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### United Nations Children's Fund

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Item 8 of the provisional agenda\*

### **Evaluation of UNICEF work for children in urban settings**

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

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Urban growth is closely related to sustainable development, as it affects social, economic and environmental development. Cities and urban metropolitan agglomerations are engines of economic growth, contributing about 60 per cent of the gross domestic product of many countries. However, they are also drivers of inequities. It is estimated that more than 56 per cent of the world's population — some 4.4 billion people — live in cities. That figure is set to rise to 70 per cent by mid-century: according to World Bank estimates, about 1.4 million people move into urban areas each week. Many of them end up in slums or informal settlements. Currently, around 1 billion people live in slums, of which approximately 350 million are children. By 2030, the number of people living in slums is expected to grow to 2 billion, or a quarter of the world's population.

The evaluation report presents the findings of the first global evaluation of UNICEF work for children in urban settings. It draws on evidence from a review of global data and trend analysis, the mapping of more than 72 UNICEF country offices and case studies of five countries, namely Belize, Brazil, the Philippines, Spain, and the Syrian Arab Republic. Its findings and recommendations are aimed at strengthening the organization's urban strategies and programming, thereby advancing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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\* [E/ICEF/2021/1](#).

\*\* The evaluation report summary 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 contains a supplementary chapter on the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which struck in the midst of the evaluation exercise. As the pandemic spread, it quickly became clear that the crisis was disproportionately being felt in urban areas, which accounted for about 90 per cent of reported cases. Accordingly, the supplementary chapter of the evaluation was developed on the basis of analyses of the UNICEF urban response to the COVID-19 pandemic in three countries: Brazil, India and Spain.

The evaluation findings recognize the important role that UNICEF has played in meeting the needs of children in urban environments. The evaluation, which also assessed the potential of the organization to contribute more to the well-being of children in such settings, resulted in several recommendations, including the four key recommendations, which are summarized below.

1.1 Recommendations targeted at the global, regional and country levels:

(a) Update the urban strategy note and issue an organizational procedure to give clear direction to country offices and partners on how UNICEF will enhance its support to children in urban settings, including the focus and scope of programming; programming and partnership models; addressing unique structural barriers to child well-being in urban settings; and spelling out the roles of headquarters, regional offices, country offices and National Committees;

(b) Prioritize the increase of work in urban settings with specific results areas and targets in the new strategic plan.

2.1 In low- and middle-income countries with slums or informal settlements, prioritize addressing the needs of children through the most appropriate programming and partnership models, according to UNICEF comparative advantages:

(a) Develop and implement a whole-of-organization approach to advocacy, partnerships and fundraising for children in urban slums and informal settlements;

(b) In countries with slums, prioritize this whole-of-organization approach in country programme documents and workplans.

2.2. In high-income countries, refocus the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) to deepen engagement on child-rights advocacy and child participation:

(a) Streamline accountability for the CFCI to enable its expansion as a strategic engagement in urban areas of high-income countries only;

(b) Given the reputational risks associated with the recognition or certification by UNICEF of cities and municipalities as child-friendly, UNICEF should engage with relevant partners, such as Governments (state or national) or think tanks (e.g., universities), that could take over the accountabilities of the recognition/certification process based on a robust monitoring and evaluation system.

3. UNICEF should address the linking of humanitarian and development programming in cities and towns, considering how governance and investment in infrastructure and services can reduce exposure and risk for affected populations and help cities to become more resilient.

4. UNICEF should expand organizational capacity in its staffing and architecture at all levels to support the urban agenda:

(a) Regional offices and country offices should articulate their urban focus in light of their contexts and programme and partnership priorities. They should

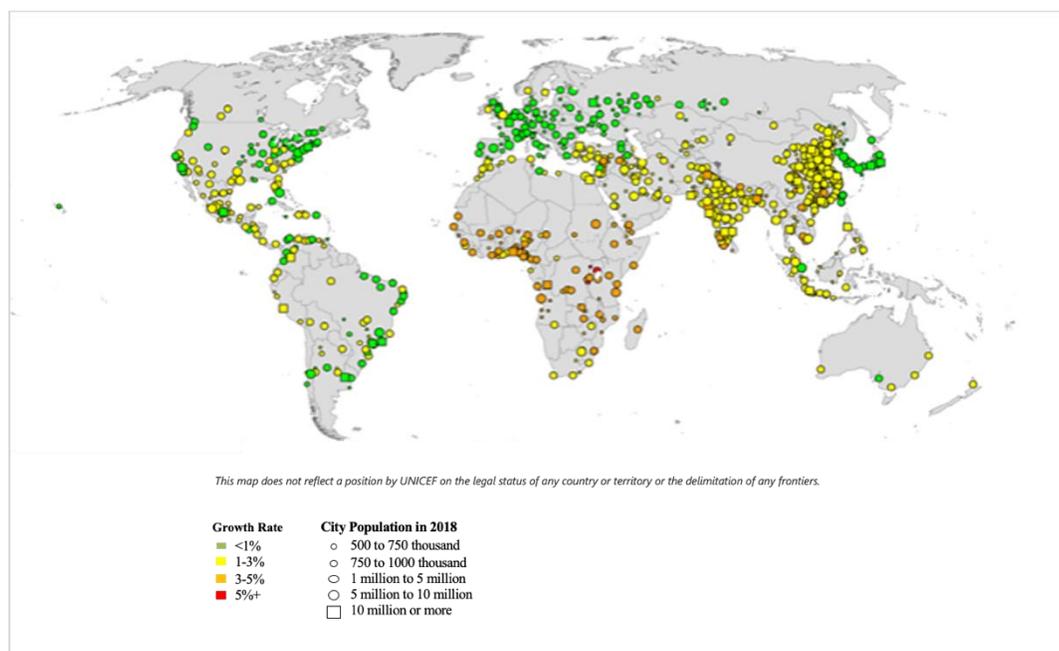
also designate urban focal points to coordinate and support urban programming in country offices.

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

## I. Introduction

1. Global child poverty and exclusion are increasingly urban phenomena. Over half of the world's children now live in cities, many in slums and informal areas. These figures are set to increase in the coming years: by 2050, 2.5 billion people will be added to the world's urban populations, with 90 per cent of this growth in Africa and Asia. Much of this growth will occur in slums and informal settlements, already home to 1 billion people. By 2030, it is expected that one in four people globally — some 2 billion people — will be slum-dwellers. At the same time, the demographics of urban populations are skewing younger. By 2030, the majority of the world's urban population will be under the age of 18 years.

