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### United Nations Children's Fund

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### **Evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations**

#### **Summary\*\***

#### *Summary*

Since its inception UNICEF has been a global humanitarian actor, responding to emergencies in all corners of the world. In the education sector, efforts to provide learning opportunities coincide with the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene, providing protection and safe spaces, nutrition, mental health and services for social emotional learning, to mention a few. In the current period and circumstances, the limits of UNICEF humanitarian response capacities are being tested, with every office — headquarters, regional and country — and all programmes, functions and operations engaged in the response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Launched in 2019, the evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations was commissioned to determine the extent to which the UNICEF approach to education in humanitarian contexts is “fit-for-purpose” to deliver equitable access to quality education. It examined education in emergency programmes in the period 2014–2019, addressing the question of whether UNICEF education programmes contributed effectively to the improvement of education outcomes for various groups of children that are susceptible to humanitarian crises. The evaluation used a theory-based, mixed-method approach, the key elements of which were to develop a retrospective theory of change for the education programmes implemented in humanitarian contexts and to conduct a desk-based review of nine countries. Evaluators took field trips to three of those countries, where they conducted key informant interviews and group interviews and visited schools and other sites where education programmes are offered.

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\* E/ICEF/2020/17.

\*\* The summary of the evaluation report is being circulated in all official languages. The full report is available in English from the UNICEF Evaluation Office website (see annex).

*Note:* The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.

The evaluation concluded that UNICEF has successfully raised the importance of education as a core component of the humanitarian response; contributed significantly to strengthening the global architecture for education in emergencies; adequately discharged its responsibilities as the lead agency for education in emergencies; and taken the first steps to strengthen the links between the education emergency response,<sup>1</sup> development and national education goals. It also concluded that UNICEF programmes have increased access to learning opportunities and offered appropriate education programmes during earlier stages of a rapid-onset emergencies, but were not as successful in acute emergencies or protracted crises.

The success with the global advocacy effort notwithstanding, the evaluation found, in some cases, that senior managers in UNICEF were not consistent in incorporating education as part of the emergency response or allocating enough resources to it. It also highlighted gaps in the targeting and prioritization of the most vulnerable children, including girls and children with disabilities, and challenged UNICEF to develop more innovative programmes to address a variety of learning needs across a variety of emergency contexts, including acute emergencies and public-health emergencies.

The evaluation recommends that UNICEF pursue the following actions: (a) equip leaders with adequate leadership and advocacy capacities and tools to reflect the commitment to deliver education as an essential part of the humanitarian response; (b) promote equitable learning opportunities, gender equality and disability inclusion in humanitarian education contexts; (c) lead key education partners to develop, implement at scale and share innovative and impactful learning solutions for children affected by acute emergencies, protracted crises and public health crises; (d) strengthen technical capacities for staff and partners in education in emergencies; and (e) strengthen engagement with education-sector partners and reinforce accountabilities to affected populations.

Elements of a decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section VI.

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<sup>1</sup> Several terms are used in this report. *Education in emergencies* is a term that is used in UNICEF and elsewhere to describe the subsector, while *education emergency response* or *education humanitarian action* more narrowly refer to a set of activities that are implemented during a humanitarian event to provide access to education services. Education in humanitarian situations or contexts is a phrase that describes the education programmes in countries that are facing a humanitarian emergency.

## I. Introduction

1. Humanitarian crises pose a critical threat to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 4 which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. As of 2018, approximately 128 million children and young people living in crisis-affected countries were out of school globally, 67 million of whom were girls.<sup>2</sup> The already dire situation grew even more critical in light of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), with an estimated 1.29 billion children in 186 countries affected by school closures as of May 2020. The right to education is under threat as never before, requiring a predictable, timely and effective response that ensures children have equitable access to quality learning in all contexts and at all stages of education.

2. Sustainable Development Goal 4 represents a paradigm shift for the global education community, from a focus on ensuring access to primary education in the era of the Millennium Development Goals, to ensuring access, participation, equity and learning for all stages of education. Across the Sustainable Development Goals, there is an emphasis on strengthening the link between humanitarian and development work; this requires attention to building safer and more equitable education systems, while ensuring well-coordinated national, regional and global systems to prepare for and respond to emergencies.

3. The World Humanitarian Summit, held in 2016, also injected new life into the global education architecture with the establishment of Education Cannot Wait, a new global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. The birth of this fund and a package of reforms on humanitarian financing known as the Grand Bargain<sup>3</sup> represented a renewed commitment to education in humanitarian contexts, although funding levels remain significantly short of what is needed.

4. Within this overall framework and as part of its mandate for children, UNICEF work in education in emergencies is guided by its corporate strategic objectives, its education strategy, and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. For a part of the evaluation period, UNICEF work in education in emergencies fell under the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014–2017. Another part of the evaluation period falls under the subsequent Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, which is aimed at responding to the paradigm shift noted above, wherein the focus on access to primary education was expanded to ensuring access, equity and learning for all ages and stages of education.

5. The Education Strategy launched in 2007 was the main document that defined UNICEF objectives in education in emergencies and was in place during the evaluation period. The key objectives of the strategy with regard to emergencies and post-crisis education interventions were to: (a) help restore normalcy for all affected children and adolescents through safe, secure and supportive learning environments; (b) help reintegrate children affected by conflict (child soldiers); and (c) help post-crisis countries build back better education institutions and education systems.

