

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA  
REGIONAL OFFICE

# 2019 ROAR

## REGIONAL OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT 2019

UNICEF MENARO



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## Part 1: CONTEXT

Large-scale protracted crises and natural disasters have continued to take a heavy toll on families and children of the Middle East and North Africa region in 2019, especially in Yemen, Syria, the State of Palestine, Libya, Iraq and Sudan. According to the 2019 *Global Humanitarian Overview*, close to 60 million people in the region (more than 10 percent of the regional population) were in need of humanitarian assistance, the highest concentration of people affected by conflict or disaster in the world.<sup>1</sup> The number of people in need across the region has further increased from 71.3 million people in 2018 to 71.4<sup>2</sup> million in 2019, with an estimated number of children in needs at 32 million in 2019. MENA comprises of 55% and 48% of the global UNICEF targets for people and children in 2019, respectively.

The total estimated number of refugees in MENA<sup>3</sup> went slightly down from 10.6 million in 2018 to 10.5 million 2019, with Syrians continuing to constitute the largest number of refugees in the region. The estimated children refugee figure also remains at approximately under 3.8 million in 2019. The total estimated number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in MENA went up from 13.6 million in 2018 to over 14.3 million in 2019, with the children IDP figure increasing from 5.6 million in 2018 to 5.9 million in 2019.

Unrest and socio-political instability affected several countries, especially Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Lebanon. In Sudan, the protests started in December 2018 led to a political transition process. Parliamentary and presidential elections were also held in Tunisia, and constitutional reform, approved by popular vote, has been initiated in Egypt. The political transition in such countries opened up new opportunities to address child rights.

Conflicts and socio-political instability, compounded by relatively low oil prices affecting oil-dependent economies, have contributed to an overall economic stagnation for the Middle East and North Africa. In 2019 the regional GDP registered a negative growth of -0.2 per cent, compared with a modest, but still positive, growth of around 1 per cent in 2017 and 2018. Iran and Lebanon recorded a severe economic downturn. Syria and Sudan have seen high inflation rates, hitting hard vulnerable families and children. Egypt, Iraq and Djibouti experienced a more positive economic outlook, the benefits of which remaining unequally distributed among the population. In the counties of the Gulf, the average growth has been below the 1 per cent mark<sup>4</sup>. Unemployment among youth remains a major challenge in many countries in the region. Subdued economic prospects, however, may continue motivating countries to pursue further economic reforms in 2020 that help address some longstanding challenges. For example, Gulf countries such as KSA and Kuwait are expected to continue accelerating efforts to diversify to non-oil sources of revenue; Jordan is expected to continue pursuing economic reforms (including plans to boost

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1 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global Humanitarian Overview 2019: GHO 2019*, accessed 24 July 2020.

<sup>2</sup> 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2019

<sup>3</sup> 2019 MENARO Humanitarian Section Annual Presentation

<sup>4</sup> World Bank (2020) *Global Economic Prospects*, June update, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33748>

social spending) as part of its agreement with the IMF; and Sudan plans to roll out extensive reforms (including overhauling fuel subsidies) to stem a spiralling economic crisis.

Gender inequality continues to severely curtail economic growth in the region. Low female labour force participation rates have resulted in an underutilization of human capital. There is a great potential to unlock a gender dividend if a larger share of women had the opportunity to participate in their economies.<sup>5</sup> The combination of a highly educated female population with widespread adoption of digital and mobile technologies provides unique opportunities for a number of economies in the region. The highly educated young population, technical innovations, and strong entrepreneurship among the population must be tapped into to accelerate growth and positive change.

The year 2020 started with new geo-political tensions for the region, followed by the unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic. Socio-economic impacts are hitting hard the fragile economies of the Middle East and North Africa, further exacerbate frustrations among young people and the poor, and bring about more uncertainty on the capacity of the region to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Accelerated progress will be needed, particularly given the region's demographic changes and the relatively short window of opportunity available to realize a demographic dividend. It is expected that that the pre-Covid estimated 29 million children (one in four) facing acute poverty as reported in the Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report covering 11 Arab countries published in 2017<sup>6</sup> will increase. Without political resolve and international solidarity, the future of MENA children and youth will remain bleak.

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<sup>5</sup> UNICEF MENARO, *MENA Generation 2030* (2019)

<sup>6</sup> Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report, 2017 <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/multidimensional-arab-poverty-report-english.pdf>

## Part 2: KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

The second year of implementation of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Office's 2018-2021 RO Management Plan (ROMP) continues to reflect an "alignment to core functions" approach with an explicit prioritization of resources to support country offices in delivering results for children in an intersectoral way. It allowed UNICEF in MENA to:

- a) adjust programmes to rapidly evolving contexts along the humanitarian-development spectrum and strengthen preparedness;
- b) promote multisectoral response to the learning challenge, violence, nutrition and disease outbreaks, and seize opportunities in Early Childhood Development and adolescents programming; and
- c) strengthen the human-rights based approach to programming with a focus on equity, vulnerability, and accountability to populations

### **A. Enhancing Programme Excellence**

This result pillar in the ROMP focusses on the RO main function of guiding and supporting CO in delivering results for children in an integrated effective way. MENARO have put in place mechanisms to encourage multidisciplinary approaches among sectoral units, and provide better quality support to the COs to accelerate strategic plan results, especially at the times of their Mid Term Reviews and Country Programme Document formulations and thematic deep dives, and in-country missions.

