As for many countries, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey significantly impacted national capacities to fulfill children’s rights. Lockdown-type measures were introduced in March. Most were revoked from May onwards but new restrictions were adopted in November as the situation deteriorated. As of end December Turkey reported 2.2 million cumulative cases.

Economic challenges were exacerbated, with GDP shrinking by 9.9% year-on-year in the second quarter, then growing by 6.7% in the third with the aid of temporary stimulus measures. Losses of jobs and income were significant. Unemployment and youth employment were 12.7% and 24.9% respectively, seasonally-adjusted, in October, and annual inflation reached 14.6%. Turkey still hosts the world’s largest refugee population, including over 3.6 million Syrian refugees and 320,000 asylum seekers and refugees from other countries. Around 45% are children. In February a migration crisis on the Western borders affected an estimated 20,000 people, including 8,000 women and children. The situation was solved in late March. While the Government continued to lead the response and invest considerable resources to meet the needs of refugees, the pandemic placed further pressures on national systems already stretched by the protracted refugee crisis.

The national relative poverty rate among children – not including refugees – was 22.8% in 2019, higher than for the general population. Social protection expenditures for children and families remained at 0.5% of GDP. A 2019 TurkStat survey found that 4.4% of children aged 5–17 years are engaged in economic activities. Child labour is believed to be widespread among refugees, particularly adolescent boys, although data are lacking. Economic pressures caused by COVID-19 are likely to encourage this practice. A recent UNICEF study estimated the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 in Turkey and showed that child poverty rates are expected to increase by 5 percentage points in case of mild economic shock, and by 9.3 percentage points in case of severe shock.

TurkStat reported that infant and under-five mortality in 2019 was 9.3 and 11.4 per thousand live births respectively. Regional and other disparities in key health indicators persist, with the 2018 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) showing 22 and 27 for infant and under-five mortality respectively for Syrian refugees.

UNICEF’s assessment through partners indicated that the COVID-19 crisis has affected children’s access to essential services including non-emergency health care, vaccination and psycho-social support. A UNICEF survey found that 24% of children 6-13 years old and 29% of adolescents 14-17 experienced negative changes of behavior during confinement, with limited socialization being the top reason by far.

While these limitations have affected many children throughout Turkey, the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities with some groups of children, including those with disabilities and those from refugee or low-income households, particularly at risk of deprivation of essential services. This situation equally applies to other services such as education, protection, as well as for leisure and participation opportunities.

Access to education for over 18 million children was affected by the pandemic, with schools closed from March until the end of the 2019-20 schoolyear. Continuity of learning was made possible through a national distance learning system on TV channels and online. While the EBA online platform enabled distance learning of nearly 11.9 million students, children from vulnerable and poor households face access challenges. A UNICEF survey showed that approximately 50% of Syrian refugee children could not access distance learning. There are concerns about maintaining standards of education quality. Limited hours of face-to-face teaching were reintroduced for some grades at the start of the 2020-21 school year but were later suspended.

Net enrolment among the resident population was little changed in the 2019-20 school year at 75.2% at
age 5 (pre-primary school), 93.6% at 6-9, 95.9% at 10-13 and 85% at 14-17. Among Syrian refugees, the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) reached 64.2% at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. Despite the increase from the 2019/2020 school year, GER in pre-primary and upper-secondary education is 24.4% and 39.7% respectively, and over 400,000 Syrian children remain out of school. The 2018 DHS showed 14.7% of women aged 20-24 in the resident population married before turning 18 and 2.0% before 15. Among Syrian refugee women, the percentages are 44.8% and 9.2%. The adverse impact of COVID-19 may contribute to perpetrating this practice as a mechanism to cope with economic hardship. A UNICEF survey found that burden for household chores increased during the lockdown and was unequally shared among family members with 62% of women and 26% of men carrying the additional burden. While children are minimally involved, data shows a pattern with girls more involved than boys.

Concern persists about violence against children (VAC), including sexual abuse (15,651 convictions in 2019, up from 13,894 in 2018). While many countries reported increased VAC during COVID-19 lockdowns, no data specific to Turkey is available. In early 2020, there were 17,746 adopted children, 7,741 in foster care, and 13,439 in residential care. The proportion of children in family care continues to rise, while the number of children in residential care remains stable. The number of children receiving ‘Social and Economic Support’ from the Government as a means to prevent family separation rose to 173,011.

