The COVID-19 pandemic and associated national responses continued to impact the lives of children and women in 2021 throughout the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region, affecting formal care arrangements, disrupting education, and exacerbating the risk of poor nutrition, maltreatment, and exposure to violence at home and online. In addition, the pandemic has put the mental health and well-being of an entire generation at risk, with potential for long-term poor mental health consequences among children, young people, and their parents and caregivers. The full, long-term impact of COVID-19 is likely that falling incomes across the region will influence families and children unequally, with vulnerable people more affected than the average population. Those at risk of extreme poverty and undernourishment, and young people in the labour market, may be worst affected.

COVID-19 revealed vital gaps and weaknesses in the efficacy of social protection as an automatic stabilizer. The vulnerabilities, growing gender inequalities, and isolation of children with disabilities, children in residential care, refugee and migrant children, and children from minority communities are likely to intensify. Within the European Union, more than a quarter of all children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This rate is critical in several countries, including Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy. In some countries in the region, as many as two of three children experience multidimensional poverty. In programme countries, UNICEF has expanded its support to enable child budgeting, including application of the Child-focused Public Expenditure Measurement methodology. Routine immunization services were badly affected by the pandemic. Although, services have now been fully restored across the region, 90% of countries report a decrease in immunization coverage between 3 to 20% compared to pre-COVID-19 times, indicating that thousands of children are exposed to vaccine preventable diseases. Supply and demand-related issues are one factor contributing to pockets of low coverage in the region, but vaccine hesitancy is also a key concern. Many children in Europe and Central Asia are not getting enough physical activity; one in three children aged 6-9 are overweight or obese, and over 60 per cent of children who are overweight before puberty will be overweight in early adulthood.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 4.6 million children were out of school in the countries in Europe and Central Asia covered by UNICEF’s programme. These countries are home to 14.6 million children aged 3-6; of these, 7.1 million do not attend preschool, and 1.5 million children aged one year younger than the official age for primary school entry are out of school. According to MICS data, 4.2 million children in UNICEF’s programme countries in Europe and Central Asia are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential.

The Europe and Central Asia region still has, by far, the highest proportion of children separated from their families and placed in residential care worldwide. An estimated 666 children per 100,000 total child population are living in residential care in countries covered by TransMonEE database of social indicators for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, more than five times higher than the global average of 120 children per 100,000.

Violence against children at home is commonplace across the region, with around half of all children in East and Central European and Central Asian countries experiencing violent discipline at home. There are close connections between intimate partner violence and violence against children, which are often fuelled by the same underlying causes and found in the same households. Boys and girls can experience violence differently. For example, boys in Serbia and in Turkmenistan are more likely to experience physical punishment than girls. In North Macedonia, girls are more likely to experience non-physical violence.

Justice systems vary widely across Europe and Central Asia, with the minimum age of criminal responsibility varying from 10 in Switzerland and parts of the United Kingdom to 18 in Belgium. There has been a steady decline in the number of children in pre- and post-trial detention across the region. This is attributable to legislative reforms, capacity building of professionals across the justice
sector, and the introduction and systematic scale-up of alternatives to detention, including diverting children in conflict with the law away from judicial proceedings. Fifty-eight million young people aged 10-24 live in UNICEF Europe and Central Asia programme countries. Of these, 37 million are adolescents (aged 10-19) who are not seen as crucial partners in developing their communities and are rarely engaged in policy development. COVID-19 has affected their participation even further. In a global survey of young people aged 18-29 by the ILO, European Youth Forum and other partners, 33 per cent of young people reported that the pandemic was impacting their right to participate in public affairs.

Across the region, children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to stigma and discrimination and are often segregated from their peers. They may not appear in national statistics, leaving them ‘invisible’ to decision makers, service providers and the public. In UNICEF’s programme countries, at least 75 per cent of children with disabilities are unable to access high-quality, inclusive education, with hundreds of thousands remaining in ‘special schools.’

Gender-biased attitudes prevalent across Europe and Central Asia are threatening equity and sustainable development in the region. When gender discrimination is felt during early childhood, the impact can be profound. Where gender discrimination, rigid gender roles and stereotypes are entrenched, and where opportunities for female employment are limited, adolescent girls are more likely to drop out of school (and remain outside the workforce, as shown in the higher NEET rates for girls and women).

