

## Egypt

### Update on the context and situation of children

In the first quarter of 2020 Egypt enjoyed a largely stable macroeconomic environment, benefitting from recent fiscal and monetary reforms, with continued political stability providing the basis for strong future growth. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has since provided an early test of those reforms, putting continued growth at severe risk and threatening to place an additional 4 million people in poverty before the end of the year[1].

Egypt's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by an estimated 5.6% in 2019 but the impact of the pandemic could reduce it by two percentage points in 2020 and further still in future[2]. Despite improved economic growth in recent years, not everyone has benefitted equitably and the poverty rate has risen since the year 2000 with about three in ten Egyptians below the national poverty line[3]. 30 million people do not therefore enjoy the fundamental human right to an adequate standard of living. Approximately 10 million children face multiple deprivations due to lack of access to basic services and adequate infrastructure (2017).

The regular renewal of emergency laws this year was punctuated only by the addition of new presidential powers designed to control COVID-19. Alongside the public health emergency, Egypt has faced a persistent terrorism threat in the restive North Sinai governorate since 2011, and major military operations have been underway since 2018 to restore stability. The Government of Egypt (GoE) has expanded its investment in infrastructure in this geographical area and permitted a limited number of development partners (including UNICEF) to support human development initiatives.

With the population growing at a fast pace (2.6% per year) and the fertility rate high (3.1 in 2018[4]), Egypt could be home to about 43 million children and 24 million adolescents by 2030. The so-called demographic dividend, if not harnessed, is likely to jeopardise the fulfillment of children's rights, bring major crises in availability of basic services and employment and may also result in an increase in popular discontent[5].

Through its updated National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 (SDS) and national response to COVID-19, the GoE has placed the improvement of Egyptians' living standards as a top priority. Key Government initiatives of relevance to children's rights include implementation of the education reform, the Presidential Leadership Program to develop the skills of young people, enhanced reach of the national social protection cash transfer programmes "Takaful and Karama", and legislative reforms such as amendments to the laws on female genital mutilation (FGM), the new law against bullying, Universal Health Insurance, civic engagement and Family law.

Despite the pandemic the Ministry of Finance decided to maintain budget estimates sent to Parliament in 2020. The new budget supports basic services which will benefit children; health represents 15% of the total budget, education represents 21% and subsidies/social benefits represent 4.8% of GDP. To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, the government also allocated 2% of GDP to a comprehensive stimulus package including cash transfers for informal workers and tax breaks for enterprises.

The pandemic has placed additional strain on the public health system, threatening to undo years of progress. Under-5 mortality has been decreasing consistently since 1990 and has reached 20 per thousand live births (2019), and neo-natal mortality is reducing. One indirect impact of COVID-19 is the restricted provision and utilization of maternal and child health services, which could quickly reverse the gains made in child survival, resulting in additional child deaths in 2020 (Lancet, May 2020)[6].

The triple burden of undernutrition, hidden hunger and overweight constrains the capacity of children to grow, develop, and learn to their full potential. 20% of under-5 children are stunted, and 15% of under-5 children are overweight (2014) - a situation likely to be further aggravated by the pandemic and its impact on household livelihoods.

The Egyptian education system, with over 25 million students, is the largest in the region, with high levels of net enrolment at primary level (97%), falling away at secondary level (56%). While gender ratios favour girls, socio-economic and geographical disparities remain the key deterrents to equal attainment. The GoE “Education 2.0” reform is designed to overhaul the curriculum, improve teacher quality and assess learning needs. The pandemic has slowed the reform process, drastically affected children’s ability to learn, and left poor and vulnerable children even less likely to gain the required competencies due the widening digital divide.

In recent years, Egypt has made progress strengthening the legal framework to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation. Notwithstanding, children continue to face significant protection risks, many of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Real-time monitoring surveys conducted by UNICEF indicated almost immediate effects on the mental well-being of children and their parents manifested through high reported stress levels and disruption in sleeping patterns. Given the prevalence of harmful practices affecting the wellbeing of children in Egypt prior to this year, the likely consequences of the lockdown on child labour, child marriage, sexual abuse and gender-based violence will need to be closely monitored in the coming period.

