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Annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action

Summary

Globally, 149 million children are living in high-intensity conflict zones^a and nearly 168 million people are affected by conflict, population movement, food insecurity, disease outbreaks, natural disasters and other emergencies requiring urgent humanitarian assistance.^b This annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action presents an overview of how UNICEF responded to humanitarian crises – globally and at the country level – in 2019. It also outlines the key challenges met and lessons learned in humanitarian action, and how the organization plans to act on these lessons.

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

^a Save the Children, Stop the War on Children 2020: Gender matters, 2020.

^b Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Global Humanitarian Overview 2020, OCHA, Geneva, 2019, p. 4.

* [E/ICEF/2020/6](#).

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



I. Overview

1. Globally, 1 in every 45 people needs humanitarian assistance¹, the highest level ever seen. Prolonged and violent conflict remained the main drivers of humanitarian need in 2019, with displacement, food insecurity, disease outbreaks, natural disasters and other emergencies also giving rise to substantial needs.

2. At the start of 2019, UNICEF requested \$3.92 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 \$4.13 billion. By the end of December, UNICEF had received \$2.04 billion in donor commitments. Despite this generous support from donors, the funding shortfall of 50 per cent is significant.

3. During the year, UNICEF and its implementing partners responded to 281 humanitarian situations in 96 countries and territories,² reaching millions of children with life-saving, gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive interventions. This included 41.3 million children 6 months to 15 years of age receiving measles vaccination, 4.1 million children treated for severe acute malnutrition, 7.4 million children reached with learning opportunities, 3.7 million children provided mental health and psychosocial support, 39.1 million people accessing safe water, and 2.8 million households reached with humanitarian cash assistance. These results were delivered in line with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs).

4. To strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of its humanitarian action, UNICEF has taken steps to address the findings of the 2018 evaluation of the coverage and quality of its humanitarian response in complex emergencies. UNICEF recognizes some inconsistencies in the quality of programmes and in its overall performance as a humanitarian actor. These shortcomings can generally be linked to human resource limitations; conditional, inflexible funding; lack of coherent advocacy; inconsistencies in linking humanitarian and development programming; difficulties operating in complex and high-threat environments; limited humanitarian access; lack of definition on the appetite for corporate risk; insufficient international cooperation actors; limited localization of the humanitarian response and engagement with affected populations; and insufficient emergency preparedness.

5. Consequently, in 2019, the organization began improving its evidence-based decision-making on humanitarian response coverage, quality and equity – by strengthening emergency preparedness, needs assessments and response planning, and strengthening partner reporting on programme coverage and quality. UNICEF also advanced its Global Humanitarian Advocacy Strategy to focus on the most salient protection and assistance needs of children in humanitarian crises. A UNICEF Access Framework has been developed to address access challenges more effectively. UNICEF also initiated a humanitarian review process in 2019 to promote institutional change to the way the organization designs and systematically delivers quality, integrated humanitarian programmes and acts on its own policies and procedures. When the CCCs, revised through 2019, are released in 2020, UNICEF and its partners will have a more robust accountability framework to ensure a principled, timely,

¹ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Global Humanitarian Overview 2020, OCHA, Geneva, 2019, p. 4.

² Although the number of situations declined versus 2018, protracted crises are lasting longer, with some conflict-affected countries facing emergencies within emergencies and heightened risks to already-vulnerable children. Conflict-affected needs have remained exceptionally high over many years in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

predictable and efficient humanitarian response. An entirely novel curriculum was developed in 2019 to improve the humanitarian leadership-training of senior country managers, to be rolled out in 2020. Finally, UNICEF also issued revised ‘scale up’ and ‘sustain’ emergency-activation procedures, plus a new procedure to strengthen the linkages between humanitarian action and development programmes.

II. The humanitarian situation in 2019

6. Global humanitarian needs have grown to the highest levels yet, with nearly 168 million people needing urgent assistance by the end of 2019 – 1 in every 45 people.³ This means that the annual global number in need of humanitarian assistance has more than doubled over the past five years.⁴

7. Over the course of a decade, UNICEF and humanitarian partners have seen prolonged and violent conflicts become the primary drivers of humanitarian needs. People living in conflict zones – such as in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen – face daily risks of death and injury, sexual and gender-based violence, lost livelihoods and property damage, heightened risks of hunger and mental health conditions, and forcible displacement from their homes.⁵

8. In the Syrian Arab Republic, nearly nine years of war have left 5 million children in need and over 2.5 million children living as refugees outside of the country.⁶ In Yemen, more than four years of conflict have created the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.⁷ And some 1.2 million children in the Central African Republic are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance after six years of violence.⁸

9. Crisis levels of hunger and undernutrition are on the rise. For the fourth consecutive year, the number of undernourished people has increased, reaching 821 million in 2019.⁹ Violence is exacerbating food insecurity: two thirds of all people facing acute hunger – 74 million people – are located in 21 countries and territories affected by conflict and insecurity.¹⁰ Yemen continues to experience the world’s worst food crisis with, by the end of 2019, nearly 16 million people in need of urgent assistance.¹¹

10. The number of people displaced by armed conflicts and violence also reached unprecedented levels, with nearly 71 million people forced from their homes by the year’s end.¹² Children are disproportionately affected: they make up one third of the world’s population but half of all refugees and 40 per cent of internally displaced people.¹³ Many of these children are being enslaved, trafficked, abused and exploited.

³ Global Humanitarian Overview 2020, p. 4.

⁴ In 2014, nearly 78 million people needed humanitarian assistance. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Global Humanitarian Overview 2015, OCHA, Geneva, 2014.

⁵ Global Humanitarian Overview 2020, p. 11.

⁶ United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2020: Overview, UNICEF, New York, 2019, p. 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Global Humanitarian Overview 2020, p. 12.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘Figures at a Glance’, <www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>, accessed 16 January 2020.

¹³ Global Humanitarian Overview 2020, p. 11.

They face increased risks of malnutrition and disease. And many more children live in limbo, without official immigration status or access to education and health care.

11. At the same time, climate change continues to cause more extreme weather events and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. More than half a billion children now live in areas with extremely high flood occurrence, and almost 160 million are in areas with high drought severity.¹⁴ Conflict-affected regions such as the Sahel region of Africa, where livelihoods rely on agriculture, grazing and fishing, are especially vulnerable.

