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Annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action

Summary

Globally, 1 in 33 people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, up from 1 in 45 people just one year ago.^a Against this backdrop of rising humanitarian needs, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has generated the most widespread humanitarian crisis that the world has ever seen.

This report presents an overview of how UNICEF responded to humanitarian crises – globally and at the country level – in 2020. It also outlines the key challenges met and lessons learned in humanitarian action, and how UNICEF plans to act on these lessons.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are presented in section X.

^a United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Global Humanitarian Overview 2021, New York, 1 December 2020.

* E/ICEF/2021/9.

Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.



I. Overview

1. In 2020, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic – combined with prolonged and violent conflict, large-scale population displacement, the global hunger crisis and climate-related disasters – drove humanitarian needs to their highest level yet. As of December 2020, 235 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.¹
2. In early 2020, UNICEF requested \$4.2 billion through the Humanitarian Action for Children appeal to respond to the humanitarian needs of women and children across the world. By the end of the year, the appeal had reached \$6.3 billion – an unprecedented level, which was largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of December, UNICEF had received \$2.2 billion in humanitarian contributions for the 2020 appeal. Despite the generosity of resource partners, the funding shortfall was significant.
3. During the year, UNICEF and its implementing partners responded to 455 new and ongoing humanitarian situations in 152 countries, reaching millions of children with life-saving, gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive interventions. This included 17 million children aged 6 months to 15 years reached with measles vaccination; 4 million children treated for severe acute malnutrition; 32.6 million children reached with learning opportunities; 47.2 million children provided with mental health and psychosocial support; 146 million people reached with emergency water supply interventions; and 2.5 million households provided with humanitarian cash assistance. These results were delivered in line with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) and the global COVID-19 response strategy.
4. To strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of its humanitarian action, UNICEF released the revised CCCs, which respond to a critical need to provide timely and quality humanitarian support in the midst of fast-moving emergencies. UNICEF also completed a humanitarian review, which examines the organization’s humanitarian operations in the context of the global challenges of the twenty-first century and makes recommendations for how to strengthen the organization’s capacity to deliver principled, timely, quality and child-centred humanitarian response and advocacy. In addition, UNICEF strengthened its ability to protect women and children against gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse in its humanitarian action.
5. Both the new CCCs and the humanitarian review recommendations will provide important frameworks for UNICEF to continue to strengthen its humanitarian action in 2021 and for years to come. UNICEF is also revising its emergency procedures based on learning from the COVID-19 response, to align with the revised CCCs and to operationalize the recommendations of the humanitarian review. This effort will make the organization more predictable, timely and efficient in its humanitarian coordination, response and advocacy.

¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Global Humanitarian Overview 2021, New York, 1 December 2020.

II. The humanitarian situation in 2020

6. Humanitarian needs grew exponentially in 2020. By the end of the year, 235 million people – 1 in 33 people worldwide – were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. That represents a significant increase from the 1 in 45 people in need when the year began, which was already the highest figure in decades.²

7. Prolonged and violent conflict remained a key driver of humanitarian needs across the globe. In 2020, violence escalated in South Sudan, the Sudan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Yemen, the central Sahel and the Cabo Delgado Province of Mozambique; new conflicts broke out in places such as the Tigray region, Ethiopia. The impacts of armed conflict and violence have been particularly devastating for children, with interruptions to education and health services and heightened risk of conflict-related sexual violence.

8. Over the past decade more people have been internally displaced by conflict and violence than ever before.³ At the start of 2021, there were an estimated 51 million internally displaced persons, and the number of refugees had doubled to 20 million.⁴ In the central Sahel, for example, more than a million children have been forced to flee due to armed conflict and insecurity – a 64 per cent increase from 2019.⁵

9. Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 pandemic generated the most widespread humanitarian, socioeconomic and human and child rights crisis that the world has ever seen. The crisis has strained already overburdened social and health service delivery systems; left millions of children out of school; contributed to rising rates of violence against children; undermined access to vital water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) resources; heightened vulnerabilities for children on the move; and eroded hard-won advances in global development.

10. Ongoing conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic also deepened an already severe hunger crisis. By the end of 2020, the number of people facing acute food insecurity reached an estimated 270 million – an 82 per cent increase since the outbreak of COVID-19.⁶ In Africa, more children are stunted than in the year 2000; and more than 70 per cent of people facing chronic hunger are women and girls.⁷

11. Climate change and environmental degradation continue to deepen these vulnerabilities. Over the past 30 years, the number of climate-related disasters – from severe drought to flooding – has tripled.⁸ In East Asia, the Mekong Region was hit by more than four storms in just one month in 2020. These disasters disproportionately impact the most vulnerable children and families, threatening food security, increasing water scarcity and forcing people from their homes.

III. UNICEF global humanitarian response in 2020

12. In 2020, UNICEF and its implementing partners responded to 455 new and ongoing humanitarian situations in 152 countries, compared with 281 humanitarian situations in 96 countries and territories in 2019. The significant increase in the number of humanitarian situations and countries can be attributed to the UNICEF humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 152 countries, which represents

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ UNICEF, UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2021 – Overview, New York, December 2020.

⁶ OCHA, Global Humanitarian Overview 2021.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

the largest humanitarian response – and the first global emergency response – in the history of the organization.

13. The UNICEF humanitarian response in 2020 was delivered in accordance with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, and the global COVID-19 response strategy. To meet humanitarian needs, UNICEF continued to leverage its long-standing comparative advantages, including having a field presence before, during and after emergencies; delivering multisectoral support; leading or co-leading four clusters/areas of responsibility; and harnessing its vast network of partners, including Governments, civil society, communities and the private sector.