#### Health and Nutrition

The focus of the MENARO contribution to the Goal area 1 'every child survives and thrives' has been the promotion of a context-relevant holistic primary health care (PHC). Jointly with WHO and through the PHC Strengthening Initiative, UNICEF MENARO engaged in direct high-level advocacy with Ministers of Health of MENA countries and supported the roll out of holistic Primary Health Care (PHC) services for women and children in selected countries (Syria, Libya and Djibouti). UNICEF MENARO strengthened and provided systematic technical support to a number of countries to improve quality of maternal and newborn care (Djibouti, Iraq, Lebanon, SOP, Yemen). Twenty million children were vaccinated against measles and polio through integrated campaigns with MENARO's technical support prioritised based on risk situation reviews for measles and polio. In order to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of response to cholera epidemics, MENARO advocated for a multisectoral and integrated approach and was strongly engaged in the development of partnerships with WHO and other stakeholders active in implementation of the Roadmap to End Cholera.

In the area of Nutrition, RO supported National SMART nutrition surveys in Syria, Yemen and Djibouti to inform the national emergency nutrition response and strengthen integrated programming to prevent and treat malnutrition. MENARO's evidence generation activities and the technical support to COs contributed to the number of countries implementing a policy action or programme for the prevention of overweight and obesity in children tripled between 2018 and 2019 and the number of girls and boys with severe acute malnutrition admitted for treatment increased by 89,691 in 2019.

### Adolescent Development and Participation, and HIV

To accelerate the Goal 5 and adolescent agenda, UNICEF MENARO provided integrated technical support to twelve MENA countries in moving towards better outcomes for adolescents and youth. Technical support was informed by the recommendations from the 'MENA Generation 2030' study, which was the first-ever UNICEF report on young people in MENA. Importantly, this involved a strong emphasis on modelling participation and engagement of adolescents and young people. The RAYAM platform, the MENA Regional Adolescent and Youth Advisory Majlis, is envisioned to serve as a sustainable and inclusive regional platform for young people from the MENA region and it has enabled the UN and NGOs in MENA to elevate the voices of adolescents and youth in a number of policy debates at regional level. RO provided technical support in monitoring adolescent and youth engagement through an innovative online platform in State of Palestine, Jordan, and Syria.

A qualitative analysis of budgeting and programming for adolescents and youth within the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan was completed in collaboration with UNOCHA, with the first training on working with young people in humanitarian settings planned in Erbil (Iraq) in December 2019. In areas of HIV prevention, the RO provided support to 4 countries (Iran, Djibouti, Egypt, and Kuwait) in scaling up the Prevention of mother-to-child transmission interventions and developing roadmaps to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV in collaboration with WHO and UNAIDS. Evidence generation activity was also conducted to support the COs. The joint (UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO) regional publication on HIV and children was finalized and launched to inform programming in the region. In partnership with the MENARO Health section, a regional adolescent health landscape analysis has been finalized.

### Education

MENARO advanced Strategic Plan Goal 2 'every child learns' by promoting a transformative education agenda through the life skills framework. In 2019, country offices were supported to actively engage with this framework through curriculum reform integrating life skills into the curriculum (Tunisia, Egypt and Djibouti), promoting multiple pathways to learning (State of Palestine, Algeria, Lebanon), contents development (Iraq) and data and evidence generation (Syria) to influence further policy and strategy development.

While the life skills agenda applies to both development and humanitarian contexts, the work conducted in most crisis-affected countries focused on keeping systems functional (Yemen) and reaching children out-of-school (Syria). The Regional Office's Education section liaised with HQ and contributed to the work done by Communication for Development (C4D) in creating material on peacebuilding and social cohesion including presentation sessions for the Regional Management Team to country office management in MENA. Also, school-based approach (regionally) is promoted as a better way for building back systems through empowering communities.

### Child Protection

MENARO contributed to Strategic Plan goal 3 'every child is protected from violence and exploitation' through key evidence generation activities informing policy and collective action to prevent and respond to violence against children (VAC). In partnership with Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, MENARO launched a report of the state of the social service workforce covering 8 countries in the region in Tunis.

The event brought together 50 experts from 11 countries around the region and resulted in the formulation of country action plans to strengthen the social service workforce that will lead to sustained technical assistance in the years to come. In addition, a mapping of parenting programmes in 8 countries in the region contributed to identify best practices which resulted in a regional strategy and practical guidance for the design and implementation of parenting programmes. Furthermore, MENARO launched a report on disciplinary practices in the region, that included household survey data from 12 countries in MENA. The combined dataset covered the largest dataset available to date on violent disciplinary practices, representing 70 per cent of the child population aged 2-14 in the MENA region. The findings show that the prevalence rate of violent discipline is 84 per cent across the countries included in the analysis, with substantial national and sub-national variations.

MENARO provided continuous support to 7 country offices involved in the UN mandated Monitoring and Reporting of Grave Child Rights Violation in the context of armed conflict, established by Security Council Resolution 1612 in 2005. This included 4 situations where the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism is activated: Iraq, Sudan, Syria and Yemen and 3 situations of concern (no parties to conflict listed): Israel/State of Palestine, Lebanon and Libya. In total some 28,000 grave violations and issues of concern in 2019. As part of the UN Secretary General (SG) report on Children and Armed Conflict 2019, 46% of the grave violations took place in the MENA region. MENARO contributed to the dialogue with 10 out of 17 listed parties to conflict identified by the UNSG report.