The number of children brought into security units as alleged victims of crimes increased to 236,498. An amendment to the Criminal Procedures Code introducing further measures to ensure child-friendly interviews for children in contact with the law took effect in September.

The number of new criminal cases against children increased to 117,000 and 50% were tried in child courts, a proportion that has remained stable in recent years. The number of convictions fell to 77,807 but the proportion of prison sentences rose to 37.4%. In 2020 the ‘Judicial Support and Victim Services Department’ was established at the Ministry of Justice as entity in charge of Justice for Children.

The number of children in detention declined by 19.9%. Approximately 800 child convicts were released under a law adopted in April to lower COVID-19 risks among people in detention. Children aged 0-6 imprisoned with their mothers were also released.

### Major contributions and drivers of results

2020 was the last year of the Turkey-UNICEF Country Programme and of the UN Development Cooperation Strategy (UNDCS), and a year that brought additional challenges for children as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and other localized emergencies in Turkey. Therefore, UNICEF Turkey has focused on three key priorities. First, efforts to further strengthen the capacity of national stakeholders to address the child rights issues affecting the most vulnerable children needed to continue to accelerate achievement of key results of the 2016-2020 CPD, the UNDCS and related Sustainable Development Goals. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic required new and innovative responses to support national efforts and address immediate needs, while ensuring staff wellbeing and health as well as effective business continuity. Third, preparatory work had to be completed to set the stage for the new Country Programme and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) from both programmatic and management perspectives.

In accelerating results for children under the 2016-2020 CPD, UNICEF Turkey continued targeting the most vulnerable children, including refugee and migrant children, children with disabilities, children involved in economic activities, children in contact with the law, and vulnerable adolescent girls and boys. A variety of strategies were employed to implement the Country Programme, ranging from service delivery to provision of technical support and engagement in policy dialogue. As an integrated programme that combines humanitarian and development aspects this mix of strategies continued to evolve in 2020, with increased emphasis on system strengthening and ensuring at-scale results for children. The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent disruption of face-to-face delivery of services and other activities also paved the way for new approaches, including partnerships
and collaboration on innovative solutions for online delivery to sustain access to services and reach previously excluded children. Scale-up of communication for behavioural and social change has been another key strategy this year to ensure continuity and adaptation of services. Facilitating access to a form of education for out-of-school children (OOSC) was a key programmatic priority in 2020. UNICEF Turkey contributed to the enrolment of 64.2% of Syrian refugee children in formal education (as compared to 63% in the previous school year and 35% in 2016) as well to supporting 6,462 out-of-school refugee children (50% girls) to access the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), a non-formal education program designed to help children catch up on lost years of learning and support transition into formal education. These results were also supported by integrated efforts of the social and child protection sectors, with the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) Programme for Refugees continuing to play a key role in encouraging participation in education while providing economic and protection support to vulnerable families. In 2020 the CCTE continued to grow, benefitting 81% of all refugee children enrolled in the 2019/2020 school year. In order to inform future policies and strategies to further decrease the number of OOSC, a comprehensive out-of-school study has been initiated with MoNE.

As the majority of OOSC and those at risk of drop-out are adolescents, a good part of the efforts in 2020 focused on supporting skills development opportunities for this age group. UNICEF and MoNE launched the “Schooling Adolescents through Vocational Education” Programme in September, which identifies at-risk adolescents and guides and supports them in accessing vocational education opportunities, where practical knowledge and technical and vocational skills are acquired through a mix of workplace and classroom learning, while also earning a stipend. With the support of UNICEF, all Technical, Vocational Education and Training curricula were revised and updated to better reflect the changing needs of the job market and learners. UNICEF supported MoNE in establishing 13 Design and Skills Labs in secondary schools in 12 provinces and provided technical assistance to develop training packages to promote innovative learning approaches and acquisition of 21st century skills in these Labs. For the first time UNICEF engaged on digital and 21st century skills development for adolescents beyond the formal education system, working together with the Southeast Anatolia Development (GAP) Administration and SCO and academia partners to establish digital skills spaces known as “Maker” and “Innoba” ateliers. Although the COVID-19 pandemic affected the pace of implementation, a first cohort of 1,152 Turkish and Syrian adolescents were equipped with digital skills through trainings on coding, 3D design and robotics.

