

EVALUATION REPORT

October 2022

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Evaluation of the UNICEF Response to the Level 3 Humanitarian Crisis in Syria



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The report was prepared by James Darcy (team leader), Enrico Leonardi, Francesca Ballarin, Jeff Duncalf and Laura Olsen. Jane Mwangi managed and led the overall evaluation process with active engagement and support from UNICEF staff in various headquarters divisions, regional offices and country offices.

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For further information, please contact:
Evaluation Office United Nations Children's Fund
3 United Nations Plaza New York, New York 10017
evalhelp@unicef.org

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PREFACE

Since the outbreak of conflict in Syria over a decade ago, UNICEF has been responding to the needs of Syrian children and their families both inside and outside the country. This report focuses on the UNICEF response inside Syria over the last four years. It asks whether UNICEF has found the right roles for itself, given the challenging and evolving context, and assesses how well UNICEF performed those roles.

This evaluation contains lessons for UNICEF and for the wider humanitarian community. Its recommendations, many of which have been already acted upon, take into account the current context and its likely future directions, and I am confident that this report will contribute to improving the organization's work to serve children in Syria and around the world.

The Evaluation Office assembled a specialized team of independent consultants to conduct this exercise. I am grateful to James Darcy, the team leader, for his insight, professionalism and commitment to this exercise. I am also grateful to the team members, Francesca Ballarin, Jeff Duncalf, Enrico Leonardi, and Laura Olsen for their excellent work. This evaluation would not have been possible without the support of UNICEF staff at all levels of the organization, and I would like to express sincere thanks to Adele Khodr, Bo Viktor Nylund, Ghada Kachachi, Michiru Sugi Mita, Olivia Roberts, Mohamad Abbasi, Aya Elbizem, Melinda Young, Robert Stryk, Alhaji Bah and Jamilya Jusaeva. Finally, many thanks to colleagues in the UNICEF Evaluation Office, namely, Jane Mwangi, Laura Olsen, Dalma Rivero and Geeta Dey.

Robert McCouch
Director of Evaluation
UNICEF

Note on terminology used in this report

We use the phrase ‘Syria crisis’ primarily to refer to the direct and indirect effects of the conflict (in humanitarian and development terms) on children and their families. It does, of course, have wider political, economic and social connotations.

We use the term ‘humanitarian’ in the relatively broad sense that it is used in humanitarian response plans, to encompass emergency work and work with highly aid-dependent populations (e.g., internally displaced persons), work on early recovery, urgent rehabilitation and support to essential service provision.

We use the following non-standard abbreviations in the report:

- GCAs for Government of Syria-controlled areas
 - Non-GCAs for areas of Syria not under government control
 - NWS (non-GCA) for non-government-controlled areas of northwest Syria
 - NES (non-GCA) for non-government-controlled areas of northeast Syria
 - ‘Cross-line’ to describe aid or services provided from GCAs to non-GCAs in NWS
 - ‘Cross-zone’ to describe aid or services provided from GCAs to non-GCAs in NES
-



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary finding

In spite of an extraordinarily challenging context, the UNICEF response to the crisis in Syria, while variable across sectors and locations, has been strong overall. The evaluation finds that UNICEF managed to identify the right roles for itself over the evaluation period, although it has sometimes struggled (often for reasons beyond its control, including the political complexity of the context) to fulfil those roles, particularly its system-wide roles of sector coordination and leadership. In common with other agencies, it has also struggled to mount a response proportionate to the scale of needs and to monitor those needs, given often very limited direct access to communities. Despite this, the hard work and commitment of UNICEF staff and partners have helped protect millions of children across all parts of Syria from the worst effects of the crisis over the past four years. Those consulted for the evaluation noted the commitment, professionalism and expertise of UNICEF staff, the organization's generally strong relations with other actors, including with governing authorities, local partners, sister United Nations agencies and donors, and its strong reputation in the region.

The evaluation also finds that UNICEF needs to develop a more coherent approach to its work across the whole of Syria. In particular, it needs a better-defined approach to the wider humanitarian agenda in order to address the acute and pervasive threats to children's well-being and development. While support to direct service delivery remains crucial, UNICEF should continue to demonstrate the case for more systematic and sustainable approaches to meeting needs in a context of protracted recovery, while pursuing opportunities to help strengthen child-related policy and systems. Resourcing this in the face of diminishing donor funding will require prioritization, a phased approach and greater programmatic focus, and it will require new forms of partnership and collaboration.

Evaluation scope and purpose

- 1 Commissioned by the UNICEF Evaluation Office, this evaluation concerns the UNICEF response to the Level 3 (L3) humanitarian crisis in Syria over the period 2018–2021. It has both a learning and accountability purpose, and while it is largely summative in nature, it makes recommendations for strengthening the organization's approach in light of the current situation and likely future developments in the country.

The evaluation is *strategic* rather than technical or operational in its focus: it asks whether UNICEF has found the right roles for itself in Syria over the past four years given the

evolving context, and how well it performed in those roles. This includes consideration of UNICEF interventions across the whole of Syria, managed from three main 'hubs' (Damascus, Gaziantep, Amman), including how well these interventions have been harmonized. It takes an 'outside-in' approach, assessing the value of UNICEF interventions with respect to the priorities for children and their families, the organization's mandate and core functions, the roles played by other actors and the needs of the wider response system. These in turn are considered against the backdrop of an evolving political, institutional, economic and demographic context across the country.

Evaluation questions, methodology and process

- 2 The focus of the evaluation has been on questions of the relevance and coverage of the UNICEF response, its quality and effectiveness, its coherence across sectors and geographic areas, and its connectedness and balance between short- and longer-term agendas. These questions are reviewed with respect to the UNICEF programme and in relation to its wider role within the United Nations family and the humanitarian system.

Evidence was gathered from a variety of sources, including documentation and key informants from both within and outside UNICEF. Around 180 interviews were conducted in total. During field visits in October/November 2021, in-person interviews were conducted in Gaziantep, Amman, Damascus, Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor. For operational reasons, the evaluation team was not able to travel in the areas of northwestern and northeastern Syria (NWS/NES) outside government control. These in-person interviews were supplemented by remote informant interviews and by online surveys of staff and partners.

The evolving context and priorities for children

- 3 The humanitarian situation in Syria since 2018 has been different to that prevailing in earlier periods of the crisis, and yet equally demanding of UNICEF engagement. On some metrics, notably food security, the situation continues to deteriorate, as reflected in the most recent United Nations-led Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) for 2022. Needs now relate less to the direct effects of conflict than to its indirect effects: continuing mass displacement, steep economic decline, damaged or lost infrastructure, inoperative systems, loss of professional capacities, and related loss of access to basic services. Over half of the pre-conflict population remains displaced, of which around 6.9 million are internally displaced (a further 5.6 million are refugees). Greater stability has allowed increased humanitarian access in some areas, although access remained limited throughout the evaluation period, particularly in areas of the country outside government control. High levels of insecurity continue to characterize some areas, particularly in NWS.

While the Government of Syria controls around 70 per cent of the state's territory, large areas in the northwest and northeast of the country remained outside government control over the evaluation period. From a humanitarian perspective, the result has been three main geographic regions of concern: the areas controlled by government, and the areas of NWS (in Idlib and Aleppo Governorates) and NES (in Deir-ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa, Al-Hasakah and parts of Aleppo Governorate) that lie outside its control. The latter are characterized by high levels of internal displacement, general lack of services and restricted access for international humanitarian actors. But humanitarian needs, increasingly linked to economic hardship, are prevalent across almost the entire country.

- 4 The evaluation suggests that the wider humanitarian agenda encompasses three priority agendas for children across the whole of Syria. The first (Agenda A) concerns specific emergency or high aid-dependency situations that pose severe, acute threats to child health, well-being and safety. The second (Agenda B) relates to less acute but widespread, severe and persistent threats to child health, security or well-being. The third (Agenda C) concerns critical threats to

child development and life chances, including lack of access to basic education and lack of opportunities for adolescents. These agendas overlap and are causally inter-related: failure to address one risks exacerbating the others. Each agenda requires a different approach. The first typically requires (sustained) direct service delivery, while the second and third require support to existing or new systems of basic service provision. The challenge of achieving scale, quality and complementarity of services is increasingly likely to require area-based, multi-sector and multi-agency approaches.



- 5 The needs in Syria are on a huge scale – both for Agenda A and (particularly) for Agendas B and C, which require large-scale and multi-year financing. Yet UNICEF and others have been working largely with (limited and decreasing) short-term humanitarian funding, and even that has often been subject to extremely tight conditionality, particularly in government-controlled areas. Taken together with other constraints, the result is that UNICEF and other agencies have struggled to work on the scale the situation demands. It has also limited opportunities to work on systems, capacity and policy agendas that could bring wider and more sustained benefits to children. This arguably represents the *dominant challenge* for UNICEF and others: how best to address the effects both of conflict and a sudden massive development deficit using limited humanitarian funding and approaches.

UNICEF strategy and Whole of Syria architecture

- 6 UNICEF has faced major strategic choices over the course the crisis, including decisions about where and how to work and decisions about the architecture best suited to managing the Whole of Syria (WoS)

response. The evaluation concludes that the decisions made were largely appropriate and remained so throughout the evaluation period. However, UNICEF has struggled to make a coherent whole of the various parts of its response across the different response hubs inside and outside Syria. This is reflected in the lack of an overarching WoS strategy and the tendency to treat the cross-border work as anomalous or even peripheral to its strategy for Syria. The evaluation found that one reason for this was the lack of a coherent overall vision for the UNICEF response in Syria, coupled with a lack of clearly articulated responsibilities and accountabilities for oversight and delivery.

- 7 The ‘strategic shift’ towards support to resilience proposed by the Syria Country Office (SCO) rightly addresses the challenge of sustainable service delivery. However, given the ongoing scale and severity of needs across Syria, the evaluation concludes that what is required is an *evolution* of the organization’s approach to the humanitarian agenda. Delivering on its Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action across Syria as a whole requires a balance – depending on the specific context – between continued direct engagement (with

partners) in essential service delivery, shifting as far as possible to more sustainable modes of delivery; and support to (or at least complementing of) the relevant official systems of service delivery. Risk communication and related policy and advocacy work are the essential complement to this, and UNICEF has a unique role to play in this regard.

- 8 The most immediate challenge facing UNICEF and others is how to maintain coverage of the more acute and high dependency needs (Agenda A) in NWS and NES given the combined constraints of access, authorization, available implementing partners and declining funding. Effective contingency planning for the potential closure of the final border crossing from Türkiye may require a fundamental shift in the current model of engagement, although at the time of the evaluation, there appeared to be limited joint thinking on this between UNICEF hubs.

Overall, it is essential for UNICEF to continue to demonstrate in practice equality of concern for children living in *all* parts of Syria, whether government-controlled or not.

UNICEF performance in leadership and system-wide roles

- 9 The evaluation finds that UNICEF has generally done well in navigating an extremely challenging and sensitive context, and in some cases expanding the space to operate; in fact, it has set a leading example among United Nations agencies in this regard. The agency's system-wide roles – in sector coordination, supply, advocacy and more general leadership on child-related issues – are essential to its added value to the wider Syria response. Any performance deficits in these areas are therefore of particular concern, and the organization should give as much weight to these roles as it does to delivering its own programme. This has particular urgency for the functions currently performed for the cross-border programme in NWS and cross-zone in NES.

Coordination

- 10 UNICEF (co-)leadership of sectors and sub-sectors is central to its added value, but its record in Syria is highly uneven. Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and child protection have been strong in most areas of coordination,

both at WoS and hub levels, helped by close involvement of senior managers at SCO and regional office levels. These sectors have also shown the potential for effective coordination cross-zone in NES, something on which UNICEF and others should build. In education and nutrition, UNICEF has not been able to provide the consistent leadership needed. Some of this is a matter of resourcing: the evaluation found that the practice of ‘double-’ or even ‘triple-hatting’ has had a negative impact on this aspect of the organization’s role.

Leadership, advocacy and communications

- 11 Overall, the evaluation finds that UNICEF has been a powerful advocate for children in Syria, both through public and private communications, and had led strongly on child-related issues. This included campaign work (e.g., back-to-school) as well as a wide range of public communications initiatives. Private communications and advocacy are by their nature difficult to evaluate, but the evaluators found evidence of strong and effective UNICEF engagement with international, national and local political actors on child rights and protection, as well as with key officials across Syria itself. Some informants raised concerns about the consistency

of UNICEF public advocacy, and in particular about its willingness to highlight conflict-related violations of child rights (attacks on schools was raised as a particular example).

Supply

- 12 The evaluation found that UNICEF continues to play a crucial role in vaccine supply and distribution for the health sector, including cold chain provision. Problems with vaccine supply in relation to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) relate in part to global availability, although some aspects of the collaboration with the World Health Organization, including around risk communication and addressing vaccine hesitancy, could be strengthened. The main supply-related issue identified by the evaluation concerned the supply processes in SCO, which have been affected by many factors, external and internal. An internal audit in 2019 reported a significant problem with delayed procurement, and while recommendations from that audit are now being implemented, the situation appears not to have been fully resolved.



UNICEF programme strategy and performance

Programme relevance and adaptation to context

- 13** The evaluation found that since 2018, UNICEF has largely managed to implement programmes appropriate to the different contexts of government-controlled areas (GCAs) and non-government-controlled NWS, and to adapt its approach to changing circumstances over the evaluation period. While each region has posed different challenges, lack of up-to-date data on needs and limited ability to monitor the effects of interventions have been common factors across the

whole country. These challenges have been particularly acute in non-GCAs.

Within this overall picture there is considerable variation. In non-government held areas of the northwest, UNICEF and its partners have done well to adapt to the rapidly evolving context, including mass displacements in 2019–2020. In non-government held areas of the northeast, since 2020 and the closure of the cross-border route from Iraq, the evaluation found positive examples of programme adaptation, particularly in health and WASH, while the nutrition and education programmes faced more challenges – although here

and elsewhere across Syria, UNICEF has done well to depoliticize the education agenda and support multiple pathways for children to learn and gain accreditation after years of disruption. Complex work on child protection, including work with third-country nationals and children associated with armed forces and armed groups, has been innovative and appropriate, and a good demonstration of the organization's added value.

- 14 The organization's work in GCAs over the evaluation period has seen increasing engagement with government counterparts and local administrations, which has allowed UNICEF to pursue a shift towards a recovery strategy, tackling Agendas B and C (basic service strengthening, rehabilitation, etc.), although this remains constrained by multiple factors. This approach is appropriate given the relative stability of the environment of GCAs, and reflects the need for approaches that go beyond relief and service delivery. However, UNICEF interventions are often dwarfed by the scale of destruction of systems and infrastructure, the effects of the economic collapse, and the loss of professional personnel, particularly in health, education and WASH. Donor conditionalities on funding in GCAs have heavily constrained work on

education and adolescent development and participation in particular and have severely limited UNICEF support to the formal education system.

Programme coverage and targeting

- 15 Across all sectors, UNICEF and the relevant clusters have targeted (but not always met) around 70-80 per cent of the assessed needs. Within that figure, target achievement has been variable across sectors and regions. While some sectors (WASH, health) have achieved relatively high coverage, others have been unable to achieve adequate coverage. Evaluating UNICEF programme *coverage against assessed needs* proved difficult given major uncertainties concerning the reliability of system-wide needs assessment data and related 'people in need' figures. The specific impacts of the crisis on children were often *assumed* rather than assessed, with access for assessment severely limited across the whole country. Likewise, UNICEF figures for 'reach' are based on achievement of output delivery targets (as assessed by partners, third-party monitors and facilitators) rather than being based on data and feedback concerning benefits actually delivered. Targeting has often been influenced as much by opportunities to programme as by assessed needs and priorities.

Programme effectiveness

- 16** While the evaluation draws some specific conclusions about the effectiveness of particular programme elements, the ability of UNICEF to gauge the effectiveness of its interventions suffers from many of the same limitations noted above with regard to needs assessment and coverage. Assessing whether a given programme intervention achieved the desired result has relied too heavily on output delivery / target achievement data and the logic of the programme itself. The lack of feedback from communities themselves is one essential missing component here, as is outcome data more generally. Although progress has been made in this regard, UNICEF itself acknowledges the need to find better ways of establishing that its interventions and those of its partners are having the desired effect. The importance of the UNICEF role in public health risk communication and in related programming (vaccination, including COVID-19, WASH) emerges as one clear area of major impact for which effectiveness can reasonably be inferred from the level of coverage.

