

## Iran (Islamic Republic of)

### Update on the context and situation of children

The impact of the pandemic coupled with the economic downturn and the recent Afghan refugee influx, has affected the lives of the 23 million children in Iran. In addition, as the 10th most disaster-prone country in the world, Iran continues to be affected by natural hazards and climate change related events.

According to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MOHME), by the end of 2021, more than 131,000 lives were lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic making Iran the most affected country in the Middle East & Northern Africa (MENA) region. More than 51,000 children have lost a parent to COVID-19. After a slow start of the national COVID-19 vaccination roll-out, almost 50 million have received two doses of vaccine (end December 2021) leading to a decline in mortality from more than 600 daily deaths during the peak of the pandemic to 40 per day as of mid-January 2022. Children aged 12 to 18-year-old began receiving vaccines in 2021.

After two years of virtual education, the National COVID-19 Taskforce recommended reopening of schools in November 2021, on the basis that 90% vaccination rate among the teachers and high vaccination rates among children would provide a safe environment for face-to-face education. An estimated 50% of the classrooms met required safety standards. However, the overall number of the students that were out of school and deprived of education since the onset of the pandemic stands at 3.5 million according to the Ministry of Education. Further, during the 2021-2022 school year, an estimated 210,000 students in the first grade are out of school - a sharp increase compared to the estimated 140,000 during 2019-2020.

The psycho-social impact of COVID-19 among adults and children highlights the urgency for policy makers to develop effective screening and coping strategies for parents and children. As a result, MOHME is calling for efforts to further prevent and mitigate the psycho-social impact of the pandemic, particularly targeted to children and adolescents.

Iran's economy emerged from a two-year recession in 2020-21. However, poor economic activity, partly due to sanctions, low oil revenues and higher recurrent COVID-19 related expenditures widened the fiscal deficit, leading to significant inflationary pressures and currency depreciation. Iran's GDP growth fell to +3.1 in 2021 and the inflation rate increased to 42.9%. Economic hardship has aggravated deprivation among vulnerable households, especially impacting those with children.

Before the pandemic, an estimated 50% of households lived below or just above the multi-dimensional poverty line. It is expected to be higher now, as the unemployment rates in Iran has increased from 8.8% to 9.6% from the second to third quarter of 2021. Youth unemployment is most concerning, constituting 70% of the unemployed. While the demographic profile indicates that youths aged 15-29 years account for 22% of the national population and can have a major role in economic growth, there are concerns that youths with graduate degrees comprise a substantial proportion of the

unemployed. Furthermore, women have been severely affected with an estimated 902,000 formerly active women leaving the labor market and approximately 662,000 who lost their jobs since the onset of the pandemic.

In line with the national priority to shift from the decade long universal basic income subsidies – for more efficiency and cost effectiveness – to targeted support for the poorest households to cope with the impact of the pandemic, a range of social protection measures have been introduced. Nonetheless, the scale of needs and the limited fiscal space are factors that are limiting the government’s ability to address the consequence of this multi-layered crisis. This is further exacerbated by the pressure on communities and welfare systems to address the needs of new refugees entering the country following the crisis in Afghanistan.

It is in this context that President Ebrahim Raisi assumed office in August 2021, aiming to revitalize economy and renew the nuclear deal under conditions that serves Iran’s national interests. Within this fluid environment and political transition, UNICEF responded to multiple emergencies, successfully renewed 9 of its 14 workplans with the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and initiated the process for the development of the new Country Programme of Cooperation for 2023-2027.

The insecurity and political instability in Afghanistan, culminating in the takeover of the government by the Taliban in August resulted in the influx of large numbers of Afghans crossing over into Iran. Many of them sought refuge within host communities in border provinces. These communities have been traditionally hosting Afghan refugee for decades and it is estimated that prior to the recent crisis, Iran was host to approximately 3 million Afghan refugees. Moreover, the border host communities are among the most deprived Iranian communities under substantial economic strain. While the government has been committed to providing basic social services, including health, education and even COVID-19 vaccinations for refugees, resources to support new refugees are limited due to reasons mentioned above, resulting in expanding vulnerabilities and widening inequities. According to recent reports, 800,000 Afghan refugees have entered Iran in the last four months of 2021.

Government officials are urging the international community to support the refugee response and citing the limited support Iran has received in the past to assist them in their refugee response relative to other countries in the region. As reflected in the 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan, the support of the international community will continue to be critical to ensure continuity of high-quality inclusive services in Iran.

