

Jordan

Update on the context and situation of children

Jordan is a small, strategically located Middle Eastern country with a population of 11 million people [1], 4.4 million of them children. Surrounded by countries that have experienced conflict for years or decades, it is relatively peaceful and stable. However, Jordan is beset by its own problems, including a slow-growing economy, pressure for political reform, the presence of large numbers of refugees placing a strain on resources, and it is the second most water-scarce country in the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic overshadowed everything this year and had a severe impact on the socioeconomic fabric of the country. In 2020 the government moved quickly to develop a COVID-19 response plan to contain the virus and expand its capacity to test for and treat those suffering from it. These efforts were further enhanced in 2021. The government rolled out a COVID-19 vaccination campaign in early January 2021 and made it available to everyone living in Jordan, including refugees. Currently, 42% of the population is fully vaccinated. A national risk communication and community engagement activity is being carried out to overcome vaccine hesitancy.

COVID-related restrictions had a severe impact on businesses and unemployment rose sharply, particularly amongst women and other marginalised and vulnerable groups including refugees, migrant workers, those employed in the informal sector, ethnic minorities, and others. Poverty is rising, with over 15 per cent of the population (over 1 million people) now living below the poverty line and a further two per cent just above it. Unemployment has increased, rising from 18.6% in 2018 to 19.1% in 2019 and 24.8 per cent by mid-2021[1] – its highest rate since 2008. Joblessness is highest amongst young people between the ages of 15-24. Jordan has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 64 per cent of the population under the age of 30.

The ability of the poorest, most vulnerable households to meet their basic needs has sharply decreased. The number of households living on a monthly income of less than JD100 (about US\$141) has doubled since the start of the pandemic from 6 to 12 per cent. At the height of the pandemic the government's Social Security Corporation supported an estimated 960,000 workers with much needed relief payments.

Jordan is a generous host to a large number of refugees from surrounding countries. Some of these, like the 2.3 million registered Palestinians, have been there for decades, whilst 1.4 million Syrian refugees are now in their tenth year of displacement. Vulnerability among refugees remains particularly high, especially among the 30 per cent living in female-headed households and the disabled. In fact, 62 per cent of households have at least one member living with a disability. [2] Over 500,000 refugees are dependent on cash and food assistance from UN agencies.

Hosting so many refugees places enormous strains on Jordan's economy and infrastructure. Even before the pandemic the economy was stagnating. The Jordanian government's quick introduction of measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, have come at a cost. Whilst the country, as a strategic partner to the international community, does receive a substantial amount of assistance, the effects of COVID-19, the measures to contain it, and the damage to the economy, have been felt across the board - in health, education and protection of children and women. Mental health support, sexual and reproductive health and family planning services have all been curtailed. In the health sector, measures were brought in to contain the pandemic and avoid the health infrastructure being overwhelmed. Unfortunately, these measures also had

the effect of reducing access to essential health care services, medication, and other critical care. [iii] Another significant concern is that women and children have been more at risk from domestic and gender-based violence (GBV), partly as a result of being confined at home during periods of lockdown.

Millions of Jordanian children had their education severely disrupted for a second year as schools remained closed for 323 days from March 2020. The Ministry of Education, together with UNICEF had to ‘reimagine’ education and quickly develop a range of online teaching and teacher professional development including Learning Bridges and Darsak in an effort to recover learning loss and ensure continued learning. Learning Bridges, a national blended learning programme, enabled almost 500,000 students (64 per cent of them female) in Grades 4 to 9 to continue to learn during the second semester of the 2020/2021 academic year.

However, despite all this, whereas prior to the pandemic the number of students enrolled had increased by 160,000 to 2.15 million in 2020, and learning outcomes had been improving, it is feared that most of the progress over recent years has been wiped out. During the period when schools were closed, vulnerable children not only lost out on learning, they also lost access to psychosocial support, meals and safe spaces.

