Update on the context and situation of children

In 2023, The Republic of Uzbekistan held a constitutional referendum on April 30th to endorse a new Constitution declaring the state as socially oriented. Additionally, the country held general presidential elections on July 9th confirming the continuity and stability of political environment.

The Government of Uzbekistan (GoU) developed and adopted a new seven-year Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy 2023-2030 in November 2023, which comes as an evolution of the previous New Uzbekistan Development Strategy. The Strategy’s overarching goal is to achieve upper-middle-income status by 2030, and to reduce poverty by half by 2026. One of the target goals is to increase the GDP to USD 160 billion and the per capita income to USD 4,000 by 2030, which will particularly contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals.

Internationally, Uzbekistan maintained a robust diplomatic agenda amid challenges such as the Afghanistan crisis, the war in Ukraine, and the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The President expressed strong solidarity with the Palestinian people and their right to independence. The GoU allocated 1.5 million dollars in aid to the UN mission in Palestine.

Concerning Afghanistan, GoU strategically continued to engage with the Taliban through the Special Envoy of the President supporting the country’s humanitarian needs, offering its infrastructure in Termez as a logistical hub, being actively used by UN entities. Out of 13,658 stranded Afghan citizens in Uzbekistan, more than 2,000 self-reported needing immediate assistance, facing visa and registration extension difficulties and limited access to basic services due to current legal status and financial constraints. Over 420 Afghan families (about 2,100 people, including 1,140 children) in Termez, Surkhandarya region, and Tashkent still require humanitarian assistance due to challenges faced with rising fuel and food costs impacting their livelihoods and already overstretched limited government resources.

In 2023, Uzbekistan's economy due to sizable fiscal expansion, high wages, and export growth displayed resilience with expected growth sustained at 5.7 per cent (same as in 2022). Inflation is projected at 9 per cent, demonstrating a decline by more than 3 percentage points compared to 2022. The country continues facing macroeconomic challenges and risks such as high consolidated fiscal deficit (4.2% of GDP) and high external current account deficit (4.7% of GDP) due to strong imports and declining remittances.

In 2022, the national monetary poverty rate fell to 14%, down from 17% in 2021, while UNICEF estimates the same poverty rate among children to stand at 18 per cent in 2023. The 2023 study on Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivations Analysis (MODA) revealed that more than 44 percent of children are deprived in two or more dimensions. Uzbekistan demonstrated increased commitment to addressing children and families’ vulnerability. The country continued providing cash assistance to 2.2 million vulnerable families corresponding to 4.8 million children under 18 through the UNICEF supported Single Registry for Social Protection. The annual expenditure on the current program is around USD 900 million. However, due to the budget deficit, reductions are expected in the program from 2024 potentially affecting around 18 per cent of current recipients.

In June 2023 the GoU established a National Agency for Social Protection under the President of Uzbekistan, thus consolidating social protection functions under one institution. It is mandated to coordinate, facilitate, and provide comprehensive and integrated social transfers and services (social benefits, social protection, child protection, gender-based violence, and disability inclusion) and to
professionalize social work.

Investments in education remained above 5 per cent of GDP, in line with SDG 4 recommended targets, enabling continuous expansion of preschool education reaching 73 per cent (42 per cent girls), and 98 per cent completion rate at lower secondary education (97 per cent girls). Increased education access, however, did not translate into increased learning outcomes due to systemic gaps in terms of curriculum, child-centered active pedagogy, and supply of qualified teachers.

The President further announced substantial reforms in the health and education sectors, declaring 2023 as the Year of Human Care and Quality Education, and embarking on major reforms to improve the education, health and wellbeing of women and children. Specifically, Presidential Decree #296 prioritizes maternal and neonatal health and nutrition. The resolution envisages procurement of nutrition commodities (micronutrient powders) through UNICEF until 2027.

In 2023, the GoU signed the National Strategy to Promote a Culture of Sustainable Development and Engaging Children and Youth in the Climate Agenda, serving as a roadmap to integrate sustainable development principles into the education system and engage young people in climate-related activities.

