

Malaysia

Update on the context and situation of children

For the second year in a row, the impacts of COVID-19 and political change framed Malaysian public life. Rising COVID-19 cases in January 2021 prompted the Government to impose a national state of emergency. The August lifting of the order coincided with the dissolution of the national government and the steepest rise in infections that Malaysia has seen to date. The surge peaked mid-August at 24,599 COVID-19 daily infections; by year end, there had been more than 2,700,000 COVID-19 cases in Malaysia and over 31,000 related deaths. Lockdowns occurred periodically throughout 2021, impacting all aspects of Malaysian life.

Overall COVID-19 infection rates in Malaysia are low relative to global incidences, with 1.5 per cent of the population infected and around 31,500 deaths since the pandemic began. Approximately 20 per cent of positive cases occur among under-18s and there have been 120 COVID-19-related deaths among children. In August, when infection rates rapidly increased, UNICEF assisted with procurement of vital medical supplies. At the same time, the government's vaccination campaign, which began in February 2021, intensified. By the end of the year, 97.7 of adults and 87 per cent of adolescents were fully vaccinated.

The continuing COVID-19 pandemic has exposed Malaysians to considerable hardships. As local COVID-19 caseloads increased, so did contact restrictions and lockdown measures, affecting the psychosocial, educational and economic well-being of children and their families. Social services have suffered from unprecedented disruptions. After opening on 1 March, schools closed from 12 May until 3 October and only partially reopened thereafter. Significant efforts were taken to make home-based learning accessible to all, including the launch of EduTV for those without internet. However, some children remained unable to effectively engage in remote education. Research on low-income families conducted by UNICEF and UNFPA (2021) revealed that, although 6 in 10 surveyed families found EduTV to be useful, 40 per cent of respondents reported a range of challenges, including children's understanding of the programme. Migrant children, children with disabilities and children in rural areas are even less likely to have engaged in effective home learning. Nearly one fourth of children in Sabah state were already out-of-school. These factors pose a significant risk to educational outcomes.

The reinstatement of Movement and Control Orders (MCO) has had a negative impact on pre-existing mental health challenges among children, reducing their opportunities to socialize and play. MCO and the related increase in family stress caused a significant surge in domestic violence and violence against children, with calls to national gender-based violence (GBV) hotlines rising by almost 50 per cent. The crisis was further compounded by the constraints placed by the MCO on social workers' ability to deliver appropriate intervention and protection assistance, and on access to available resources and therapy services. This COVID-19-related 'shadow pandemic' of GBV in Malaysia stems from existing high levels of gender inequality and social acceptance of GBV, such as child marriage. Parents and children with disabilities reported a degradation of acquired function for children with disabilities due to limitations on the operation of early intervention and therapy services imposed as part of COVID-19 suppression measures.

Despite the implementation of several stimulus packages providing financial support to individuals and households in the poor and low- and middle-income brackets, unemployment, under-employment, poverty and hardship remain visibly higher than pre-pandemic. The combination of schools being closed, inflation and rising food prices has meant that low-income families are struggling to afford the basics. Children in these families no longer have access to free school meals, forcing a change to their eating habits and bringing considerable risk that malnutrition will increase beyond its already high pre-

crisis baseline. Furthermore, lockdown measures and their impacts have brought an increase in child offenders: data released in 2021 for 2020 indicates a 10.2 per cent increase in the number of children involved in crime.

Several immigration enforcement operations were carried out during the year. As of July, this resulted in the detention of 9,241 undocumented migrants and the deportation of 13,127 people, including 433 children. This will not only directly affect the well-being of those detained and deported but also negatively impact the mental health of others. The fear of arrest may deter struggling undocumented migrants and refugee children and their families from seeking medical, economic or psychosocial support. The same fear might prevent these communities from seeking out a COVID-19 vaccination, undermining the government's efforts to curb the pandemic and placing these already marginalised communities at increased risk. Unofficial estimates of undocumented or irregular migrants range from 1.4 to 3 million, while UNHCR recorded 180,134 refugees, of which 26 per cent are children.

The effects of climate change have begun to have significant impacts on Malaysia. In recent decades the frequency and intensity of flooding during rainy season has increased. During the last two weeks of December 2021, stronger, heavier seasonal rainfall brought about Malaysia's worst flash flooding on record. According to the National Disaster Management Agency, over 70,000 people in eight peninsular states, including the most populous, were impacted. The floods caused substantial damage to buildings, roads, water and electricity supply and livelihoods, leading to estimated economic damages of around USD 200 million. The Ministry of Health (MOH) also expressed concern about a rise in COVID-19 cases among those in evacuation centres, where effective infectious disease transmission mitigation measures are difficult to implement.