The multiple crises are overwhelming the national capacity to respond, evidenced by the recovery from major floods and earthquakes in 2020 taking much longer than expected. Meanwhile, a new set of floods have hit the southeastern part of Iran which counts among the less advantaged provinces. In addition, the country is impacted by air pollution, water scarcity, heatwaves and sandstorms, with climate change believed to be the main driver. This calls for more emphasis on mitigating climate change impact and ensuring rigorous preparedness and response systems for emergencies.

## Major contributions and drivers of results

### Health, Nutrition and ADAP (incl HIV/AIDS)

During 2021, UNICEF continued to provide technical support to MOHME and play a key role in the successful roll-out of the COVID-19 national vaccination campaign. As a partner of the COVAX

Facility UNICEF procured and delivered 8,974,400 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine from Iran's paid allocation. UNICEF has also facilitated the delivery of 2.9 million doses donated by Japan, 2,139,600 doses donated by Italy and 302,400 doses donated by Germany.

### **Wider Immunization efforts**

To modernize and strengthen the cold chain, including for COVID-19 vaccines, UNICEF supported 12,000 healthcare facilities through procurement of data loggers, vaccine carriers, cold boxes, refrigerators and generators. Following detection of vaccine derived polio virus type 2, UNICEF provided 1,244,600 doses of Oral Polio Vaccines (mOPV2) for four border provinces. Reaching 515,587 children under 5 in two emergency immunization campaigns, a 98% coverage of target children was achieved helping to keep Iran polio-free.

### **Neonatal and Maternal Health**

UNICEF procured and distributed 14 neonatal Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) machines for deprived province of Sistan and Baluchestan to manage neonates with respiratory failure and reduce lung damage, including among COVID-19 cases. UNICEF and MOHME co-chaired and concluded an independent evaluation of the Newborn Individualized Developmental Care and Assessment Program (NIDCAP) to inform improvement and scale-up of the initiative through a management response plan devised for this purpose.

### **Nutrition**

UNICEF provided technical support to MOHME to establish the food and nutrition surveillance system in eight food insecure provinces given the increased rate of malnutrition in these provinces – two to three times higher than the national average.

To overcome micronutrient deficiency, 1,362,000 mega doses of vitamin A were procured and distributed among children under five in eight priority provinces. UNICEF also initiated a pilot study on supporting national flour fortification with vitamin D to inform national scale up of the programme.

### **HIV/AIDS Prevention**

With the aim of achieving Elimination of Mother-To-Child Transmission (EMTCT), UNICEF has continued its technical support to the HIV department of the MOHME and developed a model for improving coverage among underserved women including a feasibility study in the provinces of Sistan and Balouchestan, Golestan and Lorestan. UNICEF procured 200,000 HIV rapid test kits to increase the availability of HIV testing.

### **Health Promotion and Prevention of Risky Behaviour**

As a COVID-19 related mitigation measure and based on the identified needs, UNICEF supported the provision of remote psychosocial care and support services to approximately 600 vulnerable adolescents and their families through a nationwide psychosocial care and support tele-counseling programme (RESPCT). UNICEF also supported national capacity building by training 210 psychologists from different ministries and organizations including Ministry of Education (MOE), MOHME, Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), Ministry of Sport and Youth (MOSY), and Ministry of Interior (MOI) on supporting adolescents and youth. Moreover, UNICEF supported Drug Control Headquarters (DCHQ) in building technical capacity of 160 psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers from different universities and the State Welfare Organization (SWO) to provide evidence-

based pharmacological and psychological treatment of substance use disorders for children and adolescents.

## **Education**

The pandemic and the move to distant learning exacerbated the difficulties in access to quality education resulting in more than 3.5 million children, especially from vulnerable communities, being out of school. Given the increased number of Out-of-School Children (OoSC), UNICEF continued its advocacy for their identification and retention through expanding the partnership with the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare (MCLSW) and the Provincial Departments of Education (DOE).

UNICEF provided both technical and material support for the safe reopening of schools including advocacy for inclusion and prioritizing schoolteachers in national COVID-19 vaccination. UNICEF also delivered masks, sanitizers, and gun thermometers for safe return to in-person education for 225,653 children. UNICEF also continued to partner with the Ministry of Education and Special Education Organization (SEO) to ensure better access to education for the most at-risk children including Children With Disabilities (CWD), refugee children and Out-of-School Children through implementation of WASH and Infection Prevention Control (IPC) standards and protocols in 3,923 schools (954 regular schools and 2,969 special schools) nationwide.