6. UNICEF has since launched the Education Strategy, 2019–2030, which focuses on quality of education and includes education in emergencies and fragile contexts as one of six priority areas. The strategy commits to continue to provide global leadership on education in emergencies and direct services and supplies and to deepen

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<sup>2</sup> Plan International, “Left out, left behind: adolescent girls’ secondary education in crises” (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> As a major actor in the humanitarian sector, UNICEF endorsed the 32 commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit (2016), which includes a package of reforms known as the Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing and shoring up national capacities. UNICEF has since filed annual progress reports to the Grand Bargain secretariat.

integrated approaches to promoting girls' education in emergencies and protracted crises. It also encompasses newer lines of work, including promoting social cohesion and peacebuilding, supporting the recognition of learning, certification and/or the accreditation of displaced and migrant learners and delivering the organization's education commitments under the Global Compact for Refugees and the Grand Bargain, particularly accountability to affected populations

7. Finally, specific actions and minimum standards for education in emergencies are set out in the Core Commitments for Children. Initially developed in 1998 and updated in 2010, the recently revised Core Commitments will be rolled out in 2020 to equip UNICEF and its partners to deliver principled, timely, quality and child-centred humanitarian response and advocacy in any crisis with humanitarian consequences, including in complex and high-threat environments and in response to such new and emerging challenges as public-health emergencies and large displacements of refugees, migrants and internally displaced people.

## II. Evaluation approach: scope and methodology

8. The overall aim of the evaluation was to determine the extent to which the UNICEF approach to education in humanitarian contexts is "fit-for-purpose" to deliver equitable access to quality education.

9. In keeping with the purpose, the scope of the evaluation was broad, both thematically and geographically. It included UNICEF work at the global, regional and country levels and examined all components of the education response, from operational to policy levels, including coordination and cluster roles. The evaluation covered the period 2014–2019, spanning the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 and the first two years of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021.

10. Data were collected through a mixed-methods approach, including a detailed documentation review, key informant interviews and case studies (six desk-based and three in-country), supported by triangulation and iterative feedback. A survey supported the validation of the emerging findings. Case-study countries were selected to be representative of the range of settings and types of emergencies in which UNICEF operates. A contribution analysis perspective was applied at the global level and in country for three of the nine country cases — Jordan, Nepal and Somalia — to examine three themes: education solutions and results; coordination and the leveraging of partnerships; and the link between humanitarian, development, and peace programming, respectively.

11. The overarching question the evaluation sought to answer was: "What has been the UNICEF contribution to education emergency response and programming, and is UNICEF succeeding in strengthening its contribution to education outcomes for various groups of children that are susceptible to different humanitarian crises?" Six key evaluation questions were identified, as shown in table 1.

Table 1

### Key evaluation questions

<i>Key evaluation questions</i>	
EQ1.	How appropriate has the UNICEF approach to education in humanitarian situations been, taking account of UNICEF mandate and objectives?
EQ2.	What are the identifiable results of UNICEF work in education in humanitarian situations? Are there discernible patterns in these results? Do the results match UNICEF objectives and mandate?

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*Key evaluation questions*

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- EQ3. How coherent and coordinated have approaches to education in humanitarian situations been within UNICEF?
- EQ4. Has UNICEF work in education in humanitarian situations been coherent and coordinated with that of external partners?
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- EQ5. To what extent has UNICEF work in education in humanitarian situations strengthened linkages between humanitarian and development programming?
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- EQ6. What factors account for the success or setbacks of UNICEF work in education in humanitarian situations?
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### III. Findings of the evaluation

12. This section presents a selection of key findings in line with the evaluation questions. The findings are presented in a comprehensive manner in the full evaluation report.<sup>4</sup>

#### A. Appropriateness of education work in humanitarian contexts

*As a criterion for the evaluation, appropriateness is defined as the extent to which UNICEF humanitarian activities in education are tailored to local needs, increasing ownership and accountability (consistent with UNICEF policies and global priorities).<sup>5</sup>*

##### 1. Strategic approach

13. Evolving international standards and best practices in education in emergencies are reflected in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and the Education Strategy, 2019–2030. The Strategic Plan includes commitments in relation to early childhood development (ECD), adolescents, skills development and learning outcomes, among other priorities, all of which are appropriate in light of Sustainable Development Goal 4. The new education strategy reflects these priorities, strengthening the focus on the quality of education and including education in emergencies and fragile contexts as one of six priority areas. Like the Strategic Plan, it widens the range of children receiving education services to explicitly include those in early childhood and adolescence.

14. The evaluation found that the strategies were appropriate. However, in addition to whether the programmes are tailored to the needs of children in humanitarian contexts, appropriateness addresses the question of whether UNICEF is investing in the right strategies. To that end, the evaluation found that the strategies were appropriate. However, not much was available in terms of practical guidance to assist country offices in making difficult choices on what to prioritize or accompanying tools on how to tailor these strategies to specific contexts.

15. More importantly, questions have been raised, both within the organization and externally, on what additional actions are required to improve the quality of education and learning in humanitarian contexts, especially in acute emergency contexts. A key

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<sup>4</sup> The full evaluation report and case-study reports are available at: [https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_61171.html](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_61171.html)

<sup>5</sup> Appropriateness replaces the relevance criterion used in development evaluations. Source: Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, “Evaluation of humanitarian action guide” (2016).

input would be to clarify what additional measures, beyond minimum standards, should be taken to improve learning outcomes in emergency contexts and what additional capacities are required (e.g., funding, staffing, corporate guidance). Strategies on other imperatives, for example, offering access to safe learning environments and providing life-saving information and psychosocial support, were considered to be appropriate, coherent and clear.

16. In practice, UNICEF education programmes in humanitarian contexts generally adhered to the organization's Core Commitments for Children and the minimum standards for education preparedness, response and recovery.<sup>6</sup> However, case studies for this evaluation and a synthesis of humanitarian evaluations<sup>7</sup> highlighted the need for greater contextualization of the Core Commitments to different types of emergencies (e.g., protracted crises, public-health emergencies, slow or rapid onset). The revision of the Core Commitments has taken many of these concerns into account.

17. At the country level, UNICEF education in emergencies programmes were found to be broadly relevant to the education needs of children in humanitarian contexts. However, two challenges were identified. First, UNICEF work in education in emergencies was generally more appropriate in natural disasters than in complex, protracted crises. Second, UNICEF was not specific enough in targeting children most in need. Across settings, targeting of education in emergencies interventions was affected by weaknesses in data collection, disaggregation and reporting.