Collaborations, partnerships and community engagement

- 17** Working relationships with sister United Nations agencies and with

the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) were found generally to have been constructive and effective, although there are significant areas in which these need to be strengthened. Its working relationships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – local, national and international – have varied in quality and type across the three main crisis areas, in part because of restrictions on partnerships and partner presence. UNICEF lacks some usual key partner international NGOs, but there remains more scope for international NGO partnerships in Damascus and beyond. Its partnerships with local NGOs in all three areas are central to the implementation of the UNICEF programme, and from a wider perspective, they are also essential to the effective resourcing, support and capacity-building of Syrian NGOs, who have been key actors in the delivery of essential services across WoS. UNICEF technical support and capacity-building of NGOs has been particularly valued.

- 18** The evaluation found that accountability to affected populations (AAP), and more generally, engagement with communities, has been one of the weakest aspects of UNICEF practice to date. This is related to the lack of UNICEF presence in many areas, necessitating a 'remote' approach that relies on third parties to engage with communities. In

recognition of this, UNICEF (particularly SCO) has taken steps to enhance its ability to gain feedback from communities, but the relative lack of proximity and community engagement remains a significant constraint on the organization's ability to account for, and ensure the relevance and effectiveness of, its interventions.

Cross-cutting issues

19 Humanitarian principles were considered across various aspects of the UNICEF response. Largely for reasons of operating restrictions and lack of data, UNICEF cannot say with confidence that it has always responded on the basis of (assessed) need. Although the evaluation found that the response was broadly equitable and needs-based, some priority agendas have been underserved. Greater transparency concerning operational limitations would help to address potential concerns about lack of independence. The evaluation found that UNICEF engagement with the Government of Syria and with de facto authorities in areas outside government control had been appropriate and necessary. Nevertheless, more work is needed to establish in practice the principle of independence.

20 The gender-related aspects of the crisis were found generally to have been well reflected in the UNICEF response, particularly with regard to girls' access to primary education. However, given the highly gendered impacts of the crisis – including the vulnerabilities of women and girls in particular to violence and coercion – this remains a crucial area of concern and one on which UNICEF should continue to work closely with other agencies. The situation of adolescents (girls and boys), including access to education and training, and related issues of child labour and early marriage, is an area that needs more international attention, and UNICEF has an important role to play here.



According to the 2022 HNO, of the 14.6 million people in need inside Syria, some 4.2 million have a disability. The majority of children with disabilities aged 12–17 are not attending school and households that have persons with disabilities are some of the most vulnerable in Syria, both in terms of access to basic needs and protection. UNICEF has done important work to support such households through its education and social protection programmes (notably in its disability programming in Aleppo) but it has not been able to mount such work on a scale commensurate with need. Given both the priority of the need and the impact that UNICEF has demonstrated in this area, the evaluation concluded that this should be a priority for future action.

Recommendations

The evaluation makes recommendations under the following headings, recognizing that many of these issues are acknowledged by UNICEF and some progress has already been made on the agendas listed here. Implementation of some of these recommendations also depends on factors such as funding and access (in some areas) over which UNICEF has limited control or influence. The recommendations should be read in that light.

R1. Reframe the Whole of Syria agenda and related humanitarian strategy

The UNICEF crisis response in Syria, for all its strengths, has been hampered by the lack of a coherent strategy for its humanitarian work. Disconnected strategies across the whole of Syria have reflected the fragmentation of the country: cross-border and cross-line efforts have not been well harmonized, and both appear to be disconnected from work in GCAs. Over the course of the evaluation period, the humanitarian situation in Syria has largely evolved into three distinct crises, each posing different challenges for humanitarian response and recovery efforts. UNICEF needs to find a way to encompass these within a single strategy and analytical framework. Doing so requires fully recognizing the scale of the overall humanitarian crisis and the distinct characteristics and priorities of each ‘sub-crisis’, as well as the linkages between them.

While the political and security context (national and international) will largely continue to define what is possible by way of effective intervention, UNICEF must maintain the position that its mandate applies to all children equally across Syria, and that this requires it to work across political boundaries. This should be the foundation of discussions with both the

Government of Syria (GoS) and with de facto authorities in NWS and NES.

R2. Review Whole of Syria arrangements

The UNICEF WoS arrangement needs to evolve to reflect the change of circumstances since it was established while maintaining certain key functions. Specifically, it needs to provide a stronger platform for assessing needs and coordinating interventions to all parts of Syria according to a common humanitarian strategy and plan. This includes much stronger harmonization of cross-border and cross-line support. The WoS office in Amman and SCO need to collaborate closely on this agenda.

More generally, the arrangements need to provide a clearer framework of responsibilities and accountabilities for each hub and the functions located within them. Lack of clarity on this has been a significant barrier to effective and harmonized working for UNICEF across WoS.

R3. Ensure continuity of Agenda A support to areas of northwestern Syria outside GoS control, while adapting the support strategy to reflect the evolving situation

Ensuring continuity of support for the needs of children and their families in non-GC NWS must continue to be a priority for UNICEF, given the scale and severity of needs involved. The situation remains fluid and levels of vulnerability (as well as levels of aid dependency) are high. Uncertainty over the future of cross-border support and challenges to increasing cross-line support from GCAs add to that vulnerability and planning against future scenarios is an immediate priority.

R4. Repurpose the strategy for support to non-government-controlled areas of northeastern Syria

UNICEF has made real strides in opening space and responding to critical needs, but there are key service gaps (e.g., in nutrition and education) and the scale and coverage are insufficient, particularly in areas outside the formal IDP camps. Progressively extending the support provided cross-zone will require closer collaboration with NGOs as well as de facto authorities (self-administration) together with higher-level advocacy to increase the operating space. Doing this will involve rebuilding trust and will require more transparency and better communication on both sides. This is also essential for securing the trust of donors, who currently express understandable confusion as to the nature and extent of aid efforts in NES (by UNICEF and others)

and concern at the lack of coordination and collaboration between the United Nations and NGOs. For its part, UNICEF must be more open about the extent and limits of its ability to support work cross-zone, even within the camps where it currently operates.

R5. Build the scale of work in GCAs through enhanced partnerships and consortia

UNICEF has done well to work with national and local authorities, SARC and approved NGOs in GCAs despite the multiple limitations imposed by donor conditionalities, as well as limits imposed by the government on needs assessment and response. The main challenge identified by the evaluation is one of scale: UNICEF needs to find ways to better address the humanitarian agenda for children in GCAs at scale, through wider partnerships, integrated programming and area-based approaches. While this is dependent on donor willingness to fund as well as GoS permissions, joint inter-agency approaches – possibly using consortium or even joint venture models – could help to provide assurance as well as a potential scale multiplier effect.

R6. Address critical service gaps and maintain key services

Consistent with the wider humanitarian strategy, UNICEF should identify critical service gaps across the whole of Syria, analyse the reasons behind them, and take steps to address them as a matter of priority. Some of these (nutrition is a key example) cannot wait. Others may take some time to address but should be treated with the urgency they deserve. Some demand strengthening not only the UNICEF programme response but the wider sector response and its coordination.

R7. Strengthen needs assessment, situational monitoring and targeting across WoS

Related to R4 above, UNICEF needs a plan to strengthen its ability – and that of the sectors for which it has lead responsibilities – to better gauge the evolving picture of needs and vulnerabilities across all parts of Syria, including with regard to under-5 malnutrition. The methods employed may vary somewhat across the three crisis areas, but a common analytical framework should be used at sector and inter-sector levels. This needs to allow for more ‘real-time’ and baseline data gathering.

R8. Strengthen monitoring and accounting for programme delivery and performance

UNICEF needs to be better able to account (internally and externally) for its programme interventions through partners in all parts of Syria. The inability to do so reliably is a reputational risk and means that UNICEF lacks a sound basis for programme management. As part of this, UNICEF needs to be significantly more transparent in reporting both what it does (and where), and what it is *unable* to do. It also needs to ensure comparable transparency concerning the work of clusters and areas of responsibility (AoRs) for which it has lead responsibilities.

R9. Strengthen cluster and AoR leadership and coordination

While in some sectors, UNICEF leadership and coordination have been strong, in other areas they have been relatively weak at both hub and WoS levels. UNICEF must make sure that its own programme delivery is not privileged over fulfilment of its essential system-wide roles. Double- and triple-hatting has seriously affected UNICEF performance and the well-being of the staff concerned.

R10. Strengthen the supply function

Supply for the programme in GCAs and cross-zone in NES has been a persistent problem, related in part to the economic crises in Syria and Lebanon. **The SCO should request expert support from the Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO) or Supply Division** to help identify steps necessary for improvements, as well as to provide general support to the supply section. A head of section needs to be recruited as soon as possible. The evaluation suggests that a task team be established, including programme and fundraising staff, to monitor progress on agreed steps and report to senior managers on progress. This is a core function for UNICEF, the performance of which has system-wide implications.

R11. Enhance risk management and control processes

While UNICEF risk management and control processes appear relatively strong, the review of risks should happen more regularly than it does at present (we suggest quarterly). Collaboration on due diligence and spot checks under the harmonized approach to cash transfers (HACT) system could be extended beyond

the current United Nations partners. On safeguarding and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, while good progress is being made internally, more needs to be done to raise awareness amongst beneficiaries and establish case management protocols at a community level. Continued advocacy at a governmental level is required to enable wider progress on this agenda.

R12. Strengthen communication and advocacy efforts

While UNICEF (SCO/MENARO) has made good use of private advocacy channels with authorities across Syria and in the wider region over the evaluation period, it needs to be more consistent and responsive in its public advocacy and condemnations

of gross abuses of child rights (it has sometimes been too risk-averse in this regard). Such communication needs to be distinguished from communications designed primarily to promote UNICEF and its work. The current practice of routing such advocacy mainly through MENARO is appropriate.

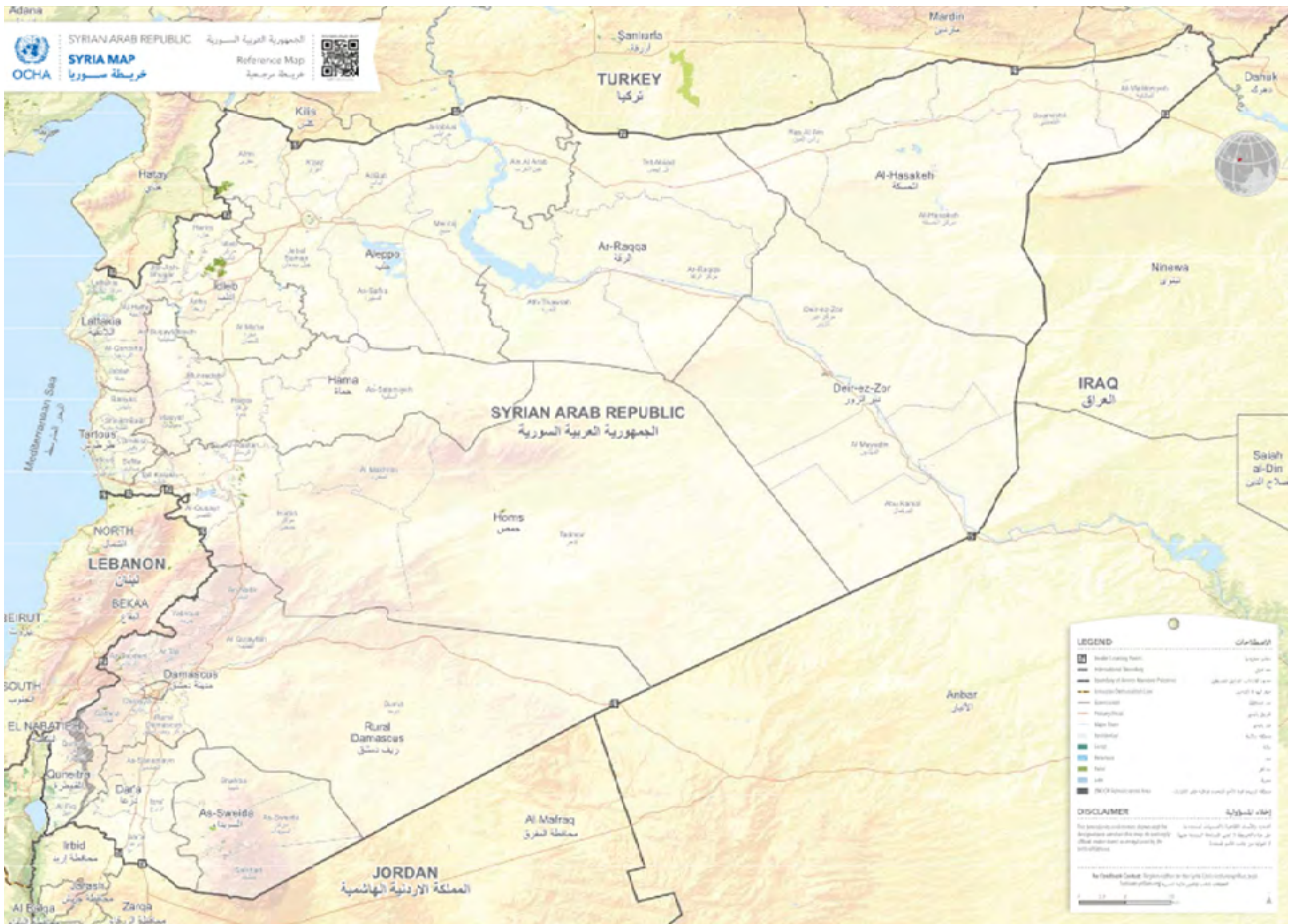
While UNICEF has tended to highlight its own (positive) role, not enough communication work is done to highlight the gaps in coverage for children across WoS, and particularly in NWS. Given the limited presence of international NGOs across the various hubs, this is an especially important agenda for UNICEF. An advocacy strategy and rollout plan should form part of the proposed humanitarian strategy and plan (R1).

TABLE OF ACRONYMS

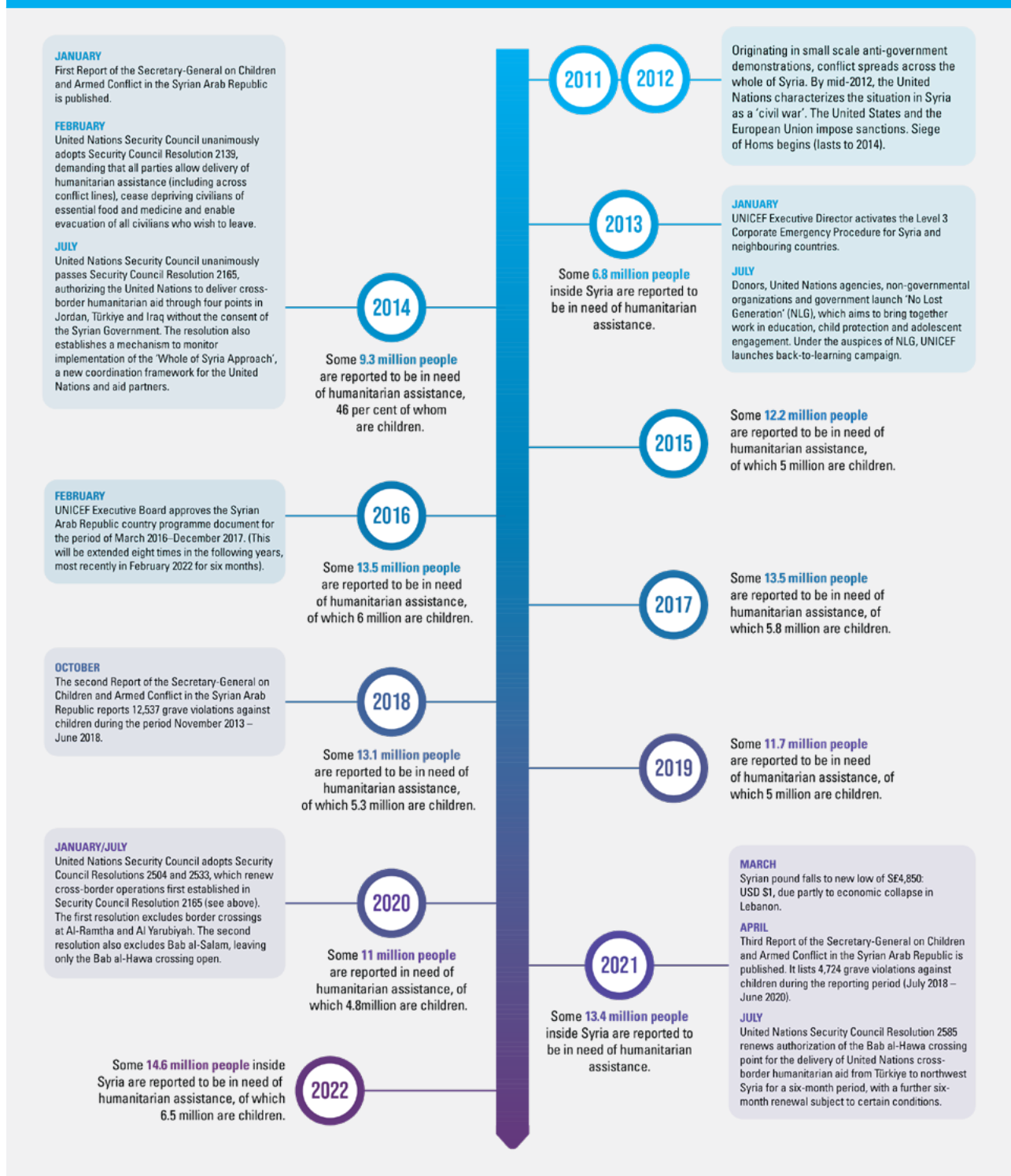
AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
ADAP	Adolescent Development and Participation
AoR	Area of Responsibility
C4D	Communications for Development
CAAFAG	Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups
CCCs	Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action
CLA	Cluster Lead Agency
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CPD	Country Programme Document
EiE	Education in Emergencies
EMOPS	Office of Emergency Programmes
EMT	Emergency Management Team
EPI	Expanded Programme on Immunization
EU	European Union
GCA	Government-Controlled Areas
GEC	Global Emergency Coordinator
GoS	Government of Syria
HNAP	Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HPC	Humanitarian Planning Cycle
HR	Human Resources
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
HQ	Headquarters
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
JOP	Joint Operational Planning
KII	Key Informant Interview
L3	Level 3 Emergency
MAM	Moderate Acute Malnutrition