Egypt is a country of transit and destination for refugees and asylum seekers. As of October 2020, 258,882 refugees and asylum seekers were registered in Egypt (38% children) from 57 nationalities. Syrians remain the largest group (50%), mostly living in urban areas alongside host communities. Syrian refugees enjoy the same access to public education and health services as their Egyptian counterparts, but other access barriers remain. The situation this year has caused many households to lose their livelihoods opportunities, whilst removal of subsidies nationally has led to an increase in the basic cost of living. UNICEF is particularly concerned for the 4,000 unaccompanied and separated children who require critical support during the pandemic.

[1] “Leaving No-One Behind in the Time of COVID-19: Preliminary mapping of potential socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and guidance for policy responses in Egypt through a vulnerability lens”, United Nations Country Team, April 2020.

[2] <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/egypt/overview>

[3] CAPMAS Household Income, Expenditure and Consumption Survey (HIECS) 2019/2020 – **report awaited.**

[4] <https://egypt.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Fertility%20April%202020.pdf>

[5] <https://data.unicef.org/resources/generation-2030-africa-2-0/>

[6] <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2214-109X%2820%2930229-1>

## Major contributions and drivers of results

2020 was characterised by both the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19, which threatened to undo years of progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. For UNICEF this entailed providing rapid support to primary healthcare services and implementing a programmatic refocus on social protection system strengthening to provide a multi-sectoral safety net for the most vulnerable children in Egypt.

The pandemic highlighted the importance of building integrated social protection systems to support

the most vulnerable and least resilient members of society, but 2020 was also an opportunity to review the way UNICEF supports the Government of Egypt to further the rights of children. The pandemic has been the catalyst for a digital transformation of public services, opening pathways towards more inclusive and responsive public health, education and employment services for children and young people. Not only has UNICEF been able to help create genuine two-way dialogues between government and constituents through its COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) programme, but UNICEF is also helping to digitise key education reform teaching and learning packages, as well as delivering online employability, entrepreneurship and life skills training to young people looking to enter the labour market as the economy recovers. 2020 was also an opportunity for UNICEF to support Government efforts to ensure the most vulnerable are covered by social protection systems, and to inform policy decisions around issues affecting children.

**In its work on social inclusion and data,** UNICEF supported the Government to consolidate and expand social protection programs to address the high levels of poverty which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) to extend the non-contributory social protection programme, Takaful & Karama Programmes (TKP), to 3.4 million affected families and 5.3 million children, an increase of 1.2 million families since December 2019. In addition, UNICEF strengthened relationships with partners like the American University of Cairo, the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED) and MoSS to generate evidence and inform policy debate and budgetary decisions on the main deprivations that children face in Egypt.

UNICEF provided technical support to MoSS through a senior social protection advisor, who led and coordinated the overall operations/expansion of TKP and advised on policy coordination for the COVID response. This improved the programme implementation, design and implementation of the M&E system, and reporting to enhance the dissemination of lessons learned, research and key achievements. It also supported the role of MoSS in drafting a national strategy to provide social protection to casual workers, including coordination with other key ministries. UNICEF also supported the deployment of RapidPro to TKP programmes, resulting in more than 100,000 TKP households engaging in two-way communication supporting positive parenting during the pandemic.

UNICEF continued its advocacy with the Government and with CAPMAS to undertake a household survey to fill data gaps on SDG indicators relating to children. The Government subsequently decided to undertake a national survey in early 2021 to close this gap, assigning UNICEF the role of UN coordinator for the process. UNICEF led the UN's review of the data collection tools for the survey and will continue to support the survey next year.

Working with key partners including the Ministry of Finance (MoF), MoPED, University of Cairo, J-Pal and CAPMAS, UNICEF developed and organized 24 briefs/studies and seminars with national and international experts, placing children's rights and deprivations at the centre of the policy debate and policy making. Key examples are the work around the critical issue of FGM, Children on the Move, shock-responsive social protection and poverty.

UNICEF continued its work in Public Finance for Children by launching the "Transparency Brief" series and co-publishing it with the Ministry of Finance together with a social media campaign that has widely disseminated four briefs and two videos together with a presentation of the new budget for the Fiscal Year 2020/2021 with details on the COVID-19 stimulus package.