In 2019, Country Offices across the region were provided remote and in-country technical support to strengthen response services for women and girls at risk, including Gender Based Violence (GBV) survivors, and integration and risk mitigation across all UNICEF sectors and programmes. MENARO led the development and piloting of a Virtual Safe Space targeting at-risk adolescent girls who may not otherwise access safe spaces in Iraq and Lebanon. Content was selected based on the field assessments, taking into consideration the need for relevant, age-appropriate content that was also factual and trustworthy. Findings from the pilot indicated positive feedback from adolescent girls and women, including mothers and caregivers, and supported identification of areas for further development, including target population, content, and method of delivery. Learning and cross-country exchange was cultivated through a MENA GBV Community of Practice that allowed for experience sharing and country-to-country learning. Several sessions focused on cross-cutting areas of work, such as justice related to GBV, to encourage collaboration for strengthened interventions.

### *Water, Sanitation and Hygiene*

MENA RO contribution to Goal Area 4 'Every child lives in a safe and clean environment focused on CO capacity building and the establishment of a regional capacity building facility. Some of the key initiatives have been completed such as delivery of capacity strengthening training covering a broad spectrum of topics including cholera epidemiology, urban WASH, WASH in emergencies, contracting for WASH and sanitation market shaping. Furthermore, the WASH Section concluded Phase I of Developing a Regional Emergency WASH Master's Programme at the German-Jordanian University. Moreover, work started on developing guidance, tools and good practices on local governance – decentralized water management planning and implementation systems, private-public partnerships and community engagement.

In the area of water scarcity, MENA RO also concluded a study on the impacts of water scarcity on children in MENA. This was considered as one of the key milestones to further enhance technical support in this

area and climate change issues in coming years. WASH and water scarcity are one of the four MENA accelerators.

### Social Protection

A significant element of UNICEF MENARO's contribution to Goal Area 5 on 'Every Child has an Equitable Chance in Life' was the support provided to Country Offices to contribute to develop more nationally-led, systems-based social protection approaches. This was achieved via knowledge leadership, coupled with timely technical and capacity support to Country Offices.

In terms of evidence, MENARO launched two regional studies on Building [Shock-responsive National Social Protection Systems](#) (March 2019) and [Fiscal Space for Child Sensitive Social Protection](#) (July 2019) that highlighted the criticality of these aspects in ensuring more robust national social protection systems in MENA countries. Furthermore, UNICEF has partnered with LAS and ESCWA to initiate the rollout of an Arab Poverty and Social Policies Center in Jordan, which is expected to be a regional public good in terms of strengthening knowledge and capacities around poverty and social protection in MENA.

MENARO also provided technical support to Country Offices to design context-specific approaches in ensuring stronger national social protection systems. The regional support system set up in partnership with the International Policy Center for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) provided technical assistance to COs to help strengthen national social protection policies (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia), identify options/design for improved child focused social protection programmes (Morocco, Tunisia) and highlight areas for more shock responsive data/delivery systems (Iran, Sudan). Beyond this, direct technical support benefited COs such as Yemen (to preserve a large-scale national social protection system benefiting 1.5 million beneficiaries in a context of active conflict), Syria (conceptualizing a more effective social protection approach straddling a context of humanitarian-development nexus) and Sudan (identifying options for accelerated national social protection reform amidst a historical political transition).

Strengthening national social protection systems to address child poverty has also been identified as one of 4 regional 'accelerators' for UNICEF in MENA, which will ensure a strong prioritization for this agenda going forward.

## **B. Generating, Promoting and Leveraging Public Goods**

This result pillar in the ROMP focuses on enhancing partnership, accelerating advocacy, support programming based on the evidence, which encompasses key UNICEF Strategic Plan strategies such as public engagement, advocacy, partnership, leveraging resources, and using power of evidence to guide and support country offices to deliver more effective results for children.

In 2019, public advocacy work focused on children in armed conflict while partnerships and donor relations efforts helped to expand the donor base at both the regional and country office levels. In addition, advocacy, policy dialogue and consultations continued to advance the agenda on public finance for children. Research plan implementation were strengthened and led to generating and leveraging evidence for positive change for children including humanitarian context.



### Public Engagement

The public awareness of children's issues in the MENA increased through a number of multi-sectoral milestones, helping to paint a comprehensive regional picture on what it means to grow up as a child in a region impacted by poverty, deprivation and armed conflict. MENA Regional office expanded the circle of audiences through the digital transformation project and public outreach.

Given the challenging situation in the MENA region – the multiple conflicts, escalation of violence in hotspots such as Syria, Yemen, Sudan and the State of Palestine, and the grave protection issues – focus was put on children and armed conflict and the impact violence is having on children's lives and well-being. In action, this translated into publishing 87 statements, news notes and press releases. Most of these highlighted the protection of children with clear advocacy asks calling on parties to stop the bloodshed and protect children.

In March 2019, to mark eight years of war in Syria, UNICEF launched its first-ever album of children's songs that are popular in MENA called 'Album 11' and they were sung by children in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. This is part of the psychosocial support programme to help children impacted by the Syria crisis. The album is a result of a partnership between UNICEF and the renowned Lebanese composer, Jad Rahbani, with support from the European Union.

A public perception survey, the first-ever in the history of UNICEF at such a large scale, was finalized. The survey covered 17 countries and nearly 12,000 people. Mostly using a face-to-face method, the survey covered three key areas: a) people's perception of, and trust in the UNICEF brand, b) key priorities for children in MENA and c) the tools that people in MENA use to get news and information. The survey is critical as it brings first-hand information on the 'pulse of the street' in the region. It is aimed at contributing to decision making at the country and regional levels in areas that UNICEF should "move the needle on" and influence and create change via policy.

