

# Country Office Annual Report 2019

## Azerbaijan

### Update on the context and situation of children

In a year when Azerbaijan welcomed the birth of its 10 millionth citizen, UNICEF continued to focus its efforts on strengthening services, strategies and structures in support of the most vulnerable and under-served children and families.

This took place in an environment in which the country continued to report economic growth, with an increase in GDP of 2.5 per cent between January and September 2019. The official inflation rate averaged 2.6 per cent in 2019.

The Government submitted its second Voluntary National Review report to the High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development in July. The country has identified 88 national Sustainable Development Goal priorities out of 169 SDG targets, and has committed to a National Plan of Action for Children and the SDGs which was further developed during the year.

In support of a more equitable environment for growth, specific social reforms were undertaken in 2019. These included an increase in social allowances, salary scales and minimum salaries levels – for example, the minimum monthly wage was raised from 130 Manats (US\$ 77) to 250 Manats (US\$ 147). During the first half of 2019, per capita cash income increased by 5.7 per cent to 2,768 Manats (US\$ 1,628). Income at the disposal of the population increased by 5.8 per cent to 25.1 billion Manats (US\$ 16.8).

Several structural reforms were also introduced within the Government in relation to social development. Most health service delivery functions were transferred from the Ministry of Health to the State Agency for Mandatory Health Insurance (SAMHI) to align with the rollout of the mandatory universal health insurance programme nationwide from 2020. A new agency of Centres for Sustainable and Operational Social Security (DOST) under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population was established and two physical DOST Centres were opened in March and December to provide one-stop access to all social protection and assistance services for the most vulnerable population.

New State standards for general and one-year pre-primary education were drafted by the Ministry of Education ahead of a public review. These standards increase the focus on inclusivity and learner-centred teaching and learning, in addition to providing an explicit list of grade- and subject-specific competencies. The system of teacher recruitment for general education institutions underwent important changes, with recruitment now managed by the Ministry of Education in a centralised manner. Over 150,000 general education teachers participated in a diagnostic assessment in 2019 and, as a result, weekly workload of assessed teachers increased for 1.5 times and monthly salary was doubled.

A new Youth Employment Programme was launched by the Government during the year to assist young people with successful career development, creating additional job opportunities and increasing competition in the labour market. The programme aims to deliver decent jobs for all sections of the population, recognizing that nearly a quarter of young people are not in education, training or employment and unemployment amongst young women is nearly three times the average unemployment rate in the country. Fifteen additional Youth Houses were officially transferred from local authority management to the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In addition, it was announced that district Career Development Centres will be established by the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation focused on strengthening employability amongst young people.

Legislative changes were also made during the year to strengthen support for children and families. The revised Family Code introduced social work interventions and several child-focused measures in child adoption procedures, to be implemented by DOST. The Law on the State Youth Policy was further updated to include advancements in the rights of young people to participate in formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes.

These reforms and innovations took place as, in a generally positive context, specific groups of the population, including children, continue to face challenges to their development. For example, the results of the national STEP survey conducted in 2018 by the national Public Health Reform Centre with the support of WHO, and released in 2019, showed that more than half of both men and women in Azerbaijan are overweight and more than 1 in 10 men and more than a quarter of women are affected by obesity. Three out of four people have an insufficient intake of fruit and vegetables, and over one-fourth of the population consume a high intake of processed foods high in salt. The survey also found that almost half of men smoke and one-fourth drink alcohol. Non-communicable diseases are becoming a major concern in the country.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) identified significant issues with the quality of learning outcomes for 15-year-olds, following a survey of school students in the nation's capital, scoring significantly lower than the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science. The study also found that 36 per cent of students, the majority being boys, reported being bullied more than once a month, compared to 23 per cent on average across OECD countries.

Despite the concerns over quality of learning, Azerbaijan's school readiness programme, which provides one-year of pre-

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school learning for 5-year-olds, has continued to expand, reaching 80 per cent of children during 2019. There was also a continued expansion of the community-based preschool education programme for 3-4- year old children, with additional financial support from the European Union as well as domestic resources, which resulted in an increase in enrolment from 2,000 children in 100 under-served communities to over 6,000 children, including more than 2,700 girls, in 320 communities in 32 districts of the country.

