Update on the context and situation of children

In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact the situation of children and UNICEF’s programmes in Iraq. According to WHO, as of December 2021, over 2 million cases were confirmed, with over 24,000 deaths. Vaccine uptake is still low; by late December, almost 30 per cent of people over 12 years received one dose of vaccine and only 20 per cent received two doses. “Booster” doses were introduced in late 2021.

The socio-economic situation in the country did not recover from the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although oil prices rebounded compared to 2020, Iraq’s over-reliance on oil revenues continued to limit the fiscal space, heightening poverty and vulnerability. A joint Ministry of Planning, UNICEF and the World Bank assessment of COVID-19 socio-economic impacts on poverty and vulnerability estimates that the poverty rate increased from 20 per cent in 2018 to 37 per cent in 2020, with high exclusion of poor children and young people, mainly due to fragmented social protection schemes.

On top of the socio-economic situation, the longstanding political stalemate continued to negatively affect children and young people in Iraq. Despite the early elections held in October 2021 as a response to the protests, especially in Baghdad and Basra, there is no clear pathway to breaking the cycle of instability, violence and insecurity.

According to the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), an estimated 2.5 million people, including 1.1 million children, need humanitarian assistance in Iraq. These figures show a drastic decrease in the number of people needing humanitarian assistance compared to 2021 (5.6 million people, including 2.6 million children). Although immediate impacts of COVID-19 were included in the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), these are no longer under the purview of the humanitarian response since they are not specifically related to primary displacement, neither do they reflect the needs of people affected by secondary displacement following the closure of camps, particularly in Kirkuk and Ninewa. Based on the 2021 Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (MCNA), around 182,000 individuals remain displaced in camps in the Kurdistan Region, while around 450,000 are displaced in out-of-camp settings. Over 1.2 million returnees are still considered in need of humanitarian assistance. Additionally, 250,000 Syrian refugees remain in Iraq, mostly in the Kurdistan Region. Key humanitarian concerns particularly affecting children included the need for improved shelters, child protection issues, including lack of civil documentation, limited access to adequate WASH services, and barriers to accessing education.

Although there are no major new sources of data, modelled indicators of progress on newborn and under-five mortality continue to decrease compared to the 15 and 26 deaths per 1,000 live births baseline in the latest Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS, 2018). Significant inequities in mortality and undernutrition prevail across governorates. Immunization coverage fluctuated in 2021, with monthly measles coverage ranging from 61 to 86 percent. Whilst the pandemic and vaccine rollout has represented a tremendous distraction to the health system, and no new source of public funding has been identified in the health sector, the Ministry of Health is looking to strengthen capacity in the digitalization of the information system and in sub-national financing and budget management.

Iraq also faces significant challenges with respect to water scarcity, which impacts peace and security throughout the region and globally. Iraq ranks as the 42nd most water-stressed country in the world. Access to potable water and basic sanitation varies significantly between governorates and between
rural and urban areas. While 96 percent of urban households have access to safe water, this figure falls to 87 percent among rural households. Similarly, only 86 percent of rural households have access to basic sanitation, compared to 94 percent of urban households. The percentage of treated wastewater is approximately 27 percent, representing a high risk for aggravating water scarcity (MICS, 2018). Local capacities to sustainably manage water resources are weak and further hampered by outdated water policies, regulations, and weak legislative frameworks.

Based on the MICS 2018, access to primary education is high in Iraq, with a net enrolment rate of 91.6 percent. However, access at other levels remains challenging; only 10 percent of Iraqi children benefit from early childhood education (ECE), and children with disabilities continue to be neglected. Enrolment in lower secondary education is only 57.5 percent, while upper secondary is at 33 percent, with significant gender disparities (net lower secondary school attendance rate is twice higher for boys than for girls in the poorest households). While data is not yet available, the Directorates of Education reported an increase in the numbers of out-of-school children of primary school age compared to the 484,509 identified through the MICS in 2018.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in over 11,000,000 children missing 25 weeks of access to face-to-face education between 2020 and 2021 (Central Statistical Office estimates). Although alternative learning modalities were introduced, children in vulnerable families with no access to internet could not benefit due to the digital divide. The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak also continued to pose a real threat to young people’s skilling and learning. Lack of house-to-house community mobilization impacted community engagement and direct involvement with communities.