Due to successful advocacy by UNICEF, significant funding opportunities have been leveraged to advance children’s rights, including the Uzbekistan Vision 2030 “Ishonch” Fund, which channels frozen assets back to the country through the UN Multi-Trust Fund. With a first allocation of USD 87 million in 2023, the fund focused on strategic priorities related to reducing maternal and infant mortality and promoting inclusive and equitable quality education. On 15 September 2023, the “Ishonch Fund,” announced the first allocation of USD43.5 million to support a new UN joint programme aimed at reducing preventable maternal and newborn deaths in Uzbekistan, where UNICEF acts as a lead agency.

UNICEF, jointly with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the National Human Rights Centre, supported the development of the National Plan of Action, currently pending approval by the Parliament based on the concluding observations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Committee. At the same time, the GoU intends to roll out the National Recommendations Tracking Database, also pending parliamentary approval.

In 2023, as a result of UNICEF’s high-level advocacy a new law was adopted instituting administrative and criminal liability for violence against boys, women and girls. This is a key milestone in addressing the 2022 Concluding Observations of both the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and UNCRC Concluding Observations.

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

In 2023, UNICEF sustained its technical support in the implementation of the UNICEF’s Strategic Plan 2022-2025 and capitalised on opportunities stemming from reforms initiated by the GoU, aligning with the new seven-year Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy 2023-2030, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, UNICEF strategically intervened in critical sectors for advancing children’s rights such as health, education, child protection, water, hygiene, sanitation (WASH), and social protection, yielding tangible results for all children in Uzbekistan. Additionally, with an emphasis on addressing exclusion and inequalities, UNICEF actively contributed to implementing the UNHCR-led Afghanistan Situation Refugee Response Plan for 2023, yielding tangible benefits for both host communities and Afghan nationals residing in the country. The results
achieved across all programming areas were made possible through the generous support of the European Union (EU), the Governments of Japan, and the United States, GAVI, the Global Partnership for Education, the Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea Region in Uzbekistan, the Vision 2030 “Ishonch” funds, as well as UNICEF’s global humanitarian thematic funds.

**Goal area 1. Every Child Survives and Thrives**

UNICEF was pivotal in modernising Uzbekistan's National Immunization Programme, resulting in enhanced services for 3.5 million children and a consistent supply of safe vaccines. This effort facilitated the administration of three doses of the DPT vaccine to 950,000 children and a measles vaccine to over 1.6 million children (98.1 per cent). Collaboratively supporting the Ministry of Health (MOH), UNICEF contributed to developing an effective vaccine management (EVM) plan, leading to an increased country’s EVM score through workshops with inputs and feedback from EPI managers.

Utilising digital technologies, UNICEF strengthened the immunisation system and supply chain by implementing the nationwide Electronic Immunization Registry (EIR) at all vaccination points, seamlessly integrating with relevant health information systems. Additionally, UNICEF leveraged social media platforms to disseminate behaviorally informed messages on COVID-19 vaccination, reaching an impressive audience of 9.5 million people.

UNICEF’s technical assistance to MOH improved the quality of healthcare services for mothers and neonates, positively impacting over 700,000 newborns and mothers across 66 per cent of Uzbekistan's perinatal centers. Perinatal death audits were rolled out to 150 centres, and UNICEF, in partnership with UNFPA and WHO, mobilised over USD 43.5 million for perinatal care. Additionally, parenting skills for 360,000 parents and caregivers were enhanced by promoting the Bebbo parenting application through primary health care.

The elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV remained a key focus, with UNICEF supporting the Government in developing a comprehensive roadmap benefiting 900,000 pregnant women. This initiative aligns with the country's commitment to the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS.

UNICEF achieved significant milestones in ensuring universal health access by supporting the Government in emphasizing primary health care (PHC). This involved the development of an essential health benefits package for PHC and comprehensive costing of PHC services. The universal progressive model of home visiting in the Republic of Karakalpakstan benefited 320,289 individuals, including 156,485 women and children, by establishing a team of trainers equipping healthcare workers at the community level.

