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## **United Nations Children's Fund**

Executive Board

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### **Report of the field visit to Turkey by members of the Executive Board, 2 to 9 March 2019**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. The following members of the Executive Board of UNICEF participated in the field visit to Turkey from 2 to 9 March 2019: H.E. Ambassador Mr. Omer Dahab Fadl Mohamed, Permanent Representative of Sudan to the United Nations; H.E. Mr. Masud Bin Momen, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations; H.E. Ms. Marie Chatardová, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations; H.E. Mr. Jorge Skinner-Kleé Arenales, Permanent Representative of Guatemala to the United Nations; H.E. Ms. Louise Blais, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations; Ms. Elena Melnik, Third Secretary, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations; Ms. Stefanie Engelberg, Policy Adviser, Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nations; Ms. Minke van der Sar, Humanitarian Affairs Officer, Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations; Ms. Hai Kyung Jun, Secretary of the UNICEF Executive Board; and Mr. Randall González Villalobos, Deputy Secretary of the UNICEF Executive Board.

2. The field visit allowed the delegation to gain a first-hand understanding of the work of UNICEF at the country level. More specifically, the visit aimed to demonstrate concrete examples of UNICEF cooperation with the Government and other partners, including the United Nations country team. The visit provided an opportunity for the members of the delegation to better understand the issues and challenges facing children and women in Turkey.

3. The delegation would like to express its gratitude to the Government of Turkey for the opportunities provided for substantive dialogue with senior members of the Government.

4. The delegation would like to thank the UNICEF country team in Turkey for the very carefully prepared and well-organized visit, and for the ready availability of their dedicated staff throughout the visit.

5. The delegation was impressed by the commitment and dedication shown by government officials at every level and by the UNICEF staff, as well as with the hospitality extended by community members in all locations visited.

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\* E/ICEF/2019/21.

6. The programme of the visit consisted of the visit to Turkey from 2 to 9 March 2019, including meetings in Ankara, Kilis and Gaziantep with the UNICEF Country Office, the Turkish National Committee for UNICEF, senior-level government counterparts, members of the United Nations country team and civil society partners. The delegation had an opportunity to visit UNICEF projects in the field. The delegation met with local government representatives, civil society organizations, teachers, school administrators; students; young people; members of community groups; children and families benefiting from UNICEF-supported programmes; and UNICEF staff.

7. The present report begins by summarizing the briefings received by the delegation members and concludes with the delegation's own observations.

## **II. UNICEF country programme in Turkey**

8. The work of UNICEF in Turkey is guided by the country programme for 2016–2020. The main priorities of the programme are equity through social inclusion (including education, early childhood development and psychosocial support), quality data and advocacy for child rights, gender equality and expansion of partnerships.

9. In 2018, the financial throughput of the programme reached \$181 million. Since 2015, the overall throughput has been \$452 million, with only \$3.7 million allocated from regular resources. The rest of the financing comes from UNICEF partnerships and from donor countries – mostly from Germany and the United States of America, and from the European Union. A total of \$2.9 million was contributed by the Turkish National Committee from 2015 to 2018.

### **A. Key issues facing children and women in Turkey**

10. Turkey faces challenges related to child poverty, child labour, child marriage and discrimination against women and girls, as well as lack of access to quality inclusive education for children with disabilities.

11. Another challenge is the need to strengthen protection from violence and abuse, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, child labourers, children in contact with the law and vulnerable adolescent boys and girls.

12. Child marriage and gender-based violence remain challenges for women and girls in Turkey where, according to a 2014 report, 4 out of every 10 women have experienced physical or sexual violence by their husbands or intimate partners.<sup>1</sup>

13. A key challenge facing Turkey is the large number of refugees. With more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees, including 1.6 million children, as well as about 370,000 non-Syrian refugees and migrants, including 120,000 children, Turkey remains the country with the largest registered refugee population in the world. This puts a strain on the country's infrastructure and basic services.

