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Report on the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and annual report for 2023 of the Executive Director of UNICEF

Summary

The present report is the second annual report of the UNICEF Executive Director on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, incorporating findings from the midterm review of the Strategic Plan.

It is accompanied by the proposed revised Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025; reports on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system;^a an annex on independent oversight functions/bodies in UNICEF; and a data companion and scorecard.

It should be considered with the report on the midterm review of the UNICEF integrated budget, 2022–2025 ([E/ICEF/2024/AB/L.5](#)).

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are presented in section V.

^a General Assembly resolution [71/243](#).

* [E/ICEF/2024/10](#).



I. Overview

1. The year 2023 marked the halfway point of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. The Plan was developed in the wake of the biggest global public health crisis in living memory – the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. There was strong impetus to revitalize multilateralism and invest in global public goods, while grassroots movements worldwide, often with children and young people at the forefront, demanded far-reaching change, including to dismantle systemic drivers of inequity and discrimination and address the climate crisis. Since then, conflicts have erupted at a concerning rate, while climate change continues unabated. UNICEF undertook the midterm review of its Strategic Plan while implementing in an increasingly violent, fragmented world.

2. Violence and conflict were identified as a critical risk during the development of the Strategic Plan in 2021, but the number and scale of crises have exceeded what would have been imaginable at that time. Over 450 million children – nearly 1 in 5 – live in or have fled a conflict zone. By the end of 2022, conflict and violence had forcibly displaced 43.3 million children, the most since World War II,¹ with additional displacements since then, including 4 million children forced from their homes by war in the Sudan.

3. The Secretary-General’s 2023 report on children and armed conflict recorded the highest-ever numbers of verified grave violations against children, with children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel and the State of Palestine, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Yemen most affected.² These grim statistics are expected to rise even higher in 2024, as parties to conflict increasingly target densely populated urban areas, hospitals, schools and refugee camps, in some cases preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid³ and attacking distribution points,⁴ as in Gaza, where three quarters of the population has been displaced⁵ and 70 per cent of those killed have been children and women.⁶

4. About 13,750 children died in Gaza between October 2023 and 26 March 2024,⁷ exceeding the combined total from all conflicts during 2019–2022.⁸ Children in Gaza are dying due to injuries sustained as a direct result of hostilities, in addition to dehydration, malnutrition and diseases.⁹ To avert an imminent famine¹⁰ and save children’s lives, UNICEF and its United Nations partners are calling for an

¹ UNICEF, *Progress on Children’s Well-Being*, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

² United Nations, *Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary-General*, A/77/895-S/2023/363, United Nations, New York, 5 June 2023, p.3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴ ‘Gaza: Aid missions constantly under threat, warns UN humanitarian chief’, UN News, 14 March 2024.

⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: reported impact – Day 169’.

⁶ UN-Women, *Gender Alert: The gendered impact of the crisis in Gaza*, UN-Women, New York, January 2024, p. 4.

⁷ ‘Gaza: ‘Double-digit’ number of children reported killed overnight’, UN News, 26 March 2024.

⁸ ‘Gaza: Number of children killed higher than from four years of world conflict’, UN News, 13 March 2024.

⁹ ‘Statement by Adele Khodr, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa’, 3 March 2024, available at <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/statement-adele-khodr-unicef-regional-director-middle-east-and-north-africa-0>; and ‘Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee: Civilians in Gaza in extreme peril while the world watches on’, 21 February 2024, available at <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/statement-principals-inter-agency-standing-committee-civilians-gaza-extreme-peril>.

¹⁰ ‘Imminent famine in northern Gaza is ‘entirely man-made disaster’: Guterres’, UN News, 18 March 2024.

immediate humanitarian ceasefire and safe, unimpeded access to deliver aid – and for all parties to the conflict to uphold international humanitarian law.

5. Today, climate change intertwines with armed violence, exacerbating complex, protracted crises, as in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Myanmar, South Sudan and the Sahel. Nearly half of the world’s children live in countries that are extremely vulnerable to climate change impacts – floods, storms, droughts, heatwaves and wildfires – which have displaced internally an estimated 43.1 million children.¹¹ Children in low-income countries and poor, marginalized communities – including the 300–500 million in rapidly growing urban slums – are at heightened risk of harm from these impacts.

6. The midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 found that these crises have had a negative impact on the work of UNICEF and have made it difficult to pursue long-term development in some countries. The compounding nature of recent crises – including COVID-19 and the economic crises it exacerbated – has impacted children worldwide, including through setbacks in reducing child poverty and learning loss.

7. Children, who make up one third of the global population, account for half of those living in extreme poverty, with at least 333 million subsisting on under \$2.15 per day – 30 million more than had been projected given pre-pandemic trends. Meanwhile, 1.43 billion children live under the \$6.85 per day poverty line defined for upper-middle-income countries.¹² Often linked to exclusion owing to disability, gender, race and migration status, poverty deprives children of sustained access to critical goods and services, with lifelong, intergenerational consequences.

8. The ongoing scale of deprivations reflects the world’s underinvestment in children. Worldwide, 1.4 billion children under the age of 15 years have no access to social protection, a proven solution to reduce child poverty.¹³ Limited fiscal space prevents many countries from fully funding essential services for children, and the number of countries in debt distress continues to rise.¹⁴ In the poorest countries, debt service exceeds social spending.¹⁵

9. The consequences of the policy choices that perpetuate this underinvestment, along with the toll of crises, are evident in the lack of progress towards the child-related Sustainable Development Goals, two thirds of which were off track as of 2023, with many missing the data to gauge progress. Sub-Saharan Africa – which by 2050 will be home to over one third of the world’s children – has the most off-track indicators.

10. UNICEF remains resolute in the face of these challenges, committed to showing that things can change for the better with political will, collaboration and investment at scale. During 2022–2023, the organization worked to strengthen its analytical capacity, do more with the resources it has, and ensure organizational alignment behind its ambitious Strategic Plan. By 2023, it had further improved its ability to reach children with life-saving services and support the delivery of basic

¹¹ UNICEF, *Children Displaced in a Changing Climate*, UNICEF, New York, 2023, p. 12.

¹² Salmeron-Gomez, Daylan, et al., ‘Global Trends in Child Monetary Poverty according to International Poverty Lines’, *Policy Research Working Paper 10525*, World Bank, 2023.

¹³ UNICEF, ‘1.4 billion children globally missing out on basic social protection, according to latest data’, Press release, 14 February 2024.

¹⁴ UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, *Global Outlook 2024: Prospects for children – Cooperation in a fragmented world*, UNICEF Innocenti, Florence, January 2024, p. 28.

¹⁵ UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, *Too Little, Too Late: An assessment of public spending on children by age in 84 countries*, UNICEF Innocenti, Florence, 2023, p. 7.

social services, as demonstrated by the significant progress in programme results outlined in this report and its annexes.

11. In 2023, UNICEF responded to 412 emergencies in 107 countries, including violence, conflicts, disasters and disease outbreaks. Interventions to address wasting reached over 70 per cent of children under the age of 5 years in 47 high-mortality countries, while UNICEF delivered 6.2 million doses of the world's first malaria vaccine to 7 African countries. In 38 countries, the Learning Passport provided uninterrupted education for refugee children, children in humanitarian settings and those in areas lacking connectivity. Nearly 11 million adolescent girls received prevention and care interventions to address child marriage.

