In 2021, a record number of people globally – 235 million – required humanitarian assistance, a number expected to rise to 274 million in 2022.[1] One percent of the world’s population was displaced, 42 per cent of them children. And the COVID-19 pandemic continued to add to children’s humanitarian needs and make assisting them more difficult.

**Prolonged and violent conflicts** remained the primary drivers of the humanitarian needs of children and families in 2021. Conflicts escalated in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Myanmar, and conflict also drove increasing humanitarian needs in the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger), Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, South Sudan, the Sudan and Yemen. The impacts of armed conflict and other forms of violence are devastating for children. Attacks on schools and medical facilities prevent them from accessing education and interrupt vital health services. Humanitarian crises always raise the risk of gender-based violence, placing women and girls at increased risk.

The United Nations verified 26,425 grave violations against children in 2020, the latest year for which complete data are available.[2] During the first three quarters of 2021, verified cases of abduction of children had risen by 39 per cent compared with the same period in 2020, and verified cases of sexual violence against children had risen by 15 per cent.[3]

**Internally displaced people, returnees and host communities** continue to be extremely vulnerable. Children who are displaced or on the move experience discrimination and xenophobia and are frequently denied essential services. Of people currently displaced, the highest levels of displacement across national borders have occurred from the Syrian Arab Republic, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Afghanistan (in that order); the highest levels of internal displacement due to conflict and violence exist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ethiopia.[4] In many places around the world, border closures and restrictions dramatically worsened the situation for people seeking protection and safety.

**Disease outbreaks are increasing.** And the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a global impact, exacerbating existing deprivations and to them adding many more linked to breaks in service provision and increased protection risks stemming from isolation, mitigation measures and economic hardships. Low- and middle-income countries experienced the brunt of inequitable access to vaccines and COVID-19 therapeutics, and at the end of February 2022, more than 100 countries were off track for meeting the target of vaccinating 70 per cent of their population by mid-2022.[5]

Even as climate change is a driver of population movement and displacements,[6] it has also become one of the root causes of famine.[7]

A record high 283 million people in 80 countries were acutely food insecure or at high risk in 2021,[8] and 45.5 million children (more than 50 per cent of them living in South Asia) experienced severe wasting. Children lacked clean water and adequate sanitation facilities. Some 23 million children worldwide missed out on routine childhood immunizations. School closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted children’s education, and 870 million students at all levels faced disruptions in their education in September 2021.[9]

Overall, millions of children were not able to fully enjoy their rights as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.
In this context, the Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS) coordinated UNICEF’s global humanitarian action. The Division led efforts to prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises; prevent and respond to the most serious protection risks and violations facing children; strengthen and expand its leadership and partnerships for child-focused humanitarian action; manage the safety and security of UNICEF personnel, premises and assets in the field; and strengthen field-based humanitarian coordination mechanisms.


**Major contributions and drivers of results**

**Gained and sustained access for principled humanitarian assistance and protection for children affected by humanitarian crises**