14. With 71 per cent of the refugee population beneficiaries of the Emergency Social Safety Net in Turkey living below the poverty line, and some families displaced for periods that may surpass 8 years, the vulnerability of refugee families has led them to increasingly resort to negative coping mechanisms, with significant risks for children, including child labour and child marriage.

15. To provide support to the large number of refugees in the country, UNICEF, the Government and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners rely heavily

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Family and Social Policies, Turkey and Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, *Domestic violence against women in Turkey: Summary report*, Ankara, December 2014.

on existing national systems and programmes. There is a focus on supporting and strengthening these systems, scaling up services for the benefit of refugee children and families, and on reaching a greater number of vulnerable Turkish children and families. At the same time, the focus is on learning from the experiences of humanitarian programmes aimed at refugee children and families and applying that knowledge to programmes for vulnerable Turkish children and families.

16. During the visit to Turkey, the delegation gained direct insight into the situation facing children and their families, including women, adolescents and refugees, among others, in the municipality of Kilis, where refugees comprise a little more than half of the population.

## **B. Health**

17. The delegation learned that all Turkish children, as well as all registered refugees, have free access to health services. UNICEF worked closely with the Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization and other partners on the refugee health response in Turkey by supporting a nationwide vaccination campaign in 2017 that covered more than 413,000 under-five refugee children from all 81 provinces. In 2018, the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and other partners focused on ensuring coverage via routine immunization and filling the remaining gaps in the vaccination status of refugee children.

## **C. Education**

18. Ensuring that children receive a quality education is a key priority for UNICEF Turkey. All the families with whom the delegation had a chance to interact stressed the vital role of education in the lives of their children.

19. UNICEF has a strong collaboration with the Ministry of National Education. Their joint programmes are in line with the country's Education Vision 2023, which focuses on strengthening evidence and data-based management of schools, expanding access to preschool education and life-learning opportunities, increasing access to education and building the capacity of teachers.

20. The delegation had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of National Education, Mr. Ziya Selçuk, who discussed his ministry's cooperation with UNICEF.

21. The delegation was informed that education from Grades 1 to 12 is compulsory in Turkey and that more than 90 per cent of Turkish children are part of the formal education system. There are also nearly 650,000 out of 1 million school-aged Syrian refugee children enrolled in the education system.

22. To provide a relevant form of learning to out-of-school children as well as a pathway back to formal education, UNICEF and the Ministry of National Education launched the Accelerated Learning Programme. The programme provides Turkish language courses and a compressed version of the national curriculum to help children to overcome years of lost learning and prepare to enter formal schools. The programme uses teachers who, with UNICEF support, have been specifically trained to understand the impact of traumatic experiences on students and their classroom behaviours, and to use appropriate strategies and approaches to support the psychosocial well-being of students and improve their educational outcomes. Classes are held in 12 provinces and, as of December 2018, had benefited more than 5,600 children. The delegation had a chance to visit one of the centres in the Şehitkamil district of Gaziantep during Turkish and mathematics classes. The adolescents said they enjoyed being part of the programme; some said it meant that they had left their homes for the first time in

years. Some of the students also shared their desire to stay in Turkey in order to pursue a higher education.

23. In cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, UNICEF has been providing Turkish language classes in youth centres across 24 provinces. The programme is supported by trained psychologists and social workers who provide regular guidance to the children and adolescents who are identified as in need of psychosocial support.

24. To identify out-of-school children, UNICEF works with its partners to conduct outreach campaigns in neighbourhoods and communities. Outreach teams identify out-of-school children at the household level and provide families with information and referrals to appropriate educational opportunities. UNICEF partners also conduct awareness-raising meetings with families, stressing the importance of education, especially for girls.

25. UNICEF also supports the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme for Syrian and other refugee children. The national programme has been in place in Turkey since 2003 and was extended to the refugee population in 2017. It is funded by the European Union and the Governments of Norway and the United States. Along with UNICEF, partners include the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services and the Turkish Red Crescent Society.

