

Turkmenistan

Part 1: Situation update in the country

Turkmenistan has been an upper middle-income country since 2012. Its overall economic prospects, although heavily dependent on its hydrocarbon exports, remained positive in 2018. The economy is projected to remain stable in the short term, owing to rising exports of natural gas to China and industrial policies to promote exports and substitute imports.

Low energy prices since mid-2014 impacted the government revenues. The International Monetary Fund acknowledged that the Turkmen economy continued to adjust to the new reality of lower oil and natural gas prices. It recommended a range of reforms aimed at re-calibration of the policy mix to reduce external imbalances, including prioritizing accumulation of human rather than physical capital. The Government planned to gradually stop utility subsidies, which, together with expected privatization of services, and an increase of fee-based pre-primary education, may negatively affect the most vulnerable unless these groups are properly identified and supported with appropriate measures.

The annual consumer price inflation surged to 8.9 per cent in June 2018, up from 3.6 per cent in June 2017, largely reflecting price increases in imports and upward adjustment in subsidized gas prices and other public services, according to the World Bank. At the same time, public sector salaries, pensions, and other government payments were increased by 10 per cent in early 2018. Birth grants and child benefits up to the age of 3 were universal. The International Monetary Fund recommended ensuring that any policy adjustments would not have undesirable impacts on vulnerable segments of the population. It is estimated that families with children may be the ones most affected by the global economic downturn and low energy prices.

In 2018, Turkmenistan reported to various UN human rights monitoring bodies, including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The CEDAW recognized the country's efforts to address discrimination against women and girls, including with the legal prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex. However, CEDAW remained concerned about the gender-neutral language of various legislative provisions prohibiting discrimination against women, which may not adequately protect women against direct and indirect discrimination. Among the most urgent recommendations of the Committee, for which written information within two years was requested, were conducting a survey on prevalence of gender-based violence against women and developing a comprehensive strategy on its basis, simplifying registration requirements for civil society organizations and undertaking a study to assess the impact of education reforms on eliminating occupation segregation.

When discussing Turkmenistan's progress in addressing Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations in the framework of the 30th session of the UPR Working Group, the states observed positive developments, such as the adoption of a new version of the Constitution of Turkmenistan in 2016 and establishing the Ombudsman's institution in 2017. The Working Group provided recommendations for further alignment of national legislation with international standards. In relation to children, the UPR recommended, inter alia, ratification of the Optional

Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure and adoption of a plan of action on child rights.

The latter recommendation was supported and implemented by Turkmenistan. In June 2018, the National Plan of Action for Realization of the Rights of Children for 2018-2022 was adopted. The plan integrated Turkmenistan's main priorities for further improving the situation of the country's children, ensuring their rights and wellbeing. It aims at strengthening coordination accountability and a cross-sectoral approach to the realization of child rights, including ambitious objectives and targets.

The Office of the Ombudsman produced its first report in 2018. The report highlighted activities promoting and safeguarding children's rights and made recommendations for systematically engaging all public associations and state authorities working in the field of child rights in the development, implementation and evaluation and monitoring of laws and programmes relating to children and strengthening the human rights education in schools.

There were three national programmes focusing specifically on social aspects of the country's development: the National Programme on Socioeconomic Development for the period of 2011–2030, the revised National Presidential Programme on the Improvement of Social and Living Conditions in Villages, Towns, Cities and District Centres for the period up to 2020, and the Presidential Programme on Socioeconomic Development for the period of 2018–2024. The latter was being revised to cover the period of 2019-2025. In September, the United Nations, including UNICEF, used that opportunity to suggest improvements to the draft. UNICEF comments focused on the need to increase pre-primary enrolment rates, state funding of health and the number of health personnel and the percentage of girls receiving higher education. The revised programme is expected to be better aligned with SDGs.

Turkmenistan volunteered to be part of the Voluntary National Review and present a report to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2019. This gave further impetus to discussions on SDG integration and monitoring, with the whole month of October devoted to SDG awareness. UNICEF participated in those activities and focused discussions on the themes of the Voluntary National Review.

The development of the first Medium Term Expenditure Framework for 2019-2021, linking policy, planning and budgeting, is expected to promote strategic results-focused planning and budgeting, as also recommended by the 2018 inter-agency missions for Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support for Sustainable Development Goals. Even though the country's budget is 'socially-oriented', with 75 per cent of expenditures in the 2018 and 2019 budgets classified as such, health expenditures both as a percentage of GDP and per capita were low compared to the average for higher middle-income countries. This was mostly due to the low budget-to-GDP ratio.