Through UNICEF support, 1.4 million children 6-23 months have improved nutritional outcomes. Specifically, UNICEF supported the MOH in implementing Micronutrient Powder (MNP) programming. This initiative involved the procurement of over eight million packets of MNPs and developing operational procedures, guidelines, learning materials, and leaflets for parents. UNICEF employed innovative methods, including social listening, to understand caregiver attitudes and practices towards nutrition interventions.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Preschool and School Education to improve the quality of mental health services for 6 million adolescents in schools. This encompassed developing and registering the Professional Standard for Pedagogic-Psychologists by the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction.

**Goal area 2. Every Child Learns**
In 2023, UNICEF facilitated the development of the first Partnership Compact for Education Reform 2023-2026, ensuring Development Partners’ commitments and additional education financing of USD 600 million focusing on transformative strategic priority areas for quality and inclusive education at pre-school and school education levels. Situational analysis and consultations were conducted with Government institutions, Development Partners, civil society, the private sector, and young people. The strengthened coordination role and identified priorities enabled UNICEF to establish new large-scale partnerships with International Financial Institutions, including the approval of a new Early Childhood Education (ECE) project of USD 2.3 million and development of education multiplier programme of USD 220 million, funded by the Global Partnership for Education and the Islamic Development Bank.

Following the country's announcement of 2023 as “the Year of Human Care and Quality Education” UNICEF increased its technical assistance on ECE and quality inclusive education. As a result of continuous advocacy, universal pre-school education was introduced as national priority of the new Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy. Pre-school enrollment reached 73 per cent for children aged 3-6 (42.2 per cent are girls) with a 4-point increase as compared to 2022, thanks to the expansion of diversified ECE models. A new multi-lingual education programme was launched following UNICEF modelling in 10 new alternative ECE centres established in Surkhandarya region to deliver pre-school education to over 400 Afghan children and children from minority languages.

Addressing quality and inclusive education, UNICEF launched the review of curriculum standards and development of National Framework for Inclusive Education, outlining inclusive standards, mechanisms, and check lists for inclusive schools. The framework is being developed in alignment with the Partnership Compact supporting education infrastructure, curriculum, national assessment and teacher professional development, benefiting all 6.2 million students in the country. Supporting quality pre-school curriculum (“Ilk Kadam”), a new in-service teacher training module for teachers was approved by the scientific-methodological council in September 2023, and scaled up at national level benefiting 108,000 preschool teachers. Focusing on foundational learning skills, UNICEF introduced a learning support programme benefiting children facing language barriers or missing schooling, resulting in the enrollment of 210 Afghan children and benefiting over 2,800 host community children.

Promoting innovation and education technologies, the real-time monitoring of school connectivity reached over 10,000 schools ensuring that 99.6 per cent of schools are connected to at least 10 Mbps. Pioneering a public-private partnership model, two model schools became connectivity hubs, benefiting over 1,000 households and 3,000 children in neighboring communities, successfully implementing the profit-sharing agreement to enable allocation of 50 per cent of connectivity profits for education and digitalization purposes. A Finnish-based digital solution was launched as the first country example of personalized and gamified learning for Mathematics. The platform, developed in partnership with the UNICEF Learning Innovation Hub in Helsinki, was tailored to align to the national curriculum with the piloting across 5th-grade students. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to introduce innovative digital solutions and accelerate digital learning in Uzbekistan. As a result, Uzbekistan was selected as one of the six Global Learning Pioneer Countries by the UNICEF Office of Innovation, with the expectation to scale up digital solutions that successfully improve children's learning outcomes and equitable access to quality education.

**Goal area 3. Every Child is Protected from Violence and Exploitation**

UNICEF’s advocacy contributed to the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) mandate for coordinating child protection services, providing social welfare services for children and families, establishing a professional social work system, bolstering psychosocial support, and developing specialized services for at-risk children and those in conflict with the law, all functions which had previously been scattered across six ministries and agencies, resulting in significant fragmentation. UNICEF assisted in designing the structure and functions of NASP, including the introduction of
social work competencies in the functional responsibilities of specialists at the community and the
district level ‘Inson’ Centres for Social Services, formulating an Internal Code of Ethics in Social
Work and drafting Professional and Safety Standards for Social Workers.