12. These trends – protracted conflicts, displacement and climate change – are also placing millions of people at increased risk of disease by weakening health, water and sanitation systems.¹⁵ Diseases such as Ebola and measles heavily impacted conflict zones in 2019, further complicating the humanitarian response where access is already restricted, as is the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the current Ebola outbreak is the world’s second largest and deadliest Ebola epidemic on record.¹⁶

III. UNICEF humanitarian response in 2019

A. Global response in 2019

13. In 2019, UNICEF and its implementing partners responded to 281 humanitarian situations in 96 countries and territories, compared with 285 in 90 countries and territories in 2018. Of these, 42 per cent responded to emergencies affecting more than 1 million people. Although there were four fewer situations in 2019, protracted crises are lasting longer, with some conflict-affected countries facing emergencies within emergencies and heightened risks to already-vulnerable children. Needs have remained exceptionally high over many years in conflict-affected countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

14. In response, UNICEF has continued to leverage its long-standing comparative advantages. These include having a field presence before, during and after emergencies; delivering multisectoral support; leading/co-leading four clusters/areas of responsibility; and harnessing its vast network of partners, including Governments, civil society, communities and the private sector.

15. In 2019, the humanitarian response by UNICEF continued to be in line with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, and the CCCs. The humanitarian response included: 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 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 conflict situations; 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.

16. Globally, UNICEF and its implementing partners delivered results for millions of emergency-affected children. This action included responses to five large-scale Level 3 emergencies: the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, and the protracted crises in Nigeria, the Syrian Arab

¹⁴ UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2020, p. 2.

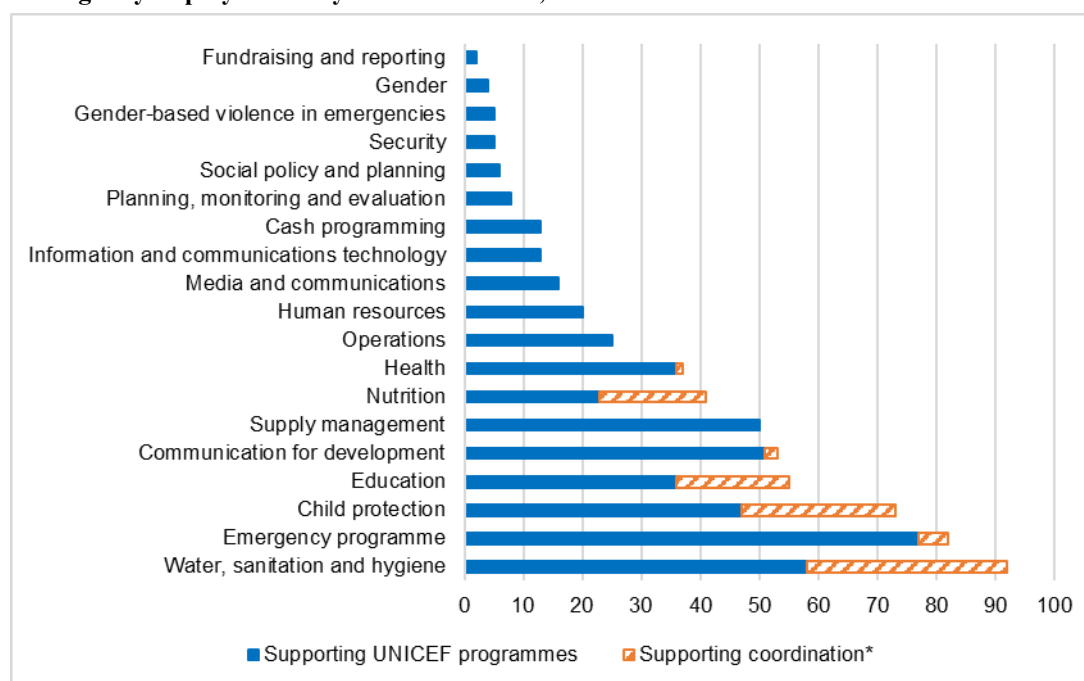
¹⁵ Global Humanitarian Overview 2020, p. 19.

¹⁶ UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2020, p. 2.

Republic and Yemen. It also included responses to 11 Level 2 emergencies: the socioeconomic crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; the migration situation across Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru; armed violence in Burkina Faso and the central Sahel; and the Ebola risk in Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda.

17. Some 600 emergency (surge) deployments were completed in 2019 – up from 461 in 2018 – and amounted to 43,107 days (73 days average). The biggest deployments supported the humanitarian responses to the situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (107 deployments, or 18 per cent), to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique (105 deployments), and to the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (56). Most deployments provided personnel for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), emergency programmes and child protection.

Figure I
Emergency deployments by functional area, 2019



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

18. Partnerships remained central to the humanitarian action of UNICEF, and involved collaboration with, for example, 1,394 civil society partners in 2019 (two thirds local). More than \$582 million in cash was transferred to civil society partners (over 57 per cent to local partners). UNICEF also partnered with national government responders, transferring nearly \$349 million of humanitarian funding. Overall, 34 per cent of humanitarian funding went directly to local and national civil society and government responders, exceeding the target of 25 per cent.

19. Strong engagement with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Governments, private sector leaders and other stakeholders at the first-ever Global Refugee Forum in December 2019 positioned UNICEF as a key partner in implementing the Global Refugee Compact. UNICEF also strengthened humanitarian partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with 46 international and national NGOs attending a two-day UNICEF-NGO Consultation for Partnership in Humanitarian Settings. The findings of a joint study by UNICEF and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, on country-level collaboration, will improve the work of NGOs.