In the first half of 2021, over 55,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro; 24 per cent were children. Currently, these countries host 303,000 refugee and migrants. The present number of children among them is 73,000, including 10,000 unaccompanied and separated children. With limited pathways to settling in destination countries, most will remain in tenuous conditions.

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

In 2021, ECARO’s Health and Nutrition Programme continued supporting countries to effectively respond to the pandemic, ensuring the continuation of essential Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and Nutrition (MNCHN) services as well as the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. During the year, UNICEF coordinated with relevant regional partners, provided technical guidance, facilitated procurement, and created demand for immunization to ensure a timely and smooth vaccine rollout. Contractual instruments were established for COVAX procurement for governments to avail of UNICEF procurement services and a total of $10 million was raised to provide operational support. At the end of 2021, approximately 30 million doses of vaccines were delivered to countries in the region achieving the global target of 44 per cent vaccination of the population.

UNICEF also supported cold chain and supply chain systems strengthening in partnership with the Supply Division and the Global Fund. These efforts helped increase quantification, forecasting, supply budgeting and procurement of antiretroviral medicines in three Central Asia countries. With support from Oxford Policy Management (OPM), ECARO reviewed national policies, programmes and budgets in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova to assess the level of demand for immunization and helped develop country-specific roadmaps and recommendations.

To better align UNICEF’s longer-term MNCHN programming in the region and shape the health response to COVID-19, the first phase of an impact analysis was completed in 2021. This included statistical modelling of the effect of the pandemic on major MNCHN indicators in the region as well as understanding the qualitative impact on the quality and coverage of services. According to findings from 16 countries, reduction or disruption of key health services was estimated to lead to a 4.2 per cent increase in under-five mortality and a 5.6 per cent increase in neonatal deaths compared to 2019.

UNICEF finalized the regional parenting application Bebbo in collaboration with 11 Country Offices and a range of national partners. Thus far, content has been translated and adapted into 12 languages and the application was launched in 2 countries with comprehensive plans for the remaining 9 in 2022.
A regional methodology for a national situational analysis of Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services for children with developmental difficulties was developed and rolled out. In addition, the e-learning platform ‘Learn ECD’ (based on the Learning Passport) was established and will enable ECARO and Country Offices to upload material and use the platform in pre-service and in-service training. Several countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) were supported to integrate policies and actions to improve the quality of care during critical perinatal periods and to introduce and scale-up perinatal death auditing.

Maternal nutrition was enhanced in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan through the introduction of universal iron and folic acid supplementation, policy advocacy to integrate nutrition counselling in antenatal care services, and development and scale up of national Flour Fortification (FF) programmes resulted in a mandatory law on FF in Tajikistan. Over 1.4 million caregivers received messages on the importance of breastfeeding, including through innovative digital and social media platforms. Global nutrition guidance was also adapted in all countries. UNICEF and its partners continued Infant and Youth Child Feeding (IYCF) counselling through mother baby corners, targeting refugees and migrants, and adapted messaging for the Balkans’ Roma population.

ECARO concluded two regional products on the nutrition and dietary status of children and adolescents to assist countries implement decisions towards improving nutritional wellbeing.

**Goal Area 2. Learning: Education**

ECARO contributed to the realization of educational rights of out-of-school and out-of-learning children by accelerating inclusive, quality education across the age continuum, which helped minimize the impact of pandemic on school access and recover learning loss. Technical assistance was provided to the education sector/sub-sector analysis in 7 countries, used as the foundations for developing data-driven national education strategies and plans while ensuring systems were strengthened to meet learning needs of the most marginalized children.

ECARO developed a regional Early Childhood Education (ECE) Strategy to provide strategic support to Country Offices as well as to advance regional ECE results. Countries working on education sector planning were introduced to the ECE Accelerator toolkit, with Armenia and Kosovo receiving priority support in the context of their ECE reform agendas. Given the major gaps in financing for the ECE subsector, a webinar series on financing for ECE was rolled out in partnership with the Social Policy section to share ongoing work and opportunities.