EMOPS supported the response to 483 new and ongoing humanitarian crises[1] in 153 countries in 2021 including five[2] Level 3 and seven[3] Level 2 emergencies. In 2021, EMOPS continued to support country offices in establishing and maintaining humanitarian access to children living in complex and high-threat environments. Reflecting the UNICEF global policy and framework for humanitarian action,[4] the revised UNICEF Emergency Procedures contain mandatory actions, including the appointment of access focal points and civil-military liaison focal points, as well as the development and implementation of country-specific access strategies. EMOPS has launched initiatives to strengthen country office access capacities and the organization’s work on access in an inter-agency setting. EMOPS piloted the first dedicated humanitarian access training tailored to a country office: staff in a wide range of functional roles in the Libya Country Office attended a three-day in-country training covering all aspects of humanitarian access, using real-life case studies, scenarios and role plays. To strengthen UNICEF’s strategic position, resources and materials on humanitarian cash transfers, EMOPS supported the deployment of the UNICEF Global Management Information System for Humanitarian Cash Transfers, Humanitarian Cash Operations and Programme Ecosystem (HOPE) in seven countries in 2021.[5] Personal data for 397,000 beneficiary households stored in this system were used to deliver $46 million between March and December 2021. In Afghanistan, for example, the Ecosystem enabled delivery of lifesaving winter cash assistance to 36,459 families in December 2021. Globally, UNICEF directly funded or facilitated humanitarian cash transfers for 9.4 million households, covering 19 million children. EMOPS continued to support UNICEF’s strong engagement on collective approaches to accountability. The aim is to ensure that vulnerable, at-risk and crisis-affected people can hold
UNICEF to account for protecting their rights and generating effective results for them. In addition to co-chairing the Inter-Agency Standing Committee results group on accountability and co-leading the RCCE Collective Service for Risk Communication and Community Engagement with the World Health Organization and IFRC, UNICEF has invested in equipping UNICEF country offices with the necessary guidance and technical support to achieve greater accountability to affected populations. As of the end of 2021, 47 country offices had received dedicated technical support on accountability to affected populations (AAP) since January 2020. During the year, four dedicated AAP technical experts were placed in regional offices. In collaboration with the Office of Innovation, EMOPS launched Voices of Change, an initiative for people to use online, offline, phone-based and face-to-face channels to share feedback and raise concerns about service providers working in their communities. It is being rolled out in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Jordan, State of Palestine, the Sudan and Yemen. EMOPS contributed to Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) work on localization and co-led the development of the IASC interim guidance note on localization. Internally, EMOPS co-led the development of a technical note on localization and provided resources that will inform its operationalization at country level. EMOPS continues to strengthen UNICEF’s voice to protect children affected by armed conflict through internal, multisectoral policy engagement to support country offices, coordinated advocacy efforts with United Nations agencies and other partners. In 2021, EMOPS increased UNICEF engagement at the Security Council and General Assembly to influence Member States on humanitarian action, notably seeking to provide information enabling a better understanding of the humanitarian challenges impacting children. With EMOPS support, senior UNICEF officials, including the Executive Director, participated in high-level briefings on developments in key humanitarian contexts. EMOPS proactively engaged in critical United Nations resolutions and processes, successfully advocating for the reflection of humanitarian principles in critical processes such as the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review Resolution, the integration review and the ongoing revision of the Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning. EMOPS continued to support UNICEF and partners to establish and strengthen policies and strategies to protect children, women and civilians affected by armed conflict. EMOPS effectively connected its operational protection concerns – and the humanitarian consequences in countries affected by armed conflict and crisis – to the development of principled humanitarian policy. EMOPS published the third volume in its Water Under Fire series, which highlighted the scale and impact of attacks on water and sanitation facilities on children in conflict-affected countries. With close collaboration of country offices in Iraq, State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen, the report examined the immense impact on children and families when water and sanitation infrastructure in countries experiencing armed conflict is