### Harnessing Partnerships and Resources for children

In 2019, in the area of partnerships, alliances and donor relations, UNICEF in the MENA region faced the challenge of mobilizing resources in a context of escalating multiple sub-regional conflicts, as well as donor fatigue, especially in countries facing protracted conflicts as well as forgotten emergencies. Despite that, MENARO continued to expand the region's donor base, advocating especially for multi-year, flexible and predictable funding. Examples of new funding attracted for countries offices and the MENARO included a Netherlands funded multi-partner, multi-country and multi-sector (education, adolescent development and participation, social policy and child protection) project on inclusive jobs and education for forcibly displaced persons and host communities; a Canada funded programme supporting a regional approach to respond effectively to the needs of children in four countries; Luxemburg's support to the No Lost Generation (NLG) initiative, and a partnership with Food for Peace by the Nutrition Section, which generated US\$11 million for three offices and the MENARO. Discussion started for a private sector partnership for winterization – an area for which fundraising becomes increasingly challenging. New strategic partnerships have expanded under specific thematic areas with the World Bank (life skills, social protection, human capital, cash transfers), WHO (PHC and cholera preparedness and response), and UNDP (youth, governance for children).

The No Lost Generation (NLG) initiative continued to allow UNICEF and its partners to rally donors, NGOs and Governments in support of education, child protection and youth programming for children affected by the Syria and Iraq crisis. In 2019, MENARO coordinated an external evaluation and extensive consultations with all stakeholders which led to defining and agreeing on a new Phase III for NLG initiative. Phase III covers the period from September 2019 to September 2022, with a stronger focus on effective and evidence-based advocacy, while strengthening the partnership and communicating more clearly NLG's purpose and advocacy priorities.

MENARO also strengthened its capacity to partner with the private sector. Dedicated capacity has been outposted by PFP to MENARO. In June, PFP/MENARO held the first MENARO/PFP/NatCom workshop to strengthen PFP fundraising in support of the humanitarian response in MENA in the context of dwindling resources and decreasing funding.

### *Leveraging Resources and Markets for Children*

This year witnessed progress in P4FC and leveraging resources at regional and country levels. At regional level, Public Finance for Children (PF4C) training, contextualized for the MENA region, was conducted for 37 participants from 14 country offices, to equip participants with practical knowledge on public finance management and PF4C.

At country level, PF4C orientation and training workshops, aimed at expanding fiscal space for children, targeted key line ministries, including the Ministry of Finance in Oman and Saudi Arabia (KSA). In KSA, PF4C an orientation session was conducted and dialogue on domestic financing was initiated, while in Oman, government counterparts were trained on key public finance principles and a PF4C action plan was developed for 2019/2020, focusing on generating evidence and advocating for performance-based budgeting. Also, support was provided to the Oman country office in fiscal space analysis and financing options for inclusive education and early childhood education.

A Regional Public Finance for Pre-Primary Education (PF4PPE) workshop was conducted in Amman, helping to equip education and social policy focal points with knowledge and skills to engage in discussions on expanding fiscal space for PF4PPE. Financing child-sensitive social protection systems is a priority for the region, and the RO and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth launched a report that provides insights on possible fiscal spaces that country offices can leverage.

A strategic alliance with the World Bank and WHO was developed to map private sector engagement in the health sector. The Regional Consultative Workshop and regional study on private sector engagement in immunization were undertaken to generate knowledge on innovative and effective public-private collaboration, and address immunization service gaps and inequities.

### *Strategic Information, Research and Knowledge Management*

The global UNICEF Strategic Plan and the ROM recognize generating and leveraging evidence as a key strategy to drive change for children and women. In 2019, through a consultative process across MENARO sections, UNICEF country offices, headquarters (Data and Analytics section and the Office of Research) and sector partners (ESCWA, UNFPA, UNWOMEN, WHO and the World Bank), the MENARO prepared an evidence generation plan with 35 publications for 2019–2020. These addressed priority gaps in knowledge

on children in MENA, with focuses on the situation of children of foreign fighters and returned migrant refugees; systems strengthening for social protection; the social services workforce; measurement of life skills; and water scarcity and its impact on children. Concerted efforts by all regional sections led to the completion of twelve evidence products, two of which were flagship publications for MENA (an analysis on social workforce in the region, and a report on water scarcity and the implication for children).

New evidence has been generated and disseminated in cooperation with other United Nations partners on adolescents, HIV and AIDS, nutrition and complementary feeding, immunization, and the impact of water scarcity on children. The RO in cooperation with World Bank, completed and released the report on 'Measuring Life Skills', in conjunction with the finalization and the testing of a life skills measurement tool, as part of the regional initiative on Life Skills and Citizenship Education in MENA.

In addition to its own evidence generation work, MENARO provided systematic support to Country Offices in the planning of their analytical work, through the quality assurance of selected studies and researches, and by leading the ethical review process, in accordance to the UNICEF procedures for the ethical evidence generation.

MENARO also provided support to the Country Offices that are implementing Multiple Indicators Cluster Surveys (MICS). In 2019, two countries completed the MICS and publicly released their results, namely Iraq and Tunisia.

### C. Strengthening Organizational Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

The MENARO built on UNICEF's strong ranking in aid transparency by conducting a peer review of the various aspects of programme implementation and operations and enhanced risk-informed programming, including by investing in preparedness and advocacy on risk reduction in development plans.