UNICEF adopted a twin-track approach to ensure access to education for CWD. While continuing to reinforce disability-inclusive interventions, UNICEF supported the SEO in implementation of the National Inclusive Education Initiative reaching 79,281 students with disabilities and training 128 teachers. Furthermore, UNICEF supported infrastructure improvement of model inclusive schools for CWD in 17 provinces. In addition, UNICEF supported procurement of 4,123 assistive learning devices, 1,266 tablets, and establishment of 32 provincial distance learning studios equipped to provide services for CWD. UNICEF continued its advocacy for the inclusion of refugee children in the national education system – 556,401 Afghan children were enrolled in 2021-22 school year compared to 443,778 during 2019-20. including through its multi-year joint programme with UNICEF Afghanistan for Children on the Move. Despite ongoing challenges, UNICEF is working on the inclusion of multi-cultural education as part of the teacher education component of its preparedness/response to the Afghan Refugee Crisis (ARC). This planned intervention will be implemented in partnership with local and international NGOs in collaboration with provincial departments of education and Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) in 2022.

## **Child Protection**

UNICEF continued to partner with the MOHME, SWO, IRCS, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Judiciary to strengthen national capacities for prevention of child maltreatment, support to children in alternative care, child protection in emergencies, including Afghan refugee children, and justice for children.

At policy level, UNICEF supported development of a multi-sectoral policy note for prevention of child maltreatment to guide key national stakeholders to adopt coordinated, multi-sectoral approaches to address this issue. MOHME and UNICEF piloted a community-based programme for prevention of child maltreatment in four provinces (Hormozgan, Tehran, Semnan and Golestan). Through capacity-building and engagement of community health volunteers to conduct awareness raising campaigns and peer education trainings, the program aims to address low participation of fathers in parenting and enhancement of children's knowledge and awareness about child maltreatment. The pilot programme will inform the development of a national communication strategy for prevention of child maltreatment.

UNICEF continued to support SWO to provide quality care and services for protection, growth, and development of children in alternative care through development of two national protocols on Care

Plans and Aftercare. The protocols cover comprehensive interventions during placement in alternative care and preparation of these children to integrate and play a role in the society.

UNICEF and IRCS started the development of a comprehensive joint needs assessment and action plan to strengthen community resilience on prevention, mitigation and response to natural and man-made hazards.

In line with strengthening capacities of IRCS' SAHAR (psychosocial support) teams, UNICEF supported developing a localized package on child friendly spaces (CFS). As the first response to children's needs in emergencies, CFS contributes to care and protection of children through community organized, structured activities conducted in a safe, child friendly, and stimulating environment. In 2021, capacity building of IRCS focal points from 31 provinces, on establishment of CFS, was initiated.

UNICEF supported capacity-building initiatives for approximately 250 professionals (judges, prosecutors, social workers and polices) on Justice for Children Deprived of Liberty, the Law on Protection of Children and Adolescents (2020), and Justice for Children Affected by Migration. The initiatives aim to promote innovative approaches to implementation of laws and child friendly procedures with an emphasis on the role and responsibilities of the above-mentioned professionals. The initiatives also pave the way for dialogue and advocacy on other issues related to justice for children.

UNICEF also supported development of a series of studies on key child protection topics such as promotion of the best interest of the child and definition of the child to further support advocacy efforts for revision of child protection legal and judicial challenges.

### **Social Policy & Integrated Social Protection**

In partnership with MCLSW, Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), Statistical Research & Training Center (SRTC), and other stakeholders, UNICEF continued to advocate and generate the required evidence and analyses for informed planning and decision making on child welfare and wellbeing. These products are used for the development of the Common Country Assessment, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and UNICEF new Country Programme Document (CPD). UNICEF provided technical support to SCI to design and conduct the socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 on different demographic groups under five thematic pillars of education, economic activities, mortality, childbearing, and marriage as well as mental health of different age groups and dissemination of results through a webinar with close to 100 participants from government stakeholders, academia, and UN agencies.