Childhood mortality rates have been reduced since the 1990s, but they remained high. While universal access to skilled medical care during delivery and health checks following delivery were ensured, childhood mortality rates were higher for children from poor households and for those in rural areas. Addressing that will require further prioritization of improved quality of maternal health services, the introduction of modern technologies for newborns, and universal access to quality infant and child health care in all settings. This should be accompanied by fostering the home visiting system to provide quality support to families during the critical first 2,000 days of a child's life (which was recommended as one of the sub-accelerators for SDGs

in the Mainstreaming, Acceleration Policy Support report). Turkmenistan continued reforming its institutional setup to provide family-centred solutions for the needs of children with developmental delays. The establishment of early identification and family-support services were in early stages and require a strategic vision for scaling-up, as reflected in the draft Early Childhood Development Strategy, which is expected to be adopted in 2019.

Obesity was becoming more prominent. Six per cent of children under five were overweight or too heavy for their height in 2016. Obesity was most common in children in the richest families. The percentage of overweight children increased by age, reaching 12 per cent among 7-year old children nationwide (with similar rates for boys and girls) and 19 per cent in Ashgabat.

The country recently moved to a 12-year education system. Laws stipulate that children with disabilities have access to inclusive education, but also contain a provision that those children with disabilities 'who cannot attend mainstream schools will receive education in special education establishments', thus creating the possibility of segregating them from mainstream education. Children with disabilities still faced major challenges in gaining access to inclusive education. There is a need for more trained teachers and child care and development professionals, improved physical access, and more supportive social and cultural norms. The number of children with disabilities in residential care was 3,761 at the end of 2015, constituting approximately 85 per cent of all children in residential care (per the Transforming Monitoring for Enhanced Equity database).

The national authorities constructed a number of kindergartens across the country over the last several years, and there are plans to build 164 additional kindergartens between 2019 and 2024. Given the existing urban-rural and geographic disparities, this may not be sufficient to make solid progress toward the SDG target on pre-primary education. A better use of existing school facilities may be needed. The recent ten-fold increase in monthly kindergarten fees may negatively impact the rate of attendance to early childhood education and pre-primary programmes.

The rates of deprivation of liberty were rather low given the overall size of the Turkmenistan population. There were approximately 80 males and 1 female juvenile in correctional facilities at the end of 2017. This was due to rather low rates of processing children in conflict with the law through the trial stage, since reportedly most juveniles who are tried and convicted are sentenced to deprivation of liberty in the juvenile correctional facility. While the assessment of the State Programme on Juvenile Justice for the period of 2012-2016 noted that children who did not go through criminal proceedings received follow-up at the local level, but concluded that there was more work to be done to develop full-fledged community services to provide diversionary programming to such children.

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

Summary of the strategic moment of reflection process

2018 was the third year of the country programme implementation and provided the opportunity for a mid-term stocktaking of progress against outcomes and opportunities and for re-positioning UNICEF against the evolving situation of children in the country. It also provided an opportunity to take into consideration, inter alia, the result areas and change strategies of the

new UNICEF Strategic Plan for 2018-2021.

Supported by the Situation Analysis of Children's and Women's Rights (SitAN), Gender Programme Review, the Baseline Assessment for Child-related SDG indicators and a few other exercises, the Strategic Moment of Reflection allowed UNICEF to document challenges, revisit the indicator framework and status of funding mobilization. The forward-looking process was used to identify potential emerging areas for consideration for the next country programme.

UNICEF Turkmenistan shared the report with, and integrated comments from the UNICEF Regional Office. A shorter version of the report was developed for the Government, highlighting progress and challenges and proposing the next immediate steps ('main conclusions') required for acceleration toward results. Key adjustments, such as confirmation of climate change adaptation as a new result area and the need to ensure the engagement of the Ministry of Finance and Economy in targets related to public finance management, were included. The report, along with the suggested revised indicator framework to be used for the remainder of the country programme and the revised costed evaluation plan, was shared with the Government. The revised framework reflected the relevant corporate standard indicators, including those of the new Strategic Plan, and took into account the regional flagship results and indicators.

Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

The Government made progress toward implementation of the 'Every Newborn Action Plan', strengthening the health system to deliver quality integrated care. Along with technical assistance to improve good governance for service delivery, in 2018, UNICEF supported putting in place a sound procurement system and health information system.

A confidential audit of perinatal mortality was implemented by a specially designated national body, which prepared the first audit report, highlighting causes of perinatal mortality, among which asphyxia, congenital malformation, and post-resuscitative complications in postnatal period stood out. The main reasons for this were the lack of management of clinical work, inadequate care and equipment, poor compliance with clinical standards, and absence of quality management systems. To address those issues, the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry worked on a normative framework for quality assurance mechanisms and standards for newborn care in primary health care facilities and hospitals through a partnership with the Liverpool School of Health and Medicine, which UNICEF established.

The Ministry also endorsed the standard operating procedures on infection control, developed in 2017, to reduce neonatal mortality from sepsis and infections and introduced a monitoring mechanism for infection control nationwide. To facilitate scaling-up, with UNICEF support, the health managers and epidemiologist all over the country were trained as trainers, followed by a series of self-administered computer trainings on the standard operating procedures and infection prevention and control.