There was an increased focus on prevalence of, response to and prevention of violence against children during the year, especially in relation to bullying and self-harm amongst young people. The Ministry of Education expanded the number of "school friends" (a form of school counsellors) available to students, while the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs embarked on a major public information and education campaign to raise knowledge and understanding of signs of bullying and how to support those affected or at risk.

### Major contributions and drivers of results

The year under review represents the fourth year of the current UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan, focusing on Early Childhood Development (ECD), Inclusive Education, Community-Based Social Services for Children, Adolescent and Youth Development and Participation, and evidence-based Child Rights Monitoring. With financial support from the European Union, a three-year comprehensive approach to integrated community-based social services was launched in 2019 to further expand initiatives in ECD, social and child protection services and youth-friendly programmes – the approach places significant emphasis on the engagement of and support to civil society partners, to strengthen non-government actors as a viable third sector for efficient service delivery.

The Country Office conducted a comprehensive situation analysis of children to identify key issues related to child deprivations and vulnerability along with relevant analysis of barriers and bottlenecks. This analysis, to be finalised in early 2020, will help shape the priority results and strategies for the new Country Programme of Cooperation from 2021-2025 and contribute to the focus of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (SDCF).

### Every child survives and thrives

Essential maternal and child health services were strongly positioned within ongoing health system reforms, with UNICEF providing technical assistance to the State Agency on Mandatory Health Insurance (SAMHI) on costing such services within the minimum insurance package ahead of its expansion from the current pilot districts to nationwide coverage in 2020. Through a new partnership agreement between UNICEF and the Agency, signed in 2019, SAMHI committed to include iron and folic acid supplements into the insurance benefit package for pregnant women as part of antenatal care, starting from 2020 – UNICEF procured sufficient supplements for 70,000 pregnant women for 2020 and secured a commitment for future procurement to be financed from the national budget from 2021.

To strengthen information available to pregnant women in rural areas, where routine access to health centres can be more challenging, UNICEF, SAMHI, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies and private sector telecommunication companies tested the use of targeted SMS messages with antenatal and postnatal care messages. A rapid assessment of the initiative found that among women receiving the messages, 62 per cent could easily recall the information provided and nearly one-third took actions to seek health services following the SMS guidance. The results were shared with relevant partners and SAMHI has shown interest in further use of this approach.

UNICEF continued promotion of exclusive breastfeeding by introducing the WHO/UNICEF new Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) guidelines and advocating incorporation of compliance with the BFHI 10 steps into maternity facilities under the Mandatory Health Insurance (MHI) system, where a quarter of all babies are delivered. Monitoring was carried out in 15 maternity facilities in Baku city and pilot insurance areas for compliance with BFHI requirements. The results of monitoring showed that none of these facilities comply with all 10 steps on support for successful breastfeeding. Many health professionals haven't participated in training on breastfeeding for the last several years. Only in half of facilities there is clear written policy on promotion and support of breastfeeding. A plan of action was prepared to address existing gaps, including adaptation of a UNICEF/WHO training package on the 10 steps and conducting of training for relevant health workers in all monitored facilities.

The International Guidelines on Monitoring of Child Development (GMCD) training has been incorporated to the Ministry of Health's regular mandatory in-service training for medical professionals, contributing to more sustainable capacity building. As a result of this new approach, familiarity with the GMCD among primary health care staff increased from 25 per cent in 2018 to 65 per cent in 2019. Expanding the model of early detection and early prevention of disabilities and development delays, introduced by UNICEF over the last few years, to two more districts with the engagement of the State Agency for Mandatory Health Insurance, will help ensure continuation of this critical

intervention and strengthen the basis for further scale-up and system change.

While approval of the draft law on mandatory wheat flour fortification, a key strategy to tackle iron-deficiency anaemia in the country, remains pending, UNICEF maintained a strong focus on the importance of flour fortification in hosting a regional workshop for the Caucasus and Central Asia, bringing together 37 representatives from governments, the milling industry and academia in eight countries to share knowledge and experience on designing and implementation of flour fortification programmes and identify main priorities for action in the participating countries. Azerbaijan's gesture in hosting this major workshop hopefully underlines its full commitment to the flour fortification programme.