MENARO	Middle East and North Africa Regional Office
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MRM	Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations Against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict
NES	Non-government-controlled areas of Northeastern Syria
NFI	Non-Food Item
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NLG	No Lost Generation
NWS	Non-government-controlled areas of Northwestern Syria
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PG	Programme Group
PBR	Programme Budget Review
PSN	Programme Strategy Note
PSS	Psychosocial Support
RCCE	Risk Communication and Community Engagement
RD	Regional Director
RO	Regional Office
SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SCO	Syria Country Office
SCR	Security Council Resolution
SSOP	Simplified Standard Operating Procedures
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TPM	Third-Party Monitoring
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization
WFP	World Food Programme
WoS	Whole of Syria

Figure 1: Map of Syria



Box 1: A selective humanitarian timeline for the Syria crisis





1

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

This evaluation was commissioned by the UNICEF Evaluation Office¹ at its headquarters and concerns the UNICEF response to the Level 3 (L3) humanitarian crisis in Syria over the period 2018–2021. It is *strategic* rather than technical or operational in nature; it asks whether UNICEF found the right roles for itself in Syria over the past four years given the context, as well as examining how well it performed in those roles. In that sense,

it is only partly an evaluation of UNICEF programme and operational performance, with as much attention given to questions of relevance, prioritization and overall approach. The evaluation takes an ‘outside-in’ approach, assessing the value of UNICEF interventions with respect to the context, children’s needs, the organization’s mandate and core functions, the roles played by other actors and the needs of the wider response system.

¹ The terms of reference (see Annex 1) were drafted following consultation with the Syria country office, the Middle East and North Africa regional office and a wider internal reference group. The evaluation was conducted in close collaboration with those offices.

The evaluation is based on an extensive documentary and data review, together with remote informant interviews during an inception phase (July–August 2021); in-person interviews in Gaziantep and Amman in September and October 2021; field visits and in-person interviews in Syria (Damascus, Aleppo, Deir-ez-Zor) in November 2021; subsequent follow-up informant interviews; and online surveys of staff and partners.

This report sets out the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation. This includes an analysis of the way in which the crisis should best be understood, since it cannot properly be understood as a single ‘crisis’, and the UNICEF response has to be considered across at least three distinct crisis contexts since 2018. The organization last commissioned an evaluation of its Syria response in 2015. The present evaluation covers the period 2018 to the end of 2021, and there is therefore a gap in evaluation coverage of the UNICEF response for the years 2016–2017. While some reference is made to the evolution of the UNICEF programme since 2016, the evaluative component is limited to the period since 2018, and within this, the dominant focus is on 2020 and 2021.

The evaluation takes account of other relevant reviews, evaluations and studies, including the UNICEF Syria Corporate Review (February 2019), an internal review of UNICEF Whole of Syria (WoS) coordination in 2021, and the internal audit of the Syria country office (December 2019). It is being undertaken concurrently with a formative ‘strategic shift’ evaluation commissioned separately by the Syria country office (SCO).²

Section 1 of this report sets out the approach and limits of the evaluation, including the main evaluation questions. *Section 2* considers the evolving Syria context since 2018 and the UNICEF response, while *section 3* is specifically concerned with evaluating the organization’s strategic approach in Syria. *Section 4* is concerned with the design, relevance and performance of the UNICEF programme response to the crisis. *Section 5* considers how UNICEF has worked with others, including through its sector coordination lead roles. *Section 6* reviews some of the main management and operational support issues arising. Finally, *section 7* contains the main conclusions and recommendations. The annexes contain the terms of reference (ToR), the full evaluation matrix, and a list of sources referred to in the text.

2 “Formative Evaluation of the Strategic Shift in Syria”, commissioned April 2021. While this overlaps to some degree with the L3 evaluation, it is formative in nature and focused specifically on the question of how UNICEF can achieve a strategic shift from a relief/supply approach to one focused on ‘resilience’. The present evaluation differs in being largely summative, concerned with the relevance, performance and effectiveness of the UNICEF humanitarian response (including recovery work) in Syria since 2018. From this it draws some formative conclusions about the organization’s role over the next two to three years.

1.2 Evaluation purpose, scope and intended users

Evaluation purpose

As set out in the ToR, the evaluation is intended to fulfil two functions:

- (i) An *accountability* function, reflecting the need to account (internally and externally) for one of the largest UNICEF country programmes, designated a corporate L3 priority throughout the evaluation period;³
- (ii) A *learning* function, reflecting the need to capture lessons from a programme of this duration and significance, to inform the in-country programme and UNICEF global programming and practice.

The specific objectives of the evaluation as described in the ToR are to:

- Provide a comprehensive assessment of the overall UNICEF response to the crisis (including cross-border programming) in relation to the organization's mandate and standards, its stated objectives, and standard evaluation criteria;

- Based on collation and analysis of relevant data and information, generate evidence, conclusions and key lessons and make recommendations to improve the response in Syria and similar responses elsewhere and in the future.

The evaluation is essentially *summative*, though it has some formative aspects – in other words, it looks both backward and forward. As established in the inception phase of the evaluation, this is intended to be a *strategic* evaluation rather than a technical or operational one, and this shapes both the scope of the evaluation and the approach adopted.

Evaluation scope

The overall subject of the evaluation is defined in the ToR as being the UNICEF “response to the L3 Syria humanitarian crisis” since 2018. The scope is limited to UNICEF work in Syria itself; it does not cover the response to the wider regional crisis involving Syrian refugees in surrounding countries or programming for Palestinian refugees in Syria. As per the ToR, the evaluation assesses

³ As of 4 February 2022, the Syria situation has been reclassified as L1 until 31 December 2022. In her statement announcing the change, the Executive Director noted that “the operational context in Syria remains complex and volatile despite some reduction in armed violence, and humanitarian needs continue to grow”. She also stressed the “urgency for UNICEF and its partners to continue strong advocacy for a renewal of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2585, which authorizes cross-border operations into northwest Syria. We must also continue to strengthen UNICEF engagement in actions across the humanitarian operation to reduce our dependency on the cross-border modality”.

the appropriateness of the UNICEF strategy and programme designs in the sectors supported by UNICEF, and the delivery modalities in the different parts of the country, including for hard-to-reach populations. It also includes *“an assessment of coverage, results, effectiveness, quality and efficiency, as well as a review of the quality and use of evidence, assessing how well the response has used previous evidence ... to inform or adapt current programming, and what systems are in place to monitor the situation and UNICEF performance”*.

Under the headings of *accountability* and *efficiency*, the evaluation includes a review of key issues arising in the management and operational aspects of the programme, including structures and lines of accountability; monitoring and reporting; financial and risk management processes; and the quality and effectiveness of the supply and human resources (HR) functions. While the evaluation does not focus on individual responsibility for actions taken, it does review the extent to which UNICEF has been able to account properly for its interventions to the relevant stakeholders, including affected communities themselves and UNICEF donors.

The evaluation reviews what is understood to be the *whole agenda of humanitarian concern* for UNICEF in seeking to answer the evaluation questions below. To this end, it covers those elements that relate to addressing the more acute effects of the crisis on children (emergency response, direct service delivery); urgent recovery and rehabilitation agendas, including support to essential services and prevention of system collapse; and addressing critical short- to medium-term threats to child development. Taken together, these are understood as constituting the humanitarian agenda in the broader sense in which it is understood in the Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) for Syria.

The corollary of this broad approach is that in this evaluation there is inevitably limited *depth* of coverage of each sector, and of the specific issues relating to management and operational support. Since this is not a technical evaluation or detailed review of programme components, the analysis is not structured according to sectors of intervention. However, examples from sectoral interventions across different parts of the country – and specifically the three main crisis areas – are used to inform the analysis of broader issues of relevance, coverage, effectiveness and so on.

Evaluation stakeholders and intended users

The evaluation is primarily intended for UNICEF staff, including:

- UNICEF staff in Syria and the outpost office in Gaziantep (Türkiye) responsible for programme implementation, support and oversight;
- UNICEF staff in the Middle East and North Africa regional office (MENARO) and headquarters (HQ) divisions responsible for coordinating and supporting the L3 humanitarian response;
- UNICEF Syria cluster coordination leads responsible for contributing to the United Nations-led humanitarian response in Syria;
- The emergency management team (EMT) chaired by the global emergency coordinator (GEC) for the Syria crisis.

Beyond UNICEF and its immediate stakeholders, including its donors and Executive Board, the report should be of interest to all actors who share responsibility and concern for the welfare of crisis-affected communities in Syria. Ultimately, the evaluation is intended to benefit people affected by the crisis, and above all the children of Syria.

1.3 Evaluation approach and methodology

The approach of the evaluation has been consultative, looking to identify lessons and ways forward in collaboration with the staff involved in the response, while maintaining independence of judgement and a willingness to challenge accepted wisdom. Given the strategic nature of the evaluation, direct community consultation and primary data collection (beyond informant interviews) was not undertaken.

The evaluation has been conducted in accordance with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) ethical guidelines for evaluation and the UNICEF ethical standards for research and evaluation.⁴ The proposed evaluation approach and related tools were reviewed and approved by an independent ethical review board, ensuring proper protocols were in place for informed consent, data protection, etc. Views expressed are not attributed to the individuals or organizations concerned, other than to distinguish views expressed by internal (UNICEF) sources from those expressed by external sources. The type of organization is sometimes noted (e.g., “a major donor said...”) but the organization itself is not named (except for some government authorities).

4 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis', UNICEF, New York, 2021.

Data collection and analysis

Documentation

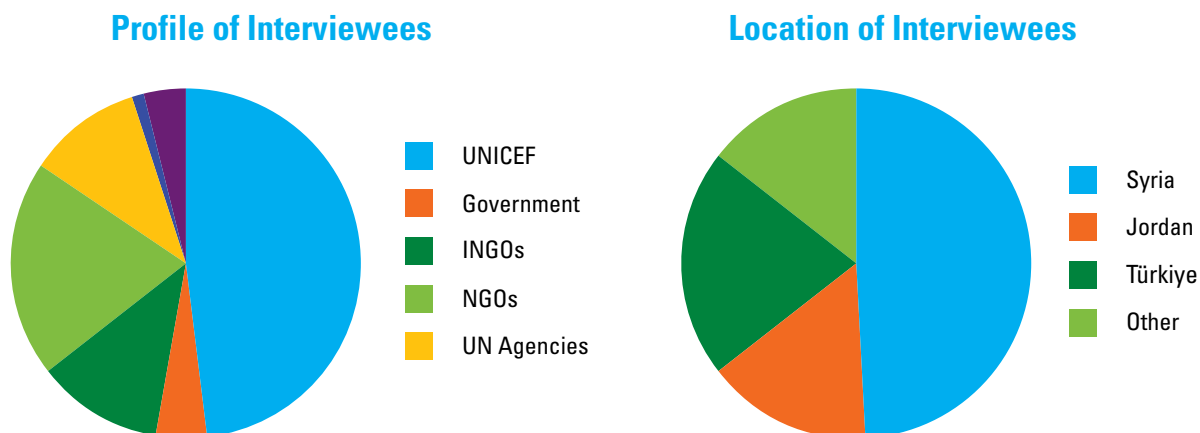
The team conducted an extensive document review of publicly and non-publicly available material that informed the analysis. This included documentation produced by UNICEF such as planning, monitoring, and reporting documentation (Humanitarian Action for Children reports, situation reports, etc.), strategies, reviews, studies, presentations, partnership documents, evaluations and meeting minutes. Among the external sources consulted were United Nations-compiled planning and needs assessment documents (HRPs, Humanitarian Needs Overviews) and a range of reviews, evaluations, studies and articles concerning the crisis. The document review was used as a key source in its own right as well as a basis for triangulating information collected in key informant interviews (KIs).

The evaluation team also compiled and analysed information from UNICEF internal reporting systems. Most notably, the analysis of programme coverage used baselines, targets and results for various indicators taken from cluster reports and from the organization's humanitarian performance monitoring reports.

Key informant interviews⁵

The evaluation team relied heavily on KIs to inform the analysis. Key informants were identified initially through a mapping exercise that took place during the inception phase; subsequently, a snowballing approach was used to identify relevant individuals. In total, the evaluation team carried out 185 informant interviews. In order to situate UNICEF work within a wider context and in keeping with the strategic nature of the exercise, the evaluation team interviewed slightly more external stakeholders than UNICEF staff. External stakeholders included staff from United Nations agencies, local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donors, and government authorities in various ministries and directorates. The team interviewed UNICEF staff from field offices across Syria, the Syria country office, the Gaziantep outpost office and MENARO as well as from headquarters offices in New York, Geneva and Copenhagen. Almost half the interviewees were located in Syria; the others were split evenly among Jordan, Türkiye and elsewhere. See Figure 2 below for a breakdown of profiles and locations.

⁵ In line with the confidentiality protocol developed during the inception phase, all key informant names were anonymized and stored according to coding system in a secure repository. Upon completion of this exercise, these notes will be destroyed.

Figure 2: Profile and location of interviewees

Field visits

Field visits covered fifteen project sites across Syria, in Damascus, Duma, Aleppo, rural Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor. The visits, which covered all sectors of UNICEF programming, included schools, hospitals, clinics, community centres for adolescents or for children with disabilities, child-friendly spaces, as well as water and sanitation projects. The locations and types of interventions were identified by the evaluation team and selected in consultation with SCO. It was not possible to visit programme sites in non-government-controlled areas of the northwest (NWS) or northeast (NES), nor (for operational reasons) was it possible to visit the UNICEF field office in Qamishli.

The evaluation team was usually accompanied by UNICEF staff, who provided valuable information about the nature of and challenges involved with the project. On site, the team interviewed those involved in the project, such as hospital administrators, school principals and teachers, heads and staff of community centres, water engineers, NGO staff and volunteers.

Online surveys

The evaluation team administered two anonymous online surveys, one for UNICEF staff involved in the response and one for UNICEF implementing partners. The surveys provided an opportunity to collect information about the perceptions of those the team was unable to interview.

The survey for staff was completed by 119 respondents from field offices in Syria, SCO, the Gaziantep outpost office, MENARO, and headquarters locations. The survey consisted of 13 substantive questions, eight of which were open-ended. This gave staff a chance to explain their views in detail and provided the team with rich detailed qualitative information. The results of the survey were coded, sorted and analysed.

The survey for partners was administered in Arabic and English. It was sent to all implementing partners that have active agreements with either UNICEF Syria country office or Gaziantep outpost office. Approximately 60 per cent of those contacted responded. The survey consisted of 14 substantive questions, nine of which were open-ended, which allowed the team to collect detailed information. The survey results were translated, coded, sorted and analysed.