UNICEF provided extensive technical guidance to a Senate-led working group during the review of
domestic legislation for alignment with international standards for protecting girls, boys and women
from violence. Amendments to the Criminal and Administrative Liability Codes criminalize domestic
violence, introduce additional protective measures for children and women, bar early conditional
release for sexual offenders and eliminate ignorance of a victim's age as a means to avoid stringent
criminal penalties.

Significant advocacy, technical assistance and guidance from UNICEF contributed to the development
of a draft law aimed at protecting children from all forms of violence, in adherence to international
child rights standards. Formulated under the Ministry of Justice's leadership, this law delineates inter-
sectoral responsibilities and outlines preventive measures and responses to violence against children.
The law's anticipated adoption in early 2024 coincides with the Government's commitment to crafting
a national multi-sectoral strategy for coordinated action against violence against children.

UNICEF through EU support significantly enhanced access to integrated social services, child
protection support, and legal aid, benefitting 15,348 individuals (8,869 children, 8,306 females, 489
Afghans). Notably, 1,209 children (647 female) received quality child welfare support including case
management and MHPSS. Additionally, 2,137 children (924 female, 214 Afghan) and 255 adults (169
female, 72 Afghan) benefited from child-friendly and gender-sensitive legal aid across Surkhandarya
region, Tashkent city, and Tashkent region. Also with EU support, 196 children (100 female) and 64
women returned from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria received gender-sensitive and age-appropriate
community-based reintegration support. A total of 3,754 children living with HIV (2,207 females)
benefitted directly from UNICEF-supported mental health and psychosocial support. Lastly, UNICEF
reached nearly 310,000 children with crucial information on their human and legal rights, with various
brochures distributed in 499 out of 953 schools (53%) in Surkhandarya.

UNICEF built the capacity of 164 directors and 27 social workers of the ‘Inson’ Centres and 747
community social work paraprofessionals as well as 1,300 child and social protection specialists in
Surkhandarya region in social welfare, social work, and child protection and care, enhancing their
skills and knowledge to assess and address the needs of at-risk children and families. Lastly, 234
justice professionals enhanced their skills and knowledge on children’s access to justice.

**Goal area 4. Every Child Lives in a Safe and Clean Environment**

UNICEF supported the Government of Uzbekistan in enhancing public health and environmental
safety by developing a more efficient and safer system for medical waste management. Specifically,
UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health (MoH) in revising and updating the healthcare waste
management policy, regulations, procedures, and standard operating procedures for improved medical
waste management.

Over 11.3 million people residing near hospitals, including 3.8 million children, experienced cleaner
air and reduced environmental risks through UNICEF's initiatives in improving healthcare waste
management. Additionally, UNICEF focused on enhancing WASH services for children in Uzbekistan,
benefiting 320,289 people in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, including 156,485 women. This was
accomplished by supporting districts and primary healthcare facilities with inclusive and climate-
resilient WASH infrastructure while enhancing the knowledge and skills of healthcare workers.

UNICEF's commitment to menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) within WASH in schools resulted in
5,000 school-aged children, including 2,303 girls, in the Republic of Karakalpakstan benefitted from
improved climate-resilient and inclusive WASH services. Specifically, UNICEF improved the WASH infrastructure in 10 schools (8.3 per cent) within three districts. UNICEF complemented the infrastructure with capacity building of 400 schoolteachers and 200 parents from 120 schools on WASH and nutrition practices. Additionally, health education sessions on Menstrual Health and Hygiene were conducted for 120 adolescent girls.

UNICEF supported the GoU in developing a National Strategy for Promoting a Culture of Sustainable Development and Involvement of Children and Youth in Climate Agenda for 2024-2030 as well as in the adoption of the Central Asia Strategy for Promoting a Culture of Sustainable Development and Involvement of Children and Youth in the Climate Agenda for 2024-2030 aimed to benefit 27 million children in Central Asia, including 13.5 million children and young people of Uzbekistan, with improved engagement and participation in climate action.