Throughout 2021, UNICEF adapted programming to better serve children and their families within the context of COVID-19. Often working in partnership with government, civil society and the private sector, UNICEF Malaysia developed innovative methods to reach children, especially the most vulnerable, and achieved considerable success in leveraging the COVID-19 crisis to call for systemic change in support of child rights.

Major contributions and drivers of results

Navigating the twin challenges of a global pandemic and political instability to ensure delivery of UNICEF Malaysia's intended results while responding to emerging humanitarian needs has demanded a high degree of flexibility, innovation and commitment to children and their families, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable.

Mitigating the public health impacts of COVID-19: In 2021, Malaysia received 1,387,200 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine shipped via the COVAX facility, or COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Plan, a partnership between the World Health Organization (WHO), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Meanwhile, Brunei received 100,800 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine shipped via the COVAX facility.

In mid-August, health services were inundated as a result of a surge in infections. UNICEF launched a public appeal, raising MYR 1.8 million (approximately USD 428,000) to provide 400 oxygen concentrators and related consumables to Selayang Hospital and Kuala Lumpur General Hospital. These were used in intensive care units as well as loaned to patients recovering at home to make beds available for more critical cases.

Brunei experienced a similar rise in COVID-19 infections in August, prompting the Brunei MOH to request UNICEF assistance in procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) using funds made

available by the Government of Japan. UNICEF Malaysia procured and delivered 100,000 rapid antigen test kits and 127,650 N95 face masks via UNICEF Supply Division in Copenhagen for healthcare workers, front-liners and vaccination centre staff.

Despite high vaccination rates, the Malaysian government has had to divert regular healthcare resources to treat critical COVID-19 patients. MOH approved UNICEF's donations of life-saving medical equipment to strengthen health services in maternity and children's wards at seven hospitals, including five in Sabah. These efforts have opened doors for further collaboration with MOH regarding COVID-19 vaccine promotional messages among marginalised populations. UNICEF and WHO provided regular social listening reports and updates to MOH to support the government's timely planning and implementation and to address the concerns and fast-changing needs of the public.

Mitigating the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable children: In collaboration with UNFPA, UNICEF Malaysia completed a research project on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and children in low-income urban families, entitled *Families on the Edge*. The third and fourth analyses in this study were published in 2021, attracting unprecedented national political and media attention. It was featured in over 140 print and digital news articles and around 15 television and radio interviews. The report was cited during Parliamentary debates on the 2022 budget and was referenced in a budget proposal published by the main political opposition coalition.

A policy brief on Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 on Children with Disabilities with recommendations for inclusion of persons and children with disabilities in the National Recovery Plan was disseminated to key stakeholders in January 2021. In addition, UNICEF Malaysia, Special Olympics Asia Pacific and Special Olympics Sabah conducted a study on the socio-economic, health and psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children with intellectual disabilities and their families in Sabah. The study findings and recommendations will be disseminated in 2022.

Mitigating the impact of school closures and reimagining education: UNICEF provided technical support to the Ministry of Education (MOE) on materials, guidelines on school reopening and the Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (DELIMa) platform. DELIMa is a vital part of blended face-to-face and online education which has kept 4.3 million children learning during school closures. A critical part of DELIMa is the UNICEF-supported Teacher Digital Learning Community which builds teacher capacity as effective remote online educators. To date, some 4,000 teachers from 2,168 schools have participated in the online training.

Alternative and remote learning as part of Reimagine Education and Generation Unlimited have also been pivoted via DELIMa; the platform will be further expanded for 500-800 children in institutions under the Malaysian Prison Department. Future Skills for All, in partnership with MOE, Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), DiGi Telecommunications and Arus, strengthens the provision of and reduces inequalities in digital and skills development. It has ensured continuity of learning during COVID-19 for 34,000 unique users.

Addressing heightened child protection risks through social service workforce strengthening: In partnership with Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFC), UNICEF is mapping the social service workforce (SSW) in relation to its child protection role, reviewing the National Competency Framework, developing capacity building measures and reviewing social work courses to integrate the needs of children affected by migration, amongst others. In addition, UNICEF published the documentation of experiences and challenges faced by non-governmental organisation (NGO) social workers during COVID-19.