ECARO disseminated dropout prevention modules enabling countries to upgrade national mechanisms to support retention of at-risk students. Additionally, ECARO deepened the focus on inclusive preschools and the use of assistive technologies, leveraging funding through the innovation office and providing technical support to scale up AAC/CBOARD in 2 additional countries and begin work in collaboration with HQ on developing a sustainability model.

ECARO also supported capacity development of country stakeholders to strengthen teachers’ use of formative assessment as a school- and classroom-based mechanism and tool to better respond to unmet learning needs of children. A joint UNICEF/UNESCO situational analysis of COVID responses in Central Asia was launched to identify and mobilize best policy practices for learning recovery.

ECARO’s work on digital learning across the age continuum has supported countries to promote the holistic development of effective digital learning ecosystems, which improved inclusion and equity in access to learning opportunities and strengthened education systems’ resilience to crises. In particular, the scale-up of the Learning Passport platform has allowed for country exchanges of best practices in addition to establishing stronger links between learning at home and learning at school as well as integrating multiple digital solutions expanding uptake.

To raise the importance of equity-based approach in the regional education agenda, ECARO generated new evidence of education inequality through the Roma education study, UNICEF/OECD PISA2018 study, and UNICEF/ITU study on connectivity. By playing an active role in regional, inter-agency coordination, such as the ESCAP forum and the Learning and Education 2030+ Network, the profile of the equity agenda was successfully improved.

ECARO provided technical support through the Child Guarantee (CG) pilots in 3 countries regionally, advising on ECE elements of the CG pilot phase III and organizing a webinar and exchange on leveraging EU funding instruments to advance access to ECE in pre-accession countries. ECARO
hosted internal and external advocacy events, including a high-level event on inclusive preschool education together with the EU and the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report. Finally, UNICEF supported the increasing need to invest in education resilience and preparedness for crises in the region, given severe impacts of such crises on education and learning of affected children. In 2021, ECARO contributed to the progress made towards inclusion of refugees and migrants in education systems in the region through the coordination of and participation in regional and global events.

**Goal area 3. Protecting: Protection and Migration**
UNICEF continued engagement with countries on the justice for children portfolio, including engaging with national stakeholders to accelerate reform and foster a greater understanding of the current situation of justice for children.

In the area of child online protection work, ECARO supported the completion of the strategic white paper, which provides solid ground for the convening and development of partnerships around this agenda. Country-specific profiles were developed as well as a package of advocacy briefs to further inform learning and exchange across the region.

In collaboration with the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), ECARO supported 13 Ombudspersons for Children in Europe and Central Asia to complete an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 measures on children’s rights (CRIA). Findings indicated a largely negative impact, particularly on the right to education, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to protection from all forms of violence, and the right to play and enjoy recreational activities. Some groups of children were more affected than others; for instance, children with disabilities, children living in institutions and places of detention, and children left behind. The CRIA exercise has fostered greater collaboration and exchange with the Ombudspersons and the EU child rights mechanisms, all of which are interested in promoting CRIA as a tool for monitoring the implementation of the CRC.

An advocacy brief was jointly produced by IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF in relation to the detention of asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children, either upon or after arrival, for reasons relating to immigration or asylum. The brief reiterated the continued concerns of the UN Agencies in relation to the use of child immigration detention and urges practical alternatives and appropriate care arrangements for children based on existing promising practices in the region.

**Goal area 5. Equity: Social Protection, Child Poverty, and Investments in Children**
ECARO provided technical and financial support to country offices to strengthen responses on social protection, including support for the launch of a child grant programme in Montenegro and support for engagements on shock responsive social protection. A public finance strategy was completed and there was extensive support to countries on PF4C, including through multiple training and capacity building events. Sectoral PF4C work was also completed, including a learning series with ECD. Child poverty work was supported, often in cooperation with OoR and DAPM, and included technical support on several new multidimensional child poverty measurement tools.

The Child Guarantee was successfully implemented and ECARO supported seven countries to develop national "deep dives" on child poverty and social exclusion, which fed into national action plans with clear commitments and budget to reduce child poverty.