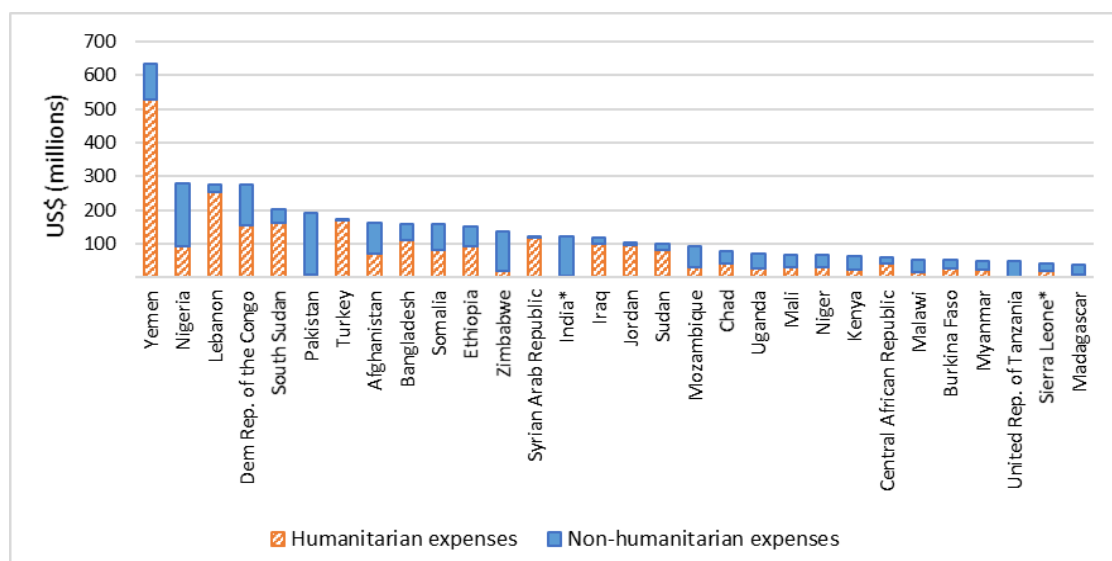
20. UNICEF continued to support the humanitarian system and deliver on its responsibility for inter-agency coordination by mobilizing, leading and coordinating collective efforts through its cluster lead-agency roles. In 2019, UNICEF designated staff to lead or co-lead in 23 countries for education, WASH and child protection,¹⁷ and in 21 countries for nutrition. UNICEF standby arrangements provided 43 in-kind deployments totalling 6,665 days of coordination, information management and technical expertise for in-country cluster and government partners. New standby deployments of 20 people started work with the global cluster rapid response teams. These teams gave support to 24 countries, including for five Level 3 emergencies, through 62 missions totalling 2,750 days.¹⁸

21. Procurement for emergencies reached \$346.1 million globally, with 94 per cent going to Level 2 and Level 3 emergencies. Nearly 100 per cent of all international emergency orders made by UNICEF in 2019 were delivered within the standard time frame. Supplies went to 58 countries and territories preparing for and/or responding to emergencies. The Supply Division provided direct support through 49 staff deployments to emergencies, including to the crises in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Yemen. The largest component of UNICEF emergency supplies by value in 2019 was for vaccines and biological products (\$88.8 million).

22. Humanitarian action played a significant role in field operations in 2019, using 52 per cent (\$2.96 billion) of overall UNICEF expenses. Of all country-level expenses, 54 per cent (\$2.81 billion) supported humanitarian response. In Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey, over 90 per cent of country-level expenses were classified as humanitarian. Of the 30 country offices with the largest overall expenses, 28 had appeals in the 2019 Humanitarian Action for Children appeal. Humanitarian action for these offices comprised 79 per cent of total country-level expenses, both humanitarian and non-humanitarian.

Figure II

Top 30 country offices on 2019 expenses (all funding types)
(in millions of United States dollars)



* India and Sierra Leone excepted, all these country offices had Humanitarian Action for Children appeals in 2019.

¹⁷ For each sector, this is out of 23 country offices in the Global Humanitarian Overview 2020 with an inter-agency humanitarian response plan.

¹⁸ This includes missions undertaken by the Global Cluster Coordination Unit.

B. Strengthening efficiency and effectiveness for humanitarian results

23. In 2018, UNICEF undertook an evaluation of the coverage and quality of its humanitarian response in complex humanitarian emergencies. The evaluation confirmed that UNICEF is among the largest and most important providers of humanitarian assistance and protection. At the same time, country offices struggle to balance scale – reaching the greatest number of people and children – with programming quality and reaching the most vulnerable populations in greatest need.

24. In 2019, UNICEF developed a management response plan to address the evaluation’s findings and has been working to implement the recommendations regarding shortcomings. For example, UNICEF took steps to improve evidence-based decision-making to determine coverage, quality and equity in humanitarian response by strengthening needs assessment, response planning and partner reporting on programme coverage and quality. A revised organizational monitoring architecture has been established, with clear standards for monitoring coverage, quality and equity across the humanitarian–development linkages, including in complex emergencies.

25. To strengthen the centrality of protection and principled humanitarian action, UNICEF further scaled up its Global Humanitarian Advocacy Strategy, which focuses on the most salient protection and assistance needs of children in humanitarian crises and is supported by the global campaign, #ChildrenUnderAttack. A UNICEF Access Framework has been developed, to be rolled out in 2020 to address challenges involving access in a more predictable, principled and effective manner. UNICEF also initiated a humanitarian review process in 2019, in an effort to change the way the organization designs and delivers integrated humanitarian programmes and acts on its own policies and procedures.

26. UNICEF continued to revise key humanitarian policies, procedures and mechanisms in 2019, including the emergency activation procedures and the CCCs, its main humanitarian policy. The CCCs revision has involved an inclusive and consultative process across the organization, and with partners and experts. The revised commitments deliver a more robust accountability framework for UNICEF and its partners, to ensure principled, timely, predictable and efficient humanitarian response in line with international norms and standards and reflecting new positions and agreements within the humanitarian community. They provide new corporate commitments on critical areas of work, including preparedness, coordination, humanitarian advocacy, programme quality (including for gender, disabilities, adolescents and early childhood development), the humanitarian–development linkage, community engagement, environmental sustainability, accountability to affected populations, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, health emergencies, and population movement.

27. In 2019, UNICEF undertook an organization-wide effort to systematically improve coherence between the humanitarian response and longer-term sustainable development, to strengthen resilience to climate change and disasters, and to promote peaceful and inclusive societies. An organization-wide procedure was issued in May to facilitate more consistent and systematic linkages between humanitarian and development programmes. The procedure builds on well-documented lessons from country programmes from 2014 to 2018 and is guided by the United Nations reform process. It was designed to help UNICEF achieve better results for children in fragile and crisis-affected situations and reduce their vulnerabilities and risks, and it seeks to link humanitarian and development programming in a systematic, consistent way across country programmes.

