Update on the context and situation of children

2020 was an extremely challenging year for Iranian children, as the country was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic while continuing to be adversely impacted by the sanctions. Parts of the country experienced earthquakes and floods even as people were still recovering from the disasters in 2019. Yet there was also good news for children, including advances in the protective legal, policy and early childhood development environment for children.

Iran recorded the highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the Middle East and North Africa region, while also being impacted by new rounds of US sanctions throughout the year. The first cases of Coronavirus infection were confirmed by the Government in February 2020 and subsequently there were three big peaks of prevalence. By end of 2020 there had been an estimated 1,200,000 infections and over 55,000 deaths recorded. Hundreds of health care providers died of COVID-19 and families, health care and other service providers struggled to care for ever-increasing numbers of cases; there was a shortage of medical staff, equipment and medicine. When the third peak of the pandemic coincided with the start of the 2020/2021 school year, the Ministry of Education (MoE) made the difficult decision to close face-to-face classes and switch to full virtual learning. MoE estimated that in 2020 five million students were deprived of some education or were out-of-school due to economic strains on families and limited or no access to remote learning technologies. The pandemic also likely deepened pre-existing socio-economic and gender inequities and led to increased domestic violence and strained mental health.

Multidimensional deprivations suffered by children were aggravated by a combination of the pandemic, economic and financial strains. 2020 was the third consecutive year of recession and GDP possibly fell by 15% due to multiple factors, including economic sanctions, exchange rate deprivations, and high inflation. The additional burden of COVID-19 contributed to declines in governmental revenues, issuance of new debt and sales of stock assets, contributing to contraction of GDP. The IMF estimated Iran’s unemployment rate to be 12.2 % in December 2020, an increase from 10.7 % in December 2019. Multiple occupational categories were affected, but the large service sector was particularly hard hit by the pandemic. The situation may be worse than this because the unemployment rate does not include those who have given up looking for work or who are underemployed. The Statistics Center of Iran (SCI) reported that the number of employed Iranians older than 15 in the summer of 2020 numbered just over 23.5 million people, approximately 1.2 million fewer than the same period in 2019.

The worst affected are children and their families already in the lowest income groups, especially those not covered by social security. According to a Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare (MCLSW) and UNICEF study on multidimensional poverty concluded in early 2020 before the pandemic, an estimated 11.5 million people (54 % of children and 55% of adults) including refugees, were under or just above the national multidimensional poverty line. The national social protection system is neither shock-responsive nor agile enough to effectively target and support specific vulnerable populations. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, 40 per cent of the national budget was allocated to social protection schemes, including universal basic income.

Renewed rounds of sanctions continued to affect the country’s health sector causing serious shortages due to problems in procurement of specialized and single-source pharmaceutical products needed for treatment of children’s specialized diseases. Iran is a disaster-prone country and experienced several floods and earthquakes in the south-east and north-west of the country in 2020, while still recovering from major disasters in 2019. Compounded with the impact of sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic, responding to the needs of people affected by natural disasters was an added pressure on the Government’s capacity and resources in Disaster Risk Reduction.
There were positive accomplishments in the legal and policy environments for children in 2020. The Law on Protection of Children and Adolescents was adopted and entered into force. This Law defines which situations potentially place children at risk, clarifies roles and responsibilities of relevant government organizations for protection of children, specifies crimes against children and associated punishments, and explains the standard procedures for investigation and processing cases of children at risk and measures for their protection. Iran also implemented the new Iranian Nationality Law, which enables children born to Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers to obtain Iranian nationality. According to official figures, 28,000 children below the age of 18 years have filed applications to receive birth certificates and a nationality. UNICEF welcomed the move as a milestone for the protection of the rights of stateless persons in Iran, including children.

In December 2020, the Supreme Cultural Revolutionary Council chaired by President Rouhani announced that the responsibility of management and running kindergartens, for children aged 0 to 6 years old, previously with the State Welfare Organisation (SWO), has been handed over to the MoE. It is important for UNICEF and relevant partners to accompany the MoE and SWO in this transition.