Despite a clear legal and policy commitment, violence, abuse and exploitation of women and children remain pervasive. In 2021, an estimated 1.7 million people needed child protection humanitarian assistance (HNO, 2021) and some 1.32 million people (75 percent women/adolescent girls) were at risk of different forms of Gender-based Violence (GBV). The lack of birth registration and civil documentation for children who were born during the conflict or in locations previously controlled by ISIL represents a critical challenge, preventing an estimated 500,000 children from accessing basic services (National Protection Cluster Humanitarian Response Guidance Notes, 2021). In 2021, grave violations of children’s rights continued to be perpetrated with impunity in Iraq with a total of 227 reported incidents. Of these, 222 incidents affecting 135 children (23 percent girls) were verified by the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting, co-chaired by UNICEF. Killing and maiming of children was the most frequently occurring violation.

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

*Every child survives and thrives*

Despite the impact of COVID-19 on the health sector, considerable progress was made in maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (MNCAH). UNICEF’s focus on access to and quality of care appears to be improving rates of post-natal care (89 percent from a 2019 baseline of 78) and early breastfeeding (61 percent compared to 32 in 2019). Kangaroo mother care was established at five more central hospitals and 523,114 live births were delivered in health facilities supported by UNICEF in 2021. However, current figures rely on administrative data from public sector facilities only, underscoring a lack of information from private facilities. To contribute to the aforementioned results, UNICEF in Iraq strengthened public healthcare services – as part of its commitment to accelerate the regional accelerator on PHC – and upgraded the capacity of maternal and neonatal health facilities in vulnerable areas to deliver quality newborn care through procurement of supplies and staff capacity development. To influence demand for quality services, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF are also developing a comprehensive MNCAH communication plan to promote health
literacy and action, including uptake of services, particularly in the public sector.

Measles coverage is reported at 83.2 percent, against a baseline of 82 percent (Ministry of Health data). UNICEF significantly contributed to the achievement of this outcome through provision of significant financial and technical support to the Vaccination programme. Ninety percent of the cold chain gaps identified in Iraq’s 2019 Effective Vaccine Management assessment have been filled over 2020-21. Most importantly, UNICEF funded the construction of three provincial vaccine stores in Basra, Ninewa and Dohuk (benefitting over 10 million people) and installed 16 cold rooms to improve vaccine storage and programme coverage and quality. As a result, no vaccine stockouts were reported in 2021. In partnership with WHO, the World Bank and others, UNICEF also provided extensive support for Iraq’s COVID-19 vaccination to reach 30 percent of the population with at least one dose, after a slow start. This included cold chain, training, population registration and coverage reporting. Support for digitalization included procurement of 977 laptop computers and 1,424 Wi-Fi modems to enable 1,377 vaccine delivery points to update population coverage in real time, a first for Iraq. UNICEF strengthened the capacity of partners and catalyzed progress on service uptake, especially for COVID-19 prevention and vaccination. This was achieved through evidence generation on COVID-19 vaccination and a national “Mask Up” campaign.

The nutrition programme was significantly scaled back due to the pandemic, but still made qualitative progress on policy (on Early Childhood Development, COVID-19, Infant and Young Child Feeding, and adolescent nutrition), training and other areas. As part of UNICEF’s humanitarian response to IDP, refugee and returnee populations, over 30,000 infants and young children were screened for growth and development in humanitarian settings and respectively 549 and 1,249 cases of severe and moderate acute malnutrition were managed with UNICEF support. More than 16,000 pregnant and lactating women in IDP camps also benefited directly from UNICEF-supported services.

*Every child learns*

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools and other educational institutions were closed for most of the year. The blended learning approach adopted by the Ministry of Education (MoE) with UNICEF support enabled an estimated 4.2 million children to access education (compared to 2.9 million in 2020). UNICEF ensured the availability of learning platforms and measures including TV/Radio education programmes, online learning platforms and social media such as Facebook. The 1001 Nights Educational Entertainment Life Skills and Civic Education Programme reached 2.3 million visualizations.

UNICEF upstream advocacy with, and technical support to, the Iraqi Federal Ministry of Education resulted in the finalization of two major strategies: the Iraq National Education Strategy (INES) 2022-2031 and the Early Childhood Development strategy. These documents are part of a government-wide effort to improve the quality, efficiency, and inclusiveness of the national and sub-national education system. To operationalize the two strategies, UNICEF increased access to pre-primary classes for 8,185 children (nearly 50 percent girls) through provision of teacher training, teaching/learning materials and related infrastructure.