28. The UNICEF WASH and education responses in Chad are a country-level example of how humanitarian–development linkages were strengthened in 2019.

These responses targeted populations beyond those directly affected by the emergency, to increase access to essential services for host communities and catalyse social cohesion and peacebuilding. In the State of Palestine, UNICEF humanitarian interventions focused on solutions to improve WASH and address the energy dimensions of the Gaza water crisis, including by providing solar power and rainwater-harvesting, and by promoting behavioural change to conserve water and reduce the impacts of climate change on children. And in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the newly formulated country programme 2020–2024 promotes humanitarian–development synergy and addresses the overlapping deprivations faced by children.

29. Also, as part of the work to strengthen humanitarian–development linkages, UNICEF continued to institutionalize efforts to improve risk analysis for stronger organizational preparedness. The UNICEF Horizon Scan¹⁹ in 2019 identified 28 priority countries for emergency preparedness – up from 11 in 2018 – and mobilized successful preparedness efforts accordingly. As part of the First Action Initiative, for example – in which UNICEF uses flexible funds in countries in urgent need of preparedness – five offices identified (Afghanistan, Haiti, the Pacific Islands, the State of Palestine and Zimbabwe) received \$2.3 million for key preparedness actions. UNICEF estimates that these investments will allow for its emergency response to be swifter by an average of 42 days, enable a 57 per-cent saving per investment, and reduce the organization’s carbon dioxide emissions by more than 1,000 metric tonnes.

30. In Zimbabwe, after a cholera hazard was identified through the Horizon Scan process, the country office received \$417,220 via the First Action Initiative to support related preparedness and early actions to minimize the likelihood of an outbreak. This early allocation helped UNICEF to reach 250,000 affected people with key hygiene and health messages and 25,000 with access to safe water, and 5,000 households with WASH hygiene kits.

C. Results by Strategic Plan Goal Area

31. This section presents the contributions made by UNICEF, with partners, under the Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, and in line with key CCCs.²⁰

1. Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives

32. UNICEF works to ensure that every child – including each affected by emergencies – 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

33. In 2019, UNICEF supported the health of millions of children affected by conflict, natural disasters and health emergencies. This included the provision of measles vaccination to 41.3 million children aged 6 months to 15 years (95 per cent of the targeted population).

¹⁹ The Horizon Scan process identifies risk and prioritizes countries with larger risks that may then be ‘watched’, ensuring that solid preparedness plans are in place to address risks.

²⁰ Detailed reporting against the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) will be available in the UNICEF Annual Results Report 2019 – Humanitarian Action. Unless otherwise noted, all country-level statistics derive from 2019 UNICEF humanitarian situation reports and relevant chapters in Humanitarian Action for Children 2019. Country-level data may not reflect more recent data informing later reports in 2020.

34. In Yemen, where the difficult access and operating environment posed major challenges, UNICEF leveraged its decentralized network of five field offices and worked with more than 62 partners, including government actors and local organizations, to reach nearly 12 million children with measles vaccination. UNICEF also continued to focus on strengthening the health system, including the Expanded Programme on Immunization. This included supporting vaccine cold-storage facilities by providing 812 solar direct drives, 4,000 cold boxes and over 657,000 litres of diesel.

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

35. 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 globally, 4.1 million children aged 6–29 months with severe acute malnutrition received treatment (86 per cent of the targeted population).²¹

36. In South Sudan, where conflict continued to hamper service provision and to drive food insecurity and malnutrition, UNICEF worked with at least 40 civil society organizations – many of them local partners – to provide key interventions to prevent and treat malnutrition. Over 233,000 children received treatment for severe acute malnutrition in 2019 – and 91 per cent of them were discharged as cured. The national coverage of vitamin A supplementation, meanwhile, rose from 63 per cent in 2018 to 91 per cent in 2019.

37. While UNICEF faced significant challenges in its nutrition response in South Sudan – including the extremely fragile health system – it was able to expand its reach by increasing the number of outpatient treatment sites from 858 in 2018 to 1,145 in 2019. In addition, the strengthened collaboration between UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization ensured continuity of treatment for children with moderate to severe acute malnutrition, through seamless referral mechanisms across programmes. The integration of nutrition services with WASH and health activities in most locations helped UNICEF and its implementing partners to address the underlying causes of malnutrition, such as malaria and acute watery diarrhoea.

2. Goal Area 2: Every child learns

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

38. UNICEF continued to focus on delivering education materials and services, and on ensuring every child's access to learning in humanitarian situations. In 2019, 7.4 million children accessed formal or non-formal education, including early learning, with UNICEF support. Yet because of funding shortfalls, escalating insecurity and targeted attacks, UNICEF reached only 60 per cent of its target.

39. In Bangladesh, improving access to education, and its quality, was the key focus in response to the Rohingya refugee crisis, given that over 40 per cent of Rohingya children and youth are still cut off from education. In the Cox's Bazar District of Bangladesh, UNICEF and its implementing partners reached nearly 274,000 children (some 140,000 boys and 134,000 girls) in 2019, giving access to education in nearly 2,500 learning centres in refugee camps and host communities. A key challenge to the response were social barriers in the Rohingya community undermining girls' access to education. To bolster their enrolment, UNICEF prioritized social behaviour/norms

²¹ The calculation (admissions/target) is based on countries with a Humanitarian Action for Children appeal in 2019. The targets are determined individually by countries, depending on various factors.

change interventions and introduced ‘girls only’ classrooms, particularly for those over the age of 12, to support their retention.

40. Continued advocacy by UNICEF and its implementing partners on the importance of formal education also resulted in the Government of Bangladesh agreeing to allow the introduction of the Myanmar curriculum for Rohingya children. A curriculum pilot is expected to reach around 10,000 children in grades 6 through 9 by the end of 2020.

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

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

41. UNICEF is a global leader in child protection in emergencies, providing critical services to girls and boys exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation in humanitarian situations, and galvanizing action across sectors to ensure every child is protected. In 2019, UNICEF reached 3.7 million children affected by armed conflict and natural disasters with mental health and psychosocial support (87 per cent of the targeted population).

42. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, following attacks on Ebola treatment centres, community-based needs assessments for affected communities revealed pressing social, humanitarian and infrastructure needs beyond those for a basic public health response. To better address the child protection needs articulated by communities, and to strengthen community ownership and engagement, UNICEF and its implementing partners integrated mental health and psychosocial support into all areas of the public health response. Overall, UNICEF reached 169,784 children (90,194 boys and 79,590 girls) with mental health and psychosocial support.

43. In addition, locally led psychosocial commissions were set up in various affected areas and staffed with non-specialist providers who were identified from within the communities and given training. Mental health and psychosocial support workers used existing social networks and an in-depth understanding of cultural norms to reach children and families who might otherwise have been hesitant to seek assistance. The services provided included family tracing, temporary care and durable solutions for orphans and unaccompanied children, as well as daily, tailored household visits to mitigate the discrimination, stigma and isolation associated with Ebola. This model of community engagement was designed to reduce child and family distress and promote healthy behaviours and recovery.

4. 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

44. WASH interventions are at the core of life-saving responses in emergencies. UNICEF reached 39.1 million people in 2019 with access to safe water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene (100 per cent of the targeted population).

45. In Afghanistan, where over one third of the population is using unimproved water sources, largely because of decades of conflict, UNICEF worked with government and NGO partners to reach nearly 291,000 people in 137 communities with improved drinking water. As part of the organization’s increasing focus on durable solutions, UNICEF gave this assistance through sustainable and low-emission water supply systems, including gravity-fed and solar-powered piped systems. There was a 140 per cent increase in the number of people gaining access to safe water compared with 2018. In addition, over 79,000 people accessed gender-sensitive

sanitation facilities, and over 342,000 benefited from hygiene-awareness services in conflict and drought-affected areas.

46. In response to the migration crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, UNICEF reached 815,000 people through emergency repair of water and sanitation systems, provision of water-treatment chemicals, chlorination of water points, water quality monitoring services, support for system operation and management, and delivery of essential supplies in schools and health-care facilities. Provision of these life-saving services was critical in the initial phase, but UNICEF continued its effort beyond that phase, focusing on durable solutions and strengthening humanitarian–development linkages. UNICEF partnered with the Ministry of Water to support WASH services for up to 2.5 million people over four years. This programme was designed using an innovative return-on-investment tool that helps to select the most effective water-supply options based on the lowest costs (both capital and operational) over the lifespan of the operation, on the carbon footprint, and on equity-related criteria.

47. Programming for WASH is fundamental to preventing the spread of outbreaks such as cholera and Ebola. UNICEF rapid-response and long-term multisectoral support contributed to minimizing cholera outbreaks in the Sudan in 2019, helping to keep cases and fatalities at much lower levels compared with a similar outbreak in 2016. In Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, a real-time evaluation found that the UNICEF response was instrumental in minimizing the severity of cholera during the Cyclone Idai emergency, thereby preventing a double disaster.

5. Goal Area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life²²

48. UNICEF works to provide all children, including children affected by emergencies, with an equitable chance in life. This work includes strengthening social protection systems in fragile and humanitarian settings and implementing interventions that aim to reach children with disabilities, adolescents and youth, and women and girls, and meet their unique needs.

49. UNICEF scaled up its work on social inclusion in emergencies in 2019. It applied a sharper focus on expanding the use of humanitarian cash transfers in ways that build on and strengthen social protection systems. Overall, 2.8 million households received cash assistance, including 8.5 million children. In Mozambique, for example, UNICEF and WFP introduced multipurpose vouchers to support cyclone-affected people as part of the government’s post-emergency cash grant. More than 22,000 households in Sofala Province benefited, including nearly 57,000 children. In Cabo Delgado Province, UNICEF supported the Government to operationalize a post-emergency child grant to children under 5 years of age affected by Cyclone Kenneth. By the end of 2019, 2,600 households, including over 6,600 children were registered with the social protection programme, and a government system had been established to deliver emergency child grants from January 2020. Where cyclones Idai and Kenneth devastated government capacities for service provision, UNICEF worked with the Government, as well as with WFP, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank, to develop a shock-responsive social protection strategy note. This helped to raise \$45 million for the Mozambique social protection response through the national social protection system – reaching 105,000 households in three provinces.

50. UNICEF is also continuing to prioritize and strengthen approaches to disability-inclusive humanitarian action. In 2019, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s guidelines, *Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action*, were

²² The revised CCCs, expected to be published in 2020, will include commitments related to work under Goal Area 5.

released following a development process co-led by UNICEF. These set out essential actions humanitarian actors must take to effectively identify and respond to the needs and rights of persons with disabilities, who are most at risk of being left behind in humanitarian settings. These are the first humanitarian guidelines to be co-developed with persons with disabilities.

51. Fifty-three country offices in 2019 reported specific work on children with disabilities in humanitarian action.²³ Of these, 21 country offices reported that their humanitarian responses in 2019 systematically included children with disabilities – up slightly from 20 offices in 2018. UNICEF increased access to humanitarian programmes and services for children with disabilities in its WASH, education, child protection and cash assistance programmes. The organization used a variety of actions, such as improving the physical accessibility of premises and facilities, strengthening processes for identifying children with disabilities, and supporting the participation of organizations of persons with disabilities in the humanitarian response.

52. In Indonesia, for example, UNICEF provided accessible temporary learning spaces for nearly 1,400 children and adolescents with disabilities. In Kenya, 48 disability-accessible classrooms were constructed in two refugee camps. In the Syrian Arab Republic, UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour continued to implement an innovative humanitarian cash transfer programme for children with disabilities. This integrates case management services to address social and economic vulnerabilities. Since the project began in 2016, 15,000 children with disabilities have been reached, including some 7,500 in 2019. In January 2019, 40 per cent of beneficiary households reported that the assistance was helping them to meet the basic needs of their children with disabilities, up from 22 per cent earlier in the programme.

D. Resource mobilization

53. At the start of 2019, UNICEF requested \$3.92 billion through the Humanitarian Action for Children appeal. By December, the appeal had reached \$4.13 billion. Escalating insecurity and limited access to services in countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Sudan and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, as well as natural disasters, including Cyclone Idai in Eastern and Southern Africa and drought in Angola, Kenya, Pakistan and Zimbabwe, contributed to these increasing needs.

