the CCTE “a significant policy and advocacy achievement”. As of December, 562,106 refugee children benefitted from the CCTE, compared to 410,740 a year earlier. The program covers 80% of refugee children in school, and 82% of beneficiaries attended school regularly throughout the year.

**Lessons Learned and Innovations**

2019 is the fourth year of the programme cycle and UNICEF Turkey has initiated the planning process for the new CPD along with the UNSDCF in collaboration with the UN system. Therefore, rather than focusing on 2019, many of the lessons learnt and innovations emerging this year draw on recent evaluations and other evidence-generation activities as part of a broader effort to reflect on this programme cycle in order to inform plans for the next one. In 2019, UNICEF Turkey completed two evaluations (on community-based child protection services and on UNICEF’s support to education personnel) and is in the process of completing the Country Programme Evaluation, which also evaluates the humanitarian response to the refugee and migrant crisis.

Regarding the humanitarian-development nexus and the use of system-strengthening approaches in a crisis context, the draft CPE report concluded that “the decision to integrate the refugee response within the wider country programme was a bold one and depended on the ability to make existing government policy frameworks and social welfare systems work both for Turkish and refugee populations. The evaluation concludes that this was the right approach and has been largely successful”. The report adds that “this approach on its own could not have met the more acute needs of refugee children in
One activity that exemplified the use of systems-strengthening approaches within a crisis context is the collaboration with MoNE on the Education Personnel Management Strategy, particularly in the development of a strategic vision for the Syrian Volunteer Education Personnel’s engagement during and after the transition of Syrian refugee children from TECs to TPSs. Both the CPE draft report and the education evaluation identified the EPMS as a key initiative which contributed substantially to enabling the education system to respond and adjust to the crisis as it evolved.

This shift in the portfolio of strategies needs to continue, while still ensuring close monitoring and consideration of the evolving programme environment. The evaluation recommends that UNICEF capitalize on its proven comparative advantage and play an even stronger role in advocacy and policy dialogue to influence policy and system change for all children living in Turkey. In this respect, the CPE draft report highlights that “UNICEF’s technical advisory role is particularly effective (and appreciated) in this context” and “the trust established has been crucial to UNICEF’s ability to play an expanded role in a context where government has exerted particularly tight control”.

Another important lesson learnt relates to the need for a multi-sectoral approach to programming to ensure an integrated response to children’s needs. The draft CPE concluded that UNICEF “has played a role that perhaps no other international organisation could play in working across sectors and ministries, and in helping bridge the gap between national, provincial and local layers of government”.

An example of this is the CCTE programme, which brings together education, protection, and social policy sectors, and specifically the integration of child protection services into this cash transfer programme. The draft CPE report states that “the inclusion of a child protection component is innovative and potentially path-breaking”. It further explains that “UNICEF has put effort into strengthening the linkage between child protection and social protection at ministry level. This also creates a potential platform for advocacy to adapt the child protection component to the national CCTE programme, which is lacking this feature so far”.

Another example of the effectiveness of a multi-sectoral package of interventions and the mobilization of diverse stakeholders is the attempt to bring out of school (OOS) children back to a form of education. MoNE, MoYS and other government and non-government entities were mobilized at national and local level to identify OOS children, while the Accelerated Learning Program established by MoNE with UNICEF’s support provides certified alternative learning pathway for these children. In addition, recognizing that economic factors are very often the lead cause for school drop-out, the ALP was connected with a social protection scheme (in this case the CCTE). Today, nearly half of the OOS children participating in the ALP have already concluded the relevant ALP cycle and have been referred back to formal education.

In line with the recommendation of the draft CPE to continue working on strengthening cross-sectoral linkages, the new CPD is being designed with a strong intent to promote multi-sectoral strategies and coordination mechanisms. It has also a clear aim to mobilize a broad coalition of different actors - government, CSOs, private sector, human rights monitoring mechanisms and the society at large – that is committed to the children’s agenda in the country.

Another important lesson learnt in 2019 relates to the work on behavioral change and social norms. This area is still incipient as C4D approaches were only recently integrated in the current programming, but are attempting to use a combination of upstream and downstream approaches to promote behavioral change through different platforms such as government services, community systems, and digital, particularly when it comes to gender norms and promotion of social cohesion between refugees and host communities. These efforts are a good basis to refine the office’s approach to C4D in the upcoming program cycle. As was recommended in the draft CPE, “UNICEF should in the new CPD devise a more coherent and consistent approach to influencing relevant social norms and to promoting social cohesion, in close collaboration with UN and other actors”. The new CPD is therefore being designed with a strong focus on behavioural and social norm change as key strategy across multiple outputs, especially for programming for early childhood and adolescents.