Promoting vaccination and mitigating the physical and mental health impacts of protracted movement control orders and social distancing: The VaksinNation digital campaign for young

people on UNICEF Malaysia's Instagram and Children4Change blog helped to build trust and confidence in the COVID-19 vaccines, encouraged compliance to COVID-19 prevention Standard Operation Procedures and promoted mental health and wellbeing. On Instagram, VaksinNation had a total reach of 8.6 million with 15.2 million impressions as of end November. Additionally, ParentText, a chatbot initiative built in RapidPro in collaboration with Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Oxford University, was rolled out to promote positive parenting.

Mitigating the risk of increased GBV in programming: UNICEF Malaysia's GBV Risk Mitigation and Referral Capacity Building Initiative emerged as a direct response to community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Initiative grew to include localisation of capacity building materials; identification of grassroots partners, including a strategic partnership with Women's Aid Organisation (WAO); inclusion of gender and GBV prevention in UNICEF programme documents and partnership agreements; and training to ensure gender-responsiveness throughout UNICEF Malaysia's work.

Progress in implementation of UNICEF Malaysia's mainstream programme: Although COVID-19 dominated UNICEF programming much of the year, UNICEF continued to make progress on the longer-term agenda for children. Key areas include:

Building the evidence base on the situation of children in Malaysia: The Country Office played a leading role in the implementation of the UN Country Team's (UNCT) joint research on the situation of the undocumented population in Sabah. UNICEF also engaged with the government on the development of stronger systems for monitoring child wellbeing, including presentations to Ministers on multi-dimensional child deprivation measurement. Subsequently, the 12th Malaysia Plan and MWFCD's new strategic plan both included commitments to develop a Child Development Index. In collaboration with the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO), UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) and UNHCHR Regional Office, UNICEF Malaysia has provided technical support to the government on UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reporting and submission.

UNICEF Malaysia has undertaken leadership of a new UN-wide initiative to strengthen monitoring and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Malaysia, including on a range of child rights and wellbeing-related issues. With MOE, UNICEF has also provided SDG4 leadership and technical support to education stakeholders on the Education 2030 Agenda in the SDG4 5-year progress review.

The study "Impact of Climate Change on Children: A Malaysian Perspective" in collaboration with the National University of Malaysia (UKM) and the University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) established critical connections between environmental degradation, climate change and children's health and wellbeing, examining in particular the impact on marginalised communities. The study received widespread media coverage and sparked discussions with the government about climate change mitigation and adaptation measures for children. UNICEF also launched the MyUNICEF Impact Challenge in collaboration with government agency Malaysia Global Innovation Centre (MaGIC). The initiative aimed to solicit innovative solutions to address mental health, psychosocial support and access to a safe and clean environment for children. Five innovations and start-ups were chosen to receive support through the Social Impact Challenge Accelerator with technical assistance from 500 Global and the UNDP Accelerator Lab.

Strengthening Malaysia's policy framework for children and families: UNICEF continued to engage with the Parliamentary Special Select Committee on Women, Children and Social Development throughout 2021, resulting in stronger scrutiny of social protection budget allocations and commitments to work with UNICEF on child-responsive budgeting. Moreover, UNICEF is supporting the MWFCD to develop a National Child Policy and associated Action Plan to replace four outdated policies and expired action plans, as well as reviewing the Plan of Action on Child Online

Protection (2015-2020) which will provide recommendations for the way forward. UNICEF advocacy for children's rights in the environment will inform the drafting of the National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights (NAP).

Preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse of children: UNICEF supported the development and launch of the 3rd National Action Plan on Anti-Trafficking in Persons 2021-2025 (NAPTIP 3.0) by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), which includes a specific focus on child trafficking and labour. Together with Global Shepherds Berhad and HOST International, UNICEF supported the strengthening of community-based child protection mechanisms in migrant and refugee communities in Sabah and Klang Valley and case management services to 390 vulnerable children. Providing technical and capacity development support to the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) led to an assessment of SUHAKAM/Office of the Children's Commissioner from a child rights perspective, identifying areas to be strengthened.

UNICEF continued to support the government-led diversion pilot of children in conflict with the law. The first country-led evaluation of the diversion pilot, commissioned by UNICEF on behalf of the MWFC, is ongoing. In preparation for the expansion of the Department of Social Welfare-led probation programme, UNICEF has also facilitated a training-of-trainers programme.