In 2021, UNICEF continued to strengthen the education system through rolling out the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and supporting the collection, analysis and utilization of quality information and data to develop tailored policies and programmes. The EMIS roll-out reached 100 percent (6,137 schools) of the schools in Kurdistan. Iraq Federal Government committed to scale of the EMIS across the country.

To address girls’ low transition rate, 6,044 adolescent girls were supported to continue lower secondary education, including through provision of communication and mobilization interventions.
Of these, 2,570 adolescent girls in Shat Al-Arab district of Basra were also provided with cash in partnership with World Food Programme (WFP). A Knowledge, Attitude, Beliefs and Practices survey was conducted in 10 focus governorates to understand key social norms and behavioral barriers to education and girls’ transition. The findings will inform the upcoming social behavior change campaign focusing on girls’ return to school and increasing the engagement of boys and men in support of girls’ education.

UNICEF strengthened the life, employability, entrepreneurship, and digital skills of 16,600 vulnerable young people (43 percent girls), including IDPs, poor and other socially excluded groups, utilizing the four Life Skills and Citizenship modules which were delivered as part of Iraq Learning Passport (in line with the regional learning accelerator). Six Innovation Labs (in Anbar, Baghdad, Salah Al Din, Dohuk, Erbil, and Ninewa) provided digital and entrepreneurship skill building and, through UPSHIFT, a Youth Incubator Bootcamp Challenge concluded with 285 young entrepreneurs (67 percent girls) designing innovative ideas aimed at supporting local communities to cope with COVID-19. 567 youths (43 percent girls) received seed funding and implemented social/business entrepreneurship initiatives benefiting their peers and communities. Coupled with business mentorship from local private sector actors, 110 youth (43 percent girls) accessed paid internships and apprenticeships with private-sector companies in Erbil, Duhok and Ninawa, thus contributing to boosting employment pathways and learning-to-work transitions.

UNICEF continued to play a pivotal role in leading the education in emergencies sector in Iraq. In 2021, 433,087 children affected by the conflict and in humanitarian settings were supported with better education opportunities through the provision of prefabricated classrooms, school furniture and teaching learning materials. UNICEF upstream advocacy and technical support to the Ministry of Education in the Kurdistan Region resulted in the development and approval of the Refugee Integration Policy, which positively impacts the sustainable access to quality education for refugee children and adolescents, in line with UNICEF-UNHCR Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children.

Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

UNICEF technical and financial assistance and advocacy support addressed critical child protection barriers through improved legal and policy frameworks, strengthened institutional and human resource capacities, and improved availability of data and evidence on child protection and Gender-Based Violence (GBV). As a result, two out of the three planned legal and policy frameworks have been finalized: the multi-sectoral “Implementation Plan for National Child Protection Policy” in federal Iraq coordinated by the Government’s Child Welfare Commission with eight-line Ministries; and the Child Rights Act in the Kurdistan Region, which was recently submitted to the Shura Council. The Act sets out comprehensive provisions for child protection and for the establishment of a child protection entity.

UNICEF worked with the Government and civil society organizations to improve access to responsive protection services and address social norms and beliefs perpetuating violence, abuse and exploitation of women and children. Overall, a total of 621,398 individuals (nearly 57 per cent females) were reached with UNICEF supported child protection and GBV prevention and response services. Of these, 153,506 (49 per cent girls) were reached with mental health and psychosocial support services; 33,295 children (41 percent girls) were reached with specialized child protection services; and 356,881 women, girls and boys (58 percent women; 40 percent girls) were reached with UNICEF supported GBV response, prevention and risk mitigation services, including strong advocacy and public communication.

To facilitate the scale-up of the adolescent girls’ programme, UNICEF is currently developing, testing
and deploying Virtual Safe Space, an online interactive platform where adolescent girls and women can access life skills and reproductive health information safely. Furthermore, UNICEF is implementing the Communities Care social norms intervention programme, aimed at addressing underlying social and gender norms perpetuating GBV.

UNICEF’s advocacy efforts led to change the narrative for children in conflict with the law, including children perceived to be affiliated with ISIL, to be seen as victims of specific circumstances, rather than perpetrators of crimes, in addition to being rights-holders. As a result, 2,742 children (5 percent girls) in contact with the law benefited from specialized legal aid, diversion, alternatives to detention and after-care. Of these, 217 foreign children (88 per cent girls) accused of affiliation with ISIL were supported and repatriated to their countries of origin.