In 2019, RO was able to strengthen regional management effectiveness through: 1) sound governance and management excellence; 2) regular monitoring of MENARO and country offices' key performance indicators for continuous improvement and efficiency gains; 3) continued improvements in regional office team performance; and 4) an enabling, greening-focused work environment that fosters staff well-being and inclusivity. A number of country offices were audited in 2019 and all are on track in terms of addressing the recommendations within the target period of 18 months.

MENARO also strengthened oversight on information and communications technology (ICT) connectivity infrastructure to improve management overview on technical and cost metrics, and ability to identify country offices requiring remediation. Building on this, and to help staff better communicate, share and collaborate easily and reliably, an updated communication platform that provides new and improved virtual conferencing tools has been launched in 2019. It enables country offices to benefit from efficiencies and performance improvements being delivered throughout the whole organization. Information and data security have been enhanced through implementation of an additional security measure – multi-factor authentication – which has helped to minimize phishing emails and ability of hackers to gain access to UNICEF systems via compromised user accounts.

Technology for Development (T4D) activities focused on the establishment of a regional T4D e-repository; capacity building for country offices through regional training and webinars; and engagement with

selected countries to support RapidPro scale-up for real-time monitoring. Finally, the 2019 regional ICT network event focused on elevating capabilities amongst our teams to guide and support business intelligence and data visualization initiatives in country offices.

Among numerous improvements in internal governance, the MENARO enhanced and strengthened financial controls, streamlined business functions and simplified partners payments system in fast-moving emergencies. This was a critical shift to improve Regional Office's ability to respond quickly.

#### ***D. Whole of Syria Programme***

The RO continued to support Syrian children as part of the Whole of Syria (WoS) approach and aligned with the WoS Joint Operational Plan. RO's cross border operations alone reached 3,486,744 people, including an estimated 2,359,645 children as of end of December, through national and international NGO partners, with USD 40.7m of funding out of USD 84.3m required. Under the Amman hub, UNICEF reached 367,838 people by end of December 2019, including 226,403 children with USD 12 million of funds. The Gaziantep hub covered Idlib, West and North Aleppo, North Hama, and reached 3,146,221 people, including 2,159,404 children by December 2019 with funding of USD28.6 million. Overall, the Syria programme, across all hubs, was 73% funded in 2019.

The use of Rapid Response Teams has been extremely effective in the delivery of critical and timely supplies and services. UNICEF continues to partner on a wide range of programmes across Syria, supply and re-stock partners in 2019, in addition to pre-positioning contingency stocks given the escalations and uncertainty over the renewal UN Security Council Resolution, especially in the last quarter of the year. Given that the cross-border programmes are managed remotely, UNICEF has maintained risk mitigation procedures to minimize the risks to the programmes. Financial and programmatic assurance under the HACT framework has included third party monitoring of cross border partners, financial spot checks and audits.

Effective coordination with the clusters has been sustained to avoid duplication and prioritise response and the UNICEF response plan is regularly updated and continues to guide the northwest response. UNICEF is cluster lead agency for the WASH, Education and Nutrition clusters, and the Child Protection area of responsibility. UNICEF has ensured capacity is in place for the Whole of Syria cluster coordinators for WASH and Child Protection based in Amman. An identified gap in Education Cluster coordination capacity in UNICEF Amman level has been rectified by end 2019. Cluster coordination is also in place for each of the hubs in Damascus, Amman and Gaziantep. UNICEF also engages strategically with multiple fora, including the High-Level Group in Gaziantep and the Syria Strategic Group for Syria as a whole.

#### ***E. Humanitarian Action***

MENA continued to represent high levels of humanitarian needs with protracted emergencies such as Yemen, Syria, Libya, State of Palestine, IPD in Iraq, Syria refugee in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. MENA provided continuous technical support to the COs in area of coordination, preparedness, planning and response.

The RO conducted Emergency Preparedness Platform (EPP) training with all COs and developed detailed preparedness plans which were quality assured by the RO EPP Working Group to ensure all COs comply with Minimum Preparedness Standards (MPS). The RO also developed its own preparedness plan and is

now fully complying with regional MPS. A MENA user engagement group was also created to inform the global EPP agenda and ensure that MENA specificities will be included in global preparedness policies. Preparedness was also fostered through collaboration with the IFRC at regional and country level, also contributing to the localization agenda and strengthening community-based initiatives. The RO Social Policy team supported Djibouti, Iraq, Libya, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Yemen in the EPP process, with special focus on cash-based programming, providing hands-on technical support in Yemen which is implementing the largest UNICEF-supported Emergency Cash Transfer Programme. The MENA region kept advocating and supporting government in building shock-responsive social protection systems in order to bridge the humanitarian-development gap.

In addition, the RO actively contributed to the development of the global Accountability to Affected Population (AAP) agenda. Support to COs has stepped up through facilitation of specific AAP sessions in Communication for Development (C4D), Education and Humanitarian Network meetings to further familiarise AAP concepts and identify key actions to operationalize AAP at CO level. To further enhance the integration of AAP in CO programming, a regional webinar on AAP was conducted and MENA compendium of good practices and lessons learned was finalised and disseminated. A Regional Cholera and Outbreak Task Force was created with participation of relevant sections in WASH, Health and Nutrition, C4D, Humanitarian, Supply and Logistics and Human Resources. The Task Force served as a one coordination mechanism for joint analysis of data and development of integrated support strategies from MENARO, as well as an operational mechanism for integrated technical support to country offices facing outbreaks and public health emergencies.