[1] Behzad Vahidnia, Head of Counseling services and Psychological affairs at the SWO (April 2020)

[2] Iranian Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs (Dr Farhad Dejpasand), 7 June 2020

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

Many of UNICEF Iran’s major contributions and drivers of results for children in 2020 were realized through adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic and a joint UN plan for support of the Government’s response. UNICEF provided technical advice, mobilized US$5,266,167 and allocated another US$509,581 from its regular resources, which was used for both immediate relief and for approaches that strengthened capacities and resilience of systems, partners and communities. UNICEF-supported achievements for children under each of the following Goal Areas were inclusive of ‘children on the move’ and other highly vulnerable children.

**Goal Area 1—Every child survives and thrives**

**UNICEF delivered protective and hygiene supplies to protect front line workers and hard-to-reach, high risk children.** Iran’s immediate COVID-19 response needs were for infection prevention and control (IPC) supplies, so UNICEF Iran and UNICEF’s global Supply Division provided 63 metric tonnes of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health workers and 16,471 COVID-19 test kits for distribution in 15 high prevalence provinces. Focusing directly on IPC among the most at-risk children, UNICEF procured hygiene kits and masks that were distributed by local NGOs, supervised by the MCLSW to 11,412 children who are refugees, in street situations, and in alternative care facilities. Additional distributions of UNICEF-procured PPE and hygiene supplies were done by Ministry of Sport and Youth (MoSY) (21,000 hygiene packages to highly vulnerable adolescents); Ministry of the Interior (MoI) (to vulnerable children in 38 cities in six provinces); and by the Prisons Organisation (to 1,108 children in correction and rehabilitations centres and 197 incarcerated mothers with infants).

**UNICEF and partners supported and promoted safe, nurturing environments for children’s recovery, psychosocial well-being and protection.** A broad strategy was implemented with MoSY and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME) to engage children, their families and community service providers on the design and implementation of mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) through a stepped approach called ReSPECT. Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) approaches included supporting MoHME with a nine-episode video series for children under ten years old, ten videos on parenting skills during COVID-19 and 18 video episodes for children and adolescents ten years and older, addressing their psychosocial needs during a pandemic. 17,107 children in family-based foster care settings received emotional support, toys and psychosocial support services were provided in children’s correction and rehabilitation centres.
UNICEF continued to work towards its planned programme result of **increased system capacity for upgraded maternal and neonatal health-care services and immunization, with a specific focus on disadvantaged areas, as a partner in the National Health Transformation Plan.** MoHME was assisted with monitoring the health status of neonates during the pandemic; this demonstrated no increases in neonatal mortality due to the pandemic. UNICEF supported ‘Help Babies Breathe’ virtual training courses for providers of neonatal health services. Evidence from 700 hospitals informed interventions to upgrade neonatal services in selected provinces. A UNICEF-supported analysis on the effects of the pandemic on immunization and routine health services showed a drop in the number of people attending health facilities. UNICEF and MoHME’s vaccination unit responded by strengthening monitoring and implementing mitigation measures. These included improvements to the cold chain, a national campaign for promotion of routine vaccination, technical guidance on follow-up with parents and guidelines on protocols for COVID-19 precautions during routine vaccinations.

**Despite economic sanctions, suffering of vulnerable children was alleviated through procurement of pediatric and specialized medicine and equipment through innovative channels.** Thanks to financial support from the Government of Germany, UNICEF procured and shipped to Iran 5.8 metric tonnes of specialized wound dressings for children suffering from *Epidermolysis bullosa* (EB) or *Butterfly Skin* disease. A US$130,000 contribution from Iranian private sector partners enabled offshore procurement of 160 best quality nebulizers for children with Cystic Fibrosis disease, who are highly vulnerable to serious complications or death from COVID-19.

Good progress was made on the planned result of **enhanced capacity for provision of quality PMTCT of HIV and AIDS and Adolescent Well-being services and also to increased prevention of risky behaviour, substance use disorders and non-communicable diseases.** A report on the secondary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the PMTCT programme revealed an important drop in the number of pregnant women referred to health facilities in the first quarter of 2020. To remedy this, UNICEF helped MoHME develop improved information sharing between the private and public health sectors and 7,000 booklets were produced to encourage HIV testing among pregnant women using private health care providers. 200,000 Rapid HIV tests were procured. Initial results from a survey on HIV and AIDS and STIs showed that at-risk groups had a low level of correct information. To address this, a number of interventions were undertaken through strong MoHME-UNICEF collaboration and national consultation. Guidance was issued on supervision of staff at Adolescent Well-being Clubs (AWBCs), the centres received 21,000 HIV test kits and UNICEF supported improved data collection, processing and reporting.

