In terms of socio-political stability, 2021 was calm with no serious incidents reported however insecurity concerns increased in the north as a result of spillover effects from the Central Sahel. After the October 2020 re-election of President Alassane Ouattara, a new Prime Minister, Patrick Achi was appointed on March 26, 2021 following the unfortunate health-related death of his predecessor Prime Minister Hamed Bakayoko. In the formation of a new cabinet, several ministerial changes were made at technical ministries (education, health, social protection, ministry of family, women and children). Following attacks in Burkina Faso, three cross border population movements took place (in March, November and December 2021), resulting in 3,222 refugees hosted in already fragile communities in the north of Côte d’Ivoire (Boukani and Tchologo regions). (As of Jan 2022 the current total of refugees is 5957 including 3552 children). UNHCR took the lead in addressing the needs of refugees, while the CO worked closely with local authorities and host communities to provide additional medical equipment for local health centres and school kits for children. As the spillover effects from the Central Sahel crisis is expected to continue, the CO also took several steps to support system strengthening, preparation and resilience at community levels. A lessons learned mission to the Burkina Faso was undertaken including with staff from Benin and Ghana, other spillover affected coastal countries.

Côte d’Ivoire resumed its positive economic performance despite the COVID-19 pandemic context. The country’s economic growth rate was estimated at 6.5 per cent in 2021, against 2 per cent in 2020. Important disparities persist and the new national development plan (PND 2021-2025) reflected the Government’s commitment to invest more in promoting equity and social inclusion. Action research on the impact of COVID-19 conducted by the CO demonstrated that the pandemic contributed to increasing equity gaps for vulnerable families and limiting access to basic social services. Since March 2020, a total of 68,146 COVID-19 cases and 712 deaths were reported in Côte d’Ivoire. Although Abidjan remains the epicenter, all regions are affected. Case numbers rose in Abidjan in late December 2021 (no deaths), attributable to the Omicron variant. UNICEF is responsible for procurement and logistics of COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX and AVAT mechanisms, which ensured 95 per cent of the country’s COVID-19 vaccine supply. From the beginning of 2021, the CO reoriented its efforts (staff and time) and signed tripartite agreements with the Government and World Bank to procure vaccines and cold-chain equipment (valued at US$68 million), ensuring reception of 15 million vaccine doses in 2021.

Since Côte d’Ivoire experienced lower morbidity and mortality rates the general population needed regular reminders not to ignore preventive measures, particularly in the countryside. Schools remained open all year round and all CO programming returned to a normal levels in 2021. Nationwide campaigns supported by the CO had excellent coverage: distribution of almost 13 million long-lasting impregnated mosquito nets; measles/rubella vaccination for 5,967,964 children aged 9-to-59 months (95.5 per cent coverage); 1,599,408 children aged 3-to-59 months vaccinated against polio (105.2 per cent coverage); two rounds of Vitamin A supplementation and deworming in 72 districts with 5,759,827 children aged 6¿59 months receiving VAS and 5,244,573 children aged between 12¿59 months dewormed in June (data from the November round not available yet).

In February 2021 neighbouring Guinea experienced an outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD), sparking national preparedness and prevention efforts in western Côte d’Ivoire. The CO received support from the UNICEF Guinea office to reinforce infection and prevention control (IPC) and the regional staff office to reinforce risk communication and community engagement (RCCE). One case was reported in Abidjan on 14 August 2021 triggering an intense response. WHO and UNICEF
coordinated the dispatch of 4,950 doses of Ebola vaccine from Guinea to Cote d’Ivoire. However, the case was re-classified on 31 August as a non-case, and an after-action-review was conducted. The potential for EVD, an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the risk of spillover from the Central Sahel highlighted the need for the Cote d’Ivoire to adopt a ‘multi-demic’ preparedness and response approach rather than focus on a specific emergency or disease.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021-2025, consisting of eight pillars, was approved in January 2021. UNICEF is lead of the education pillar and co-lead of the basic services pillar. UNICEF’s country programme document (CPD) 2021-2025 was endorsed by the Executive Board in March 2021 and important progress was achieved on the four CPD programmatic shifts: (i) focus on the convergence area - zonal offices were reinforced to ensure better results for the most vulnerable children and the CO reinforced its preparedness and emergency response capacity; (ii) the CO developed its strategy for community-based approaches; (iii) the CO better aligned its adolescent and young people component to the most vulnerable, in particular vulnerable adolescent girls; (iv) some innovations transitioned to nationwide approaches (recycled plastic bricks, uterine balloon tamponade kits and kangaroo mother care) and private partnerships were strengthened, especially in the cocoa sector, to achieve more results for children.