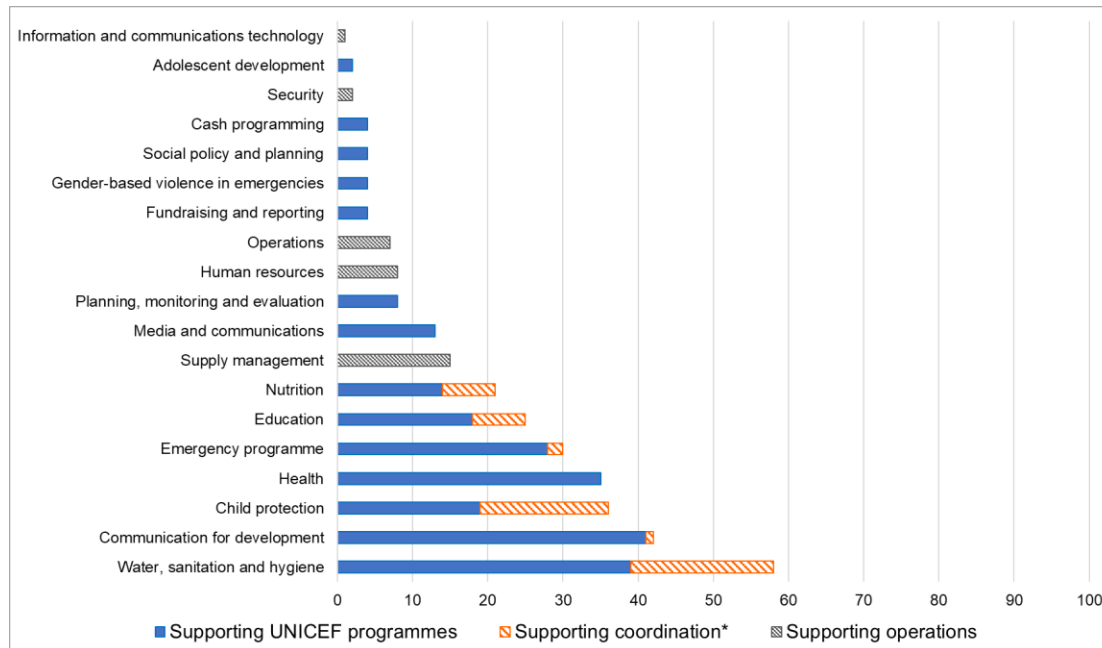
14. Across its humanitarian action, UNICEF continued to focus on: strengthening the response to mass population displacements and protracted crises; increasing the coverage and quality of humanitarian assistance; recognizing the profoundly different and gendered impacts of crises on women and men, and girls and boys; advocating for the central role of protection, with particular attention to specialized protection services for children in armed conflicts; and growing organizational capacity to support, operate and deliver critical services to the most vulnerable children in remote, insecure, high-risk and complex humanitarian emergencies.

15. Globally, UNICEF and its implementing partners delivered results for millions of emergency-affected children in 2020. This action included responses to three Level 2 emergencies: the complex humanitarian situations in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger) and internal displacement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and four large-scale Level 3 emergencies: the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, protracted emergencies in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, and the global COVID-19 pandemic. Since the UNICEF Level 3 response to the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020, UNICEF has reached 261 million children with vital health, nutrition, education, child protection, gender-based violence and social protection services.⁹ UNICEF and partners also reached 3 billion people (including approximately 810 million children and 1.5 billion women and girls) with life-saving risk communication and community engagement information and activities to support well-being and a reduction in COVID-19 transmission and mortality.

16. A total of 319 emergency (surge) deployments were completed in 2020 – down from 600 in 2019 – and amounted to 33,850 days of support (on average, 122 days per deployment). The significant decrease in the number of deployments in 2020 compared with 2019 can be attributed to pandemic-related restrictions. UNICEF adapted by quickly developing essential legal, operational and duty of care frameworks. The largest share of deployments (44 per cent, or 141 deployments) supported the humanitarian response to COVID-19; followed by the explosion in Beirut, which benefited from 39 deployments; and the emergency in Burkina Faso, which received 17 deployments. The bulk of deployments provided personnel for WASH, communication for development and child protection.

⁹ The UNICEF COVID-19 strategy contributes directly to some of the key pillars of the World Health Organization’s multi-agency Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan for the pandemic and the United Nations Global Humanitarian Response Plan led by OCHA, as well as the United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19. The UNICEF response to COVID-19 is described in detail in the document “Update on UNICEF humanitarian action: the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic”, which was presented at the 2021 first regular session of the Executive Board. This paper focuses on UNICEF humanitarian action more broadly.