The government made substantial efforts to expand the provision of social protection to those newly vulnerable by the pandemic. With assistance from the World Bank and UN agencies, a total of 395,000 households were supported with cash assistance through various National Aid Fund (NAF) programmes. The expansion of the social protection system contributed to UN sustainable development Goal 1: (No Poverty), helping to reduce poverty rates in Jordan and furthering the development of a nationally appropriate social protection system.

The closure or reduced services provided by courts, youth centres, health and women’s shelters at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected women and children. Resumption of these services after the lockdown was lifted has been appreciated.

[1] <http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo>, 29 December 2021.

[2] ‘24.8% unemployment rate during the second quarter of 2021’, Department of Statistics Press Release 6 October 2021; link.

[3] Humanity & Inclusion and iMMAP, *Removing Barriers: Disability Assessment among Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon*, July 2018, link.

[4] *Jordan’s Extraordinary Measures to Contain COVID-19 Spread Draw Int’l Accolades (The Jordan Times, 2 April 2020) JD 602 million less than same period in 2019.*

[5] Freedom House Index: Jordan 2021: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan>.

Major contributions and drivers of results

UNICEF is in the fourth year of its Country Programme and continuing its transition from a purely humanitarian response to more of a system-strengthening one. The pace of this change has had to increase over the past year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with programmes geared more towards helping build Jordan’s resilience to deal with crises and better prepare its young people for the years ahead. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF has had to develop new and creative ways to adapt its programming methodologies and enlarge their scope to ensure that critical services could still be provided, especially to those who are most vulnerable. UNICEF has also used its comparative advantage, borne out of its long-standing presence in Jordan and excellent working relationships with government ministries and other counterparts, to continue delivering vital services to the most vulnerable.

Humanitarian response

UNICEF's lead role in the humanitarian sector came to the fore as the country continued to record high numbers of COVID-19 cases, particularly in the first quarter of 2021, with the resulting impact on peoples' livelihoods, employment and wellbeing. WASH interventions focusing on vulnerable communities, including the 117,000 Syrian refugees in four refugee camps, were implemented throughout 2021, ensuring that children and their families had access to safe water and sanitation, and related messaging. More than 830,000 children and their families received support from UNICEF for improved access to water and sanitation services, as well as critical messages on key hygiene practices (including related to COVID-19) and water conservation this year. These are especially critical given that Jordan is the second most water-scarce nation in the world and the past few winters have been particularly dry. Upgrading the WASH facilities in 25 schools benefited 13,248 students (58 per cent females) and reached students with hygiene and climate awareness messages remotely.

Teaching and resources reimaged

As a result of COVID-19 school closures, children in Jordan have lost up to 323 days of in-person learning to date with online provision provided through DARSAK (MoE online learning platform) and televised lessons. As a result, the World Bank estimates that education inequality in Jordan could increase by up to 11 per cent and all progress in PISA since 2018 could be lost. UNICEF provided support for the quick establishment of DARSAK in the first weeks of the pandemic, and later advised on school reopening.

Almost half a million children were able to continue to engage with learning during school closures thanks to Learning Bridges, a national blended learning programme providing weekly printed curriculum linked activities, with additional resources available. A total of 499,765 children (65 per cent of them girls), representing 61 per cent of all children in those grades engaged with over 50 per cent of Learning Bridges weekly activities.

In Syrian refugee camps, UNICEF provided operational support to 54 schools and 11 kindergartens. An attendance monitoring system to track close contacts of COVID-19 positive cases has been established across the 36,000-student population. Over 600 Syrian assistant teachers (SATs) provide a variety of support functions in camp schools. This year, SATs have supported early grade reading and delivered lessons to develop a sense of school community, including school logos.

To improve the effective functioning of schools, UNICEF has initiated efforts to build the capacity of school leadership teams in the refugee camps. All 54 schools in refugee camps have used evidence and data to develop and implement school development plans.

With UNICEF support, 32,379 teachers, non-formal education (NFE) facilitators and MoE personnel received professional development support on distance learning, including Learning Bridges. Around 75,000 teachers and MoE staff have completed online training on awareness of the national teacher professional standards. An e-safety course will soon be made available on the MoE online portal as a mandatory course for all teachers.

