Update on the context and situation of children

Ten years into the Syrian conflict, 2020 brought many challenges for children and their families in Lebanon. Already facing a declining economy, a fragile political environment, civil unrest and the highest per capita ratio of refugees in the world, the emergence of COVID-19 further decelerated economic activity and increased pressure on the faltering public health system.

The situation of the approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees and 200,000 Palestine refugees in Lebanon remains precarious, with over 3.5 million Lebanese estimated to live in poverty and around three-quarters of the Lebanese population now income vulnerable.

The deep social and economic crisis that emerged in 2019 has worsened. Lebanon's Pound hit new lows in December 2020 as the country's financial and economic collapse accelerated, heralding more misery for the millions who have seen the value of their savings/salaries wiped out. This has increased prices, with inflation at 137 percent. Of concern, food prices increased 441 percent in the year to October 2020 and the imminent removal of large price subsidies on basic goods will leave most struggling to survive. An estimated one-third of the population is unemployed, with rates higher among youths and refugees. UNESCWA estimates the Lebanese poverty rate increased from 28 percent in 2019 to 55 percent in May 2020. More than 91 percent of displaced Syrians live below the poverty line, along with 65 percent of Palestinian refugees who were in Lebanon prior to the Syrian refugee crisis and 89 percent of Palestinian refugees who have arrived from Syria.

Lebanon has faced high community transmission of COVID-19 recently. As of early December, there have been 138,096 cases, resulting in 1,115 deaths. The daily average of new confirmed cases hovers near 2,000. While the economic situation and COVID-19 affects everyone; unemployment, inflation and illness are worsening the precarious situation of Syrian and Palestinian refugees. The crowded living conditions and poor hygiene conditions creates high-risk conditions for the virus to intensify.

The impact of the economic crisis on children is felt through decreased access to basic social services, an increase in child poverty and a decline in child wellbeing. The economic deterioration increases pressure on the already underfinanced and overstretched public system due to lack of resources. Unemployment and the impacts of COVID-19, are increasing the anger and frustration, resulting in continued protests and agitation.

The water sector has been impacted by the socio-economic crisis, through a popular movement of civil disobedience encouraging citizens to refuse to pay public utility fees. Losing their only source of income, Water Establishments fear bankruptcy if not kept afloat by external aid. Urgent action is required to maintain minimum water and wastewater services. Drinking water coverage in Lebanon is officially reported as 100 percent. However, under the newly developed Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) ‘safely managed’ parameters of service - accessible on premises, available when needed, and free from contamination - coverage falls to 48 percent.

COVID-19 restrictions saw over 1.2 million school-aged children affected by school closure. Some children only had 1 or 2 months of regular classes in the 2019/2020 school year. The economic crisis is also leading Lebanese students moving from the (semi)private to the already-challenged public education system, which could affect available spaces for Syrian refugee children. There are increased risks of measles outbreaks due to difficulty accessing immunization services, school dropouts, increased protection vulnerabilities. Budgetary constraints are impacting capacity of the welfare, law enforcement and justice system, leaving the vulnerable women and children more exposed and less
Through real-time monitoring, nearly a third of UNICEF and Inter-Agency Child Protection partners have reported problems for children and their families in accessing child protection services, primarily due to COVID-19 related movement restrictions and fear of contamination. Fewer children were reported as needing Child Protection services compared to 2019. The situation on the ground has not improved, rather outreach and identification of cases has become more difficult.

The explosions at the Beirut port on 4 August brought another substantial, and unanticipated humanitarian crisis. The explosion took the lives of 191 people, displaced more than 300,000 people and approximately 100,000 children saw their homes completely or partially destroyed. More than 6,500 people were injured, including 1,000 children.

Over 160 public and private primary schools and 20 Technical and Vocational Education and Training centres were damaged, affecting over 85,000 students. Six major hospitals, a new-born and pediatric unit, 20 clinics, 23 Primary Health Care Centres, dispensaries and the Central Drug Warehouse require rehabilitation.

The resignation of the government following the blast, and the continued failure to form a new government, leaves the country without immediate action plan to implement reforms, creating uncertainty over financial aid for longer term reform and recovery. Routine immunization uptake decreased in 2020, due to the lockdown measures and fears about accessing health facilities amidst COVID-19. With more people unable to afford subsidized primary health care services, vulnerable pregnant and lactating women are at risk of not accessing quality reproductive health services with subsequent risk for women, new-borns and children. The compounding crises are exhausting families’ coping capacity, and more desperate measures are being taken – often putting children at risk. In 2020, increased rates of child labour and children on the streets were observed, in addition to an increase in sea departures towards Cyprus.