26. The programme has an estimated 500,000 beneficiaries. Beneficiary families receive cash support every two months on the condition that their child attended school at least 80 per cent of the time in the preceding months. The amounts paid to families depend on the gender and grade level of the child. Kindergarten and primary-school-age children are entitled to receive approximately \$7, and high school students approximately \$10. In both cases, girls are paid slightly higher sums than boys so as to encourage girls' education. In addition, each child is paid an additional sum of around \$18 at the beginning of each school term (September and January). Since 2018, participants of the Accelerated Learning Programme can also benefit from the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme.

27. UNICEF also supports a large number of education-related activities in the 13 remaining temporary accommodation centres for refugees. UNICEF provided support to the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority in the establishment of schools and child-friendly spaces in the centres. UNICEF also provided learning kits to the children who are most in need. More importantly, the Ministry of National Education and UNICEF lead the teacher incentive programme for Syrian volunteer teachers, who work in schools in temporary accommodation centres as well as other education facilities throughout the country. The programme now covers around 13,000 teachers who are paid a monthly wage of approximately \$290 per month; the rate is aligned with the Turkish national minimum wage.

28. The delegation had the opportunity to meet with Syrian teachers at the Nizip 2 temporary accommodation centre. Among other issues discussed, they raised concerns about their salaries being too low for them to be able to sustain themselves and their families financially outside the centres.

29. UNICEF has supported Turkish language courses for refugees from the outset of the refugee crisis. Since 2016, formal education has been conducted increasingly in Turkish, and at present some schools do not provide any classes in Arabic. Several the parents with whom the delegation had a chance to interact stressed the importance of keeping Arabic at schools as an extracurricular course so that their children could maintain fluency in their native language and could

some day return to the Syrian Arab Republic, should the necessary conditions be in place.

#### **D. Adolescent development and participation**

30. UNICEF works closely with government and NGO partners to expand opportunities for meaningful engagement, empowerment and life skills education for Turkish and Syrian adolescents and youth, with a focus on social cohesion.

31. Members of the delegation had an opportunity to meet with the Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports, Mr. İhsan Selim Baydaş, as well as other representatives from the Ministry and to visit the Gazikent Youth Centre in Gaziantep. The delegation was impressed by the quality and diverse range of programmes and activities offered at the centre. At the youth centre, as well as at the Topçuoğlu Kadınlar Meslek Zenginleştirme community centre for women and children in the Kilis municipality, members of the delegation witnessed how sports can be an important tool for the empowerment of children and adolescents, in particular girls and adolescent girls.

#### **E. Child protection**

32. At the UNICEF-supported Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants Al Farah child and family support centre in Ankara, the Kilis municipality community centre, and the child-friendly space in the Nizip 2 temporary accommodation centre, the delegation witnessed a range of child protection and psychosocial support activities, such as psychosocial group work to cope with past experiences and workshops designed to address gender issues.

33. The delegation welcomes the holistic approach adopted by UNICEF and its partners, which combines programmes and activities related to child protection with educational activities, sports, art and music, adolescent empowerment and social cohesion. The fact that most of the centres offer activities for both mothers and children was also appreciated.

34. During interactions with some of the users of the centres, members of the delegation understood the importance of having specialized centres to support families and children, and the positive impact this has on the number of children who utilize their services. Vulnerable Turkish children and refugee children continue to be at risk of being recruited into child labour. The delegation recognizes the government's commitment to the issue through its declaration of 2018 as the "Year against Child Labour". UNICEF is expected to continue its work on ending child labour, in close cooperation with relevant governmental and local authorities, and to help ensure proper monitoring and evaluation as well as to advise on the effectiveness of these programmes.

35. At the Turkish Red Crescent Society community centre in Gaziantep, the delegation learned that a child protection component had been added to the extension of the national Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme for refugees, where child protection outreach teams visit the homes of children who do not show up for school. This allows the teams to detect potential risks, such as child marriage or child labour, and to identify special needs, as well as to create an intervention plan that includes possible referrals to social or health services.

#### **D. Early childhood development**

36. UNICEF supports the Ministry of National Education policy that aims to have all children aged 54 to 66 months in preschool by 2020. In 2017–2018, UNICEF built 304 container classrooms in 12 provinces to provide more learning spaces for young children.