UNICEF successfully advocated for exemption from documentation for refugee children to register in government schools. Through the UNICEF helpline, 1,000 children enrolled in September 2021. UNICEF continues to provide support for over 1,000 children with disabilities in over 100 schools.

Many adolescents could not attend non-formal education (NFE) during school closures, despite the provision of online learning through UNICEF partners. UNICEF outreach has resulted in many reenrolling, with over 5,000 now attending. As of December 2021, the NFE programme transitioned

from UNICEF supported to direct MoE implementation. After piloting in over 1,000 schools, in May 2021, the Nashatati life skills programme was also transitioned to the MoE.

To support learning recovery, UNICEF and the MoE developed a national diagnostic assessment, which will be sat by all 1.25 million students from Grade 4 to 11. This will provide teachers with information on what students know and can do. The data will also be collected on EMIS, providing national data on learning loss for programme design. An accelerated programme in maths and Arabic has been developed for implementation in Makani. This includes over 1,200 accelerated lesson plans and training for facilitators.

National Child Protection system strengthening progressing

In the area of child protection, important progress was made, thanks to UNICEF advocacy, towards strengthening Jordan's national child protection system and providing prevention and response services for vulnerable children.

UNICEF technical support to key government partners of the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), Family Protection and Juvenile Department (FPJD), and the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA) provided increased support for the endorsement of a child rights law and juvenile law or the first time in Jordan. It also revitalized government-led child protection coordination at the national level and the endorsement of the national framework and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on child labour by the Cabinet. Internal child protection and GBV SOPs were completed by the Ministry of Education, Family Protection and Juvenile Department to help improve the coordinated response between government institutions, which included a tracking system for family violence as a national tool for case management. Moreover, with UNICEF support, MoSD finalized and endorsed a policy brief on foster care to bolster advocacy for increased budget allocations and expand and strengthen the provision of community-based foster care as an alternative to institutional care for children in Jordan. UNICEF support to FPJD continued to strengthen the cybercrime unit for monitoring, preventing, and responding to online sexual exploitation.

Evidence generation resulted in the finalization of a national study on violence against children; a study on social and behavioural norms assessment relating to child discipline in Jordan; a 'safe to learn' national diagnostic study focused on national efforts to prevent and respond to violence in school; and a rapid assessment on violence against children in the context of COVID-19 were completed.

UNICEF-supported child protection prevention and response programmes resulted in the provision of child protection specialized services to 15,131 individuals (5,575 girls, 7,797 boys, and 1,759 women) including 734 children engaged in child labour and 708 women and girls hosted at government GBV shelters. Structured and sustained child protection and psychosocial support services reached 66,069 children (36,571 girls and 29,498 boys), while mental health and psychosocial support (MHPPS) programmes in MoE schools reached 200,000 students. As part of prevention efforts, 24,338 parents and caregivers (21,723 women and 2,613 men) were reached by positive parenting and child-rearing practice programmes. By year-end, 95 percent of the targeted parents had improved their knowledge and skills as a result.

Social Protection & Policy – System strengthening and contribution to a swift coordinated sector response

UNICEF made a valuable contribution to enhancing the business processes of national level social protection programmes and the overall digitization of the sector, including the integration of 26 entities under the National Unified Registry (NUR). Further enhancements of the National Aid Fund (NAF) management information system enabled the expansion of the national complimentary cash transfer to

155,000 households of daily wage workers. UNICEF technical support facilitated communication with and registration of beneficiaries, the opening of mobile wallets, and processing grievances through a two-way SMS platform. Overall, these enhancements with UNICEF support allowed the effective expansion of NAF coverage to over 640,000 children in 2021.

At the policy level, technical support was provided for the operationalization of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS 2019-2025), including defining priorities through a dedicated Implementation Support Unit (ISU) hosted at the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) and supported by UNICEF. The UNICEF-supported development and launch of an interactive web-based economic model (CGE) in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) will enhance national capacities for policy analysis and evaluation based on a model based on macroeconomic and sector data.