Amid this challenging context, there have been signs of hope. The political crisis has provided for a broad range of participation, especially of adolescents, youth and women. Further, youths were able to find a sense of civic pride and solidarity by assisting with the explosion clean up and cooking meals for affected families.

The economic crisis will negatively impact progress towards achieving SDGs. Even prior to the crisis, the 2018 Lebanon Voluntary National Review of the SDGs indicated that most national strategies and plans need adapting, and progress on goals that are crucial for children’s wellbeing and development has been slow and impeded by the economic and political context. No national development framework exists in Lebanon to integrate the various dimensions of the SDGs.

<table>
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<th>Major contributions and drivers of results</th>
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<td><strong>Goal Area 1: Every Child survives and thrives</strong></td>
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<td>UNICEF utilized an integrated approach focusing on Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health (MNCAH), reaching the most disadvantaged communities targeting children, adolescents, women, and caregivers irrespective of nationality. The MNCAH package is implemented through a diverse network of implementing partners in coordination with Child Protection, WASH, and Adolescent and Youth programmes. The MNCAH package is embedded in the national Primary Health Care Programme, through the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and the Health Core Group Partners including WHO, UNHCR, UNFPA, and NGOs. To address COVID-19 risks, UNICEF provided extensive support for the primary healthcare centers</td>
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(PHCCs) in providing reassurance and counselling, in setting up pre-triage pathways, and linking PHCCs with public hospitals. UNICEF supported the development of a Health and Nutrition Referral Pathway for available services at PHCCs including immunization, paediatric, reproductive health and counselling on infant and young child feeding practices, as well as waste management questions.

As part of COVID-19 infection prevention and control (IPC) measures, UNICEF provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to 803 dispensaries, PHCCs and Qadaa (district) offices. At 5 land border crossing points, between March and October, UNICEF supported safe screening of 163,367 individuals along with COVID-19 awareness messaging. One-on-one counselling and remote follow up was provided to 9,146 caregivers of children under five around infant and young child feeding practices and breastfeeding support to combat the spread of COVID-19.

UNICEF secured sufficient stock of all routine vaccine antigens in country and provided support to MoPH for rehabilitation and maintenance of the cold chain at all public Expanded Programme of Immunization points.

From January to October, 37,186 children under five were vaccinated against measles and 61,336 received the first dose of the pentavalent vaccine. A further 53,030 children received the third dose of the pentavalent vaccine, indicating continuity of childhood immunizations. Of children arriving at the borders and at UNHCR facilities, 9,353 were vaccinated against measles, 49,468 received the oral polio vaccine, 3,191 received the inactivated polio vaccine and 20,295 received measles, mumps and rubella (MMR). Additionally, 112,820 caregivers were reached with health integrated messages.

In October, in collaboration with WHO and the MoPH, the second phase of the measles campaign was launched, with 230,202 children vaccinated, of a targeted 400,543. UNICEF’s Communication for Development (C4D) section supported the campaign, leading efforts on mobilization, advocacy and capacity building, reaching 223,043 individuals through door to door, community and edutainment activities.

On the evening of the Beirut explosion, UNICEF directly supported MoPH to transfer all routine vaccines from the damaged cold rooms, saving all 1,748,680 vaccine doses. UNICEF provided logistical support to transfer all medicines to our third-party warehouse, saving approximately 80 percent of the medicines.

Preventative maternal and child health care services were provided through UNRWA’s network of 27 PHCCs serving the 12 official Palestine refugee camps and in larger informal Palestinian gatherings.

Goal Area 2: Every Child learns

To support learning for the most marginalized children, UNICEF promoted quality and inclusive education for all children with evidence-informed policy and programme actions. To address the critical education needs of the most marginalized school-age Lebanese and refugee children, UNICEF worked closely with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) to implement the Reaching All Children with Education Plan (RACE II: 2017-2021).

UNICEF supported MEHE to increase demand for and access to education, improve quality and access to formal and non-formal educational (NFE) services, adapting to distance/blended learning approaches. UNICEF supported inclusion of children with disabilities in NFE programmes through capacity-building of partners and delivering specialized services and assistive devices. MEHE, through UNICEF, continued to support subsidized formal education for 230,584 Lebanese and 196,238 refugee children. Additional targeted interventions to increase access, attendance and retention in formal education included the provision of learning supplies, transportation, school heating and cash assistance for transportation.