**2.1 Gender Dimension**
ECARO supported the completion of over 95% of gender work plan activities in the region for 2021 as well as the integration of gender into country planning documents and result frameworks. Specifically, ECARO supported 8 Country Offices in the finalisation of their Country Programme Documents (CPD) and Gender Programmatic Reviews, provided inputs to the new UNICEF Gender Action Plan and Policy, rolled out the regional gender strategy with change pathways for addressing gender equality, provided country gender profiles for all 22 COs, and delivered 10 gender capacity sessions to all COs. During 2021, UNICEF enhanced multi-regional collaborations on Girls Skills, STEM and Digital interventions with over 6 multi-regional learning sessions and partnerships on gender equality.

**2.2 Humanitarian Situations**
Emergency response continued to be a significant focus in 2021, including the COVID-19 crisis affecting all 23 countries, the refugee/migrant crisis in Europe, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and migrant crisis in Belarus. ECARO provided remote technical support, including development and quality assurance of country response plans and humanitarian appeals, as well as surge deployment. In addition, resources were mobilized ($37M - 48% of 71.9M for ECAR HAC and $35M - 73% of $42M Refugee and Migrant HAC requirement raised for the region).

Regular risk monitoring triggered early preparedness action in countries most at risk. Significant investment made to ensure adequate multisectoral preparedness in place for the potential Afghan refugee influx in Central Asia, in coordination with ROSA and MENA.

In Italy, there was an emphasis on ensuring the social inclusion of refugee and migrant girls and boys, through the implementation of Phase III of the European Child Guarantee. In addition, the Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) programme was scaled up to reach even more disadvantaged Italian adolescents and youth with participation and skills building components. The UNICEF team in Italy provided prevention and response services to almost 1,300 GBV survivors and individuals at risk in Rome, Sicily, Calabria, and at border areas, ensuring women and girls accessed reliable information on GBV risks and services.

2.3 Influencing global and regional discourse and policy

Partnerships

Private Sector Engagement (PSE) gained significant uptake in the region over the strategic plan 2018-2021. During the year, UNICEF Country Offices expanded the practice of the business advisory councils with guidance from ECARO, enhanced private sector integration in CPD processes, diversified engagements with business, and key knowledge pieces were developed to further support this area of work.

On the fundraising side, the plan finished with a strong year, with an official income in five PSFR Countries of ca. US$ 15.3 million (+40% vs. 2020). When excluding exceptional income, results were US$ 10.4 million in 2021, registering a steady broad-based growth of 9%.

Public Advocacy and Communication

ECARO, through strategic, evidence-based, and primarily digital communications outreach, successfully reached 33 million and engaged more than two million online audiences with key messages on major advocacy priorities and child rights issues in 2021. With Russian being the most spoken and geographically widespread language in the region, ECARO launched platforms and prioritized Russian contents, resulting in UNICEF becoming the first non-profit organization with the largest Facebook online community in the Russian Federation. ECARO supported all COs with Social Listening services – an integrated, scalable monitoring system – during major humanitarian crises, including COVID-19, to inform programmatic interventions and public advocacy. In 2021, ECARO proactively strengthened UNICEF’s regional positioning as a leading child rights organization by enhancing ECARO’s digital and social media reach, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Knowledge Management, data and research and evaluation

The regional value proposition of UNICEF was further enhanced through partnerships and regional assets and initiatives. For example, The UNECE/Conference of European Statisticians Task Force developed recommendations to NSOs to improve statistics on children, mainly focusing on children in alternative care, exposed to violence and with a disability. The guidance document and recommendations will support the data advocacy efforts of UNICEF in the region. ECARO also supported the second phase of Uzbekistan MICS fieldwork and MICS+ in Georgia. The TransMonEE data collection using the new templates for the first time was conducted successfully, albeit with inevitable delays. Initiatives such as the CRC recommendations dashboard and MICS inequity dashboard have been initiated, which will enhance UNICEF’s CRM role in the region once finalised in 2022.
UN Reform
ECARO has been actively engaged with the RCP and holds an updated Workspace/Knowledge Platform to coordinate regional activities UN Coherence & Support to UNSDCF Development, which partially covers the gap of a knowledge management system at the DCO level that is still under preparation. UNICEF is already contributing financially and with expert resources for the RCP Knowledge Platform.