**Regarding child survival and early development,** the pandemic has placed the health system under unprecedented stress. UNICEF's initial response focused on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), procurement of critical supplies, and risk communication. UNICEF procured and delivered more than 7 million pieces of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), enough to protect more than 116,000 health

staff and provided 56,000 litres of chlorine to 3,733 public health facilities, 4,365 community schools and 277 childcare centres nationwide, benefiting an estimated 3 million people. UNICEF also provided personal hygiene kits to 6,000 people living with HIV, as a particularly vulnerable group. UNICEF rehabilitated water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in 60 PHCs engaged in COVID-19 triage and in 10 isolation hospitals. Additionally, UNICEF reached over 65 million people and engaged 3.2 million online with COVID-19 related messages. Furthermore, over 600,000 people have been engaged in feedback mechanisms on preventing and mitigating the secondary impacts of the pandemic.

The pandemic reduced access and demand for public health services, threatening to reverse the significant progress Egypt had made in improving child survival in recent decades. UNICEF prioritized strengthening the health system and support to parents to provide nurturing care at home with a comprehensive “Jump-Start Package”, comprised of capacity-building for health managers and service providers, procurement of essential supplies, and community engagement and risk communication.

The Jump Start Package ensured over 1,445,000 children and women received essential health care, including perinatal services, immunization and treatment of childhood illnesses through UNICEF-supported health facilities. Some 142,000 live births took place in health facilities supported by UNICEF and over 530,000 families were reached with face-to-face or online communication messages; 10,000 university students engaged in peer-to-peer and community engagement to prevent the spread of COVID-19, to promote positive parenting and to enhancing demand for essential health and nutrition services. Over 580,000 caregivers received counselling on IYCF. Close to 2,000,000 parents have also been involved in responsive parenting initiatives. Preliminary information indicates that utilization of health services is increasing – but not yet to pre-pandemic levels.

UNICEF and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) finalized the country’s first National Strategy for Early Childhood Development (ECD) in 2020. Aligned with Egypt’s Vision 2030, the Strategy provides the rationale for urgent and substantive public investment, as a foundation to human capital development, to allow young children and their families to have equitable access to a continuum of care through high quality health, nutrition, early learning, child protection and social protection interventions from pre-conception to 6 years, enabling them to survive, thrive and overcome inter-generational poverty.

UNICEF also partnered with MoYS to implement an ECD Voluntary Centre model, which supports play-based learning in some of the most deprived communities. It is fully operational in 28 locations across the country, serving children between 2-5 years of age, of whom 46% are girls. Young Child and Family Centres were designed in partnership with MoSS to provide holistic family-based childcare. The model, which includes a model nursery, community awareness on the importance of ECD, positive parenting, family counselling and training for facilitators, was implemented in three governorates this year, producing three governorate-level centers and 49 local nurseries. As a result, more than 2,500 children and their families have benefitted from enhanced ECD services so far.

**Under its learning and protection pillar,** UNICEF focused efforts on mitigating the disruption to in-school learning as well as adapting the delivery of protection service to the context to support the most marginalised children. In March the Minister of Education announced a complete shutdown of all educational institutions for the rest of the academic year, affecting more than 23.5 million students. . The closure of schools placed more importance on online learning modalities, and highlighted the significant digital divide which limits the ability of poor and vulnerable children to continue learning. Together with a lack of peer interaction, this is likely to affect the social and behavioral development of children, and has compelled key child protection services to be delivered through blended modalities.

UNICEF continued its support to the national **education** reform agenda, which has successfully been rolled out to more than 6 million students between Pre-Primary and Primary 3. UNICEF also ensured that 626,000 children, accessed an improved and quality learning environment, with almost equal gender representation throughout. This total includes 183,000 primary school students enrolled in Sinai Peninsula, and over 5,000 refugee students who received distance home learning supplies in response to COVID-19 during school closures.

UNICEF supported the MoETE in building the new “Egyptian Digital Education Hub” – an online platform offering materials and channels to support the continuation of learning through the pandemic. UNICEF also supported MoETE with the associated national launch campaign, reaching a total of 6.5 million individuals and engaging 1.4 million of them. To further amplify the national ‘Back to Learning’ campaign with MoETE, UNICEF’s private sector partner, Carrefour, distributed 500,000 leaflets with COVID-19 messages in 15 hypermarket outlets.