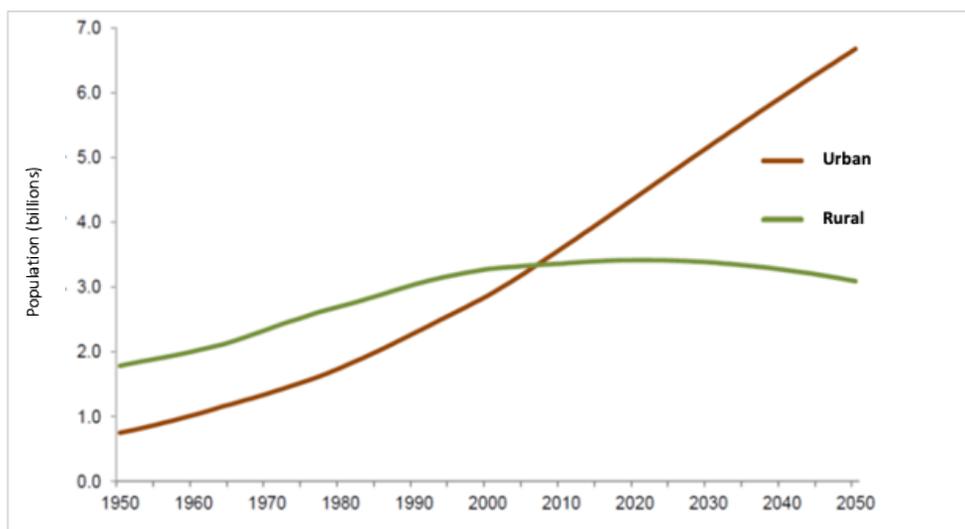
Figure I  
Urban growth, 2018–2030 (projected)



2. UNICEF work for children in urban settings is not new. Its publication *The State of the World's Children 2012*<sup>1</sup> focused on children and the urban agenda. Following this important work, two key internal documents were developed. The first document, the global urban strategic note entitled “Urban 101” (2016), served as the background for the development, in 2017, of the strategic note on UNICEF work for children in urban settings (“urban strategic note”). These were followed by the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, which recognized the challenges of rapid urbanization and the need for UNICEF to support children in such contexts. These documents identified key priorities for UNICEF work in urban settings and were intended to inform the preparation of country programme documents (CPDs) and workplans at all levels of the organization.

<sup>1</sup> Available from [www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC\\_2012-Main\\_Report\\_EN\\_13Mar2012.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2012-Main_Report_EN_13Mar2012.pdf).

Figure II  
**Urban and rural populations of the world, 1950–2050**



Source: *World Urbanization Prospects 2018: Highlights* (United Nations publication, 2019).

3. The evaluation comes at a time when UNICEF is in the process of reviewing the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and preparing for a new strategic plan. Several challenges, including rapid and inequitable urbanization in an increasingly urbanized world, as well as the risks to children’s rights posed by informal settlements or slums, must be addressed if countries are to achieve their commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals to leave no one behind. The overarching purpose of the evaluation, therefore, is to analyse the organization’s ongoing work for children in urban settings with a view to informing future directions.

4. The evaluation had three objectives:

(a) To assess the relevance of UNICEF approaches to delivering results for children in urban settings, including understanding the relevance of these approaches to local contexts;

(b) To better understand the results achieved so far by UNICEF for children in urban settings, including its ability to engage stakeholders and children;

(c) To identify good practices and lessons learned from various sustainable approaches to working in urban settings.

5. In addition to the foregoing, the supplementary chapter on the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic presents an analysis of the response of three UNICEF country offices through an urban lens. The additional questions that frame that chapter include:

(a) What has been the impact of COVID-19 on urban settings, including in such low-resource settings as slums and informal settlements? Has the pandemic exposed underlying and concealed vulnerabilities for children in urban settings?

(b) How has UNICEF responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in urban settings? Which of the urban approaches are more relevant to preparedness and response to an urban pandemic? What are the lessons learned?

(c) Considering the lessons learned from the COVID-19 response, what critical components should be included in the future urban programme framework for UNICEF?

## II. Evaluation approach: scope and methodology

6. Overall, the evaluation adopted a theory-based, formative evaluation approach. This began with the construction and subsequent refinement of an explicit theory of change for each of the three most prevalent approaches to working in urban settings identified through an initial mapping of UNICEF country office annual reports from 2018. On the basis of this mapping exercise, key informant interviews and document analysis, the evaluation team identified three main approaches to the organization's work for children in urban settings, which reflect the multi- and cross-sectoral nature of its programming:

(a) **Sectoral:** In this approach, work for children in urban settings is sector-specific in one or more sectors and in cross-sectoral areas, including the organization's new area of urban work promoting a safe and clean urban environment for children. This approach tends to be needs-based, often led by the ministry or department of a sector and implemented in one or more cities or municipalities. Sectoral work also often emerges as ad hoc initiatives or in response to emergencies;

(b) **Integrated:** This approach involves strategically combining two or more sectoral interventions or cross-sectoral areas and/or programming across sectors, drawing from the various sectoral work plans but integrated and coordinated at the city or municipal level to improve programme convergence while working for children in urban settings;

(c) **Child-Friendly Cities Initiative:** This is a platform through which local governments and other local stakeholders implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the community, city or municipal level.

7. The core methodology of the evaluation consisted of comparative case studies, which are particularly useful for understanding the ways in which context influences the success of an intervention. In order to facilitate a comparative approach, the evaluation case studies disaggregated the three main approaches further, wherever feasible, by context: development-humanitarian for the first two approaches and National Committees and programme countries for the third. The sample of country case studies aimed for a mix of country income level and size of programme.

8. The evaluation relied on a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data. The evaluation team reviewed more than 1,000 UNICEF and non-UNICEF documents, data sets and systems. Interviews and focus-group discussions were carried out at the country, regional and global levels with 346 respondents. In-depth case studies were conducted in five countries: Belize, Brazil, the Philippines, Spain and the Syrian Arab Republic, with field missions to Belize, Brazil and Spain. In addition, a U-Report survey of 2,925 adolescents in Brazil was undertaken, along with a paper-based survey of 70 children in the Philippines.