54. International humanitarian assistance from the public and private sectors declined slightly in 2019 compared with 2018. By 31 December 2019, UNICEF had received \$2.04 billion (\$7 million less than in 2018) in donor commitments towards the Humanitarian Action for Children appeal. About 59 per cent of the funding received in 2019 came from the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the European Commission, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Germany.

55. Despite the generous support of donors, the funding shortfall remained significant, at 50 per cent. Almost half of the funds received focused on the large-scale crises in South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, and on supporting Syrian refugee-hosting countries. Sixty-eight per cent of all funds received went to support 10 countries out of the 47 with appeals launched in 2019. Many responses remained underfunded, including to the situations in Burkina Faso, Cameroon,

²³ The slight reduction from 59 countries in 2018 is due in part to UNICEF country offices refining their self-rating on disability inclusion, based on a better understanding of what disability-inclusive humanitarian action means in practice.

Pakistan, Uganda and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela – all of which had funding gaps exceeding 70 per cent.

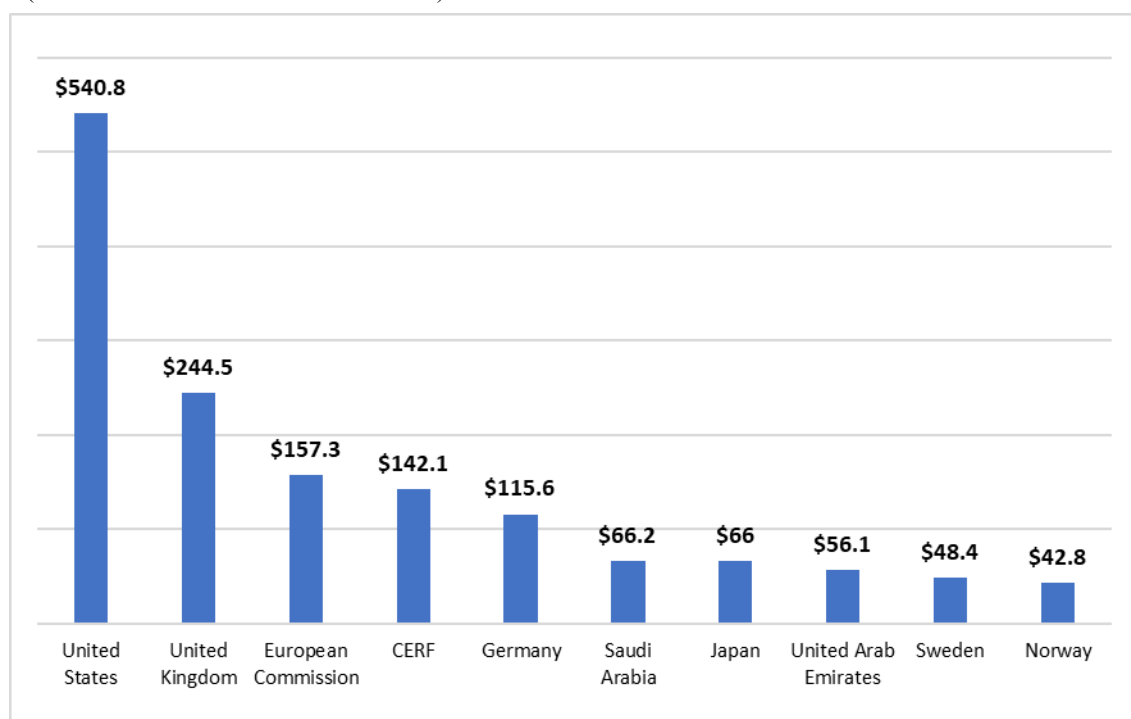
56. At the regional level, similar to the previous year, the Middle East and North Africa region received the largest proportion of funding, at 45 per cent of the total, while Eastern and Southern Africa received 18 per cent and West and Central Africa received 14 per cent.

57. The majority of the humanitarian funding received – 73 per cent – came from the top 10 resource partners that contributed a combined total of approximately \$1.5 billion (see figure III, below).

Figure III

Top 10 partners for humanitarian funding in 2019

(in millions of United States dollars)



58. Of the funds received in 2019, \$145.3 million (7 per cent) was humanitarian thematic funding at the country, regional and global levels. Global humanitarian thematic funding – the most flexible funding after regular resources – made up less than 1 per cent of the total commitments received. Top global humanitarian thematic donors include the Netherlands, the Swedish Committee for UNICEF and the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF. Allocations of global humanitarian thematic funding were used to expand activities and respond to increasing needs in countries such as Burkina Faso, where displacement rose dramatically, and the Sudan, where violence and unrest continued to escalate. These funds also enabled UNICEF to respond to cholera in Haiti, fill critical gaps in WASH, nutrition and health in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and support the health response and emergency preparedness in the State of Palestine.

59. In 2019, UNICEF welcomed \$493.9 million in multi-year contributions from resource partners, \$24.1 million less than in 2018. The top government partners included (in order of contribution) the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, Canada and the Netherlands. Several National Committees for UNICEF played an important role in raising multi-year funding, including those of Germany, the United

States, the United Kingdom, Japan and Norway. Longer-term funding allowed UNICEF to be more strategic and predictable, and to respond effectively where needs were greatest, including bridging humanitarian action and development programming.

60. UNICEF humanitarian programmes continued to benefit from CERF and the country-based pooled funds (CBPF) in 2019, which constituted 9 per cent of all humanitarian funds received. With the largest-ever annual CERF allocation of \$142.1 million, UNICEF was able to provide timely and life-saving support in 44 countries. In country after country, children are surviving and getting the help they need, thanks to the ability of CERF to provide rapid support, and to forgotten crises, when and where it is most needed. In addition, UNICEF country offices received funding allocations from all of the 18 CBPFs that were active in 2019. At the end of the year, the combined CBPF funding totalled \$40 million, enabling UNICEF to reach the most vulnerable children with health, nutrition, clean water, education and protection assistance.

61. UNICEF regular resources were also used to ensure an efficient response. Specifically, its revolving internal Emergency Programme Fund released \$68.5 million to 24 country offices and 3 regional offices in 2019 – to respond rapidly to crises. For example, \$7.5 million disbursed to Mozambique in response to Cyclone Idai allowed UNICEF to order supplies and deploy surge staff to coordinate an immediate response to the emergency.