In 2019, MENARO strengthened analysis, advocacy and learning to inform humanitarian strategies and improve outcomes for children. This was done through review of country office-level analytical and country planning documents. To ensure analytical work was reflected in other aspects of UNICEF's work, regional humanitarian products were produced, including quarterly humanitarian overview presentations. The online MENARO Humanitarian Data Repository was finalized at the end of the year, which provides a one-stop shop for humanitarian data and analysis of trends in the region.

## ***F. Cross-cutting Programming Areas***

### ***Programme Planning***

MENARO supported Iraq for CPD formulation, four MTR processes (Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Yemen), four CPD extension process (Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen) with technical guidance and quality assurance activities with a focus on risk informed programming and result-based management. In view of strengthening RBM capacity and applications at field level, various training module from Programme Policy and Procedure, Result Based Management, Human Rights Based Approach in Programming, Guidance for Risk Informed Programming and Emergency Preparedness and Response were reviewed in a co-creation workshop with the participation of Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Yemen COs. The approach of integrating humanitarian and regular programming learning modules was tested in a training conducted in Iraq and Syria. Cos were sensitized on the UNSDCF guidance and its criticality when developing PSNs and CPDs.

MENARO strengthened the risk management approach in programming through pre-audit peer review on programme & planning jointly completed with RO operations for Jordan, Syria, Yemen and Sudan COs as

well as follow-up with OIA. Furthermore, for better risk management and strengthening and speeding of humanitarian responses by Implementing Partners, RO supported COs in the roll out of Civil Society Organization procedure 2019, and the new guidance on follow up actions from financial assurance activities. The RO supported the Cos to adopt different eTool portals, meeting the target of roll out except Trip Management portal, to enhance the feedback loop and enhance the programme quality.

Additionally, COs were kept abreast with all the latest global guidelines, policies and tools, Collaboration for Results initiative, including collaboration with other regional UN agencies through the Peer Support Group (PSG), UN Reform and SDGs taskforces.

### Gender

Significant progress was reported in Implementing GAP institutional results, between 2018 and 2019 MENA almost doubled its expenditure on gender programming from 7 % in 2018 to 13.3% in 2019, slightly short of the global target of 15%. 7 staff from MENA benefited from the global gender Pro capacity building plan and more than 150 staff across MENA countries joined gender orientation / training opportunity across the year including MENARO first Virtual Network Meeting for gender focal points. UNICEF also led gender analysis training module in WFP regional TOT training for 25 WFP gender focal points .While gaps in compliance with gender staffing guideline remain, the year witnessed recruitment of three dedicated gender HR capacity in Yemen, Sudan and Lebanon, and Gender Programmatic Reviews (GPR) were initiated for Morocco Jordan and Yemen reflecting increasing attention and accountability to gender programming in the region.

2019 also observed a momentous milestone in fostering regional partnerships to drive gender results. Within the humanitarian context, UNICEF MENARO led efforts culminated in the establishment of a No Lost Generation (NLG) gender taskforce. This UN – NGO taskforce is now co-led by UNICEF and Plan international. With advocacy and technical support of this group, gender related advocacy messages and issues are now well position in NLG Phase III strategy and the taskforce has been integrated in the NLG steering committee. Within development context, UNICEF MENARO managed to engage and mobilize UN agencies and NGO partners to join UNICEF in its regional flagship study on the Situational Analysis of Girls and Women in MENA. The initiative is now an interagency initiative within the wider undg agenda. In line with regional efforts towards Beijing+25 agenda, UNICEF also contributed to efforts led by ESCWA and UN Women in the development of Arab State Progress report and organization of the high-level meeting with member states.

In field of Knowledge management, the gender virtual network meeting was an opportunity to share country level gender priorities and experiences across GAP results, A joint ADAP , Education and Gender webinar was also organized on Skills for Girls brining experiences from Egypt and Jordan .MENARO also supported the development of several knowledge products including ; Social protection and gender equality in MENA - background paper for CSW side event ; Brief of Preliminary Findings: Health, Dignity and Rights of Women and Girls in MENA and Arab States – As first product of regional partnerships for the situation analysis of women and girls; Digital access- risks & opportunities for girls in the region –

background document for the private sector mobile application advocacy meeting ; as well as an article for the Global child marriage newsletter<sup>7</sup>.

### Communication for Development

In 2019, MENARO strengthened the social and behaviour change dimensions of key sectoral and cross-sectoral initiatives at the regional level that included the Parenting Mapping and Strategy, as well as the Review and identification of good practices in Accountability to Affected Populations, particularly in relation to community feedback and response mechanisms.

MENARO engaged in global consultations and led regional discussions and conceptualization of approaches to strengthen social cohesion, peacebuilding and conflict resolution programming in the region. Partner advocacy and the development of an approach to create a Regional Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) Alliance was initiated in 2019 for launch during the planned 3rd Global SBCC Summit for 2020 in Morocco.

A critical achievement during the year was the development and launch of a new theoretical framework 'Behaviour Drivers Model' and accompanying research tools and programming guidance building out of the previous work on social norms within the region. The model is being used as a basis to conduct participatory situational assessments, design and operationalize strategies and programmes, monitor the extent to which interventions are being implemented, and evaluate effectiveness and changes in behavioural and social outcomes. Drawing from this, MENARO led the establishment of a major, cross-regional study in collaboration with ESA and WCA Regions across 11 countries, 5 of which are in the MENA region on a range of child rights issues including child nutrition, child marriage, and FGM. The study is being conducted by IPSOS and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Field work will be completed between 2020-21 and findings will be used to design multi-layered social and behaviour change national programmes as well as finetune tools and guidance.