A more detailed description of the methodology can be found in the inception report. The information collected by the methods outlined above was organized by evaluation question and analysed accordingly. Two debriefings-cum-early findings workshops were held, one in Damascus and one remotely, which provided an opportunity for those involved in the response to provide feedback on the initial findings.



Evaluability and evaluation limitations

Some of the limits to evaluating the UNICEF response in Syria come from the lack of reliable data concerning needs and priorities across different parts of the country, as well as data gaps concerning UNICEF programming and operations. The datasets are sometimes divided between Government of Syria-controlled areas (GCAs) and non-GCAs, and in many cases are based on different indicators. In other cases, it was not possible to establish a geographic breakdown within larger (WoS/SCO) datasets. The nature of the data makes it difficult to compare across regions, and more generally to assess how well targeted, prioritized and effective UNICEF interventions have been. These limitations are analysed in the following sections, particularly section 4. For some parts of the programme, most notably

in NES, the lack of available data over the evaluation period had a significant impact on the overall evaluability of that component of the programme.

The 'hybrid' nature of the UNICEF programme introduced another complication. The evaluation had to consider the organization's approach and performance across at least three distinct geographic and humanitarian contexts (GCAs, NWS and NES) as well as across the whole of Syria. This includes work within GCAs and that was conducted (largely remotely) cross-border as well as 'cross-line' or 'cross-zone'. There are a number of evaluability challenges related to this. Some relate to the lack of a clear overarching strategy for the humanitarian response: neither the 2016 country programme document (CPD) nor the more recent draft CPD articulate the UNICEF strategy for this component of its work, which in practice makes up the great majority of its work in Syria over the evaluation period. No explicit WoS strategy exists and the programme logic for humanitarian interventions is not always clear.

Other limitations on evaluability are more typical of contexts such as this, including limits on access, time and resources. With respect to access, the evaluation team was not able to access areas in non-government-controlled parts of NWS

and NES. For these it has been reliant on interviews with staff working 'remotely', mostly through NGO partners in NWS; staff working directly and with partners out of the Qamishli field office in NES; and (mostly remote) consultation with partners and others working in these areas. Access to parts of Syria under government control was not significantly constrained, so a fair degree of direct observation and discussion with partners was possible on a 'representative sample' basis. The team was able to broaden its range of inputs from all areas through the use of online surveys of staff and partners, but the nature of the evaluation was such that no other primary data collection was possible beyond these and KIs. This inevitably limited the extent to which the evaluation could draw firm conclusions on the effectiveness and quality of UNICEF interventions.

Significant UNICEF and partner staff turnover since 2018 across all offices and hubs meant that not all interviewees had institutional memory of how the response had evolved during the evaluation period. This led to a relative bias in evidence towards the more recent part of that period, although the evaluators concluded that such evidence often had greater relevance to current challenges – and that this was consistent with the intention of putting particular emphasis on more recent experience.



1.4 Evaluation questions

The evaluation team devised a framework of guiding questions for the evaluation, building on those in the ToR. These provided the basis for informant interviews and documentary analysis. Together with sub-questions, criteria and potential evidence sources, they are set out in full in the evaluation matrix in Annex 2. Below, we list the main headings and related evaluation criteria.



Overall evaluation questions:

How well has UNICEF served the best interests of children (short- and medium-term) across the whole of Syria since 2018? Has it found the right roles for itself, overall and by sector? What has been the main added value of UNICEF interventions? What can be learned from this for the future of UNICEF work in the country, region and globally?

A. Evolution of Syria context, priority issues for children, operating context

(Questions of appropriateness and relevance of UNICEF response)

B. UNICEF strategy, needs assessment, planning and programme design

(Relevance, appropriateness, coverage, equity, coherence)

C. Programme performance and impact

(Quality, results, effectiveness)

D. Partnerships, coordination and collaboration

(Coverage, external coherence, connectedness, efficiency)

E. Management, operations and support functions

(Efficiency and control)

F. Cross-cutting issues



2

THE SYRIA CRISIS AND THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE⁶

2.1 The Syria crisis and its effects

The timeline in section 1 above shows some of the key humanitarian milestones in the course of the Syria crisis since 2011. In the rest of this section, we highlight some of the main features of the Syria context as they bear on the immediate well-being and security of children and their families; on the prospects for recovery of families,

communities and institutions; and on the related humanitarian interventions by UNICEF and others. We also consider some of the key factors in the wider development context; and we briefly review the context for the sectors with which UNICEF is most concerned: health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection, education, adolescent development and participation (ADAP) and social protection.

⁶ This section covers evaluation questions A.1 *How has the general Syria country context evolved over (i) the decade 2011–2021, (ii) evaluation period (2018 to date)?* A.2 *How has the humanitarian context evolved, specifically for children and women?* A.3 *How has the context for humanitarian intervention by international and national/local organizations evolved since 2018?* A.4 *What have been the main operating challenges for UNICEF and its partners?*

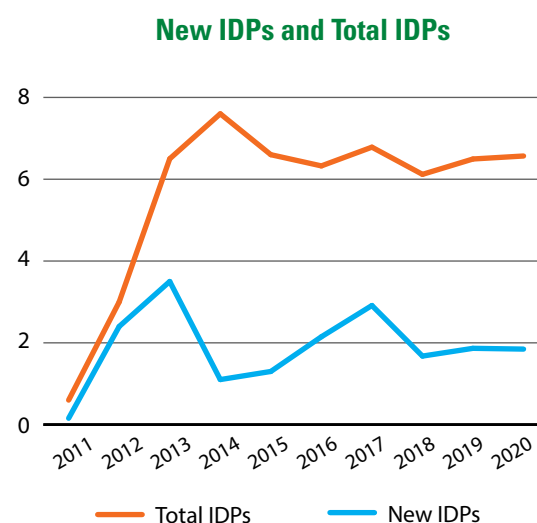
The impact of conflict and economic collapse

Although the figures are difficult to verify, it is estimated that since the conflict began over half a million people have been killed, over 350,000 of whom were civilians.⁷ The United Nations has verified that nearly 12,000 children have been killed or injured in Syria, although the real figure is likely much higher.⁸ There have been attacks on civilians and medical personnel, reports of torture, kidnappings, summary executions and the use of chemical weapons. More than two-thirds of basic infrastructure has been damaged and targeting of civilian infrastructure – including markets, hospitals, schools and residential areas – has been regularly reported, particularly in northern Syria.

The crisis is estimated to have *displaced more than half the population*, internally and externally. Since 2011, almost a third of Syrians – 6.8 million – have sought refuge outside Syria and around 5.6 million Syrians are hosted by countries in the region. There have also been enormous displacements within Syria. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 6.7 million people are currently displaced, but this figure hides

the extent of the displacement crisis, as many Syrians have been displaced *multiple times*. The graph below shows the total number of people displaced at the end of each year (in orange) and the number displaced in each year (in blue).⁹ Repeated displacement explains the relatively steady total number of displaced people. Every year, since 2012, between 1 million and 3.5 million people have been displaced. The effect on families, communities and the social fabric and cohesion of the country is incalculable.

Figure 3: Internal displacement in Syria, 2011–2020



⁷ Statement by Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, September 2021.

⁸ United Nations, 'Syria War: Average of one child injured or killed every eight hours over past 10 years', <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087212>.

⁹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Humanitarian Data Exchange, Geneva, <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/id-mc-idp-data-for-syrian-arab-republic>.

The *Syrian economy* has been devastated by years of conflict. Destruction of infrastructure and prevailing insecurity have made most of the country economically unviable, and key sectors like agriculture and mineral extraction have shrunk dramatically.¹⁰ One result is a dramatic loss of employment opportunities for millions of Syrians, including older adolescents and young adults. Fuel and electricity shortages have negatively impacted households, as well as health services, water services and the agricultural sector. Since late 2020, low levels of rainfall contributed to significant crop failures, particularly in the northeast, which produces around 60 per cent of the country's wheat and barley.¹¹ Insufficient water for irrigation jeopardizes the income of vulnerable families who are at risk of sliding further into poverty and exacerbates the risks for gender-based violence and poor health.

Overall, the past decade of conflict has seen the *impoverishment* of much of the population of Syria. Poverty levels¹² rose

from 34 per cent in 2007 to 85 per cent in 2015 and 90 per cent in 2021.¹³ This has both short- and longer-term implications. Some of the more acute aspects of this are considered below, in terms of loss of livelihoods and the ability of families to meet their basic needs. At the macro-economic level, the collapse of the economy and the impact of sanctions have had profound fiscal as well as monetary impacts (the collapse in the value of the currency), including impacts on the ability of the Government of Syria (GoS) to generate adequate revenue to invest in essential services. This is reflected in the ever-smaller government social sector budgets, meaning less funding for social support programmes like fuel and food subsidies and for the wages of public employees, who make up a third of the workforce.¹⁴

In the last two years, the economic situation has deteriorated further due to the ongoing economic crisis in Lebanon, a financial centre for Syria. This has caused

10 Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report, June 2022.

11 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Syrian Arab Republic: Euphrates water crisis and drought outlook as of 17 June 2021', Geneva, June 2021. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-euphrates-water-crisis-drought-outlook-17-june-2021>.

12 In Syria's context, overall poverty is defined as the share of the population whose per capita expenditure is less than the cost of food and a reasonable minimum expenditure on non-food items.

13 Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 'Confronting Fragmentation', February 2016. World Food Programme, 'Hunger, Poverty and Rising Prices: How one family in Syria bears the burden of 11 years of conflict', WFP, Rome, November 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/hunger-poverty-and-rising-prices-how-one-family-syria-bears-burden-11#~:text=This%20year%2C%2090%20percent%20of,to%20meet%20their%20basic%20needs>.

14 Christou, W. and K. Shaar, '2021 Budget Reveals the Depth of Syria's Economic Woes', Atlantic Council, December 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/2021-budget-reveals-the-depth-of-syrias-economic-woes/>.

the Syrian currency to lose much of its value against the US dollar, leading to soaring prices for food, fuel and other critical items.¹⁵ The cost of basic staples has increased much faster than household incomes, causing many families to adopt negative coping mechanisms, including child labour, early marriage and skipping or reducing meals. Similarly, the more recent depreciation of the Turkish lira against the US dollar has increased the cost of living in the northwest.¹⁶ It has been estimated that the regional economic downturn has reduced remittances sent to Syria by up to 50 per cent.¹⁷

The economic impact of sanctions on Syria has been severe. The country has been under sanctions for several years, but in 2020 sanctions were expanded with the passage of the Caesar Act in the United States. The act dramatically increases the authority of the United States to sanction businesses, individuals and government institutions for economic activities that support the Government of Syria, particularly in the areas of oil, gas and reconstruction. Notably, the act gives the United States the authority to sanction third-country actors who engage in such activities.

Taken together, the factors outlined above mean that Syria has suffered not just a humanitarian but a *development catastrophe*, and this has profound implications for the medium- and longer-term well-being and development of children and adolescents in Syria. What was a 'lower-middle-income' country only a decade ago, with relatively strong health, educational and social systems, is now a 'low-income' country with a collapsed economy, over half of whose population is displaced either internally or externally (as refugees), and many of whom have lost their former livelihoods. The loss of human capital is incalculable, but already shows itself in the severe shortage of trained professionals in the health, education and other sectors. More generally, the social fabric of the country has been torn in ways that may take generations to repair.

Humanitarian consequences for children and their families

In 2016, the conflict was much more active across multiple fronts, and far more people were suffering the direct effects of war, including exposure to violent attack and bombardment, loss of homes and property, displacement, denial of access to assistance and so on. Aid workers

15 Reuters, 'Syrian Pound Hits New Low in Contagion from Neighboring Lebanon's Currency Crisis', March 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/syria-economy-pound-int/syrian-pound-hits-new-low-in-contagion-from-neighboring-lebanons-currency-crisis-idUSKBN2AV1U1>.

16 Reuters, 'Turkish Lira Slump Hits Displaced Families in Syria's Northwest', December 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkish-lira-slump-hits-displaced-families-syrias-northwest-2021-12-09/>.

17 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Humanitarian Response Plan for the Syrian Arab Republic, 2021', Geneva, 2021.

and aid convoys were directly attacked, as were civilian institutions like schools and hospitals. Gaining secure access to ‘hard-to-reach’ and besieged populations was still the key humanitarian challenge for international actors.¹⁸ Needs and vulnerabilities related as much to the direct effects of conflict as the indirect effects, and the protection agenda extended to the entire civilian population of Syria, with widespread violations of international law.

The scale of humanitarian needs in Syria today remains enormous. Although the current humanitarian situation in Syria is different in kind to that in 2016, the scale of the crisis is comparable. Some 13.4 million people were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2021, including 6.6 million children.¹⁹ These figures are around 20 per cent higher than those from 2020 and comparable with those from the period 2016–2017. The figure for 2022 is 14.6 million, an increase of 1.2 million from 2021, and the profile of those in need continues to evolve. As the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) for 2022 describes: *“Long-standing needs of an estimated 6.9 million [internally displaced persons] remain staggering,*



*particularly for over two million people in 1,760 informal settlements and planned camps, often hosted in inadequate shelters and with limited access to basic services. Households in overburdened host communities and those who have returned to their – often destroyed – places of origin continue to face major challenges in meeting their most basic needs”.*²⁰ But it goes on to note that is the ‘vulnerable residents’ category – those that have not been recently displaced – that shows the greatest increase in humanitarian needs, revealing the impact of economic deterioration in areas historically less directly affected by hostilities and displacement.

¹⁸ The lack of access was so severe that the UN ERC reported in early 2016 that “[in 2015] the UN only delivered humanitarian assistance to less than 10 per cent of people in hard-to-reach areas and only around one per cent in besieged areas”. Statement of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien statement to the London Conference on Syria, January 2016.

¹⁹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Humanitarian Needs Overview for the Syrian Arab Republic, 2021’, Geneva, 2021.

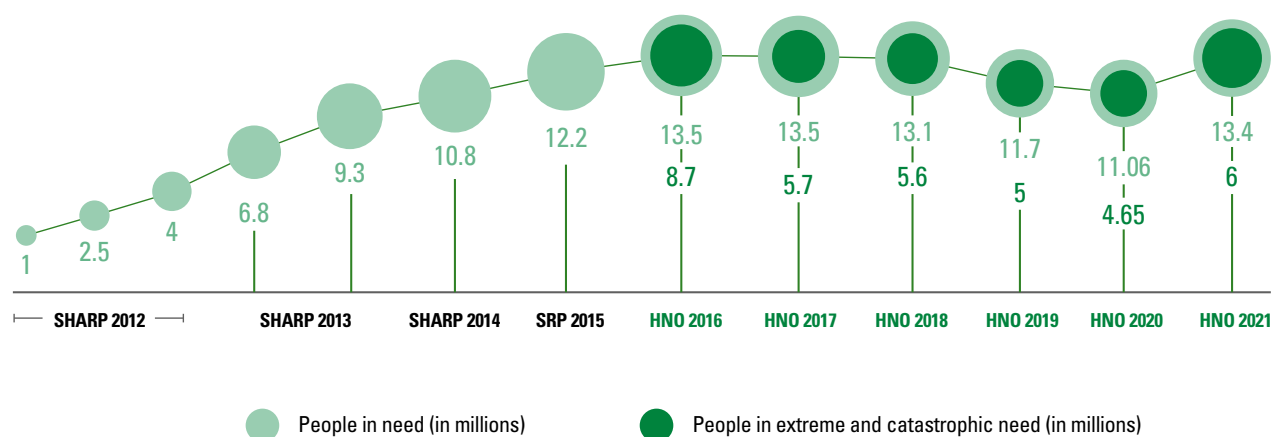
²⁰ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Humanitarian Needs Overview for the Syrian Arab Republic, 2022’, Geneva, 2022, p.8.