In line with the PND, and as a response to increasing disparities and the security threat in the north, the government developed a new national social programme (PS Gouv 2), expected to be adopted in 2022, with a clear focus on the north-east (Bounkani and Tchologo regions bordering Burkina Faso). Alongside other partners (the World Bank, U.S. Agency for International Development, European Union (EU), and French, Japanese and German Cooperation), the UN system and UNICEF are developing a common approach to complement PS Gouv 2 in the north-east and increase the resilience of both populations and social services.

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

In 2021 the country office structured its annual management plan (AMP) programme results around the key results for children in West and Central Africa (KRCs) to which the Country Office increased its commitment to five KRCs with the addition of KRC 4.

**Key result for children 1 on Immunization:** “By 2021, the percentage of children vaccinated with DTP/Penta 3 vaccine is at least 90% nationally”. This objective was met; 90 per cent of children aged 0-11 months were vaccinated with three doses of DTP-containing/Penta vaccine, and in 91 per cent of all districts at least 80 per cent of children are vaccinated with DTP/Penta 3-containing vaccine.

This is a considerable achievement, since COVID-19 and the significant response it required distracted the health system from its regular activities. COVID-19 vaccination, which started in March 2021 in Cote d’Ivoire, was initially plagued by very low acceptance fuelled by mistrust of vaccines and false rumors on social media discouraging people from getting vaccinated. Communication was prioritized to manage vaccine hesitancy, starting with a vaccination pool survey through U-Report and engaging young bloggers to track and address rumours on social networks. Stock-outs of vaccines and syringes and rapid changes in the immunization strategy posed challenges to communication activities. In September 2021, with the arrival of significant quantities of vaccines through UNICEF, the CO engaged in bringing services closer to communities, mainly through mobile clinics, and seeking to vaccinate teachers before the start of the school year. As of 31 December, 34 per cent of the target population (people over 18 years old) had been vaccinated with one dose and 15 per cent fully vaccinated. Vaccines are now available in all parts of the country and integrated into routine immunization services.

**Key result for children 3 (Education):** “By 2021, additional 4,000 out-of-school girls and boys participated in early learning, primary or secondary education through UNICEF-supported
programmes”. This objective was met. Some 8,419 formerly out-of-school children participated in early learning, primary or secondary education in 2021 through UNICEF-supported programmes.

Of the 8,419 newly enrolled children, 3,573 joined community pre-primary centres (1,879 girls) and 4,846 children entered primary school (2,406 girls) through alternative pathways (bridging classes). This ‘second chance’ for out-of-school children enabled them to enter the formal system through an accelerated curriculum allowing them to complete two levels in one year. In addition, as part of the national strategy for integration of children from Islamic education structures into the formal education system, the CO contributed to the production of a mutually acceptable curriculum and adapted teachers’ guides. Additional tools were developed to assess their compliance with formal school standards and develop action plans for further integration. As a result, the first phase of integration was implemented at 538 Islamic schools, allowing 104,000 children to start the 2020-2021 school year with a revised curriculum combining formal and religious education.

Key result for children 4 on Education: “By 2021, an additional 6,000 children are provided with individual (one-per-child) education/early learning materials through UNICEF-supported programmes”. This objective was met through the distribution of new learning materials to 13,623 students (including 6,652 girls).