MENARO also provided targeted support to country offices to enhance technical approaches based on evidence, and C4D capacity in the areas of social norms-based programming with focus on child protection, ending child marriage and FGMC in Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon, Djibouti and Jordan. To build institutional and professional capacity in SBCC/C4D within the region, MENARO supported the successful regional roll-out of the fifth cohort of the UNICEF-NYU Global Learning Programme on Behavioural Communication for Epidemics held in January 2019 in Beirut, in collaboration with the American University of Beirut. Over 70 students and professionals from NYU, UNICEF, AUB alumni, and officials from ministries of health in the Arab region participated in the eight-day training course.

### Early Childhood Development

As part of the joint advocacy efforts to invest on Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the MENA region, No Lost Generation partners under the leadership of UNICEF MENA RO in cooperation with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Plan International and the International Rescue Committee

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<sup>7</sup> Global child marriage newsletter Issue 11, Sep 2019 "Gender inequality is a root cause of child marriage both in stable contexts and in situations of crisis. How can crises exacerbate gender inequalities and hence the incidence of child marriage?"

organized a donor briefing and panel discussion on ECD in December 2019 to identify investment gaps and opportunities. An initial mapping revealed that while compelling work to support families is underway, the provision of ECD services in the Syria and Iraq Humanitarian Response Plans is only reaching a fraction of the total number of children in need. The briefing and panel discussion presented an opportunity for the NLG partners to engage with key stakeholders on evidence, developments and policy as well as programmatic priorities with regards to ECD in the region. Recommendations were made available in a number of platforms (NLG newsletter, for the Brussels Conference in 2020 etc.)

UNICEF MENARO has initiated a regional study on ECD to document good practices on ECD in the region and improve understanding of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, including in emergency contexts, and propose options for scaling up and investing in multisectoral ECD.

MENARO has provided technical assistance to a number of countries to adapt Care for Child Development, a training package targeting health, education, social welfare and other practitioners. The training package is aligned to the Nurturing Care Framework that promotes the holistic development of the child.

### Supply Management

In 2019, UNICEF MENA region procurement throughput continued to be the largest among UNICEF regions with a total annual procurement of USD 513 million out of a record total annual procurement of goods and services of USD 3.826 billion. Over USD 100 million worth of supplies went towards emergency responses in Yemen and Syria Arab Republic and surrounding region mainly for vaccines, Nutrition, WASH, winter clothing and Education.

In 2019, MENARO supported MENA countries to locally source children's winter clothing and family hygiene kits. This contributed to USD 1.9 million in savings from the procurement of children's winter clothes and USD 3.4 million in savings from the procurement of family hygiene kits. MENARO also supported various initiatives in Yemen including construction and rehabilitation of schools, water networks, health facilities and medical warehouse facilities. In addition, MENARO supported Yemen CO to alleviate the supplies transportation issues by establishing new corridors and establishing a hub for Yemen at Salalah, Oman.

MENARO supported countries in the region to overcome vaccine procurement challenges and providing practical options to bridge financing gaps, including Sudan for routine and GAVI supported vaccines, Yemen on routine and GAVI vaccines especially cholera vaccines, Libya on Measles vaccine, State of Palestine on routine vaccines as well as Iran in the face of sanctions. In addition, MENARO supported forecasting of supplies and quantification of budget gaps.

In collaboration with Supply Division MENARO has continued to explore pharmaceutical markets, with Tunisia and Morocco complementing assessments undertaken in 2018 in Jordan and Egypt. Capacity has been further built among Cos to offer Governments strategic procurement services of Health and Nutrition commodities. Significant savings are now recorded under the Iraq Government budget thanks the Government's reliance on UNICEF Procurement services.

Through a joint Supply Division and MENARO, conducted a training with WASH on sanitation market shaping for MENA countries with participation of 30 staff from MENA country offices.

Through MTR in 2019, MENARO Supply function was re-structured in order to align MENARO supply to other UNICEF regional supply functions. As a result, a process was started to transfer MENARO



procurement transactions to Jordan Country. This will create capacity for MENARO Supply function to offer more, better and forecasted technical support to MENA countries.

### Evaluation

In 2019, as in previous years, MENA has faced challenges in evaluation coverage both in terms of number of evaluations as well as percentage of budget spent. During 2019 seven evaluations were completed and as in previous years the quality rating so far has been mostly highly satisfactory or satisfactory. One of the MENA evaluation “Evaluation of Family Centres as Community Level Service Delivery Mechanisms Reaching Vulnerable Children in Gaza for the period June 2015 to October 2017” has just been nominated for the Best of UNICEF Research and Evaluation finalists.

For MENARO, 2019 has been a year with a focus on assessing the situation more objectively and preparing for a more comprehensive approach. Evaluation has been a topic at the Regional Management Team (RMT) for the first time and the representatives committed the placement of two multi country evaluation specialists in MENA countries to cover Algeria, Djibouti, GAO, Libya, Sudan and Syria. Toward the end of 2019 MENARO has initiated a timetable for 2020, with key steps of (a) updating the costed evaluation plan, (b) identifying the key question(s) the evaluations in 2020 should answer, (c) a deadline for draft ToRs for evaluation and an evaluation ToR clinic for peer learning on evaluation ToR writing.

Another focus of work has been to improve coverage in 2019, and the MENA region has initiated evaluations primarily in countries that did not have evaluations for three years. At the end of 2019 Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and Syria have ongoing evaluations that are likely to be completed by end of 2020.