The Central Asia Strategy was signed during the World Children’s Day, at which occasion the GoU hosted the international Forum “children and Youth in Action for Climate Change in Central Asia” which was attended by seven First Ladies from the region, with a focus on promoting awareness and education, empowering young people, strengthening partnerships, ensuring inclusivity and equity, and implementing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Throughout the year, 1,715 individuals, including 72 students with disabilities, benefited from the school disaster risk reduction (DRR) interventions, consisting of practical and theoretical seminars and training in DRR. UNICEF supported the review of national WASH in Emergencies legislation and policies, and mapped WASH actors’ capacities. UNICEF partnered with the Ministry of Emergency Situation (MES) Institute for Civil Protection in strengthening ten target schools in disaster-prone regions with improved resilience. Specifically, UNICEF trained 2,380 school administrators and teachers (1,270 female, 1,110 male) in disaster risk management (DRM) and climate action. In turn, the teachers established school DRR teams and conducted assessments. UNICEF supported the MES in the development of an inclusive school DRM plan.

**Goal area 5. Every Child Has an Equitable Chance in Life**

The establishment of the new National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) unified all social protection functions, social assistance and services and takes over the Single Registry for Social Protection, developed with UNICEF’s technical assistance and currently residing with Ministry of Finance. UNICEF’s advocacy and technical support leading to the establishment of NASP drew on the frameworks for institutional reform developed under the SDG Fund Joint Program on Social Protection led by UNICEF in 2020-2022.

UNICEF engaged in discussions with the NASP on child benefits and ensured the coverage of children was maintained at 4.8 million. The new changes to eligibility criteria initiated by the agency are expected to affect newcomers into the system from 2024. Agreement was reached to start revising the child benefits and material support programs to ensure that both, inclusion, and exclusion errors are addressed. UNICEF will support the Agency together with the World Bank in this reform.

Assessment, recommendations and manuals were developed on how to advance the Program-based Budgeting (PBB) and results-based management (RBM). 45 participants from the ministries of preschool and public education, health and finance have improved skills in PBB. 18 national trainers were selected to continue with strengthening capacity of the national partners in PBB and RBM. In total UNICEF trained over 80 national colleagues to apply PBB and RBB principles in budgetary processes.

Uzbekistan has declared itself as a pathfinding country for the UN Secretary-General Initiative on the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transition. UNICEF co-led country
consultations with ILO, UNDP, and other UN agencies and partners to define the acceleration points.

UNICEF analyzed the preparedness of Uzbekistan’s social protection system to respond to shocks and also carried out an in-depth legal review. UNICEF also researched the heatwaves in Uzbekistan and the potential cash transfer response. 91 per cent under the age of 18 are exposed to heatwaves. 25 staff from 16 national ministries and agencies improved their understanding and strengthened their capacity on cash transfers as a social protection response during emergencies.

UNICEF supported the development of the national multidimensional poverty measure for children. The findings of the survey show that over 44 per cent of children under 18 are multidimensionally poor.

**Gender Equality and Social Inclusion**

Country Programme results are aligned to UNICEF’s Gender Action Plan, Gender Policy, and incorporate recommendations from the Light Gender Programmatic Review finalized in 2023.

With UNICEF’s advocacy and technical expertise, the Government of Uzbekistan enhanced legal protection of women and children from violence, including though criminalizing of domestic violence and enforcing prosecution. In addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) needs during emergencies, UNICEF integrated the GBV Safety Audit Tool as part of effective emergency preparedness planning activities of the Institute of Civil Protection under the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES). The Institute committed to adopt the tool addressing Gender and GBV issues specifically related to earthquakes and, also demonstrating UNICEF’s commitment to delivering on its Core Commitments for Children. UNICEF integrated gender-transformative programs across all Goal Areas, benefiting 309,000 children in 499 schools reaching with information on identifying and reporting violence as well legal and human rights. UNICEF’s focus includes enhancing girls’ leadership and skills, challenging harmful gender norms and stereotypes, and empowering networks of young people and communities. UNICEF also strengthened systems and improved services related to adolescent girls’ nutrition, HPV vaccination, girls’ education and skills, including in STEM, accessible MHH services, and gender-responsive social and child protection systems.