The expansion of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative from maternities to primary health care facilities in three velayats (provinces) was a vital step forward toward implementation of the State Law of Turkmenistan 'On promotion and support of breastfeeding' and helped revitalize the initiative in line with the updated WHO/UNICEF guidelines. This work resulted in the establishment of a National Technical Group on Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative promotion and International Code of Breastmilk Substitute monitoring, with 15 facilities initiating the process.

For the first time in the country, two primary health care facilities received a Baby-Friendly Certificate, maternity hospitals in three main velayats confirmed their Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative status and one additional hospital was certified. In total, 190 primary health care workers in three target velayats are now able to promote and support the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative and prevent International Code of Breastmilk Substitute violations.

Progress toward global nutrition targets for the UN Decade of Action 2016-2025 in Turkmenistan needs to be accelerated. Of six global targets, only three were on track: stunting, breastfeeding and wasting. The Government and UNICEF developed a nutrition strategy for 2019-2025, following recommendations in the evaluation of the previous strategy and focusing on the reduction of the triple burden of malnutrition represented by stunting, obesity and anaemia among children and their mothers.

To address the lack of monitoring and surveillance tools for tracking SDG 2, UNICEF, in partnership with Iodine Global Network, facilitated a practical workshop for an interagency technical group in February 2018 on monitoring iodine deficiency disorder/universal salt iodization. This resulted in the development of an Action Plan for strengthening IDD/USI monitoring of those conditions at the health system level. As a follow-up, a national urinary iodine laboratory was re-established, and funding was put in place by the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry. Standard operating procedures were introduced, on-the-job training for laboratory specialists was conducted and data collection was initiated. The national monitoring and evaluation guidelines were updated in line with the 2018 UNICEF Guidelines for impact monitoring of universal salt iodization programmes.

Joint work with the Food Fortification Initiative resulted in the adoption of the Fortification Monitoring and Surveillance approach to track the coverage and impact of the national food fortification programme. The Ministry of Health and Medical Industry endorsed the establishment of sentinel monitoring of anaemia prevalence and neural tube defects, aligning the universal salt iodization monitoring system with the fortification monitoring and surveillance approach. Six sentinel sites were established, supportive supervision monitoring visits were conducted, and data collection was initiated by the Government. Additional monitoring of salt iodization and flour fortification programmes was conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, using a premix reconciliation tool. The data triangulation was undertaken by the Centre of Public Health and Nutrition with support from UNICEF, the Food Fortification Initiative and the Iodine Global Network. The initial population-level fortification monitoring and surveillance approach data confirm sustained coverage of fortified flour as well as a reduction in neural tube defects in Turkmenistan.

To accelerate progress toward meeting the global nutrition goals, the Government, with technical assistance from UNICEF, committed to enhancing efforts in improving the nutrition and food security status of the most vulnerable through the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform launched in Ashgabat in July 2018. The initiative seeks to enhance capacities in the Europe and Central Asia region through training of specialized workforce at all levels of nutrition, enhanced leadership and governance, accelerated investments in food security and nutrition, evidence-based programming, inter-sectoral collaboration and improved accountability.

UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry and Ministry of Education in the second year of implementing the 'First 1,000 days of a child's life – the foundation for a happy future' national early childhood development campaign, carried out as

part of the global #EarlyMomentsMatter initiative. The primary focus in 2018 was rolling out the campaign at the sub-national level to support parents with essential information on early childhood development through effective communication for development (C4D) interventions, health counselling and a call for increased engagement of fathers in child rearing. The target audience included parliamentarians and health and education professionals. The campaign continued to generate strong interest among local stakeholders and will be further followed up in 2019.

To further strengthen the outreach interventions for families and caregivers and to increase awareness of parents about the development milestones and stimulation activities, a new partnership with the State Committee on Television, Radio Broadcasting and Cinematography and Women's Union was conceptualized and put into the pipeline for 2019. The role of the Women's Union will be critical in community engagement for monitoring of the effectiveness of the early childhood development radio programmes.

Within the framework of UNICEF's strategic communication support, the communication for development (C4D) strategy for a joint UNICEF-Government Programme of Cooperation was developed, presented at the strategic moment of reflection meeting and further refined. The development of the strategy was informed by the evidence generated by several studies, including: the 2015-16 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, survey on young child rearing practices (2016), child rights consultations with children (2016), the Situation Analysis (2018) and relevant technical recommendations derived from the mapping of the national health promotion system (2012). The strategy for social and behaviour change communication articulates a common pathway for strategic programme communication across the sectors, including advocacy for joint UNICEF programmes, increased partnerships and support for C4D interventions through strengthened national systems. In the longer term, it is hoped that the national system will trigger a greater community uptake of positive behaviours, practices and social norms.