UNICEF continued support to the Integrated Child Wellbeing Package of holistic support to the most marginalized children excluded from education to allow children to receive integrated social assistance through enrolment in a Basic Learning and Numeracy Programme, access to child protection services and cash assistance support through a monthly grant.

UNICEF’s advocacy allowed for continued support to MEHE’s piloting of an inclusive education model into 30 public schools that mainstreams children with learning difficulties and disabilities in the same classrooms with specialized educational services. UNICEF partnered with the Center for Educational Research and Development to incorporate disability-responsiveness, child protection and
gender-based violence into teacher training and classroom management. Continuous assessment of implementation will support MEHE to scale-up the number of inclusive public schools. In April, the Learning Readiness Rapid Assessment report findings were published; indicating that while 92 percent of refugee households have internet access, over 25,000 children need some form of learning support. The results informed the design of remote learning support to children enrolled in NFE programmes.

In response to COVID-19, UNICEF supported MEHE to develop their back-to-school strategy based on the global Framework for Reopening Schools (UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank and WFP). UNICEF supported 8,000 children with distance learning, educational supplies, psychosocial support and wellbeing activities as part of the engagement in learning or NFE Phase 1 of 2020. NFE remote learning Phase 2 commenced in September, targeting 13,700 children, including children with disabilities. Phase 2 provides regular NFE programmes remotely. The most disadvantaged children were provided with relevant learning programmes with printed files and learning material delivered to their homes.

In partnership with the Early Childhood Education Development Consortium of NGOs, UNICEF supported 3,034 girls and boys with access to early childhood education. A further 11,099 girls and boys were provided with learning retention and homework support.

In response to the port explosion, UNICEF is supporting the rehabilitation of four public primary schools, with a focus on hygiene, health, accessibility and gender sensitivity, and the refurbishment and replacement of damaged furniture and laboratory equipment for all 90 affected public schools. As most damaged schools were unable to open as planned in September, UNICEF continued to support the continuity of learning in line with MEHE’s distance learning plan.

**Goal Area 3: Every Child is protected from violence and exploitation**

The Child Protection programme continued to engage with the Government through key line-ministries, including the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the Ministry of Labour, MEHE, and the Ministry of Justice, to strengthen Child Protection and Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response systems, while supporting national prevention and response capacities to cases of abuse, exploitation, neglect and violence.

UNICEF supported MoSA to launch its Strategic Plan for Child Protection and Gender-based Violence 2020-2027. MoSA and UNICEF also launched the Social and Behavioral Change Communications Plan, “Qudwa”, which supports a range of actions that promote social change and challenge norms that perpetuate child protection violations and gender-based violence. It includes actions to mitigate protection risks and reduce – in the long-term - issues such as child marriage, child labour (including children engaged in armed violence), and violence against children and women at home.

Through the Child Protection Working Group and the Psychosocial Support committee, both led by UNICEF, and UNICEF participation in the case management taskforce and the Sexual and Gender-based Violence taskforce, partners quickly adapted implementation modality to respond to child protection and gender-based violence needs. Since April, revised guidelines and tools for case management, focused psychosocial support, safe space and community-based activities for children and caregivers, have been used to catch-up on annual targets, and to ensure that activities reach those most in need. Early in the pandemic, UNICEF enhanced the capacity of over 400 frontline workers on the revised modality to ensure at-scale quality responses.

Progress was made on UNICEF’s Integrated Child Wellbeing Programme to continue mitigating the many forms of vulnerability children increasingly face. Approximately 9,000 vulnerable children – including working children and children on the street - benefited from this initiative that combines NFE and child protection support with monthly cash assistance.

In response to the Beirut blast, UNICEF reached over 30,000 individuals with various psychosocial support interventions, from community-based actions and support to parents to care for their children to individualized, specialized mental health support. Approaches were adjusted to reach young people from middle, and upper-middle socio-economic backgrounds impacted by the blast, as well as children and families from vulnerable communities.

To ensure wider access to specialized services, a tailored training tool was developed and nearly 800
frontline youth workers were trained on child protection and gender-based violence core concepts and early identification and referral.

C4D continued the implementation of the disability strategy and built the capacity of implementing partners to develop their own Inclusion Community Engagement plan. 7,840 individuals (4,321 female) were trained on interpersonal communication, micro-planning and outreach, advocacy and COVID-19 municipal response plans.