As part of the PSG, ECARO reviewed Common Country Analysis and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks for Serbia, Tajikistan, Albania, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova. Further, ECARO has been actively engaged with Serbia CO in the piloting of the Local Shared Service Center (LSSC) /Common Back Office (CBO). The lessons learned from Serbia CO, including feedback on the methodology, governance mechanism and process, were key findings to feed the UNICEF LSSC/CBO Strategy developed in December 2021. In collaboration with GSSC a series of sessions on UN Reform in Operations were conducted for top management in Country Offices to enhance understanding and support implementation of LSSC/CBOs, Business Operations Strategy, Mutual Recognition and Common Premises.

2.4 Cross-cutting
Strategic Planning
ECARO supported COs in the region in strategic planning and prioritisation. A CPD roadmap webinar series was conducted between June-July 2021 to foster exchange between countries and provide guidance on situation analysis development, integrating gender, and mainstreaming risk-informed programming into CPDs going to the board in 2023. In September, a Regional Workshop for European Countries and Moldova has held to guide Country Offices toward a simplified and substantive approach to Country Programme Development.

A Regional Dashboard for Monitoring UNICEF’s Contributions to Regional Flagship Results was developed that provides updated progress from every country in the region.

SBC
ECARO continued to strengthen evidence generation for RI, COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) response and vaccine acceptance. Tools, guidance, job aids, communication assets were developed to support interventions with priority groups, including health professionals. The HealthBuddy+ chatbot reached around 500,000 users with information on COVID-19 in 20 languages. Monthly social listening reports on immunization and COVID-19 were shared with countries. Interpersonal Communication and Community Engagement capacities of health workers (15 countries) and social service workforce (8 countries) were strengthened. Cooperation with Parliamentarian, academic institutions, and interreligious networks was enhanced to advance the implementation of country programs, regional priorities and COVID-19 response.

Youth and Adolescents
Young people were most affected by the Covid-19 crisis resulting in increasing demands for meaningful youth participation, improved policies, data and action, ECARO strengthened its youth development and participation programming, amplifying youth voices on issues like social inclusion, lifelong learning, green transitions, access to appropriate, gender-sensitive information and services, and supporting COs in scaling-up skills-building programmes, school-to work transitions, building socio-emotional and mental health skills and supporting digitalization and innovation initiatives. Country Offices, including those developing new CPDs, were supported to strengthen adolescent and youth programming, responding to increased attention by governments, UN Agencies and European institutions to youth issues.

T4D
ECARO continued strengthening programme results under the framework of the regional/global ICT/T4D strategies both at the regional and country levels. In 2021 the efforts were focused on providing technical support and guidance as well as oversight and capacity building to deliver programme results by using innovative digital solutions. This included the HealthBuddy and Bebbo parenting applications, the Learning Passport for ECD, the digital learning initiative ‘LearnIn’, and the MHPSS platform for youth ‘uSupportME’, among others.
2.5 Internal Management
ECARO continued to provide strategic support for efficient selection processes, performance management best practices, and organisational design. In 2021, ECA was the leading region in recruitment Key Performance Indicators (KPI). Aligned with the ECARO 2021 Annual Work Plan and UNICEF’s strategic plan, ECARO also worked closely with the counselling function to positively influence workplace culture in the region. The Regional Office engaged with planning, operations and emergency to support fit-for-purpose staffing and personnel structures. Building a Risk Management culture was an area of focus in 2021, ECARO has strengthened its internal annual risk assessment process and has integrated periodic risk data reviews into the governance mechanisms. A total of seven sessions covering use of eGRC system, risk data harmonisation, conducting annual risk assessment and review were organized for Country Offices in the Region to enhance their risk management processes.

Lessons Learned and Innovations
The COVID-19 pandemic continued to be a challenge during 2021 and provided additional lessons learned, particularly in the delivery of services (health and nutrition, child protection, education, youth and adolescents).