18. The insufficient specificity in the targeting of children affected by emergencies is not just specific to the education in emergencies portfolio. It reflects a weakness that has affected humanitarian responses generally, as documented in the 2019 evaluation of the coverage and quality of the UNICEF humanitarian response in complex humanitarian emergencies. This suggests a need to strengthen data systems and to be more innovative in data sourcing and collection, with UNICEF drawing on its own experience as well as that of other organizations.

## **2. Resourcing**

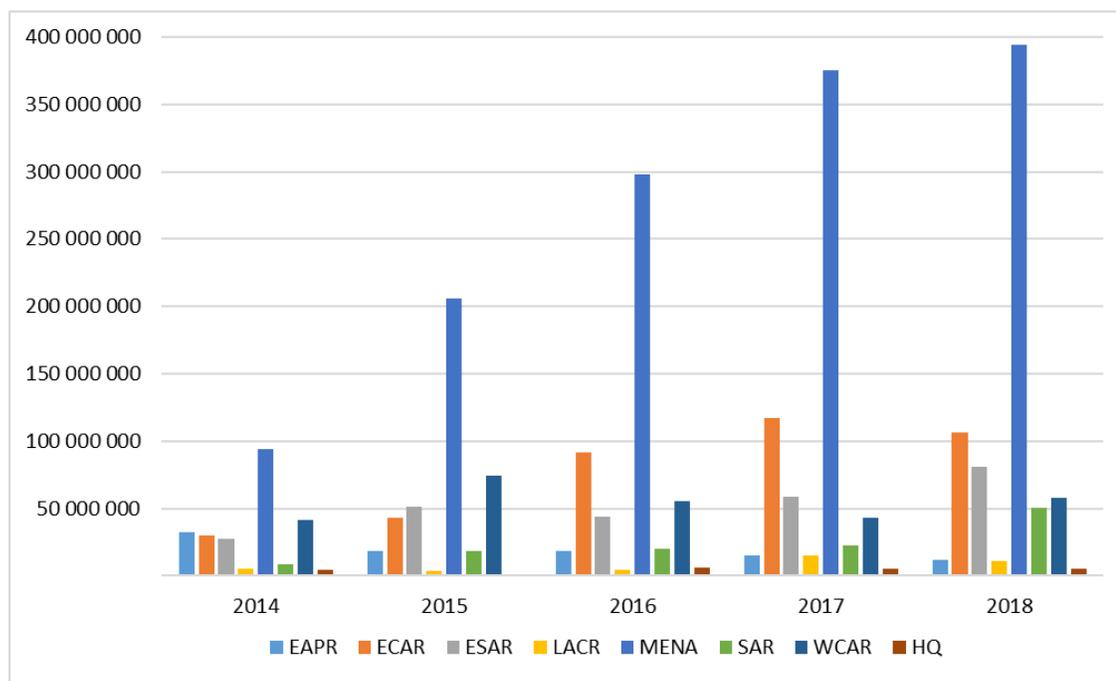
19. The organization's expenditure on education in emergencies increased significantly in recent years, from \$242.5 million in 2014 to \$718.8 million in 2018. This trend demonstrates an increased commitment from donors, which, in turn, reflects the advocacy efforts by UNICEF and other partners. Overall, however, funding for education in emergencies remained well short of needs during the evaluation period, and education in emergencies accounted for only 10 per cent of the humanitarian funding received by UNICEF. Moreover, the increase in expenditure was not evenly distributed. Over half of education in emergencies expenditure was in the Middle East and North Africa region. Indeed, a year-by-year breakdown shows that other regions did not experience a significant increase in expenditure (see figure I).

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<sup>6</sup> Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, *Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery* (2010).

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, *Towards improved emergency response: synthesis of UNICEF evaluations of humanitarian action 2010–2016* (2017).

Figure I  
UNICEF education expenditure by region, 2014–2018



*Legend:* EAPR: East Asia and the Pacific Region; ECAR: Europe and Central Asia Region; ESAR: Eastern and Southern Africa Region; LACR: Latin America and Caribbean Region; MENA: Middle East and North Africa Region; SAR: South Asia Region; WCAR: West and Central Africa Region; HQ: headquarters.

*Source:* UNICEF financial data provided on 17 April 2019.

20. Dedicated staffing for education in emergencies at UNICEF headquarters was also insufficient in relation to the task and budget. For much of the evaluation period, a few staff members balanced several items in the work plan for education in emergencies, including providing oversight for the Learning for Peace programme; supporting partnerships and networks; participating in the establishment of Education Cannot Wait; developing guidance on risk-informed programming; and supporting the Ebola response, among other areas of work.

21. Consequently, UNICEF headquarters was perceived (internally and externally as expressed across key informant interviews) as reactive and responding in an ad hoc manner rather than strategic manner. This also had consequences for internal coordination and quality of support. Relatedly, the skills development of UNICEF education staff with regard to education in emergencies was not sufficiently prioritized. Survey results indicated that staff did not consider themselves to be well equipped to implement the strengthened focus on quality of teaching and learning and on longer-term planning and financing aligned, where possible, with national development needs.

22. In spite of these limitations, UNICEF generally provided appropriate surge support in crises through the global education cluster Rapid Response Team, UNICEF regional offices, UNICEF rapid response teams and standby partners.

## B. Results

*As a criterion for this evaluation, effectiveness is defined as the extent to which UNICEF education activities in humanitarian contexts achieve their purpose, or whether this can be expected to happen on the basis of the outputs.*

### 1. Global and regional levels

23. The evaluation found that at the global level, UNICEF substantially contributed to the evolution of the global education in emergencies architecture. For example, the organization had a pivotal role in the development of the Education Cannot Wait fund and through advocacy and active participation in the Global Partnership for Education. While it is impossible to quantify the organization's contribution, stakeholders consulted by the evaluation team were consistently of the view that UNICEF played a major and critical role in positioning education in emergencies more centrally in the education and humanitarian landscapes, in collaboration with key partners.