Figure I
Emergency deployments by functional area, 2020

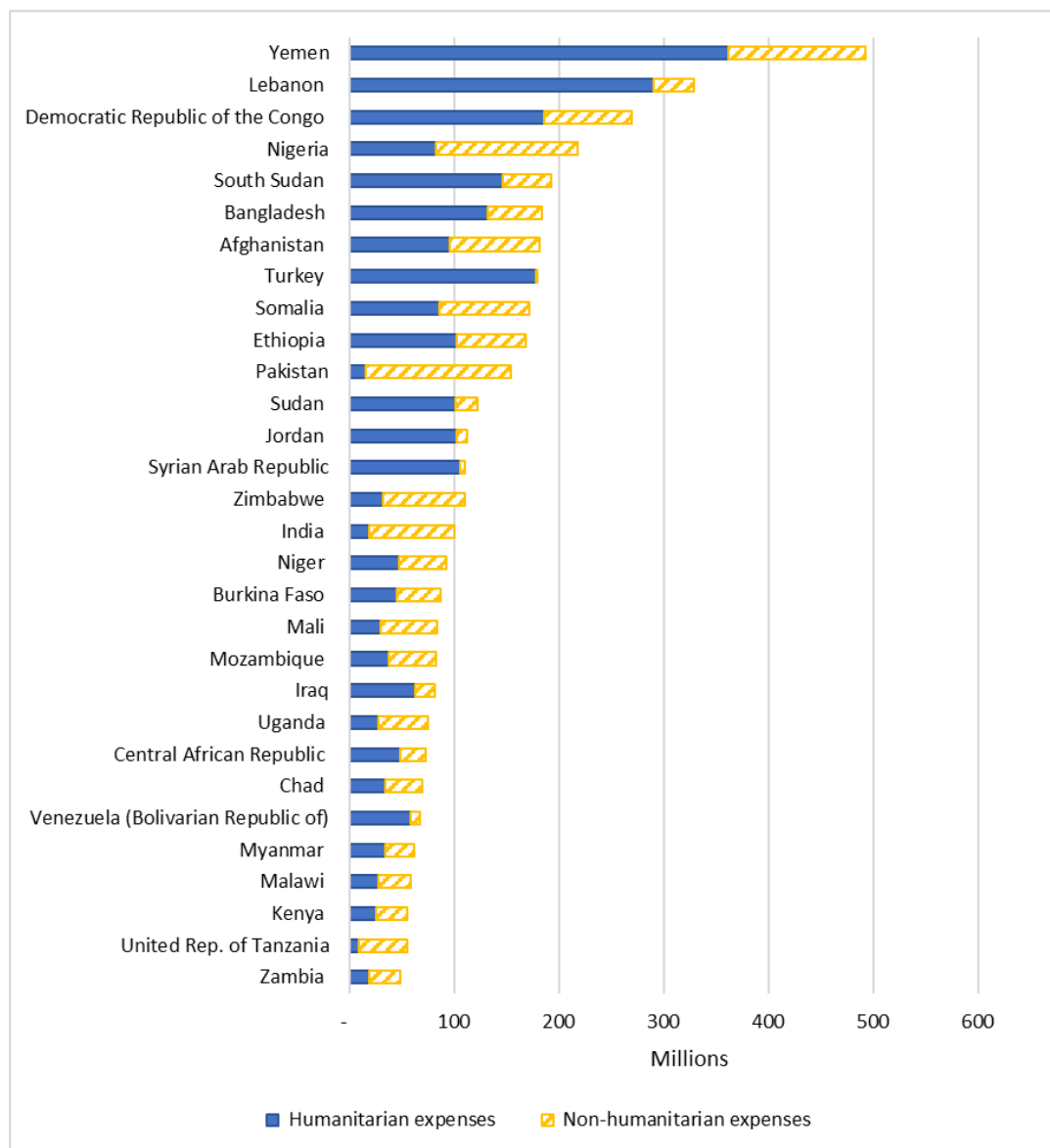


* Includes rapid response teams, standby partners and UNICEF deployments in support of cluster coordination.

17. Procurement for emergencies reached \$682.5 million globally, with 94 per cent (\$640.6 million) going to Level 2 and Level 3 emergencies. Supplies were provided to 143 countries and territories preparing for, or responding to emergencies, or both. The Supply Division provided direct support through 25 staff deployments to locations including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Yemen. The largest component of emergency supplies by value was medical renewables, including personal protective equipment worth \$197.2 million procured for the COVID-19 response.

18. Humanitarian action played a significant role in field operations in 2020, totalling 57 per cent (\$3.24 billion) of overall UNICEF expenses. Of all country-level expenses, 53 per cent (\$3.01 billion) supported humanitarian response. In Greece, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey, more than 90 per cent of country-level expenses were classified as humanitarian. Of the 30 country offices with the largest overall expenses, 26 of them were included in the 2020 Humanitarian Action for Children appeal. Humanitarian action for these offices comprised 77 per cent of total country-level expenses, both humanitarian and non-humanitarian.

Figure II
Top 30 country offices in terms of 2020 expenses (all funding types)
 (in millions of United States dollars)



*With the exception of India, Malawi, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, all of the country offices listed had Humanitarian Action for Children appeals in 2020.

IV. Humanitarian partnerships and collaborations

19. UNICEF continued to prioritize close collaboration with partners in its humanitarian action in 2020. For example, during the year, UNICEF worked with 1,852 civil society partners (1,294 local and 558 international non-governmental organizations (NGOs)). Nearly \$555 million in cash was transferred to civil society partners (more than 58 per cent to local partners). UNICEF also partnered with national government responders, transferring nearly \$244 million in humanitarian funding. Overall, 28 per cent of humanitarian funding went directly to local and national civil society and government responders, exceeding the target of 25 per cent.

20. Strong engagement with other United Nations entities remained vital to UNICEF humanitarian response. Collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) from the onset of the pandemic enabled unprecedented access to and participation in the global health planning and response to COVID-19. With WHO, UNICEF co-authored global infection prevention and control guidance for health facilities, schools, homes and communities or public spaces; and UNICEF, WHO and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies jointly developed a global risk communication and community engagement strategy.

21. In 2020, UNICEF and the Office for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees launched the Blueprint for Joint Action for refugee children. Blueprint is an ambitious initiative supporting the Governments of 10 countries to reach more than 10 million refugee and host children with essential education, WASH and child protection services. By modelling an innovative, effective and efficient collaboration that aims to realize substantive cost savings and to improve efficiency, the Blueprint also directly contributes to United Nations reform.

22. UNICEF continued to support the humanitarian system and to deliver on its responsibility for inter-agency coordination by mobilizing, leading and organizing collective efforts through its cluster lead agency roles. In 2020, UNICEF designated staff to lead or co-lead on education and child protection in 25 countries; on WASH in 23 countries; and on nutrition in 21 countries.¹⁰ Twenty-four standby partners provided UNICEF with more than 16,000 days of support, equivalent to in-kind contributions of approximately \$14.4 million. Global cluster rapid response teams supported 17 countries, including for two Level 3 emergencies, through 29 missions totalling 2,074 days.¹¹

V. Strengthening efficiency and effectiveness for humanitarian results

23. UNICEF continued to advance initiatives to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian results in 2020. This section provides a summary of this work.

A. Revision of the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action

24. A key milestone in 2020 was the release of the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, the organization's core policy for humanitarian action and a vital framework that guides and shapes its humanitarian response in complex and life-threatening environments. This edition of the CCCs responds to a critical need: to provide timely and quality humanitarian support in the midst of fast-moving emergencies. It reaffirms key principles and standards that guide UNICEF humanitarian action and ensure that children are protected, that their dignity is respected and that no child is left behind, even in the most adverse circumstances.

25. The CCCs include new corporate commitments on important areas of work that have emerged over the past decade, and that are essential to the ability of UNICEF to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian results. This includes dedicated commitments on preparedness; humanitarian access; protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; accountability to affected populations; the quality of

¹⁰ For each sector, the number of staff designated to lead, or co-lead is out of 25 country offices in the Global Humanitarian Overview 2020 with an inter-agency humanitarian response plan.

¹¹ This includes missions undertaken by the UNICEF Global Cluster Coordination Unit.

programmes; multisectoral and integrated programming; equity; linking humanitarian action and development programmes; environmental sustainability and climate change; localization; community engagement for behaviour and social change; and humanitarian cash transfers.

B. Review of UNICEF humanitarian action

26. In 2020, UNICEF completed a humanitarian review that examined the organization's humanitarian operations in the context of the global challenges of the twenty-first century. The recommendations of this humanitarian review – which are summarized in section IX – were endorsed by UNICEF senior management to strengthen the organization's capacity to deliver a principled, timely, quality and child-centred humanitarian response and advocacy.