Two recent international studies (PASEC and EGRA/EGMA) showed that learning achievement for students completing grades 2 and 5 was very poor in writing, reading and mathematics and placed Ivorian students among the worst performing in the sub-region. The data reflects low levels of efficiency in the system, since 20 per cent of public spending is dedicated to education. To overcome the learning crisis, the CO supported the design and implementation of a national programme to improve fundamental learning (PNAAF), introducing gender-sensitive and child-centred learning approaches into new learning materials for reading and mathematics.

Key result for children 5 on Child Protection: “By 2021, 5,000 girls and boys who have experienced violence are reached by health, social work or justice/law enforcement services”. Direct support to frontline social and justice workers continued in 2021, facilitating the provision of quality assistance to 5,017 child victims of sexual and other forms of violence, thereby meeting the regional target for Côte d’Ivoire.

The national campaign ‘Reimagining Côte d’Ivoire without violence against children’ yielded important results and reinforced the country’s role as a pathfinder in the global ‘End-Violence’ initiative. As part of the campaign, partnerships were formed with the private sector to encourage businesses to find new, innovative ways to respond to violence against children. Formal agreements were signed with MTN, to curb online sexual exploitation and abuse, and with IHS Tower, to address violence in schools. To reach a wider audience, agreements with key media providers led to the broadcasting of six episodes of the popular TV series ‘Oranges Sucrées’ that addressed violence against children, leading to nationwide discussion and debate.

Key result for children 7 on Child Protection:” By 2021, 76% of children under one year whose births are registered in Cote D’Ivoire”. Registration of children under one year of age increased from 64 per cent in 2020 to 65 per cent in 2021, despite the COVID-19 context; however the KRC target was not met.

New birth registration mechanisms in health platforms were brought to scale in 2021, covering 100 per cent of maternities and immunization centres across the country. Birth registration services functioned well at most maternities, but further support is needed to improve the issuing of birth declarations through immunization services, to capture children born at home and close the gap with immunization rates.

The fifth AMP programme results chosen for 2021 is related to the CPD 2021-2025 adolescents and youth participation outcome: “By 2021, 3400 adolescent girls and boys and youth have more access to
opportunities to develop their full potential, engagement, and active participation in the life of their communities and in social change”. The objective was met in 2021: 396 youth benefited from civic service programmes (102 vulnerable girls aged 16-24), 19,582 gained enhanced life skills and 29,714 young people (including 26,326 aged 14-19) were enrolled in technical and vocational education.

A major achievement of 2021 was the government’s decision to adopt the ‘girl power’ project, a civic service programme for vulnerable girls supported by the CO and developed in partnership with the private sector and the National Civic Service Office. The project seeks to reach 14,000 of the most vulnerable youth per year through additional 14 civic centres.

The CO stressed quality engagement with young people during 2021, with a focus on the disadvantaged youth. The National Children’s Parliament was revitalized, and 130 new parliamentary representatives were elected across the country, including out-of-school and disadvantaged children. The ‘voices of youth’ initiative was reoriented to include younger age groups through the ‘voices of youth in schools’ project, which developed more than 7,000 solutions for promoting a healthy environment. Some 677,276 new U-Reporters were recruited on the U-Report online platform in 2021, bringing the total to 3,340,558 U-Reporters, of whom 14 per cent are aged 15-to-19 years. Additionally, the U-Test project, targeting HIV prevention among at-risk adolescents was expanded, reaching a total of 56,412 young people with combined HIV prevention services, distributing over 32,000 self-test kits and enrolling 865 adolescents in pre-exposure prophylaxis/PrEP.