UNICEF’s inclusive education programme provided support services and facilities to 5,000 children (33% girls) with disabilities in 290 inclusive public primary schools. 348,000 children (47% girls) now benefit from this more inclusive learning environment, and 3,700 teachers and school managers are now trained to better integrate children with mild disabilities into the formal public-school system.

80,000 vulnerable children (66% girls), including those out of school or at risk of drop out, benefited from improved quality of teaching and learning in 1,390 community-based education (CBE) schools. Additionally, 342 CBE school management committees and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) were trained on community participation and resource mobilization to enhance parent engagement and participation in their children’s learning.

Furthermore, 17,000 young people were trained on life skills and employability through “Meshwary” - a comprehensive social and economic empowerment programme for youth in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) – and the Sports for Development programme. UNICEF continued to engage with the private sector on facilitating internships for young people.

UNICEF provided education grants to families to cover the main costs of pre-school for 10,000 preschool-age refugee children (49% girls) and provided more than 5,000 refugee students with textbooks to support their learning while schools were closed. Through the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), UNICEF supported the integration of 58 Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC), of whom five were girls, to regain access to education.

UNICEF is a key partner to the GoE to ensure expanded and quality access of **Child Protection (CP)** services for vulnerable children and families. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the prevalence of violence against children; in response UNICEF utilised blended outreach modalities to provide critical protection services in partnership with government and civil society, reaching over 88,000 persons with Mental Health and Psychosocial Support services.

UNICEF continued to advocate for policy and legal reform to enhance the protective environment for children in Egypt. As the overarching policy framework in spelling out sectors’ responsibilities towards the protection of children, the National Plan of Action on Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC) was finalized this year by the National EVAC taskforce, with support from UNICEF. UNICEF also initiated, together with MoETE, the establishment of child safeguarding mechanisms in schools, based on the national EVAC strategy.

UNICEF continues to mainstream protection interventions across social care, justice, education, and health sectors. Accordingly, over 10,000 children who are either at-risk or survivors of violence have been reached through case management (CM) services through the MoSS CM units, the National Council of Motherhood and Childhood’s (NCCM) Child Helpline, and other community-based

protection services. Child Helpline staff and members of 36 district-level Child Protection Committees were also trained on how to identify and manage child marriage cases.

In addition, 29,000 Egyptian, refugee, asylum-seeker and migrant children in public health units (PHUs) were provided with psychosocial support as part of efforts to mainstream protection services within the health sector.

UNICEF continued to support national efforts for addressing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and under the leadership of the National FGM Committee (led by NCW and NCCM), UNICEF supported the design and launching of FGM National Campaign with referral to protection services provided by the national Child Helpline and the Women's Complaints Office. The interactive campaign implemented in partnership with UNFPA reached over 12.5 million individuals with a high engagement rate of 9% (1.1 million).

FGM prevention and response interventions have expanded into PHUs, schools and sports centers; as a result of strengthening the capacity of social workers and youth club facilitators, more than 89,000 students and youth were actively engaged on FGM abandonment in Upper Egypt.

In the justice sector, UNICEF supported 500 children in contact with the law to receive legal and social services in 12 governorates; in addition to the expansion of the practice of non-custodial measures for children in conflict with the law to additional governorates with an increase of 90% of all cases compared to 2019.

UNICEF advocacy with MoSS to institutionalize a case management system to protect children has contributed to the issuance of a ministerial decree stipulating the establishment of a case management unit, coupled with a legal provision in the National Child Law's executive by-laws. UNICEF finalized the social workforce accreditation scheme with MoSS and its corresponding training packages which were tested on over 150 social workers, with further roll-out planned for 2021. UNICEF also drafted a national alternative care strategy, informed by two gap assessments on foster/alternative care systems and complemented by two draft executive regulations introducing structural reforms to institutional childcare.

UNICEF continued its long-term efforts with NCCM and NCW to address online harassment and bullying, reaching 34.7 million people and engaging 1.6 million individuals. By raising these issues, UNICEF also contributed to the Government's "New Societal Culture against Bullying in Egypt" initiative.

To address the root causes of violence against children and create an enabling environment for children to learn and fulfil their full potential, UNICEF developed a social and behavioural change model which identifies girls' empowerment and positive parenting as key drivers of change.