A key step forward in advancing early childhood development during 2019 was the introduction of a Home Visiting training module through a Training of Trainers initiative involving 23 master trainers including medical professionals, pre-school teaching staff and professionals from NGOs who will facilitate the roll-out of the training to frontline health and social workers in four pilot districts in support of parent counselling and education through home visits from 2020, increasing quality of care, frequency of contact between child and health worker and increased capacity for referrals to other services.

### Every child learns

Coverage of one-year school readiness increased from 75 per cent in 2018 to 80 per cent in 2019. With continued advocacy by UNICEF, the Ministry of Education has embraced full ownership of regular school readiness classes for 5-year-old children, providing relevant policy support, teacher training, supplies and financial resources. The programme reached more than 105,000 five-year old children in the 2019-2020 school year with nearly 6,000 teachers benefiting from enhanced skills to provide short-term school readiness programmes through continuous training activities, mentorship advice and regular monitoring measures to ensure consistent quality assurance. A formative evaluation of the School Readiness Programme is now being undertaken to generate good practices and lessons learned for both UNICEF and government partners.

The community-based early learning programme initially supported by UNICEF has been further expanded to 320 centres in 32 districts, reaching more than 6,200 children aged 3-4 years old with direct financial support from UNICEF, the European Union and other national resources. Around 320 community Early Childhood Education teachers received professional training and mentoring support in early child learning, play, active learning methodologies, communication with children and community mobilization to enhance and encourage parents' meaningful engagement in early childhood development in a home environment. Continuous monitoring through mentorship visits, training and effective cooperation with parents, families and communities has been provided by the Ministry of Education to identify gaps and training needs amongst preschool teachers and to ensure quality of early learning services. The Ministry is also considering scale-up of the community early learning model across the country in the coming years.

Through these two programmes, the overall preschool enrolment rate for children aged 1-5 years old has increased from 14.2 per cent in 2015 to 28.5 per cent in 2019.

Continuous advocacy with the Ministry of Education and other partners on inclusive education for children with disabilities saw the introduction of teacher training programmes on inclusive education to the formal curriculum of pre- and in-service teacher training universities. Through a European Union funded initiative, UNICEF supported improved capacities of pre- and in-service teacher training universities to teach inclusive concepts and classroom strategies to general education teachers – 87 master trainers were trained and rolled out the training in five target universities for 318 university teachers who in turn will transmit the inclusive concepts and approaches to future teaching students. A draft national strategy for capacity building in inclusive education and a related action plan were finalized to guide and support the Ministry in employing a systemic approach to teacher, school leader and specialist training on inclusive education, addressing known gaps in policy and technical capacity. Over 5,000 primary school teachers in seven target districts received in-service training on inclusive concepts and classroom strategies addressing diversity of learner needs. The Center of Excellency for Inclusive Education established in 2018 with UNICEF's support played an important role in leading the pre-service and in-service teacher training in 2019. A case study conducted in 2018 to assess and document the inclusive school modelling experience, and capture good practices and lessons learned, was shared with the Ministry of Education and recommendations of the study supported the Ministry in further strengthening of the pilot model to further contribute to the implementation of the State Programme on Inclusive Education and scale-up inclusive education. UNICEF contributed to strengthening of the pilot model in 2019 through capacity building of 11 trainers and 23 primary school teachers of the 4 pilot schools with in-service training in inclusive concepts and learner-centred teaching approaches.

Nine Resource Centres were established in regular schools to enable school-based professional development of teachers, school management and other professionals in inclusive education. As one of the initial steps for gradual introduction of inclusive education to regular schools, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education in the development and piloting of a

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screening methodology and toolkit to identify and accommodate the learning needs of children with learning difficulties already in schools, and who need support of teachers currently trained under the Inclusive Education initiative. Over 80 schoolteachers from seven pilot districts were trained to run the screening process in regular schools.