In addition to these programme results, the country office also produced two results related to management:

Promotion of ethics and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA): The 2021 PSEA action plan was developed and validated by the CMT, and then monitored quarterly. In collaboration with UNFPA and UNDP, the CO developed PSEA awareness-raising posters that were distributed to CO implementing partners and social workers throughout the country. The CO continued to carry out PSEA assessments of implementing partners; at end-2021 about 77 per cent were rated low or moderate risk.

Enabling environment for effective and efficient programme delivery through improved systems, processes and procedures: The country programme management plan (CPMP) 2021-2025 was developed and endorsed by WCARO. Aligned to programmatic strategic shifts, implementation of the CPMP allowed for reinforcement of the two zonal offices (Man, in the west and Korhogo, in the north). An accountability framework was developed through a participatory process to clarify the role of zonal offices and to empower them. Also, a new section on community approaches to social and behaviour change was created under Programmes to facilitate cross-sectoral synergies and multisectoral approaches. The adolescent and youth outcome was restructured with the aim of bringing together all components related to youth engagement and participation. A construction unit was created under Operations to facilitate the transition to large-scale production of plastic bricks. Finally, the partnerships section was reinforced, new positions were created for a security officer and an emergency and resilience specialist. All these changes were implemented in light of the new vision presented by the CPD 2021-2025.

The office conducted an analysis aimed at increasing gender and cultural diversity, elements of which were included in the recruitment process to improve the CO’s overall gender ratio as well as geographical diversity within the IP population. The gender ratio improved from 38 per cent female in 2019 to 42 per cent female by end-2021. Women have been encouraged to apply to posts and internal women candidates given priority when applying for NO positions. Through a head-hunter, the CO was able to recruit a female driver for the first time. As part of the agenda to increase the CO’s youth population, during 2020 and 2021 the CO recruited 15 UN Volunteers.

At the end of December 2021, the Country Office’s overall funding totalled US$63,277,123 (US$10,137,410 in RR, US$49,860,045 in ORR, and US$3,279,668 in ORE), plus US$34,018,886
already re-phased (OR and ORE) for 2022 and beyond. Funding for 2021 was higher than in 2020 (US$57,668,018) and 2019 (USD$3,231,552). As of 31 December 2021, the budget utilization rate was 99 per cent for RR, ORR, and ORE, and no DCT was greater than nine months.

The Country Office was able to mobilize USD 35,633,289 in 2021 -- 3,767,371 and 31,865,918 OR --. The 2021 COVID response focused mainly on vaccination, with UNICEF’s signature of three agreements with the Government and the World Bank for a total value of US$68,140,705 to procure vaccines and cold chain equipment. In addition, an agreement between the Government and the Global Fund (valued at US$2,466,450) was signed to purchase medical equipment. As a consequence, CO supply expenditures in 2021 increased (45 per cent in 2021, versus 32 per cent in 2020).

The CO’s internal emergency ‘COVID Team’ initiated at the outset of the pandemic in March 2020 was expanded to all programme components and used again in response to the threat of Ebola virus disease (EVD) to permit an integrated response. For example, the CO strengthened the health system (particularly in Abidjan) by providing 82 health centres with touchless hand-washing stations connected to the public water supply; procuring COVID vaccines and cold chain equipment, training and communication tools to support COVID vaccination. In addition, the CO strengthened the capacity of social workers and health workers to address mental health and provide psychosocial support. This training was introduced after the first case of EVD was reported in Guinea and served to address the impact of both Ebola and COVID-19. For school children, the CO distributed handwashing devices to 6,000 schools benefiting 1,888,330 students (874,979 girls) and distributed 1,296,000 masks to primary schools. The CO was the first to advocate for and implement a targeted communication campaign to encourage teachers’ vaccination at the beginning of the new school year. U-Reporters were engaged to support outreach immunization activities in the suburbs of Abidjan, and the CORONA and Ebola SMS-based info centers were regularly updated. Working together in this way made it possible to gradually move toward integrating COVID-19-and by extension other risks-- into routine programmes.