9. In terms of scope, the evaluation covered the period of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 as well as the strategic plan baseline for urban work (from 2016 to 2020). While the focus remained on this latter period, the case studies also included earlier programming and results. Thematically, UNICEF urban programming cuts across the organization's sectoral work (health, nutrition, education, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and social policy) and cross-cutting work (humanitarian, data and evidence, partnerships, innovation, communication for development, adolescent development and participation, disability and gender).

10. The evaluation had three main objectives, with a series of more detailed evaluation questions under each (see table 1).

Table 1

**Evaluation objectives and questions**

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1.	<b>To assess the relevance of UNICEF approaches in urban settings to delivering results for children</b>
1.1.	What types of approaches do country offices engage in to achieve results for children, including results on child rights, inequity and gender, while working in urban settings? What is their modus operandi?
1.2.	To what extent are approaches consistent with the strategic note on UNICEF work for children in urban settings and the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021?
1.3.	Are the approach(es) to working in urban settings evidence-based and addressing the identified needs?
1.4.	To what extent are the approaches to working in urban settings based on a sound understanding of the local context, including the governance context? To what extent are they equity- and gender-sensitive?
1.5.	To what extent do the approaches address the drivers of change within the urban landscape?
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2.	<b>To better understand the results achieved by UNICEF so far for children in urban settings</b>
2.1.	What key results have been achieved to date, including results on child rights and the reduction of urban disparities?
2.2.	Were there any unintended results?
2.3.	How effective were the different approaches to working in urban settings?
2.4.	To what extent has UNICEF successfully engaged with relevant stakeholders in its approaches in working in urban settings?
2.5.	To what extent were affected urban populations engaged in the identified UNICEF approaches?
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3.	<b>To identify good practices and lessons learned from various sustainable approaches to working in urban settings to inform future directions</b>
3.1.	What are the good practices and lessons learned?
3.2.	Are there any innovative and locally driven solutions that should be highlighted?
3.3.	To what extent can these approaches be scaled up or replicated in other contexts?
3.4.	On the basis of drivers of change in the urban context, what new approaches and/or modifications to existing approaches should UNICEF pursue to leverage the achievement of at-scale results for children in urban settings?

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### III. Key findings of the evaluation

11. This section presents the key findings of the evaluation in line with the evaluation objectives.

#### A. Objective 1: To assess the relevance of UNICEF approaches in urban settings to delivering results for children

12. The evaluation found three main approaches to working with children in urban settings: (a) integrated approach; (b) sectoral approach; and (c) CFCI, all of which

have different country-specific models under them. The approaches draw from three different UNICEF frameworks or guidance for urban and local governance and the CFCI. The urban strategic note identifies five key pillars for programming in urban settings, but does not detail the steps to be followed for programme development and implementation. The local governance guidance identifies four key areas for working with local governments, but lacks an urban focus and linkages with national and regional governments. Notably, the CFCI has gone the furthest in developing goals and a results framework for working in cities as well as with communities. However, the framework is not attuned to reducing disparities in urban settings, nor does it specify targets and indicators. Furthermore, the CFCI has only been taken up as a side project in programme countries.

13. The evaluation found that UNICEF work for children in urban settings is largely relevant to the goals and strategies articulated in the Strategic Plan and the urban strategic note. However, there are shortcomings in the existing strategic framework and gaps in guidance:

(a) **Strategic Plan, 2018–2021:** Urban-focused work is cross-cutting by nature. However, the Strategic Plan establishes organization-wide urban-specific outcomes and outputs only under Goal Area 4 (Every child lives in a safe and clean environment) without specifying urban-specific strategies and targets for other Goal Areas;

(b) **Urban strategic note:** The urban strategic note does not articulate a programme framework with associated indicators for the five priority pillars, nor responsibilities and resources from UNICEF headquarters to the country level for contributions to urban-specific results. There is a need to articulate “how” UNICEF should work for children in urban settings, and “what” urban programming in different contexts should look like, with proper guidance on engaging with complex urban governance systems.

14. Within headquarters, there are only two posts focused on working in urban settings: the senior urban advisor and an urban WASH specialist, both situated in the Programme Division. Only one regional office, East Asia and Pacific, has created an urban specialist post, but it is currently stalled in recruitment due to lack of funds. UNICEF work for children in urban settings is coordinated by social policy units (East Asia and Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean), communication for development units (Europe and Central Asia) or WASH units (Eastern and Southern Africa). In the regions with the fastest rates of urbanization and the most pressing urban inequities and crises, UNICEF has no designated focal points (Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, West and Central Africa) or budgets.

15. The evaluation found that the approach with the strongest potential to demonstrate results in child rights and the reduction of urban disparities — namely, the integrated approach — was the least prevalent. Out of 72 country offices engaged in urban programming, only five work for children in urban settings through an integrated approach: Bangladesh, Brazil, Lebanon, Peru and the Philippines. There are two types of models within the integrated approach that allow countries to have a more differentiated response to the different scales of urban settings: (a) a certification-based model designed to lift averages within municipalities at scale across a country; and (b) a partnership model in large cities, with a focus on vulnerable and marginalized children and adolescents and a narrow range of priorities. The implication for the integrated approach elsewhere is that different types of models are needed to address inter- and intra-urban disparities. The child-friendly local governance audit in the Philippines is the only model that is managed by the national Government, with technical assistance from UNICEF. The Government also confers

recognition (Seal of Child-Friendly Local Governance), making this a more sustainable model.

16. Despite the high prevalence of sectoral work in urban settings, the evaluation noted very limited sectoral strategies and guidance for working in urban contexts. Only the WASH sector has developed a comprehensive strategy for urban settings and the health sector has guidance for immunization in urban environments only. There are other general guidance packages available, such as for public finance for children or the selection of geographic priorities, that also inform programme design in urban settings, even if such guidance lacks a specific urban lens. The other sectors have not developed specific strategies or guidance for adapting programming approaches to urban contexts. Sectoral approaches in humanitarian contexts similarly suffer from a lack of guidance on how to apply the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action while designing a city-specific response, taking into account such characteristics of urban environments as density, informality, road safety, complex interdependent systems and the diversity and multiplicity of actors.