2018 was also marked with tangible progress toward the establishment of early intervention services. The regulations on standards of provision of early intervention services in the health system were drafted by a team of national experts, in cooperation with Ankara University. Following its initial testing in previous years, the International Guide for Monitoring Child development became a standard tool for early identification of a developmental delay and its management. Systematic on-site and online capacity development of health specialists in child development monitoring continued, with the National Early Development and Intervention Service Centre functioning as a training hub. Use of the International Guide for Monitoring Child Development on a pilot basis allowed families and childcare practitioners to monitor children's development from the start and helped children to reach their potential. The Guide emphasizes strengthening of coordination and referral mechanisms at all levels to provide effective, efficient, and quality services to children with developmental delays and/or disabilities and their families. Since August 2015, more than 3,000 children received early intervention services at national level early childhood development centres, after being referred from local levels.

To incorporate gender perspectives into family counselling, all 24 national early childhood development trainers were trained on gender basics, gender and early childhood development using the Regional Training Package for Home Visitors. With Gender Innovation funding, UNICEF Turkmenistan partnered with the Ankara University to develop and introduce a tablet-based version of the International Guide for Monitoring Child Development application. Procurement services remained an integral component of the country programme, with support

provided to the Government in improving planning for supply needs and budgeting, selection of supplies and equipment, and effective delivery and distribution. Immunization supplies provided via procurement services contributed to the sustainability of high immunization coverage rates, with measles vaccination coverage at 99 per cent and DPT3 coverage at 98.9 per cent.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

In line with Turkmenistan's commitments under SDG 4 concerning education and early childhood development, UNICEF continued to provide technical support for strengthening access to and quality of early learning, with a focus on pre-primary preparation and promotion of inclusive education.

UNICEF helped develop an operational plan to introduce one-year quality pre-primary preparation for all five-year-old children. The process, supported by qualified international expertise, involved the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, the State Statistics Committee and the Ministry of Education.

The operational plan was finalized. It includes proposed equity-based options and models with detailed costing, projected increase in pre-primary coverage, timelines and indicators for monitoring. The plan was accompanied by a cost/benefit analysis, which provided a strong justification for the impact of pre-primary education on a child's cognitive skills and improved educational performance. Discussions on the recommended options and models and a fee-based system were underway with the Ministry of Education at year end.

UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Education with the broader use of pre-school and pre-primary materials (play based pre-primary curriculum resource document, parental empowerment document, early readiness checklist). The materials, approved in 2016, were integrated into the annual training plan of the regional methodological centres nationwide. Those centres are in charge of in-service training for local pre-school professionals. UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Education in building up multi-disciplinary support and early intervention services for children with disabilities and their families, UNICEF initiated a partnership cooperation agreement with the St. Petersburg Early Intervention Institute. Within this partnership and on the basis of a 'positive deviance' example from one of the velayats, the regulations of all the medical-pedagogic commissions (disability assessment and referral mechanism for education sector) were updated to make a multi-disciplinary team composition possible. This will allow the multi-disciplinary teams across all the rehabilitation centres for children with disabilities and two early childhood development centres under education sector mandate to initiate support for young children with disabilities and their families. The support will be guided by the social model of disability, based on assessment and preparation of individual learning and development plans for the child and family. The model aims to empower and continuously support the child for inclusion into mainstream education and family for their social inclusion. In the longer run and if sufficiently scaled up, these family-centred support services will help prevent institutionalization and reduce the number of already institutionalized children with disabilities. This multi-disciplinary service provision incorporates gender aspects, given that girls with disabilities are more vulnerable in general because of associated stigma.

The Ministry of Education undertook further steps toward operationalization of the child-friendly standards originally adopted by Turkmenistan in 2016. Accomplishments in 2018 included capacity development on inclusive education and building an inclusive learning environment for caregivers, pre- and primary school teachers of selected mainstream education facilities.

Following a series of trainings, professionals became members of extended multi-disciplinary teams across six rehabilitation centres for children with disabilities and two early childhood development centres. They gained an understanding of how to support the process of inclusive learning for children with disabilities across their mainstream kindergartens and schools. This was an initial experimental step for the development of a continuum between multi-disciplinary teams and selected mainstream kindergartens and schools in support of a child's transition from a specialized facility to mainstream education and development of an inclusive learning environment.

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

With UNICEF support, the Government continued its efforts to align its legislation and practices with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations received in 2015. The National Plan of Action for Realisation of the Rights of Children was signed by the President on 22 June 2018. The Plan was developed through a consultative process over many years, and involved the relevant partner ministries and agencies. Following its adoption, UNICEF and the Institute of State, Law and Democracy, an entity responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Plan, held consultations with representatives of the concerned institutions to discuss the next steps to operationalize it.

The Concept of Integrated Services for Social Support of Families and Children submitted to the Government in 2016 continued to serve as an entry point to provide further technical assistance to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population with review of the policy and relevant legislation, with an aim of providing advice on necessary amendments and revisions. In 2018, the joint work focused on advocating for optimal ways of introducing and strengthening existing social/child protection services to the most vulnerable children and families at the community level.