12. Through UNICEF support, 5.4 million and 4.8 million people, respectively, accessed climate-resilient water systems and sanitation facilities. UNICEF-supported cash transfers reached over 106 million households, including in emergencies. UNICEF development and humanitarian programmes with partners reached 4.7 million children and adults with disabilities across more than 145 countries, while social and behaviour change (SBC) interventions in 107 countries addressed barriers faced by children with disabilities and their families. At the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, more commonly known as COP28, UNICEF and partners contributed to discussions leading to critical decisions positioning children and adaptive essential services as central to climate policies, action and finance.

13. The midterm review also found notable gains to celebrate, even amid crises. After COVID-related setbacks, immunization coverage shows signs of recovery across all regions, including in countries with high child and adolescent mortality. Through the efforts of partners including UNICEF, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the World Health Organization (WHO), the Expanded Programme on Immunization – which turns 50 in 2024 – increased coverage of life-saving vaccines against childhood diseases, from under 5 per cent in the early 1970s to 85 per cent today. As civil registration and vital statistics systems rebounded from the pandemic's impact, rates of birth registration – necessary for children to access essential services to secure their rights – reached 76 per cent in 2023, resulting in 13 million fewer unregistered children under 5 since 2021. The proportion of the population using at least basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) increased from 88 to 90 per cent, 75 to 78 per cent and 69 to 72 per cent, respectively, during 2020–2022.

14. While the review clearly indicates that progress is not happening fast enough, a UNICEF benchmarking exercise¹⁶ prepared for the 2023 SDG Summit shows that acceleration remains possible – and could change the development trajectory for – millions of children. More often than not, the solutions are already known – but they need the right support and scale, underpinned by investment in national systems. If countries double or triple their rates of progress to match each region's strongest performers, by 2030, 90 per cent of children could live in countries with at least 70 per cent of Sustainable Development Goal targets met.

15. Looking ahead, UNICEF will further refine its approaches in response to the evolving situation of children and the findings of its midterm review. It will support countries to fill Sustainable Development Goal data gaps, define ambitious yet realistic targets, and identify game-changing, context-specific strategies, including financing for investments in children, to deepen the focus on the root causes of development and accelerate progress. Capitalizing on its strengths at the front-line level, UNICEF will scale up successful initiatives, including to support and build

¹⁶ UNICEF, *Progress on Children's Well-Being*, p. 37.

the capacities of parents, community health workers, teachers, social workers and local governments. All sectors will more systematically integrate social and behavioural change science and community engagement programming, as key to addressing systemic barriers to change, and will focus on practical solutions to realize the rights of adolescent girls, including by promoting their leadership and agency.

16. Based on the midterm review analysis, UNICEF will refine its strategy on systems strengthening, to clarify how its programmes can better catalyse outcome-level change for sustainable development and address fragility. The review highlighted the need to forge more partnerships with key actors in contexts where UNICEF faces the greatest challenges, and to develop a coordinated, strategic approach to accelerating sustainable progress in Africa. UNICEF will expand work to strengthen sustainable, climate-resilient services, advocate for child-responsive climate action and financing, and empower children and youth to be environmental stewards. It will invest in its ability to respond to emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), to counter threats and exploit opportunities to accelerate progress for all children.

17. Having reviewed the risks and assumptions underpinning the current Strategic Plan, UNICEF is striving to future-proof its work beyond 2030. It will take a more systematic approach to risks affecting Strategic Plan implementation, and work with existing and new partners to leverage financing for systemic changes that drive better outcomes for children. It will increase its efforts to raise more flexible, predictable and long-term resources, including by advocating with other United Nations agencies for a new funding compact and sharpening its understanding of financing trends, to influence the global financial architecture. It will seize every opportunity – in intergovernmental forums, and with partners at every level – to advocate for children’s rights and mobilize collective action to uphold them.

18. As a result of the midterm review, it has become evident that the global crisis of child rights demands more than investment in programmes; it demands reflection and a global reprioritization on the rights and needs of children, through 2030 and beyond. The world spends billions to respond to crises, trying to control the damage from accumulated failures to uphold human rights, invest in children and tackle inequality and fragility. But the damage – unfolding today not only in conflict-affected countries, but also in poor, marginalized communities everywhere – reverberates throughout children’s lives, from generation to generation. Its impact reaches across borders and through social media, showing children around the world how policy choices made today are compromising their future.

19. Breaking this cycle of deprivation, discrimination and violence requires making different choices and recommitting to rights-based development – no longer tolerating the killing of children, addressing root causes of social, political and economic inequalities, investing in resilient national systems and fostering social cohesion, and – together – addressing the global challenges that threaten the survival and well-being of not only today’s children, but also tomorrow’s.

II. Programme performance

20. As its programmes and strategies gained operational momentum, UNICEF saw significant progress in programme results in 2023, especially those relating to the delivery of basic social services to meet children’s immediate needs. Progress remained slower in supporting systemic change, exemplified by WASH sectoral systems in Goal Area 4 and education sectoral systems and policy change in Goal Area 2. These are underfunded, overlooked areas requiring greater prioritization and advocacy with partners, as well as greater investment – with a need for not only

more funding, but more flexible, predictable and long-term funding to address structural barriers to change.

21. Changes that drive Sustainable Development Goal progress tend to unfold over a longer time frame and rely on collective efforts with partners, including donors, Governments, other United Nations agencies and civil society, so outcome- and impact-level indicators cannot always provide a timely picture of the effectiveness of UNICEF in driving transformational change. Still, some – including indicators of immunization and basic WASH coverage – showed encouraging improvements, and acceleration remains within reach.

A. Goal Area 1: Every child, including adolescents, survives and thrives, with access to nutritious diets, quality primary health care, nurturing practices and essential supplies

22. The global under-5 mortality rate has fallen by 62 per cent since 1990,¹⁷ and child stunting, by over 40 per cent.¹⁸ These are achievements to celebrate, but they mask significant challenges. Growing inequities, conflicts, climate change, economic crises and food insecurity – alongside practices like harmful marketing of ultra-processed foods and beverages – are slowing progress and eroding children’s rights to survive and thrive.

23. In 2022, the number of under-5 deaths dropped to 4.9 million. Four out of five occurred in sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia, which account for just three in five live births. Nearly 1 million adolescents died that year,¹⁹ many from self-harm, road injuries and, among girls, maternal mortality. About 200 million children under the age of 5 years suffer from stunting or wasting, while 136 million children aged 5–10 years suffer from overweight and obesity. Food poverty – the inability to access and consume a nutritious, diverse diet – affects 181 million children under the age of 5 years in its most severe form, and remains the main driver of child malnutrition, increasing risks of mortality, poor growth and suboptimal development.

24. UNICEF worked on Goal Area 1 in 158 countries in 2023, with a total expense of \$3.63 billion, including \$2.47 billion for humanitarian action. On average, it reached or came close to reaching its 2023 output-level milestones for seven of eight result areas.

25. To address the threats to children’s survival and development and reach those most at risk, UNICEF-supported health interventions centred around a continuum of care across the life cycle and through primary health-care service delivery. Maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health programmes progressed well. Prioritizing the 37 highest-burden countries, UNICEF produced solid results to help fast-track the end of HIV/AIDS among children, adolescents and pregnant women. The latest immunization coverage estimates highlight recovery, consistent with prioritized efforts to reach zero-dose children.