17. The integrated and CFCI approaches are both sensitive to municipal governance contexts and are shaped by (a) the Convention on the Rights of the Child; (b) decentralization; and (c) the need to strengthen the equitable delivery of quality social services. However, the CFCI, with its focus on advocacy for child rights within urban settings, is not designed to extend quality basic services to children and reduce urban disparities. Countries with longstanding urban programmes (Brazil and the Philippines) started implementing the CFCI in the late 1990s but, because of these shortcomings, moved to an integrated approach for urban programming to achieve outcome-level results focused on reducing disparities across municipalities at scale. In the strongest models, the integrated approach is integral to the UNICEF country programme, whereas the CFCI is often run as a side initiative.

18. The evaluation found that broader guidance on urban programming is needed. The urban strategic note does not articulate targets and indicators for the five priority pillars, nor the responsibilities and resources from headquarters to the country level for contributions to urban results. Since the formalization of the urban strategic note, programming guidance has been expanded through a thematic chapter on children in urban settings in the new-generation situation analysis toolkit. The vision underlying the guidance is to increase attention to urban issues in country programmes, grounded in situation analysis. However, a review of CPDs indicates that awareness of the impact of urbanization in a situation analysis or research does not necessarily translate into programming for children in urban settings.

19. The evaluation found that the integrated and CFCI approaches in urban settings were able to engage in a wide range of urban issues by widening their stakeholder engagement beyond local governments to include regional/state/provincial and national levels. Currently, UNICEF guidance for working with local governments does not specify strategies for engaging with the wider and more complex urban governance system. However, effective urban governance involves the city-national interface, municipal capacity, the role of the private sector and political systems and institutions.

20. The evaluation team created a framework to guide the analysis of drivers of change in urban contexts (and to answer the evaluation questions). The framework is based on three interconnected dimensions of change: (a) equity and inclusion (the core vision of change); (b) urbanization and planning (the spatial organization of change); and (c) complex adaptive systems (the management and implementation of change).

21. For the most part, the organization does not confront the two major trends in urban contexts, namely: (a) exclusionary growth and privatization in planning that exclude the urban poor and new migrants from formally planned city spaces; and (b) widespread informality, such as an increasing number of people living in informal settlements and slums. With over a billion people living in slums across the world's cities and that number likely to double by 2030, addressing the needs of vulnerable children in urban settings, especially in slums and informal settlements, should be at the core of UNICEF programming in countries with widespread urban informality. Lessons from Brazil, the Philippines and other countries that experienced early urban expansion show that once unplanned and inequitable urban growth has occurred (favelas and slums in peri-urban areas and at-risk locations within cities), undoing the negative consequences is difficult and costly. UNICEF and other development partners have a short window in which to work with countries and cities to address equitable urbanization and inclusive planning for reducing poverty and environmental risk. Without this, UNICEF work on cities will leave intact underlying structural vulnerabilities that affect urban children. The link between exclusionary planning and urban violence, as seen most notably in Brazil, is only beginning to surface in urban programming models in large cities. This needs to be integrated into the urban programming framework, accompanied by adequate technical guidance.

22. Urban planning is a very new area for UNICEF, with mostly preparatory work and training under way. However, the focus of the training is exclusively on transportation planning and road safety, leaving such important areas of child-responsive urban planning as safe public places unaddressed. Where countries have undertaken initiatives in urban planning and the environment, such as through the CFCI, these have tended to be small-scale and have not addressed the drivers of change identified in the evaluation or in the United Nations System-Wide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements (2019).<sup>2</sup> While some guidance exists in the form of the UNICEF handbook *Shaping Urbanization for Children: A Handbook for Child-Responsive Urban Planning* (2018),<sup>3</sup> it does not provide operational guidance to country offices on child-responsive planning. Although many of the case-study countries are on the front line of climate change, there is little focus on disaster risk reduction and management or climate-change adaptation in urban programming. None of the countries were found to be addressing environmental degradation issues related to air and water pollution and waste.

23. The evaluation found that UNICEF work for children in urban settings had a strong overlap and interconnection with local governance, depending on the broader enabling framework, as well as a strong focus on adolescent participation. Even though these are relevant to the driver of change related to complex adaptive systems, city-wide programming in complex large cities is only just beginning to emerge across the approaches, and there are gaps in many other dimensions of this driver. The evaluation noted gaps relating to UNICEF partnership with the private sector, engagement with the complex systems involved with managing urbanization and planning, and public finance for children at the local level. Some country offices and National Committees are keen to address these in the future. The models across all the approaches recognize that municipal policy and resources, in cities large and small, are dependent on national and regional policy frameworks and fiscal transfers, and it is not possible to achieve results at scale working solely on bottom-up approaches with cities. This is particularly true in humanitarian crises, in which municipal resources can be easily overwhelmed.

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<sup>2</sup> HSP/HA/1/2/Add.3.

<sup>3</sup> [www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF\\_Shaping\\_urbanization\\_for\\_children\\_handbook\\_2018.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Shaping_urbanization_for_children_handbook_2018.pdf).

## **B. Objective 2: To better understand the results achieved so far by UNICEF for children in urban settings**

24. Among the different models under the integrated approach, outcome results are reported most consistently in the certification-based models (Municipal Seal and Child-Friendly Local Governance Audit (CFLGA)), followed by the city-level partnership-based models. The CFCI models also report outcome-level results, but within their own goals and results framework, which are not necessarily attuned to results on the reduction of disparity. Both the integrated approach and the CFCI contribute to process outcomes, including improved municipal governance for children, adolescent participation, cross-sectoral coordination and evidence-based local plans. However, the evaluation found significant variability in the quality of the plans between and within the approaches.

25. The evaluation observed a significant range in the capacity to monitor work for children in urban settings, with noticeable differences in (a) the design, periodicity of reporting and function of monitoring systems; and (b) the quality and availability of data on children in urban settings. Generally, the integrated and sectoral humanitarian approaches have invested in stronger systems, with a significant input of human resources (UNICEF and partners) to manage the collection, validation and reporting of data.

26. Among all approaches, the integrated model has the most consistent monitoring system, which focuses on outcome-level results for children. However, as the evaluation found, where annual or frequent reporting is not mandated, results are not available until the end of the cycle, after a few years. This weakens the monitoring system and compromises the tracking of progress towards the achievement of results. The certification-based models typically work with aggregate data at the municipal level and cannot further disaggregate the data to capture intra-urban disparity. In the Municipal Seal, UNICEF Brazil encourages the further disaggregation of data within municipalities in order to go beyond averages and identify districts or neighbourhoods that require more-active outreach. However, there are no data on how many towns have conducted further analysis of this type. The CFLGA is addressing this gap by designing an audit tool at the *barangay* (ward) level. The collection of data at the *barangay* level will help to identify the most vulnerable of these — those with a high prevalence of slums and informal settlements — with a view to informing local planning and investment decisions.