As a result of UNICEF advocacy and technical assistance, the Ministry of Education started a gradual rollout of a social work curriculum at a pedagogical college to produce a competent workforce to support families with children. UNICEF, through a partnership with Partnership for Every Child (Russia), assisted in the development of a 10 year roadmap for 2018-2028. The roadmap provides direction for the introduction of social work services and includes step-by-step guidance and technical competency requirements for this work. UNICEF also requested that a working group be established with the overall purpose of leading and coordinating the development of standards for social services, with a particular focus on households with children. It was proposed that the working group, at the initial stage, include the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, Ministry of Health and Medical Industry and Ministry of Education, as well as the Mejlis (Parliament) of Turkmenistan. To encourage an exchange of best practices, UNICEF supported the participation of a multi-sectoral delegation from the Government of Turkmenistan at the Regional Conference on Social Work in Romania.

UNICEF also partnered with the Office of the Ombudsman in initiating its first sub-national workshops and consultations with representatives of the local authorities on child rights. The workshops provided an opportunity for local stakeholders to raise issues with the Office of the Ombudsman and provided a tool to monitor child rights. These forums are expected to evolve and to include youth to ensure their perspectives and voices are heard.

UNICEF contributed to the draft National Plan of Action on Elimination of Statelessness for the period of 2018-2024, which the Government initiated in coordination with the UN High

Commissioner for Refugees. Stateless persons with a permanent residence permit on the territory of Turkmenistan generally enjoy the same rights and obligations as citizens, regardless of their origin and other attributes. Stateless persons without permanent residence permits and formal recognition as 'stateless', on the other hand, do not have those entitlements.

The Assessment of the General Programme on Development of the Juvenile Justice System in Turkmenistan for the Period of 2012-2016 was concluded. It provided insights into the implementation of the Programme and led to discussions about a possible generation of such a programme. The assessment recommended setting up a central-level government agency and raising awareness on evidence-based policymaking. It also recommended improving the existing mechanisms for rehabilitation, reintegration and re-socialization of juveniles sentenced to custodial measures, in particular, by promoting the principle of continuity of care, and developing needs-based programming that relies extensively on community-based aftercare schemes. The recommendations were presented and discussed with relevant government bodies. Additional follow up will be undertaken in 2019.

UNICEF also supported the participation of State Statistics Committee representatives and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the regional Transformative Monitoring for Enhanced Equity (TransMonEE) network meeting on data on violence against children. UNICEF Turkmenistan participated in the 'Sixteen Days of Activism' campaign through social media engagement (approximately 200 were reached through Facebook) to contribute to the public discourse on preventing violence against women and girls.

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

In the framework of Turkmenistan's commitments under SDGs 12 and 13, UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Education and National Red Crescent Society on the Strengthening Resilience for Climate Change Adaptation for Children initiative. The initiative focused on enhancing the integration of climate change adaptation, environment and energy topics into the curriculum at the primary and secondary school levels. The existing curricula were reviewed and subsequently, new domains were added for five subjects along with an extra-curricular class on climate, environment and energy topics. The five subjects are: nature study, basics of life skills, ecology, geography and agriculture. This work was accompanied by the development and refinement of a set of age-appropriate and interactive subject-specific curricular and resource materials. Testing of the curricula across primary and secondary schools nationwide began in September 2018, its full approval is expected in 2019, with formal implementation expected to begin in September.

The partnership with the National Red Crescent Society included the promotion of community-based environment and climate change initiatives, focusing in the first year on capacity development of the Society's staff and volunteers, as well as of school teachers in climate, environment and energy teaching methodology and development of resource materials for curricula and extra-curricular activities. Specifically targeting 17 selected schools in two velayats, UNICEF and partners provided teachers with the curriculum and instructional materials, improving their teaching practice through child-centred, interactive and hands-on methods. UNICEF and partners also supported pre-testing of the curriculum materials. This work was closely linked to and accompanied by 'Go Green' campaigns across the same schools and their communities, where school children and community members organized exhibitions, contests and competitions on climate change. This work will be expanded through further capacity development, which will include the teachers and volunteers from the selected

17 schools and a core group of professionals in charge of pre- and in-service training of pedagogical professionals.

Following up on the recommendations of the 2017 Climate Landscape Analysis for Children, UNICEF expressed its willingness to contribute to the revision of Turkmenistan's climate change adaptation strategy. There may be such an opportunity in 2019.

UNICEF used the roundtable organized by the UNRC on Capacities of UN and the National Partners to Respond to Emergencies to increase partners' understanding of UNICEF's potential role in preparedness and the international humanitarian response system. This focus on core corporate commitments was reinforced through a child-risk informed preparedness and response workshop for Central Asia emergency authorities organized by the UNICEF Regional Office. UNICEF was exploring the possibility of solidifying and formalizing the country's contingency planning with the National Red Crescent Society.