**Goal Area 4: Every Child lives in a clean and safe environment**

UNICEF focused WASH programme delivery on mitigating the rising conflictual risks around limited access to drinking water, environmental degradation and competition for jobs – all of which have been ongoing causes of tension between communities. At a national level, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Energy and Water in finalizing the update of the National Water Strategy, including social, environmental and climate change adaptation components.

UNICEF emergency WASH programming addressed gaps in service delivery by ensuring the continuity of uninterrupted temporary WASH services (mainly water trucking and desludging) for 223,033 of 300,000 Syrian refugees living in informal settlements (61,543 girls, 58,181 boys, 50,204 men 53,105 women). This mitigated public health hazards and tensions between communities due to accusations of pollution or depleting water resources. Water delivery was increased from 35 to 60 liters per person per day in informal settlements to promote good hygiene, reducing COVID-19 risks.

The socio-economic situation jeopardized the capacity of Water Establishments to deliver water services, due to difficulties procuring fuel and operation and maintenance materials due to the shortage of US dollars. UNICEF is supporting Lebanon’s four Water Establishments through immediate repairs and the direct provision of supplies, materials and equipment. UNICEF supported the Water Establishment to repair leakages on the water network and replaced more than 4,000 household water roof-tanks damaged by the explosion.

UNICEF is providing daily support to Bekaa, South and North Water Establishments to cope with financial difficulties and mistrust from customers. Through UNICEF support, these Water Establishments have a mobile application to facilitate direct communication with customers through their smart phone. Through UNICEF advocacy, all Water Establishments are sharing their monthly financial status with the donor community to strengthen the transparency as a step towards improved relationships with the civil society.

Through direct implementation by UNICEF, the construction of 33 reservoirs and 17 springs providing improved access to safe water for 1,240,000 people nationwide was finalized, contributing to reducing tensions between and within populations. The construction employed 3,224 people including 412 women and 1,182 young people - directly addressing competition for jobs.

UNICEF implemented a quick impact programme to improve access to drinking water within the most vulnerable Lebanese communities hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees. More than 93,396 people (38,038 Lebanese and 55,358 Syrian refugees) benefited from water network extensions and equipment for pumping stations.

UNICEF initiated a programme to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through analysis of opportunities to install decentralized renewable energy power generation for UNICEF-implemented water wells. Two pumping stations have been equipped with photovoltaic panels systems.

UNICEF distributed 6,100 IPC kits to home-isolated COVID-19 positive people to care for the affected person and to protect their families. UNICEF supported WASH rehabilitation of eight isolation centers and is providing monthly medical PPE and IPC supplies for 42 medical staff in 14 isolation centers and four affected elderly centers and mental health institutes nationwide, in addition to provision of water, wastewater, cleaning and laundry services.

**Goal Area 5: Every Child has an equitable chance to life**

The economic crisis, exacerbated by COVID-19, increased focus on the need for social protection response. UNICEF remained at the forefront, providing analysis, advocacy and technical assistance. UNICEF led coordination to consolidate the UN’s position on social protection, producing a UN position and a UNICEF statement on policy direction that fed directly into Government policy, being presented by the Deputy Prime Minister. A series of articles drew attention to the specific sector.
responses needed, including an op-ed alerting to the removal of price subsidies that shaped the policy debate on response. UNICEF’s new partnership with the Ministry of Finance’s Institute of Finance advanced well, with completion of draft financial analysis of the Government’s social protection spending to feed into the strategy development. Other crucial partnerships included the Lebanon Centre for Policy Studies, and two new platforms with experts and CSOs representing people with disabilities.

Due to concerns about the removal of price subsidies, a technical roundtable with civil society was held and Government Ministers consulted with UNICEF and ILO to craft a mitigation response. UNICEF led support to civil society to draft and widely share a position.

Work to finalise the draft National Social Protection Strategy, though delayed and adjusted as each crisis hit, is being consolidated to be presented to the new Government. Over 100 stakeholder consultations were completed, as well technical working group sessions to draft the document.

Cash support to Syrian refugees continued through the roll-out of the Integrated Child Wellbeing Programme, reaching around 9,000 children. For Lebanese households, a cash grant was provided in February to respond to the economic crisis and in December before the winter and the removal of price subsidies. UNICEF Lebanon’s Management Information System (MIS) continued to be a strong global example of in-house MIS capacity and was adapted throughout the year to address new programmatic challenges. UNICEF continue to lead the common cash delivery platform alongside UNHCR and WFP to provide cash assistance within the country.