27. Results for children in urban settings are also evident in the sectoral humanitarian approaches in the Philippines and the Syrian Arab Republic. However, reporting often identifies the numerator (number of children reached) but not the denominator (total number of children in need), making it difficult to classify these as outcome-level results. Nevertheless, the scale of results achieved highlights the value of area-based approaches implemented with local government authorities.

28. The CFCI models included in this evaluation, in both high-income-country and programme-country contexts, were found to lack strong results-based management. The specific weaknesses include:

(a) Every candidate city is a “special case”, with a unique situation analysis and a budgeted local action plan based on it. The selection of candidates for recognition is a case-by-case decision primarily based on these documents, without proof of demonstrated results. The selection process is resource-heavy and time-consuming for UNICEF and its partners due to a lack of comparability across standard indicators;

(b) As the performance of the cities does not impact the recognition process, providing the CFCI recognition is a serious reputational risk to UNICEF, with the process relying heavily on commitments and self-reporting, with insufficient quality-assurance mechanisms. Currently, there is little guarantee that a UNICEF-recognized child-friendly city is delivering results for children.

29. For the CFCI in Belize and Spain, the strong focus on child participation has led to the perception that this is the primary purpose of the initiative, drawing attention away from the need to demonstrate results for children and eliminate discrimination. However, the focus on child participation through the CFCI and integrated approaches has also generated positive (unexpected) results, such as adolescent participation in national decision-making (Belize), an impact on regional policies (Spain) and alumni of child participation structures going on to serve in leadership roles in their towns and states (Brazil).

30. Different strategies have been devised for the three approaches and the models under them to effectively address inter-urban disparity:

(a) Within the integrated approach, the certification-based model has the capacity to achieve results at scale. The Municipal Seal has achieved extensive coverage in both the current and past editions, the current edition being the largest to date (covering 85 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively, of municipalities in the Semi-Arid and Amazon Legal regions). The passing rate for achieving certification is not available for the current Municipal Seal cycle, which ends in 2020, but the passing rate in the previous cycle (2013–2016) was 29 per cent. For CFLGA, 71 per cent of all Filipino municipalities participated in the audit in 2019 and 21 per cent passed, implying that a significant number of municipalities have demonstrated improvements for children on a range of indicators designed to reduce disparity;

(b) Some CFCI models are effectively leveraging the different responsibilities of subnational governments, including regional, provincial and other local entities, to support smaller municipalities. For example, the Spanish CFCI model is recognizing not just municipalities, but all local entities that help smaller municipalities under them, such as the province, the *cabildo* and the *mancomunidad*, among others;

(c) An area-based approach to humanitarian response, using a severity scale, identifies the cities and towns with the greatest need for targeted interventions.

31. Two of the approaches and the models under them have devised different strategies to address intra-urban disparity:

(a) Even though the certification-based models under the integrated approach are designed to lift averages rather than to address intra-urban disparities, countries have designed strategies and tools to address specific vulnerabilities at the individual and settlement levels;

(b) The partnership-based models in large cities have the strongest potential to reduce inequities within urban areas, as they are designed to reduce disparities in access to services within each city;

(c) The CFCI model has strategies for reaching out to the most vulnerable children and families to address intra-urban disparities through two main mechanisms: child-participation structures within the most vulnerable neighbourhoods in large cities and targeted social services that offer a safe space to marginalized children from ethnic minority and refugee backgrounds.

32. In each of the approaches and country-based models, UNICEF engages with different tiers of government based on the degree of ownership of the model and coordination (national versus more localized) and the extent of decentralization:

(a) The strongest degree of engagement with national Governments was seen in the CFLGA, the CFCI model in Belize and the humanitarian response in the Syrian Arab Republic. However, across the three models with strong national-level engagement, the ministries and departments responsible for the oversight of local governments, rather than core ministries serving children and families, emerged as the most prominent partner of UNICEF;

(b) UNICEF engagement with state and regional governments varies across approaches and country-based models. In the more decentralized country cases, this is a critical tier of government for results at scale. The strongest degree of engagement with regional and state governments was seen in the models of the Municipal Seal in Brazil and the CFCI in Spain, due to the considerable responsibilities pertaining to welfare vested in the regional government in both countries;

(c) All the country-based models are based on the recognition that municipal policy and resources, in cities large and small, are dependent on national and regional policy frameworks and fiscal transfers and that it is not possible to achieve results at scale working solely on bottom-up approaches with cities. This is particularly true in humanitarian crises, in which municipal resources can be easily overwhelmed. However, in the integrated and CFCI approaches, mayors and municipal governments are the primary stakeholders, while intersectoral committees or councils expand the circle of accountability. The committees tend to focus on traditional UNICEF partners in the social services, and while these can strengthen coordination for children, they may neglect other sectors important to urban programming, such as urban planning, the environment and transportation, among others.

33. The models across the integrated and CFCI approaches in Brazil, the Philippines and Spain have engaged with a broad range of civil society stakeholders outside of government, such as non-governmental organizations, universities and research institutes. At the national and regional levels, these stakeholders contribute to the design and oversight of the initiatives in large cities, often providing expertise that does not exist within UNICEF. At the local level, in smaller municipalities as well as at the neighbourhood level, non-government stakeholders help to implement local plans for children. The evaluation did not find good examples of private sector partnerships; relationships were instead contractual or geared towards fundraising. However, all the case-study countries were eager to expand private sector engagement within each approach.