¹⁷ United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, *Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2023 – Estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation*, UNICEF, New York, 2024, p. 11.

¹⁸ UNICEF, WHO and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, *Levels and Trends in Child Malnutrition: UNICEF/WHO/World Bank Group joint child malnutrition estimates – Key findings of the 2023 edition*, UNICEF and WHO, New York, 2023.

¹⁹ United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, *Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2023*, pp. 3–4, 32.

26. UNICEF led global action to prevent food poverty and reduce the triple burden of malnutrition – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight. Efforts to expand access to wasting prevention, early detection and treatment reached over 70 per cent of children under age 5 in 47 high-mortality countries. The organization drew attention to the nutrition needs of crisis-affected children and mobilized global and domestic resources, including through the Child Nutrition Fund, an innovative financing mechanism to strengthen global and national governance to address child wasting.

27. In 2023 alone, UNICEF supported 34.1 million live births in health facilities across 86 countries – for a total of 119.3 million since 2021, exceeding the cumulative 2023 milestone of 103 million. Implementation of integrated management of neonatal and childhood illnesses reached 66.4 million children, and 1.1 million health workers received the skills and support for delivering essential maternal, newborn and child health services.

28. UNICEF supported countries to implement policy changes to strengthen primary health care. It facilitated 30 costed plans, as a basis for countries to advocate for health reform and investment, and 40 localized implementation research studies, with 70 per cent of findings used to change practice to reach children more efficiently and effectively. At the World Health Summit, UNICEF and partners launched the Community Health Delivery Partnership to support community health workers, the backbone of primary health care systems. With WHO, UNICEF led the global agenda for quality of care for maternal and newborn health; 70 of 106 countries developed national plans.

29. UNICEF supported adolescents' access to health programmes, including for sexual and reproductive health, using health, school and digital platforms in 41 countries, up from 27 in 2021. Over 5.4 million adolescents accessed UNICEF-supported health services.

30. UNICEF supported the integration of HIV diagnostic platforms into primary health care in 37 countries, policies for the dual elimination of HIV and syphilis in 36, and multisectoral HIV prevention interventions for young people, focusing on adolescent girls, in 32. Its peer and community models for adolescents living with HIV contributed to improved outcomes, including in HIV, sexual and reproductive health and mental health.

31. UNICEF strengthened its partnership with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, focusing on zero-dose children and recovery from COVID-19-related immunization reversals. It mobilized political commitment and resources with partners for the Big Catch-up initiative, and supported 20 focus countries to plan, implement and monitor “catch-up” activities. Its *State of the World's Children 2023: For every child, vaccination* report led six heads of State and 43 donors and partners to publicly commit to reprioritize childhood immunization.

32. With UNICEF support, 132.9 million children were vaccinated against measles, including 32.4 million in emergencies, and over 400 million were vaccinated against polio. As the largest vaccine buyer globally, UNICEF delivered 2.79 billion doses to 105 countries, including over 1.4 billion doses of polio vaccines to 85 countries. It supplied one in four countries worldwide with the human papillomavirus vaccine and supported seven to introduce it in national vaccination campaigns. To build demand for immunization, UNICEF supported capacity-building on behavioural insights in 11 countries, and gender-sensitive approaches to reach zero-dose children in 9; worked with multi-faith organizations to design vaccine demand training; and trained over 50,000 health workers on SBC approaches for vaccine acceptance.

33. Two key COVID-19 vaccine partnerships in which UNICEF played leading roles ended in 2023. The COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery Partnership contributed to ninefold coverage increases in 34 countries. COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility delivered 2 billion doses to 146 countries since 2021, in the largest-ever vaccine roll-out. UNICEF responded to at least one public health emergency in 98 countries. It established a Global Cholera Emergency Cell to coordinate its and partners' responses to the global resurgence of cholera, and provided support to countries.

34. Just 55 per cent of children in 78 countries received early stimulation and responsive care from their parents and caregivers, pointing to the need for enhanced parenting support to promote holistic early childhood development. UNICEF facilitated the development of comprehensive services and enabling policies, resulting in 82 countries integrating early childhood development into primary health care.

35. In 2023, UNICEF-supported policies and programmes for stunting prevention reached 434.4 million children under the age of 5 years and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. Policies, programmes and services for prevention, early detection and treatment of wasting reached 210.2 million children, including 9.3 million who received life-saving therapeutic treatment for severe wasting.

36. UNICEF reached 122.8 million school-age children and adolescents (including 69.4 million girls) through its support for gender-responsive policies, programmes and services to prevent anaemia and overweight. After school-based anaemia prevention programmes in Afghanistan were terminated owing to the closure of girls' secondary schools in 2021, UNICEF expanded its community-based iron and folic acid supplementation programme, mobilizing over 30,000 skilled community workers, half of them women; in 2023, the programme reached over 1.5 million adolescent girls.

37. Efforts on nutrition in early childhood led to an increase in the global rates of exclusive breastfeeding, from 44.1 per cent at baseline to 48.8 per cent. UNICEF supported countries to address dietary deprivation, contributing to more children receiving a nutritious, diverse diet, from 28.9 per cent at baseline to 34.3 per cent.

38. UNICEF expanded its support to integrate early detection and treatment of wasting into routine services, from 67 countries at baseline to 73. Through the No Time to Waste Acceleration Plan 2022–2023, UNICEF reached 6 million children with severe wasting in 15 acutely affected countries, exceeding the targeted 4.5 million, and renewed its partnership with the World Food Programme to optimize prevention and treatment protocols.

39. Based on analysis of the midterm review, UNICEF will accelerate health and nutrition progress by expanding community-level primary health care, a critical strategy to address health inequities, especially in fragile and humanitarian settings. Through the Community Health Delivery Partnership, UNICEF will advocate for policy shifts to support community health workers by ensuring adequate remuneration and training, and strengthening referral care, supply chains and data; it will reinforce existing partnerships, including with WHO, the World Bank and the Global Financing Facility, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the United States Agency for International Development and the Global Fund, and forge new ones, including with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, foundations and the private sector. Work through the HealthConnekt initiative will enhance the digitalization of primary health care and connect community health workers.

40. Work to build momentum for the Big Catch-up initiative will focus on new vaccines and integration into primary health care through targeted approaches. To fast-track the end of AIDS, UNICEF will continue to focus on adolescents, especially girls, who are disproportionately at risk of HIV, and support increased access to quality sexual and reproductive health and rights services. UNICEF will prioritize programming to protect children's health and well-being from climate change impacts, leveraging its multisectoral approach and expertise in delivering results through primary health care, and partnering with global health institutions, WHO and key donors.

41. UNICEF will continue addressing multiple determinants of optimal early childhood development and integrate mental health for caregivers into existing services. It will advocate to transform food, nutrition and protection systems to ensure young children's access to nutritious, diverse diets. The First Foods initiative, launched with public and private sector actors, will support local production of nutrient-rich foods and supplements for young children in Africa. To mobilize resources for child nutrition, UNICEF will continue work through the Child Nutrition Fund, including to leverage climate financing, and will roll out the Maternal Nutrition Acceleration Plan.