UNICEF supported the launch of Dawwie, the national girls' empowerment initiative designed to engage adolescent girls and boys and their communities to change the way they see and talk about girls. Over 1 million people have been reached through Dawwie digital platforms, and 46% of participants in the Dawwie digital literacy programme demonstrated increased understanding of gender equality..

The positive parenting programme included viewing clubs for 10,000 parents to watch the "Peace. Love. Tolerance" docu-drama, training for 300 social workers, nursery facilitators and foster parents on positive parenting approaches, and toy making festivals to engage 10,000 parents directly. Over 40% of parents demonstrated an increased understanding of behaviours favouring the wellbeing of children.

UNICEF also chaired the **working group on the Universal Period Review (UPR)** this year, an ad hoc working group established by the UN Country Team (UNCT), to identify UNCT priority issues for UPR follow up and engagement between other treaty bodies and the GoE. The GoE received 372 recommendations at its UPR in November 2019 and supported 294 of them. 43% of the recommendations focus on fostering peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16) and 18% on gender equality (SDG5).

## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF is an active contributing member of the Egypt-UN Partnership Development Framework (UNPDF), the partnership agreement between GoE and UN agencies encompassing all development programming. UNICEF is a major contributor to many of the pillars under the Framework and assumed the co-chairmanship of the coordination platform of the largest pillar (People) at the end of 2020. In 2021, UNICEF will lead the group in development of a Joint Work Plan, including the COVID-19 socio-economic response.

As the pandemic started to affect national development efforts, the UN in Egypt, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator and WHO developed the Country Preparedness and Response Plan (CPRP), under which, UNICEF co-leads the working group to implement the COVID-19 RCCE strategy with WHO.

UNICEF worked with government ministries and national entities through 17 partnership agreements this year. In addition to expanding the scope of existing partnerships, UNICEF has also forged strategic new partnerships this year including those with the Ministry of State of Information (MoSI) to engage mass media on social and behavioural change, and the Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC) to inform GoE policy making on issues related to children.

UNICEF also worked closely with other UN agencies on the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for the Syria crisis. As co-chair of the Education Working Group (EWG) and the Child Protection sub-sector Working Group (CPWG), UNICEF contributed to improving information and coordination mechanisms that would enhance effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian efforts for refugee and migrant children in Egypt.

In 2020 UNICEF expanded existing partnerships such as the global Joint Programme on FGM with UNFPA, and forged five new bilateral and multilateral partnerships with IFC, ILO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNHCR, and the World Bank (including 'Prospects'). The partnerships harness respective strengths in areas of common interest such as youth employment, Children on the Move, and Early Childhood Development, enabling UNICEF to expand youth employability services to additional governorates and support the inclusion of migrant and refugee youth in education and skills training.

UNICEF expanded its relationships with both local and international private sector partners, mobilizing US\$ 1.3 million, receiving in kind support with an estimated value of US\$ 2.3 million and undertaking joint advocacy and programme delivery.

Private sector companies supported the UNICEF COVID-19 response in Egypt reaching over 3.1 million people through provision of essential equipment such as PPE, ventilators, disinfectant, soaps and sanitizers to frontline health workers, as well as information books for children on good hygiene practices. The partners, including the American Chamber of Commerce, Selah El Telmeez, Aramex, Clorox, Johnson & Johnson, Eva cosmetics amongst others, were notably some of the quickest to respond to UNICEF's emergency appeal by providing in-kind products, services or financial support.

Allianz supported UNICEF to strengthen social inclusion and protection programmes for vulnerable children and their families. Unilever supported the installation of WASH facilities in 135 schools reaching 88,000 students, and Nahdet Misr publishing house integrated health and nutrition messages in 8 million schoolbooks for children in Kindergarten up to grade 6.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

COVID-19 required UNICEF to respond quickly and adapt constantly throughout the year, fielding

urgent requests from multiple national counterparts for support. At the onset of the crisis, where critical IPC supplies such as PPE and disinfectants were essential and in limited supply, UNICEF quickly secured in-kind support from private sector partners and reprogrammed funds from existing grants to support frontline health workers. Maintaining flexibility and pursuing both local and international procurement enabled UNICEF to source PPE and disinfectants in a timely manner. Unprecedented global demand for equipment including ventilators far outstripped supply, and in future it may be necessary for UNICEF and the wider UN system to consider prioritisation of country needs sooner, rather than address supply requests on a first-come-first served basis.