Progress with school safety assessments, initiated in 2017, was somewhat limited in 2018. Only half of the planned schools underwent such assessments in 2018. Discussions were underway with the Ministry of Education to better understand the bottlenecks and accelerate progress in this area.

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

Turkmenistan has a comprehensive benefit and cash payments provided universally to all families with children, including a universal birth grant and child benefits up to the age of three. However, there is no evidence about the adequacy of those benefits or how they help reduce poverty and address the needs of the most vulnerable. This lack of data limits the possibility of assessing the impact of policy changes, such as the removal of utility subsidies. The Situation Analysis of Children's and Women's Rights had to rely primarily on outcome data to identify potentially vulnerable groups. According to the limited data from the Household Budget Survey, the share of food expenditures spent by the bottom quintile decreased slightly, from 67.9 per cent in 2000 to 64 per cent in 2016. As part of Turkmenistan's SDG monitoring efforts, discussions were underway about introducing the 'relative poverty' measures, which would require strengthening the Household Budget Survey methodology.

Public spending on health, education and social protection was featured in the SDG baseline assessment. Immediately following the strategic moment of reflection, a health and nutrition sector budget analysis was initiated in consultation with the UNICEF Regional Office and Headquarters, as the first attempt during the current country programme to generate evidence on budget allocations and effectiveness. That exercise, the success of which will depend greatly on data availability, will also determine further UNICEF engagement in public finance management deliberations.

Within the framework of advocacy for the equity approach, UNICEF held discussions with partners, including the UN agencies, to strengthen inter-agency cooperation across sectors and reduce vulnerabilities for children and families at risk. UNICEF was actively engaged in the realization of the rights of children with disabilities under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, challenges that children (and people) with disabilities faced led to multiple vulnerabilities that require a more coherent policy and programmatic response by the Government, with the support of the UN. The next round of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey will include the UNICEF/Washington Group module on child functioning, with the aim of

collecting disability-disaggregated outcome data for the first time.

The initial mapping on hearing loss among young children, as part of UNICEF efforts to establish a sustainable neonatal screening mechanism, revealed a need for technical assistance to establish a system for timely detection and rehabilitation of children with hearing problems. The mapping indicated that most of the required testing equipment existed but needed to be brought together in one health facility to provide adequate services. Human resources were limited, and no services were provided to children under three. There is a strong need for further engagement in this area.

UNICEF, as a member of the UN Working Group on Human Rights, Gender and Advocacy, advocated for a stronger and more coherent advocacy approach in relation to the issue of capacity building of the civil society-based organizations and the issue of violence against children and women. Those two issues came across in the latest concluding observations of the treaty bodies to Turkmenistan.

Adolescents and youth were identified as another area for the inter-agency UN initiative within the framework of the newly launched global UN strategy on Youth, 'Generation Unlimited', the 2030 Agenda and the possible UN support in the implementation of the State Programme on Youth Policy for the period of 2015-2020. UNICEF initiated an inter-agency rapid analysis of the situation of adolescents and youth (ages 10-24 years) together with the UN Development Programme and UN Population Fund. The analysis is expected to influence youth-centric policies and programmes in the country in the context of SDGs. The youth situation analysis will inform the upcoming UN Development Assistance Framework and the Country Programme Documents of the three agencies. The findings will also inform the Voluntary National Review of Turkmenistan on SDG implementation, the International Youth Forum planned in 2019 and the 2020 national report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Focused reporting on selected 'hows'

1. Winning support for the cause of children from decision-makers and the wider public

In 2018, UNICEF Turkmenistan aimed to make a difference by becoming an even stronger advocacy, campaigning and communication force for children. Through a number of interventions, UNICEF Turkmenistan strengthened its voice and advocacy; strengthened its brand; increased efforts to engage and empower children and young people; and developed strategic and innovative communication and advocacy partnerships.

In 2018, the Government and UNICEF entered the second year of the four-year national #EarlyMomentsMatter campaign. Students of major universities argued for promoting early childhood development during the student debates at an event on International Child Protection Day. In their deliberations, young people called on the Government, parents and the public at large to ensure optimal development of young children by creating an enabling environment for them to grow with good health, access to quality education, care and love. Authors of media pieces on early childhood development published in 2016-2017 were recognized and empowered to continue advocating for child rights.

The main focus of the campaign was to address the limited role of fathers in child upbringing and development, as found by the 2015-16 Turkmenistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. In this context, UNICEF Headquarters and Regional Office offered Turkmenistan and four other

countries the opportunity to share stories and photos of fathers and newborns and their bonding. A total of 300 million readers learned about the examples of fathers' engagement in Turkmenistan through major media outlets.