Another key programmatic priority for 2020 has been ensuring the sustainability of the CCTE programme and exploring new areas of engagement in social protection for children. Ongoing dialogue with the Government, the European Union and other actors was informed by the findings of the Costing and Financing Study of the CCTE, as well as the external evaluation of the programme, both finalized in September. Partly as a result of this dialogue additional funding was granted for an extension to the CCTE for refugees, which will now continue until mid-2022. The CCTE evaluation and technical assistance from UNICEF also informed ongoing policy dialogue with the Ministry of Family Labour and Social Services (MoFLSS) on integrating cash and care services in the national social protection system, with the Government using its own resources to model adjustments to the national CCTE program. The community-based child protection (CBCP) program also continued to evolve in 2020 as UNICEF and its partners made efforts to expand multi-sectoral collaboration, improve the targeting and design of activities to reach at-risk adolescents, and strengthen the links between CBCP services and local public institutions. With UNICEF support CBCP partners also demonstrated a good level of flexibility in adjusting service delivery modalities and approaches to continue reaching the most vulnerable children and families, both during the COVID-19 pandemic and the migrant crisis on the Greek border in February. In 2020, over a quarter of a million people including 173,000 children benefited from psychosocial support (PSS), referrals to specialized services and legal counselling through the CBCP program, while 6,328 survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), mostly children, were identified and supported. As part of the COVID-19 response, UNICEF supported partners in disseminating GBV-related information as part of hygiene and PSS kits distributed to families.
UNICEF has positioned itself as a key UN voice on gender issues, particularly child marriage and other forms of GBV, and as such it has continued leading the UN joint programme on the prevention of child early and forced marriage (CEFM), which increased national synergies in CEFM prevention through evidence generation, support to provincial action plans and community mobilization focusing on girls’ empowerment and male engagement. UNICEF reached 6,087 adults (86% female) and 7,817 children (62% female) with various programmes to promote gender equality. Together with other UN agencies UNICEF has been active in advocacy to ensure gender remains a national priority despite the changing discourse in the country.

Beyond gender UNICEF also continued to play a monitoring and advocacy role on other child rights-related issues. UNICEF supported evidence generation on the health, education and protection effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, and on its longer-term socio-economic implications. UNICEF has continued supporting the child rights monitoring function of CSO partners and of statutory redress and oversight mechanisms. The deepening collaboration with the Ombudsperson Institution (OI) contributed to increased awareness of children’s rights and access to redress mechanisms through the operationalization of the OI’s Child Rights Strategy. With the recently established parliamentary sub-committee on the Rights of the Child UNICEF developed child-friendly versions of relevant legislation to strengthen the link between children and Parliament and to raise children’s awareness of their rights. 2,000 young people participated in online sessions organized by Provincial Child Rights Committees raising concerns on COVID-19 and other issues.

Overall, despite many changes in the operating environment UNICEF Turkey has continued to position itself as a key and trusted partner of both Government and civil society and has been able to ensure continued and effective implementation of the program by leveraging consolidated partnerships and starting new ones. The Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) finalized this year observed that “UNICEF’s relationships with Government at senior management level and the respect accorded to the agency by partners have considerably facilitated progress”. It also observed that “its technical advisory role is particularly effective (and appreciated) in this context”. UNICEF’s capacity to convene a diverse and complementary range of partners and leverage was also recognized in the evaluation, which concluded that UNICEF “has played a role that perhaps no other international organisation could play in working across sectors and ministries”.

As in many countries, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequities in Turkey and may be deepening vulnerabilities among many of the groups already targeted by the Country Program. The pandemic also created emerging vulnerabilities among a wider group of children. As the prolonged nature of the pandemic became evident, mitigating the impact of disruption of face-to-face learning modalities on all children, but particularly the most vulnerable, became a top priority. UNICEF, MoNE and the Ministry of Youth and Sports distributed “Learn at home” kits to 90,548 children. UNICEF supported MoNE in strengthening the Education Information Network (EBA) platform and EBA Support Centers to deliver online learning, as well as strengthening teachers and school counsellors’ capacity to support students in coping with the demands of distance learning, and physical, emotional and mental well-being. In addition, as part of its effort to support safe, continued learning for all children, UNICEF provided hygiene materials and cleaning services to more than 326 Turkish public schools in 9 provinces with high numbers of refugees and high prevalence rates of COVID-19 cases and to 571 Boarding Schools in 68 out of 81 provinces.