B. Goal Area 2: Every child, including adolescents, learns and acquires skills for the future

42. Global progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 remains far off track. Despite significant increases in access to education, socioeconomic and regional disparities in participation and attainment persist. Between 2015 and 2021, the out-of-school population fell by 9 million worldwide, but increased by 12 million in sub-Saharan Africa, primarily from lack of progress at the secondary level.²⁰ In 2022, the global number increased by 6 million, reaching 250 million owing to stagnation worldwide, along with Afghanistan's exclusion of girls and young women.²¹

43. Two thirds of 10-year-olds cannot read a simple story or do basic math²² – a significant increase since before COVID-19, as school closures and difficulties in accessing alternative education modalities exacerbated learning poverty. Many children and young people, especially among the most marginalized, enter adulthood without the full range of skills to navigate personal, social and economic challenges. Only half of children and young people surveyed by UNICEF and Gallup in 55 countries understand what climate change is. Although expanding digital learning is key to offering alternative education pathways, the digital divide is growing.

44. In 2023, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 2 in 144 countries, spending an estimated \$1.74 billion, the highest ever recorded, including an estimated \$1.08 billion in humanitarian settings, working on service delivery and systems strengthening on access to education, learning quality, skills and youth engagement. Significant progress was observed, and UNICEF reached its 2023 output-level milestones for both result areas.

²⁰ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'New estimation confirms out-of-school population is growing in sub-Saharan Africa', *Factsheet 62/Policy Paper 48*, September 2022, p. 4.

²¹ UNESCO, 'SDG 4 mid-term progress review: Progress since 2015 has been far too slow', UNESCO, 2023.

²² World Bank, *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 update*, World Bank, 2022, p. 8.

45. UNICEF support enabled 37.7 million children and adolescents (51 per cent girls) to access education, including 3.1 million children on the move and 17.7 million in emergencies. Learning materials were distributed to 31.2 million children (49 per cent girls), including 5.4 million in emergencies.

46. UNICEF launched the Five Million Futures framework, advocating to mobilize support for over 50 countries to scale up evidence-based interventions around early learning, parenting support and school readiness. UNICEF bolstered systems-strengthening approaches, including alternative learning pathways to prepare adolescents for re-enrolment or work, strengthening curricula to integrate a full range of skills, and supporting school-to-work transition and community-based skills development programmes. Thirty-five per cent of countries institutionalized holistic skills development, up from 21 per cent in 2021.

47. In 2023, the Learning Passport – the UNICEF flagship digital learning programme, providing uninterrupted education for refugees and children in conflict- and disaster-affected areas – launched in seven new countries, reaching 38 total, with 6.02 million registered users and an offline solution for schools with limited to no connectivity. A pilot programme in Guinea and Mexico demonstrated improvements in student performance and engagement. UNICEF partnered with government to integrate Ukraine’s Learning Passport into Poland’s national digital learning platform, to train teachers serving Ukrainian refugees to manage stress, facilitate cross-cultural communication and work with children affected by war trauma.

48. In Bhutan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Uzbekistan, UNICEF piloted Eduten, an AI-powered, gamified math learning platform. Students in Bhutan who used it for 10 weeks improved mathematics skills by over 40 per cent compared to peers without access.

49. UNICEF programmes engaged 21.9 million adolescents and young people (including 1 million in humanitarian contexts, and 11.3 million girls) in civic initiatives across 92 countries, up by 5.8 million from 2022. Children and young people were engaged in action and advocacy to address climate change or environmental degradation in 78 countries, 28 of which worked to mainstream climate change in teacher training and learning opportunities. UNICEF identified entry points to accelerate climate action in schools through learning materials, teacher training, curricular reform and school safety strategies.

50. With UNICEF support, 65 per cent of countries implemented evidence-based education sector plans or strategies addressing inequities and mainstreaming Sustainable Development Goal indicators, up from 48 per cent in 2021. Twenty Governments endorsed the commitments to action following the 2022 Transforming Education Summit, bringing the total to 30.

51. Fifty-seven per cent of countries reported inclusive and gender-equitable systems for access, up from 46 per cent in 2021. Strategies to accelerate gender-transformative education included bilingual education, integrating violence prevention in teacher education, implementing school packages of inclusive and gender-responsive services, scaling tested interventions and developing multisectoral service delivery approaches. UNICEF advanced inclusive education for learners with disabilities through advocacy and targeted interventions. In 2023, 81 Ministry of Education personnel from Nigeria and Somalia participated in a joint course on foundations in disability-inclusive education sector planning offered by UNICEF and the International Institute for Educational Planning of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

52. Based on midterm review findings, UNICEF will focus on educational transitions at ages 5, 10 and 18 years to address the compounding skills gap, so that all children meet developmental milestones, are ready to start school, acquire foundational skills and enter adulthood prepared for life and work. UNICEF will support Governments to provide at least one year of quality, inclusive early childhood education; make scale-up models, strategies and technical resources for foundational learning globally accessible; and work to ensure that adolescents develop essential skills for navigating life successfully, including through school-to-work pathways into green jobs.

53. Four cross-cutting areas – education in emergencies; digital transformation; gender, equity and inclusion; and climate education – will reinforce this approach. UNICEF will prioritize enhancing preparedness, emphasizing continuity of education in emergencies; monitor country progress towards fulfilling Transforming Education Summit commitments; and advocate and disseminate best practices to make digital learning universally accessible.

54. To instigate transformative change, UNICEF will support countries to remedy the serious data gaps relating to Sustainable Development Goal 4, including by scaling up large-scale household and school-based learning assessments, following existing global standards, and population-based measures of early childhood development. UNICEF will develop measures, analytics and interventions to tackle systemic educational inequalities and barriers, including by scaling up and advocating for learning pathways for out-of-school children. It will continue monitoring and advocating for the equity of education spending, supporting Governments to allocate sufficient resources for poor and marginalized children. UNICEF will support adolescents and young people as change-makers, including on climate action, partnering with youth-led organizations.

C. Goal Area 3: Every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices

55. In 2023, escalating armed conflicts, climate change and unprecedented levels of forced displacement posed mounting threats to children. Economic crises and rising poverty, a global push-back on gender equality and child rights, and the politicization of migration hampered efforts to protect them.

56. The child protection-related Sustainable Development Goals have seen modest, uneven progress. Prevalence of child marriage declined in recent decades – but at current rates, it will take 300 years to eliminate the practice, which often surges during crises, as in Ethiopia following devastating drought in 2023. Keeping adolescent girls in school, reducing poverty and providing employment and economic development opportunities have been shown to delay marriage and improve girls’ health, self-efficacy and agency – but inadequate financing to scale up proven interventions hampers progress, as do weak laws and enforcement.

57. While the rate of children in detention dropped slightly, from 29 per 100,000 at baseline to 27, rising authoritarianism, “tough on crime” discourse and national security- and conflict-related detentions are keeping progress slow. Despite small declines, social acceptance of physical punishment of children and intimate partner violence remains widespread, hindering progress towards the elimination of violence against children and women.

58. In 2023, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 3 in 150 countries, with a total expenditure of \$0.98 billion, including \$0.63 billion for humanitarian action. Significant progress was made, although the severe erosion of protective systems by disasters and conflicts impeded the achievement of some results. At the output level,

on average, UNICEF achieved or came close to achieving its 2023 output-level milestones for all three result areas.