UNICEF provided technical support to reduce child poverty and increase efficiency of the existing social protection system and services in order to move towards an integrated child centered social protection approach which is shock responsive. UNICEF also mobilized technical support from the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) in Brazil to accelerate support to MCLSW to implement the recommendations identified in the comprehensive social protection system review. Through adoption of national solutions and customizing experiences gained in Brazil, China, and Austria, UNICEF provided technical and financial support to the design and roll out of cash transfer and in-kind support (cash plus) model in four selected counties/provinces with multiple deprivations and severely impacted by the pandemic – Harsin in Kermanshah, Khoramshahr in Khuzestan, Baharestan in Tehran and Beshagard in Hormozgan. The cash plus model is being rolled out with two objectives: First, to provide a top up to the existing cash transfers provided through the national universal basic income subsidies to support vulnerable households with children in the four lowest deciles to safeguard school retention and address vulnerabilities due to socioeconomic hardships. Second, to scale up the model and develop a national road map to accelerate progress towards integrated and shock responsive social protection with children at its heart including inclusive health

and education services for Afghan refugees under a social protection umbrella.

With financial support of the government of Austria, and following a comprehensive situation and vulnerability analysis in Harsin/Kermanshah and Khoramshahr/Khuzestan provinces, vulnerable households with children were identified. Data were triangulated through Iranian Welfare Database and provincial Ministry of Education and implementation started through a standard operational procedure jointly developed with MCLSW. Vulnerable households were contacted through SMS and MCLSW's well established call centers to be informed of the support schemes. While the identified number of households was higher, 6,500 households with 7,222 children were registered in the programme as direct beneficiaries. In-person summer schools, with full COVID-19 protocols, were established for approximately 4,500 children who were out of school and/or at risk of dropout due to not having resources to access online education. Furthermore, as part of the design in Khoramshahr, 465 adolescents aged between 15 to 18 enjoyed intensive vocational training courses in 25 majors such as computer visual arts, tailoring, carpentering, graphics, accounting, etc. to facilitate their transition from Learning to Earning. As a part of the design, the current national Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) - a hotline – is being strengthened to enable sending SMSs to the beneficiaries as an active outreach and placing feedback/complaint boxes at schools, health centers, etc. to allow the beneficiaries including the children to voice concerns. UNICEF Iran also provided technical support to MCLSW for development of a child poverty atlas that categorizes the country into five distinct geographical areas based on children's vulnerabilities and household's income deciles. It enables policymakers to have access to necessary evidence to address equity and provincial disparities. Availability of this provincial data on child poverty will complement the data in the Iranian Welfare Database toward

an integrated platform in which every child in Iran will have an individual socioeconomic certificate for targeted and effective social protection services.

### **Communication and Advocacy**

UNICEF Iran continued to increase the level of public and media advocacy and awareness-raising for children, especially on COVID-19 prevention and response, by reaching over 10 million Iranians (49% female and 51% male) through digital platforms and other events and included member of the public, media and policymakers. UNICEF's Instagram followers in Iran grew to 573,000, the highest among UN agencies in Iran and UNICEF offices in MENA.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MOCIG) digital media literacy and ethical reporting on children among media professionals were enhanced. UNICEF launched two contests for photojournalists and reporters on "Children's Lives during COVID-19 Times."

In addition, in partnership with the Youth Cinema Foundation, an entity under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, UNICEF trained approximately 200 talented and vulnerable children in less advantaged districts on child-focused filmmaking and script writing, to educate a young generation of filmmakers to create "movies by children for children". Furthermore, as part of the joint work plan activity with the MOCIG, UNICEF financially and technically supported the Department of Cultural Planning and Studies of the MOCIG to implement and upscale the "*National Book Reading League*" for children and adolescents across the country, especially those children living with disabilities and those who live in the most disadvantaged areas.

UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy organized the first national children's painting contest on the occasion of World Water Day. The main theme was "Valuing Water" to promote children's involvement and participation in addressing water scarcity.

## Humanitarian Response/Afghan Refugee Crisis (ARC)

Building on previous engagement as a major humanitarian responder at system and community level in the context of the COVID-19 response, UNICEF continued to address the needs of vulnerable children impacted by the pandemic and intensified its assistance to the recent influx of Afghan refugees. An estimated 800,000 refugees including 250,000 children have entered Iran since August 2021. As part of the Refugee Coordination Mechanism led by UNHCR, UNICEF has been co-leading the WASH, Education, Child Protection and Nutrition sectors and coordinated development of the response strategies. Following successful resource mobilization through the humanitarian response plan (HRP) and engagement with donors, UNICEF mobilized approximately 5 million USD in 2021 and prepositioned essential items required for immediate response.