A communication for Social and Behaviour Change Strategy was developed to address stigma and prejudice towards children with disabilities with interventions at national, organisational, community and family levels. Over 1,200 students in three universities enhanced their knowledge and understanding of the value of social inclusion and inclusive education through public talks delivered by young people with disabilities.

### Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

UNICEF's promotion of a child-centred and equity focused social protection system linked to child protection concepts continued with technical support for the Government's development of a social services strategy which includes national priorities and is in line with key international standards. Meanwhile, the ongoing modelling of the Integrated Social Services initiative provided a strong background for testing the validity and effect of a number of concepts and strategies including strengthening the social services workforce, data analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and community-based and equity-focused approaches. A cost-benefit analysis is being undertaken to provide a financial assessment of the effectiveness of the community-based service model in comparison to institutional care models, to support advocacy for further social services reforms in the country.

The pilot initiative of integrated social services was expanded to a third district in 2019, providing a tangible example of community-based social services for the most vulnerable children. A series of quality standards on social services for children with developmental delays and disabilities and for children in conflict and contact with the law, as well as guidelines on social work with children and families within a child protection system, were applied and tested in the service centres of three pilot districts, with 36 trained social workers from non-government organizations now in place. More than 1,550 children directly benefited from the provision of social services in the three districts between January and November 2019. An electronic case management tool has also been developed and is currently being tested in the pilot districts. These standards, guidelines and tools will be finalized in 2020 and be adopted as national standards in the future.

The introduction of professional social work is a core strategy of the social service reforms currently underway in Azerbaijan. UNICEF strengthened its collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population during the year, and developed a new partnership with the recently established Centres for Sustainable and Operational Social Security (DOST) to advocate for the continued development of the social services workforce and the mainstreaming of community-based integrated social services for the most vulnerable children and their families within the national social security and service system.

This continuous advocacy combined with the technical support of UNICEF in strengthening the social work component in child protection has produced positive results in changes of Government policy on the child adoption system. The revised Family Code introduced social work interventions and several child-focused measures to existing child adoption procedures. As a result, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population has now established a structure that includes professional social workers to conduct assessments of child and family situations, and to manage child adoption and reintegration cases based on internationally accepted practices.

In consideration of the insufficient number of professional social workers in the country, in 2019 UNICEF initiated the development of a standard training programme on social work for existing practitioners who have no formal university degree in social work. A team of instructors of Azerbaijan University and other social work professionals from leading non-government organizations drafted 28 training modules, including the principles, methods and standards of social work, ethical values and principles of social work, social work with various groups of vulnerable children including children with disabilities, children without parental care, and children in conflict and contact with the law, inter-personal communication and communication for social change, child rights, child protection, and other topics. Based on these modules, an e-training course will be developed and implemented in 2020, greatly improving the quality and sustainability of pre- and in-service education in social work.

The issue of violence against children, including peer violence and self-harm, was a strong focus for UNICEF's work in several sectors during the year. The Country Office worked closely with the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs to produce and disseminate information materials to help parents, relatives and children themselves recognise and respond to possible incidents of bullying or young persons experiencing personal or emotional crises. With the Ministry of Education, UNICEF supported the skills building of 320 staff in the "School Friends" programme which aims to strengthen safety and protection of children in schools by providing students with a professional, trusted source of support and guidance within the school environment. Through the partnership with UNICEF, the "School Friends" programme recruited 12 professional social workers in 2019 to further strengthen their

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work. UNICEF also initiated a partnership with the Ministry of Education to develop a child safeguarding policy and procedures, training system for administrative staff, teachers and students to prevent, respond and report violence cases in schools and residential institutions. A more comprehensive programme on violence against children will be developed and implemented as a priority in the next Country Programme 2021-2025.

In supporting the Probation Service established under the Ministry of Justice in 2018, which to date has provided limited support to 98 children, UNICEF provided technical support for capacity building of the Service's staff on internationally recognized good practices in probation services for juveniles, with a focus on social reintegration and case management including international standards in probation services, social work and ethical principles in probation, social inquiry report, monitoring and evaluation of the status of juveniles in probation, reintegration, community-based services and psychological support to juveniles.