59. Parenting programmes reached 11.8 million parents and caregivers, and 34.7 million children, adolescents, parents and caregivers accessed mental health and psychosocial support services, both results exceeding their milestones. In Cambodia, the Positive Parenting Programme boosted the skills of 14,809 parents and caregivers (10,197 women, 20 with disabilities), benefiting about 20,797 children (10,658 girls, 30 children with disabilities). Fifty-six countries tracked delivery and referral information related to mental health and psychosocial support services for children, up from 23 in 2021.

60. Through gender-transformative and SBC approaches, programmes addressing female genital mutilation reached over 603,000 girls and women in 20 countries. UNICEF-supported programmes offered child marriage prevention and care interventions to 11 million adolescent girls and engaged 32.4 million people in community dialogues to challenge discriminatory norms. The United Nations Population Fund-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage learned that success hinges on a broader focus on gender equality and adolescent girls' empowerment, necessitating work across multiple fronts. Our efforts are having an impact. For example, in Zambia – one of nine countries in which UNICEF efforts supported policy changes restricting child marriages – the Global Programme facilitated advocacy and technical support resulting in parliament passing the Marriage (Amendment) Act of 2023, setting the marriageable age at 18 years, without exception, including for customary marriages.

61. UNICEF worked with other United Nations agencies and scaled up efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children and women; in 2023, 4.5 million children who experienced violence accessed health, social work, justice or law enforcement services. The United Nations Statistical Commission adopted the International Classification of Violence against Children, developed under UNICEF stewardship, enabling the collection of globally comparable data to inform action.

62. Inclusive and effective national child protection systems require investments in the social service workforce and justice for children. In 2023, 46 countries had quality assurance for social service work, and 34 had specialized justice for children systems, exceeding the 2023 milestones of 43 and 30, respectively. Forty-eight per cent of children in conflict with the law were diverted or subjected to non-custodial measures, up from 40 per cent in 2022. Sixty-three countries had interoperable civil registration and health systems to achieve universal birth registration, up from 59 in 2022.

63. Fifty-nine per cent of children without parental care were placed in family-based instead of residential care in 2023, up from 27 per cent in 2021. In Ukraine, 68 per cent of children in alternative care (of which 12.6 per cent were children with disabilities) were in family-based care. UNICEF partnered with the Government to launch the Better Care programme, linking care to humanitarian response and enhancing focus on children with disabilities and other vulnerabilities.

64. UNICEF supported over 26 million people in humanitarian settings with child protection services, and provided alternative care or reunification to over 253,000 children who had lost or been separated from their families due to conflict or displacement. Work on gender-based violence in emergencies expanded, reaching 23 million people through response, prevention and risk mitigation programmes in 77 countries. In Ethiopia, for example, UNICEF scaled up programmes on gender-based violence in emergencies, reaching nearly 9.5 million people.

65. UNICEF reached over 580,000 migrant and displaced children across 42 countries with services across sectors and worked to protect and include them in national systems. It managed the cross-sectoral, five-agency Prospects partnership to support the inclusion of forcibly displaced children and host communities in eight countries.

66. Building on midterm review findings, UNICEF will focus on making child protection systems more effective by tracking their maturity, identifying approaches for sustainable progress and prioritizing inclusion and resilience, including through climate adaptability, displacement-responsive services and anticipatory planning. UNICEF will work across sectors to expand interoperability for birth registration, focusing on high-burden countries and promoting digitalization to include identity management in civil registration and vital statistics systems.

67. UNICEF will address the interdependence of violence against girls, boys and women, and will expand work on online violence, strengthen inter-agency and external partnerships, and build national statistical offices' capacities on indicators based on the International Classification of Violence against Children. It will support adolescent girls by accelerating prevention interventions and implementing programmes towards the elimination of harmful practices in over 29 countries. Migration and displacement programming will prioritize field engagement, while maintaining successful policy and advocacy efforts on global governance.

D. Goal Area 4: Every child, including adolescents, has access to safe and equitable WASH services and supplies, and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment

68. The world has expanded access to safely managed WASH services – accessible on premises, available when needed and free from contamination – but no region is on track to achieve universal access by 2030. As the WASH sector still struggles to secure adequate levels and quality of funding, 2.2 billion people lack safely managed drinking water, 3.4 billion lack safely managed sanitation, and 2 billion lack basic handwashing facilities. For children under the age of 5 years, the total WASH-attributable disease burden remains extremely high, representing 7.6 per cent of all deaths as of 2019.²³ Inadequate WASH services disproportionately impact girls and women through increased safety risks, heavier household and care work burdens, and disruptions to education and work during menstruation.

69. The impacts of conflicts, economic crises and climate-related disasters still hamper progress towards the WASH-related Sustainable Development Goals and endanger the full range of children's rights. In 2023, the hottest year recorded,²⁴ nearly half of children faced significant risks due to climate hazards. Meanwhile, 739 million children face high to extremely high water scarcity, and 436 million live in areas prone to severe water vulnerability.²⁵

70. Children's unique susceptibility to climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss demands urgent action – but international climate finance has fallen short, with just 2.4 per cent of major climate funds dedicated to child-centric

²³ WHO, *Burden of Disease Attributable to Unsafe Drinking-Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2019 update – Executive Summary*, WHO, Geneva, 2023, p. 1.

²⁴ World Meteorological Organization (WMO), *State of the Global Climate 2023*, WMO, Geneva, 2024.

²⁵ UNICEF, *The Climate-Changed Child: A children's climate risk index supplement*, UNICEF, New York, November 2023.

initiatives,²⁶ and the widening gap in adaptation finance estimated at between \$194 and \$366 billion yearly.²⁷ Children's involvement in climate policy formulation is negligible, with Nationally Determined Contributions barely reflecting their concerns.

71. In 2023, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 4 in over 158 countries, spending \$1.25 billion, including \$0.88 billion for humanitarian response. On average, it reached or came close to reaching its 2023 output-level milestones for one of three result areas.

72. UNICEF made great progress in supporting safe WASH services. In 2023, 21.5 million people (including 1.2 million people with disabilities) gained access to at least basic sanitation; 35.9 million (including 1.6 million with disabilities), to safe water available when needed; and 24.2 million (including 1.1 million with disabilities), to basic hygiene. UNICEF support in emergencies reached over 42 million people with WASH services, including in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, Türkiye and Ukraine.

73. UNICEF supported over 7,500 schools and 3,000 health-care facilities to provide basic WASH services, and supported programmes to address menstrual health and hygiene for 7.9 million women and adolescent girls. The Sanitation Game Plan was rolled out in seven countries. UNICEF strengthened government capacity for Citywide Inclusive Sanitation, promoting innovative solutions to serve populations in urban settings.

74. UNICEF endeavoured to enhance WASH sector systems, facing challenges linked to resource and capacity constraints in leveraging additional finance (achieved in 21 countries) and WASH finance strategies (implemented in 11 countries). Strengthening systems requires greater prioritization, advocacy and increased flexible funding to drive progress.

75. UNICEF introduced its Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan, 2023–2030, to safeguard children's rights to a clean, healthy and safe environment. It expanded its work on sustainability, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and disaster risk mitigation to protect children, nurture future environmental stewards and minimize its ecological footprint.