C. Prioritizing gender in the humanitarian response

27. UNICEF continued to prioritize gender equity in humanitarian action – from preparedness to response and recovery. The revised CCCs for the first-time outline three overarching gender-equity commitments: ending gender-based violence; engaging with and for women and girls; and making programming gender-responsive. These commitments are designed to accelerate and catalyse UNICEF programming, coordination and advocacy, and complement the integration of gender into all of the Core Commitments. The commitments make gender analysis a mandatory part of humanitarian action, commit UNICEF to more equity-focused data collection and disaggregation, and call for more meaningful partnerships with civil society organizations advancing the rights of women and girls.

28. UNICEF also took steps in 2020 to strengthen its efforts to protect women and children against gender-based violence. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF leveraged its inter-agency leadership to support the roll-out of key guidance, including: guidance for practitioners on how to adapt gender-based violence case management services to align with COVID-19 infection prevention and control efforts; a resource on how to integrate disability considerations into gender-based violence programming during the COVID-19 pandemic; and guidance on supporting the safety and well-being of female front-line health-care workers.

29. In 2020, UNICEF also applied digital innovations to address the rise in gender-based violence in the context of the pandemic. In December, UNICEF and Microsoft launched Primero X, an open-source case management website application that helps social service providers to coordinate critical support – including gender-based violence services – for vulnerable children and women.

30. During the COVID-19 response, UNICEF worked closely with other United Nations entities to develop a collective response to the gender-related impacts of the pandemic. This included guidance that is being used by all United Nations country teams to apply a gender lens in response plans and served as the basis for the allocation of gender-earmarked funds from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund. Six UNICEF offices received a total of \$20 million from the fund to integrate gender issues into their COVID-19 response plans.

31. Within UNICEF, the COVID-19 response has also been an opportunity to focus on improving gender-disaggregated data collection and reporting. For example, between June 2020 and February 2021, the percentage of UNICEF country offices reporting disaggregated data for the 11 situation report indicators relevant to gender increased from 10 per cent to 34 per cent.

D. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

32. In 2020, UNICEF scaled up its internal systems for protection against sexual exploitation and abuse globally and in countries responding to emergencies. All UNICEF personnel are required to complete mandatory training on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse; and all UNICEF partners must adhere to a code of conduct and reporting procedures for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF assessed risks of more than 1,300 civil society partners to determine gaps in capacity and training, and is working with partners to address these gaps. The organization is also actively seeking to inform communities of its standards and commitments, through communications tailored to local contexts and community-based complaint mechanisms. Globally, UNICEF estimates that the reach of these communications and mechanisms tripled from 2019 to 2020, and now covers 44 million people.

33. In addition, UNICEF country offices operating in humanitarian crises are setting targets for establishing safe and effective reporting mechanisms for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, quality response services and timely and child-friendly investigations based on informed consent. In order to fund this work, UNICEF has allocated dedicated resources to 32 country offices with significant humanitarian responses.

34. The allegations of sexual exploitation during the tenth Ebola response (2018 to 2020) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo provide a stark reminder that grave risks of sexual exploitation and abuse persist. Outbreaks of infectious diseases, natural disasters, armed conflicts and economic crises all increase the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, as the needs for assistance and livelihoods become more acute. In October 2020, UNICEF participated in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) field support mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to identify challenges and lessons learned, including the barriers for communities and personnel in reporting sexual exploitation and abuse. Vigilance is required to integrate prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse from the outset of an emergency response, and to mitigate the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse in programmes and operations.

35. UNICEF scaled up the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse as part of its response to COVID-19. In 2020, UNICEF reached 44 million people in 91 countries with safe and accessible channels for reporting sexual exploitation and abuse – a significant increase compared with the 8.9 million people reached in 2019. UNICEF investments in and efforts to strengthen capacities and systems to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse have yielded substantial improvements: 130 countries have established internal reporting systems and training mechanisms for partners that address sexual exploitation and abuse, and the number of countries with quality standard operating procedures on the referral and provision of sexual exploitation and abuse services for survivors has increased by 50 per cent.

36. Signalling continuing commitment by UNICEF to addressing sexual misconduct, the organization became the first United Nations entity to follow the recommendation of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation on ending sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. In 2021, UNICEF will launch a new emergency procedure on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and will mandate its integration at the outset of any emergency response as well as the inclusion of the necessary steps and resources.

VI. Delivering results for children by Strategic Plan Goal Area

37. In 2020, UNICEF and partners contributed to delivering results for millions of children in accordance with the Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and key CCCs. This section presents some of those results.¹²

A. Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives

38. UNICEF works towards ensuring that every child survives and thrives. This means reaching children living in humanitarian situations with vital health, nutrition and other life-saving services.

Health commitment 2: Children and women access life-saving interventions through population- and community-based activities

39. In 2020, UNICEF supported the health of millions of children in fragile, vulnerable and conflict-affected settings. This included the provision of measles vaccination to 17 million children aged 6 months to 15 years (exceeding the target of 8.5 million).

40. In Afghanistan, COVID-19 mitigation measures (e.g., lockdowns and movement restrictions) and fear of accessing health facilities led to a significant decline in the use of essential health services. UNICEF deployed 49 mobile health and nutrition teams in the most remote and deprived emergency-affected areas to reach communities with life-saving health services. More than 450,000 children under 5 years of age (47 per cent girls) and nearly 56,000 pregnant women received essential health services and information. For children, this included services under the Integrated Management of Newborn and Childhood Illnesses strategy, the Expanded Programme on Immunization and nutrition screening; and for pregnant women these included antenatal and postnatal care and family planning services.

41. Local partners, including provincial public health directorates and community networks, as well as national government partners, were vital to this response. Working through community networks and with local actors enabled UNICEF to implement these interventions, negotiate humanitarian access, engage communities and raise awareness.

Nutrition commitment 4: Children and women with acute malnutrition access appropriate management services

42. Against the backdrop of rising rates of malnutrition due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF and its implementing partners delivered life-saving action to safeguard the nutritional status of women and children in both new and protracted emergencies. In humanitarian contexts, UNICEF reached 4 million children aged 6 to 29 months with severe acute malnutrition with treatment (78 per cent of the target).