Technical and material support was provided to the child-friendly court rooms in the Courts for Grave Crimes in two additional districts, which enabled the courts to conduct hearings of victims and witnesses of crimes in a child-sensitive manner. In 2019, UNICEF took further steps to ensure continuation of legal aid services for vulnerable children and families, including integration of legal aid services to the youth-friendly services of Youth Houses, and the aforementioned community-based integrated social services – as a result, 358 children and young people benefitted from legal assistance during the year.

### Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

In 2019, UNICEF continued to provide technical support to the Ministry of Education to increase knowledge of the global Sustainable Development Agenda and to encourage environmental thinking amongst 170 teachers and over 4,000 school students in 38 schools.

A study of the existing Education Management Information System (EMIS) was initiated with the Ministry including a focus on identification of capacities and gaps and suggestion of strategies for improvement of quality of data on water, sanitation and hygiene in schools.

UNICEF's partnership with the Government in support of disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness and response was further enhanced. UNICEF supported a workshop on inclusion of vulnerable groups in disaster risk reduction jointly organized by the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Council of Europe and the International Organization on Migration. The workshop resulted in agreement on recommended priority actions from all participants grouped around policy review, capacity building, data collection on vulnerable groups, and communication. These recommendations will inform the Government's Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction.

A simulation exercise based on a severe earthquake was organized jointly by the Government, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, providing an opportunity to test existing contingency plans for emergency preparedness and response. UNICEF technical experts participated in the exercise in their capacities as co-leads of the joint Government-UN emergency clusters covering education, water and sanitation, child protection and nutrition. Recommendations based on the lessons of the simulation exercise were developed for future consideration and allowed for updating of the UN's own contingency plans in response to natural disasters, including those where UNICEF is lead agency.

### Every child has an equitable chance in life

UNICEF continued to strengthen its partnership with the Azerbaijan's National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development (NCCSD) through engagement on child development issues. While the approval by the Government of the National Children's Strategy remains pending, UNICEF has supported the drafting of a National Plan of Action for Child Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, which provides a practical framework to operationalise the Strategy in support of the national Sustainable Development Agenda. The draft Action Plan will be reviewed and validated once the National Children's Strategy is approved.

In 2019, UNICEF provided training through a workshop organized by UNICEF's Office of Research – Innocenti to staff of the Ministry of Economy and the State Statistical Committee on calculating multidimensional child poverty by using statistical software. Discussions are now underway with the Committee to pilot child poverty measurements using data from the annual Household Budget Survey in 2020. The capacity of staff from the State Statistical Committee on data processing, validation and analysis using statistical software was also further developed through the organization of a formal course at ADA University. Ten staff were selected from five key departments working with data related to children, with all staff successfully completing and meeting the academic requirements of the course.

The UNICEF-supported Child Deprivation Study was finalized and prepared for publication, subject to final approval by the



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Government. The study will provide a valuable gender-disaggregated resource for monitoring national targets for further reducing non-monetary poverty. A baseline survey in selected districts was completed by UNICEF and partners on the most immediate needs faced by vulnerable children and families in the areas of early childhood development and integrated social services, to support more effective and evidence-based programming.

Using available budget data, a Social Protection Budget Brief and a National Budget Review for Children were prepared, which contributed to a broader Situation Analysis of Children in Azerbaijan. A part-time Social Policy expert was engaged by UNICEF to support social policy and public finance-related activities, creating new opportunities for UNICEF to advocate for more child-focused budgeting within the national strategic planning process and strengthen cooperation with the Ministries of Economy and Finance. The Situation Analysis itself adopted new guidelines and best practices and will be available for public use in 2020.

Adapted to the national context, the short version of the Washington Group's Functioning Module was included in the 2019 national census. This was the first time that a social approach to measuring disability on a national scale has been used. The census data is under processing and preliminary results are expected in 2020.