76. The Children's Climate Risk Index-Disaster Risk Model, developed with partners, created risk maps using geospatial data combining hazard exposure and child vulnerability. UNICEF piloted parametric cyclone insurance in Bangladesh, the Comoros, Fiji, Haiti, Madagascar, Mozambique, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu through the Today & Tomorrow Initiative, the world's first child-focused climate risk financing solution, with the premium cost fully funded via the World Bank Global Risk Financing Facility.

77. In 2023, UNICEF support resulted in 5.4 million people accessing climate-resilient water systems and 4.8 million accessing climate-resilient sanitation facilities. Sixty-eight countries adopted child-focused climate resilience programmes. UNICEF expanded support for integrating child-sensitive approaches into government disaster preparedness frameworks, from 50 countries in 2021 to 85 in 2023, though local-level progress was slower.

²⁶ Children's Environmental Rights Initiative, *Falling Short: Addressing the climate finance gap for children*, 2023, p. 5.

²⁷ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Adaptation Gap Report 2023: Underfinanced. Underprepared*, UNEP, Nairobi, 2023.

78. At COP28, UNICEF, together with its child rights partners, highlighted the disproportionate effects of climate change on children, securing critical COP decisions positioning children and adaptive essential services as central to climate policies, action and finance. Parties mandated an expert dialogue on the impacts of climate change on children and relevant policy solutions, scheduled for June 2024 – the first-ever such focus under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process.

79. Responding to midterm review findings, UNICEF will use WASH as an accelerator of its Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan, develop an integrated approach on WASH in health-care facilities, and invest in upskilling staff on resilience. To strengthen WASH systems, UNICEF will continue to support countries to develop financial strategies and leverage financing, including through expanded partnerships with businesses and international financial institutions. It will build evidence on climate-resilient sanitation and develop a WASH sector resilience index. Advocacy priorities include incorporating climate-resilient sanitation into the Green Climate Fund, tracking WASH in the global goal on adaptation, and implementing environmental and social safeguards.

80. To support Governments to engage in larger-scale child-centred programming and advocacy on climate and sustainability, UNICEF will make sustainability and climate action a priority across programming, operations and advocacy in 50 countries by 2025, including through sustainable, resilient social services and budgeting; advocacy; empowerment and skill-building among children and youth; internal greening and environmental and social safeguards. UNICEF will work to strengthen monitoring systems to track how climate action translates into tangible results for children.

E. Goal Area 5: Every child, including adolescents, has access to inclusive social protection and lives free from poverty

81. The first trend data on extreme poverty among children, released by UNICEF and the World Bank in 2023, show a 13 per cent decrease since 2013 – but reflect three lost years of progress owing to COVID-19’s economic impact.²⁸ Economic crises, climate change and conflicts are eroding children’s right to live free from poverty, while compounding fiscal pressures, including from debt service, are preventing countries from fully financing social services to alleviate deprivations.

82. UNICEF has scaled up high-impact solutions to address child poverty, influencing national and international policies and financing priorities; enhancing inclusion, preparedness and risk-informed programming in social protection systems, as critical to supporting children and families before, during and after crises; and providing support in fragile and humanitarian contexts. In 2023, it worked on Goal Area 5 across 157 countries, spending \$0.85 billion, including \$0.41 billion for humanitarian action. In the aggregate, 2023 output-level milestones were achieved for both result areas.

83. UNICEF-led evidence or advocacy on child poverty translated into change in 39 countries in 2023, up from 32 in 2021. Monetary and multidimensional poverty were each measured by 72 countries, as pandemic-related delays in household survey implementation, slowing momentum to collect Sustainable Development Goal data, and political sensitivities dampened progress.

²⁸ Salmeron-Gomez, Daylan, et al., ‘Global Trends in Child Monetary Poverty according to International Poverty Lines’.

84. Seventy-nine countries had moderately strong or strong social protection systems in 2023, up from 56 in 2021, while 22 had strong systems that can effectively and rapidly respond to humanitarian crises, compared with 17 in 2021. Many countries' social protection systems became more inclusive. With UNICEF support, often with United Nations partners, 46 countries had social protection programmes that were gender-responsive or led to transformative gender equality results, up from 22 in 2021; 67 had disability-inclusive social protection programmes, up from 55; and 37 supported care work through family-friendly policies, up from 13.

85. Over 106 million households had access to UNICEF-supported cash transfer programmes in 2023, while UNICEF reached 2.9 million families in 49 countries with humanitarian cash transfers. Twenty-one countries used the Humanitarian cash Operations and Programme Ecosystem (HOPE), a UNICEF data management solution to ensure risk-informed delivery of humanitarian cash transfers.

86. UNICEF provided technical support during emergencies, including in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Mali, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Ukraine. In the State of Palestine, UNICEF delivered cash assistance to the most vulnerable families with children within six days of the escalation, reaching every fourth person in Gaza (545,073 people, 81,655 families, 262,016 children) in the first round, including through a nutrition-sensitive cash payment to 28,840 pregnant and breastfeeding women, and a disability top-up payment to 5,079 children.

87. UNICEF supported the equitable use of budgets, revenue, tax systems, debt frameworks and public finance management across sectors. Eighty-four countries, up from 65 in 2021, strengthened public finance systems and advanced the sufficiency, effectiveness, transparency and equity of social sector budgets across multiple sectors. Engagement with international development partners and the private sector led to 71 countries mobilizing resources for social services, up from 55 in 2021.

88. Responding to midterm review findings, UNICEF will leverage strategic collaboration among Governments, United Nations agencies, international financial institutions, resource partners and civil society to address climate risks as a major driver of child poverty; advocate that ending child poverty is a policy choice; convene multisectoral expertise to advance family-friendly policies and the care agenda; and scale up efforts to improve the coverage, inclusiveness and shock-responsiveness of social protection systems. To support the public finance systems, crisis preparedness and response capacity of low- and middle-income countries, UNICEF will invest in preparedness and contingency plans and work to secure equitable access to global insurance and risk finance markets. With 65 per cent of Sustainable Development Goal targets linked to subnational and local government work,²⁹ UNICEF will support local governments to broker partnerships with international financial institutions/development finance institutions, philanthropic organizations and sustainable investors, while expanding advocacy and programming for children in urban settings with UN-Habitat, WHO, the World Bank and Slum Dwellers International.

²⁹ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/breaking-through/>.

III. Strengthening organizational performance

89. Throughout 2022 and 2023, and in response to the evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the UNICEF positioning to achieve the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, UNICEF maximized efforts to operationalize its change strategies and invest in its organizational performance enablers. The change strategies and enablers made invaluable contributions to the achievements and improved performance outlined above. UNICEF work across change strategies and enablers is presented in further detail in the present report's annexes. The following paragraphs exemplify some of the more critical results cutting across Goal Areas.

Upholding children's rights

90. In a context of grave threat to children's rights, UNICEF brought child rights violations to the attention of United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, United Nations Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review. The majority of country offices supported country-level follow-up to the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2023, including by incorporating follow-up actions in respective country programmes and advocacy with relevant duty bearers.

91. UNICEF amplified global and national child rights advocacy through engagement with the Human Rights Council, the Third Committee of the General Assembly and other United Nations-wide forums, while strengthening its engagement with broad-based national human rights institutions and dedicated independent institutions with a child rights mandate. In 2023, 59 per cent of country offices reported engagement with independent human rights institutions with a child rights mandate, compared with 45 per cent in 2021.