The United Nations assessment of the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance over time is shown in Figure 4 below. By the end of 2013, more than half of all Syrians inside the country were in need of humanitarian aid. Although the total number of people in need started to decrease in 2018, that trend has since reversed, so that today close to 75 per cent of the population is assessed as being

in need. Within the category of 'people in need' of humanitarian assistance and protection as understood in the HRP, five different levels of severity are recognized, from 'minimal' (level 1) and 'stress' (2) to 'severe' (3), 'extreme' (4) and 'catastrophic' (5). All but 5 per cent of the population were assessed to be in the top three categories in 2021.²¹

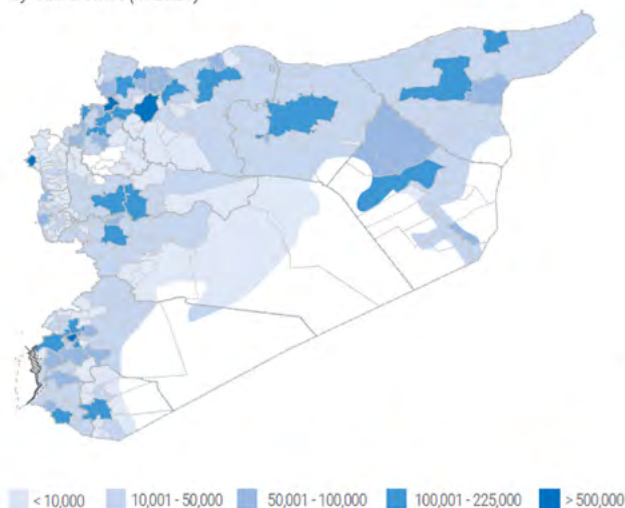
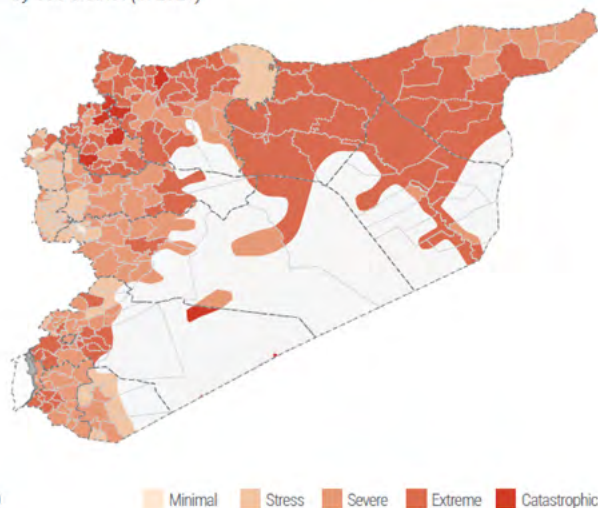
Figure 4: Number of people inside Syria in need of humanitarian assistance

People in Need by Year 2012 – 2021



Source: HRP 2021

²¹ HNO 2021; HNO 2022.

Figure 5: People in need in Syria**Distribution of People in Need**
by sub-district (in 2021)**Inter-sectoral Severity of Needs**
by sub-district (in 2021)

Children and women are generally the worst affected by the crisis, and they constitute around 80 per cent of those living in internally displaced person (IDP) settlements. Older people and those living with disabilities are among the other key groups of humanitarian concern, along with displaced people generally.

Food insecurity makes up a large and growing proportion of needs. In 2021, an estimated 12.4 million people in Syria were thought to be food insecure, the highest level ever recorded in the country, up from 7.9 million in 2020. Food insecurity is particularly high among IDP populations

(the 1.7 million people living in camps are almost entirely aid dependent) but this is now a more generalized phenomenon across the population. Levels of both chronic and acute malnutrition among children are thought to be rising as a result, though recent nutrition survey data are lacking.

Health vulnerabilities are high across all of Syria, in part because of major damage to the health care system from years of conflict. By 2019, just about half of the pre-conflict number of health facilities were functional, with the northeast of Syria being hardest hit; furthermore, an

estimated 70 per cent of trained health care workers have been lost to the system. From 2020, an already greatly weakened and fragmented system was put under further strain by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Areas of high population density, such as informal settlements, IDP camps and collective shelters, are at high risk for disease outbreaks. A decline in coverage of routine immunization through the Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI) during the conflict years was evidenced by a resurgence of polio in 2013 and 2017, as well as in frequent measles outbreaks. Although these have been successfully contained, EPI coverage, particularly outside GCAs, remains significantly lower than before the conflict. While overall rates are reported to be reasonably good (around 70 per cent), they are said to be much lower in NES and Aleppo. Data on these and other health indicators (e.g., mental health) are scarce.

The number of people in need over the period 2018–2021 has ranged between 11.3–13.2 million people for the health sector and 4.6–4.9 million people for nutrition,²²

with women and girls representing more than 70 per cent of the total (72 per cent in 2019).²³

Prior to the conflict (2011), **water and sanitation** indicators in Syria were comparable with other middle-income countries in terms of access to improved water sources, sanitation and sewage systems. The conflict dramatically affected the WASH infrastructure and the functioning of the related systems. Now over 7 million people are highly dependent on emergency WASH assistance, including 1.9 million people living in IDP sites that require full provision of WASH services for health and survival. Currently, around 42 per cent of households rely on alternative water sources such as water trucking and wells. At least half of the sewage systems are not functional and around 70 per cent of the sewage is discarded untreated. The lack of electricity in large parts of the country has been a major constraint on WASH systems and is directly correlated with the decrease of water distributed.²⁴ As in the health sector, loss of skilled human resources has had a major adverse impact.

22 HRP 2018–2021.

23 United Nations Children's Fund, 'HRP Sector Plans 2019: Provision of primary health care services for vulnerable children and women in Syria', UNICEF, New York, 2019.

24 According to the 2022 HNO, electricity is at 15 per cent of what it was before the onset of hostilities in 2011.

The number of people in need for the WASH sector during the period 2018–2021 has ranged between 10.7–15.5 million people,²⁵ with a spike in 2019 reflecting increased hostilities and consequent new displacements. In 2021, the worst drought in 70 years put an even greater strain on available water sources, particularly in northeast Syria and parts of Aleppo Governorate. As the HNO 2022 describes it, *“historically low water levels in the Euphrates River have not just reduced access to water for drinking and domestic use for over five million people, but also triggered substantial harvest and income losses, decreased hydroelectricity generation, an increase in water-borne diseases, and additional protection risks. In the mid- to long-term, these developments are expected to have serious and cumulative impact on health, food insecurity, malnutrition rates, as well as the protection environment, with potentially irreversible consequences”*.²⁶

The conflict has had a devastating impact on access to **education**. More than one in three schools have been damaged, destroyed, are no longer accessible or are occupied (often by IDPs). Loss of qualified

teaching staff²⁷ has been compounded by the irregular (and low) payment of qualified teachers, limiting the quality and provision of education. As a result, 97 per cent of children in Syria, who comprise almost half the affected population, are in need of emergency education assistance. In 2020, an estimated 2.45 million children were out of school and 1.6 million children were at risk of dropping out.²⁸ Children in areas with high rates of IDPs have less access to education than those in other parts of the country, and new waves of displacement in 2019–2020 put further pressure on education facilities already overstretched by earlier displacements. There is a sharp drop in attendance for adolescents due to the lack of access to secondary and vocational education. Combined with deepening poverty, this has fuelled harmful coping mechanisms, and child labour (including its worst forms) is reported in all governorates. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the situation. More generally, response to education needs is complicated by the existence of different systems in different areas of control, as well as by the politics surrounding the education agenda.

25 HRP 2018–2021.

26 HNO 2022, p.8.

27 In 2019, over 140,000 teachers and education personnel were no longer in their teaching posts.

28 In 2020 and 2021, COVID-19 exacerbated the risk of dropping out and threats faced by students in attending schools.



Between 2018 and 2021, there were on average around 6 million children in need of **child protection** services, including 95 per cent of those living in areas ranked as high severity locations.²⁹ Psychosocial distress among children, though hard to quantify, has been a persistent issue throughout the evaluation period. In the earlier part of this period, the direct effects of conflict – including widespread violations of humanitarian law and human rights – gave rise to particular protection concerns for children and the wider civilian population. But armed conflict, economic deterioration, displacement and the COVID-19 crisis have all had an impact and have disproportionately affected girls and women in Syria. Rates of gender-based violence and violence against children are reported to be high.³⁰ Grave child rights

violations remain a significant concern, including in areas where hostilities have declined. Children in Syria are still at risk of being killed or injured, recruited and used in hostilities, tortured, detained, abducted and sexually abused. Children of foreign nationals housed in Al-Hol and Roj camps are a group of particular concern.

There are 4.6 million **adolescents** (ages 10-19) in Syria, representing 22.5 per cent of the total population. The unemployment rate among older adolescents is estimated to be close to 75 per cent and is significantly higher among girls. There are strong links to both the education and child protection agendas here: with an uncertain future and limited opportunities, adolescents have grown increasingly disillusioned, frustrated and disempowered. Adolescent boys

29 HNO 2021.

30 HRP 2021.

Gender-based violence continues to be a real and persistent threat in the lives of many women and girls. The continuation of armed hostilities significantly restricts women's and girls' freedoms, such as freedom of movement and the ability to seek employment, protection services, healthcare, information, and assistance, trapping them in cycles of vulnerability and abuse. Inequitable gender norms which relegate women and girls to positions of subordination and justify the use of violence against them persist across Syria.

Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, p.8

are at a substantial risk of being killed and/or injured or being exploited and involved in child labour. Adolescent girls are particularly at risk of child marriage and other forms of exploitation and gender-based violence, including sexual violence. Many adolescents and youth are reported to resorting to negative coping mechanisms such as joining extremist organizations, crime, trafficking and substance abuse.

With regard to **social protection**, the needs far outstrip available resources through either government or aid mechanisms. Nearly ten years of crisis have had a devastating impact on Syria's economy and social fabric, and the effects of the crisis on human lives profoundly affect the prospects for longer-term recovery of the country. Rebuilding Syria's human and

social capital will be a far greater and more lasting challenge than reconstructing the physical infrastructure.³¹ In the meantime, the acute macro-economic crisis facing the country is reflected at the level of household economies. According to a recent study, the average price of items in Syria is now 17 times higher than their value in 2010, and food and beverage prices are 20 times higher than their value in 2010.³² The decline in the living standards of people in Syria is evident in the dramatic rise in poverty levels noted above.

Prior to the crisis, the social protection system in Syria, although it did not provide universal coverage, consisted of free health care, old age pensions, disability pensions, survivors' pensions, employment injuries and social assistance programmes. Since

³¹ Gobat, J. and K. Kostial, 'Syria's Conflict Economy', working paper WP/16/123, International Monetary Fund, Washington, D.C., June 2016.

³² Mehchy, Z and R. Turkmani, 'New Consumer Price Index Estimates for Syria Reveal Further Economic Deterioration and Alarming Levels of Humanitarian Need', conflict research programme policy briefing, London School of Economics and Political Sciences, London, January 2020.

the onset of the crisis, the significant downscaling in the government social welfare programmes – as a result of fiscal pressures – has led to a further lack of support for many vulnerable children and families. People with disabilities are among the most vulnerable sections of the population, both socially and economically.³³

The fragmentation of Syria: Addressing multiple crises

Although the government has regained much of Syria's territory since 2016, it remains a divided country. With the consolidation of territorial control by the government and opposition factions, the crisis in Syria now extends across three main zones of control. As a result, it cannot truly be described as a single 'crisis' but has to be understood across *at least three distinct crisis contexts*: Government-controlled areas (GCAs) and the two main non-government-controlled areas (non-GCAs) in NWS and NES. Although there are multiple common features across all of these 'sub-crises', including more recently the threat of COVID-19, they pose different threats to the populations concerned and different challenges for those seeking to respond to them.

Overall, the situation in most parts of the country has become less volatile since 2018. Yet the humanitarian situation continues to be severe, particularly in NWS and NES, but also in areas like rural Damascus, Homs and Aleppo.³⁴ One key difference between 2016 and the present is in the extent of humanitarian access, i.e., the ability of affected people to access assistance and protection from humanitarian agencies (national and international). The access situation has improved substantially since 2018 with the relative stabilization of the conflict, the ending of sieges and the opening-up of previously 'hard-to-reach' areas. Greater stability and improved security have allowed more consistent access to most areas, both GCAs and non-GCAs – the latter supported through cross-border and cross-line or cross-zone operations. However, the 2020 closure of the authorized crossing point from Iraq and the bureaucratic and logistical demands of supplying cross-zone now pose additional challenges to the provision of support to people living in NES, including routine immunization and vaccination campaigns (COVID-19 and other).

33 UNICEF sector plans, HRP 2019; United Nations Children's Fund, 'Social Policy: Cash transfer programme for children with disabilities', UNICEF, New York, 2019.

34 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Syrian Arab Republic: 2021 Needs and Response Summary', Geneva, February 2021.



A common factor between the different areas – apart from general impoverishment – is the loss of access to basic services. While this is hard to quantify, there is a key difference in this respect between GCAs and other areas, namely that government services have largely ceased to be provided in the non-GCAs and are having to be substituted mainly through a combination of NGOs supported by United Nations agencies and recently established authorities, which often lack capacity and experience. Perhaps most significant here is the loss of professional human resources, including health personnel. These authorities have at present neither the capacity nor the resources to substitute effectively for services that had been provided by the relevant government ministries. Service provision is heavily dependent on supply through United Nations agencies – cross-border into NWS and cross-zone into NES

– and particularly on the service delivery capacity of civil society (national and international NGOs). These in turn depend on international funding and (for NES) on securing permissions from the governing authorities.

The non-GC areas of both NWS and NES are vulnerable in part because of political uncertainty, the situation being contingent in part on choices made by foreign powers as well as by the GoS and the United Nations Security Council. The non-GCAs of the northwest in particular are highly volatile and unstable, and uncertainty over the future of the remaining border crossing at Bab al-Hawa compounds this situation (see next section). With the potential for new movements of refugees and IDPs into and out of both of these areas, contingency planning and flexibility of approach remain essential.

There are further key differences between NWS and NES. These relate partly to different needs and vulnerabilities and partly to the capacity to meet those needs and the different modalities by which humanitarian support is provided. The northwest has suffered some of the most severe effects of conflict over the evaluation period (see Box 2), resulting in repeated mass displacements. This has left a high proportion of the population in non-government areas homeless and highly aid dependent, with little short-term prospect of being able to return home. Services are largely dependent on aid organizations supported cross-border from Türkiye.

The northeast of the country, already relatively under-developed compared to other parts of Syria, suffered particularly high levels of damage in cities like Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor as well as large-scale displacement and loss of professional capacities. Supporting displaced people in severely overcrowded (and politically charged) camps like Al-Hol poses a particular set of challenges. The closure of the authorized crossing point from Iraq (Al-Yarubiyah) in January 2020 left the humanitarian operation weakened, with United Nations agencies only able to provide support cross-zone from GCAs.

Box 2: Recent humanitarian context in northwest Syria

Much of the **northwest** of Syria is outside the control of the government. Today, there are an estimated 4.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in northwest Syria. Some 2.8 million people are displaced, of whom 1.7 million are in IDP sites.* In 2020 alone, the camp coordination and camp management cluster tracked over 2 million movements.

More than 1 million children are estimated to be out of school (out of a population of 1.7 million school-aged children), a sharp increase from 2019. Many schools have been destroyed or damaged – 47 in 2020 alone – and a third of the teachers have not been paid in over a year. Global acute malnutrition rates have consistently deteriorated among children under five.** This part of the country is highly dependent on humanitarian aid.

* United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Situation Report May 2022', Geneva, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/north-west-syria-situation-report-17-may-2022>

** Standardized Expanded Nutrition Survey (SENS), Idlib & Aleppo Governorates, northwest Syria, report 18 June 2021

Box 3: Recent humanitarian context in northeast Syria

Before the war, Ar-Raqqa, Al-Hasakah and Deir-ez-Zor had the most significant incidence of poverty nationally. Today, the humanitarian needs are acute. Much of the population in the northeast is internally displaced and most IDPs have been displaced for more than four years. Because host communities are overcrowded with limited access to services, many have been forced to resort to camps or informal settlements. But camps too are overcrowded and facing serious capacity issues. Many captured members of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), including third-country nationals and children, are imprisoned or held in camps in the northeast. Other challenges in the region include 'brain-drain' and the presence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh) sleeper cells.

Water scarcity now poses a major risk in the region. In 2021, the hydroelectric potential of the Tishreen and Tabqa dams, two of the most significant reservoirs in Syria, significantly diminished, resulting in power blackouts. Three million people in the northeast, as well as hospitals and other vital infrastructure, rely on electricity from these dams and many more depend on water pumped by the power of the dams. Areas in the northeast are at heightened risk of disease outbreaks due to the frequently interrupted water supply. According to the World Health Organization, only 1 out of 16 public hospitals in the northeast is fully functioning while other hospitals are either partially functioning or not functioning at all.