24. UNICEF also demonstrated effective representational, advocacy and technical leadership within several temporary working groups to influence new global humanitarian and development frameworks, and as a founding member of the various key networks that make up global education in emergencies architecture, including the global education cluster, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector, and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative.

25. While global-level partnerships and forums generated significant knowledge, guidance and lessons learned, these were taken up by regional and country offices in an ad hoc manner, typically at the initiative of individual staff members. This was due to a confluence of factors, particularly the lack of clarity of roles between global, regional and country offices with regard to targeted communication, knowledge management and technical support and the insufficient capacities of the education-in-emergencies staff at headquarters.

26. Regional offices provided leadership for various initiatives that advanced education in emergencies, often despite funding constraints, even though the work was found to be ad hoc. The recent enhancement of capacities for knowledge-management communication is expected to improve the sharing of lessons between the global, regional and country levels.

### 2. Country level

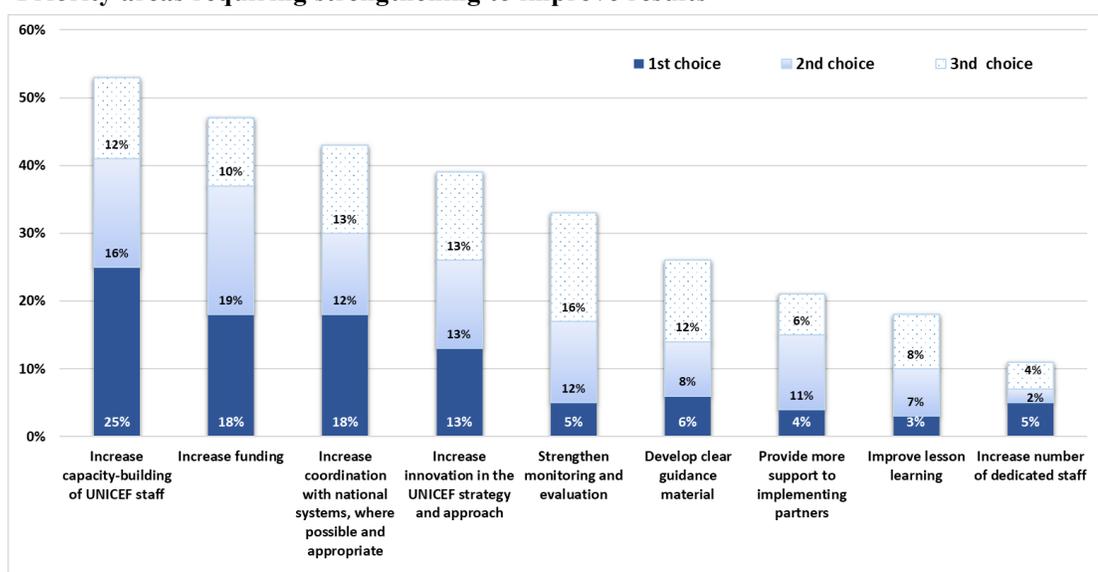
27. The evaluation found that UNICEF made significant progress towards the benchmarks of the Core Commitments for Children and the UNICEF Strategic Plans, 2014–2017 and 2018–2021 and in increasing education access at all levels, from early childhood through adolescence. In collaboration with implementing partners, UNICEF offered non-formal education services for out-of-school children and, to the extent possible, remedial education to prepare children for re-entering formal schooling. With the new education strategy, the organization is taking additional steps to strengthen its focus on learning outcomes and skills for active citizenship and employability.

28. Typically, the education package UNICEF implements as part of the education emergency response consists of the provision/construction of temporary learning spaces. This approach was found to be effective in acute emergency settings and critical to ensuring access to and the continuity of safe learning opportunities for boys and girls. For more protracted emergencies, UNICEF requires a greater focus on

building internal understanding and technical capacity as well as partnerships to shift focus from supplies to quality teaching and learning. It also requires a better understanding of practical actions to align humanitarian and development programming and financing, strengthen work and communication on innovations and develop a more robust approach to applied learning across levels. A related challenge was that in some cases UNICEF-supported programmes did not address the different populations of learners (e.g., ECD and secondary level, as well as out-of-school children).

29. Regarding where UNICEF should focus its efforts to strengthen education in emergency results, survey respondents identified capacity-building of UNICEF staff, additional funding and increased coordination with national systems as the top three priorities (see figure II).

Figure II  
Priority areas requiring strengthening to improve results



Source: Analysis of survey results by the evaluation team; n=116.

30. The evaluation also found that the UNICEF systems-strengthening work of linking humanitarian and development programming in acute emergencies and protracted crises contributed substantively to the development of policies and capacities by Governments. For instance, in Jordan, UNICEF successfully advocated to integrate education in emergencies into education sector policies and support the Government in the transition from implementation through international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to direct implementation. The new country programme adopted a vulnerability-based approach, in support of the Two-Year Plan and National Vision Jordan 2025 and Jordan Response Plan.

31. As co-lead for the education cluster, UNICEF is designated as provider of last resort, conferring the responsibility to ensure predictability in the education cluster response and the coverage of all populations that need assistance (Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 2018). Drawing from examples in country case studies, the evaluation found that UNICEF discharged its responsibility as provider of last resort, often filling gaps by delivering assistance in remote and hard-to-reach areas, in collaboration with local partners. For instance, UNICEF created three zonal offices in 2014 to establish a greater field presence in the Central African Republic. In Liberia, UNICEF hired helicopters to deliver education supplies to nine areas of the country that were hard to reach by road and negotiated with donors to redirect funding

to the emergency response to cover such activities. In South Sudan, UNICEF dispatched supplies and deployed education experts to enable the start-up and/or resumption of education activities in missions that were covered by the Integrated Rapid Response Mechanism.<sup>8</sup>

32. UNICEF has not always been successful in its responsibilities as provider of last resort. For instance, in countries with serious funding gaps, such as the Central African Republic and Somalia, the focus became appropriate prioritization of the limited resources available rather than attempting to fill every gap. And while innovative digital platforms such as EduTrac or U-report were used to collect valuable information about humanitarian needs in areas inaccessible to humanitarian workers, as in the Central African Republic, the organization was not able to reach sizeable populations in need of assistance with critical services, including education.