attacked, damaged, destroyed or controlled or otherwise restricted. EMOPS also continued to engage in all relevant outcome documents of contextual and thematic multilateral forums affecting children, to highlight protection issues of concern to children affected by crisis. The Office influenced ongoing processes including annual Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General, the Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, the IASC review of the implementation of the IASC protection policy and the expansion of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. EMOPS began implementing the recommendations of the Humanitarian Review, the change management tool for transforming the organization’s humanitarian response. As of November 2021, implementation was under way for nearly 50 per cent of the recommendations. EMOPS allocated $1 million in global humanitarian thematic funding in 2021 to kickstart implementation of the recommendations. Of this, $800,000 had been raised and committed as of November 2021. EMOPS has set an ambitious timeline of completing implementation of the recommendations by the onset of the next Strategic Plan in 2026. Strengthened resilience and preparedness architecture and timely, effective and efficient support to responses to humanitarian crisis In 2021, EMOPS continued to strengthen its global preparedness architecture to improve country offices’ readiness to respond to emergencies with the approval and activation of revised Emergency Preparedness Procedures, and with more than $4.4 million in preparedness funding allocations provided to 19 country offices. EMOPS improved the online Emergency Preparedness Platform (EPP), expanded strategic partnerships for preparedness and increased investments in preparedness.
through the First Action Initiative and the Co-Funding Initiative – innovative funding facilities that push resources out before crises to step up preparedness. Co-Funding Initiative allocations made to Afghanistan and neighbouring Central Asia countries ahead of the change of regime in Afghanistan supported the response to the unfolding situation by bolstering preparedness and capacity to respond to refugee influxes from that country. EMOPS continues to lead the development of methodology and tools to enable data-driven risk analysis and monitoring, at all levels. The global horizon scan process identifies priority situations for preparedness and enables headquarters support to country and regional offices. In 2021, EMOPS conducted pilots with Nigeria and Somalia to enable dynamic risk monitoring using spatial analysis and mapping. In collaboration with the Office of Innovation, EMOPS supported the Somalia Country Office to build an open-source geospatial system under a ‘risk informed response’ project for dynamic monitoring of compounding risks. In 2021, effective and adequate support was provided to emergency situations through strengthened coordination, remote desk support and tailored private and public advocacy at multiple levels, along with timely deployment of financial and human resources. EMOPS closely engaged with country and regional offices as well as headquarters divisions on 12 declared Level 3 and Level 2 emergencies, as well as several Level 1 emergencies. EMOPS successfully led the roll-out of UNICEF’s new policy and framework for humanitarian action. The Office engaged the organization in significant steps to foster the changes needed to support the revised Core Commitments. EMOPS also supported the coordination, development and roll-out of humanitarian response plans and appeals, situation monitoring, oversight and support to Emergency Management Teams. EMOPS conducted strong private and public advocacy to position UNICEF as a key principled voice at the inter-agency level to ensure humanitarian space and the protection of civilians. This included, for example, the Executive Director’s briefings to the Security Council on Yemen. EMOPS led an unprecedented global mobilization for the Afghanistan crisis that included strong advocacy for continuation of social services as part of humanitarian package. EMOPS promoted and supported a no-regrets approach to the Ebola outbreak in Guinea in February 2022. This meant that tailored emergency procedures, rapid scale-up, resource mobilization (through the Emergency Programme Fund) and capacity mobilization (including 27 staff deployments) were quickly provided, helping to rapidly contain the outbreak in Guinea and prevent its spread to neighbouring countries. EMOPS coordinated the multi-sectoral Emergency Response Team comprising 26 staff. This team covered 23 countries via 61 missions, providing nearly 3,500 days of surge support, including remote support for areas where pandemic restrictions continued to limit movements. Over 90 per cent of team members were trained as trainers and subsequently supported the roll-out of the revised Core Commitments at the country level. Capacity building on the Core Commitments and their implementation was provided to several Level 3, Level 2 and Level 1 emergencies. EMOPS promoted multiple humanitarian learning opportunities for staff and partners in 2021. Around 10,000 UNICEF staff and partners enrolled in a variety of learning opportunities (online courses and webinar