The integrated youth services programme initially piloted in two district Youth Houses was expanded to six districts as the result of effective advocacy by UNICEF. Importantly, the expansion also covered the newly established Career Centres created by the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation, increasing the alignment of the two systems. In 2019, the initiative helped to equip more than 3,600 young people with basic life skills, support for volunteerism, information on reproductive health and gender-based violence, psychological and legal counselling, as well as sports opportunities for girls. New elements of Public Relations and Marketing of Youth Houses, Employment Readiness and Social Entrepreneurship were successfully added to the package of services as a result of the partnership between UNICEF and the European Union which aims to engage more civil society actors in youth programming.

A Basic Life Skills education programme enhanced the skills of over 650 young people from the two pilot Youth Houses and the Girls' Empowerment Academy of the Azerbaijan Football Federation in self-awareness and personal empowerment, interpersonal relationships, effective decision-making and goal-setting. These skills are increasingly recognised as vital foundational competencies that enhance the ability of young people to play a successful role in their communities and prepare themselves for adulthood. An innovative smart-phone based service assessment system was developed and tested to collect feedback from youth on the quality of services and to provide them with a platform upon which to share their opinions.

The UN Youth Advisory Council, with ten newly-elected young men and women from diverse social backgrounds, continued contributing to the formulation and finetuning of youth programming by the UN Country Team. The Azerbaijani Youth Advocate Programme (AYAP), the Country Office's flagship project on youth participation modelled in three Line of Contact districts, continued to grow with some 2,000 young people actively engaging over the last year in projects initiated by youth themselves in 2018 jointly with the local authorities in 2018. In addition, young people in the AYAP programme have led consultations with nearly 1,200 peers to identify new projects for 2020. With the support of the European Union and contributing to the State Youth Programme 2017-2021, the AYAP model has been expanded to five more districts in partnership with the National Association of Youth Organisations of Azerbaijan (NAYORA) and sub-national authorities.

The Master's degree programme for preparation of youth work specialists, launched in 2018, is now being implemented in six universities, positioning Azerbaijan amongst only ten countries in the world to have a youth work academic programme at Master's level. All practical sections of the programme were developed by local specialists with the guidance of international experts from UNICEF.

Sport for Development and Communication for Behaviour and Social Change remained among the key strategies producing tangible results for adolescents and youth in Azerbaijan. In 2019, 185 children and adolescents with disabilities, including an international team of seven children from Georgia, participated in the 5th Children's Paralympic Games, competing in seven sports - judo, powerlifting, table tennis, swimming, boccia, taekwondo and goalball. UNICEF also supported expansion of the Children's Paralympic Movement to two more districts - Agjabady and Ganja - through regular coaching sessions by coaches from the National Paralympic Committee.

Two major events to promote social inclusion of children with disabilities were organized around the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. An Inclusivity Festival was initiated by the Regional Development Public Union with joint support from UNICEF, the UN Development Programme and the European Union under the banner 'All Different, All Equal'. A Dance and Music Gala organized by UNICEF, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and the Embassy of Italy with the theme of Inspiration through Art brought artists with and without disabilities from Azerbaijan and Italy together to promote the concept of social inclusion and equality to a large public audience.

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### Cross-cutting initiatives in 2019

The #GirlsCan campaign launched in 2018 in partnership with the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) and the Government of the Netherlands continued during the year with a series of videos featuring girls and young women sharing their experiences of breaking stereotypes in different aspects of life. UNICEF supported AFFA to reach out to 25,000 people through social networks to promote gender equality, challenge stereotypes with regards to roles of men and women in society and inspire more girls to demonstrate their individual skills and talents. As part of the campaign, a special event was held to mark International Day of the Girl Child involving a visit by coaches and women players from the Royal Dutch Football Association.

In Azerbaijan, UNICEF's first global Parenting Month was celebrated in 2019 by a social media campaign - #Atabala Challenge. Four famous male personalities shared their personal stories of fatherhood on social media, encouraged other fathers to take part and spread the word on how fathers can help in the early development of their young children; the campaign reached 100,000 people and, by national standards, generated a significant number of public social media responses from men and women.

A mapping and capacity assessment of non-government and civil society organizations working with families, women and children was undertaken with more than 100 national organizations. Sixteen non-government organizations were engaged during the year to deliver programmes in partnership with UNICEF, with ten receiving direct financial grant support.