As Co-chair of Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) of grave child rights violations, UNICEF contributed to advocacy engagement with government authorities around the prevention of and response to grave child rights violations. These advocacy dialogues were instrumental in ensuring that the government fulfills its obligation to protect children.

UNICEF and partners continued providing reintegration programme services for children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups and children at risk of recruitment, expanding interventions to two additional target governorates (Salah Al Din and Dohuk). Lastly, UNICEF provided Explosive Ordonnance Risk Education (EORE), reaching 74,974 individuals (36 percent girls and 14 percent women).

Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

In 2021, UNICEF expertise and financial support contributed to enabling 43.5 percent of the population (representing 973,325 additional people) to access safely managed drinking water services at community level (meeting almost the target of 44 percent) and 27 percent of the population (representing 318,976 additional people) to gain access to safely managed sanitation services.

UNICEF’s contribution mainly consisted in providing access to safely managed sanitation services in most vulnerable communities in Ninewa, Anbar, Erbil, Kirkuk, Dohuk, Najaf, Basra and Baghdad governorates of federal Iraq and Kurdistan Region (meeting the planned target). 67 healthcare centers, including clinics and hospitals serving nearly 380,000 people (50 percent female) were provided with climate resilient WASH facilities and 193 schools serving over 120,000 students (53 percent girls) were provided with basic WASH services.

UNICEF shifted to climate resilient programming as part of its regional commitment to address water scarcity and promoted the use of renewable energy for water and sanitation operations to lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to ensure that WASH infrastructure, services and behaviors are sustainable, safe and resilient to climate-related risks. To this end, UNICEF contributed to system strengthening and decentralized WASH planning, financing and management by supporting the development of four risk-informed WASH operational plans in four prioritized governorates (Najaf, Muthanna, Erbil, Sulaimaniya) based on the WASH Bottleneck Analysis Tool. UNICEF also strengthened the capacity of government officials in Basra and Ninawa on water quality testing and sampling as well as the capacity of the technical staff from Muthanna, Najaf, Erbil and Sulaymaniyyah Directorates of Water to assess and address the root causes of water scarcity and other climate-change related risks. By so doing, UNICEF contributed to the relevant regional accelerator.

With UNICEF support, 101,751 people in humanitarian settings (51 percent female) gained access to safely managed water, while 13,270 (51 percent females) gained access to safely managed sanitation services. Over 751,246 people (51 percent females) were reached with COVID-19 preventive supplies.
and messages focusing on handwashing and personal hygiene.

UNICEF also played a crucial role in COVID-19 prevention and response through raising awareness on hand hygiene and distributing critical personal protective equipment and hygiene supplies in schools, healthcare facilities and poorest community in informal settlements. Evidence generation on WASH and COVID-19 related knowledge, attitude and practices further strengthened community engagement for sustainable behaviour change. Nearly 4 million affected children and their families across Iraq were reached with key messaging on COVID-19 infection prevention and control.

*Every child has an equitable chance in life*

UNICEF advanced the work on systematically addressing child multidimensional poverty by finalizing, with the Ministry of Planning, a national methodology and the design for survey tools to regularly track child multidimensional poverty. This work is positioned to feed into Iraq’s upcoming social protection strategy and the national poverty reduction strategy. On public financing for children, cognizant of the multilayered challenges, UNICEF established a national coalition partnering with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning, and social sector ministries. Work has advanced on bridging the evidence gap on public spending for children via the development of a fiscal space analysis and sector budget reviews for WASH, education and social protection sectors, including two governorate case studies. To link evidence with practice, UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Finance to develop a training module that can advance programme-based budgeting with focus on children.

Iraq is well positioned to make substantive progress on the social protection regional accelerator. UNICEF successfully shaped the agenda for the reform of social protection focusing on three principles: child responsiveness, integration, and shock responsiveness. The joint programme puts forward a system approach to address gender inequality with focus on girls’ education, women economic inclusion, and addressing negative social norms. At scheme level, UNICEF’s advocacy efforts secured government commitment to transform the national social safety net into an incentivized cash transfer targeting children and women. UNICEF’s upstream engagement resulted in positioning the joint programme within the Government economic and financial reform package aiming at protecting the poor and vulnerable from the negative impacts of the financial and economic reforms. To that effect, the Prime Minister approved the joint programme and delegated to the Minister of Planning to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with UNICEF, ILO, and WFP to secure this work moving forward amid political change around elections. In addition, UNICEF successfully supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in the Kurdistan Region to build the social safety net Management Information System, which positioned UNICEF as a leading partner in the reactivation of the social safety net in the region.

