The COVID-19 pandemic dominated Ukraine in 2020. While the first case was detected early March, the Government had approved a national action plan and released a budget of UAH 80 B. However, reports soon indicated medical services lacked basic medical, protective equipment and skilled personnel.

Despite a two months quarantine introduced early March, the numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases steadily increased. As of December 25th, 1,012,167 confirmed cases and 17,581 deaths were reported with no signs of decrease. PCR tests were soon insufficient in numbers. Free of charge PCR testing was overtaken by commercial testing in private labs with no coherent contact tracing system. The primary healthcare system was largely not involved, as the focus was put at the tertiary level through designed COVID-19 hospitals.

The quarantine measures triggered the closure of non-essential businesses and services, including schools leaving around 6.5 million girls (48%) and boys (52%) out of school. Out of them 42,000, including children with disabilities, were sent back home from institutions without prior verification of their family conditions further increasing the risk of abuse and neglect. Under UNICEF’s and the Office of Ombudsman’s pressure, the Ministries of Education and Social Policy adopted immediate measures, including conducting regular monitoring and finding joint solutions for them.

The lockdown also augmented risks for children in families and online, while creating new ones. The increased numbers of reported cases of violence triggered the President of Ukraine to issue an Order for urgent measures to prevent and combat domestic violence, GBV, protection of rights of child-victims and witnesses of violence as well as endorsing the introduction of a “Barnahus” model. While the justice system's limitations to ensure child friendly procedures became evident, full support from the Rule and Law institutions was received to introduce child-friendly judicial procedures, special treatment and protection for child survivors and witnesses. Meanwhile, a major achievement was accomplished with the expansion of UNICEF-supported restorative justice model throughout the country guaranteeing its sustainability through state funding.

On the economic front, the COVID-19 outbreak hit Ukraine half-way in its reform efforts with modestly growing economy and a six-year ongoing conflict in the East. The lockdown crippled the economy, and the officially registered unemployment rate increased by 60 percent according to media reports[1]. Ukraine’s GDP is reported to have fallen at the rate of 3.5 percent in Q3 compared to the same period in 2019. However, a steady progress is noted as compared to Q2[2] mostly as a result of the restriction measures' easing triggering a greater consumption. The overall contraction in economic activities resulted in reduced budget revenues and the national debt is reported to equal 57.8 percent of the country’s GDP.

Under the less severe scenario described by the Institute of Economy and Demography and UNICEF, the level of poverty was forecasted to increase from 27.2 to 43.6 percent with an increase in absolute child poverty from 32.8 to 51.3 percent.

Though the government adopted some measures to adjust the social protection system, such as extending subsidy programmes as well as the duration of payments and providing one-off top payments to vulnerable groups, results are barely noticeable.

The other social sectors, such as Health and Education, were challenged by both internal factors and the global pandemic alike. Changes at the highest level of the Ministries resulted in staffing and structural adjustments affecting both policy development and implementation of their reforms.

In Health, while the first phase of the reform was completed during the first quarter, the second phase broadening the primary health care package, expanding into secondary and tertiary health services, and improving service quality, efficacy, equity and access was postponed. Yet the current reform lacks socially oriented approaches truly promoting Universal Health Coverage.
On vaccination, the steady progress reported over the last 2-3 years was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. DTP-3 coverage for children below 1 year old increased from 53.2% (2017) to 80% (2019) with similar projections expected for 2020.

In Education, the endorsement of the Basic Component of pre-school education together with the launching of the ECERS assessment pilot phase is paving the road towards the development of the Professional Standard of Pre-School education.

To ensure the continuity of education during the quarantine, television lessons for Grades 1-11 were launched, however distance education options remained challenging especially for children with disabilities and those living in Eastern Ukraine and/or remote and poor communities. A National Assessment of Schools’ preparedness to operate in conditions of COVID was conducted over the summer resulting in a new Regulation on the provision of distance learning. All schools reopened early September following a strict sanitary protocol, however UNICEF estimates that 360,000 girls (48%) and boys (52%) of primary and secondary school age stayed homebound.

Despite these new challenges, SDG’s and Child Rights agenda remained a priority for the Government. The first SDG Voluntary National Report (VNR) was presented by the Vice Premier Minister at the UN High-Level Political Forum, while two additional SDG monitoring reports were published.

Adolescents and young people’s agenda were also prioritized with a new National Youth strategy 2030 - aligned with the UN youth strategy and with meaningful child and youth participation – endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers. Child and youth participation were further promoted through the elaboration of the first COVID-19 impact on economy and society consensus forecast and the CFCI.