UNICEF led inputs to influence the design of the World Bank’s new Emergency Social Safety Net programme that aims to expand the National Poverty Targeting Programme, ensuring prioritisation of key categories to identify households living in extreme poverty. UNICEF, with the ILO, led support to Government to inform the design of the national emergency cash programme in response to COVID-19, that reached 170,000 households with cash grants.

Immediately following the port explosion, UNICEF rolled-out a large-scale Emergency Cash Grant to reach vulnerable individuals including children, people with disabilities, older persons and female-headed households with a one-off cash grant. The programme was accompanied by a detailed communication and community outreach programme and is on track to reach close to its target of 80,000 individuals.

Regarding support to youth and adolescents, UNICEF completed the first phase of the ‘Education Mapping Project’ to generate evidence on the situation of Lebanon’s 157 TVET institutions and to highlight the actual job opportunities for youth and adolescents through private sector mapping in the surroundings of TVET schools taking recent labour market changes into consideration.

After the explosion, UNICEF mobilized over 1,000 youth volunteers to support affected families and communities. Additionally, under the cash for work program, 600 youths rehabilitated 550 households and prepared 17,000 hot meals which were distributed to vulnerable families in the affected areas.
UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

While the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 has been the predominant humanitarian architecture, the economic crisis, COVID-19 and the Beirut explosion resulted in multiple coordination frameworks. Efforts to mainstream them into one humanitarian coordination structure are on-going. UNICEF leads the WASH and Education sectors, and the CP sub-sector across all the emergencies. The Nutrition Sector was established under the Humanitarian Country Team with UNICEF as lead. UNICEF remains an active member in Health, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, and Shelter sectors. For COVID-19 response, UNICEF led the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) pillar, Logistics taskforce, and co-led IPC pillar. UNICEF continued to lead the UN Joint Programme on Social Protection which supports implementation of much of the social protection related work. In March, a National RCCE Taskforce was established to coordinate COVID-19 response on community engagement, risk communication and social mobilization. The taskforce, led by UNICEF C4D, includes UN, NGOs, CBOs, academic institutions and line ministries. The taskforce’s strategic RCCE response plan was revised in August to expand the scope of community engagement in the context of the explosion and increasing COVID-19 cases. An accountability to affected population plan was designed to reflect people’s voices and need in the emergency response, to be implemented with a series of cross-sectorial community engagement activities.

A complementary RCCE External Communication taskforce with 25 partners including the Government, UN and the civil society were established, to reach at risk populations with prevention measures and information for services. UNICEF led an action plan with the Ministry of Information, WHO and UNDP to address misinformation and fake news through content campaigns, media outreach, digital activations and a dedicated website and App. Multimedia packages and campaigns were developed on a monthly basis in partnership with different ministries and WHO, among others. The RCCE external communication activities reached a monthly average audience of 3.3 million people through traditional and digital platforms. C4D supported ministries to develop standard operating procedures for quarantine centres with specific annexes for persons with disabilities, municipal response plans, a package for migrant workers, MoPH RCCE plan, and safe return to schools. To ensure inclusiveness, C4D supported development and dissemination of audio-visual materials with modern Arabic sign language.

The No Lost Generation initiative played a major role in galvanizing international concern around the plight of girls and boys affected by the Syria crisis. The initiative has provided a framework for critical interventions in support of child rights.

Building on the already strong coordination with UNHCR, the collaboration was deepened during the year through the new global Blueprint partnership, resulting in strategic planning and coordination of activity implementation in the areas of WASH, Education and Child Protection.

The planning process of the 15 months Recovery, Reform and Reconstruction Framework (3RP), led by EU, World Bank and UN, is ongoing.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Due to the economic situation, UNICEF used innovative means to support youth into entrepreneurial opportunities despite COVID-19 restrictions. UNICEF content partners digitized UNICEF’s social entrepreneurship course, the incubation curricula and other courses including digital media literacy, social media marketing and mobile application development. Promising projects from the training received online coaching. This approach provided 1,859 youth with social entrepreneurship and creative thinking courses, and 966 youth with digital skills training. Of the 1,859 youths, 44 percent received incubation support and up to USD2,000 seed funding.
UNICEF Adolescent and Youth Programme expanded its skills training and employment support component to support WASH in pioneering a Cash 4 Work project. More than 2,000 youths were trained and referred to the WASH programme, which employed 1,182 youths with a minimum of 40 days paid work rehabilitating 17 springs and constructing 33 reservoirs. Beyond improving water services, this provided positive change by building bridges of social cohesion and integration amongst the youth on site.