37. UNICEF also supports non-formal education activities for children. In Kilis, the delegation had a chance to visit the Catom multi-purpose community centre, which provides early childhood education classes and other services. The delegation participated in a Turkish language class during which young Syrian refugees performed a song in Turkish. Members of the delegation appreciated some of the children's creative work that was on display. Unfortunately, due to limited space and a limited number of teachers, a child cannot visit the centre more than twice a week.

38. The centre also provides vocational training for mothers. The most popular classes were Turkish language classes and income-generating activities like painting or carving figures. For families unable to access services at the centre, it also offers a home-based early childhood education programme, which is supported by UNICEF. The programme includes weekly home visits to increase children's school preparedness and to help mothers properly respond to their children's needs and connect to other available services in the community.

## **E. The role of UNICEF in Turkey**

39. UNICEF has been working in Turkey to protect children since 1951. The organization works closely with the Government of Turkey, other United Nations agencies, international and local NGOs and other partners to reach the country's most vulnerable children.

40. Due to special historic circumstances, Turkey is the only country in the world that has both a UNICEF country office as well as a National Committee for UNICEF. The National Committee was established in 1956 and is responsible for fundraising for UNICEF programmes. Most funds are collected from individual donors. In 2018, the Committee's total revenue was approximately \$3.5 million.

## **F. Observations**

41. Members of the delegation welcomed the close collaboration between UNICEF and the Government of Turkey and the partnerships established with the ministries and local authorities at provincial and community levels in the development of norms and standards and the formulation of key policies affecting children. The delegation welcomed the strong emphasis by UNICEF on national ownership, which was evident throughout the visit.

42. The delegation was impressed by the sharp focus of UNICEF on its comparative advantages, providing strategic policy advice in national programmes. Being a relevant partner was possible not least because UNICEF has been able to attract expert international staff as well as dedicated and skilled local staff.

43. Members of the delegation were struck by the level of the facilities and centres as well as the quality and diversity of services offered to Turkish and refugee children and their families.

44. The delegation noted the importance of maintaining a minimum level of core programme resources in order to sustain UNICEF capacity to provide high-level technical advice and to influence policies. The delegation recognizes the fact that a lack of predictable, multi-year funding makes the planning and sustainability of important programmes such as the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme and the Syrian Volunteer Teachers programmes difficult.

45. Delegation members expressed concerns about the ability of UNICEF and its partners to reach the most vulnerable children, including children with

disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, as well as child victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

46. The delegation was concerned about the limited access to education for children with disabilities. The delegation believes that this issue should be addressed both in terms of providing special courses for teachers as well as ensuring proper school infrastructure and transportation for children.

47. Members of the delegation were impressed by the dedicated work of a diverse group of Turkish civil society organizations for the rights of children in Turkey and recognized the need for a safe and enabling environment for the promotion, protection and defence of these human rights.

48. The delegation noted the good cooperation within the United Nations country team. The delegation was informed by representatives of United Nations agencies of the close cooperation among agencies on policies at the central level. The delegation requests UNICEF to continue to work in close cooperation with the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Turkey and the other United Nations funds and programmes to deliver crucial results for children in Turkey and to continue to implement the reform of the United Nations development system, as laid out in General Assembly resolution 72/729.

49. Members of the delegation appreciated the critical role UNICEF plays in support of the Government to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in supporting the protection and fulfilment of the rights of children and women in Turkey.

50. The delegation commends the Government of Turkey for its efforts to welcome Syrian refugees into the country and to expand their national social protection programmes and education system to encompass Syrian refugees.

51. After years of displacement, the situation facing Syrian children and their families remains critical. The delegation calls for the international community to support the work of UNICEF on behalf of this highly vulnerable group of children.

52. The delegation also wishes to commend the many refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and elsewhere who volunteer in child-friendly spaces, schools, youth centres and beyond. The delegation encourages UNICEF, in cooperation with the Government of Turkey, to continue to make use of the skills of Syrian and other refugees in a way that they can contribute to the social and economic progress of their people, while at the same time ensuring a wage that allows them to sustain themselves and their families.