Programme components were also integrated as a result of the community-based strategy developed and validated by the CO in 2021. Two sub-prefectures (Blapleu and Guiembe) were identified for initial implementation. Sub-prefectures, comprised of around ten villages and camps, constitute an appropriate scale for initiating this type of approach: (i) they meet equity requirements due to the diversity of their ethnic and socio-economic profiles; (ii) they offer an opportunity to work not only with each community present in the sub-prefecture, but also to consolidate links between communities, in particular by strengthening referral systems and through the involvement of local administrative and technical services; (iii) finally, starting at this scale should facilitate the anticipation of problems likely to arise during subsequent scale-up.

**UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships**

In 2021 the CO reinforced its collaboration with the UN system around the UNSDCF 2021-2025 notably by leading the development of joint work plans for education (pillar 3) and basic services (pillar 4). At the request of the UN country team, the CO collaborated with the Ivoirian Centre for Economic and Social Research to conduct a community-based diagnosis in two regions bordering Burkina Faso most affected by the security threat. The study will inform the development of a UN joint programme and guide the operationalization of the government’s social programme (PS Gouv 2), which focuses on the most vulnerable regions, notably in the north. A concept note on resilience-building in the north is currently under development to ensure strategic positioning of UNICEF in the response.

UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) intensified their COVID-19 coordination mechanism, expanded to include the EVD response. Several sub-committees were revamped, and now include members from other agencies (World Bank, Centres for Disease Control, US Agency for
International Development, International Rescue Committee, Médecins Sans Frontières, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, etc.). Under the overall lead of WHO, UNICEF led four sub-committees: IPC, RCCE, logistics and supply and psychological support. The CO issued nine situation reports in 2021 to inform the Regional Office and facilitate coordination with neighbouring countries. Both the COVID-19 and Ebola responses reinforced the CO’s positioning as a key actor in emergency preparedness and response.

Since 2021 was the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, UNICEF and the International Labour Organization (ILO) intensified their partnership with a specific focus on the cocoa sector. The work included advocacy efforts both in Côte d’Ivoire and internationally, as well as the provision of technical support to the Government and the EU multistakeholder initiative for sustainable cocoa in Côte d’Ivoire. UNICEF, ILO and the International Organization on Migration (IOM) launched discussions with the EU and Switzerland about implementation of a joint programme for an integrated, area-based approach to combatting child labour and its root causes in a specific cocoa-growing region. The joint programme should be launched by mid-2022.

The new CPD also allowed the CO to reinforce its partnership with civil society, notably through the signature of partnership agreements with 22 implementing partners for a total value of US$3,831,757. Two of the agreements were for humanitarian purposes in response to COVID-19 and the Ebola threat.

Private sector engagement was critical to the success of the ‘Girl Power’ project. The CO played an important role by brokering collaboration between companies and the government to secure placement opportunities for girls. Partnerships were set up with MTN, on online sexual abuse and exploitation of children, and with IHS on violence against children in schools. The private sector has significant potential for further developing social services in Côte d’Ivoire through technological and connectivity solutions, which will be pursued in 2022.

Private-sector fundraising by UNICEF national committees significantly helped to finance the plastic bricks project, in collaboration with the Colombian social enterprise Conceptos Plasticos.

**Lessons Learned and Innovations**

Innovations were mainstreamed in 2021 to accelerate progress toward key results for children and create an environment conducive to the achievement of at-scale results for children. Digital technologies were introduced in all programmes, notably: the U-Test project, through the creation of a virtual platform to facilitate young peoples’ access to information on self-testing and PrEP kits; the birth registration platform, which allows civil registers to share birth registration performance information monthly through SMS and WhatsApp displayed via a PowerBi dashboard; and the Conceptos Plasticos dashboard and live project map showing the construction status of different classrooms.