Promoting child health and wellbeing: An extension of a nutrition landscape analysis for children under 5 years of age is currently underway in collaboration with the Nutrition Division and Institute for Public Health. It will identify and analyse current stakeholders and policies, legislation, interventions and programmes to facilitate malnutrition reductions. UNICEF has also provided technical and financial support to MOH in evaluating the impact of sugar-sweetened beverage taxes on purchases, intake and economics. UNICEF supported the Government in monitoring, communicating and evaluating the impact of enforcing universal salt iodisation (USI) and offered technical support on costing methodology in wheat flour fortification to tackle micronutrient malnutrition on a national scale.

On mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), UNICEF partnered with MOH to assist in the generation of evidence on MHPSS multi-tiered system strengthening, and piloting diagnostic assessment tools and school-based interventions for high-risk adolescents. The outcomes will inform policy development and scaling-up of school- and community-based MHPSS programmes.

Promoting adolescent and youth participation and empowerment: In 2021, UNICEF scaled-up digital engagement programmes to empower young people on mental health resilience, learning and civic engagement. With Project I.D., 615,000 young people participated in skill-building and interactive workshops through UNICEF's @KitaConnect platform. Dewan Muda Malaysia (DMM), a Malaysian Youth Parliamentary Academy involving 222 youth representatives, was launched in partnership with youth-led organisation UNDI18 to promote legal empowerment and civic engagement. Generation Unlimited (GenU) established new high-value partnerships with UNDP and government-affiliated agencies, engaging 1,900 young people in 2021. In support of the National Strategy Plan in Handling the Causes of Child Marriage 2.1, Federation of Reproductive Health Associations Malaysia, youth media R.AGE and UNICEF delivered a digital campaign providing young people a safe space to obtain accurate and non-judgemental information about sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Additionally, a chatbot named ANA was launched in August to provide SRHR info in both Malay and English via web and WhatsApp.

In collaboration with UNDP, UNICEF launched the Youth Environment Living Lab (YELL) in August 2021 to ground youth-led climate and environmental action in local narratives and promote action learning through an experiential approach. Overall, UNICEF Malaysia contributed to 23 capacity-building conferences with around 2,000 young participants and organised three youth events in collaboration with the British High Commission, Italian Embassy, Ministry of Environment and

Water and Malaysian Youth Delegation.

Promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities: A partnership with real estate developer Sime Darby Property has resulted in the design and construction of a disability-inclusive community playground in the City of Elmina. Construction was completed in November 2020 with validation sessions undertaken in April 2021. A Best Business Practice Circular and Guidance Toolkit and advocacy package has been developed and is scheduled to be disseminated in 2022. The engagement of children and youth with disabilities in the playground design was highlighted at the Global Forum for Children and Youth in December 2021.

Strengthening institutional capacity in Communication for Development (C4D): UNICEF has strengthened institutional capacity in Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) through the addition of two C4D Centres at UPM and UKM, bringing the total in Malaysia to three (in addition to UMS). The UKM C4D Centre focuses on health communication policy and practice; the UPM C4D Centre has over 15 SBCC expert Fellows. The UMS-UNICEF C4D Research Unit evaluated the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards the COVID-19 vaccine amongst 985 people in Sabah including non-citizens and rural and low-income communities. Findings were presented to the State Health Department and used to inform the response to address the low COVID-19 vaccination rate in Sabah.

Programme development and private sector engagement: World Children's Day on 20 November received high-level attention: Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) football club produced videos to mark the occasion and turned their stadium blue in honour of child rights. In Parliament, children and young people interviewed Members of Parliament (MPs) on child rights and stakeholders addressed the audience on the relevance of rights promotion. Attending MPs wore UNICEF's lapel pin and the Parliament building turned blue for three days. In Brunei, several online discussions and programmes involving children and youth were organised by Brunei's Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports and two bridges turned blue on 20-22 November to honour children's rights.

In Sabah, UNICEF partnered with Good Shepherd Services to distribute critical gender-responsive sanitation and hygiene supplies, promote COVID-19 mitigation measures and spread awareness on GBV risk mitigation and referral pathways in 16 remote rural and underserved urban communities.