## C. Coherence and coordination

*As criteria for this evaluation, coordination and coherence are defined as the extent to which UNICEF education activities in humanitarian contexts are harmonized internally across sectors and the extent to which UNICEF has provided guidance and methodological support and ensured capacity for coherence in terms of its priorities for education.*

### 1. Internal coherence

33. The evaluation found that water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and child protection were generally well integrated into education in emergencies activities, and this was linked to the UNICEF role as cluster lead in these areas. Coherence and coordination with other sectors, however, were variable. The evaluation noted that, across case studies, intersectoral work in country offices was stronger when it involved dealing with acute emergencies.

34. Interviews conducted for the evaluation highlighted a need for better coordination between headquarters, regional and country offices. At the country level, more attention is required on communication and teamwork, technical guidance and support and strengthening knowledge management. In particular, cross-country and cross-regional learning and sharing of lessons need significant improvement. However, countries received additional capacities after declarations of L2 or L3 emergencies, which enabled better coordination between headquarters, regional offices and country offices.

### 2. External coherence

35. At the global level, the evaluation found good coordination and coherence with other actors in terms of advocacy and policy and in marshalling the inputs to strengthen the education in emergencies architecture. More strategic thinking is required on the organization's comparative advantage and complementarity vis-à-vis the work of partners as well as developing protocols at the regional and country levels to help ensure the complementarity of efforts.

36. In countries with weak education capacities, there was strong alignment with the Government and ministries of education as principal partners. UNICEF also promoted coherence through its cluster co-lead role. The evaluation observed a growing complementarity and cross-sectoral coordination between partners working on education in emergencies, WASH and child protection, mirroring the

<sup>8</sup> Developed in partnership with the World Food Programme, the Integrated Rapid Response Mechanism was a means to access hard-to-reach populations for a short duration to deliver a mix of health, water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, education and child-protection services.

complementarity between these sectors within UNICEF. Bilateral coordination with partners was not as strong, with organizations engaging in areas of work similar to those of others.

37. UNICEF played a role in enhancing the effectiveness of the education response in humanitarian contexts by working toward strengthening national systems and coordination structures and building the capacity of Governments, progressively working towards the handover of responsibility. More attention should be paid to building capacity at the subnational level, however. Relatedly, while UNICEF is channelling an increasing proportion of funds through local NGOs in most of the case-study countries, the organization should systematically prioritize building the capacity of local NGOs. Limitations in the capacities of these key partners may limit UNICEF contributions to systems-strengthening and sustainability.

38. Leveraging its capacity as education cluster co-lead at the global level, UNICEF invested substantially in the function of cluster coordinator at the country level. Furthermore, support to country clusters through standby mechanisms and the deployment of rapid-response team cluster coordinators and information managers was positively assessed in terms of supporting timely and adequately staffed responses.

39. The evaluation also found that there was room to improve coherence between the UNICEF education team at the global level and the global education cluster, which were reported to often work in parallel, in silos (e.g., in the work on protecting education from attack and the establishment of Education Cannot Wait).

40. Also, informants noted that guidance and support for the global education cluster was largely designed for emergency situations with weak government capacities in the education sector. In countries with relatively stronger education capacities that were nonetheless not sufficient to cover the needs of children, the activation of education clusters resulted in parallel structures, with limited or no alignment with education sector plans.

#### **D. Strengthening resilience and linking humanitarian and development programming**

41. Linking humanitarian and development programming is a stated priority for UNICEF, and the evaluation observed that the organization took the first step by issuing guidance in this regard, including through an internal UNICEF procedure issued in 2019. More work is required on practical tools for contextualizing and operationalizing the global guidance for the different country contexts and programme sectors, including education.

42. A key aspect of the UNICEF strategy to improve the link between humanitarian response and national efforts has been strengthening its partnerships with local NGOs. In practical terms, UNICEF committed to a series of financing and localization reforms in 2016, which included a commitment to allocate at least 30 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national actors. UNICEF reported in 2019 that 31 percent of humanitarian expenditure was transferred to local and national responders. However, questions were raised regarding the effectiveness of this strategy in the absence of wider investments in the capacity-building of local NGOs to engage more meaningfully with national systems. Also, it is not clear how much of this expenditure was directed to the education sector.

43. Similarly, UNICEF has a strong commitment to promoting the participation of affected populations, with an implicit assumption that community participation will improve the sustainability of education in emergencies activities. For instance, the evaluation found that parent and school community bodies were commonly integrated

as part of education in emergencies interventions by UNICEF. However, more work is required to build evidence on the effectiveness of different community-engagement approaches and to share lessons learned across different countries.

44. Alongside efforts to adopt longer-term approaches within the emergency response, there were efforts to make national systems more responsive to and resilient in emergencies. In many countries, UNICEF advocated successfully for national institutions to integrate education in emergencies responsibilities. Relatedly, UNICEF was successful in promoting the mitigation and prevention of risk in national education systems. This work was strongest with respect to natural disasters and, to a much lesser extent, conflict. Other hazards, such as health crises and economic crises, were less well anticipated, monitored and responded to.

45. The evaluation found that UNICEF invested heavily at the corporate level in developing strong guidance to support multi-hazard risk-informed programming and preparedness planning. Progress was most evident with regard to preparedness and mitigating the effects of natural disasters, but these need to be scaled up and prioritized further. However, there was still some way to go in applying this guidance to the education sector.