Additionally, to advance the youth agenda, UNICEF, in close collaboration with UNFPA, actively engaged with governmental actors at both the federal and Kurdistan region level for the revision and launch of the Youth Vision 2030. The promotion of meaningful participation of young people included the promotion of youth involvement in UN and UNICEF programme planning processes, for instance through the Young People’s Advisory Group (YPAG). The National Youth Volunteering Platform was launched with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and UNV. U-Report was launched in federal Iraq and scaled to comprise over 72,000 U-Reporters, with 20 polls conducted on COVID-19 themes.

The evaluation function was institutionalized, promoting a cultural shift. In 2021, three evaluations were completed: Evaluative Review of the Jump Start activity (managed by MENA RO); Evaluation of the WASH Smart City Initiative Pilot Project in Baghdad; and Evaluation of the Emergency Psychosocial Support Programme in Iraq. The latter was rated highly satisfactory according the
UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In 2021, UNICEF expanded and strengthened its collaboration across the UN system to catalyze results for children and young people in Iraq. ILO, IOM, UNDP, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNFPA, WFP and WHO were partners of choice.

The Blueprint resulted in solid achievements for Syrian refugees in Iraq in the education, child protection and WASH sectors. Amongst the key results achieved is the approval of a holistic policy for the integration of refugee children in the education system in the Kurdistan Region. UNICEF joined efforts with other UN agencies, notably UNHCR and ILO, as part of the partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities (PROSPECTS), which enabled targeted young people to transition from learning to decent work through a range of self-employment and wage-employment opportunities. This included the referral of UNICEF-supported young people to ILO-supported entrepreneurship/employment programmes in Dohuk. UNICEF also continues to lead the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) technical working group with participation of the Ministry of Health, WHO and various stakeholders, as part of the COVID-19 response.

As part of the humanitarian framework, UNICEF co-led several clusters and sub-clusters. As donor support to the humanitarian response in Iraq is shrinking, discussions are held with relevant stakeholders to promote longer-term solutions to humanitarian needs. As such, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, signed in 2021, includes a strategic priority on durable solutions. UNICEF proactively engaged with the government in both federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region to better strategize future humanitarian support, encouraging local authorities to take on increased responsibility for operation and maintenance of WASH services.

Partnership with the private sector was concretized in 2021. With Zain, a major telecom service provider, UNICEF signed a three-year agreement, adopting joint work plans to cover all UNICEF’s programmes in Iraq. Thanks to this partnership, free data/internet access was provided for adolescent girls and women to access Virtual Safe Spaces and 911 wi-fi devices and annual subscriptions were provided for all COVID-19 vaccination service delivery points, health districts and provincial vaccine stores, enabling the use of digital platforms for registration and vaccine management and reaching to various segments of the populations through SMS messaging. UNICEF also partnered with Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI), a global oil company, to strengthen the capacity of the water sector in Basra to adopt innovative and environmentally sustainable water supply solutions and promote green jobs for young people in the water sector.

Collaboration with academic institutions was also strengthened. UNICEF worked with the University of Baghdad to assess planned WASH projects against the UN Environmental Management Framework and to empower young people through youth-led research and civic engagement initiatives addressing climate change. Finally, UNICEF and the University of Baghdad held the first annual conference for children, entitled “Childhood and Sustainable Development: Investing in the Future of Iraq,” which brought together researchers, policy makers and representatives from line ministries. Building on this, UNICEF and the University of Baghdad will hold quarterly round table discussions and institutionalize the conference to become an annual event.
Lessons Learned and Innovations

In 2021, UNICEF conducted a strategic programme review to reassess the evidence used and assumptions made during the formulation of UNICEF’s Country Programme 2020-2024 and to suggest relevant strategic, programmatic, and operational adjustments to accelerate results for children within the post pandemic and fragile post conflict context.

The first lesson learned was to recognize that the evidence needed to inform these shifts was not always available. Much of the data informing current strategies is outdated, drawn from the 2018 MICS. The result is a number of key data gaps, particularly from an equity perspective. For this reason, UNICEF Iraq plans to develop a data strategy.