Engaging children, adolescents and young people

92. UNICEF engaged 27.9 million children, adolescents and youth in advocacy, 1.4 million in communication and 36.6 million in online platforms, primarily U-Report, which registered 6 million new members in 2023.

93. UNICEF supported national system-building for adolescent and youth participation in 55 countries, doubling its 2021 results. Adolescents were consulted on country programme milestones in 89 countries, including through in-depth consultations and at-scale surveys, typically using U-Report. Over 12 million young volunteers took action to accelerate results across sectors, building transferable skills in the process.

Addressing discrimination, norms and practices

94. UNICEF mainstreamed community engagement and SBC in programming across 129 country offices, 67 per cent of which reached organizational benchmarks for related standards, exceeding the 2023 milestone. UNICEF implemented sector-specific SBC strategies in 104 countries, investing in human-centred design, applied social and behavioural science, social listening and capacity-building with Governments and other partners. To understand the cognitive, social and structural drivers of practices and service uptake, UNICEF generated social and behavioural data in 101 countries through community and population surveys, anthropological studies, behavioural studies and qualitative formative research.

95. SBC interventions in 107 countries addressed barriers faced by children with disabilities and their families. Thirty-seven per cent of UNICEF country offices met organizational benchmarks for systematically assessing and addressing multifaceted drivers of discrimination and stigmatization, including on account of disabilities, sociocultural background and migration status.

96. UNICEF supported child rights policies and programmes promoting gender equality in 110 countries in 2023, compared with 85 in 2021. Seventy-eight countries deployed at-scale programmes to address gender-discriminatory roles and practices, with the biggest expansion in Europe and Central Asia. Over half of country offices reported gender-transformative results, with dedicated outputs addressing harmful gender norms and fundamental power and resource imbalances between women and men. The annual report on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025 provides more details on UNICEF gender work.

Strengthening accountability

97. UNICEF dedicated expertise in accountability to affected populations and supported 47 countries with technical advice, strategy development and integrating such efforts with protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, addressing previously identified issues. Half of country offices met organizational benchmarks on accountability to affected populations, compared to 23 per cent in 2021. In Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh, UNICEF strengthened complaints and feedback mechanisms, improving accessibility for people with disabilities and strengthening local capacity for inclusive accountability.

98. By the end of 2023, 56 per cent of country offices implemented holistic systems to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, up from 41 per cent in 2021. With more accessible reporting channels – serving 70.3 million children and adults in 118 countries, compared with 49.2 million in 2022 – the number of reports of sexual exploitation and abuse increased by 53 per cent in 2023. The annual update on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse offers further details on UNICEF work in this area, including on challenges and underlying issues.

99. UNICEF developed policies and standards on environmental and social safeguards. Responding to findings of a baseline assessment of its implementation, which identified country offices as key drivers of implementation, UNICEF will leverage country-level experience and resources to facilitate the phased organization-wide roll-out, and will build capacities and continue raising staff awareness.

Supporting local partners and building resilience

100. In 2023, UNICEF transferred \$1.07 billion from humanitarian funding to civil society partners (43 per cent to local partners, exceeding the Grand Bargain target of 25 per cent). Through the humanitarian clusters, UNICEF spearheaded initiatives to make humanitarian coordination more accessible for local women's organizations, including in north-east Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, while advocating for direct funding to local actors.

101. UNICEF implemented its Procedure on Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus and increased efforts on knowledge management and documenting good practices. Sixty-one per cent of country offices met organizational benchmarks on implementing risk-informed programming, demonstrating that country-level workplans were informed by recent child-sensitive multi-hazard risk analyses. Conflict analysis informed conflict-sensitive programming in 24 per cent of country offices, and programmes contributing to social cohesion and peace in 30 per cent.

102. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF worked with the government of Tanganyika Province, United Nations agencies, international and local civil society partners and representatives of the indigenous community to address the root causes of inter-ethnic violence and restore intercommunal trust, facilitating the return of 130,000 displaced people and offering multisectoral programming, including vocational training for former child soldiers, improved access to safe water and strengthened local governance. Lessons learned and good practices will inform UNICEF work in the country's other provinces and elsewhere.

Harnessing innovation

103. To date, 46 at-scale innovative solutions in 90 countries have reached over 20 million people and catalysed over \$40 million in financing. The public sector has been a source of foundational investment in this work, including by hosting the Giga Technology Centre and innovation hubs for Sustainable WASH, Innovative Finance and Learning Innovation, which positioned UNICEF to convene expertise and catalyse impact.

104. UNICEF initiated a research and foresight agenda on AI, building on its 2021 policy guidance, and leveraged AI, blockchain and other frontier technologies to create global public goods, solve challenges facing the most marginalized children and increase diversity in the technology sector. Since 2014, the Venture Fund has made \$16.8 million in equity-free investments in 147 open technology solutions sourced from start-ups (43 per cent female-founded or -led, 65 per cent revenue-generating) and UNICEF offices in 86 countries, reaching over 41 million children.

Partnering with business

105. UNICEF mobilized core business assets to support its programming and influenced over 5,000 businesses, including to adopt family-friendly workplace practices, improve online safety policies, address gender stereotyping in marketing and assess child rights impact. Ninety-seven country offices mobilized non-financial business resources at scale, including through advocacy support, leveraging technical expertise and data, and sharing information and knowledge on child rights. UNICEF successfully advocated for the inclusion of child rights disclosure standards in the European Sustainability Reporting Standards, and for improved laws, policies and industry standards addressing businesses' impact on children's rights in 33 countries.

106. Advocacy, capacity building, screening and identification of needs, and systems strengthening in 24 countries boosted assistive technology provisioning for children and adults with disabilities. UNICEF reached over 400,000 children with assistive products and inclusive supplies, addressing vision, mobility, hearing, incontinence and digital assistive technology for inclusive education, among other needs.

107. In total, UNICEF procured \$5.24 billion in goods and services, down 29 per cent from 2022, but up 37 per cent from pre-COVID-19 figures. It delivered over \$893.1 million worth of emergency supplies, a record amount, to 81 countries.

Mobilizing resources

108. Despite a challenging fundraising climate, UNICEF income reached \$8.92 billion in 2023, contributing to a projected 37 per cent increase in total income for the period 2022–2025. Core resources for results (regular resources)

amounted to \$1.57 billion, with 47 per cent coming from the private sector, 34 per cent from the public sector and 19 per cent from other income.³⁰ Voluntary contributions to core funding amounted to \$1.27 billion, with over half coming from private sector partners. Flexible thematic contributions, however, plummeted from \$1.201 billion in 2022 to \$475 million in 2023, due largely to decreases in flexible humanitarian funding from the private sector. Digital transformation enabled UNICEF to surpass 2022 and 2023 resource mobilization targets from new and individual donors acquired through digital channels.

109. The ratio of regular resources to total income, at 18 per cent, falls far short of the 30 per cent commitment made by Member States as part of the funding compact. This trend of shortfalls contributed to UNICEF being 82 per cent projectized. In response, UNICEF worked to catalyse core funding, including by showcasing results in compelling ways and demonstrating their traceability. Through the annual structured funding dialogues, UNICEF and other United Nations agencies raised the implications of declining core resources, advocating for Member States to honour funding compact commitments and for a stronger compact to be adopted in the next iteration (funding compact 2.0).