Makani and Hajati continued to support vulnerable communities, with a focus on excluded groups such as dwellers of informal tented settlements, Dom, Ex-Gazans and children with disabilities. In 2021, over 22,000 children were reached by the Hajati cash programme, 3,000 of them newly enrolled 13–18-year-olds, to help mitigate the negative coping mechanisms due to the impact of COVID. This is in addition to the more than 4,000 children from informal tented camps, who were initially included as part of the COVID response.

A shift in approach and implementation modalities improved the integration of services and linkages with national schemes. UNICEF launched a programme named Takaful Plus, which provides Makani integrated services targets to vulnerable Jordanian families supported by NAF. Forty per cent of the beneficiaries of Makani services in the last cycle were also beneficiaries of NAF, and 50 percent of the Hajati cash programme had at least one child attending Makani services.

UNICEF continued to prioritize evidence generation on the situation of children, public finance for children, and social protection issues for policy advocacy and key internal and national enhancements in social protection programming. The results and lessons learnt from the UNICEF social policy and social protection programming in Jordan have been commended in the recent global case study by UNICEF HQ entitled “Jordan: A swift operational response strengthens the building blocks of a shock-responsive social protection system.”

Sustainability and integration of ‘Makani’ services

The 140 Makani (‘My Space’ in Arabic) centres developed by UNICEF and partners provide a safe space for children and young people to access an integrated package of services including learning support services, skills building training, community-based child protection, better parenting, and early childhood development. In 2021, these centres continued to provide vital services through both in-person and remote modalities (when the physical centres had to close). A reading recovery programme, blended learning delivery mechanisms (in-person and remote) and revamping the skills building programme to focus on financial and digital skills were also added in 2021.

Makani centres reached over 130,000 beneficiaries, of whom over 103,000 were children (55 per cent girls) with an integrated package of services. Additionally, the Makani programme supported more than 24,000 children (52 per cent female; 1 per cent children with disability) children in accessing digital learning platforms through the provision of 9,410 tablets to vulnerable households (mostly Syrians) in refugee camps and host communities.

In 2021, UNICEF Jordan continued its efforts towards the sustainability of the Makani programme through focusing on cost efficiency, building the capacity of MoSD and national partners, and embedding the programme in the national social protection system through the linkages with NAF via

the Takaful Plus.

Training programmes equip youth with valuable employment and life skills

Jordan's young population (63 per cent is under the age of 30) has been disproportionately hit by COVID-19, with disruption to education, loss of employment (or difficulty in finding one in the first place) and harm to their mental wellbeing. COVID-19 has underscored a need to re-engineer and revamp UNICEF's skills building programme to ensure young people are empowered and supported in appropriate ways that will improve their prospects in a post-COVID world. This included the addition of girls' leadership, financial literacy and social innovation programmes to the Life Skills package. As part of its graduation programme, UNICEF equipped vulnerable youth in Jordan, with a focus on young women and young people with disabilities, with accredited demand-driven technical and vocational courses and digital skills which conclude with livelihoods and employment opportunities.

Amongst the successes of UNICEF-supporting training programmes for young people in 2021 were the following: Around 37,374 adolescent and youth provided with access to skills development and employment training; 92,200 young people provided with civic and volunteering opportunities within their communities; 5,000 young people provided through the Learning to Earning programme with quality teaching and vocational education and training (TVET) courses, paid internships, and employment opportunities; over 5,500 young women reached with support and activities related to entrepreneurship and self-employment; and the establishment of 33 home-based businesses and 103 women-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs), providing support and employment through financial and technical assistance.

Through the UNICEF learning-to-earning pathway in 2021 37,374 young people (62 per cent female) received training in essential life and employability skills for the 21st century. Successes of other programmes such as 'Inhad' include the enrolment of 812 youth (43 per cent female) in a comprehensive social entrepreneurship training and mentoring to establish 192 enterprises, creating 791 job opportunities with a total investment of more than 5 million JOD. Fourteen thousand young people (68 per cent female) were enrolled in informal online learning on the Youth Learning Passport platform, and 86,282 young people volunteered for a total of 2.1 million hours on the UNICEF Nahno platform to benefit their communities, while experiencing individual growth.