Media representatives from radio channels learned how to report on early childhood development issues in their programming. Through this capacity development initiative, UNICEF Turkmenistan identified the strengths and weaknesses of the channels and highlighted opportunities for collaboration. As part of the early childhood development campaign, UNICEF revitalized its partnership with the State Committee for TV and Radio Broadcasting. Beginning in 2019, UNICEF will partner with radio channels to produce early childhood development programmes for parents and TV content on various children's issues.

As part of the global cause framework, Turkmen children took over media spaces on World Children's Day to voice their aspirations and dreams, and to call on the Government and other duty bearers for the realization of children's rights. Children interviewed teachers, parliament members, entrepreneurs, and actors in the popular TV and radio programme for children 'Sizin Uchin, Korpeler!' ('For you, kids!'). The UNICEF branded TV programme reached hundreds of thousands of families and generated interest among audiences who provided their feedback through SMS messages.

UNICEF continued to influence decision-makers, stakeholders and relevant audiences to take action that contributed to the fulfilment of children's rights. UNICEF advocacy over the years led to the adoption of the National Plan of Action for Realization of the Rights of Children. Through the visit of the Regional Director and Deputy Regional Director, as well as the Representative's advocacy engagement at higher levels, UNICEF Turkmenistan aimed to build political will for change. In 2019, UNICEF will work to establish credible external engagement by sharing key documents with donors, embassies and international non-governmental organizations.

UNICEF continued its strategic engagement with newly elected Members of Parliament and the Speaker to advance the national agenda for children in the country. UNICEF's Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia met with the Speaker to reinforce commitments to align national legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and expand the role of the Parliament as an influential voice for the wellbeing of children. Orientations on the Convention on the Rights of the Child provisions and early childhood development were provided to all Members of Parliament, including those at the sub-national level. Orientations were carried out in a consultative manner with the participation of public organizations, media representatives, social sector workers and members of the Peoples' Council.

Digital engagement on Facebook increased to 26,761 compared to 16,346 in 2017. A new UNICEF Turkmenistan website was being developed and the launch was planned for early 2019.

2. Harnessing the power of evidence as a driver of change for children

The availability of data to inform budgetary and policy decisions needs to be improved. This would allow all stakeholders to better monitor, analyse and report on the situation of children's and women's rights. The Government made further progress in discussing data availability and disaggregation, encouraged by the SDG adaptation and monitoring process. The number of SDG indicators adopted was modified. There are now 175 indicators, of which 117 are fully in

line with the global indicators and 45 have undergone modifications.

UNICEF continued to co-chair the Result Group on Quality Data and Progress Monitoring, one of the five groups established to oversee the implementation of the UN Partnership Framework for Development. To improve understanding of SDG indicators, data sources and frequency, the Result Group experimented with a goal-by-goal review of and discussions about indicators, starting with SDGs 2 and 3. Those discussions were then replicated for another six goals that constitute the theme of the 2019 Voluntary National Review. The group also was instrumental in bringing together the efforts of UNICEF, the UN Population Fund and the World Health Organization to support the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry in conducting an assessment of the health data system and initiating a health data strategy.

Preparations for a new round of a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in 2019 continued. The survey is expected to provide data for approximately 25 SDG indicators (approximately 14 per cent of all indicators). UNICEF, in close consultation with the State Statistics Committee, finalized and published the 'Baseline assessment for child-related SDG indicators of Turkmenistan' and developed a summary focusing on the six goals included in the theme of the 2019 Voluntary National Review. The report served as the first attempt in Turkmenistan to look into availability, timeliness and disaggregation of data to serve as baselines for SDG indicators, focusing primarily on child-related indicators. This sub-group included 55 indicators accounting for 29 per cent of all indicators adopted by Turkmenistan.

UNICEF Turkmenistan also carried out an analysis of the situation of children and women (SitAn) in close consultation with national partners. While the new global SitAn guidance was being developed by UNICEF Headquarters, the Turkmenistan SitAn was informed by the existing guidance as well as thematic guidance for situation analyses related to gender, early childhood development, public finance management and risk-informed programming. The Turkmenistan SitAn aims to better inform programming and policy advocacy efforts. It represents the current situation, outlines progress and highlights areas where increased attention is required to improve the wellbeing of children and women. It identifies the following children as the most vulnerable: those who do not survive to the age of five, children with disabilities, particularly those in residential care, and children at risk, including children without parental care or exposed to violence. In general, children in rural areas have more vulnerabilities than those in urban areas. The SitAn recommended improving the availability, quality and disaggregation of data, enhancing cross-sectoral coordination and management mechanisms and increasing the investments in health care services to ensure free quality healthcare for all.

UNICEF led the UN Country Team Health Group, which worked with the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry to conduct an End-term Assessment of the National Strategy and Action Plan on Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health for 2015 – 2019, which will inform the development of a new strategy. The main findings and recommendations of the assessment were validated with key stakeholders. The findings, while confirming the considerable progress made during the last decade, note several challenges that impeded the achievement of universal health coverage. The assessment also strongly recommended a detailed costing of the next generation of the country programme to sustain financing from the state budget and identification of mechanisms for efficient utilization of allocated funds. UNICEF plans to initiate a health and nutrition sector budget analysis to help better align Turkmenistan's public finance planning and implementation with mother and child health and nutrition priorities. UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry in the establishment of a

database on child mortality and morbidity, disaggregated by sex, weight at birth, age, and cause of mortality, using the International Classification of Diseases 10 classifications.