62. In addition, UNICEF continues to strengthen its partnerships with the World Bank. In 2019, UNICEF received \$448 million from the World Bank for projects in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected countries, including Yemen. With the largest-ever envelope of International Development Association 19 funding, the UNICEF–World Bank partnerships will scale up in 2020 in several countries and regions, particularly Bangladesh, the Horn of Africa, the Sahel region of Africa, South Sudan and Yemen.

63. UNICEF will continue to adapt to and respond to critical humanitarian needs as they evolve and, with partners, advocate for flexible thematic and multi-year funding, which is crucial to meeting the needs of children everywhere. UNICEF has doubled down in 2019 on maintaining its high transparency standards, increasing efficiency and improving its results reporting. UNICEF took steps to enhance the visibility of contributors to its regular resources and humanitarian thematic funding, while demonstrating the value of such funding.

64. UNICEF will also continue its strategic engagement with a diverse set of stakeholders – from Governments to the private sector to civil society – to diversify its partnerships and funding and to find innovative ways to respond to humanitarian needs. The following are some key highlights of such important partnerships to ensure more efficient and effective humanitarian response:

(a) In September 2019, UNICEF and the Islamic Development Bank established a joint Global Muslim Philanthropy Fund for Children, to be held as a trust fund within the Islamic Development Bank. It provides a Shariah-compliant vehicle to receive philanthropic contributions from zakat institutions, and public and private donors, with a large proportion of funds to be directed towards humanitarian assistance in the 57 members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation;

(b) UNICEF recently launched a new partnership arrangement with KOIS Invest to pursue blended financing of WASH infrastructure projects in fragile contexts. Under this arrangement, UNICEF and KOIS will work together to pursue a feasibility study for a global financing facility for durable WASH interventions – leveraging both donor funds and impact investors to support sustainable projects,

furthering the humanitarian–development nexus. When fundraising for the initiative proves successful, the team will examine promising infrastructure projects in two to four fragile contexts, and then aim to launch a financing facility within 9 to 12 months.

IV. Challenges and lessons learned

A. Increasing predictability, quality and equity in UNICEF humanitarian action

65. Despite being one of the largest United Nations agencies, and its dual development–humanitarian mandate, UNICEF is not always seen as a major humanitarian actor. Several evaluations and reports point to variations in the quality of programmes and the overall performance of UNICEF as a humanitarian actor across various emergencies.

66. The current CCCs and Strategic Plan invite the measurement of UNICEF performance by “percentage of targets” achieved or “number reached” by interventions, which can lead the organization to prioritize large-scale responses over principled, high-quality ones delivered to the most vulnerable populations. Several evaluations have found weaknesses in equity in the UNICEF programme approach, gaps in indicators to measure quality, and weak mechanisms for quality assurance. At the same time, in some countries, the targets in UNICEF humanitarian response plans are not met.

67. To overcome this situation, UNICEF will implement holistic approaches with renewed, shared commitments from representatives, regional directors, headquarters directors and the organization’s senior leadership, based on a common understanding and consistent commitment to deliver on accountabilities and obligations to affected populations, host countries and partners. UNICEF will ensure a more coordinated approach to humanitarian response, breaking out from operating in programmatic silos, and taking a multisectoral approach. This will enable the organization to consistently and more effectively enact its humanitarian and development mandate within its own programming.

B. Increasing humanitarian capacity and leadership

68. *Improving human resources for humanitarian action.* UNICEF needs to focus on addressing the limitations in its human resources. Getting the right people in the right place at the right time is a key factor in quality humanitarian action. To ensure that UNICEF is predictable in its role in humanitarian response, investment in career management and building humanitarian capacity will be important, as will investment in core funding for key leadership roles within the humanitarian architecture. UNICEF will also explore opportunities in collaboration with other United Nations agencies for improving human resources for humanitarian action.

C. Guaranteeing corporate commitment to humanitarian response

69. *Mobilizing more flexible and multi-year funding.* Short-term funding commitments and donor conditionalities make response planning challenging. Flexible and multi-year funding remained low in 2019, undermining the ability of UNICEF to rapidly and equitably reach every child affected by emergencies – including in the less-visible crises – and in a way that achieves sustainable results over the longer term. UNICEF shifted its 2020 Humanitarian Action for Children funding appeal to an earlier December 2019 launch to drive organization-wide efforts

to reposition UNICEF as a leading humanitarian body and to synchronize the appeal within the inter-agency humanitarian appeal process. UNICEF is also working to improve its allocation criteria, tracking and results reporting on flexible funding to support additional resource mobilization efforts. The contributions made by UNICEF to the Grand Bargain work stream on flexible funding have been well received, and the organization is developing a clear position on donor conditionalities, particularly where there are counter-terrorism agendas.

70. *Improving the coherence of organizational advocacy.* The linking of humanitarian advocacy to response planning needs to be tightened to better enable UNICEF action on the ground. Building on its Global Humanitarian Advocacy Strategy to focus on the most salient protection and assistance needs of children in humanitarian crises, UNICEF will ensure a streamlined approach to advocacy strategies and planning, making its organizational position clear across all levels of its structure, and increasing the strength of its advocacy messaging.

71. *Addressing inconsistencies in linking humanitarian and development programming.* UNICEF has been engaged in this work at the policy level and is now investing in translating this work into coherent and systematic action in programming. The areas targeted for implementation for the new procedure on linking humanitarian and development work will also be carefully analysed and regularly monitored throughout the procedure's implementation, to ensure that measures are adapted to each context.

D. Ensuring accountability to achieving results for children in humanitarian settings

72. *Operating in complex and high-threat environments with access challenges.* UNICEF continues to face challenges to maintaining and sustaining principled, timely and equitable access in complex and high-threat environments, particularly with the rise in the number of non-State entities in many contexts. UNICEF will take the following action: scale up efforts in 2020 to systematically strengthen the capacities of leadership in country offices on principled humanitarian action and engagement modalities; provide dedicated country support for humanitarian access with the full roll-out of the UNICEF Access Framework and guidelines for engaging with non-state entities; and expand the expertise provided through the Emergency Response Team.

73. *Defining an appetite for corporate risk.* UNICEF is working to support country offices more systematically to help to make humanitarian programming more effective in terms of risk management, particularly in complex and high-threat environments. This means the organization will be more systematic in developing a 'corporate risk appetite', particularly in such environments, to support a common understanding of risk boundaries and more systematic risk-informed decision-making by country offices.