As part of the UNHCR-led refugee coordination mechanism, UNICEF led the Child Protection Area of Responsibility and developed a preparedness and response plan for Afghan Refugees. Furthermore, a Child Protection mainstreaming checklist for all sectors involved in the response, and a standard operation procedure for protection of unaccompanied and separated children in Iran and identification, documentation, tracing, and reunification process for new arrivals were also developed.

To scale up capacity to host and deliver basic services to Afghan refugees in communities and camps, UNICEF is activating new partnerships with Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and two local NGOs (SRS and PDA) in addition to retaining an existing partnership with Relief International

In collaboration with WHO and UNHCR, UNICEF also supported the delivery of 1.6 million COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX Humanitarian Buffer to protect 800,000 refugees.

### UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF sustained the response to the COVID-19 outbreak in line with the Country Preparedness and Response Plan (CPRP). UNICEF continued to co-lead the resilient economy pillar of the UNSDCF and implementation of the UN Iran Socio-Economic Recovery Programme (SERP) from the impact of COVID-19 and the Technical Assistance Package in response to impact of the sanctions on the most vulnerable populations. UNICEF, together with UNDP, UNFPA, UNAIDS and Relief International strengthened the national health system, improved social protection, and create jobs in the wake of the pandemic, with focus on female headed households and at-risk children.

UNICEF was vice chair of the UN Operations Management Team (OMT) and the Chair of the Harmonised Approach in Cash Transfer (HACT) working group where it contributed to the business operations strategy and the joint work in finance, HACT and procurement where UNICEF is seen to have strong capacity.

UNICEF Iran continued its partnership with EU/ECHO and coordinated joint actions to (1) support health, WASH, IPC and RCCE in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and (2) the ARC. UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNODC also pursued their multi-year partnership with EU/DG INTPA, and Kingdom of the Netherlands' fund on Adolescent Development, drug use and HIV/AIDS prevention which are contributing to Health and Drug Control pillars of UNSDCF.

In 2021, UNICEF's partnership with civil society organizations remained critical. Through the renewal of its workplan with the IRCS, UNICEF will continue to strengthen community resilience,

empowerment, and engagement.

In line with CPD objectives and to cover the one-year extension of the current partnership framework, UNICEF supported implementation of 14 joint work plans with lead technical ministries and renewed 9 partnerships with ministries and national organizations.

UNICEF also mobilized more than 100,000 USD from the private sector to cover the cost of procurement of hygiene packages and educational supplies for vulnerable children impacted by the pandemic.

As part of UNICEF's Child Friendly City Initiative (CFCI) and in partnership with MOI, Isfahan was recognized as the first child friendly candidate city in Iran. Under a two-year action plan CFCI is putting into place the required mechanisms for realizing children's rights through the participation of children in urban decision making through the Youth Urban Advisory Council, allocation of child-specific budget and encouraging partnership with the of private sector. UNICEF also supported the development of a Children Advisory Council Manual and organized the CFCI Inspire Awards 2021 in which one initiative on Child Participation from Yazd was recognized as best practice and three more from other cities were featured in the Inspire Awards Booklet.

UNICEF is grateful to its development and humanitarian partners for their support to children in Iran. International donors include the European Union, Austria, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, the United States of America, etc. UNICEF also thanks support of other governments, private sector partners and individuals which have contributed to the implementation of the CPD and the humanitarian response through these partnerships, UNICEF was able to mobilize 14,033,271 USD to support children in Iran.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

The key lessons learned in 2021 were on risk informed and adaptive implementation including, more evident application of cross sectoral approaches to respond to humanitarian needs given UNICEF's dual humanitarian and development mandate. The internal changes within ministries after the presidential election is calling for rigorous advocacy on UNICEF's comparative advantages to support national priorities and plans for children living in Iran.

During 2021, All joint partnerships were adapted to enable support to government's response to the pandemic and ARC. To refine and accelerate the planning and response, UNICEF continued to advocate with relevant national authorities for availability of relevant data on the new influx and initiated signing Programme Cooperation Agreements with local and international NGOs.

To ensure proper resource mobilization and allocation and hence continuity of the implementation, UNICEF staff and partners adopted a hybrid work modality with online events as well as presence in missions where necessary.