The Country Office also invested further in engaging the private sector as a key partner for promotion and protection of child rights in Azerbaijan. Working with the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator, UN Women and the UN Global Compact, UNICEF co-hosted a Responsible Business Conference, at which the concepts of child rights and business practices were introduced to more than 30 international and national business entities operating in the country. As a result, a number of businesses have requested further guidance and advice on how to incorporate child-friendly approaches to their daily business activities.

UNICEF continued to engage with traditional and social media to promote child rights to a broad public audience through the year. A new UNICEF Advocacy Kit reflected the focus of the organization's priorities in the latter half of the current Country Programme, using a blend of traditional print materials and multimedia assets to show the impact of UNICEF's work on real children and families. The popular Nargis Magazine dedicated its June 2019 issue to UNICEF's 25 years of work in the country. Social media remains an increasingly important tool to reach out to various audiences and the Country Office invested in new social media photography platforms to build on its existing strong presence on social networking sites. The main UNICEF Azerbaijan social media site reached over 46,000 followers in 2019, compared to 38,000 the year before.

A new Country Office website was launched during the year, initially in English with an Azerbaijani language version scheduled to go online in early 2020.

Issues around children continued to be prominent in the national media as a result of ongoing UNICEF engagement. More than 1,300 stories in print and online media were linked to UNICEF's messaging during 2019. The Country Office produced four quarterly e-bulletins showcasing the impact of UNICEF-supported activities, to enhance relationships with both national and international partners.

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### Lessons Learned and Innovations

In a context where economic development continues to dominate the national agenda, UNICEF has strived to forge partnerships with national and international actors in support of advocacy for critical social investments. In addition to ongoing partnerships, agreements were signed with the respected Heydar Aliyev Foundation to promote early childhood development, with the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations to promote child rights awareness with the public, with the Embassies of Italy and Belgium to challenge misconceptions over disability amongst children and with the Embassy of the Netherlands to promote girls' equality.

Institutional capacity strengthening remains key to sustainability of the investments being made in child and adolescent development, and this has been supported through UNICEF's work in connecting international expertise with national partners and establishing additional partnerships with academic institutions in the areas of inclusive education, youth development, social work and data analysis. Partnerships with educational institutions should embed routine capacity strengthening into existing pre-service and in-service training and create a continuum of technical capacity amongst professionals in these sectors, year after year. Within the UNICEF Country Office, efforts were made to share knowledge and experience of staff with other countries in the region, including two Azerbaijani colleagues engaging in staff exchanges and technical missions to other UNICEF offices during the year.

UNICEF continued its efforts to provide a robust evidence base for investment in children and young people, linked to the national focus on economic growth. A cost-benefit analysis of the integrated community-based social service model was started to make the case for the medium and long-term benefits of scaling up the social service workforce and social service provision to the most vulnerable populations. A formative evaluation of the School Readiness Programme will also provide evidence for more effective alternatives to expand the coverage of basic pre-school learning to all children.

Efficiency and effectiveness have also underlined the investments made during the year in the NGO and civil society sector, through a European Union supported programme. The partnership with the EU has enabled UNICEF to expand collaboration with civil society partners to support the most vulnerable children and their families, while also offering management capacity support in areas such as financial planning and management, reporting, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The Country Office also benefited from expert guidance and strategic support from the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, through visits by technical advisers in health, education, adolescent development, Technology for Development and social policy. This engagement supported the development of the new Country Programme vision and allowed for technical inputs to programme implementation. The Country Office also invited a visit by UNICEF's Regional Staff Counsellor as part of its commitment to staff wellbeing. This range of support by regional experts allowed the Country Office to benefit from technical know-how and regional good practices that contributed to achieving better results for Azerbaijani children.

The Country Office ensured robust oversight of organizational financial, administrative, human resource and information technology procedures to maximise efficiencies, ensuring that the bulk of the time and human and financial resources available could be expended on programmes for children. During the year under review, UNICEF Azerbaijan allocated a total of US\$ 2.9 million (approximately 5 million Manats) for its work in 2019 - of this, less than 20 per cent was spent on operating costs.