sessions) to improve their understanding of the revised Core Commitments and their use in emergencies. At least 900 staff also gained knowledge and skills on the uptake of the new emergency procedures. EMOPS delivered four in-person Humanitarian Leadership Workshop sessions to train 90 senior field and country office managers in advanced leadership abilities. In addition, a Humanitarian Learning Framework to guide the learning and development of UNICEF and partners’ (inter)national personnel, informed by the Core Commitments, was finalized. EMOPS defined a strategy for priority humanitarian innovations and pursued opportunities to collect evidence and raise resources around these priorities. In this light, the Covid-19 programme monitoring and evaluation working group collected and recorded innovations from the field. Other efforts included the development of new entry points towards sustainable nexus programming such as the roll-out of innovative financing approaches for nutrition and water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH). The Nutrition Match Fund, initiated by EMOPS after an analysis of nexus entry points, leveraged nearly $4 million of incremental domestic resources in 2021 for child wasting prevention and treatment in countries including Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda. In recognition of the Fund’s potential, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation committed an additional $10 million to it in December 2021. Strong humanitarian partnerships and alliances, central to UNICEF’s ability to
reach children with live saving assistance in emergency  In 2021, EMOPS continued strengthened key strategic partnerships at all levels as an integral part of its contributions to UNICEF humanitarian action. The Blueprint for Joint Action[9] coordination team facilitated interventions in 10 countries, reaching more than 2 million refugee children and their families with WASH, education and child protection services. The partnership between UNICEF and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) piloted work in Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria and Tajikistan and aimed at making collaboration more predictable and efficient in country-level partnerships between UNICEF, Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies and IFRC. EMOPS continued proactive partnership engagement with civil society organization (CSO) and private sector partners. EMOPS participated in the organization-wide review of the CSO portfolio and engaged with partners through webinars, meetings and information sharing. In 2021, EMOPS scaled up the interdivisional and multiregional Business and Community Resilience initiative and enhanced its work on private sector engagement through close collaboration with the UNICEF Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division. Through the Business and Community Resilience initiative, UNICEF and the Government of Indonesia, for example, finalized a white paper for a national business engagement framework for disaster resilience. The Guatemala, Peru and Eastern Caribbean country offices adopted business engagement as a change strategy for achieving national preparedness and resilience goals. The standby partner mechanism managed by EMOPS continued to provide essential surge support for UNICEF humanitarian response, deploying/supporting (including through remote support) 165 experts to 55 countries for 22,222 days, with an estimated value of over $11 million in in-kind contributions provided by 18 partners. Efficiency in met requests was increased to 75 per cent from 67 per cent in 2020. Enabled conditions for security and safety environment of staff In 2021, while continuing to apply the framework for accountability for the United Nations field security management system throughout the organization, EMOPS worked through the Inter-Agency Security Management Network to update the framework (subsequently endorsed in January 2022) based upon lessons learned and feedback from regional and country offices. UNICEF work in violent conflict and complex, high-threat environments is enabled by a comprehensive security risk management process consistent with both the United Nations Security Management System and the security benchmarks outlined in the revised Core Commitments. The UNICEF Operations Centre (OPSCEN) prepared and disseminated real-time situational awareness products to further the security of UNICEF personnel and programmes. In 2021, OPSCEN developed ad hoc maps using ArcGIS mapping and analytics software, and fewer requests for data visualization products (e.g., infographics) to support emergency management meetings. 2021 was the last year of the Central Investment Fund 2018-2021 cycle, whereby $20 million was invested to improve the compliance level and security of UNICEF personnel, premises and operations. More than $3 million was allocated to 73 country offices in 2021. The Fund supported country offices faced with new security risk management measures to ensure the continuity of UNICEF programmes within an acceptable level of risk. A good example of this is the support provided to the Mozambique Country Office to procure an armoured vehicle for UNICEF operations in Cabo Delgado, which enabled programme implementation while safeguarding personnel. UNICEF Cluster Lead Agency accountability ensured EMOPS continued to support UNICEF’s cluster leadership or co-leadership roles in the child protection area of responsibility and in the education, nutrition and WASH clusters. In 2021 Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC) continued to provide support to an expanded number of countries.