43. UNICEF and WHO issued joint guidance to help countries to adapt and simplify their nutrition programmes to reach malnourished children in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance was designed to provide innovative solutions to ensure access to and the availability of services in challenging contexts. More than

¹² This report aligns with with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) published in 2010, as will all UNICEF reporting on humanitarian action in 2020. The 2020 revision of the CCCs will be rolled out in 2021 and reflected in 2021 reporting. Detailed reporting against the 2010 CCCs will be available in the forthcoming “annual results report 2020 – humanitarian action”. Unless otherwise noted, all country-level statistics derive from 2020 UNICEF humanitarian situation reports and relevant chapters in “Humanitarian Action for Children 2020”. Country-level data may not reflect more recent data that will inform reports issued later in 2021.

70 countries reported adopting one or more of the recommended measures, such as delivering treatment through community health workers or simplifying enrolment and discharge criteria. In the West and Central Africa region, for example, several countries implemented “Family MUAC”, an innovative intervention that empowers mothers and caregivers to use mid-upper arm circumference tapes to identify early signs of malnutrition in their children and make informed decisions about when to seek care.

B. Goal Area 2: Every child learns

Education commitment 2: Children, including preschool-age children, girls and other excluded children, access quality educational opportunities

44. In 2020, UNICEF launched its largest education-in-emergencies effort – which reached every programme country – as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the year with UNICEF support, 32.6 million children accessed formal or non-formal education, including early learning (exceeding the target of 10.2 million). In addition, as part of the COVID-19 response, more than 301 million children (approximately 147 million girls) in 109 countries were supported with remote learning.

45. In Bangladesh, learning centres for Rohingya refugee children were closed in March 2020 due to the pandemic. This meant that Rohingya students lost almost three quarters of structured learning time for the year, and the planned introduction of learning based on the formal Myanmar curriculum was put on hold.

46. Before they were closed in March 2020, nearly 232,000 children aged 3 to 14 years (112,000 girls and 1,200 children with disabilities) were attending the 2,500 learning centres operated by UNICEF implementing partners. Ninety-eight per cent of these centres were operated by national NGOs, in accordance with localization principles followed by UNICEF.

47. With the learning centres closed, UNICEF and the Government of Bangladesh developed guidelines for home-based learning led by caregivers. Some 2,500 instructors in the Myanmar language visited households to support parents to encourage children to continue to learn from home with the materials they had been given for the academic year. According to a 2020 multisectoral needs assessment, 86 per cent of children who were attending learning centres before they closed continued to participate in remote learning.

C. Goal Area 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

Child protection commitment 6: Psychosocial support is provided to children and their caregivers

48. As a leading global advocate of child protection in humanitarian settings, UNICEF strives to protect every girl and boy from violence, exploitation and abuse. In 2020, UNICEF reached 47.2 million children, adolescents and caregivers with community-based mental health and psychosocial support in more than 110 countries, an exponential growth compared to 4.7 million reached in 60 countries in 2019. In addition, 91 countries have scaled up the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse as part of their COVID-19 response, including by increasing access to sexual exploitation and abuse reporting channels, establishing country action plans, training partners and strengthening referral pathways.

49. In Lebanon, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to address community reports of violence in schools with the launch of a

gender-sensitive child protection policy that includes, among other commitments, promotion of the mental health and psychosocial well-being of children and adolescents. Before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, nearly 7,000 education personnel (counsellors, teachers and administrative staff) had been trained on the basics of child protection and psychosocial support for children and adolescents, in accordance with the new policy.

50. In response to COVID-19, the Beirut explosion and the economic crisis in Lebanon, in 2020, more than 66,000 girls, boys, women and caregivers were reached with psychosocial support through UNICEF partner organizations.

D. Goal Area 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

WASH commitment 2: Children and women access sufficient water of appropriate quality and quantity for drinking, cooking and maintaining personal hygiene

51. In humanitarian situations, WASH interventions play a critical role in all other UNICEF programme results, including health, education and protection. In 2020, UNICEF reached 146 million people with emergency water supply interventions.

52. In Myanmar, due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict, UNICEF needed to embrace multiple implementation modalities to mitigate humanitarian access challenges. This included strengthening the capacities of local organizations and engaging local contractors to more effectively participate in the WASH response. In Rakhine State, where humanitarian access continued to deteriorate, UNICEF engaged local contractors to construct latrines and distribute supplies. Such approaches enabled UNICEF and partners to maintain critical services for internally displaced persons in an extremely complex operating environment, and to cover gaps as the provider of last resort.

53. UNICEF was able to reach nearly 83,000 crisis-affected people in Myanmar (including 44,000 women and girls and 4,000 people with disabilities) with water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene (50 per cent of the target). This support was provided through the repair, rehabilitation and construction of water supply systems – including gravity-fed systems – and delivered in partnership with the Government, 12 civil society organizations, the World Food Programme and local contractors.

E. Goal Area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life¹³

54. Across its programming, UNICEF strives to provide all children – including those affected by emergencies – with an equitable chance in life. This includes improving the use of social protection in fragile and humanitarian settings and implementing interventions that aim to reach and meet the unique needs of children with disabilities, adolescents and youth, women and girls.

1. Linking humanitarian cash transfers to social protection systems

55. Given the vital role of national social protection systems in the response to COVID-19, UNICEF and its partners have supported Governments to make their national systems sufficiently agile to respond to the pandemic. In 2020, UNICEF provided technical assistance to Governments to scale up social cash transfers to meet the needs of 45.5 million COVID-19-affected households. In addition, 2.5 million households in 50 countries were reached through UNICEF-funded humanitarian cash transfer programmes. Out of these, more than 591,000 households in 18 countries

¹³ The revised CCCs will include commitments related to Strategic Plan Goal Area 5.

were assisted through funding provided to Governments to scale up social cash transfers and 1.9 million households in 34 countries were reached directly, through partnerships with local financial service providers and civil society partners. In seven countries, UNICEF used a mixed approach where elements of existing national social protection programmes were leveraged (such as beneficiary lists and social workforce) to deliver humanitarian cash programmes.

56. In Guatemala, UNICEF used an innovative cash approach to achieve results at scale. Prior to the pandemic, UNICEF had engaged with the Ministry of Social Development to strengthen the social registry and revamp information systems. At the onset of the pandemic, UNICEF and the World Bank supported the design and implementation of Bono Familia, an innovative unconditional emergency cash transfer programme that identifies poor families based on their energy consumption. Innovations included electronic registration, token distribution and electronic signatures. More than 2 million poor and vulnerable families were reached across the country, representing 80 per cent of all households in Guatemala. This was the largest social programme in the country's history in terms of coverage and investment, with a budget of approximately \$780 million.