As part of the response UNICEF adapted its communication tools to further its reach into the community. UNICEF launched its own TikTok account in September 2020 to help reach a younger audience which has moved away from more established social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media is becoming more creative and user-friendly, but whilst UNICEF's Risk Communication work achieved extraordinary results with a reach of over 60 million people, community engagement cannot rely on the same methodologies which are largely technology based. It will be important in 2021 to review how to increase the reach into communities to have real conversations and promote impact and change.

The value of RapidPro was evidenced this year, engaging with TKP beneficiaries on COVID-19 prevention and positive parenting. RapidPro allowed engagement and collection of data via short message service (SMS), an important means of better reaching rural and marginalized communities in a population where the penetration rate of mobile phone is around 95% but smart phones account for around only 16% [1].

UNICEF's positive parenting programming also benefitted enormously from the new partnership with MoSI: by partnering with the Ministry, it enabled UNICEF to reach agreement with a production company which will be selling the rights to the upcoming TV drama on positive parenting to major broadcasters. With the support of MoSI, UNICEF was able to secure sufficient revenue from broadcasters to cover at least 40% of production costs. The TV drama is scheduled to be broadcast during Ramadan in 2021.

It is becoming increasingly clear that it is important to interconnect the different social services with the growing social protection network. The Country Programme already focuses on addressing multidimensional poverty in Egypt through improvement of a range of basic services, but a workshop is planned for early 2021 to review in more detail. The participants of the Takaful and Karama cash transfer programmes are identified as the most vulnerable families in Egypt and are thus a logical starting point for all programmes that aim to fulfill the rights of the most vulnerable. Global evidence points consistently to the need to ensure that cash transfers are accompanied by a series of 'soft' services and referral services in order for the cash to be most effective in fulfilling children's rights. Further investment and reform of the social work system will be an important component of the remainder of the country programme in partnership with relevant line ministries and under the leadership of MoSS.

The pandemic was an opportunity to accelerate national efforts to modernise ways of working, and further digitise the economy. It also highlighted inefficiencies in how different stakeholders communicate in the provision of basic services to children. There were understandable connectivity challenges for many partners and service providers, and the switch to online training was not without its challenges. UNICEF adopted a new strategy and mobilized health workforces at the decentralized level through an organized system of online meetings, trainings and follow-up. The online sessions were instrumental in re-organizing the work of PHC services during the outbreak's peak. UNICEF connected health authorities and professionals at national and decentralized levels with local authorities and communities, which in fact helped reverse the downward trend in the utilization of maternal and child health services.

Similarly, with an initial schools' closure as part of the response to COVID-19, MoETE moved to e-learning on the government-owned Egyptian Knowledge Bank (EKB). This significant achievement was, however, not available to those most vulnerable who have no access to the internet. While UNICEF responded through distribution of textbooks and learning materials to these groups, their learning outcomes are likely to be negatively impacted, possibly leading to increased drop-out. UNICEF's solution is to procure and distribute tablets and internet packages for the most vulnerable, as well as the introduction of the Learning Passport, a tech platform developed in partnership with Microsoft and the University of Cambridge, enabling high quality and flexible learning, to fill the gap for these groups in the coming year. A future goal is to secure data-free or discounted data packages from internet and phone service providers in order to break down a key access barrier for children to stay online and learn. Data packages could also be used as incentives to ensure students reach certain levels of attainment. UNICEF will need to continue to invest in private sector partnerships in order to leverage their reach and expertise to promote inclusion of the most vulnerable children in the learning reforms.

In the area of child protection, social workers and Child Helpline staff were trained to provide remote and blended service provision including psychosocial support, but such modalities have their drawbacks and will require refinement. The pandemic re-emphasises the need for UNICEF's continued investment in the development of information management systems including case management systems, which allow for safe and efficient data collection, storage, sharing and reporting.

UNICEF was able to strengthen its standing as a knowledge-leader this year by launching a survey series to monitor the situation of children through repeated telephone-based assessments. The assessments generated an improved understanding for both UNICEF, Government and other development partners of the likely impact of the pandemic on children.

[1] "What infrastructure will aid Egypt's digital transformation?", Oxford business group, accessed on 4th January from: <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/mobile-connection-new-legislation-and-continuing-investment-communications-infrastructure-set> )