46. The prominence of peacebuilding activities, meanwhile, appears to have diminished sharply, especially at the field level, over the evaluation period. Positive impacts of pilot projects linking education to peace were reported, even though programmes were not taken to scale or sustained within national systems or UNICEF country-office priorities. In the absence of a strong corporate focus, the extent to which peacebuilding approaches were included in education programmes was a reflection of commitment from office leadership or of individuals, particularly those who were exposed to the Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (Learning for Peace) programme.

47. Overall, the short-term nature of most humanitarian funding was an impediment to integrating the longer-term planning required for programmes to mature and transition into the development phase.

## **E. Gender equality and disability inclusion**

48. Overall, gender was consistently mainstreamed in needs assessments, planning and reporting and in global tools and frameworks. The evaluation found that staff were generally aware of and making efforts to address gender-related inequalities, and a review of UNICEF planning documents across the country studies found consistent examples of gender mainstreaming. The most visible work of UNICEF on gender was around attention to the enrolment and retention of girls in schools (e.g., the Central African Republic, Jordan, Nepal, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic). Other areas of work included menstrual hygiene kits and the provision of separate latrines in collaboration with the WASH sector/clusters. In Nepal and the Syrian Arab Republic, for example, this meant providing WASH-integrated and gender- and disability-friendly schools (Syrian Arab Republic) and transitional learning structures (Nepal). In Nepal, menstrual hygiene management was also integrated into education services.

49. Nonetheless, mainstreaming gender into education humanitarian response in line with the Gender Action Plan needed strengthening. Across countries, the evidence suggests that the organization missed opportunities to adequately contextualize guidelines, to reflect more deeply on gender gaps and to apply lessons learned and good practices across sectors, including education. For example, project proposals committed to addressing gender balance in all activities in Dominica; however, these commitments were not followed through in reporting. In Liberia, Ebola had a

disproportionate effect on girls because barriers that affect them were not addressed during school closure. Relatedly, gender mainstreaming and gender-based violence were featured in subsequent teacher-training efforts even though subsequent reporting did not establish the effect of these activities.

50. Even though there was commendable progress with regard to programming for children with disabilities in a handful of countries (e.g., Jordan), evidence suggested that such vulnerable groups as children with disabilities, children in pastoralist communities, over-age students and girls facing child marriage were not sufficiently prioritized in programming. Also, the need to build a variety of technical capacities to incorporate disability inclusion in planning as well as to implement and report on it was identified.

## IV. Conclusions

51. Conclusion 1: Over the evaluation period, UNICEF consistently advocated for the importance of education in emergencies as part of the humanitarian response and played a strong leadership role at the global level in furthering the education in emergencies agenda. Education is now more strongly recognized as a necessary part of the humanitarian response, which is in itself an achievement. Consequently, funding to education in emergencies has increased and larger numbers of children have been reached. However, continued advocacy is needed to ensure that education is consistently and immediately prioritized at the same level as other elements of the response and that funding is provided in ways that allow UNICEF to link humanitarian and development programming towards long-term education solutions.

52. Conclusion 2: Guided by the Core Commitments for Children, the evaluation found, by and large, that UNICEF made a difference in humanitarian contexts by providing continued access to safe educational opportunities and continuity of learning, mostly by erecting learning spaces that offer primary education and non-formal education services. However, the evaluation also indicates that, due to resource constraints and a shortage of technical capacity, planned coverage has often fallen far short of the needs, especially in protracted crises. The strengthening of technical capacities in monitoring and needs assessments will increase the effectiveness of UNICEF and partners in targeting children most affected by emergencies, in particular children with disabilities, and in priority settings, in line with the UNICEF Gender Policy, Gender Action Plan and UNICEF Guidance on including children with disabilities in humanitarian action. In addition, more work is needed to prioritize adolescents, ECD and the most vulnerable children, many of whom are out of school, as well as to report systematically on progress in reaching targets.

53. Conclusion 3: UNICEF education solutions have generally been more appropriate to earlier stages of rapid-onset emergencies than to acute emergencies and protracted crises. The availability of standardized supply-driven education solutions has allowed UNICEF to respond at scale to sudden-onset emergencies. Several best practices were identified that should allow UNICEF to further adapt and improve its education solutions in protracted crises. These include the improved design and management of temporary learning spaces; more locally adapted learning materials; stronger and more comprehensive teacher training and professional development; systems strengthening; stronger linkages across sectors; and longer-term planning and financing for linking humanitarian and development work. Moving forward, UNICEF should build internal knowledge management of and capacity for adapting emergency education solutions from the standard supply-driven packages to more nuanced, longer-term solutions informed by a context analysis.

54. Conclusion 4: As a cluster lead agency, UNICEF was instrumental in bringing together humanitarian actors to plan and implement a coordinated and collective

response. These efforts have contributed to the achievement of collective results and have promoted efficiencies across contexts, such as better joint planning, targeting and prioritization, stronger coverage of gaps and the leveraging of the collective resources of partners. Strong sector coordination has also enabled UNICEF to serve as provider of last resort, although the extent to which this could be achieved has been limited by resource constraints in many contexts, especially in protracted crises. There are opportunities to increase collaboration and coherence between the UNICEF global work on education in emergencies and the work of the global cluster in ways that benefit the response at the country level and to leverage the UNICEF comparative advantages in each context.

55. Conclusion 5: Within UNICEF headquarters and regional offices, staff capacities and the resourcing of education in emergencies was not commensurate with the growth of the portfolio, in terms of both its size and significance. Additional staff are required to strengthen the knowledge management function and coordination between different levels of the organization, across sectors, regions and countries. Opportunities also exist to strengthen joint work, clarify roles and responsibilities and learn across countries and regions, not least by tapping the experience of national UNICEF staff, who represent institutional memory and often have first-hand experience in emergency response.