In line with UNICEF’s new Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2022–2025, the strategic review resulted in a renewed commitment to achieving gender-transformative results through a coordinated lifecycle approach, to reduce GBV and promote the transition of girls to secondary education. UNICEF Iraq renewed its commitment to adopt cross-sectoral approaches recognizing the intersectionality of gender-based violence and its impacts; this will be done through, *inter alia*, leveraging the links between schools and gender-based violence prevention and response services, expanding communities care programmes, building capacity around case management, and analyzing and addressing gender-based violence risks across health and WASH interventions. UNICEF also recognized the need to adopt an integrated approach to promoting adolescent girls’ wellbeing and empowerment, promoting girls’ secondary education and skills-building, child marriage prevention, adolescent health care and menstrual hygiene management to accelerate transformative outcomes. A lesson learned was also the need to emphasize interventions aimed at addressing the underlying causes of gender inequality and discrimination, such as gender-discriminatory social and cultural norms, while also promoting positive masculinities through engaging with men and boys as allies, agents of change and gender equality advocates.

UNICEF Iraq also renewed its focus on Early Childhood Development (ECD), encompassing elements of health, nutrition, stimulation, education, and protection. A lesson learned is the need to bring these elements together under a coherent, integrated strategy for ECD, which includes early childhood education along with health and nutrition interventions for children under the age of three, as well as child protection interventions related to birth registration, parenting practices and prevention of violence against children, and community engagement.

Leveraging cross-sectoral opportunities and synergies to enhance digitalization in the post pandemic environment was also stressed, both for online learning purposes and within the context of system strengthening, including information management systems in health, education, birth registration and social protection. In addition, UNICEF recognized the need to further address the digital divide to promote equity across its interventions and reach the most vulnerable segments of the population.

Communication for Development and Accountability to Affected Population strategies have been strongly integrated within all programmes, supporting effective community engagement interventions and capacity building of external and internal stakeholders on RCCE. These have focused on understanding behavioral insights that are impacted by social, cultural and religious norms.

Building a coalition with relevant stakeholders proved essential to address the needs of vulnerable people in a comprehensive manner, while avoiding duplication of efforts. For example, the joint programme with ILO and WFP to drive the reform of the social protection system proved instrumental to strategically engage with relevant stakeholders to offer a comprehensive reform support package.

In 2021, UNICEF introduced innovative advanced technology solutions for the on-site treatment of biomedical waste by combining shredding and sterilization by microwaves in one single vessel. This solution allows hospitals, healthcare centers, and laboratories to efficiently treat and decontaminate medical waste directly in their production site, in order to control and limit the risks of external
contamination. This microwave sterilization solution, recognized and recommended by the World Health Organization and the United Nations for the treatment of hospital waste, allows, in 30 minutes, to transform them into uncontaminated inert waste that can then be treated through the same channels as household waste. So far, a total of 16 medical treatment units were installed and functionally operated in selected hospitals. However, the scale up of this innovation would require private sector engagement to ensure low-cost local production and maintenance.

Based on the downward trend analysis of the humanitarian funding situation in Iraq, the transition process in Iraq, with the overall strategy of scaling back the humanitarian support while promoting expansion of durable solutions under a development cooperation framework, is providing a number of interesting lessons. As the funding for humanitarian response shrinks, there is an impetus to make a tighter definition of humanitarian needs when finalizing the HNO and the HRP for 2022. However, this can lead to the exclusion of certain vulnerable groups falling between the humanitarian and durable solutions planning and fundraising instruments. The experience on the ground is showing that the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is not exhaustively served by the various instruments available. UN agencies and other relevant stakeholders need to be cognizant of this and conduct earlier and more realistic discussions to better define roles and responsibilities for meeting long-term humanitarian needs, encouraging increased responsibility of local authorities.

As funding availability is expected to become critical while the needs for more systemic and sustainable results increase, UNICEF might need a shift in emphasis from mainly fulfilling basic needs directly to increasingly working with and through the government to promote the development of more equitable and inclusive policies and address system gaps and weaknesses in a more sustainable manner. This can be achieved through promoting system strengthening and public spending on issues related to children and young people. UNICEF must therefore accelerate its transition from service provider to technical advisor, increasing support for capacity-building and innovation, leveraging resources and partnerships for children, and promoting local ownership and sustainability. Also, as explained above, UNICEF can better engage with and leverage the private sector, not merely as sources of funding, but also as sources of expertise, as advocacy partners, and as partners in achieving results for children.

The above-mentioned lessons learned and innovations have been documented in the Mid-term review report to inform and shape UNICEF’s programme in the next years and beyond.