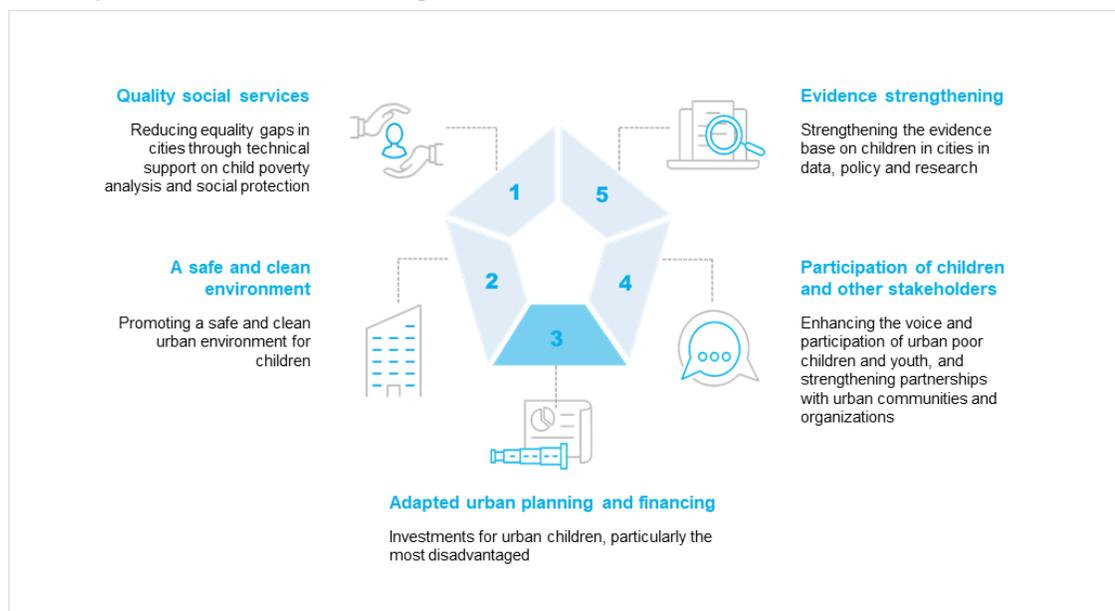
34. The evaluation could not find conclusive evidence that community participation had impacted decisions and plans. In the models under the integrated approach, the Municipal Seal of Brazil holds two community forums and the Platform for Urban Centres (PCU) engages with civil society organizations representing community interests. Child and adolescent engagement is a key feature of both the integrated and CFCI approaches, with many city-level innovations to address intra-urban disparity. In some country-specific models (Municipal Seal and CFCI Spain), child and adolescent participation is institutionalized. Yet there is also no conclusive evidence that the child participation structures are reaching the most socially excluded and marginalized children and adolescents at scale, and the approaches vary in the extent to which they translate young people's participation into actual influence on urban decision-making. Notably, the CFCI model builds in indicators that track children's influence on urban decision-making, but this influence tends to be small scale and limited to smaller municipalities.

## C. Objective 3: To identify good practices and lessons learned from various sustainable approaches to working in urban settings to inform future directions

35. Lessons and good practices are analysed in accordance with the priority areas in the urban strategic note, as shown in figure III.

Figure III

### Priority areas in the urban strategic note



#### 1. Quality social services

(a) Brazil and the Philippines have adapted the integrated models developed for smaller municipalities to larger cities. The PCU and Priority Cities models are less focused on municipal policy implementation than on reducing persistent inequities. The CFCI model has started differentiating approaches in large and small cities as well, in order to facilitate better service delivery and more-meaningful child participation;

(b) Good practices in the models under the integrated approach and CFCI foster a focus on local leadership and ownership, alignment with national and regional government institutions and policies, inter-sectoral coordination, results-based management and partnerships;

(c) In the countries with the strongest approaches, there have been notable inputs and contributions from UNICEF, such as the involvement of sectoral programmes, providing methodologies and frameworks for the model and facilitating capacity-building, advocacy and the convening of stakeholders to catalyse collective action.

#### 2. A safe and clean environment

(a) The evaluation noted good practices in WASH in terms of targeting slums and informal areas in both the integrated approach (Priority Cities model in the Philippines) and sectoral humanitarian response (network rehabilitation model in the Syrian Arab Republic);

(b) The workplans of the four UNICEF priority cities in the Philippines address disaster risk reduction as a cross-cutting area (the only model in the evaluation to do so) and have outcome indicators linked to developing child-sensitive local disaster risk reduction and management plans. However, it was not clear what kind of guidance existed for creating such plans or for building capacity;

(c) The evaluation notes that UNICEF does not have a specific strategy for responding to an urban humanitarian crisis, and the country office responses using a sectoral approach are typically seen to lack urban specificity;

(d) The evaluation did not find examples of urban humanitarian actions with a focus on rebuilding devastated areas using child-responsive urban planning principles to create resilient child-friendly cities. Every crisis is an opportunity to build back better. This is an aspect of work that could be addressed through child-responsive urban planning (under priority 3 of the urban strategic note) to create safer, more-sustainable urban environments for children in crisis contexts;

(e) None of the countries were found to be addressing environmental degradation issues related to air and other types of pollution and waste;

(f) In the PCU in Brazil and the CFCI model in Spain, there is a strong effort to cater to children of refugees and migrants through social services, healthcare and compulsory education.

### **3. Adapting urban planning and financing**

(a) Urban planning is a new area for UNICEF, with mostly preparatory work under way. Among the case-study countries, only the Philippines is involved with rolling out the child-responsive urban planning training modules developed at headquarters. However, these modules are focused only on transportation planning, leaving many other aspects of child-responsive planning unaddressed;

(b) Within the CFCI case-study countries (Belize and Spain), the evaluation saw promising practices of young people successfully demanding safer streets and increased recreational spaces within their child participation structures. However, children had limited involvement in the actual planning and design of such facilities;

(c) The local plans for children under the CFCI were typically stand-alone documents and not linked to the larger city development plans. In exceptional cases, such as in Málaga, Spain, where the local plan for children is part of the city's plan for social inclusion, there was a strong focus on mapping marginalization and spatial exclusion, followed by such interventions as slum upgrading and the allocation of standard housing units. However, there is no evidence of children's participation in such processes;

(d) To work on the Priority Cities model, implemented by local governments, UNICEF staff capacity has been developed around the need to understand the political economy, public financial management and integrated programming.

### **4. Participation of children and other stakeholders**

(a) The evaluation found limited examples of community engagement in the case-study countries and approaches. In the Municipal Seal model, two community forums in each edition are part of the design. In the CFCI model in Spain, it is recommended that a commission at the municipal level coordinate with all external stakeholders, such as teachers, health-care professionals, families and others. However, the commission has been made mandatory in only one region;

(b) Child and adolescent participation is a key feature of the integrated and CFCI approaches in Belize, Brazil and Spain and all three countries generated good practices and lessons learned for child and adolescent participation.