56. Conclusion 6: Country-level capacities for education in emergencies were strengthened over the evaluation period. Also, several corporate directives, frameworks and guidelines were developed, some of which were acknowledged as very useful. However, existing guidelines and frameworks should be consolidated into an integrated framework and a package of resources developed to support staff involved in education in emergencies. This package should incorporate the priorities of the new education strategy, which reflect a stronger focus on the quality of education and learning. The Education Strategy, 2019–2030 recognizes the importance of building UNICEF staff capacity. This is particularly important, as linking development and humanitarian work requires programming and leadership skills to address constantly changing needs while building adaptable systems and capacities for longer-term responses. Stronger investments are needed for UNICEF staff as well as for local and national partners.

57. Conclusion 7: UNICEF has made good progress in linking humanitarian and development programming. As a first step, its work in helping to establish education — traditionally viewed as a development priority — as a critical priority in humanitarian response is itself a contribution. UNICEF has also made progress in developing corporate directives on linking humanitarian and development programming, although more reflection is required on the organization's roles and comparative advantages vis-à-vis partners. Strong contributions have been made in supporting Governments to integrate education in emergencies into education-sector policies and institutional capacities, and UNICEF work on preparedness and risk-informed programming has made a significant difference in internal and external preparedness to respond to crises. This includes UNICEF upstream work with Governments to include disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding in national policies and strategies.

58. UNICEF work on risk-informed programming was widely acknowledged and it will need continued attention. Valuable experience was also gained over the evaluation period on social cohesion and peacebuilding, especially through the Learning for Peace programme, which had a sustained impact on research and programming in this field, including outside UNICEF. However, much of this momentum was lost once the programme concluded. The organization should do more to capitalize on and sustain its work in disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding.

59. Conclusion 8: A range of good education practices exists in many countries that are implementing humanitarian programmes. However, limitations in UNICEF systems for monitoring, evaluation and knowledge management have reduced the organization's capacity to learn and to improve its programming. While UNICEF headquarters has been increasingly involved in identifying and supporting innovations in education in emergencies, the flow of information and knowledge from that work could be improved. In addition, information flows in UNICEF concentrate on aggregate corporate reporting, which is not optimal for systematically collecting information on innovations, good practices or lessons learned at the regional and country levels.

60. Conclusion 9: At the country level, UNICEF registered achievements in building the capacity of Governments and implementing partners. An important area of progress has been its upstream work with Governments to integrate education in emergencies into sector policies and the introduction of preparedness and risk reduction in country education plans. UNICEF has also increased its funding and engagement with NGOs in line with the localization agenda, although this needs further strengthening.

61. Across different contexts, communities were effectively involved in awareness-raising initiatives, although this did not always translate into the voices and opinions of beneficiaries being taken into account in the design of the interventions. In addition, capacity-building at subnational levels has received less attention, despite its obvious importance. UNICEF needs to be more deliberate and systematic in capacity-building with front-line responders, communities, local NGOs and subnational government officials.

## V. Recommendations

62. The overall recommendations that arise from the evaluation are presented below, with a rationale for each recommendation as well as details on suggested actions. Suggested timelines and responsibilities within the organization are also provided.

63. The recommendations are mutually supporting and interconnected, and do not suggest a radical change of direction. Rather, they focus on “doing business better” and are aimed at strengthening ongoing work on education in emergencies by focusing on the broad areas of leadership and advocacy; improving UNICEF capacities for education in humanitarian action; planning, programming, monitoring and learning; and improving support to Governments and partners.

**64. Recommendation 1: UNICEF should equip leaders (including Representative, Deputy Representative, and Chief of Education and Emergency Officers) with adequate leadership capacities and tools to work in a manner that reflects the organization's commitment to education as an essential part of the humanitarian response, across the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus.**

65. UNICEF has contributed strongly to positioning the education sector at the centre of humanitarian response at the global, regional and country levels, and has achieved recognition for advocacy and for strengthening the global infrastructure for education in emergencies. The organization needs to reinforce these gains by better equipping country leadership teams with capacities and tools to strengthen the prioritization of education in humanitarian programming at the country level and to make informed decisions for humanitarian response, working across development and humanitarian programming and advocating for the education cluster in the country team and with Governments and partners.

66. Education also needs to be consistently prioritized at the same level as other sectors in humanitarian action and funding needs to be provided in ways that allow

UNICEF to link humanitarian and development programming towards long-term education solutions. While the evaluation found that education in emergencies funding increased both in absolute terms and as a proportion of overall education funding, it also found that education in emergencies still accounts for a small proportion of the humanitarian funding received by UNICEF and that it is unevenly distributed among the regions.<sup>9</sup>

67. As the lead agency for education in emergencies, with additional accountabilities such as provider of last resort, it is incumbent upon UNICEF to champion the cause of education and to actively advocate for allocating more resources to education in humanitarian action. Relatedly, allocating resources to activities such as education preparedness planning is not only a step towards building resilience; it is also a necessary safeguard to mitigate future emergencies. Recommendation 1 therefore challenges UNICEF to invest in developing such tools as country investment cases for education in emergencies to support stronger advocacy for resources, partnerships and, ultimately, better results for children.

68. Capacity-building for staff should also include a comprehensive training package based on a comprehensive education framework and guidance that draw from the provisions of the Core Commitments for Children. The training should cover all skill levels of office leadership, operationalizing the task of leading an education programme across the humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and resilience phases.

**69. Recommendation 2: Recognizing the priorities of the education strategy, UNICEF should promote equitable learning opportunities in humanitarian education response, with particular emphasis on gender equality and disability inclusion.**

70. The evaluation found that UNICEF work in humanitarian contexts made a difference by providing continued access to safe educational opportunities and continuity of learning, mostly by creating learning spaces that offer primary education through formal and non-formal education modalities.