Additional interventions complemented national efforts to provide a comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF’s partners distributed PSS kits to 84,184 children (57% girls) whose access to community-based PSS services had been interrupted. UNICEF and its partners also supported efforts to mitigate the secondary effects of the pandemic on the incomes and livelihoods of vulnerable families with children, distributing hygiene kits to over half a million people from vulnerable Turkish and Syrian families, including 294,174 children (53% girls), and providing an additional top-up payment to 518,794 children of families enrolled in the CCTE programme. 1,206 families who lost their income as seasonal agriculture laborers were also supported with cash payments to prevent an increase in child labor.

Risk communication and community engagement were another important part of the COVID-19 pandemic response in Turkey. Emphasis was placed on mobilizing and engaging adolescents, with
UNICEF and partners working to empower this age group and enhance their capacity to participate and contribute to community needs by disseminating COVID-19 related information and influencing the behaviours of their peers. To this end, 21,072 adolescents (54% girls) participated in online activities promoting their empowerment and participation in collaboration with several partners, including two youth-led organizations with whom UNICEF initiated partnership for the first time. Large scale dissemination of messages to help families protect themselves from COVID-19 and support their children’s education, health and well-being was also implemented in collaboration with celebrities, partners and through social media. COVID-19 related information has reached 78 million people and engaged around 650,000 people through UNICEF Turkey’s Facebook page.

Supporting staff well-being and health while ensuring business continuity was a key management priority during the pandemic phase. UNICEF Turkey activated the Business Continuity Plan at the beginning of the outbreak in March with full teleworking modality until 7 June, in line with the UN Crisis Management Team decision. The Office was able to work effectively and efficiently under this modality. All the systems worked properly, and the Office did not face any disruption in its operations. Consistent with measures issued by the government authorities, as well as the guiding principles developed by UNICEF Headquarters and the UNCT in Turkey, the first phase of a gradual reopening of the Office premises started on 7 June and was still in effect as of end of December.

Under these circumstances, staff experienced a sudden shift in the work culture while having to cope with stressful situations related to the spread of COVID-19, school closures, the need to adjust care arrangements for dependents in their households, and other related situations. Constant communication with and care for staff was emphasized, with staff made aware of the latest developments in the situation and guided through the relevant support measures made available by the organization in weekly all-staff meetings. Resources for stress management were disseminated, including through dedicated Staff Counsellor-led wellbeing sessions and “Mind Detox” seminars for stress management provided by a local psychologist. An internal survey was conducted to take the “pulse” of the team on their well-being, and an anonymous questions and feedback virtual “box” was established to support those who did not feel comfortable raising issues directly during the regular all-staff meetings.

In preparation for the upcoming new programme cycle, in 2020 UNICEF Turkey developed the 2021-2025 Country Programme Document, building on the Programme Strategy Notes prepared the previous year and the UNSDCF outcomes endorsed by the UNCT and the UNSDCF Joint Steering Committee. Gender equality is mainstreamed in both the CPD and the UNSDCF and the latter also includes a full outcome dedicated to gender. Under the leadership of the Presidency of Strategy and Budget a series of technical consultations with government and CSO partners contributed to enrich the document and ensure alignment with national development priorities as well as ownership by national stakeholders. This process culminated with the Child Intersectoral Board meeting in March, where the draft CPD was presented along with the main findings of the Country Programme Evaluation. With official recognition of the Resident Coordinator of the clear alignment between the CPD and the UNSDCF, the UNICEF Executive Board approved the CPD in September.

From mid-2020 onwards a new Country Programme Management Plan was developed to operationalize the CPD, using a participatory and phased approach involving a dedicated CPMP committee and the active engagement of the staff association. This plan included adjustments to the organizational structure taking into account the programmatic priorities of the new CPD and the projected resource availability, as well as the development of a series of adjusted management arrangements and coordination mechanisms to reflect the multi-sectoral ambitions of the CPD. UNICEF also contributed to a similar parallel process to define management arrangements for the new UNSDCF. UNICEF was given the chairpersonship of the Social Inclusion Results Group, and as co-chair of the Partnership and Development Finance Taskforce and as member of the Results Groups Taskforce, UNICEF contributed to the preparation of guidelines on interagency partnership and financing and on coordination mechanisms.