Throughout 2020, the Government remained committed towards Eastern Ukraine with a new ceasefire agreement signed, decreasing the level of fighting. Investments in the water sector were facilitated with bilateral’s signing large contributions. An Action Plan for the implementation of the Safe School Declaration was developed including a monitoring mechanism on attacks on schools. Agreements were reached for the opening of new entry and exit points along the Line of Contact easing civilians' crossing.

However, ceasefire violations are still recorded almost daily on both sides impacting people's lives. In total, 60 incidents of damage to water infrastructure and 11 to education facilities were reported by the WASH and Education clusters.

[1] Euromaidan Press

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

2020 was an important year programmatically. In February, with regional office’s support, the office concluded an extended end of year review reconfirming the relevance of CPD priorities while gradually shifting the geographically focus in Eastern Ukraine, into a more upstream expansion of the ‘national’ programme encompassing the humanitarian-development nexus. Simultaneously, the office responded to an external audit. As per the costed evaluation plan, the third evaluation on Education was launched, while participating in two regional evaluations on ECD and on the country programme.

In response to the humanitarian and COVID-19 situations, UNICEF reviewed its emergency preparedness plan and prepared a HAC aligned with the inter-agency HRP, highlighting gender specific needs of 510,000 girls (57%) and boys (43%) in eastern Ukraine. UNICEF maintained its
presence both in government and non-government-controlled areas, while effectively leading the WASH cluster and Child Protection sub-cluster, as well as supporting the Education cluster IM function.

With the COVID-19 outbreak, UNICEF positioned itself as a knowledge broker for children further consolidating its partnership at the highest level of the State with the President and First Lady, with key line ministries and at decentralized level. UNICEF also expanded its partnership with IFIs, the academia and the private sector. The latter contributed over $2M in cash and in-kind value to UNICEF programmes.

UNICEF significantly scaled up its voice around child rights issues by developing and distributing effective information materials placing the child rights agenda in the media spotlight, bridging advocacy efforts with key stakeholders and growing its digital channels to reach a larger audience of supporters. By the end of 2020, the total digital followership across the channels exceeded 480,000 people, and average monthly reach increased to 14-20 million people, average monthly engagement to more than a million people and the annual website audience to 430,000. In parallel, UNICEF continued highlighting the situation of boys and girls trapped in the six-year volatile conflict. U-report’s use was further enhanced running 10 polls, including on gender related topics, reaching about 10,000 respondents (70% girls) and becoming one of the first monitoring tools to assess youth opinions during pandemic.

In response to the RCCE COVID-19 national response, UNICEF took the lead and applied different strategies such as edutainment, raising risk awareness, capacity building, community engagement, partnerships and influencer marketing, reaching up to 22 M people country-wide through related activities.

UNICEF also stepped up in producing evidence on the COVID-19 impact on poor and vulnerable children resulting in increased UNICEF’s visibility as a key player on social protection. The report “Fighting COVID-19 in Ukraine: Initial estimates of the impact on poverty” made public and mentioned over 600 times in media raised the attention of the highest level of the State and parliamentarians.

Further advocacy efforts on universal and comprehensive social protection for children triggered MOSP’s decision to introduce a new cash benefit programme for families with children of self-employed workers and soften eligibility criteria of several subsidized programmes. UNICEF’s timely evidence-based advocacy also resulted in the Government re-introducing the suspended Baby Box programme for new parents.

On child rights, UNICEF strengthened the capacity of relevant institutions in disaggregated data collection and in the design of a comprehensive CRM system. UNICEF’s advocacy led to the development of a gender disaggregated data collection methodology with more than 50 children related indicators incorporated into State Statistics data collection. On the World’s Children’s day, an online conference covering over 15,070 national practitioners responsible for the protection of child rights was organized focusing on strengthening coordination in minimizing the negative impact of (i) COVID-19 and (ii) the armed conflict. In addition, UNICEF and the Ombudsperson’s Office joined efforts in developing a CRM methodology for child rights monitoring at sub-national level.

Child Friendly Cities Initiative continued to be a strong instrument for child-friendly planning and budgeting expanding to 35 municipalities covering over 10 percent of the Ukrainian population. Moreover, further technical assistance was provided for child-focused and budgeted action plans’ formulation in 24 municipalities. Child and youth participation were promoted through capacity building events, and a year-long course to strengthen child and youth participation at local level led
over 400 young people to design and implement their own projects. CFCI’s cooperation framework in 30 communities also helped mobilizing private sector contributions for IPC supplies to schools and kindergartens covering over 100,000 children.