After the December flooding, UNICEF and the Malaysian Red Crescent Society (MRCS) conducted joint gender-responsive and disability-inclusive rapid needs assessments in affected areas in Sepang. UNICEF and Toy Libraries Malaysia donated children's face masks, hand sanitisers, clothes and toys to four aid distribution centres in the flood-affected region. Also, through the support of MRCS, 50 hygiene kits were dispatched to Orang Asli communities in Sepang.

Developing and leveraging resources and partnerships for children: Malaysian supporters responded in abundance to a call for donations by UNICEF's Private Fundraising and Partnerships (PFP) Division. A total of USD 24 million was raised, thanks to over 160,000 committed donors and some local and international companies based in the country. These Malaysian benefactors provided significant income and resources for children in 2021, funding the UNICEF Malaysia Country Programme and COVID-19 and flood response efforts, while also contributing to UNICEF programmes for children and major emergencies globally. UNICEF Malaysia's support to children and their families, especially the most vulnerable, was made possible by the generosity of the Malaysian people and companies at large.

UNICEF partnerships enabled strategic input on policy, such as on the new national child policy with Child Rights Coalition Movement; the National Medium Term development plan (RMK-12) chapter on poverty with the Prime Minister's Department; in Technical Working Groups; and with the Ministry of Finance on social protection alongside preparation of the annual national budget. UNICEF worked with MOH on COVID-19 response and psychosocial support and diagnostic assessment for high-risk adolescents; MDEC on youth engagement and employment; and MaGIC, along with UNDP, on entrepreneurship. Multi-stakeholder partnerships included with MOE, MOHA and Google on the DELiMa platform and with MCMC, MWFC, NGOs and global partners "We Protect" regarding a successful Child Online Protection seminar.

UNICEF's valuable inter-agency partnerships included acting as Inter-Agency Results Group lead, presenting recommendations to the Prime Minister-chaired Social Protection Council. UNICEF collaborated with UNFPA on *Families on the Edge*, girls' rights, teenage pregnancy (supported by Burnett institute) and child marriage. Partnering with UNDP proved critical regarding advocacy on the National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights (NAP); also on climate change and adolescents, the Accelerator Lab initiative, entrepreneurship and employability for young people and, with ILO, the social protection agenda. With UNHCR and IOM, work focused on undocumented or migration-affected children. With the RCO and ILO, UNICEF developed a UN-wide proposal for the Government's 2022 budget on social protection responses to COVID-19. With WHO, UNICEF provided technical support to MOH in risk communication, community engagement - also involving IOM, UNHCR, IFRC, ICRC, MRC, Mercy Malaysia and IMARET - and COVID-19 vaccine rollout, alongside adolescent mental health.

UNICEF's collaboration with university and research institution included University of Oxford, the Institutes for Clinical Research (ICR) and Health Behaviour Research (IHBR); findings informed MOH's National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme communication strategy. A partnership is also in place with UKM and UMS on climate change and children; UKM, UMS and UPM regarding C4D Centres; University of Edinburgh on developing a strategy to end violence against children; and University of Malaya International Institute of Public Policy and Management for National Evaluation Capacity Development. UNICEF Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Asia Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development will collaborate on children's programming initiatives.

UNICEF partnered with Special Olympics on a study on the impact of COVID-19 on Sabah children with intellectual disabilities and with Good Shepherd Services in Sabah and on GBV prevention, risk mitigation, referrals and capacity building. Regarding GBV, WAO provided technical and localised gender expertise. During the floods, UNICEF joined with the MRCS and Toys Libraries. UNICEF has formalised a partnership with Digi Telecommunications regarding child protection and rights. Climate-related partners include UNDP and the Malaysian Plastic Manufacturers Association on responsible plastics use. Partnerships in support of adolescents and youth include UKM U-Inspire, Malaysia Youth Delegation and, regarding the @KitaConnect initiative, Project I.D. UNICEF collaborated with Universiti Malaya Cares and UNDI18 for youth civic empowerment programme DMM. UNICEF's partnership with JDT included virtual campaigns for World Children's Day, climate change mitigation, healthy eating and COVID-19 vaccine promotion.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Flexibility and the openness to adapt methodologies to largely unexpected and changing scenarios continued to be a key lesson learned during 2021. From finding new ways of working and forging new relationships, UNICEF was able to adapt programming to meet the needs of children and their families during a challenging year. Many events, programmes, launches and study trips were moved to the virtual contexts to comply with COVID-19-related restrictions. These virtual events enabled greater

participation, inclusivity and reach, as many barriers to in-person involvement - such as travel costs, venue accessibility, logistics and time – were eliminated or reduced. UNICEF also took measures to strengthen and promote the equitable participation of adolescents, including those with disabilities, and plans to provide targeted accessibility support such as data vouchers to young people from low-resource settings. The risks inherent in a virtual environment necessitate the establishment and enforcement of clear child protection protocols and counselling services. Establishing digital learning communities alongside platforms will increase their successful, sustained and safe use.