UNICEF worked to improve the research-policy interface. An operational plan was developed to introduce one-year pre-primary preparation for all 5 year old children in Turkmenistan on the basis of the 2015-16 Turkmenistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey findings on disparities in attendance to kindergartens and pre-primary programmes. The plan linked achieving SDG target 4.2 to addressing inequalities and closing the gaps in access to pre-primary education by velayats. Geographic targeting was used to guide the costing, scenario-building scenarios and prioritization presented in the plan.

The Gender Programme Review, conducted with UNICEF Regional Office support, recommended 'adolescent nutrition' as a target priority and 'adolescent health' as a mainstream priority, building on areas of strength and success in health and nutrition. UNICEF Turkmenistan was looking into additional youth and adolescents programming, and the emphasis on adolescent maternal health was an effective entry point for Gender-Responsive Adolescent Health and Well-being. The timelines for the Gender Programme Review actions and respective indicators were being discussed.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

The Evaluation of Turkmenistan's National Nutrition Programme for 2013-2017, finalized in early 2018, included lessons learned and documented Turkmenistan's progress in nutrition indicators such as exclusive breastfeeding. The evaluation had implications concerning the positive leadership of the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry that created a favourable environment for complementarity and cross-sectorial work by key stakeholders. The evaluation established that the National Nutrition Programme lacked a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy to measure impact, outcome and output indicators, which limited partners' ability to assess the progress achieved during the implementation.

Those observations cut across most of the national plans and strategies and supported the recommendation of the 2018 Mainstreaming, Acceleration Policy Support report to enhance the strategic planning capacity for better SDG implementation and monitoring. In the area of nutrition, in 2018 UNICEF supported the Government in developing a monitoring and evaluation system for a nutrition programme, which was expected to be adopted in early 2019. UNICEF also helped establish sentinel sites for monitoring some of the important nutrition indicators through routine data collection.

The strategic moment of reflection confirmed that there had been little progress toward current country programme document targets related to public finance management, which in the longer run, may put at risk the scaling up and acceleration of the work for children. This can primarily be explained by the country's relatively weak institutional capacity in results-based management and budgeting. The linkage between high-level public finance management results of the country programme document and planned outputs was weak, exacerbated by the lack of devoted human resources to take the public finance management agenda forward. The strategic moment of reflection established that UNICEF needed to reinforce its capacity and presence in public finance management with, at least, a national specialist. Recruitment for the position was underway at year end. UNICEF initiated a dialogue and a workplan with the Ministry of Finance and Economy. UNICEF also began to develop an operational plan for

introducing one-year universal pre-primary education. This move would support the implementation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child concluding observations related to budget analysis and allocations for children, and support the capacities of line ministries in public finance management and outcome-based budget formulation. Progress in this area will not be quick or straightforward.

The current country programme focuses on early childhood development and children with disabilities, as well as on addressing high childhood/neonatal mortality rates and reducing risks and vulnerabilities of children with developmental delays. UNICEF Turkmenistan documented its support for the establishment of multi-disciplinary teams for early identification/early intervention. This documentation is also necessary because the work in the area does not and cannot fully meet the conditions expected from pilots. It is important to take stock, identify opportunities and bottlenecks for going to programming at scale and acceleration of progress. In 2019 this exercise will inform the evaluability assessment for a potential evaluation of Turkmenistan's early childhood development policy.

Scaling up multi-disciplinary support services for children with disabilities and their families, strengthening an inter-sectoral referral system and further promotion of inclusive education were constrained by the lack of childcare professionals with required competencies and/or absence of professionals of the core childcare disciplines required for multi-disciplinary support (psychologists, speech, physical and occupational therapists, developmental paediatricians, inclusive pedagogues). UNICEF took proactive steps to establish bridges with the State Medical University to initiate early childhood development courses for primary health care workers, paediatricians and child neurologists. Social work specialization was initiated at the college level. In general, there is a need to adopt a systematic approach to human resources development in the social sector and step up UN coordination and support, particularly in the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and introduction of social services.

The strategic moment of reflection highlighted that while it was important to continue scaling up promising current initiatives, examining long-term transformational initiatives was equally vital. UNICEF Turkmenistan therefore started to engage in longer-term planning and scenario building exercises, including the development of plans and roadmaps for some medium-term results for children. These included introduction of universal pre-primary education, introduction of social work profession and education and health management information systems. The planning exercises indicated that some of the results targeted to be achieved by the end of 2020 can in the best-case scenario only be attained after another country programme of cooperation.

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