**Social and behavioural change is an important enabler of UNICEF’s change results for children.** A package on risk reduction counseling was developed and 45 mental health workers in Primary Health Care Centres were trained to improve early identification and interventions for risky behaviors among adolescents. In partnership with Drug Control HQ, UNICEF supported MOE to train school counselors across 31 provinces on life skills-based drug prevention among at-risk adolescents. With UNICEF support, the staff of five pilot schools in a at-risk prone district of Tehran were trained to use the life skills package ‘TAHAMTAN’ for preventing high risk behaviours among adolescents.

**UNICEF supported procurement, service delivery and capacity-building to prevent adverse impacts of the pandemic on children’s nutrition;** this contributed to the programme’s planned result of enhanced capacity of the MoHME to improve equality in nutritional status of the children, adolescents and women, with a specific focus on prevention of non-communicable diseases, micronutrient deficiencies and undernutrition in priority provinces. Progress in 2020 included development of a package of interventions for prevention of growth failure and stunting; dissemination of messages on healthy eating; and updating breastfeeding promotion brochures in the context of COVID-19. To tackle micronutrient deficiency, UNICEF provided technical support to MoHME for flour fortification with vitamin D3 for piloting in less advantaged areas where many Afghan refugees live. Two million mega doses of Vitamin A were procured and administered to children under age five in eight priority provinces. As an example of public-private partnership, the Ministry of Interior, Iran-Switzerland Chamber of Commerce and UNICEF Iran collaborated to deliver 2,172 food packages to vulnerable children in Sistan and Baluchistan provinces. Collaboration with Tehran Chamber of Commerce and Society for Protection of Prisoners enabled delivery of 26,518 packages of
complementary foods for children of incarcerated mothers.

**Goal Area 2 – Every child learns**

Work continued towards the Programme’s planned result of *increased MoE capacity to enhance equity* in access and retention for all children, with a particular focus on girls, refugees and children with special needs, in accordance with national policies on promoting inclusion and participation of all children. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF Iran supported MoE with adaptive learning approaches for continuity of inclusive, safe and quality education for vulnerable children. UNICEF, with the Special Education Organization (SEO), continued to integrate children with disabilities (CWD) into regular schools, including through a remote rehabilitation programme adapted to pandemic needs. Capacities of teachers were increased to work more effectively with CWD and advocate for committed community engagement in inclusive education.

The UNICEF Programme is progressing towards a planned result of enhanced capacity of MoE to implement national policies and strategies for improving quality of education at all levels, with a special focus on pre-primary education, holistic life-skills education and effective integration of education on the natural environment and disaster risk reduction. UNICEF successfully completed its humanitarian support to schools in Lorestan, Golestan and Khuzestan provinces that were affected by flooding in 2019, including: rehabilitation of WASH facilities; providing 50 schools for CWD with educational equipment; and equipping 100 schools with 11,156 students (including 5,302 girls) with 500 emergency educational kits. Procurement and delivery of school furniture and pre-primary education and sports items benefitted 82,100 students, including 34,816 girls and 1,353 Afghan students.

MoE was provided with a Persian translation of international guidelines and best practices on Inclusive Distance Learning, including UNICEF’s regional (Middle East and North Africa) ‘Teacher Preparedness Training Package.’ Moreover, to facilitate South-South exchanges of experiential learning, UNICEF supported MoE to publish and share Iran’s experience with its COVID-19 education response. The UNICEF education and social policy teams worked closely together to support MCLSW’s efforts to integrate the needs of out-of-school children into national social protection schemes.

**Goal Area 3 – Every child is protected from violence and exploitation**

The Programme continued to strengthen the capacity of health, education and social welfare systems for prevention and early detection of child maltreatment, and for integration of this capacity in emergency preparedness and responses. In 2020, UNICEF supported MoHME with a multi-sectoral Policy Note and with an evaluative study of MoHME’s programme for prevention of child maltreatment. The findings, which should be available in the second half of 2021, will be used to enhance programme effectiveness and to establish a robust national monitoring and evaluation system for prevention of child maltreatment. MoHME was also supported to develop an assessment towards setting up a monitoring system to address gaps in positive parenting services. A community-based intervention for prevention of child maltreatment was initiated that will inform a national communication and community engagement strategy for prevention of child maltreatment.