2. Children with disabilities in emergencies

57. UNICEF continues to advance disability-inclusive humanitarian action, both in its own programming and through its leading role globally. In 2020, UNICEF co-led the establishment of the Reference Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, to ensure a coordinated approach to the topic and promote the implementation of the IASC guidelines issued in 2019. The Reference Group now has more than 130 members, including from United Nations entities, NGOs and organizations of persons with disabilities, with members representing global-, regional- and country-level actors.

58. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the fact that children with disabilities face heightened risks due to their exclusion from basic service systems and barriers to their participation. In 2020, 44 per cent of country offices with a Humanitarian Action for Children appeal – 28 country offices – systematically included children with disabilities in their response efforts. In the context of COVID-19, UNICEF efforts to promote access by children with disabilities to education, WASH, health services and psychosocial support became even more vital, both to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and to strengthen service systems in humanitarian contexts so they are more inclusive in the longer term.

59. For example, to mitigate the impacts of school closures related to the pandemic, UNICEF Kenya supported the Government and partners of the Education in Emergencies Working Group to reach more than 3,300 children with disabilities with home-based learning. In Bangladesh, UNICEF constructed 82 accessible latrines in Cox's Bazaar, bringing the total to 282; and equipped 20 schools with accessible latrines, handwashing facilities and drinking water for hygiene promotion. In Zimbabwe, UNICEF reached more than 1,900 children with disabilities with community-based psychosocial support.

3. Gender equality

60. In 2020, the number of people reached with gender-based violence services in emergencies nearly doubled. As part of the COVID-19 response, UNICEF was able to reach 17.8 million people in 84 countries affected by crisis with gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention and response services.

61. In Afghanistan, for example, UNICEF partnered with three women's civil society organizations to ensure that the needs of women and girls in hard-to-reach

areas were met. These organizations reached more than 1 million people (379,000 men, 478,000 women, 103,000 adolescent boys and 115,000 girls) with gender-based violence prevention information, referral services, COVID-19 prevention information and psychosocial support for women and girls. This localized engagement complemented UNICEF training of 2,250 front-line workers from the education and nutrition sectors on the delivery of gender-sensitive and age-appropriate services, and the integration of gender-based violence risk mitigation and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

VII. Resource mobilization for humanitarian action¹⁴

62. At the beginning of 2020, UNICEF requested \$4.2 billion through its Humanitarian Action for Children appeal. Funding requirements continued to grow over the course of the year, reaching \$6.3 billion for 152 countries (53 appeals)¹⁵ by the end of December. The unprecedented level of funding needs for humanitarian assistance was primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on children and women.

63. Humanitarian requirements also rose as existing crises grew in complexity. In Zimbabwe, communities confronted multiple natural hazards and an economic downturn, while children in the Pacific were affected by Tropical Cyclone Harold. New needs also emerged in several countries, such as Lesotho (drought), Lebanon (Beirut explosions) and in the Central America region (hurricanes Eta and Iota).

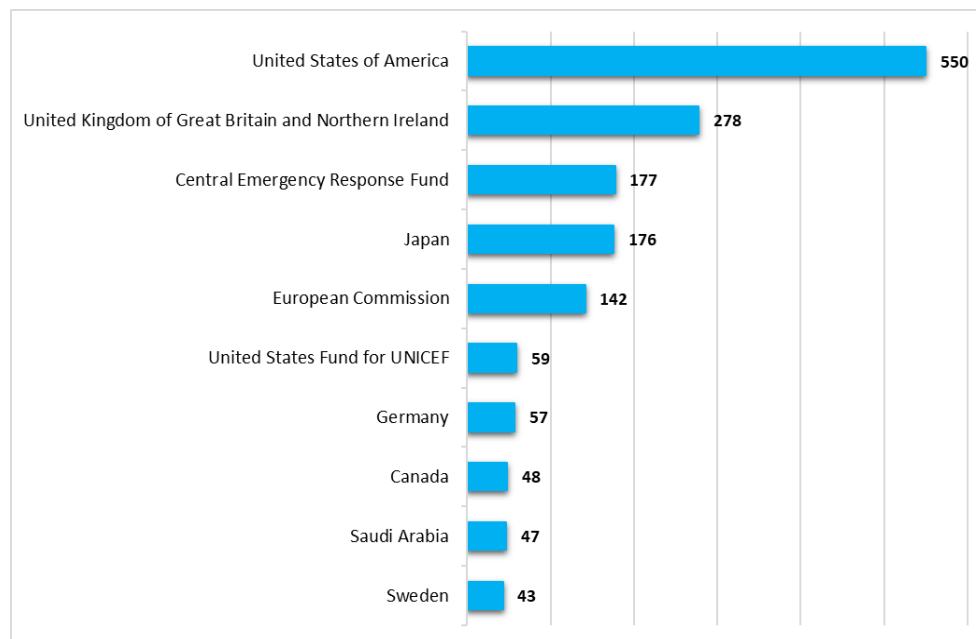
64. By the end of 2020, UNICEF had received \$2.16 billion in humanitarian contributions for the 2020 appeal, including \$1.9 billion from the public sector (88 per cent) and \$261 million from the private sector (12 per cent).¹⁶ The COVID-19 response accounted for 34 per cent of the total humanitarian funds (other resources-emergency) received. Resource partners also provided \$463.1 million in other resources towards the global response to COVID-19, including through repurposing ongoing contributions.

¹⁴ The 2020 figures presented in this section are provisional and subject to change.

¹⁵ The total funding requirement in 2020 applies to 53 individual appeals issued over the course of the year.

¹⁶ Thematic figures represent the total amount from the humanitarian action pools at the global, regional and country levels.

Figure III
Top 10 partners for humanitarian funding in 2020
 (in millions of United States dollars)



65. Despite the generosity of resource partners and the high level of funding in absolute terms, humanitarian needs reached record levels and posed significant challenges for UNICEF and its partners.

66. UNICEF acknowledges the resource partners that provided flexible funding that included thematic humanitarian funding in 2020. They are the lifeline for flexible resources in the humanitarian response. Partners that are consistent in providing quality funding over the years continue to be essential in supporting UNICEF to reach the most vulnerable, crisis-affected and forgotten children. Top global humanitarian thematic donors include the Government of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF and the Swedish Committee for UNICEF.