During the explosion response, use of simple but effective coordination and mobilization initiatives such as establishing UNICEF tent hubs was highly valued. Three UNICEF tents established in the most affected neighborhoods were referral and outreach points for the affected people, which proved essential in reaching the most vulnerable children and families. Inclusiveness of these tents to bring together partner and non-partner organizations to join efforts helped in ensuring coordinated assessment and division of labour among the many aid organizations.

Seed funding and coaching was provided to four 2018 and 2019 Generation of Innovation Leaders (GIL) teams to support families affected by the blast. The businesses provided valuable furniture, woodworking, volunteer and construction services to affected families. This enhanced the support provided by UNICEF to GIL beneficiaries by providing business opportunities and work experience during an otherwise difficult time.

UNICEF implemented several technology solutions for the capture of information and to improve efficiency and effectiveness of operations. This includes C4D’s complaint mechanism for the measles campaign, the EPICS dashboard providing real time information on UNICEF staff to security and HR in case of emergency and extension of the RIMS system for cross-sector referrals between UNICEF partners. The child protection section implemented a clinical management of rape (CMR) mobile application for medical doctors to assist with survivors of rape by grouping all CMR resources in one place. Systems were implemented for child level monitoring in education, and for Child Protection to monitor and follow-up on improvements in psychosocial wellbeing.

UNICEF WASH has finalized the implementation of an innovative online digital platform – the WASH Assessment Platform (WAP) to influence daily programme planning, decision making, and nationwide response plans for more than 300,000 refugees in informal settlements. The vulnerability of settlements across the seven governorates in Lebanon is estimated according to the following stressors: water, sanitation, solid waste, and environmental. To standardize data collection in informal settlements and to highlight the various opportunities of intervention within the WASH sector, the WAP was developed by UNICEF Lebanon as a real-time response tool. The WAP aims to influence partners to provide equitable access to WASH services across Lebanon’s informal settlements.

The Beirut port explosion tested UNICEF Lebanon’s resilience in wholly anticipated ways. Country Office staff exhibited remarkable dedication to vulnerable children and their families in Lebanon in the immediate aftermath of the explosion in the months that followed. Despite devastating personal losses, injuries requiring medical care and substantial damage to their homes and workplace, UNICEF staff returned to work to ensure vital programmes were not disrupted.

UNICEF’s operations after the explosion demonstrated that from a HR perspective, the office could respond effectively due to its emergency preparedness and close collaboration between management and the Staff Association. HR’s capitalization on Staff Wellbeing Services became critical in the aftermath of the explosion, with immediate support for relocation of staff and ensuring medical attention and provision of counselling and psychosocial support.

The rapid response by UNICEF health and supply teams to the explosion demonstrated the office’s capacity to respond to critical emergencies. UNICEF’s relationship with the MoPH, and ability to
implement quick actions meant that US$1.7 million worth of vaccine stocks were saved. The explosion highlighted the importance of Supply’s ability to mobilise contingency stocks. The ability for Supply to source stocks locally was emphasized, due the COVID-19 increasing global demand for PPE and IPC materials.

The Emergency Cash Grant program for the explosion response, rapidly developed in consultation with regional and headquarter colleagues, was recognized as innovative given its creative approach to rapidly reach vulnerable categories of individuals. Monitoring of the execution of the grants will feed findings into national discussions to develop a new national cash transfer programme.

The disruption to essential health services from the explosion and reduction in demand for routine immunization due to COVID-19 are concerning. UNICEF plans to maintain and renew IPC materials and PPE in PHCCs and dispensaries in the most vulnerable municipalities, and conduct outreach activities via social media to encourage access to essential public health services.

Despite efforts to reach all vulnerable children with education, increasing poverty is leading families towards negative coping mechanisms harmful to children. The challenges that COVID-19 imposes on the learning environment and learning gaps are increasing risks of children not returning to school. UNICEF plans to provide cash transfers in the 2020-21 school year to support in-class, distance or hybrid education.

Given the fluid programming context in 2020, building a solid evidence base and staying informed on young people’s changing needs and priorities is instrumental in ensuring UNICEF is well positioned to address increased vulnerabilities. The Youth Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices assessment, the two Youth Polls and programme evaluations enabled UNICEF to successfully advocate as well as adapt its programmes to changing priorities and needs. This evidence base will substantially impact the strategic direction of 2021 programming, including supporting protection concerns among young people through the Youth Protection Policy with the Memorandum of Agreement and the Code of Conduct for work-based learning with the Ministry of Labour.