Work continued towards the planned result that *SWO in four disadvantaged regions has the capacity to offer improved services to children without effective caregivers.* Three protocols and national minimum standards were developed in partnership with SWO, for provision of comprehensive care and support to children without effective caregivers, including Afghan children in different care settings. To provide every child with the best start in life, UNICEF supported MoHME and SWO with integration of the Care for Child Development package into their current child care services. The next step is integration into nurseries and Comprehensive Health Centres. MoHME, SWO and UNICEF also developed guidance on parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Development of a national protocol was initiated for provision of aftercare and follow-up services for children in alternative care, to ensure their full re-integration into the community after leaving alternative care settings.

Another of the Programme’s planned results is that the *justice system will have stronger capacity to deal with children in judicial proceedings, in line with national commitments.* Progress towards this result included collaboration with the Judiciary and National Body on the CRC(NBCRC) to increase the professional capacity of 650 judges, prosecutors, social workers, counselors, school
principals and teachers working in eleven provinces. Topics covered included child protection, justice for children, best practices for prevention of delinquency, national laws for protection of children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and justice for children affected by migration. The Judiciary, the Ministry of Justice/NBCRC and other stakeholders gained increased capacity for systematic data collection, monitoring and evaluating the situation of children in judicial proceedings, including development of qualitative and quantitative Justice for Children indicators. In addition, a study on an aftercare programme for social re-integration of children in judicial proceedings was completed to inform improvements in aftercare services.

**Goal Area 5 – Every child has an equitable chance in life**

The Programme’s planned results are to strengthen national and subnational capacities for (i) data collection and analysis of the situation of child poverty, evaluation of social programmes and policies; (ii) design and implementation of integrated child-sensitive social protection programmes and (iii) child-sensitive public financial analysis and management. UNICEF provided cross-cutting technical support to the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the population of Iran. To reduce economic vulnerabilities caused by the pandemic, UNICEF and MCLSW co-designed conditional cash transfers and in-kind support to about 42,000 households in four pilot provinces severely affected by COVID-19. This complements existing national social protection coverage, with improved access to health care, learning and nutrition. The aim is to scale up the approach to other severely affected provinces after the pilot phase.

Eight knowledge products were completed in partnership with SCI. Topics included methods of data collection on children, children’s health status, children’s nutritional status and access to nutrition, access to education and child labour. MCLSW’s successful experiences with social welfare programmes targeting out-of-school children, food security, and pregnant and lactating mothers with malnutrition were documented. UNICEF supported MCLSW to customize a child-sensitive, single-registry social protection system in partnership with the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth of Brazil, a world renowned centre of excellence. Monitoring mechanisms were established for child welfare, children’s needs at the onset of crisis, nutrition for children under age six and children in quasi-family settings.

UNICEF supported the MCLSW to synthesize studies and information and consult with stakeholders in order to draft the executive regulation of the Law for Protection of Children and Adolescents, adopted in June 2020. UNICEF technical experts contributed to awareness-raising sessions led by MCLSW for media professionals on child rights issues related to the enforcement of the new law. UNICEF also supported advocacy sessions led by MCLSW for monitoring barriers to enforcement and to build coalition networks to raise awareness.

**Twelve pilot cities were selected for the Child Friendly City Initiative (CFCI) and Isfahan became the first official CFC candidate in Iran.** UNICEF provided technical support to MoI and the National CFCI Coordination Committee for the development of the Isfahan Action Plan and an Urban Atlas, which captures child and adolescent-responsive urban planning and implementation in CFCI cities. The CFCI Handbook in Farsi was widely disseminated. Fourteen best practices from nine cities in Iran were featured in UNICEF’s global CFCI Inspire Awards Compendium, with six practices receiving special recognition. Through a South-South cooperation seminar, Indonesia and the Iran shared CFCI experiences. UNICEF and MOI promoted child participation in CFCI through a national art contest on the topic of COVID-19.