The final important management priority was the implementation of the office wide PSEA action plan adopted at the end of 2019. PSEA assessments have been conducted for 16 NGO partners and individual action plans for CSO partners have been developed. UNICEF’s high-risk implementing partners have received basic PSEA training and have been supported with the development of PSEA
policies, reporting guidelines, HR requirements and referral pathways for survivors. An analysis of the legal and regulatory framework for SEA reporting in Turkey is being finalized, and UNICEF’s PSEA Risk Assessment Tool has been promoted for use by the UNCT PSEA Taskforce.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In 2020 UNICEF continued to broaden its partnerships to ensure the successful implementation of the Country Programme. Historical partnerships such as those with MoNE, MoFLSS, MoJ, MoYS and the Ombudsperson Institution remained central to upholding the rights of both Turkish and refugee children. Despite the reduced operating space for civil society, UNICEF maintained partnerships with 17 national CSOs, including one a gender equality-focused CSO, and diversified the range of areas of collaboration. The agreement for a global stand-by partnership with AFAD for emergency response was finalized between the Government and UNICEF and is expected to be signed in early 2021.

New partnerships were established to respond to the evolving needs of the Programme, including the response to COVID-19. For the first time, UNICEF Turkey partnered with youth-led organizations to support COVID-19 response efforts through active engagement with young people. A new partnership was developed with Sanliurfa Municipality to support the provision of essential services to vulnerable Turkish and refugee children. The partners’ portfolio was expanded also in the area of evidence generation, with a new collaboration with Koc University aimed at aligning research practices in Turkey to international ethical standards of research involving children. After the establishment of the Parliamentary Sub-committee on the Rights of the Child in 2019, UNICEF initiated a partnership focused on developing the capacity of the Sub-committee.

In recent years, UNICEF Turkey developed partnerships with private sector entities (particularly the confederation of small and medium-sized enterprises) with a focus on child rights and business principles and prevention of child labor. Engagement with the private sector also expanded into education through the public-private partnership involving SAP and MoNE which promotes the acquisition of 21st century skills by adolescents. A business for results approach has been integrated in the new country programme and private sector engagement is explicitly mentioned under one of the CPD outcomes. Collaboration with the Turkish National Committee for UNICEF has intensified in the last quarter of the year to plan for diversified modalities of engagement with the private sector in order to accelerate results and maximise opportunities.

Partnerships with the UN system intensified in 2020. Since 2017, UNICEF Turkey has been leading the UN Joint Programme on Child Early and Forced Marriage with participation of IOM, UNFPA, UNWOMEN and UNHCR. Since the start of the response to the Syria refugee crisis, UNICEF has also participated actively in the 3RP, leading the Education and Child Protection sectors, and progressively strengthening this platform based on partnerships between UN agencies and other humanitarian actors. In 2020, UNICEF invested significantly together with the RC Office and UN agencies in the preparation of the new UNSDCF, which foresees even closer partnership and more integrated working. In this framework, a Partnerships and Development Finance Taskforce co-chaired by UNICEF and the RCO developed principles and mechanisms for increased inter-agency collaboration in both fundraising for the UNSDCF and leveraging of development finance in Turkey. UNICEF was also actively involved in the UN interagency Task Team on the socio-economic response to COVID-19.

Lessons Learned and Innovations
As 2020 is the last year of the programme cycle UNICEF Turkey has drawn on the Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) and the external evaluation of the CCTE programme, both completed in 2020.

The CPE found that “UNICEF has successfully applied humanitarian-development ‘nexus’ thinking to its programme in Turkey – and that it has in the process designed some creative and innovative approaches to addressing the challenges involved. There are lessons here for others in UNICEF working in UMIC [Upper Middle-Income Country] contexts”.

The CCTE evaluation recognized the success of the programme and its innovative nature, recommending “that other countries hosting refugees integrate social protection, child protection and education programming from the start, and maximize efficiency by using existing and shared platforms. In middle and upper-middle income countries with strong infrastructure like Turkey, if it is possible to work through national systems and in parallel with national social protection programmes, this approach could facilitate sustainability, social cohesion and child protection as seen with the CCTE”.