UNICEF Uzbekistan’s programme is fully aligned with the Global UNICEF’s Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy. Under UNICEF’s leadership, United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) Joint programme has been finalized with UNDP, UNFPA, OHCHR, the Government and organizations of people with disabilities (OPDs). Capacity of around 200 people with disabilities, among those 130 OPDs and 24 self-initiative parents’ groups was enhanced on the CRPD, disability inclusion, GBV and legal awareness, with support from Association of Disabled People. As a result, five additional self-initiative parent groups submitted application documents to the Government for registration as NGO with UNICEF’s support, fostering a more inclusive civil society for people with disabilities. Further, UNICEF's coordination in implementing the UN Joint Programme funded by UNPRPD resulted in provision of age-appropriate services for children aged 2-17 years with functional difficulties. The UNJP facilitated multi-stakeholder commitment to achieving CRPD-compliant Sustainable Development Goals, established a robust legislative and policy framework, and ensured accessible person-centred services. Notably, UNICEF improved the capacity of patronage nurses on early identification and intervention and teachers on the Universal Design for Education, and evidence was generated to advocate for a more integrated approach in service provision.

**UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships**

In 2023, the country office harnessed partnerships with various development actors, International
Leaning on these partnerships UNICEF ensured unprecedented resources were mobilised and leveraged for children and young people, surpassing set country office targets and contributing to outcomes for children across the country. For instance, UNICEF as Chair and Convenor of Uzbekistan’s National Education Compact, successfully leveraged financial commitments of up to USD 600 million from development partners on quality and inclusive education.

UNICEF successfully mobilized USD 43.5 million from the Uzbekistan Vision 2030 “Ishonch” Fund enhancing maternal and neonatal health in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MOH), WHO, and UNFPA, as the first programme implemented under the Restitution Funds and which UNICEF acts as convening agency.

UNICEF successfully leveraged funding from IFIs, to advance results across various sectors. New strategic partnerships were established with the Islamic Development Bank including a new ECE project of USD 2.3 million leveraging a larger USD 69 million programme to expand access to alternative ECE models during 2024-2027, in addition a Multiplier Project (USD 220 million) was developed with UNICEF coordinating main components on quality and inclusive education at pre-school and school level. Likewise, a new partnership with the World Bank was established with the Ministry of Pre-school and School Education within the framework of GPE Systems Capacity Grant to step-up coordination and systems strengthening activities underpinning national education reforms. Another success in leveraging funds for results for children was the regional partnership with WASH Asian Development Bank Facility on "Improving Access and Strengthening Innovations for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene in Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Countries and Caucasus". It was deployed in Uzbekistan to generate much needed evidence on strengthening water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) systems. In addition, UNICEF provided technical support to ADB in reviewing and refining a forthcoming USD 100 million concessional loan Feasibility Assessment.

The partnership between ILO, the World Bank, and UNICEF on strengthening the social protection system has played a crucial role in establishing the National Agency for Social Protection. Through this collaboration, all three organizations have offered extensive technical guidance and assistance to support the Agency in designing its structures, functions, programmes, and services. In addition, UNICEF forged a partnership with the World Bank to set up a monitoring system dedicated to children in alternative care, providing technical guidance and on-ground support to ensure adaptation of the monitoring system to the context of Uzbekistan.

UNICEF contributed to the development and endorsement of the joint Theory of Change under UN Gender Thematic Group with a roadmap to address violence against girls, boys, and women at scale. Under UNICEF’s leadership, UN PRPD Joint programme was finalized with UNDP, UNFPA, OHCHR, the Government and organizations of people with disabilities (OPDs) contributing to the CRPD-compliant SDGs and ensuring availability of accessible services for people with disabilities. Meanwhile, UNICEF’s ongoing partnership with the MOH secured USD 2.7 million grant from the UN Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund to improve the healthcare system in the Republic of Karakalpakstan.