UNICEF significantly increased communication, advocacy and awareness-raising with the public, policy makers and media, especially on COVID-19 prevention and responses to mitigate impact on children. UNICEF’s RCCE reached out to more than 21 million people and engaged around seven million people (49% female and 51% male) via digital platforms with COVID-19 prevention and response messages. The dedicated COVID-19 site, with over 50 articles and infographics in Persian, is the highest visited page on the UNICEF Iran website. There were 420,000 followers of UNICEF Iran’s Instagram by end of 2020, the highest number among all UN agencies in Iran and among all UNICEF offices in the Middle East and North Africa. In partnership with Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MoCIG), UNICEF enhanced children’s representation in multi-media, leveraging national initiatives such as the Iran’s Children’s Film Festival with online filmmaking sessions for adolescents.
UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF’s collaboration with other UN entities continued under the UNDAF 2017-21 and through the Country Preparedness and Response Plan/CPRP (March 2020) for a coordinated, One UN response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This Plan facilitated UNICEF’s resource mobilization, including from its Global Humanitarian Thematic Fund. UNICEF leads on RCCE while UNICEF and WHO co-lead the Pro-Health group and contribute to the Supply and IPC pillars. UNDP and UNICEF, co-leading on resilient economy, also co-lead the UN Iran Programme for Socio-Economic Recovery from the impact of COVID-19. This joint UN programme (UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNAIDS) with Relief International aims to strengthen the national health system, improve social protection and create jobs in the wake of the pandemic, with focus on female headed households and at-risk children. Euro eight million was donated by ECHO and UNICEF is using its allocation for activities in health, WASH, IPC, and RCCE. UNICEF, UNAIDS and UNODC are partners with EU-DEVCO on a multi-year Adolescent Development and HIV and AIDS programme. In partnership with UNFPA and the SCI, UNICEF supported the national Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19.

To improve efficiency of cash assistance to most vulnerable households, UNICEF has been working within the Interagency Cash Working Group, especially on data sharing related to Afghan children and on the Cash Plus initiative for social protection during and post pandemic.

Government partnerships, described in the above Results section, remain integral to UNICEF’s country programme. In 2020 several key partnerships were secured and/or renewed for the well-being of children and adolescents of Iran. UNICEF and the Ministry of Energy signed a first-time partnership agreement to improve access, quality and management of water and sanitation with a focus on children in humanitarian situations. UNICEF renewed its partnership with MoE, adding activities for the safe re-opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Agreements were renewed with the MoCIG on enhancing ethics of representing children in media and with MOSY on mental health of young people. A tripartite partnership between UNICEF, MoHME and the Autism Institute of Iran is undertaking RCCE for autistic children and their caregivers.

UNICEF’s partnerships with civil society organizations remain an important contributor to results for children. The Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) is one of the country's major actors in emergency preparedness and response, and with a large number of its volunteers in all provinces of the country, is well positioned to strengthen community resilience, empowerment and engagement.

UNICEF Iran is grateful to its development and humanitarian partners for their support to children of Iran. International donors include the Governments of Austria, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, UNICEF National Committees of UK, Denmark, Korea, Japan and Switzerland and the EU. Iranian donors include Edge Business Group, Iran-Switzerland Chamber of Commerce, Refah Chain stores, Saman Bank, Sanam Company, Tehran Chamber of Commerce and Tejarat Bank. For the first time, UNICEF has launched a dedicated Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) which will help better address multi layered emergencies impacting children in Iran.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Lessons learned

The key lessons learned in 2020 were on adaptive management, operations and programming, the importance of flexibility to respond to urgent humanitarian needs, and the gains from leveraging new and emerging opportunities and partnerships. In the second half of 2020, UNICEF conducted an Internal Strategic Moment of Reflection to discuss implementation of recommendations from the Mid-Term Review (2019); lessons learned about adaptations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, natural
disasters and economic challenges; and priorities requiring adjustments during the one year extension of the UNDAF and Country Programme, to end of December 2022. 

All 15 programme workplans were adapted to enable support to Government’s COVID-19 response, based on the One UN CPRP. Corresponding shifts were made in resource mobilization and re-balancing of resource allocations. Work modalities for UNICEF staff and partners were adapted and challenges to remote delivery and monitoring of programmes were largely overcome through quick application of lessons learned. For example, training was done online rather than face-to-face to guarantee continuity of technical assistance. Interventions were re-strategized to be risk-informed and the Office was retooled to better deliver emergency responses and enhance emergency preparedness throughout sectors.