In 2021, partnerships were key to robust (virtual) programming. Through collaboration with media and education partners, UNICEF was able to develop interactive programmes maximising the use of video conferencing features. For instance, the launch of the State of the World’s Children was simultaneously held live on television and Facebook Live, presented on MOH’s and UNICEF’s Facebook pages, and posted on both the Minister of Health’s individual account and the BERNAMA news agency main platform. BERNAMA and UNICEF are now looking to build on this experience with a more formal, long-term cooperation. A critical lesson learned is the need to enlist existing innovation stakeholders to advocate for child rights. Our collaboration with MaGIC demonstrated significant potential for involving the private sector in advancing children’s outcomes while fostering entrepreneurship among young start-ups. Additionally, it has the potential to serve as a sustainable model for integrating innovation into UNICEF programming.

Programme interventions must be localised to the Malaysian context and incorporate robust gender-integrated and disability-inclusive planning, monitoring and evaluation. Online teaching and learning platforms that incorporate accessibility features and offline learning materials/packs can help teachers and students with disabilities and marginalised groups of children overcome barriers. In that vein, UNICEF adapted an equity approach to extending access to the Teacher Digital Learning Community to all teachers. The Learning Community utilises Google Classroom and Telegram groups, Google Earth for creation of learning resources, Discord for alternative platforms and a Telegram bot for mobile learning.

The VaksinNation campaign, which performed well on Instagram, was met with demands for content in additional dialects. This paves the way to future use of dark posts targeted to a specific audience. The official launch of the inclusive playground in the City of Elmina has been moved to 2022 to safeguard against any reputational risks that may result from launching a space of play amidst lockdowns.

There needs to be a greater emphasis on innovation and creativity in climate campaigns, advocacy and communications to effectively engage and empower young people in the climate movement. This was reflected in the capacity-building training sessions held in the run-up to the 26th Conference of the Parties, as well as the development of the country’s first flagship climate report, “Impact of Climate Change on Children: A Malaysian Perspective”.

The pandemic disrupted face-to-face nutrition training, such as for child growth assessment or infant and young child feeding counselling, that cannot be transferred to the virtual space. Capacity building to improve the delivery of nutrition programmes during emergencies and humanitarian situations is in the pipeline. In addition, partner capacities – which remain an obstacle to the sustainability and scaling up of nutrition programmes – should be considered in the design and implementation phase of programming.

The impact of COVID-19 on research was initially underestimated. Given the challenges of gathering primary data during the pandemic, existing reports and data sources were heavily mined and validated or built upon, rather than duplicated. Key informant interviews replaced focus group discussions and there were delays due to multiple lockdowns, research fatigue amongst researchers and respondents and limitations in remote data collection methods. This impacted the birth registration study on children affected by migration, a needs assessment for children in street situations in Sabah and the

mapping of SSW work, as well as led to the postponement of the national survey of children living in residential care.

The Social Policy workstream was significantly affected by the demands of Country Programme Document (CPD) revision in 2021. Furthermore, restrictions on in-person meetings complicated stakeholder consultations, while Malaysia's mid-year political reconfiguration made policy engagement very difficult. In the context of continuing political uncertainty at the Federal level, State engagement could offer an alternative channel for delivering results for children at scale, with potential for feedback loops to federal policy-making.

The UNCT study about the undocumented population in Sabah has highlighted the need to support the development of a joint UN engagement strategy on children affected by migration, refugees, the stateless and other undocumented children.

After severe December rainfall affected more than 70,000 in eight different Malaysian states, it would be prudent for UNICEF to review and update its disaster preparedness plan, with related staff training on child safeguarding protocols and referral pathways.

The pandemic has also underlined the importance of donor retention and value maximization in difficult times. As the continuity of call centre operation was a major challenge, an incentive system was introduced to motivate agents, achieving partial success. In 2021, PFP reduced expenditures by an estimated MYR400K per year and invested in a healthy mix of diversification in acquisition channels, with proven results.