The EU supported UNICEF in Surkhandarya region to improve access to inclusive multi-lingual education, social services, legal aid and youth skills development benefiting vulnerable local and Afghan children, youth, and families. Moreover the EU continues to support Uzbekistan to provide age-appropriate and gender-sensitive reintegration support to children and women repatriated from Iraq and Syria. Meanwhile, UNICEF partnership with USAID on Global Health Security mobilized USD 500 000, to advance risk communication. Additionally, under the USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance program, UNICEF enhanced its partnership with the Red Crescent Society of Uzbekistan.
Uzbekistan in disaster risk preparedness and response.

With UNICEF’s advocacy National Agency for Social Protection demonstrated a commitment to transition to a social model of disability assessment and determination, enhancing access to disability-inclusive infrastructure, services and programmes, community care and support services, and assistive technology. Road Map on inclusion of the social model into existing disability assessment and determination system was developed with UNICEF’s support.

UNICEF strategic partnership with the Zamin Foundation chaired by the First Lady of Uzbekistan, facilitated high-level advocacy on the Climate Agenda in Uzbekistan and across Central Asia. The partnership culminated in the “Central Asian Strategy for Promoting a Culture of Sustainable Development and Involvement of Children and Youth in the Climate Agenda for 2024-2030”. In Uzbekistan, the partnership brought together government counterparts such as the Ministry of Preschool and School Education, Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change and the Ministry of Youth Policy and Sports that advanced UNICEF’s agenda on child and youth–led climate action and laid a solid foundation to the Greening Education Agenda.

UNICEF mobilised partnerships for children and young people through private sector engagement. Partnership with retail giants Korzinka reached nearly 1.5 million with awareness messages, over 3 million were reached via UTA media Group and with a potential of reaching 7 million people via UNICEF’s partnership with U-Cell on the IoGT platform. In addition, UNICEF singed MoUs with Astrum IT Academy and Artel, the largest manufacturer of consumer electronics in Central Asia – to promote learning of transferable skills through the digital platform FunDoo, company tours and master classes/workshops. Further, UNICEF formed a partnership with private entity, ADM Jizzakh on WASH in communities.

UNICEF engaged academia to enhance programme design and delivery. UNICEF facilitated a tripartite partnership with the Columbia School of Social Work and the National Agency for Social Protection. This partnership aims at building on the best international practice through establishment and operation of the proposed Uzbekistan-Columbia Centre to significantly enhance social work research and practice in social and child protection, and mental health. Further, UNICEF established partnership with the Law Clinic at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, to provide pro bono legal aid.

**Lessons Learned and Innovations**

Innovations were at the forefront of UNICEF programming in 2023. UNICEF supported the Government of Uzbekistan in finalising the economic analysis of the climate-resilient healthcare waste management pilot in 34 healthcare facilities. The analysis confirmed that non-incinerating sterilisation machines, a new technology in the market, are a cost-effective and safe method to treat infectious waste in hospitals, consistent with WHO’s global costing estimates. UNICEF will continue to support the government of Uzbekistan in 2024 in the scale-up of climate-resilient healthcare waste management and in addressing the analysis’s recommendations through knowledge generation and high-level advocacy towards domestic allocation of resources towards climate-resilient health care waste management solutions.

UNICEF demonstrated agility in its programming, primarily through developing and disseminating the Bebbo parenting app. When social media campaigns proved ineffective, UNICEF shifted its strategy and collaborated with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Preschool and School Education to introduce the Bebbo parenting application in 6 out of 14 regions through patronage nurses and teachers. Thanks to extensive awareness raising and trainings among service providers, patronage
nurses and teachers incorporated the app into their regular duties, resulting in customised, enhanced screening and preventive services. A recent review revealed that the application had high usage rates (85 per cent weekly), improved parental knowledge and practices, and increased public trust in home visiting services for early childhood development. Uzbekistan is an example of the successful promotion and uptake of the Bebbo parenting application.