Effectiveness and localization of primary health care services boosted

After three years of support, UNICEF built and piloted a web-based, electronic national reporting system in 20 primary health care (PHC) facilities. It includes all services provided at peripheral, primary and comprehensive centres. The system captures and analyses service delivery data automatically and displays data on a dashboard for use by decision makers. UNICEF's support in this area was critical, and the ability for PHCs to produce decentralized data in this way will greatly enhance monitoring and planning at the local level, as well as improve governance and accountability.

In collaboration with USAID and the Health Care Accreditation Council (HCAC), UNICEF is also working on expanding the baby-friendly hospital initiative (BFHI) and its inclusion in the hospital accreditation system to help improve the quality of perinatal, neonatal and maternal health. At present, 11 hospitals are in the process of implementing the BFHI, in addition to the five hospitals which were certified as baby-friendly in 2020.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

During the current Country Programme, UNICEF has shifted away from an emergency response (the COVID-19 pandemic notwithstanding) towards leveraging partnerships with NGOs to focus more on system strengthening and implementing programmes at scale. To do this, UNICEF forged a range of strategic partnerships with government ministries, UN agencies, national and international NGOs, thus ensuring the continuation and expansion of its programmes to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Key to this was the emphasis placed on system strengthening, advocacy, capacity building of local partners, collaborative innovation and determination to reach the most vulnerable.

In the area of child protection, for example, UNICEF worked jointly with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) and the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA) on the development of laws on child rights and juveniles. System strengthening was provided to the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice Ministry of Culture and the National Council for Family Affairs. Such support represents an important step forward to the development of a proper national legal framework to protect children. Using a multisectoral approach together with Social Protection, Education and Youth sections, UNICEF worked with implementing partners to deliver COVID-related responses, for example through the Makani centres.

Policy advice and evaluation was provided to the MoE to strengthen the sector partnership and coordination and UNICEF continued to co-chair the education sector working group (ESWG), comprising more than 40 partners including UN agencies and non-governmental organizations. In response to one of the lengthiest school closures globally, UNICEF led advocacy efforts to ensure the continuation of education for Jordan's children remained a priority. As well as working jointly on developing and implementing a range of online platforms and remote learning modalities for students and ensuring that teachers' professional development could continue, UNICEF also led advocacy efforts to enable all children in Jordan could enrol in school, regardless of their status, financial circumstances or nationality.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, partnerships with the World Health Organization (WHO), Ministry of Health (MoH), Royal Health Awareness Society (RHAS), and National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA) have been vital to the success of the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) process in raising public awareness about COVID-19. Through the communication of key messages on multiple social media platforms about preventive health measures that everyone can take to hinder the spread of coronavirus, Jordan's efforts to contain the pandemic have shown good results. Building strong partnerships with leading media outlets helped maintain UNICEF's leading voice and reach, especially during the pandemic. UNICEF also partnered with UN organizations on numerous advocacy campaigns social mobilization exercises and other events to promote the increased uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine amongst the population.

UNICEF Jordan ensured strategic partnerships, building on the strengths of the private and public sectors for programming and resource mobilization. For example, a partnership with a telecommunication company resulted in programmatic and campaign messaging across their social media networks. In addition, UNICEF Jordan undertook partnerships discussions with eight private sector entities for potential future collaboration.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Another year of the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges in the design and implementation of UNICEF Jordan's programmes, but also presented opportunities for creativity and innovation. An important lesson learned was the need to strengthen internal systems and build the capacity of key staff members on how to become improved spokespeople on children's issues, and how to better amplify

the voices of most vulnerable children across all platforms. Effective programming necessitated embracing online technologies, relying ever more on local community support and building up the capacities of local counterparts.