2.2 The international humanitarian aid context since 2018

The role of UNICEF in Syria must be understood in the wider context of the international community's efforts to assist Syrians. From 2011 onwards, the previous development-oriented United Nations programme (see section 3) has been replaced by successive humanitarian response plans coordinated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The HRP detail how the United Nations and its international and national partners intend to respond to the priority needs of the Syrian population. Because it was difficult for humanitarian actors to access territory that was under the control of the opposition, in July 2014, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously passed Security Council Resolution (SCR) 2165. This resolution authorized the United Nations to deliver cross-border humanitarian aid through four points

in Jordan, Türkiye and Iraq without the consent of the Syrian government.³⁵ This led to the creation, in 2015, of the ‘Whole of Syria’ (WoS) approach, a framework for coordinating aid to both the opposition and Government of Syria-held territories, designed to help harmonize strategy, planning and advocacy across the entire response, based on information-sharing, ‘joined-up’ needs assessment and joint analysis. Central to this has been the attempt to ensure that major gaps in the response are avoided, areas of unmet need are addressed, and overlapping or conflicting programmes avoided.

In January 2020, the Security Council passed SCR 2504, which authorized cross-border work via only two of the four crossing points – Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa, both in Türkiye – for a period of six months. The effect of the closure of the border crossing at Al-Yarubiyah, at the Iraqi border, led to major coordination challenges and weakened an already weak healthcare sector – just before the advent of COVID-19. Later that year, authorization was further limited to just one crossing (Bab al-Hawa), and a decision is pending in mid-2022 on whether to further to extend that authorization.³⁶

Today, the WoS system is still in place. Although initially set up to coordinate the work across multiple hubs, it now facilitates cluster/sector coordination between three hubs: (i) Damascus, (ii) Cross-Border NW Syria and (iii) the NES Forum. The three are coordinated for delivery of the HNO and HRP – in other words, for needs assessment and for overall planning and fundraising for the Syria response.

Syrians are thus reached with humanitarian aid in various ways. To service populations in the non-GCAs of **NWS**, many United Nations agencies have established offices in Gaziantep, Türkiye. While United Nations staff generally do not cross into Syria from Türkiye, they work with partners with presence in NWS to provide humanitarian aid. For the first time since 2017, in August 2021, the World Food Programme (WFP) completed a cross-line delivery of food aid, and UNICEF has since provided cross-line support for WASH services through a partnership with the private sector. In order to service non-GCAs of **NES**, several United Nations agencies based in Damascus work cross-zone. Additionally, there are many international NGOs (INGOs) that operate with partners in these areas without permission from the Syrian government.

³⁵ Bab Al-Salam, Bab Al-Hawa, Al-Yarubiyah and Al-Ramtha.

³⁶ A decision on this has in fact now been made, with the passing of Security Council Resolution 2642 (2022), which extends the mandate to at least 10 January 2023. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2642>

They are coordinated through the NES Forum and a series of working groups in a system that mirrors the standard humanitarian architecture usually led by OCHA.

Insecurity remains a key limiting factor on access for aid organizations. The United Nations and NGOs implement programmes in areas affected by frequent armed clashes, air strikes and regular exchanges of indirect artillery fire and other types of attacks by or among parties to the conflict. Humanitarians also operate in areas highly contaminated with unexploded ordnance, landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Since the beginning of the conflict, hundreds of humanitarian workers have reportedly been killed.

Besides the very limited access of the United Nations in non-GCAs of NWS, its access is restricted in other parts of Syria. Ruhkban, an area on the Jordanian border, has not been accessed by the United Nations since September 2019. The United Nations also does not operate in north-central Syria, which is controlled by Turkish authorities. Within GCAs,

there are communities and enclaves that have remained difficult to reach owing to administrative impediments and security approvals.

As a result of these access challenges, the quantity and quality of reliable data on key humanitarian indicators are poor. The data used to inform the HNOs and subsequent programming are based on annual needs assessments,³⁷ but many of those interviewed for this evaluation stated that figures presented in the HNO are known to be weak and unreliable.³⁸ Obtaining permission to undertake large-scale data-collection exercises has been challenging, although UNICEF is currently planning a multiple indicator cluster survey with the GoS.

For political reasons, the largest donors to the HRP have put conditions on how the funding provided to United Nations agencies and their international and national partners can be used. The United States and the European Union (EU), in common with most donors, are committed to the approach set out in the Parameters and Principles of United

³⁷ Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme, HNAP.

³⁸ KIs with staff from UNICEF, other UN agencies and NGOs. All of those consulted noted the weaknesses of the HNAP process and the need for a more substantial and reliable process.

Nations Assistance in Syria.³⁹ This limits support provided through the HRP to ‘life-saving and basic needs’ and blocks support to ‘reconstruction’ pending a political settlement.

The factors above have a direct bearing on the ability of UNICEF to operate in the Syria context. The most recent UNICEF resource mobilization strategy states that the organization is challenged by the “highly political nature of the conflict and

questioning of the neutrality of the [United Nations] inside Syria by some donors”. Although a certain proportion of UNICEF funding for Syria remains unearmarked, donor conditionalities and earmarking of contributions have restricted UNICEF work, programmatically and geographically. Apart from the potential impact on impartial aid delivery, this results in “high transaction costs with complex contribution management and frequent requests for information and detailed reporting”.⁴⁰

Box 4: Overview of UNICEF response to the crisis 2018–2021

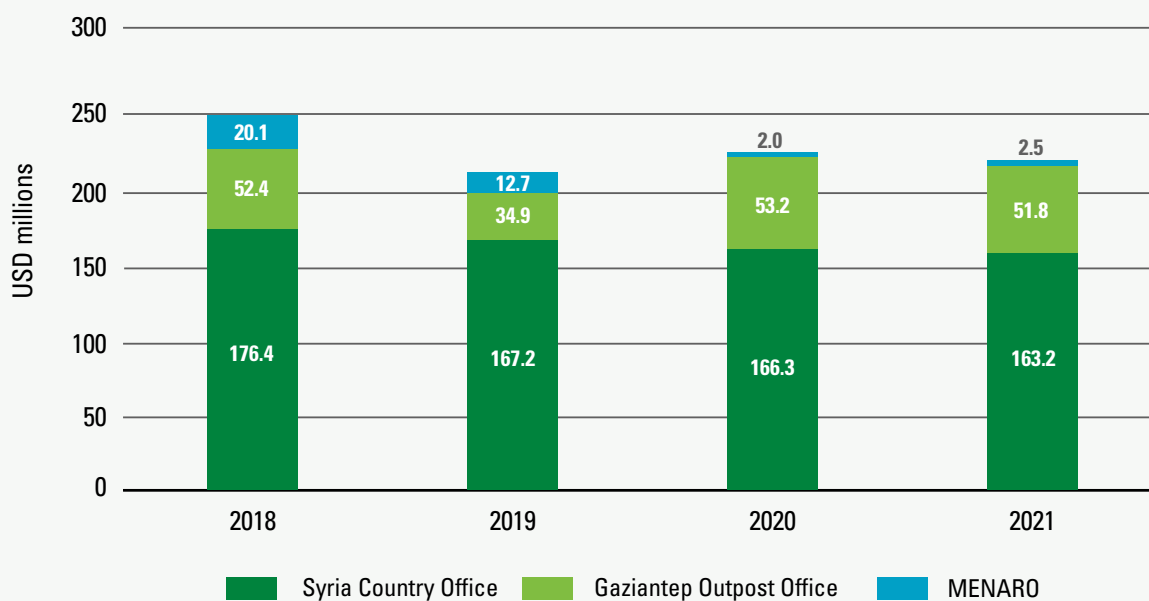
The organization’s approach to the WoS agenda has been to operate from two external hubs in addition to the Syria country office in Damascus and its six field offices in Homs, Aleppo, Qamishli, Deir-ez-Zor, Tartous and rural Damascus. From Gaziantep, it has managed and coordinated cross-border responses into non-GCA NWS. Before the UNSC-authorized crossing from Iraq closed in 2020, UNICEF coordinated the cross-border response into NES from MENARO in Amman, Jordan. Today, a team in MENARO coordinates the UNICEF WoS response, including work managed from both Damascus and Gaziantep.

Since 2018, UNICEF has spent over \$900 million on its response in Syria. The majority of funds (between 71 and 78 per cent between 2018–2021) have been managed by the SCO. The Gaziantep office has managed 16–24 per cent of the annual budget over the same period. In 2018 and 2019, MENARO managed 8–9 per cent, and since 2020, 1 per cent.

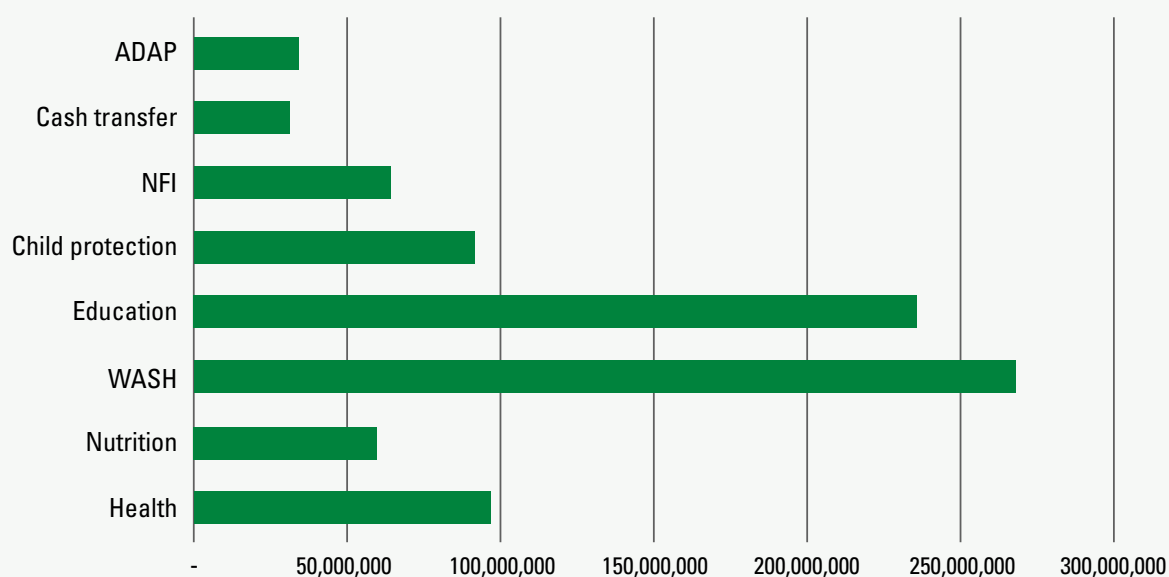
39 <https://www.kommersant.ru/docs/2018/UN-Assistance-in-Syria-2017.pdf>. In practice, the US and EU are reported to have been reasonably flexible in their assistance, within the parameters and principles (correspondence with UNICEF staff).

40 United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘UNICEF Partnership and Resource Mobilization Strategy’, UNICEF, New York, 2021, p.18.

Funding available by office, 2018 – 2021



Funds available by sector for WoS 2018 – 2021 (USD millions)



In percentage terms, this equates to WASH 30%; education 27%; health 11%; child protection 10%; nutrition 7%; NFIs 7%; cash transfers 4%; ADAP 4%



3

UNICEF ROLE AND STRATEGY IN RESPONSE TO THE SYRIA CRISIS

3.1 The organization's evolving role and strategy⁴¹

The UNICEF role in Syria has to be understood in the wider context of the role of the United Nations and members of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT). Before the conflict began in 2011, the UNCT was coming to the end of the first United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UN-

DAF) for 2007–2011, aligned with Syria's tenth five-year national plan. Syria was reportedly on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and the UNCT had developed a second UNDAF for the period 2012–2016. However, the outbreak of conflict halted the implementation of this framework, and instead, the 2007–2011 UNDAF was extended year by year.⁴² From 2011 onward, the development-oriented

⁴¹ Evaluation question B.1 *Has UNICEF found the right role for itself in Syria over the evaluation period? How well did its strategy support this?*

⁴² The UN's work is now guided by the UN Strategic Framework for Syrian Arab Republic 2022–2024 (published March 2022).

United Nations programme was replaced by successive humanitarian response plans.⁴³ In compliance with SCRs 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), the Syria strategic response plan of 2015 factored in cross-border and cross-line humanitarian assistance in the context of a WoS approach.

In common with the other United Nations agencies, from 2012 UNICEF shifted its focus to the humanitarian response.⁴⁴ In 2015, the SCO developed a new country programme for the period 2016–2017, focusing on resilience and capacity-building in tandem with humanitarian response. This was subsequently extended and revised several times, most recently

in February 2022, and it remains the Executive Board-approved framework for UNICEF work in Syria, pending approval of a new CPD. This in turn depends in part on approval of a new strategic framework for the United Nations as a whole.

In 2019, SCO started work on a new CPD for the period 2021–2023, again covering only the part of the country under GoS control. The new draft CPD (June 2020) signalled an intended strategic shift away from a predominantly (humanitarian) service delivery role toward more focus on sustainable solutions, restoration of basic services, social protection and building local capacities and resilience. “*The*

Box 4: Extracts from the UNICEF CPD for 2016–2017 (p. 3)

“A key lesson [from the past four years] has been the centrality of capacity development of partners and institutions, even in the midst of crisis; building the capacity of public service delivery systems thus remains a core strategy in the proposed country programme. The dislocation and ‘brain-drain’ of professional service providers and managers in all the key social sectors, as well as damaged infrastructure networks, have substantially weakened the functionality of public services. ... Over the next two years, UNICEF programming will address immediate needs while also focusing on interventions that enhance the resilience of families, communities and systems”.

⁴³ Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plans (SHARP) 2012–2014; HRP 2015–2021.

⁴⁴ UNICEF emergency programming in Syria is set out in the Humanitarian Action for Children appeal, which is published every year and aligns with the OCHA-led HRP for Syria. It focuses primarily though not exclusively on life-saving activities and covers all of Syria, including cross-border and cross-line programming. The HAC is funded by other resources, emergency (ORE) which over the past four years has made up more than 85 per cent of the funding for UNICEF work in Syria.

need to restore services, expand social protection and rebuild community capacity and social cohesion while responding to humanitarian imperatives emerged as a key lesson to ensure cost-effective delivery of basic services at scale, given the protracted nature of the crisis. Hence, the country programme gives greater emphasis to more sustainable solutions through both humanitarian responses and development programming.”⁴⁵ This draft CPD is supported by programme strategy notes (PSNs) for each sector of intervention.

As a result of the above, UNICEF work in Syria continued over the evaluation period to be based on the 2016 CPD, although it has evolved in various ways since that time. Both the 2016 CPD and the new draft CPD reaffirm its core humanitarian commitments. However, CPDs provide only a limited strategic framework for the humanitarian work itself, which constitutes the majority (around 85-90 per cent) of UNICEF funds spent in Syria. The new draft CPD clearly reflects a situation that has evolved greatly since 2016 and indeed over the course of the evaluation period. What it reflects less clearly is the extent and severity of the short- to medium-term threats to children’s well-being

and development across different parts of the country, within and beyond the government’s control.

The non-government-controlled areas of Syria, although they have shrunk overall in the past few years, remain of grave humanitarian concern, with regard to both the displaced and settled populations. While the areas outside government control in northeastern Syria have remained largely unchanged over the evaluation period, those in the northwest have shrunk, with the population living in ever-more crowded conditions. How to treat these populations within a ‘whole of Syria’ paradigm has been a contentious issue throughout the conflict, and even within the United Nations family, the various agencies have found different solutions. The UNICEF WoS approach devised in 2015 gave responsibility for sector/cluster coordination and support to cross-border operations in areas beyond government control to a dedicated team in MENARO (see section 6). Although a comprehensive strategy for the response in the whole country – GCAs and non-GCAs – was supposed to be developed, this did not happen.⁴⁶ Since the closure of the border crossing from Iraq and the passing

⁴⁵ United Nations Children’s Fund, Draft Syria Country Programme, UNICEF, Damascus, paragraph 19.