53. The delegation commends the efforts of UNICEF to integrate existing national programmes with humanitarian programmes primarily aimed at Syrian and other refugee populations, which ensures that both refugees and local communities benefit from these interventions. This could serve as an inspiration in other countries.

54. The delegation appreciates the focus by the Government of Turkey and UNICEF on social cohesion between the host and refugee populations and wishes to underline the importance of maintaining the delicate balance. Engaging adolescents and young people plays an important role in this regard.

55. The delegation is of the view that it is important to have programmes in place, including Arabic language courses, that make it possible for Syrian refugees to voluntarily return home when the conditions for a safe, voluntary and dignified return are in place.

56. Members of the delegation encourage UNICEF to continue working with the Government of Turkey on ending the biggest threats against Turkish and refugee children, including child marriage and child labour, and to work with relevant

governmental and local authorities to ensure proper monitoring and evaluation of these programmes. Sustaining these important programmes and monitoring their effectiveness is of the utmost importance to achieve durable results and a shift in mindsets.

57. The delegation expressed concern about the number of Syrian children not attending school and stressed the importance of strengthening work related to the education sector both in Turkey and the Syrian Arab Republic, including by ensuring quality education for girls, children with disabilities and other children in need of special attention, including through continued collaboration on the implementation of Education Vision 2023.

58. The members of the delegation further encourage UNICEF to assist in ensuring quality education, including for girls, children with disabilities and other children in need of special attention, through support for sufficient teacher training as well as continued support for the implementation of the Education Vision 2023.

59. On child protection, members of the delegation acknowledge the holistic approaches taken in the various programmes, such as adding a child protection element to the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme. The delegation encourages UNICEF to work with the Turkish Government to expand the child protection component to the national programme as well.

60. The delegation urges UNICEF to work with the Government to further expand opportunities for engagement and empowerment of Turkish and Syrian adolescents and youth, with a focus on meaningful and youth-led participation and with a view to gender equality and combating traditional gender stereotypes, including in activities under the “Year of Volunteerism” in 2019.

61. The delegation appreciated the efforts of UNICEF to continue the delivery of cross-border humanitarian assistance to northern Syrian Arab Republic based on Security Council resolution 2449 (2018), in collaboration with humanitarian partners within and beyond the United Nations, and recognized that certain challenges persist in this regard, especially when operating from a distance.

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## Annex

### **Summary of the programme of the field visit to Turkey, 2–9 March 2019**

The Executive Board visit to Turkey included meetings in the capital, Ankara, as well as in the field, in Kilis and Gaziantep, with key partners, including senior-level government counterparts and civil society, as well as with the Turkish National Committee for UNICEF and members of the United Nations country team. The agenda of the visit provided opportunities for the delegation to meet not only with government and non-governmental organization representatives, but also to directly interact with teachers and school personnel, outreach workers, youth and adolescents, and children and families who benefit from ongoing UNICEF programmes in Turkey.

Key visits included the following:

#### **Ankara (4–5 March 2019):**

- Meeting with Mr. Ziya Selçuk, Minister of National Education
- Meeting with Mr. İhsan Selim Baydaş, Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports
- Meeting with Dr. Mehmet Güllüoğlu, President, Disaster and Emergency Management Authority
- Meeting with Dr. Kerem Kinik, President, Turkish Red Crescent Society
- Working Lunch with the Turkish National Committee for UNICEF: President Dr. Tezer Kutluk and Executive Director Ms. Inci Haseki, Yelken Balık
- Meeting with UNICEF national civil society partners.

#### **Field visits – Kilis and Gaziantep (6–7 March 2019):**

- Working lunch with Mr. Hasan Kara, Mayor of Kilis
  - Working dinner with Ms. Fatma Şahin, Mayor of Gaziantep
  - Field visits to government and civil-society-managed community centres, including discussions with education and child protection personnel, both inside and outside camps, as well as household visits to families benefitting from the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme and early childhood education programmes supported by UNICEF.
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