The CPE also found that “the UNICEF Country Office has tried to address gender issues both through a set of specific gendered programme priorities, and through an integration approach and efforts to make systems gender responsive. While the gendered programme elements appear to the ET to have been appropriate and largely effective, it is less clear whether integration and mainstreaming efforts have worked”. In response to this, the new Country Programme more clearly spells out its gender mainstreaming approach and foresees an expansion of gender capacity in the office.

The CPE also highlighted the importance of sustainability for the gains achieved in the short and medium term. “Addressing the wider sustainability issues for the programme, and ensuring continued progress on the child development agenda, will require UNICEF to address more consistently the Public Finance for Children (PF4C) agenda.” The new CPD has an explicit focus on public finance for children, with increased technical capacity in the office and new partnerships aiming to influence national and local budget allocations and their efficient use.

Finally, the CPE found that “a more coherent and consistent approach to influencing relevant social norms and to promoting social cohesion” is needed. Therefore the PSN for the new programme cycle focuses on influencing social norms, including social cohesion, and one UNSDCF outcome has been dedicated to social cohesion and support to the national harmonization strategy. The new CPMP foresees an expansion in C4D human resources capacity.

The critical importance of prioritizing the adolescent age group with an integrated approach to learning, engagement and skills development was another key lesson learnt, now embedded in the new CPD with a dedicated Outcome area on adolescent development. Laying the groundwork for the new CPD, in 2020 adolescents were the focus of a series of innovative initiatives aimed at ensuring social inclusion, learning and engagement, including digitally, of the most vulnerable adolescents and young people.

The Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), launched in 2018 by MoNE and UNICEF, supports out-of-school adolescents and youth to make up lost years of learning and transition into formal education. Since its inception it has reached nearly 25,000 adolescents ages 10-18 (48% girls) with a face-to-face modality. In 2020 an online version of ALP was initiated. This online platform will ensure continuity of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as during other emergencies, but it is also envisaged as a tool to reach greater numbers of out-of-school adolescents in Turkey, particularly girls, disabled young people and others who may face gender, geographic and other barriers to reaching physical ALP facilities.

Continuing to look for opportunities to innovate while leveraging the resources of the national education system in service of at-risk adolescents, whose enrolment rates are markedly lower than younger children, UNICEF and MoNE launched the “Schooling Adolescents through Vocational Education” Programme in 2020. The programme targets out-of-school refugee and Turkish adolescents through individual counselling provided by a team of Syrian Volunteer Education Personnel, school counselors and coordinators. Through SAVE, these adolescents receive individual guidance on the vocational education opportunities in Vocational Education Centers (part of the formal education
system), where they acquire practical knowledge and skills through a combination of classroom and workplace learning (including technical and vocational skills), while earning a stipend equal to at least one third of the minimum wage, which can help reduce the economic barriers to their participation in education. The innovative aspect of this programme is two-fold. On one hand the individualized approach is critical, considering that lack of access to adequate information and guidance on how to navigate TVET opportunities is one of the key bottlenecks, especially among refugees and other socio-economically marginalized groups. On the other hand, this individualized approach can be brought to scale in a cost-efficient manner as it builds on the existing resources of the national education system, capitalizing on a solid and well distributed workforce with adequate skills.

Together with partners, for the first time UNICEF also engaged on digital and 21st century skills development for adolescents beyond the formal education system, working together with the Southeast Anatolia Development (GAP) Administration and civil society and academic institutions to establish digital skills spaces known as “Maker” and “Innoba” ateliers. Although the COVID-19 pandemic affected the pace of implementation, a first cohort of 1,152 Turkish and Syrian adolescents were equipped with digital skills through trainings on coding, 3D design and robotics. The curricula for the ateliers were developed by Harran University, a local University in southeast Turkey, based on its research and local knowledge of the needs of young people in this particularly deprived area of Turkey. The initiative is innovative in that it uses digital skills acquisition as an opportunity for fostering social cohesion between young people from the refugee and host community and aims to support adolescent creativity and innovation while also potentially creating livelihood and development opportunities. In 2021 this initiative will be scaled up through the expansion of the digital skill workshops in other centers belonging to the Ministry of Youth and Sports.