## 5. Evidence strengthening

(a) A primary lesson learned is the importance of administrative data, and in the countries with the strongest monitoring systems (Brazil and the Philippines), the primary evidence source is the city's data. The strongest approaches invest in training and methodological guidance and have robust human resources (UNICEF, government and partners) to support data validation and analysis. Moreover, the countries have found that, through exposure and usage, data quality improves over time;

(b) Large household surveys, such as the multiple indicator cluster survey, are also an essential part of UNICEF urban approaches, providing important data to inform national and subnational situation analyses and identify priorities. However, few of the case studies relied on the large surveys to track urban programming due to the substantial time lag between the surveys and the generation of a sufficient number of samples large enough to conduct intra-urban data analysis for vulnerable areas, such as slums and informal settlements;

(c) The humanitarian needs overview in the Syrian Arab Republic analyses sector-specific data at the subdistrict level using a severity scale and at the community level through the inter-agency multisector needs assessment. However, where access and local government capacity exist, it is important to strengthen the administrative system's ability to respond to humanitarian needs;

(d) Migrants and refugees have been integrated into the existing health, education and welfare databases in Brazil by modifying in an innovative way how systems classify displaced populations. This has enabled a humanitarian response through the PCU model using administrative data.

36. The replicability and successful scale-up of the urban approaches and models included in the evaluation will depend primarily upon two factors: the relevance and recognizable benefit to the population in other geographic contexts (external factors) and the commitment of UNICEF at all levels to engage in urban programming as part of the country programme (internal factor):

(a) External factors: The integrated and CFCI approaches can be better replicated in countries that have:

(i) A decentralized approach to basic service provision, where local governments have more authority to make decisions about investments in services for children and families;

(ii) Reliable administrative data systems for core sectors that permit the regular tracking of the progress of local plans for children;

(iii) Adequate capacity, both human and financial, to effectively execute the functional responsibilities of local governments in urban settings;

(b) Internal factors: A primary internal factor for the replication and scale-up of successful urban approaches is the commitment of UNICEF as an organization across all levels to working with children in urban settings and allocating appropriate resources to urban programming. The success of any approach is the ability to demonstrate results, which in turn, relies on investment in results-based management.

## IV. Conclusions

37. The main conclusions of the evaluation are presented against each of the evaluation objectives.

### A. Objective 1: To assess the relevance of UNICEF approaches in urban settings to deliver results for children

38. The evaluation found that UNICEF uses three main approaches to working with children in urban settings: (a) an integrated approach; (b) a sectoral approach; and (c) the CFCI, all of which have different country-specific models under them. The integrated approach has two differentiated approaches: a certification-based model and a partnership-based model. The three approaches draw from three different UNICEF frameworks, namely the urban strategic note, the guidance on local governance and the guidance on the CFCI, each of which was developed by a different UNICEF section.

39. Each framework has its own targets within the UNICEF reporting systems. Country offices seeking to develop models for urban programming look at the guidance across the frameworks to design programmes relevant to their country context. Notably, the CFCI is the only approach with a well-developed goals and results framework that has been adopted by countries for doing urban work in “project mode”. The other two fail to translate their priorities into a results-based programme framework and hence into a viable approach for urban programming.

40. However, as the evaluation found, the CFCI approach, as currently operationalized at the country level, has many shortcomings, including but not limited to results-based management systems that fail to connect recognition to outcome-level results or with contributions to delivering the UNICEF country programme. In addition, as the performance of cities does not impact the recognition process, providing CFCI recognition is a serious reputational risk to UNICEF, with the process relying heavily on commitments and self-reporting, with insufficient quality-assurance mechanisms.

41. The integrated approach was found to have the strongest potential to demonstrate results on child rights and the reduction of urban disparities.

### B. Objective 2: To better understand the results achieved so far by UNICEF

42. The evaluation found a mixed picture when it comes to demonstrating results for children in urban settings, with a greater emphasis on such process-level results as improved municipal governance and services for children. Some countries can report outcome- and impact-level results for urban children at scale across a range of child-rights areas. However, only one country, Brazil, can report on the reduction of intra-urban disparities. Countries implementing the CFCI have not been able to report outcome-level results focused on the reduction of disparities, although this is expected to change with the new handbook and monitoring frameworks. Nevertheless, the evaluation found continued weaknesses in monitoring systems and a failure to recognize the significant investment of time, human resources and technical expertise required to effectively measure outcome- and impact-level results for children.

43. Countries have also developed distinct approaches for large cities, applying greater flexibility in the municipal structures for children and narrowing in on a smaller range of priority areas and results. Results for children in urban settings are also evident in the humanitarian approaches. The scale of results achieved highlights

the value of area-based approaches implemented with local government authorities. This is particularly the case for WASH, the sector that has gone the furthest in defining a distinct strategy for the humanitarian response in urban settings.

**C. Objective 3: To identify good practices and lessons learned from various sustainable approaches to working in urban settings to inform future directions**

44. The evaluation noted that, for the most part, the good practices identified in the evaluation centre on the organization's traditional areas of strength in data and evidence; strengthening basic services for children; and working with local governments and adolescents. The good practices highlight the value of intersectoral coordination and results-based management in cities, but also the significant investment of resources, both human and technical.

45. A key lesson learned is that urban approaches need to be integral to achieving the goals of country programmes, rather than being run as "side projects". An integrated approach in urban settings in programme countries has the strongest potential to demonstrate results on child rights and the reduction of urban disparities. Using an integrated approach, UNICEF ensures that the programme (a) has a clear rationale grounded in situation analysis; (b) is integrated into the country programme; (c) is linked with national and subnational governance structures and policies; and (d) is supported by a robust planning and monitoring framework with comparable workplans and indicators.

46. In addition to the foregoing, the supplementary chapter on the UNICEF response to COVID-19 identified three important lessons to inform future responses to emergencies in urban contexts:

47. **Lesson No. 1:** Country offices with existing urban programmes were able to rapidly respond at scale, leveraging existing data, platforms and relationships to protect populations and ensure the continuity of services:

(a) This was most notably seen in Brazil, where the existing platforms of the PCU and the Municipal Seal were effectively leveraged and adapted for the COVID-19 response. Similarly, the large network of child-friendly cities in Spain had access to cross-sectoral trainings and capacity-building for municipal staff as well as technical inputs for their recovery plans from the National Committee;

(b) The significant investment of UNICEF Brazil in data-strengthening paid tremendous dividends during the pandemic response. The country office was able to use existing geospatial epidemiological data at the city and municipality levels to undertake hot-spot mapping for an accurate and targeted response.