74. *Leveraging cooperation with international actors.* Overall, there needs to be an organizational shift in how UNICEF approaches its partnerships, to ensure that it is an attractive partner to civil society and other implementing partners. The organization will also look to the private sector for new ways to partner in certain sectors or locations. Fostering more coherent engagement with the cluster system will also improve coordination, as well as the overall quality of cluster members' responses and UNICEF programmes. With new coordination systems emerging, such as those in large-scale displacement or public-health emergency responses, UNICEF will define its approach to, and place in, such systems.

75. *Providing some localization of humanitarian responses, and engagement with affected populations.* The beneficiaries of humanitarian programmes rarely have sufficient influence on how aid is prioritized or delivered, and where feedback mechanisms exist, feedback is rarely acted upon. UNICEF will invest in closing the feedback loop. Localization efforts will be context-specific, with improved analysis on where to localize, and a recognition that various disaster typologies call for differing levels of localization. Making use of existing local networks will also help UNICEF to focus its localization efforts.

76. *Improving support for emergency preparedness.* UNICEF needs to invest additional human and financial resources in emergency preparedness, including the global tools and systems needed to achieve better operational preparedness in the field. In 2020, UNICEF will develop a global simulation package enabling country offices to test their operational capacity, strengthen its capacity to provide feedback to country office senior management on the quality of preparedness plans, and improve its financial resources for preparedness and risk analysis. A preparedness co-funding initiative designed to increase resource allocations to preparedness at the country level is being tested, and a new preparedness tagging function in the organization's global financial data systems will be introduced. UNICEF will also increase preparedness resource-mobilization efforts across the organization. The organization also needs to invest more in capitalizing on its dual mandate to ensure a holistic response. This includes pushing for more multisectoral approaches – both externally with other agencies, and internally. Technology will be used more frequently in the analysis of context and needs, and multi-layered analysis will be looked at to understand the external factors influencing humanitarian contexts. This will allow UNICEF to be more proactive in its responses and better ready for immediate response.

77. *Strengthening organizational capacities to implement humanitarian cash transfers.* While 2019 saw an increased uptake of humanitarian cash transfers as an organizational strategy, technical expertise in programme implementation and scale-up remain limited across the organization. UNICEF will roll out a capacity-training strategy in all seven regions in 2020 and implement a fast-track training approach in targeted countries. The organization will also accelerate the development of the cash management information system in partnership with headquarters divisions and UNHCR, and run a country-level pilot. Specific areas of collaboration have also been identified with WFP for the joint beneficiary registration of humanitarian cash transfer programmes in non-refugee settings.

78. *Expanding humanitarian learning.* The relevance and usefulness of humanitarian learning extends well beyond UNICEF staff, to the many external partners and counterparts who implement humanitarian response with and on behalf of UNICEF. Providing adequately scaled, effective learning and training to many of them, often working in far-flung places and diverse contexts, has proved challenging. UNICEF is therefore developing a knowledge management strategy to increase interaction, promote knowledge transfer and make information available more purposefully for practitioners and communities of practice within and beyond UNICEF. A newly designed global Humanitarian Leadership Workshop for senior managers will be rolled out in 2020 as a priority organizational need. When deployed for humanitarian action, Emergency Response Team members will receive skills-transfer training for the benefit of UNICEF field staff and implementing partners.

V. The way forward

79. As part of the ongoing humanitarian review, UNICEF will assess its procedures and capacity to provide effective and timely responses to humanitarian crises. It will re-evaluate how it designs and delivers integrated programmes and interprets and acts on its own policies and procedures. The results of this humanitarian review are due in 2020.

80. UNICEF will strive to reach the most vulnerable children with the support they need in emergencies and will include women and persons with disabilities. A central element in achieving this will be the finalization and roll-out of the revised CCCs in 2020. These CCCs will provide a more robust accountability framework for UNICEF and its implementing partners to ensure principled, timely, predictable and efficient humanitarian response.

81. UNICEF will be revising its emergency procedures in 2020 to rationalize decision-making and improve efficiencies and planning. It will also implement its first review of humanitarian–development linkages in the 10 priority countries in 2019 with the highest humanitarian expenditures. The review will aim to systematically inform and improve linkages in practice between the humanitarian action and development programmes of UNICEF. This review has been designed for easy, cost-effective replication in subsequent years.

82. UNICEF will also continue to harness evidence and learning for principled humanitarian planning, programming and monitoring at all levels, providing clear needs-based guidance for more effective analysis, prioritization and coordination of its own and its inter-cluster and inter-agency programming. UNICEF will expand its surge mechanisms, including through standby partnerships. Across the organization, UNICEF will continue to strengthen risk analysis and horizon-scanning for better emergency preparedness.

83. UNICEF will invest in having more human and financial resources for better emergency preparedness on the ground. In 2020, simulation packages will be rolled out to test country operational capacities and preparedness plans, and to improve financial resources for preparedness and risk analysis. Anticipatory action and innovative financing will continue to be developed, based on advanced operations research and financial analyses. Through alliances with a diverse portfolio of partners and funding methods, innovative means to respond to humanitarian needs in efficient and effective ways will be ready for roll-out.

84. To increase reach to the most vulnerable children, UNICEF will maximize its efforts to place child protection at the centre of humanitarian action, including through targeted, sustained, high-level advocacy. UNICEF will strengthen its leadership and capacity to tackle access challenges in a more predictable, principled and effective manner. Further, UNICEF will scale up its capacities to deliver humanitarian cash programmes in the field, will expand its efforts to localize humanitarian responses, and will improve its accountability to crisis-affected communities.

85. Finally, the outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), reported at the end of 2019, became a pandemic by early March 2020, swiftly throwing the world into a menacing, shifting and uncertain new reality. While the numbers of severe illnesses and deaths are clearly above the capacity of most countries to manage, this pandemic's wider consequences – in particular for children, women and their families as well as for many populations already in humanitarian situations – are yet to be seen. The negative impacts of the crisis on the deployment of staff, supplies and resources to reach people in need, both in the COVID-19 response and in all other humanitarian emergencies, are expected to be high and long-lasting.

VI. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action (E/ICEF/2020/10/Rev.1).