As a joint social policy and child protection programme, support and technical assistance on the provision of integrated social service provision in Eastern Ukraine achieved major results. Twelve municipalities conducted consultations on local planning and budgeting, while eight municipalities allocating funding for their local plans. Integrated social services for families with children were strengthened through capacities building of 118 case-managers addressing social and gender specific needs of around 15,000 vulnerable families with children, while training 100 community specialists and decisions makers on social service design, planning and budgeting. UNICEF’s advocacy resulted in the introduction of 25 new social workforce positions and 14 funded posts in newly introduced services. 3,000 community professionals benefited from capacity development activities. Information materials developed on social service demand generation reached around 1 million people all over Ukraine. Tools and practices developed, as well as integrated models applied within this programme are documented and shared with national authorities for further replication under the ongoing decentralization reform. The national conference on social service provision supported by UNICEF and organized jointly with the Ministry of Social Policy, WB and the Council of Europe became a cornerstone in the national level advocacy path for sustainable and integrated service provision.

Despite newly emerging child protection risks and challenges, UNICEF continued its’ evidence-based advocacy on child welfare and social protection reforms, with specific focus and targeted interventions directed to “gatekeeping” through community-based child and family support services. UNICEF and partners worked on strengthening the existing alternative care system, introducing new family-type alternative care forms, capacity development of the social service workforce, and expanding policy dialogue at all levels aiming to further influence the national policy/strategy in the area of alternative childcare. The first national assessment of the existing alternative care system was conducted providing an overview of the child protection and alternative care system, as well as recommendations serving as a basis for the DI National Plan of Action.

The National Strategy on Reforming Justice for Children (J4C) implementation was further supported, including on the legal framework and smooth coordination of the sector. Among the main results achieved are a) development of unified standards of training for professionals in J4C; b) programme for resocialization of juveniles in conflict in the law and preparation to release; c) institutionalization of the restorative justice programme for juveniles in conflict with the law.

The lockdown increased existing risks for children in families and online. As a result, UNICEF expanded the online consultations’ coverage providing a nationwide access to 30,000 children and caregivers, while keeping the focus on GBV/VAC services and online/offline consultations through 12 mobile teams in conflict affected Eastern Ukraine (around 29,500 survivors of GBV/domestic violence/VAC reached). To ensure access of parents to the information on positive parenting, PSS and other protection issues, UNICEF introduced online courses for parents, teachers and school psychologists and expanded positive parenting activities, encouraging male care givers. Furthermore, tailored advocacy on Ending Violence Against Children (VAC) resulted in the Government’s prioritization of services for child survivors and witnesses of violence.

In eastern Ukraine, comprehensive mine victim assistance was provided to identified 105 cases (75 children/30 adults), while additionally around 4,560 girls and 3,440 boys gained knowledge on EORE (MRE) and another 100,000 benefitted from online programme.

UNICEF provided technical and financial support for the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ECERS) pilot assessment, while conducting capacity building of preschool personnel and parents on quality preschool education and child-friendly approach through 1) face-to-face and online
trainings of 850 preschool teachers (93% women) and 450 parents (85% women); 2) 12 webinars for 15,000 educators; 3) conducting national advocacy events for 100 representatives of local educational authorities and In-service Teacher Training Institutes; 4) developing brochures for parents, preschool teachers, and local authorities on key elements of quality preschool education. UNICEF also conducted a LearningAtHome digital campaign reaching over 5 million girls (48%) and boys (52%) complemented by the distribution of education supplies, ECD and learning kits and sports equipment to 12,000 vulnerable children.

Based on the successful modelling of the Child-friendly and Safe School model, UNICEF and MoES further implemented it in 50 education facilities. Elements of the Safe School instrument and modules were incorporated to the mandatory institutional pre-schools and schools’ audit, as well as national on-line capacity building conducted for 4,000 educators and 2,000 representatives from 650 schools. The Government continued to promote inclusive learning environment for children with disabilities, and with UNICEF and 200 young people’s support a Cyrillic font for dyslexic children was developed.