⁴⁶ According to several of those interviewed, this lack of a common strategy and understanding of the approach, coupled with the need to limit interactions between the UNICEF offices in Damascus and Gaziantep for sensitivity reasons, exacerbated the sense of dichotomy between the two. As a consequence of this, several responders in Damascus affirmed that they had “no idea” about the details of the parallel programmes in the north and questioned the current structure.

of responsibility to the Damascus office for managing and supporting programmes in NES, the current UNICEF WoS structure is under active review.⁴⁷

The role of UNICEF in Syria remains essentially a humanitarian one. However, it is increasingly concerned with putting the provision of basic services for children on a more sustainable footing and with building ‘resilience’, at least at the local level. Given the protracted nature of the crisis, and the decline in donor willingness or ability to fund even some core humanitarian responses, the humanitarian and system recovery agendas are arguably inextricable from each other. Yet securing funding for this approach – let alone anything more like real system strengthening – is proving difficult in the current donor climate. As the programme strategy note for health and nutrition notes: *“The large-scale reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged health facilities is crucial to improvements in access and utilization of health services. Without a major infusion of external resources, linked to the broader geopolitical context, the prospects of significant reconstruction and rehabilitation are slim. The same logic applies for the recruitment, motivation and retention of*

frontline health workers”.⁴⁸ This arguably represents the **dominant challenge** for UNICEF and others: how best to address a sudden and massive development deficit using limited humanitarian funding and approaches.

The ‘strategic shift’ proposed by SCO rightly addresses this sustainability challenge. However, in the view of the evaluators, what is required is an evolution of the UNICEF approach in the direction suggested below. The agency is committed to delivering on its Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs). Across Syria as a whole, and depending on the specific context, this requires a balance between continued direct engagement (with partners) in essential service delivery, shifting as far as possible to more sustainable modes of delivery, and support to – or at least complementing of – the relevant official mechanisms of service delivery. Risk communication and related policy and advocacy work are the essential complement to this, and UNICEF has a unique role to play in this regard.

⁴⁷ A decision on its future had yet to be taken at the time of writing.

⁴⁸ United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘UNICEF Syria Programme Strategy Note: Health and nutrition, 2021–2023’, UNICEF, Damascus, 2021, p.13.



3.2 How should the UNICEF role in humanitarian action be understood?

Given the context above, the evaluation team's understanding of the UNICEF role as part of the international humanitarian response in Syria since 2018 might be summarized in the following terms:

(i) To help protect and meet the basic needs of children and their families living outside areas of government control and hence largely out of reach of government services. This includes (a) those living in NWS, under multiple administrations, supported by humanitarian services coordinated and supplied cross-border from Türkiye; and (b) those living in NES in areas outside government control and largely beyond the reach of government services, supported by United Nations agencies from GCAs and by NGOs with bases in Kurdish-controlled areas and cross-

border from Iraq. There is a high degree of uncertainty about future scenarios in the non-GCAs, in NWS in particular. Readiness to respond and contingency planning are essential requirements for the UNICEF approach.

(ii) To help ensure the well-being and effective protection of children and their families within government-controlled areas of Syria. The humanitarian agenda in GCAs is itself very large, for the reasons outlined above. As the 'severity of needs' map in section 2.1 shows, levels of need are high almost throughout (the coastal areas are rather less affected), including in large parts of rural Damascus. This relates partly to destruction of homes and public infrastructure in cities like Homs, Hama and Damascus, with large numbers remaining displaced from their home areas and many having lost their livelihoods. Acute poverty is a common denominator for those in most need.

As noted above, UNICEF currently lacks a coherent strategic framework for the humanitarian work that makes up the bulk of its work across the whole of Syria. Essentially ad hoc and reactive approaches have been adopted to the evolving situation in the three main crisis areas over the past few years. This is understandable in the context of a rapidly evolving geopolitical situation. It is less understandable in the current climate, which is more stable. The evaluation finds that this has been a weakness of the response and contributed to a lack of coherence and consistency in prioritization.

In order to evaluate UNICEF performance, the team's analysis distinguishes *different* kinds of threats to children in Syria and related response agendas. Based on this analysis, we propose a scheme of **three priority agendas for children**, which are inter-related but distinct. These are illustrated in Figure 6 below. The first (Agenda A) is where the humanitarian imperative is clearest: it concerns specific emergency or high aid-dependency situations that pose severe, acute threats to child health, well-being and safety. The second (Agenda B) relates to less acute but widespread, severe and persistent threats to child health, security or well-being. The third (Agenda C) concerns critical threats to child development and life chances, including lack of access to basic education and lack of opportunities for adolescents.

Clearly, these agendas overlap. For example, damaging coping strategies like child labour relate to both B and C. Education could be included in agenda B as well as C. These agendas are also causally inter-related, and failure to address one risks exacerbating the others. In particular, failure to address issues in Agenda B can precipitate an emergency falling under Agenda A. These agendas are not based on particular response modalities – or on sometimes loosely-defined concepts like *resilience and early recovery* – but on what we understand to be the short-to medium-term priorities for children across the whole of Syria. This could be described as a 'humanitarian plus' agenda and includes efforts to ensure sustainability and continuity of essential services, as well as support to the related systems and capacities at all levels (as highlighted in the CPD).



Figure 6: Defining the humanitarian (+) agenda for UNICEF in Syria**Three priority agendas for children in Syria****AGENDA A**

Responding to specific emergency (or high dependency) situations that pose **severe, acute threats to child health, well-being and safety** (severity 4-5). Including acute food insecurity / acute malnutrition, water crises in NES, new displacements, acute CP issues, EiE, epidemic surveillance and response, need for targeted NFI/cash winter support. Building critical risk awareness. 'Aid economy' and IDP high aid dependency in large parts of NWS & NES.

AGENDA B

Responding to less acute but **more wide-spread and persistent threats** to child health, security or well-being. This includes much of the CP agenda (e.g., rising child labour), chronic malnutrition, general WASH, EPI and access to health care, SP/welfare support to families and the most vulnerable e.g., disabled children. Building IYCF and public health understanding. Taking account of actual and potential IDP returns.

AGENDA C

Preventing irreversible damage to child and adolescent development and life chances for which there is a limited window of opportunity to respond. Including education access and quality issues (teacher training, etc.), curriculum development (e.g., Curriculum B), ALP/SLP. In ADAP, skills, employment and meaningful engagement in society. Providing opportunities, building social cohesion.

Related response approaches – and issues arising

Agenda A typically requires **relief interventions and direct service delivery**. Timing is often critical here. Have UNICEF and its partners been as responsive as they need to be in these cases? In GCA/non-GCA? Has that response been proportional to need? How well prepared are UNICEF and its partners for new emergencies (contingency, etc.)? Given the protracted crisis and numbers in high aid dependency, has UNICEF found ways to transition to more sustainable service provision for this category (e.g., in IDP camps)?

Agendas B and C by their nature demand something more sustainable, **more scalable, and capable of being systematized** and locally or nationally co-designed and 'owned'. They require support to basic services and prevention of system collapse, including through area-based approaches and multi-party initiatives. In GCA, this needs to work with / supplement / complement GoS systems (local/national), subject to funding conditionalities and GoS permissions. In other areas, it needs alternative approaches to sustainability and ownership. How well has UNICEF been able to address these agendas and navigate / expand the space to work? Has it engaged appropriately and effectively in related upstream policy work?

Note: These agendas overlap and are causally inter-related.

Taken together, these three agendas constitute an extended humanitarian agenda for UNICEF in Syria, characterized by the urgency, scale and severity of the threats involved. Each agenda requires a different response approach. The first typically requires (sustained) direct service delivery. The second and third require support to basic service provision and prevention of system collapse. The challenge here is to achieve scale, quality and complementarity of services, which is increasingly likely to require area-based, multi-sector and multi-agency approaches. In GCAs, such approaches need to supplement and complement service provision through the GoS and locally-run systems. In other areas, alternative approaches to sustainability and ownership are needed but are harder to identify in the current transitional contexts.

This classification, though clearly very broad, has proved a useful analytical tool for the evaluation. Essentially it is concerned with identifying and addressing the short- to medium-term priorities for children, and the links between them. We believe that UNICEF could frame its current and future agenda in similar terms in order to make sense of different kinds of needs and priorities across the whole of Syria.

This would help provide an overarching framework for its decisions about humanitarian priorities and the relationship between them, as well as a programmatic and policy bridge through recovery to future development priorities. It might also help in communicating to others, including donors, the sense of priority attached to these child-focused agendas that are sometimes treated as beyond the strictly humanitarian priorities but which the evaluators believe need to be treated with equal urgency.⁴⁹

Whatever framework it adopts, we believe UNICEF needs a realistic common planning framework against which to make decisions about priority interventions in the face of access and resource limits. This should help enable stronger multi-sector approaches to be formulated, an area which at the moment is less advanced than it should be (see next section). At present, programme strategy is largely seen through the lens of individual sectors and the programme is essentially the sum total of separate interventions, tending to lead to a 'stove-piped' programme and disconnected interventions. We suggest that a multi-sector planning framework could help to build coherence and deliver greater impact across the programme. One

⁴⁹ The use of the term 'humanitarian' to cover this relatively broad agenda is consistent with the use of the term in HRPs. However, what matters is less the terminology adopted than the approach, i.e., the focus on short- to medium-term priorities for children.

practical starting point for this could be the role of schools as platforms for protection, health, nutrition and WASH interventions.

UNICEF itself recognizes the need for such integration, but lacks a clear framework for bringing these strands together. Related to this, the evaluation finds that UNICEF lacks a framework for decision-making that allows it to prioritize interventions within and across the three main crisis areas described in section 2. This should be grounded in current realities (including

limits on available funding and access) and should help determine the phasing as well as the combination of different components within a given intervention. It should be practical and capable of being reviewed and revised as situations evolve, and should specify how UNICEF interventions supplement or complement those of others. With regard to policy and advocacy objectives, these should be articulated and including in a rolling plan that is regularly reviewed by managers.



4

EVALUATING THE UNICEF PROGRAMME

4.1 Introduction

For the purposes of this section, the UNICEF programme is considered to consist of the range of sector-specific interventions conducted in its own name, through implementing partners or in collaboration with other agencies in response to the crisis in Syria since 2018.⁵⁰ The evaluation has reviewed these

as a whole, to identify overall patterns and lessons, but also by sector and by geographical area, since the answer to many of the evaluation questions require distinctions to be drawn over time, place and sector. They also require consideration of the *form* of UNICEF engagement (support to direct service provision, technical support, supply, policy/advocacy, etc.).

⁵⁰ UNICEF system-wide roles, including its sector lead and coordination roles, are considered in section 5 below.

To give structure to this enquiry, in this section we consider questions⁵¹ concerning:

- the *relevance* and *appropriateness* of the programme, relative to needs
- the *coverage/proportionality* of the programme, relative to needs
- the *logic* of the programme
- the *balance* and inter-sector *coherence* of the programme
- the *effectiveness* and timeliness of programme responses by UNICEF and partners

In each case, the evaluators have attempted to assess the value of UNICEF programmes relative to the context and to the roles of other actors.

With regard to the **non-government-controlled areas of northwest Syria (non-GCA NWS)**, UNICEF, in common with other United Nations agencies, has provided the great majority of its support cross-border from Türkiye, managed by the Gaziantep office⁵² and implemented through NGO partners able to operate in NWS. It is important to understand the overall constraints of designing, managing and accounting for a programme in this

part of Syria since 2018. This has been the most highly contested part of the country and subject to high levels of insecurity, which has prevented UNICEF staff from being physically present or even (with very limited exceptions) from visiting the area. Needs assessment and monitoring have been extremely constrained as a result, with a high level of dependence on implementing partner self-reporting and on third-party monitors. This has inevitably affected the organization's ability to ensure the continued relevance, quality and delivery of its programme interventions, as well as their effectiveness and impact – particularly since opportunities for accountability to affected populations (AAP) and community engagement have been very limited. This has also been a highly fluid context over the evaluation period, with major movements of people (IDPs) and a correspondingly high level of Agenda A aid dependency. Given the shrinking area of northwestern Syria outside GoS control, around 4.3 million people have been concentrated in an ever-smaller area with a population density around three times the Syrian average. Around 2.8 million are IDPs, 1.7 million of whom live in formal or informal camps.⁵³

⁵¹ These questions correspond with questions B2-5 and C1, 2 and 4 in the evaluation matrix.

⁵² The resourcing, functions and performance of the Gaziantep office are considered in section 6 below. We note here our finding that the Gaziantep office has been seriously under-resourced in relation to its expected functions.

⁵³ OCHA situation report, northwest Syria, May 2022, p.2.

With regard to **non-government-controlled areas of northeast Syria (non-GC NES)**, UNICEF, in common with other United Nations agencies, has been unable (with limited exceptions) to provide cross-border support to the area since the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing in January 2020. While the level of support was not comparable in scale to that provided to NWS, this was nevertheless a substantial change, although its effects are hard to quantify.⁵⁴ One effect is that United Nations support for the ongoing NGO-led response in NES, and the visibility of that response, has diminished overall even though the NES Forum is treated as a 'hub' within the international response system.

UNICEF support to NES since 2020 has been delivered cross-zone. It has largely been directed to the formal IDP camps and to the camps holding third-country nationals who have been associated (directly or indirectly) with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh) (Al-Hol and Roj), though efforts are being made to extend this coverage to other non-GCAs, e.g., for WASH rehabilitation, in discussion with the self-administration and GoS.⁵⁵

Again, UNICEF has worked principally through local GoS-registered implementing partners in this area and in some cases with private contractors (WASH), but the organization has over the evaluation period had limited means to assess needs and monitor the delivery, quality and effectiveness of its interventions.⁵⁶ UNICEF has also had significant policy and advocacy engagement with the self-administration as well as the GoS concerning WASH (e.g., for the Alouk water system), child protection, social protection, education (curriculum, exams, etc.) for children in this area, and with multiple parties concerning the approximately 27,000 foreign national children.⁵⁷

With regard to the **majority of the country that is now controlled by the government** (GCAs), UNICEF has faced different constraints to programming. Access has improved considerably over the evaluation period, but over this period UNICEF has been constrained in where it can work, what it can do, and the partners with whom it can work. Some of those constraints come from government, though these are reported to lessening.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ UNICEF has not been able to provide the evaluators with data on the scale and nature of supplies and other support provided cross-border into NES prior to 2020, nor has it been possible to get financial and other data on cross-zone supply provided since 2020. This is both a significant gap in management information and a limit on the evaluability.

⁵⁵ In some cases, UNICEF has filled gaps when urgent intervention has been needed or in areas when access is provided only to UNICEF (e.g., Al-Roj camp). It has also sometimes facilitated the distribution of kits of other agencies.

⁵⁶ The situation with regard to monitoring in NES is now reported to be greatly improved (correspondence with SCO staff).

⁵⁷ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Media Monitoring Snapshot: Foreign children in northeast Syria,' UNICEF, New York, September 2021.

⁵⁸ Correspondence with SCO staff.

Others relate to the conditions attached by donors to their funding for work in GCAs – and to the general limitations imposed by the Parameters and Principles of United Nations Assistance in Syria (see 2.2.6), which is the key internal guidance for operations in Syria. In particular, work related to reconstruction and to strengthening national systems has been restricted.⁵⁹ The extent to which work can be justified under the heading ‘recovery’ (included in the HRP) is unclear, though there are signs of growing acceptance by donors of work in this category.⁶⁰

4.2 Programme relevance, appropriateness and adaptation to context⁶¹

The evaluation found that since 2018, UNICEF has largely managed to implement programmes appropriate to the different contexts of both GCAs and non-GCAs and to adapt its approach to changing circumstances over the evaluation period. More challenges were encountered in the non-GCAs, partly due to the complexity and largely ‘arms-length’ nature of the related

modalities. Within this overall picture there is considerable variation.

UNICEF work in northwest Syria (non-GCAs)

In areas of the northwest beyond government control, the evaluation found that UNICEF had overall found the right roles for itself within the largely Agenda A context (emergency and high dependency) that has characterized this region since 2018. These have included emergency WASH and health and nutrition work (including COVID-19 vaccination), as well as support to community and centre-based child protection services. With regard to the latter, UNICEF and its partners have successfully built resilient community child protection mechanisms, allowing IDPs continued support (including case management) despite multiple displacements.⁶² There has been continuous engagement on the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict (MRM), and more recently on children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG), including ongoing negotiation of an action plan to

⁵⁹ Although UNICEF managed to expand its basic rehabilitation work (WASH, education) in GCAs during the evaluation period.

⁶⁰ KIs with donors and with UNICEF SCO staff.

⁶¹ Evaluation question B.3 *Has the UNICEF programme been relevant and appropriate to the evolving context? What has been the quality of UNICEF needs assessment and situational monitoring?*

⁶² KIs with UNICEF staff in Gaziantep, UNHCR, UNICEF partners, child protection AoR members and coordinators.

end child recruitment with parties listed in the annexes of the annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict who are active in northwestern Syria.