Good programming is reliant on good data, and so data collection continued despite the COVID-19 restrictions. In the COVID-19 context, UNICEF's Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation team continued evidence-generation activities, adopting the 'new-normal' of engaging respective partners, clients, duty bearers and rights holders through virtual means, in order to effectively collect the relevant data. It strengthened its support to consulting firms that conducted research, studies, and evaluations. However, some key planned results, especially those relating to studies and evaluation, were delayed owing to the substantial number of these undertakings and due to limited capacities in research studies and evaluations on the part of the vendors and partners. The lesson learned was that more capacity both within the section and widening the net for strong research partners is imperative to move forward.

As well as strengthening its own internal structures and systems to adapt to the situation, UNICEF's technical, humanitarian and financial support is now focusing more on system-strengthening. While already mandated by the current Country Programme, it became apparent that this would also be key to being able to operate effectively and continuing to achieve results. UNICEF supported and built up the capacities of key partners including government ministries, NGOs and CBOs including the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA) and provided leadership and expertise as co-chair of the child protection working group. This has resulted in improved and better coordinated planning and response to child protection issues. A lesson learned from 2021 however, is that the NCFA will need more support in 2022 in its joint planning with the relevant line ministries and departments, and for their respective roles and responsibilities to be clarified, as inter-ministerial coordination on child protection issues is still rather weak.

Technological and digital innovations provided effective solutions across a range of UNICEF programming. UNICEF's ICT section installed software in tablets distributed to school children to enable continued remote learning. The tablets have pre-installed education applications and links to resources such as Darsak, Learning Bridges and Learning Passports platforms. UNICEF is able to upload additional resources through a mobile device management (MDM) system that provides the opportunity to continually improve the available resources, as well as track usage and other analytics.

UNICEF also realised the importance of equipping young people with digital and technological skills to provide them with transferable skills that will benefit them in terms of employability, life in the post-COVID world and become agents of change.

The existence of a solid data management component for UNICEF's internal programmes, including a feedback mechanism, adaptive M&E systems, and MIS (Bayanati) enabled flexible and responsive programme design of both the Makani and Hajati programmes, to better meet the emerging needs of the affected population. This was highlighted in the global case study on best practices of M&E systems during the COVID-19 response.

As the provision of water and sanitation services is a critical life-saving service to the Syrian refugee camps, UNICEF initiated business continuity planning during the COVID-19 pandemic with all contractors and service providers to ensure minimum critical staff and key supplies were identified and prepositioned to allow for any disruption in obtaining supplies needed for network operations. This step was vital to ensure continuity of services. UNICEF also continued to closely monitor and ensure availability of sufficient stock of essential materials and vital supplies for the operation of WASH systems (e.g chlorine, fuel, etc) in camps.

There were notable challenges in the provision of child protection services, such as the inadequate

government budget allocations for the provision of child protection services and social service workforce. Coordination among different line ministries and their contribution to the national child protection system in accordance with their mandate needs to be further clarified and strengthened.

UNICEF works with relevant line ministries to implement its health and nutrition programmes at national and subnational levels through a consultative process, which can be lengthy and time consuming to build consensus. The COVID-19 pandemic made this engagement quite challenging, especially as a major part of government resources (financial and human) was directed towards responding to the pandemic. UNICEF engaged with government partners continuously and provided technical support where needed. It was a clear lesson for future engagement with line ministries that early initiation of discussion is important in order to receive the necessary approvals and guidance that allow programmes and project implementation to proceed in a timely manner.

Lack of real-time data and information can still be a challenge to inform effective programming. To address this, UNICEF built a digital health information reporting system for peripheral, primary and comprehensive health centres throughout Jordan, which was handed over to the Ministry of Health and rolled out in pilot facilities. This will identify coverage gaps and inequities and help in evidence-based planning. Discontinuation of public health services during the lockdown caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic was a major challenge. UNICEF, together with other agencies, continued its advocacy for continuity of essential health and nutrition services and to avoid disruptions.

For UNICEF Jordan adapting to working in a COVID environment has been challenging, but staff are now back in the office after a period when only remote working was possible. Procedures are in place that include PCR testing on site twice a week. There is an almost 100% vaccination rate among staff members, and rotation of staff office presence helps ensure a safe working environment. Effective support, follow-up and monitoring of COVID-affected staff is carried out through partnership with all UN agencies in Jordan.