71. Nevertheless, the evaluation also concluded that UNICEF should pursue more effective equity approaches and tailor interventions to the specific needs and characteristics of the children. One constituency that must receive attention is girls, who are ordinarily and disproportionately disadvantaged due to social norms that impede their access to and participation in school. These disadvantages are amplified in humanitarian situations, where girls and young women are at a heightened risk for many other harmful practices, including gender-based violence and forced marriage. Similarly, children with disabilities are almost always among those most in need of assistance, as they are at a heightened risk for similar abuses. Since both these groups are disproportionately excluded from educational opportunities, one of the key actions for promoting gender and/or disability inclusiveness and equality should be to seek out girls and children with disabilities, understand their barriers, views, priorities and capacities and ultimately ensure their participation in all levels of education.

**72. Recommendation 3: UNICEF should lead key education partners to develop, implement at scale and share innovative and impactful learning solutions suited to the needs of children affected by acute emergencies and protracted crises, including public-health emergencies.**

73. One of the most daunting education challenges today is the “learning crisis” — the fact that children in most parts of the world have fallen behind in terms of mastery

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<sup>9</sup> Over half of education in emergencies expenditure was in the Middle East and North Africa region because of the Syrian Arab Republic crisis

of age-appropriate knowledge and skills. Overall, the evaluation concludes that UNICEF education solutions are effective in the earlier stages of rapid-onset emergencies and credits this success to the availability of standardized supply-driven education solutions that often provide country offices with the capability to act swiftly and to roll out the response at the desired scale. However, the UNICEF solutions for education in acute emergencies and/or complex, protracted crises were assessed as much less effective.

74. This conclusion also points to a limited emphasis on knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation, which has reduced the organization's capacity to distil lessons to improve programming.

75. Recommendation 3 challenges UNICEF and a range of partners in education in emergencies (traditional and non-traditional) to focus in a significant way on innovative solutions that produce tangible learning outcomes, well beyond the current dominant focus on access to safe learning spaces. These may include the improved design of the content and management of temporary learning; the development and adaptation of locally sourced and culturally appropriate learning materials; innovative ways of capacitating a learning workforce in instances in which the professional teaching force is depleted; and the use of information and communications technology for instructional purposes, such as interactive audio instruction. These solutions should also cover the needs of children in their early years as well as adolescents, especially girls, well beyond the current focus on children in the primary school age.

76. Recommendation 3 also calls attention to the need to assess the efficacy of learning solutions and to validate them for different types of emergencies, learning contexts and learning modalities and platforms in order to extend access and coverage to a variety of children and to determine the scalability of the learning solutions. To that end, UNICEF partners need to embark on a systematic and sustained effort to build a range of capacities at the individual and institutional levels, based on the comparative advantages of partners.

**77. Recommendation 4: In implementing the Core Commitments for Children on education, UNICEF should strengthen capacities of staff and partners with responsibilities for education in emergencies in the identification and targeting of affected children and the monitoring and reporting of interventions and outcomes to ensure that education in humanitarian action reaches the most marginalized children.**

78. The recently revised Core Commitments for Children outline programmatic commitments for education and associated benchmarks in six areas, namely: leadership and coordination; equitable access to learning; safe learning environments; mental health and psychosocial support; strengthening education systems; and community engagement for behavioural and social change. However, the benchmarks indicated for each commitment communicate the absolute minimum, considering the extensive needs of children in emergencies, and the expectations implied in UNICEF education in emergencies objectives and work plan.

79. The evaluation notes the progress that UNICEF has made in building capacities among staff who implement education in emergencies programmes. This effort has however not kept pace with a growing education in emergencies portfolio and/or UNICEF humanitarian footprint, resulting in gaps in the technical expertise of staff around core elements of humanitarian programming in general, education in emergencies and the education humanitarian response. As a result, the evaluation recommends a systematic capacity-building approach organized around meeting the six relevant commitments of the Core Commitments for Children and the IASC- and Sphere-endorsed INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response,

Recovery as well as implementing the Education Strategy, 2019–2030, and that pays particular attention to providing the skills required to support Governments in their transition from humanitarian to development programming, including peacebuilding and resilience.

80. This recommendation further highlights the need for greater contextualization of capacity-building for UNICEF staff regarding the different types of emergencies (e.g., protracted, rapid-onset and slow-onset crises, public-health emergencies). The capacity-building package should be suitable for all categories of UNICEF staff and extended in a meaningful way to implementing partners and government counterparts.

81. The training should also go beyond technical skills to address the leveraging of the UNICEF comparative advantages in each context and strengthening collaboration at all levels of education in emergencies work.

**82. Recommendation 5: UNICEF should strengthen its engagement with the education sector (Government, private sector and civil society) by ensuring that the design and implementation of education in emergencies interventions capitalizes on national capacities, to strengthen the localization agenda and reinforce accountability to affected populations.**

83. UNICEF holds the responsibility and privilege of being the lead United Nations agency for education in emergencies, co-lead of the global education cluster and the designated provider of last resort in IASC-coordinated responses. In this context, UNICEF should further advance the commitments on accountability to affected populations, reinforce national and local systems, invest in local capacities, and pursue programmes in a manner that links humanitarian and development programming.

84. The evaluation concludes that, while most programmes had a community engagement component which included awareness-raising initiatives on several components of the education response, the voices and opinions of affected children and their families were not always taken into account in the design of interventions. Furthermore, UNICEF needs to invest more in the capacities of front-line responders, including community representatives, local NGOs and government officials at the subnational level.

85. The recommendation is for UNICEF to build on the progress noted by the evaluation by strengthening community consultations in the planning, design and implementation of programmes, facilitating systematic communication and dialogue by creating feedback loops to fulfil mutual accountabilities.

## VI. Draft decision

*The Executive Board*

*Takes note* of the evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations, its summary (E/ICEF/2020/19) and its management response (E/ICEF/2020/20).

## Annex

### **Evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations**

1. Due to space limitations, the evaluation report of UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations is not contained within the present annex.
  2. The report is available from the UNICEF Evaluation Office website: [https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_61171.html](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_61171.html)
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