Initiation of vaccination was challenged by limited supplies and a politized process, placing additional burden on Country Offices and requiring extended coordination and communication with Supply Division. COVID-19 has also increased challenges around routine health practices and services, especially ensuring infants and young children have access to nutritious and healthy food. In response, ECARO developed a digital platform to enable parents, caregivers, and other active community members to share their real-time experiences of being targeted by aggressive advertising of breast-milk substitutes (BMS). The Baby Feeding Code Square (BFCS) supports parents and users to familiarise themselves with the major features of the national and international code of marketing of BMS and their rights to offer optimum IYCF to their new-borns. The BFCS will be launched in 2022 with a phased approach in priority countries in the region.

The pandemic, and related educational obstacles, highlighted inequality in education systems, particularly challenges in collecting data of marginalized children. In addition, the important of inter-sectoral coordination and the provision of a safe and healthy learning environment were emphasized during the year. ECARO will continue to advocate and engage multiple sectors and stakeholders to address learning needs of disadvantaged children. Given the restructured learning and teaching in many countries following the pandemic, ECARO will support the process of revising long-term education strategies and plans to meet evolving needs of children and societies.

The COVID-19 crisis had a disproportionate impact on youth and showed the importance of engaging them systematically in issues affecting their lives. Governments and multilateral partners recognized the need to take action to support and provide opportunities to youth to prevent the risk of a “lost generation” resulting from COVID-19. This commitment pushed the EU to declare 2022 as European Year of Youth. This provides UNICEF with critical opportunities to strengthen focus on youth programming and engagement and use the European Youth as a platform to develop longer-term and more visible youth programming, especially in areas of mental health and wellbeing, greening and climate change, social inclusion, education and learning, employment and entrepreneurship, youth mobility and protection.

COVID also increased recognition of innovative “digital solutions” and their potential to respond to challenges in health, education, employment, communication, social norms, etc. UNICEF’s focus on developing digital MHPSS solutions is an important and practical way to help reduce gaps between the needs for MHPSS support/services and access to those services by young people. Digital platforms, if developed carefully, co-created with youth and with attention to existing scientific evidence, can help decrease gaps between service needs and access. This can increase effective MHPSS support for mild-to-moderate conditions through digital and/or blended approaches. Building capacities of governments to work with youth, recognize their agency and involve them in co-creating and co-designing systems.
and services that respond to their needs will be essential. Building on previous experience, the Partnerships and Planning Teams jointly developed a methodology to ensure that strategic interventions involving business stakeholders were integrated into CPD development, in line with the Business for Results approach, and conducted workshops with relevant Country Offices. Additionally, a strategic document on the relevance of business to different Programme areas and potential key interventions was developed jointly with ECARO Regional Advisers to serve as a key tool for COs. One highlight during the year was the support provided to the Croatia CO to insert specific references to children's rights and family-friendly policies within financial reporting regulations in the country. This will have a long-term impact on business awareness, practices, and reporting related to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), showing the potential for further engagement in advocacy related to business regulation.

The new data collection template of TransMonEE indicated severe gaps in the availability and disaggregation of data for child protection indicators for many countries. ECARO launched data action planning and systems, in close collaboration with headquarters, to support governments in the region with short and long-term plans to improve administrative data on child protection and enhance the understanding of the broader data landscape for children.

Despite capacity challenges, ECARO Communications strengthened its digital advocacy approach, tailored global assets for regional use, and provided Russian translation for more than 140 different communication assets, facilitating the exchange of country-produced contents between offices with shared language and media space.

Social and Behavioural Change (SBC) communication learned several lessons during the year including the importance of strengthened coordination mechanisms and evidence generation to develop targeted interventions and amplify reach. This was particularly relevant in the vaccination rollout process regarding national perceptions and vaccine hesitancy.

In terms of internal management, the transition to DHR leadership, competing organisational initiatives, and restrictions in accessing data, created bottlenecks in the implementation of Geneva-level HR activities. On a positive note, COVID-19 led to increased desire and willingness for teams to bond, discuss, and review ways of engagement. HR and wellbeing functions seized these opportunities to support change management in offices and engage on diversity and inclusion.