67. Public sector partners continued to lead the way, with the top 10 donors making up 73 per cent of total funds received in 2020. The bulk of resources (74 per cent) went to supporting the top 10 high-profile emergency responses. In large-scale emergency settings such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Syrian refugee-hosting countries, Yemen and Zimbabwe, UNICEF programmes remained underfunded, limiting the organization's capacity to reach those children who are most in need. While Yemen remained the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, UNICEF only received 34 per cent of the \$535 million requested.

68. Loans provided through the Emergency Programme Fund supported the UNICEF response to acute emergencies by fast-tracking funding to affected countries within 48 hours of a crisis. In 2020, \$46.3 million was allocated to 21 countries – for example in Ukraine, where these funds facilitated uninterrupted WASH and education support. These regular resources are critical, especially in sudden-onset emergencies and unpredictable contexts such as the COVID-19 crisis, and UNICEF was able to reprogramme and utilize \$81.7 million in 2020.

69. Pooled funding mechanisms continued to play a critical role in the UNICEF humanitarian response in 2020. The Central Emergency Response Fund provided

\$177.1 million to more than 40 countries, including timely and flexible funds to support the COVID-19 response. Country-based pooled funds awarded \$42.6 million in contributions to 12 countries to address the challenges outlined in country humanitarian response plans. Combined, both pooled funds amounted to 10 per cent of the total funds received.

70. UNICEF continued to strengthen its partnerships with international financial institutions in 2020. As part of the response to COVID-19, UNICEF and the World Bank tripled the number of countries in which the organizations work together, establishing more than 80 projects in 43 countries, nearly half of which were fragile or affected by conflict and violence. UNICEF was also the lead United Nations responding agency for the Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility, reaching 24 countries with COVID-19 emergency support and mobilizing \$41 million in direct financing.

Table 1
Thematic and non-thematic humanitarian funding trends, 2015–2020
(in millions of United States dollars)

Year	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%
Non-Thematic	1 514	88%	1 759	92%	1 812	92%	1 892	92%	1 894	93%	1 958	91%
Thematic ¹⁷	204	12%	145	8%	164	8%	154	8%	145	7%	202	9%
Total	1 718	100%	1 904	100%	1 976	100%	2 046	100%	2 039	100%	2 160	100%

VIII. Challenges and lessons learned

71. With the unprecedented nature of humanitarian action in 2020, UNICEF faced several challenges in its ability to deliver results for children. These are described below.

A. Staying and delivering humanitarian action in the context of COVID-19

72. In a number of countries, COVID-19-related restrictions negatively impacted UNICEF emergency programmes and the number of children that UNICEF was able to reach. At the onset of the pandemic, the movement of humanitarian supplies, for all operations, was constrained by international and domestic travel restrictions, curfews, checkpoints and bureaucratic impediments impacting the delivery of assistance and the pre-positioning of supplies. In several countries where vaccination campaigns were put on hold, rapid response missions were cancelled and camps for internally displaced persons were inaccessible, fewer people in need were reached with UNICEF humanitarian assistance.

73. Despite these challenges and the uncertain operating environment, UNICEF staff remained committed to staying and delivering. The organization is adapting to the new way of working in the context of the pandemic, with business continuity plans and special measures adapted in accordance with programme criticality assessments. UNICEF country offices maintained a large physical presence in terms of the number

¹⁷ Thematic figures represent the total amount from the humanitarian action pools at the global, regional and country levels.

of staff members on the ground and were either in full or partial teleworking mode. In most countries, where international partners operated with reduced capacities and financial resources due to COVID-19, UNICEF increasingly put local partners at the forefront of the humanitarian response. UNICEF also prioritized duty of care, which remains critical to ensuring the continuity of operations and the ability of UNICEF and partners to stay and deliver. This included procuring personal protective equipment and treatment supplies for health workers and humanitarian actors.

B. Meeting escalating needs despite significant underfunding of several crises

74. The year 2020 was marked by a dramatic increase in humanitarian needs, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic added substantial needs to a humanitarian landscape already characterized by significant crises. And in many cases, the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 exacerbated the dire conditions that millions of children and families affected by conflict, deprivation and disaster were already experiencing. As a result, there was a substantial increase in humanitarian funding requirements.

75. However, many emergencies remained severely underfunded. For example, the UNICEF response in Burkina Faso received only 27 per cent of required funding; Mali received 35 per cent; and the Niger received 42 per cent. While overall humanitarian funding increased in 2020 compared with 2019, the quality of funding remained a concern: The amount of flexible thematic funding for humanitarian action remained low at 9 per cent and has stagnated at under 10 per cent for the past five years. In addition, while UNICEF acknowledges the resource partners that provided multi-year contributions for the humanitarian response, 2020 was marked by a decline in multi-year contributions (\$513 million in 2019 versus \$376 million in 2020).

76. The global COVID-19 appeal received high levels of flexible funding, which proved critical to the organization's ability to mount an efficient, swift and agile response, and provide countries and communities with support to build their long-term resilience. In 2021, UNICEF will support advocacy and resource mobilization efforts at all levels to ensure that funding is available to meet rising needs. UNICEF, together with other United Nations entities and partners, will take stock of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 response to increase flexible funding for humanitarian action, in the hope that such funding becomes the norm and not the exception.

C. Adapting to the limitations on in-person surge deployments

77. At the onset of the pandemic, COVID-19-related restrictions significantly impacted in-country surge support to ongoing humanitarian operations. In response, UNICEF rolled out a surge protocol to address the travel constraints and scale up surge support for the remainder of 2020. The experience yielded important lessons. First, remote support can be a viable alternative modality when physical deployments or travel are not possible when a surge request is initiated or under way. Second, remote deployment is most effective when the support is targeted and well-defined. For example, in Burkina Faso, UNICEF launched a remote internal surge plan that supported the expansion of emergency coordination, humanitarian access, emergency operations, humanitarian cash assistance and child protection services.

D. Responding in insecure contexts with limited humanitarian access

78. In several contexts where UNICEF operates, insecurity and limited humanitarian access hampered the movement of humanitarian personnel and endangered their safety. At the same time, in many countries, COVID-19-related restrictions imposed on international and domestic travel limited the ability of UNICEF and partners to implement and monitor programmes.