(c) In India, UNICEF programmes in the cities of Mumbai, Surat and Ahmedabad have gone the furthest in preparedness planning and response due to existing UNICEF programmes in these cities, which enabled UNICEF to leverage existing partnerships for a wide-ranging, multisectoral COVID-19 response. At the same time, the India Country Office was not able to achieve the same scale of results as those seen in Brazil due to the lack of existing countrywide urban programming using an integrated approach.

48. **Lesson No. 2:** Investment in preparedness pays off. In countries in which UNICEF had invested in preparedness, such as in shock-responsive social protection systems (e.g., Dominican Republic and Guatemala and in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu), Governments were more agile in their response through cash transfers. Cities and states that had faced emergencies in the recent past were generally better prepared. For example, the prompt response to COVID-19 by the government of

Kerala State, India, can be attributed to its experience and investments made in emergency preparedness and response during the floods in 2018 and the Nipah virus outbreak in 2019. In the aftermath of the devastating floods, local governments were asked to prepare local disaster management plans, and when the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in China, local governments in Kerala State were able to incorporate planned quarantine and health surveillance measures at the local level early on.

49. **Lesson No. 3:** The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed “hidden” vulnerabilities and priorities that should shape UNICEF work going forward:

(a) In the case of Brazil, the country office did not include WASH in either of its integrated models, despite water and sanitation having been identified as major deprivations in low-resource urban settings. The pandemic exacerbated such WASH vulnerabilities, leading the country office to make WASH a priority in its COVID-19 response;

(b) Traditionally in India, UNICEF has worked in locations in which the indicators for women and children are the lowest and typically those were identified as rural settings. However, the pandemic has thrown into sharp relief significant vulnerabilities in cities and particularly slums, which demand a UNICEF response;

(c) An important piece of advocacy by the National Committee of Spain as part of its inputs to pandemic recovery planning was around proposals for sustainable and child-friendly urban planning, areas identified by the evaluation as gaps in UNICEF programming. Such engagement with urban planning is highly relevant to creating greener, safer, healthier and inclusive climate-smart cities that are better prepared for future pandemics.

## V. Recommendations

50. The recommendations of the evaluation are set out in table 2.

Table 2

### Evaluation recommendations

	<i>Recommendations (A)</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
A1	<p>1. Specific recommendations targeted at the global, regional and country levels are summarized below:</p> <p>(a) Update the urban strategic note and issue an organizational procedure to give clear direction to country offices and partners on how UNICEF will enhance its support to children in urban settings, including the focus and scope of programming, programming and partnership models, how to address unique structural barriers to child well-being in urban settings, and spelling out the roles of headquarters, regional and country offices and National Committees;</p> <p>(b) Prioritize increasing work in urban settings with specific results areas/targets in the new strategic plan;</p> <p>(c) Assist country offices to develop work plans and investment proposals to implement the redefined urban agenda.</p>	<p>Programme Division lead, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring</p>

	<i>Recommendations (A)</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
A2	<p>2.1 In low- and middle-income countries with slums and informal settlements, prioritize addressing the needs of children through the most appropriate programming and partnership models according to UNICEF comparative advantages:</p> <p>(a) Develop and implement a whole-of-organization approach to advocacy, partnerships and fundraising for children in urban slums and informal settlements;</p> <p>(b) In countries with slums, prioritize the above in country programme documents and workplans;</p> <p>(c) Develop global and regional strategic partnerships to support actions for children in slums;</p> <p>(d) Build coalitions and strengthen local capacity for the collection and analysis of intra-urban data on the situation of children in urban settings, including a specific multiple indicator cluster survey module covering issues relating to informality, with better disaggregation within surveys (age group, gender, slum/non-slum, etc.);</p> <p>(e) In partnership with sister United Nations agencies, strengthen advocacy for child-responsive urban planning, participatory slum upgrading, safe public spaces for children and child-friendly transportation systems, and issues around urban waste and environmental degradation.</p> <p>2.2. In high-income countries, refocus the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) to deepen engagement on child-rights advocacy and child participation:</p> <p>(a) Streamline accountability for the CFCI to enable its expansion as a strategic engagement in urban areas of high-income countries only;</p> <p>(b) Given the reputational risks associated with UNICEF recognizing or certifying cities and municipalities as child-friendly, UNICEF should engage with relevant partners such as government (state or national) or think-tanks (e.g., universities) that could take over the accountabilities of the recognition/certification process based on a robust monitoring and evaluation system.</p>	<p>Programme Division lead, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, regional and country offices</p> <p>Programme Division, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, regional and country offices</p>
A3	<p>3. UNICEF should address the humanitarian-development nexus in cities and towns, considering how investment in infrastructure and services and governance can reduce exposure and risk for affected populations and help cities to be more resilient.</p> <p>3.1 UNICEF should work on enhancing preparedness capacity within urban areas from a multi-hazard perspective and link to climate resilience and environmental degradation.</p> <p>3.2 UNICEF should develop additional guidance on applying the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action in urban settings, including in slums and informal settlements.</p>	<p>Office of Emergency Planning, Programme Division and country offices</p>

<i>Recommendations (A)</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
<p>A4 4. UNICEF should expand organizational capacity in staffing and architecture at all levels to support the urban agenda. This should provide for the appropriate institutional location of the few urban specialists that the organization has, introduce a multilevel support system for addressing urban issues, especially those related to slums, and facilitate partnerships and resource mobilization:</p> <p>(a) Regional and country offices should articulate their urban focus in light of their contexts and programme and partnership priorities. They should also designate urban focal points to coordinate and support urban programming in country offices.</p>	<p>Programme Division lead, regional offices</p>

## VI. Draft decision

### *The Executive Board*

*Takes note* of the evaluation of UNICEF work for children in urban settings, its summary ([E/ICEF/2021/3](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2021/4](#)) and of the evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, its summary ([E/ICEF/2021/5](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2021/6](#)).

## Annex

### **Evaluation of UNICEF work for children in urban settings**

1. Due to space limitations, the evaluation report of UNICEF work for children in urban settings is not contained within the present annex.
2. The report is available from the UNICEF Evaluation Office website: [www.unicef.org/evaluation/executive-board](http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/executive-board).