The operational and programming challenges in 2021 accelerated UNICEF's application of change strategies, particularly on social and behavioral change communication and on cross-sectoral collaboration and convergence of resources and actions. Interventions were re-strategized to be risk-informed and the office was retooled through recruitments and surge support to better deliver emergency responses and enhance emergency preparedness throughout sectors.

The gender-specific adolescent wellbeing programme continued in the first quarter of the year, relying on the expertise of the trained psychologists, the initiative under other available governmental platforms related to HIV/AIDS prevention services to adolescent girls and boys.

UNICEF as the co-chair of Resilient Economy pillar of the UNSDCF needs to engage discussion with



Presidential Offices as well as Budget and Planning Organization to play a more effective role in social protection.

Sanctions have had a significant impact on offshore procurement and logistics processes for Iran Country Office, as suppliers are not willing to acknowledge purchase orders from or ship directly to Iran. Hence, creative solutions have been required.

Approaching banks through the Operations Management Team (OMT) and as a united One-UN facilitated banking, thereby streamlining processes and easing bottlenecks. In addition, the recently established UN interagency collaboration of finance staff has helped find solutions to sanctions-related issues.

UNICEF continued to pursue quality assurance under HACT to identify areas of concern and propose improvements where practices by the partners were not fully compliant or risk factors were seen. Based on the observations by the spot check and the programmatic visit teams, conducting a HACT training workshop – planned for 2022 – was deemed necessary for all partners.

An interagency committee on HACT chaired by UNICEF was also established in 2021 and has proven useful in ensuring a harmonized and consistent approach with partners that will be supportive in addressing the challenging HACT agenda in 2022.

In 2021, UNICEF constantly monitored the challenges pertaining to the programme planning and implementation to inform the decision-making to adopt new approaches in the interest of sustainability, higher impact and addressing emerging needs.

Securing Staff welfare and promoting respectful workplace culture

### **Emerging opportunities**

Given the geographical disparities increased because of the double impact of the pandemic and sanctions, UNICEF needs to turn focused at provincial models that can be scaled up nation-wide. Using various situation analyses UNICEF needs to continue advocacy and policy dialogue on sensitive agenda such as children living in street situations, children in detention, etc. that are part of national priorities as outlined in the approved children and adolescent bill. Additionally, considering the exceeding barriers that CWD face in accessing education due to COVID-19 and the economic downturn, UNICEF Iran adopted a twin-track approach in supporting access to education for CWD: continuing to reinforce disability-inclusive interventions, and mobilizing funds and supporting disability-specific interventions such as better access for distance learning.

Adoption of the new Law on Protection of Children and Adolescents (2020) and development of its executive regulations in 2021, provides a valuable opportunity for UNICEF to advocate with relevant stakeholders for adoption of a systematic and multi-sectoral approach towards protection of children. UNICEF continues its advocacy efforts for revision of the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR), definition of the child and abolishment of the capital punishment through its partnership with the Judiciary and NBCRC/Ministry of Justice.

Through its eminence on social media channels and the results of cooperation with the MoCIG, UNICEF could persuade the Iranian state radio and television organization – Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) – to request for close cooperation with UNICEF to advocating for improving the lives of the children in Iran. Since the IRIB is the only TV and radio broadcasting entity in Iran with millions of viewers and listeners, including channels that are dedicated to children and adolescents, this can bolster the awareness raising, advocacy and visibility activities of UNICEF Iran.

## **Innovations**

The UNICEF Iran Innovation Strategy 2020-2022 was developed using a portfolio approach updated with mapping of the programmatic challenges and COVID-19 adaptations. The strategy includes but is not limited to conducting a baseline diagnostic analysis on the 2018-2019 Innovation Strategy, mapping challenges and priorities to potential tech spaces and viable innovative solutions based on the localized risk-informed criteria.

In partnership with Vice Presidency for Science and Technology (VPST), UNICEF launched the National Innovations Challenge for Children and Adolescents award which resulted in increased advocacy for innovation ecosystem to address issues faced by children. The programme introduced top innovative solutions developed by the startups and knowledge-based companies and mobilized financial resources through connecting them to the VPST.

UNICEF widely disseminated Innovation Call equity-free investments in the fields of Machine Learning (ML), Data Science (DS) or Artificial Intelligence (AI) and provided technical support to solutions from Iran to apply. UNICEF also facilitated the onboarding of the first Iranian startup, Treejer – an open block chain protocol experimenting with cutting-edge concepts – to unlock new opportunities in climate finance and rural development, using UNICEF Innovation Fund equity free investment.