[10] The Global Nutrition Cluster Strategy 2022–2025, developed in 2021, reflected this increased scope of work to focus on both coordination and programmes. The Strategy underpins cluster and sectoral coordination before, during and after emergencies by supporting subnational, national, regional and global platforms. For example, to help nutrition partners to respond to the political and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, the Rapid Response Team Nutrition Cluster coordinator was deployed to Myanmar to support the country coordination team and partners in developing contingency and early response plans. Globally, the GNC developed and launched a GNC e-learning platform with more than 120 courses, supported 43 country coordination mechanisms and provided 1,015 days of deployment to countries. Capacity development, assessment and thematic support were used by the Global Education Cluster-
supported country clusters and working groups to coordinate timely, quality, appropriate, effective and accountable education responses in 2021. Around 171 coordination staff and partners gained the knowledge and skills to coordinate effective education responses by participating in coordination training. The Global Education Cluster (GEC) reinforced capacities, resources and tools available to country teams for undertaking comprehensive assessments informed by the voices of children and using these to plan responses. For example, the GEC advised the Sudan Education Cluster on using participatory approaches to capture the voices and needs of 408 children in its assessment. In 2021, the Global WASH Cluster (GWC) demonstrated innovation in its transition from a coordination platform, focused on operational support, to a driver of sectoral strategy and policy, able to influence decision makers as a thought leader for the WASH sector. The Cluster provided direct support to national coordination platforms in 31 countries, and the GWC sought to achieve impact by reaching 79 million people affected by crises. In addition, the GWC partnered with UNICEF and REACH to spearhead a game-changing approach known as the WASH Severity Classification (WSC). An operational tool, the WSC was implemented in 20 countries in 2021, using a five-phase approach to quantify the number of people in need and classify the severity and drivers of WASH needs and vulnerabilities. The WSC aims to maximize results, drive decision-making for investment and mitigate emerging crises in the WASH sector. The Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility supported 52 countries with child protection coordination, information management and thematic technical support. Advocacy support was provided on the situation and protection needs of children in such escalating crises as those in Afghanistan and Ethiopia. The Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility Arabic Help Desk facilitated five sessions in Arabic on key protection-related topics. The 24 participants represented mostly national NGO coordination group members from eight countries in the Middle East and North Africa. These sessions promoted capacity strengthening among local organizations along with cross-country peer exchange and learning. The Arabic Help Desk also trained local authorities in Yemen on child protection in humanitarian action to improve inter-agency coordination. [1] These included 104 natural disasters, 84 socio-political crises, 226 health emergencies (including COVID-19 pandemic responses), 27 nutrition crises and 42 other situations. [2] The protracted emergencies in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Northern Ethiopia crisis, and Afghanistan. [3] The complex humanitarian situations in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger), in Cabo Delgado (Mozambique), internal displacement and health epidemics in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the escalation of violence in Myanmar, the effects of climate change and worse drought in southern Madagascar and Haiti earthquake. [4] The revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. [5] Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Sudan. [6] Such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Myanmar, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. [7] Integration is the guiding principle for the design and implementation of complex United Nations operations in post-conflict situations and for linking the different dimensions of peacebuilding (political, development, humanitarian, human rights, rule of law, social and security aspects) into a coherent support strategy. [8] Available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic. [9] A UNICEF-United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees partnership initiative. [10] Following significant expansion of Global Nutrition Cluster support from 30 to 60 countries in 2020.