In 2023, UNICEF focused on strategically using analytical tools and methodologies for evidence-informed decision-making. The Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) showed that 44.7 per cent of children under 18 in Uzbekistan faced multidimensional poverty, providing a basis for UNICEF's informed programming. Additionally, UNICEF used the Digital Situational Analysis to obtain a real-time understanding of children's situations, enabling interventions to be tailored to changing needs of the target population. UNICEF also conducted thorough digital landscape analyses and baseline assessments before developing the Electronic Immunization Registry (EIR) in Uzbekistan. These analyses helped identify challenges, review policies and assess the current technical capacity and infrastructure leading to the development of a sustainable system. User feedback from these assessments was also crucial in improving the design of the EIR, resulting in a system that is effective and enduring. Furthermore, UNICEF mapped social services for children with developmental delays and disabilities, which informed programming decisions and strengthened services for children with disabilities across various sectors. UNICEF also assessed the readiness of Uzbekistan's social protection system to respond to shocks, supported by an in-depth legal review. This was important given the current climatic challenges, with heatwaves affecting approximately 9.6 million children. Looking ahead, UNICEF’s commitment to data collection remains unwavering. UNICEF’s knowledge generation in-country plays a crucial role in informing the new country program, ensuring that interventions are aligned with the ever-evolving landscape of challenges children in Uzbekistan face.

One of the key achievements of UNICEF in the past year was the effective use of high-level advocacy to promote the rights and well-being of children. Some of the notable outcomes of this strategy were the establishment of the National Agency for Social Protection by the Government of Uzbekistan, which will benefit more than 5 million children and 2.3 million women through improved social assistance, social services and protection from violence and abuse; the organisation and participation of the Climate Action Conference for Children, which involved the first ladies of the region and resulted in the adoption of a regional strategy for climate action that was led and developed by children themselves; and the approval of a Presidential Decree that authorised the procurement of micronutrient powders (MNPs) through UNICEF until 2027. This was facilitated by a study visit to the Supply Division for the senior officials and key decision makers from the Ministry of Health, who gained a better understanding of UNICEF's comparative advantage in the supply of MNPs and other essential health commodities.

Despite the global decline in official development assistance funding, UNICEF forged strategic alliances with non-traditional donors such as international financial institutions and development funds to advance its priorities. UNICEF offered technical assistance to the Asian Development Bank in reviewing and refining a feasibility assessment for a $100 million concessional loan program that will end in January 2024. The loan supports the Vision 2030 project on perinatal care and UNICEF’s priorities in improving neonatal survival rates.

UNICEF also facilitated the development of the Uzbekistan Partnership Compact for Education Reform 2023-26, which secured over USD 600 million in funding commitments from development partners and identified five new strategic areas for quality and inclusive education. UNICEF’s enhanced coordination role enabled the Government of Uzbekistan to establish new large-scale partnerships with international financial institutions and develop new programs across all sub-sectors of education through the Multiplier Program 2024-2027, with USD 220 million in funding from the Global Partnership for Education and the Islamic Development Bank. This sectoral compact approach is worth emulating in other sectors.
UNICEF leveraged funding from the Vision 2030 Fund, based on an agreement between the Swiss Confederation and the Government of Uzbekistan on the restitution of illicit assets signed on August 16th 2022. The first Vision 2030 Fund project (43.5 million USD) is implemented by UNICEF, UNFPA, and WHO. The fund aligns with Uzbekistan’s national reform agenda and the SDGs and can serve as a global model for the restitution of illicit assets through the United Nations.

As part of the programme review, UNICEF evaluated the expected programme outcomes and the underlying theories of change to assess their relevance and adequacy in the changing program environment. The review highlighted the growing importance of climate change as a priority issue. Moreover, UNICEF restructured its cross-sectoral programming to enhance gender-responsive, inclusive and climate-resilient interventions across different sectors.

Negative and harmful gender and social norms and stereotypes have been identified as a cross-cutting barrier, calling for additional focus on addressing the drivers of social and gender norms persistent across all areas. UNICEF Uzbekistan identified social and behaviour change as a key cross-sectoral strategy throughout the life cycle.