During the lockdown, UNICEF provided technical and financial assistance for the development of on-line lessons for Grades 1-4, while partnering with a private media for sign-language translation of 532 lessons for all grades. Technical expertise was extended to conduct a National Assessment of Schools’ preparedness to operate in conditions of COVID-19. Infection prevention and hygiene supplies along with information materials were distributed to 2,060 schools, including to 1,625 schools converted into testing centres for school graduates. Another 435 schools were supported with IPC supplies non-government controlled area and along the contact line.

In response to the humanitarian situation, a total of 26,500 boys (43%) and girls (57%) benefitted from emergency repairs of education facilities (inclusive of gender sensitive WASH interventions) and provision of key education materials and supplies. Another 9,900 children benefited from conflict-sensitive, risk-informed and life-skills-based education delivered by 212 trained teachers. Capacity building programs on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Life Skills Education (LSE) were introduced in NGCA for the first time. UNICEF also supported MOES in setting up a monitoring mechanism on attacks on schools as part of the Safe School Declaration action plan.

UNICEF cooperated with MoYS, MoES, civil society and private sector and provided technical expertise and support for meaningful child and youth participation for the development of the National Youth Strategy. Building on its 2-year program on conflict resolution skills, UNICEF and MoES developed peer-to-peer mediation toolkit and video tutorial on solving conflicts promoting it among 1,000 educators in conflict-affected areas. With the schools’ closure in March and consequent frustration, anxiety and increased violence, UNICEF conducted series of 55 online workshops “Solving conflicts in digital space” reaching 2,177 adolescents and 1,883 adults. UNICEF expanded its flagship programme UPSHIFT, empowering young people as grassroot innovators and social entrepreneurs developing innovative projects around COVID response and environmental challenges reached 75,000 second beneficiaries.

Alongside with WHO and partners, UNICEF was in the first line of support to MoH to ensure adequate national COVID-19 response, providing technical expertise to several government-led actions plans and taking the leading role in supply, CCE and logistics, as well as demand generation activities. UNICEF advocated for better and more efficient involvement of primary healthcare network, while carrying out webinars for more than 600 primary healthcare workers, family doctors, nurses, and managers. UNICEF jointly with WHO advocated and supported the design of a National IPC Strategy. To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, 144 medical facilities across Ukraine received 300 oxygen concentrators, 1000 pulse oximeters and other diagnostic medical and non-medical equipment. Furthermore, UNICEF built Public Health Center’s capacity in COVID-19 data management and visualization.
On the health reform at primary health care level, UNICEF continued supporting MOH at national level by maintaining dialogue among involved professionals and agencies and advocating for the inclusion of MCH related activities (integrated ECD packages and universal-progressive home-visiting model of care) into the package of care financed by the State. On the procurement side, UNICEF ensured uninterrupted supply of vaccines and ARVs.

On immunization, a blended approach was used to address decreasing planned vaccination coverage, while responding to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, combining advocacy and public dialogue on immunization in the context of the reform, policy support, capacity development and communication messages. Changes to the routine immunization calendar proposed with UNICEF support were met favorably and new vaccines (pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, PCV) are planned to be introduced in 2021. In NGCA, UNICEF continued to provide life-savings support on immunization with the roll-out of 110,000 IPV doses and syringes, 757 cold chain equipment and 200 items for cold chain mode control. In addition, health care workers benefited from tailored made trainings. UNICEF also supported HIV and TB exposed children in NGCA via multidisciplinary clinical teams and free medicine e-vouchers benefitting 1,100 children and their families.

On adolescent’s health, UNICEF advocated for gender sensitive youth friendly services to remain included into primary and secondary health care level reform, while promoting the inclusion of syphilis into MOH plans as part of the elimination of Mother to Child transmission of HIV and congenital syphilis. An on-line course on adolescent health, highlighting differential needs of girls and boys, for primary health doctors was rolled out. UNICEF also supported on-line psycho-social counselling for adolescents on COVID-19 and HIV related topics via SupportMe web platform benefiting over 475 young girls and boys.

Due to COVID-19 situation the advocacy for the adoption of mandatory Universal Salt Iodization legislation was put on hold, while national survey of iodine status among women of reproductive age postponed.

While WASH infrastructure was less targeted with “only” 60 incidents reported since January, limited national-level support was provided in 2020 for the water provision in the two conflict affected regions. In responding to the COIVD-19 outbreak, much of UNICEF’s work focused on mitigating the impact of the pandemic, targeting frontline workers and most vulnerable population. The readiness of the e-voucher programme used in previous years turned out to be real asset for a rapid response. As a result, 500,000 patients and medical staff in health care facilities, 12,380 people in social institutions and small group homes and 184 schools and kindergartens (24,095 children and 5,670 teachers) were reached on the onset. The pandemic provided UNICEF with an opportunity to expand its work on IPC and hygiene promotion, including on menstrual hygiene, to Western Ukraine reaching respectively 17,584 Romas and 8,000 Romas girls and women.