**Key result for children 1:** In 2021, the CO benefited from additional resources for COVID-19 vaccination, allowing reinforcement of the expanded programme for immunization. Important lessons were learned from the initial resistance to COVID-19 vaccination:

- Information posted on social media is volatile but not permanent. The CO reinforced communications, including: SMS messaging, regular tracking of rumours, establishing a communication monitoring committee/watchdog, and digital communication through live chats with U-Reporters and young bloggers who reinforced pro-vaccination messages. Yet it was difficult to counter misinformation. The CO therefore reinforced community engagement strategies, including
collaboration with community health workers, local influencers and religious leaders.

- When COVID vaccines and syringes became widely available, the CO supported a mobile strategy that brought vaccines closer to the population, with support from community mobilizers and U-Reporters. This strategy resulted in significant adhesion to COVID vaccination.

- The need to monitor popular perceptions and respond flexibly. For example, low attendance was initially observed during the October national measles-rubella/Polio (MR/IPV) vaccination campaign for children 9-to-59 months. This was largely due to false rumours that the campaign aimed to attract and vaccinate children against COVID-19. The campaign delivery strategy was therefore revamped, ensuring that every vaccination site had two clearly separated lines: one for COVID-19 vaccination for people over 18, and the other for MR/IPV vaccination for children. As a result, the MR/IPV campaign reached 95.5 per cent of its target.

Key result for children 3: In 2021, the CO noted that children attending ‘bridging classes’ have difficulty staying motivated because many of them work and support themselves. Discussions are underway with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to identify other approaches that are better adapted to these out-of-school children without penalizing them. CO support to Islamic education structures was highly successful. By the end of the programme it will have reached about 400,000 students enrolled in these structures. Three studies produced with support from the CO provided a solid understanding of the issues, challenges and needs of all stakeholders. The main challenge was to reassure parents that their children would continue to benefit from the religious component after Islamic structures are integrated into the formal education system. The work supported by the CO around the timetable was key to accommodating both types of education.

The CO’s partnership with Conceptos Plásticos continued to generate considerable interest from donors, notably through UNICEF National Committees. However, this innovative social enterprise faced challenges in 2021 as it sought to transition from small-scale production to larger volumes. The plant experienced power cuts and struggled to meet CO demand for the production of recycled plastic bricks. In response the CO provided support, including technical assistance for the development of a business plan and production dashboard and the provision of generators for use during power cuts. In line with its management plans, the CO established a dedicated construction unit under the supervision of the Deputy Representative for Operations to ensure supervision of the quality of construction using plastic bricks.

Key result for children 4: An assessment of the distance learning programme “Mon ecole a la maison” (My school at home) launched in 2020 revealed the limitations of learning via radio and TV broadcasts. In 2021 the MoE decided to put the programme on hold and develop a digital platform with the full content of each programme for each grade of primary and secondary education. The CO supported the MoE in this effort. While considerable progress was made, some issues should be highlighted. Putting the official curriculum online takes time. For example, 11,000 lessons need to be transformed into adapted digital resources, including a fact sheet, a video capsule and corrective self-tests. The two main recommendations are to: (i) mobilize a national team dedicated solely to producing these resources and getting them online and (ii) prioritize the content to be developed and phase-in the platform accordingly, to enable it to go online as soon as possible - even if not entirely finalized.

Key result for children 5: Setting up a pool of ‘champion’ social workers was an innovative initiative for bringing value to frontline workers and for mobilizing social workers more broadly. The pool, consisting of designated social workers from each of the 33 regions of Côte d’Ivoire, contributes to UNICEF’s efforts to further decentralize funding and key initiatives in support of social services.

Key result for children 7: Birth registration services are functioning well at most maternities, but birth declarations through immunization services require further support to capture children born at home and close the gap with immunization rates. Accountability mechanisms could also be developed to
allow communities to report irregularities in service delivery.

In addition, the CO contributed to the acceleration of key result for children 8 – ending open defecation. The sub-prefecture approach launched jointly with the government, which aims to cover all villages within the targeted sub-prefecture, led to the first sub-prefecture to be awarded open defecation-free status in 2021.