Working with United Nations partners

110. UNICEF continued advancing United Nations development system reform, providing comprehensive support to governments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. It co-led the drafting of the Secretary-General's guidance note on child rights mainstreaming through a comprehensive consultative process across the United Nations and with civil society. UNICEF contributed to the development of inter-agency resources to support the integration of the human rights-based approach, the "leave no one behind" principle, and gender equality and women's empowerment in United Nations system-wide programming.

111. UNICEF delivered within United Nations country teams, under the leadership of resident and humanitarian coordinators, including through pooled funds, joint programmes, United Nations to United Nations agreements, the Central Response Emergency Fund and the country-based pooled funds of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. In 2023, the fourth consecutive UNICEF survey on the implementation of the United Nations development system reform reported that the majority of country representatives believed that the reform contributed to enhanced results for children.

112. Over 110 country offices engaged in United Nations inter-agency pooled funds, receiving total contributions of \$420 million. UNICEF continued to track progress on relevant quadrennial comprehensive policy review indicators, and the common and complementary indicators in its Integrated Results and Resources Framework.

Improving organizational culture and diversity

113. UNICEF met or exceeded 94 per cent of benchmarks on the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, up from 88 per cent at baseline, thanks to advancements in gender parity. The proportion of women increased among all staff (to 49.4 per cent), international professional staff (52.4 per cent) and national professional officers (48.5 per cent), but stagnated among general service staff (from 47.5 per cent in 2022 to 47.8 per cent in 2023).

³⁰ Other income includes income from interest, procurement services and other sources.

114. UNICEF expanded its understanding of workforce diversity to include age and disability, among other factors, to consider in recruitments. Regional road maps will be developed in 2024 to inform talent outreach and inclusion efforts. UNICEF adopted its first Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy, 2022–2030, and established a Global Accessibility Helpdesk offering technical advice, training and knowledge resources to make programmes, premises and digital platforms more inclusive. UNICEF met or exceeded 88 per cent of United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy accountability framework indicators, up from 75 per cent in 2021.

115. UNICEF met or surpassed all global internal communication targets, exemplified by a 12 per cent increase in message readership, while internal communication on Gaza and the Sudan was critical to addressing staff concerns. The November 2023 Pulse Check survey on workplace culture showed a decrease in UNICEF offices meeting the benchmark on psychological safety and trust. The 2024 Global Staff Survey will provide more data and evidence to support analysis of the trend and check on the efficacy of remedial measures.

Enhancing efficiency and oversight

116. UNICEF issued its policy on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism to further enhance integrity, accountability and partner trust. Work on the policy on delegation of authority and the revision of the anti-fraud policy is under way. A new cash transfer system, which streamlines transactions and partnership management processes, is expected to save over 200,000 hours of staff time annually.

117. Continuing to pursue eco-efficiency in line with Strategic Plan and United Nations reform targets as well as its newly launched Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan, UNICEF is on track to achieve its carbon emissions reduction target through 85 greening projects, including solar energy initiatives, sustainable fleet management, and promotion of sustainability as a core organizational value. Fifty-four per cent of UNICEF offices were located in United Nations common premises, facilitating common or shared services between organizations.

IV. Looking ahead

118. Just past the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the world is at a pivotal juncture. The midterm review found that accelerated progress remains possible, but multiple complex, interrelated challenges continue to threaten children’s survival and well-being.

119. A wave of conflicts is driving violations of children’s rights, with far-reaching regional and global consequences. Geopolitical shifts and a fragmented multilateral system thwart concerted global action to address these crises, while structural inequities hamper developing economies from making critical investments in children. Disinformation, shrinking civic space and threats to democracy compound these challenges, while unchecked technological advancements – including the emergence of AI and the rush to develop sustainable energy sources – can further compromise children’s rights.

120. How these trends unfold depends on choices made now. Opportunities exist to uphold human rights; fight misinformation with critical thinking, science and data; strengthen international cooperation and accountability; reform the global financial architecture, to provide debt relief and ensure that climate finance benefits children and the hardest-hit countries; counter anti-democratic forces; and steer technological developments to minimize harm and maximize public goods, including to address

climate change. The analysis done for the midterm review shows that with political will, investment and collective action to build on progress already achieved, great advances towards the Sustainable Development Goals are possible.

121. The 2024 Summit of the Future and the 2025 Second World Summit for Social Development offer opportunities to rally the international community around a common vision of development grounded in justice and human rights. UNICEF will continue to advocate to have children recognized as a distinct group of rights holders, and make the case that upholding child rights and accelerating progress towards the child-related Sustainable Development Goals are indispensable to addressing current and future challenges. It will call for more investment to go beyond managing the tragic and recurrent symptoms of deprivation and child rights violations, to tackle their underlying, systemic causes.

122. UNICEF is operationalizing the analytical work done for the midterm review in 2023, to gain a more sophisticated and actionable understanding of Sustainable Development Goal progress across country typologies and regions, and support the broader United Nations system and partner countries in addressing data gaps and using evidence to drive action at scale. The next Strategic Plan, 2026–2029, will advance this work by identifying game-changing strategies and approaches for different kinds of results in different operating contexts.

123. Given constraints identified during the midterm review on progress towards sectoral systems strengthening and systemic change, UNICEF will refine the strategy, definition and measurement of systems strengthening in fragile contexts and build learning on proven approaches, while clarifying and better communicating how programmes on the ground can instigate outcome-level change.

124. Responding to recent evaluation findings, UNICEF will further integrate SBC and community engagement programming across sectors, as a comprehensive approach to addressing systemic barriers to change, and will systematically implement effective community feedback and complaints mechanisms for accountability to affected populations in humanitarian crises.

125. Building on the midterm review and its work to better understand the correlation between funding types, country typologies, interventions and results, UNICEF continues to prioritize raising regular resources and flexible other resources, including by communicating the value of flexible funding in leveraging the world's resources for children. With other United Nations agencies, UNICEF will advocate for a new, more effective funding compact, to raise more flexible resources to address the underlying causes of inequalities. UNICEF will further diversify its funding, seeking out investment funds that are responsive to economic conditions and the private sector landscape, as key to generating additional regular resources locally and globally.

126. Children and young people are counting on us, and in time, they will hold us accountable. Today's policymakers must turn things around, by choosing to prioritize and invest in children; by reaffirming – through actions, not just words – their commitments to human rights and the rules-based international order that is our only hope for global security; by addressing the root causes of systemic injustices that destabilize societies; and by stepping up collective action to accelerate Sustainable Development Goal progress and address climate change.

127. There is real hope, even in this time of crisis. Like those who created the United Nations nearly 80 years ago, out of the carnage of World War II, we can work together to build a world in which more children, including those from the poorest countries and communities, can grow up in more peaceful, equitable and

just societies, enjoy a healthier environment, and benefit from the services, support and opportunities they need to realize their rights.

V. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the report on the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and annual report for 2023 of the Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as the proposed revised Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025; the report on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025; the report on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system; the description of independent oversight functions/bodies in UNICEF; and the data companion and scorecard;

2. *Decides* to transmit the above-mentioned reports to the Economic and Social Council, along with a summary of the comments and guidance of the Executive Board;

3. *Takes note* of the UNICEF report on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit, including the management responses to the four recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit intended for consideration by the Executive Board.