On centralized water systems, efforts were made to strengthen services providers’ capacity through the development of a water management system software, and risk assessments were completed in 9 vodokanals to evaluate their strength and weakness and develop water safety plans while building their resilience.

Actions on decentralized water networks in rural areas improved the situation in 42 settlements and villages for 45,000 boys (57%) and girls (43%) and families triggering people to return following the completion of the work. Water, sanitation and heating systems were rehabilitated in 20 schools and kindergartens and 11 healthcare facilities benefiting more than 25,000 children, teachers and patients.

With regards to the water quality, in close collaboration with partners, UNICEF supported the provision of water treatment chemical to water companies benefiting 403,785 people. Additionally,
on-site hypochlorite production units were procured in several large water treatment stations to replace chlorine gas equipment.
In support of the COVID-19 government response, UNICEF consolidated its partnership with Ministries responsible for the provision of social services (Health, Education, Social Policy, Youth and Sport) and the recently established Ministry of Digitalization providing them with technical and financial assistance.

Moreover, UNICEF engaged at the highest level with the President of Ukraine and the First Lady laying the ground for potential stronger child rights advocacy in the nearest future. With the latter a MoU was signed focusing on five areas: (i) nutrition and school feeding; (ii) gender equality; (iii) inclusive spaces; (iv) healthy lifestyle and (v) awareness on child rights.

Partnership with media remained instrumental for highlighting critical issues (projects with TV channels on frontline hospitals and Back2School); unpacking complex concepts (social services video explainers, historical backgrounder on social services and media literacy explainer); identifying and promoting youth changemakers (written media); and channeling UNICEF priorities (placing op-eds, columns and interviews with UNICEF experts at top-tier media outlets).

UNICEF pro-actively engaged with the private sector expanding its partnership and mobilizing over $2M in cash and in-kind value both for UNICEF emergency and development programmes. This engagement resulted in not only leveraging new markets and building new relationships, but also raising awareness on UNICEF mandate and child rights issues. It also allowed UNICEF to be fast, agile and flexible in the response, boost the local economy favoring local products or local production, beat - at times - global shortages, and suggest new production alternatives (i.e alcohol manufacturers to produce sanitizers).

With development stakeholders, in particular WHO and CDC, UNICEF joint forces for providing technical assistance to the Government, while engaging with major donors, including IFIs, leveraging additional resources for the outbreak response and for children. 2 MOUs with WB were signed for the procurement of medical supply and technical assistance.

For the implementation of interventions at decentralized level (introduction of integrated social services, CFCI, home visiting programme, etc...) UNICEF partnered with regional and local authorities within the framework of the Memorandums of Understanding leveraging human and financial resources for sustainability of proposed models. With women-led CBOs, UNICEF expanded its partnership creating a consortium acting as a “think-tank” providing technical expertise to newly created amalgamated municipalities and the Government of Ukraine on child welfare/protection issues. This contributes to strengthen coordination of ongoing reforms at local level, shaping opportunities for their implementation, but also increasing women’s influence in local governments.

As part of UN supported initiatives, UNICEF took the lead in supporting the drafting of the first Government VNR report, as well as drafting the chapter on social services of the UN socio-economic assessment. In addition, UNICEF as Chair of the UN-OMT facilitated the common procurement of PPE for UN Staff, the shared recruitment of a stress counselor and a nurse. In eastern Ukraine, the good UN cooperation of sharing of offices and other resources continued, as well as the support to and coordination of convoys to NGCA. Active participation to inter-agency coordination forums resulted in joint funding opportunities for conflict and COVID-19 related programmes.
Lessons Learned and Innovations

COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the situation of many girls and boys and their families, soon revealing the lack of capacity within the Government in designing and implementing relevant response measures, including needs-based budgeting and social protection of the most vulnerable people. Time-sensitive evidence generation coupled with a good understanding of the specific context proved to be the prerequisites for designing policy measures. The non-availability of an updated census and social development data coupled with limited evidence-based decision-making processes hampered the Government to make informed decisions. Continuous advocacy and capacity development in supporting state’s data collection systems to register all vulnerable groups of the population and produce quality data on their situation in order to address equity gaps, are critical.