The participation of MENA in the global conference on National Evaluation Capacity building where training was provided to governments on how to best integrate evaluation in the SDG reporting cycle was much appreciated by participants from national governments.

### Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

Gender analyses of the region indicate that women and girls face a systematic gender gap, lack of laws that provide for equality of rights, and are at greater risk of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse. Yet, SEA allegations remain extremely underreported across MENA underscoring the need to strengthen community-based complaints mechanisms, community awareness, and UNICEF staff and partner knowledge and accountability to report allegations of SEA.

To address identified issues around PSEA, in 2019, Country Offices in MENA were provided remote and in-country technical support in three pillars of work related to PSEA – 1) internal UNICEF processes, including capacity building and community-based complaint mechanisms; 2) linkages to quality, accessible survivor assistance; and 3) increasing access to accountability mechanisms, including safe investigations. Capacity building was supported through in-country trainings, for example, in Iraq and Libya, in addition to remote support through webinars targeting the 8 countries benefiting from 7% Set Aside Funds for PSEA: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Learning and cross-country exchange was cultivated through quarterly calls with Country Office Representatives and MENARO as well as bi-monthly technical level calls with PSEA Focal Points. Recognising the accountability for PSEA across all of UNICEF, sessions on PSEA were included in Regional Management Team meetings, and various Network Meetings. PSEA was more systematically included in the reviews of Country Office

Emergency Preparedness Plans as well as in Accountability to Affected Populations initiatives. In addition, MENARO supported all Country Offices to include the new PSEA clauses in all partnership agreements and directly provided orientation for MENARO partners on PSEA procedures and obligations as part of UNICEF partnership agreements.

### Part 3: LESSONS LEARNED AND CONSTRAINTS

As the ROMP has deliberately focused on the key accountabilities expected from a Regional Office and has been mindful of not superimposing regional priorities on top of those agreed through the country programming process, it has required important adjustments from MENARO, strong management processes and significant internal investment in team work to deliver on its strategic intent. This effort might have come to the expense of attention to acceleration of results at CO level, and emphasis on support over oversight. MENARO has carefully and inclusively reviewed key lessons learnt during the first two years of implementation. These are as follows:

- To be optimal, interaction between RO and CO needs to be based on a sustained engagement approach with a right balance between support, guidance, oversight and involvement of HQ as need be;
- Support requirements of COs are best identified through a dialectic approach to have a good understanding of actual needs at the onset. Feedback at the end of missions are needed to improve real time improvement to CO support;
- Common issues faced by COs would benefit from RO-led joint programme/operations peer reviews (e.g. countries under sanctions, management of remote response, civic engagement, donor engagement, etc.);
- Expanded quality support to COs relies to a great extent on the RO's ability to mobilize external expertise including through LTA, other ROs, MENA peer support, and HQ with predefined set of parameters;
- Despite acute crises affecting the Region and requiring UNICEF's immediate attention and response, the Organization must continue to invest in accompanying socio-economic development in the region, longer-term analysis and change strategies to address entrenched norms and navigate long-term drivers of change; and
- Staff wellbeing improvements must be embedded in each unit work plan to create the caring environment necessary for UNICEF MENARO to effectively deliver on its ROMP commitments.
- To deliver ambitious humanitarian agenda in increasingly complex operating environment, UNICEF needs leaders who have the right skillsets and experience and who are also accountable for what their country office delivers on. In 2020 it will be key to work with country offices to invest and build on internal capacities, improve surge mechanisms, roll out the updated Core Commitment for Children (CCCs), and support strengthening of leadership, including through integrating CCCs in UNICEF internal accountability mechanism.

For 2020-21, the office aims at supporting the following shifts:

- Increase UNICEF MENARO capacity to more systematically support COs when progress on specific child indicators is too slow, and to work with COs in accelerating results in common programmatic

areas where such opportunities exist (identified as MENA accelerators): a/ Addressing violence against children, especially in homes, schools and institutions; b/ Improving adolescent girls and boys' skills, learning and employability right from early childhood, and taking advantage of GenU; c/ Expanding social protection national systems to reduce multi-dimensional poverty and vulnerabilities; and d/ Scaling up UNICEF's specific programmatic response to the climate crisis including water scarcity. In MENA, acceleration of results in the above areas means amongst others, supporting the development of systems, making Governments' finances work for children, addressing entrenched social norms (such as gender), responding to humanitarian needs with a longer-term perspective, and partnering with the private sectors for solutions and jobs for young women and men.

- Improve RO monitoring of MENA contribution to the UNICEF Strategic Plan results.
- Strengthen RO capacity to support COs in risks management in a more cohesive way.
- Strengthen synergies and better integrate the use of evidence generation and data work in the Country Programme cycle.
- Optimize efficiencies in Supply/Procurement transactions and refocus MENARO's attention on its oversight and support functions by exploring synergies between Supply functions respectively supported by the RO and the Jordan Country Office.
- Improve duty of care for staff, with a stronger emphasis on staff safety, security and well-being.
- Further delineate accountabilities and strengthen firewalls between the key RO accountabilities and its unique coordination role vis-à-vis the Whole of Syria operation, and reflect that the latest Syria cross-border resolution means that UNICEF will not be a conduit for the funding of NGOs operating cross-border from Iraq into Northeast Syria. Establishing separate cost centres for the Gaziantep/Turkey outpost and the Amman-based support to the cross-border operations is a further step in this direction.