79. For example, the security situation in the Cabo Delgado Province of Mozambique deteriorated significantly in 2020, with increased attacks, rising displacement and growing access constraints in the northern districts. In Myanmar, COVID-19 travel restrictions further reduced already severely constrained humanitarian access to populations in need.

80. UNICEF remains committed to staying and delivering to sustain humanitarian interventions and to identifying innovative ways to adapt and scale up programming – including remote implementation (e.g., through telephone counselling and psychosocial support sessions, or online group discussions) and monitoring where direct access is not possible.

IX. The way forward

81. UNICEF is dedicated to improving its humanitarian action, in accordance with its Strategic Plan, to meet the challenges described above and strengthen its ability to deliver results for crisis-affected children. This section describes the key initiatives that UNICEF will take forward in 2021 and beyond.

A. Implementing the recommendations of the humanitarian review

82. The recommendations of the humanitarian review reflect the organization's current challenges and its desired outcomes. Collectively, they will help UNICEF to become more agile, more effective in fulfilling the CCCs across its dual mandate and, most importantly, better able to meet the needs and rights of all crisis-affected children.

83. Specifically, to prepare for future emergencies, the humanitarian review recommends that UNICEF:

- (a) Clearly define its role in public health emergencies, with increased technical capacity at all levels and adapted strategies, including a no-regrets approach.
- (b) Explore new configurations for headquarters field support.
- (c) Reinforce current capacities for refugee and migration crises.
- (d) Mainstream and increase the volume of humanitarian aid delivered through cash across sectors.
- (e) Leverage technology and innovation.
- (f) Strengthen or increase the integration of supply needs in programme planning and response.

B. Rolling out the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action

84. In 2021, UNICEF will continue rolling out the updated Core Commitments globally, across all country and regional offices, headquarters divisions and with partners. Advocacy, management, planning and training tools, including but not limited to training of trainers and interactive eLearning and virtual programmes, will be further developed for managers, staff members and partners to meet the commitments in all contexts. This includes a new external digital platform (<https://www.corecommitments.unicef.org>) to deliver the CCCs to UNICEF staff, partners and affected communities, increase access to relevant knowledge and learning and support the achievement of the CCCs in both humanitarian and development contexts. The CCCs will also more systematically inform the new UNICEF strategic plan, annual workplans, emergency response plans, country programme documents, performance reports and partnerships with Governments and civil society organizations.

C. Revising the organization's emergency procedures

85. UNICEF is developing new emergency procedures based on learning from the COVID-19 response and the thematic review of those procedures by the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations. The new procedures will apply to all emergencies (Levels 1, 2 and 3) with additional simplifications and requirements for Level 2 and Level 3 crises. They will align with the revised CCCs and operationalize the recommendations of the humanitarian review to make UNICEF more predictable, timely and efficient in its humanitarian coordination, response and advocacy. The procedures will include a minimum package of actions to be taken in emergencies for such key areas as protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, humanitarian access and accountability to affected populations. They will be auditable to ensure a more predictable and accountable response.

D. Strengthening preparedness and risk analysis

86. To advance its ability to analyse risk, UNICEF is developing data-driven online tools to support country and regional offices and headquarters divisions to determine baseline risks and emerging dynamic hazards. UNICEF is also pooling resources with inter-agency partners on the INFORM project¹⁸, which aims to add a dynamic quantitative multi-hazard warning tool to the existing set of INFORM products, with components that leverage academic expertise.

87. UNICEF is conducting a series of emergency preparedness webinars, developing simulation packages to test capabilities and highlight areas for improvement, and supporting new funding structures that are critical pieces of the risk management architecture. The First Action Initiative, anticipatory action and other trigger-related funding are promising approaches that require additional support. UNICEF is also strengthening the coherence between humanitarian preparedness, disaster risk reduction and resilience, both internally and at an inter-agency level. In response to the lessons learned from the COVID-19 response, UNICEF will strengthen preparedness for global-level catastrophic risk, beginning with a review of its readiness to effectively respond to a variety of events.

¹⁸ INFORM is a collaboration of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Risk, Early Warning and Preparedness and the European Commission.

E. Ensuring programmes are informed by and adapted to risk

88. UNICEF is developing systems to manage contextual risk beyond the traditional boundaries of preparedness in large-scale disasters. Following a recommendation made in the humanitarian review, the new emergency procedures will include a risk appetite statement, with the principle risk for UNICEF in all humanitarian responses identified as any action or inaction that results in a failure or delay in saving lives, alleviating suffering, maintaining human dignity and protecting rights. UNICEF is working across headquarters divisions to develop a common risk analysis format to support both emergency preparedness and risk-informed programming, and better integrate the results into programme design. At the field level, UNICEF is piloting new ways of monitoring and managing risks in volatile contexts, including using rapidly updated spatial data to inform programme decisions. UNICEF is also developing a new risk compact to clarify and establish accountabilities at all levels of the organization, tailored to the different types of emergencies to which the organization responds. At the inter-agency level, UNICEF is collaborating with partners such as the IASC on existing and innovative risk management processes.

F. Improving accountability to affected people through strong feedback mechanisms

89. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of having strong complaint and feedback mechanisms in place to listen to and engage with affected populations. However, integrating these mechanisms into UNICEF programmes has remained challenging. In 2021, UNICEF will continue to prioritize supporting country offices to establish these mechanisms and ensure that systematic engagement with affected people guides evidence-based decision-making in all of its programming. UNICEF will also integrate learning from the COVID-19 response to invest in digital platforms to strengthen both accountability to affected populations and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

G. Supporting the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out through the global Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator

90. The document titled ‘Update on UNICEF humanitarian action: the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic’, which was presented to the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2021, provides an in-depth description of the steps planned by UNICEF in the COVID-19 response. In addition, UNICEF launched a \$659 million appeal to support the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, which includes a COVID-19 vaccine humanitarian buffer, a mechanism of last resort under the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility to ensure equitable access to and allocation of COVID-19 vaccines for humanitarian populations not covered by national allocation and access mechanisms. The humanitarian buffer is made of up to 5 per cent of COVID-19 vaccines procured through the COVAX Facility. The buffer was approved in principle by the Board of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and its design is being finalized by the Gavi Secretariat with support from UNICEF, WHO and IASC partners.

X. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action (E/ICEF/2021/13).