The operational and programming challenges in 2020 accelerated UNICEF’s application of change strategies, particularly on social and behavioural change communication and on cross-sectoral collaboration and convergence of resources and actions. UNICEF leveraged the UN’s CPRP to establish a UN RCCE coordination committee for the first time and is supporting MoHME to continue this beyond the pandemic and recovery periods. Adolescent-related programmes of different Ministries were synergized under a comprehensive, coordinated model for health and well-being. Of particular note were the practical UNICEF actions that resulted in more effective inter-organizational cooperation between MoHME and MOSY.

Despite many challenges in 2020, UNICEF’s success was in mitigating the adverse impact of the pandemic and economic challenges on children. Meanwhile, ICO continued to apply lessons learned through the 2019 Mid-Term Review (MTR) and contributed to accelerating results in the five programmatic areas identified in the MTR: a) neonatal health in deprived provinces b) inclusive education for Afghan refugees and children with disabilities; c) adolescent health well-being through a life skill focus; d) preparedness capacity of provinces for disaster response; e) child friendly cities with a vision of transition to child friendly provinces for the next programme cycle.

Emerging opportunities

UNICEF harnessed emerging opportunities created by the pandemic. For example, as mentioned above, due to the COVID-19 pandemic UNICEF was invited by the Prisons Organization to support children in correction and rehabilitation centres and incarcerated mothers and their infants. The vulnerability of these children and mothers is a serious concern beyond the pandemic. Another leveraged opportunity was the creation of an Iranian Task Force on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPPSS). UNICEF further solidified its Task Force on Children in Street Situations following requests by the Government to support COVID-19 interventions for these children, and aims to expand partnerships with relevant government entities. The success of an expanded partnership with SWO highlighted opportunities for protective services to previously hard-to-reach children and families. Both Task Forces fostered improved cross-sector collaboration within UNICEF and among relevant governmental partners.

The UNICEF Country Programme does not include water, sanitation and hygiene, but the pandemic opened an opportunity to partner with the SEO to procure WASH/IPC items for special schools, and to partner with SWO on an adaptive learning strategy. These interventions significantly helped children with disabilities to safely access learning. The COVID-19 pandemic created an opportunity for MoHME and UNICEF to assess the Primary Health Care System in terms of its resilience to different types of emergencies and to design shock-resistant interventions to enhance health system capacity and quality of care in different situations.

The new Law on Protection of Children and Adolescents provided a valuable opportunity to advocate with relevant government stakeholders for multi-sectoral programming for addressing the needs of children who are out-of-school, in contact with the law, affected by migration, have incarcerated parents, have disabilities, affected by substance abuse.

With the support of the UNICEF Regional Office, UNICEF Iran conducted a mapping of Iran’s private
sector across ten programmatic areas. The opportunities that emerged from this study for innovative partnerships have already shaped UNICEF Iran’s 2021 engagement with the private sector. More opportunities to leverage business for results will be reflected in the 2022 workplans and in consultations to design the next country programme.

Innovations

The ‘UNICEF Iran Innovation Strategy 2020-2022’ was developed using a portfolio approach updated with mapping of the programmatic challenges and COVID-19 adaptations. Two UNICEF Global Innovation Fund calls on Blockchain and Child Online Safety were facilitated for Iranian startups. The Office also participated in INOTEX 2020 and shared innovation packages with Pardis Technology Park. In partnership with the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology, a call for the National Innovations for Children Award produced over 80 innovative solutions; finalists will be selected and awarded in 2021.

UNICEF engineered innovative operational solutions to the obstacles caused by sanctions and movement restrictions. **Sanctions made it challenging to find** suppliers and shipping companies willing and able to ship to Iran and there were significant increases in freight costs due to closed borders and the very limited number of flights to Iran. With the support of Governments of Qatar, China and Iran and an innovative partnership with Qatar Airlines, UNICEF eliminated around US$700,000 in freight costs for procurement of COVID-19 related supplies, thus enabling procurement of PPE for 1,300 additional healthcare workers. Due to an enforced working-from-home modality during the peak periods of the pandemic, UNICEF successfully established a new system to process all banking transactions without delays through receipt of electronic staff signatures.