**Lessons Learned and Innovations**

**Challenges** in the first years of the Strategic Plan focused heavily on the need to balance coverage, predictability, quality and equity of the UNICEF humanitarian response and improve its timeliness. The organization also began to articulate the need for improved humanitarian leadership and capacity and greater accountability for results. Out of these early years of the Strategic Plan was borne the revision of the Emergency Procedures and the UNICEF global policy and framework for humanitarian action, the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. Both were completed in 2020 and rolled out in 2021. Additionally, the Humanitarian Review was finalized in 2020 and implementation of its recommendations began in 2021.
The personnel of UNICEF needed to adapt to the evolving scale, depth and dynamism of humanitarian crises. To meet these challenges, efforts to develop even stronger leaders for cluster leadership roles and for UNICEF responses in complex, high-threat environments have included developing a framework for leadership skills in emergency settings and tailoring learning programmes to help staff obtain these skills. The Humanitarian Leadership Workshop was further developed into several modules and rolled out in 2021, and it will be taught to 100 senior UNICEF field managers yearly into the foreseeable future.

**Making partnerships** – of every kind – work better for children has been an ambition of UNICEF throughout the Strategic Plan period. This is an ongoing process. At the global level, examples include strengthening the partnership with the World Health Organization for emergency health-related responses, and deepening and improving partnerships with UNHCR and IFRC, among others. Innovative partnerships with the private sector are also accelerating.

UNICEF continues to seek ways to empower local partners and foster a more localized approach to humanitarian assistance. UNICEF has exceeded a key target of providing 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national partners. Mandatory benchmarks on localization of the humanitarian response were included in the revised Core Commitments, and UNICEF has also developed a strategy on localization (not yet finalized).

Improving accountability to affected populations has been a key challenge throughout the Strategic Plan period. UNICEF has established mechanisms for such accountability in many of its humanitarian responses, but consistent systems to act on the feedback received and adapt programmes accordingly have been lacking.

**The Humanitarian Review** articulated extremely well one of the key challenges facing UNICEF throughout the Strategic Plan period: how to carry out action in the face of uncertainty to better serve children. This includes better identifying risks and setting up ways to act on these identified risks more quickly and effectively. The Review recommended that UNICEF define its “risk appetite”, both operational and financial, in order to effectively prepare for and mitigate risks and, ultimately, deliver a better response for children in times of crisis. The last year of the Strategic Plan saw progress in this area.

**Humanitarian access** was identified as a critical challenge during the second half of the Strategic Plan period. In 2021, some of the organization’s long-term work on improving UNICEF capacity to push for and obtain access to populations in need came to fruition. The organization released guidelines (for both leadership and field-based practitioners) on humanitarian engagement with armed non-state actors when operationally or programmatically necessary. UNICEF also finalized the Access Field Manual, to be disseminated in 2022; and it piloted, in the Libya Country Office, the organization’s first dedicated humanitarian access training course. These efforts are expected to lead to better and more consistent access to populations in difficult environments, although access challenges will remain great as the number of humanitarian responses occurring in complex and high-threat environments continues to rise.

Nearly one half of the Strategic Plan period occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. To the many challenges and aspirations guiding UNICEF were added the many challenges of humanitarian response in the COVID-19 era. Challenges in the context of the pandemic have included “staying and delivering”, adapting to limitations on in-person work and deployments (a situation that improved somewhat in 2021) and the need to reach more children than ever. Yet finding ways to meet children’s needs during the pandemic has also fostered new ways of operating and opened new avenues for delivering programmes.
Finally, present throughout the four years of the Strategic Plan 2018–2021 was the need for greater levels of unrestricted funding for humanitarian action. There are signs of progress: Thematic funding ranged from 7–9 per cent of humanitarian funding during the first three years of the Plan but jumped to 14 per cent in 2021.

**Several key goals will animate UNICEF work in 2022 and throughout the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.** UNICEF expects to: ensure that the right human resources are in place for humanitarian action; strengthen its response to mass population displacements and protracted crises; increase the coverage and quality of its humanitarian assistance; recognize the profoundly different and gendered impacts of crises on women and men, and girls and boys; advocate for the central role of protection, with particular attention to specialized protection services for children in armed conflicts; and grow organizational capacity to support, operate and deliver critical services to the most vulnerable children in remote, insecure, high-risk and complex humanitarian emergencies.

As called for by the Humanitarian Review, the organization is cultivating stronger humanitarian leadership; improving preparedness and conflict-sensitive risk-informed programming and reinforcing technical capacities, particularly in public health emergencies and migration crises; and investing in new implementation modalities to respond effectively and efficiently to the needs of children.

UNICEF is expanding its preparedness, anticipatory action and risk analysis work. A dedicated team is addressing these issues and providing direct technical support to country and regional offices. They are working to catalyse preparedness action not only within UNICEF, but in the United Nations system and in the broader humanitarian community.

UNICEF also promotes cooperation around accountability to affected populations at the inter-agency level. In 2022 and beyond, UNICEF will continue to prioritize supporting country offices to establish accountability mechanisms and ensure that systematic engagement with affected people guides evidence-based decision-making in all programming.