Where the data is not available, the Government should be encouraged to use evidence produced by development partners. As an example, the early impact study of COVID-19 on poverty, including child poverty, enabled UNICEF, not only to be able to advocate with the Government at the highest level for enhanced gender sensitive social protection measures, but also to be a key player on social protection. UNICEF’s immediate advocacy on the protection risks of 42,000 girls and boys - most of them from vulnerable families and/or with special needs – sent back from institutions coupled with the child poverty analysis triggered the President of Ukraine to meet with UNICEF and commit full support for de-institutionalization reform.

COVID-19 pandemic also boosted the demand for funding and financing due to the growing level of poverty and vulnerabilities among children and vulnerable groups. As the Government did not possess enough financial resources due to changing priorities and reduced budget revenues, complementary resource mobilization and optimization of state budget expenditure are key. In future, UNICEF should have a stronger voice and partnerships in leveraging resources and in making budgets efficient and effective. At the same time, UNICEF financial resources supporting the humanitarian and recovery response in eastern Ukraine, but also supporting the on-going reforms at the national level allowed UNICEF to quickly respond to new emerging needs thanks to the flexibility of funding and/or the possibility to reprogram it. UNICEF is particularly thankful to the German Government BMZ & AA, USAID, OFDA, BPRM, Italy and EU/ECHO.

Government’s commitment to continue with the reforms despite COVID-19 is commendable. However, many ministries responsible for the provision of social services underwent major changes at the highest level resulting in staffing and structural adjustments affecting both policy development and implementation. Moreover, the lack of strategic vision of the decentralization reform resulted in services being abolished at the local level without proper justification and replacement with others. This is particularly true for children related social services. This situation requires UNICEF to enter the reform process consultations and work with stakeholders on different levels in minimizing the risks of reforms to the well-being of children.

While the COVID-19 pandemic challenged Ukraine, it also became a stimulus for creative and innovative solutions to address new emerging needs. Many planned face to face activities were shifted online, even large and complex events, such as the High-Level Conference on “Social services for families with children”. For other activities, a hybrid approach was chosen ensuring both outreach and quality of the services. This is certainly true for the provision of individual services, such as psycho-social consultations.

Digital technology and social media gave the opportunity to children and young people to have their voice heard, and U-report was used extensively to hear about their concerns, challenges and fears related to their future and inform decision makers. Digitalization, however, has its limitations as it is not spread evenly across the country with regions experiencing limited internet connection, while
vulnerable families are not able to afford ICT equipment. This is also one of the lessons learnt from the distance learning programme developed by MOES (and supported by UNICEF). Children from vulnerable families and/or with special needs were excluded from it with no alternative modalities proposed to them posing a major equity challenge. Within the pace of digitalization, UNICEF has a critical role to play to continue to advocate at all levels for the rights of children, in particular for the most vulnerable, including those with special needs.

The response to the COVID-19 further highlighted the need for inter-sectorial coordination and collaboration. From the onset of the response, UNICEF advocated with line ministries to ensure a comprehensive approach. UNICEF supported behaviour change communication on preventive measures becoming part of the public response across all ministries responsible for social services through tailormade messages addressing sector needs and targeted audience. High-level advocacy with the Government resulted in IPC also being included within the government health response, while becoming an another cross-sectorial priority across UNICEF’s response. There are many more examples of excellent advocacy done fostering inter sectoral collaboration, such as the immediate measures taken by the Ministries of Social Policy and Education related to the return of children from institutions.

In terms of business continuity, UNICEF shifted on the onset to teleworking modality, however without much understanding for how long nor how this would work. Over the time, the office came to the evidence that teleworking is proving itself as viable option for ensuring operational continuity, increased productivity and delivery of results, allowing a more “flexible” schedule and the “freedom” to work from an alternative location. However, experience shows - confirmed by the staff wellbeing survey conducted in June - that teleworking brings also back-draws and risks: overwork impacting the work-life balance equilibrium, increased demand on household chores and care for children - particularly true for women – and feeling of isolation (particularly for individuals living alone), and the loss of contact with colleagues. So being better prepared for managing stress and having hobbies outside of work for maintaining a work-life balance are key. Putting in place regular and predictable communication with colleagues and teams, while offering trainings and sessions with regional and local staff councilors is equally critical to foster collaboration, trust and transparency, but also it translates into a feeling of care towards others.