Education in NWS has been more problematic and more limited in its coverage and impact.⁶³ While the focus on Grades 1-9 (up to 14 years of age) has been understandable, there have been high levels of pre-adolescent dropout. Despite successful distribution of self-learning materials and successful efforts to negotiate for and provide multi-sectoral support to children who have crossed lines to sit for exams, the lack of accreditation remains a key challenge. Together with multiple displacements, the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis, this has resulted in increasing numbers of children out of school and increasing trends of child labour and child marriage. The education needs of children with disabilities (many with war-related disabilities) are largely not met.

The evaluation finds that UNICEF could have done more to highlight and tackle these deficits, both through its own

programme and as cluster lead agency for education. Stronger and more consistent advocacy was required, including with donors. Given this, and the relatively low coverage of needs,⁶⁴ education work in NWS was found to be of limited relevance in relation to needs.

Funding and delivery of a winterization programme (non-food items) was consistently late, making it less relevant as an intervention. This work was (rightly) phased out to focus limited resources on other critical needs.

With regard to adaptation to change, UNICEF has generally shown a strong degree of adaptability to the evolving context in NWS, something that was made necessary by the further mass displacements of people in 2019–2020. The WASH response in particular involved close attention by UNICEF and the wider cluster to displacement dynamics and identification of new informal IDP settlements, working well with the camp coordination and camp management cluster to improve registration of IDPs in informal camps. Health and nutrition units were reportedly successful in shifting

63 In NWS, education is mostly considered non-formal (there is no internationally recognized accreditation system) and there is more space to navigate donor conditionalities compared to GCAs. But the decision not to work with the relevant education authorities in NWS – apparently to ensure consistency and equity of approach with the GCAs – exacerbated the disconnect between formal and non-formal programming and meant a loss of opportunity to work on education quality.

64 HRP 2019, 2020, 2021 and UNICEF humanitarian performance monitoring 2019, 2020, 2021.

patients away from the conflict-affected areas in around 80 per cent of cases.⁶⁵ Use of rapid response teams enabled nutritional surveillance together with health and nutrition awareness outreach. There was progressive improvement of the follow-up of under-5s moving between camps.⁶⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic also required considerable programme adaptation. The evolution of communications for development (C4D) into a risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) approach provided a strong baseline for the COVID response.⁶⁷ The education programme was also reported to have been relatively successful in adapting to COVID, shifting to online modalities and remote teaching and learning, together with extended use of self-learning curricula and support to the expansion of temporary learning spaces.

UNICEF and its partners have also made some progress towards sustainability, even on Agenda A. This is most apparent in the WASH response, which has increasingly shifted from water trucking to basic structural rehabilitation of piped water systems since 2018, something fully endorsed by the WASH cluster in

Gaziantep. In child protection, appropriate efforts were made to strengthen the technical capacities of partners and to build a community of practice within the UNICEF-led area of responsibility (AoR), including through training and guidance produced by the thematic working groups in the AoR.



UNICEF work in northeast Syria (non-GCAs)

UNICEF faced a challenging adaptation of its programmes in the areas of the northeast outside government control. Before 2020, most operations in NES were carried out cross-border and managed from

⁶⁵ KIs with UNICEF and partner staff in Gaziantep.

⁶⁶ UNICEF country office annual reports 2019, 2020, 2021; KIs with UNICEF staff and partners in Gaziantep.

⁶⁷ Around 1.2-1.5 million people were reported to have been reached by SMS with COVID awareness messages.

Amman, with very limited interventions from Damascus and Qamishli. Following closure of the border to the United Nations in January 2020, UNICEF phased out most of its Amman-led operations by June 2020 (with some exceptions for child protection/ CAAFAG), meaning UNICEF programming was now enabled entirely through the Damascus and Qamishli offices through increased cross-zone operations. These remained limited in scale at the time of writing, although access and scale of operation are reported to be increasing.⁶⁸ While UNICEF is keen to expand these operations, the response of the various sections has been variable, with WASH in particular showing intent and ability to seek new opportunities, some other sectors less so. These differences might be partly explained by the differing attitudes of key governmental counterparts at Damascus and governorate level to interaction with self-administration authorities, as well as to collaboration with NGOs working through the NES Forum.

The evaluation found positive examples of programme adaptation by UNICEF in non-GCAs in northeastern Syria. These included continued EPI coverage at relatively high levels cross-zone as well as in GCAs;

WASH cross-zone interventions following negotiations with the Ministry of Water Resources and the self-administration, with the WASH working group of the Forum kept in the loop; and more generally good communication between the WASH cluster and WASH working structures and coordinators at all levels. On the other hand, UNICEF nutrition programming has been relatively weaker over the evaluation period – although recent progress suggests that UNICEF recognizes the scale and seriousness of the malnutrition agenda in this region and is now more fully addressing it, particularly in Al-Hasakah and Ar-Raqqa.⁶⁹ The evaluators observed a disconnect between the nutrition cluster and the NGO nutrition working group of the NES Forum, and (crucially) gaps in the supply of emergency nutrition products, which is a UNICEF responsibility. While the evaluation team recognizes the challenges of providing nutrition supplies to INGOs in NES, these gaps remain concerning given the deteriorating nutrition situation.

The child protection response in NES has been both appropriate and highly relevant, addressing grave violations, children deprived of liberty in camps and detention facilities, third-country nationals,

⁶⁸ Correspondence with SCO staff.

⁶⁹ Correspondence with SCO staff; United Nations Children's Fund, 'Every Day Counts: Acute malnutrition in northeast Syria', UNICEF, 2020. Progress was significantly impeded in 2020 due to COVID-19, but accelerated in 2021.

implementation of the action plan to end child recruitment signed with the self-administration, and the release and reintegration of CAAFAG. UNICEF has done well to support (from Amman) CAAFAG coordination capacity in the NES Forum through the child protection working group. With regard to third-country nationals and 'best interest determination' for children living in camps in NES, UNICEF did well to step up and take on an agenda that UNHCR sees as outside its mandate. This was highly appropriate, and a good demonstration of the unique role and value-added of UNICEF in defending children's rights.

In some sectors, however, UNICEF has not been able to achieve the reach that might be expected. Work on social protection in northeastern Syria has been limited to areas under government control, and even there has been affected by the lack of suitable implementing partners. In education, while excellent policy and advocacy work has been done on curriculum and accreditation, support to basic education provision has been limited to camps and to government-controlled enclaves.⁷⁰ In health, COVID-19 vaccination

coverage remains limited for a number of reasons, including limits on supply and vaccine hesitancy.

The evaluation concludes that effective adaptation to the changing context in NES requires both continued dialogue with the self-administration and much better engagement with the NGOs working in the region, through the NES Forum and its working groups. There has been a history – and some continuing legacy – of mistrust between United Nations agencies and the international NGOs working in non-GC NES. However, the NGOs are the major providers of services in this region,⁷¹ and UNICEF should not let this history deter it from collaboration, which remains essential. Some sectors did much better in this regard than others: the examples of WASH and child protection in particular demonstrate that such collaboration is both possible and effective.

UNICEF work in government-controlled areas

Agenda A ('emergency') interventions in GCAs are limited to a few IDP camps in the north of the country and ad hoc interventions in case of sudden crises.

⁷⁰ As in NWS, UNICEF has largely not engaged with the 'formal' education system in self-administration areas of northeastern Syria. But it has provided support through its partners to self-learning through provision of materials to home-based community schools and some local authority schools.

⁷¹ With an estimated aggregate annual budget estimated around \$300 million (KII UNICEF SCO).

Maintaining a solid field operations and emergency unit in Damascus with flexible funding has strengthened SCO capacity to adapt to sudden events. The need for this type of support is likely to continue, especially if the SCO takes on more responsibility for NWS.

Related to this, increasing engagement with government counterparts and local administrations has allowed UNICEF to consolidate a progressive shift toward a recovery strategy, tackling Agendas B and C (basic service strengthening, rehabilitation, etc.) while responding to emergency needs as necessary. This approach is appropriate given the relative stability of the environment of GCAs, and it reflects the widespread and persistent nature of the threats to children in these areas and the corresponding need for approaches that go beyond relief and service delivery. However, the scale of destruction of systems and infrastructure – and of the economic collapse and loss of professional workers – can make any intervention by UNICEF seem like a drop in the ocean. The evaluation found many examples of appropriate and increasingly sustainable UNICEF recovery and rehabilitation interventions in GCAs. These included WASH interventions in Deir-ez-Zor (pumping stations, piping systems, sewage systems); support to primary health care and community-based management of acute malnutrition centres linked with

Ministry of Health systems, and to key hospitals and health facilities (technical support, material and capacity-building); light rehabilitation of schools (related in part to enabling the return of IDPs and refugees) and back-to-learning campaigns; and support to child-friendly spaces and ADAP centres (although the latter have been limited in impact due to weak social security systems for case management and a lack of work opportunities). The social protection programme, though relatively limited in scope, developed a support and case management system for children with disabilities. While not yet fully sustainable, this project has been greatly appreciated by beneficiaries and local administrations and offers scope for further development.



Donor conditionalities on funding in GCAs are reported to have heavily constrained work in education, social protection and ADAP in particular. In education, UNICEF uses its own funds to support engagement with the Ministry of Education on key issues such as the transitional education sector plan, 2020–2022,⁷² the school integrated management information system, revising and alignment of curricula (Curriculum B⁷³ and the self-learning programme) and teacher training on child protection and psychosocial support (PSS) issues. Some minor rehabilitation of schools and provision of temporary teaching spaces is allowed by some donors.

The evaluation found that, largely as a result of these constraints, the education response in GCAs has been based largely around an ‘education in emergencies’ (EiE) model concentrated on non-formal education. In the context of such massive and chronic deficits, this is not an adequate approach. While work on curriculum development and self-learning has been remarkable and has helped to keep the response relevant to the needs of children, some key components are missing: (full)

school rehabilitation and reconstruction (due to donor ‘redlines’) and quality of teaching and learning (including teacher capacity development and assessment of learning outcomes). This has resulted in a de facto parallel system of education in which children complete Curriculum B studies and register for exams but are unable to transition into the formal system, and so remain in the Curriculum B learning pathway.

With regard to child protection, the evaluation found an appropriate focus on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), but one that had limited reach and was heavily reliant on the technical capacity of implementing partners. More work is needed to grow the network of child protection organizations that could help expand the reach of such services. With respect to case management, a basic system exists, but efforts are required to address difficult child protection cases (those involving the judicial system). In addition, UNICEF continued to engage on the MRM-CAFAAG advocacy agenda with the GoS and to document grave violations against children while co-chairing the country task force on the MRM.

⁷² A comprehensive sector analysis which proposes an overarching, gender-sensitive education sector policy for 2020–2022.

⁷³ Curriculum B is an accelerated learning programme recognized by the MoE which allows reintegration in the formal education system and access to official exams and accreditation.

Child protection issues were found to have been very well integrated into the education programme, thanks to an introductory child protection and psychosocial support training to teachers (one area of teacher training allowed by donors). That said, after ten years of the crisis, a one week training on child protection is very limited. Although work is beginning on violence against children, this has not been adequately tackled to date and needs urgent action. The evaluators expected to find more emphasis on this subject in schools, alongside peacebuilding, given the synergies with education.

4.3 Programme strategy, logic and consistency with the CCCs⁷⁴

Programme strategy and planning

As described in the previous section, the 2016 CPD has been rolled over year after year, while the situation in the country has changed dramatically and the programme has in practice been continually adapted. The approach to strategy over this period

is best described as ad hoc, reactive and opportunistic, both in areas covered by the CPD and more generally across WoS.⁷⁵ While this is understandable, the lack of a unifying UNICEF humanitarian strategy has been a significant gap and appears even more so as the situation has stabilized. The 2016 CPD lacked supportive PSNs, but with the drafting of a new proposed CPD for 2021–2023, PSNs have been prepared. While these remained provisional over the evaluation period, pending approval of the new CPD, they give a clearer window into UNICEF thinking on sector-specific programme strategy and logic.⁷⁶ Their provisional nature reflects the fact that in many respects, the conditions necessary to implement them are not yet in place, but they provide a clear articulation of the intended direction for the programme.

Different approaches to strategy have been taken across the three crisis areas. The sector strategies set out in the PSNs, while designed to support the CPD, are more obviously tailored to the context of government-controlled areas of Syria and the relatively stable areas in which the relevant government ministries and

⁷⁴ Evaluation question B.2 *Has UNICEF programme logic been clear, cogent and based on realistic assumptions? Has the programme been internally coherent, and harmonized between GCAs/non-GCAs?*

⁷⁵ This approach tended to characterize the strategies of individual sectors, e.g., ad hoc strategies were developed by the WASH cluster in Gaziantep (WASH cluster strategic operation framework) and by CP (AoR WoS operational strategy).

⁷⁶ More recently (2022), UNICEF SCO has developed sector-specific 'think pieces' to support its proposed strategic shift. These summarize its approaches and interventions to date and articulate a forward agenda to 2024.

local authorities have responsibility for delivering essential services for children. The programme for GCAs is developed, authorized and implemented in close coordination with the GoS and the key ministries. While emergency response capacity is maintained within the office, such response has progressively decreased and represents a relatively small part of UNICEF current interventions in GCAs, although maintaining such emergency response capacity is essential given the likely increase of SCO responsibilities in NWS. This leaves a gap in the logic and planning for the current situation in GCAs, in which the conditions largely do not exist to implement the PSN strategies, but where the situation does not fit the 'standard' humanitarian model.

The humanitarian situation in non-government-controlled areas of NWS and NES better fits the standard model, particularly with regard to highly aid-dependent displaced populations. Yet no clear overall strategy has been articulated for these specific contexts or for related cross-border and cross-zone or cross-line support, and this is a gap that needs to be filled. Particularly in NES, the ad hoc approach to work in these areas can no longer be justified in what has become a relatively stable and protracted situation.

For non-GC areas of NWS, in what again has been a predominantly an Agenda

A context, the strategy has been largely defined by individual sectors, using an emergency logic. The evaluation found this to be largely consistent with the CCCs. The lack of a formal overarching strategy for the cross-border programme in NWS has been partly compensated for by joint operational planning (JOP) meetings. But the combination of mass displacements in 2019–2020 and the advent of COVID-19 in March 2020 have meant that the programme in this area has by necessity been largely reactive in nature. The need to be highly adaptable remains, and the potential loss of the cross-border modality in 2022 has meant that UNICEF and others have more recently had to focus on contingency planning for this region (see below). As this situation becomes clearer, UNICEF will need a more settled plan for meeting the priority needs of children in this area.

The WASH response highlights the various factors affecting the organization's ability to shift from predominantly Agenda A interventions to recovery and basic rehabilitation in different parts of the country (GCAs and non-GCAs). While UNICEF WASH in both Gaziantep and Damascus has tried to progressively shift to more sustainable interventions, this was only partially possible in context of high levels of acute need in NWS. Here, water trucking, solid waste management and provision of hygiene kits still represent a

large part of the programme. The shift has been much more evident in GCAs, where UNICEF works in close coordination with the Ministry of Water Resources to identify priority basic rehabilitation interventions. While these are greatly appreciated and largely sustainable, they still represent a small contribution to a much bigger agenda. In NES, while ensuring continued support to the IDP camps (Agenda A), the WASH programme has been quite proactive in trying to expand its cross-zone operations to address basic rehabilitation in areas under control of the self-administration.

UNICEF programme logic

The 2021–2023 PSNs follow the logic of the CPD in being geared toward support for ‘building resilience’. Each contains a common statement of strategic intent, which starts with commitments about which there could be little debate, such as more convergent programming, multi-factor behavioural change strategies, use of evidence to inform policy and programmes, etc. They go on to say:⁷⁷

While continuing to fulfil the Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action, the three-year country programme will evolve to:

- i. Stronger inter-sectoral programming for children, including adolescents, who have missed education and other opportunities due to crisis and displacement*
- ii. Trilateral linking of development, humanitarian and social cohesion programming*
- iii. More system-building approaches that increase equity and resilience and reduce longer-term vulnerability of the poorest children and their families*
- iv. Supporting design and implementation of social protection systems that address multiple vulnerabilities.*

While the first and fourth of these appear to be appropriate to context and consistent with the prevailing priorities (as described in section 3), the second and third are harder to make sense of in the current context. There is little short- to medium-term prospect of development programming (or funding) as it is normally understood, although social cohesion can and should be a priority across the whole programme. System-building, while clearly needed, depends at the macro level on conditions that are not currently

⁷⁷ Text taken from the document Syria WASH PSN Final Draft, undated. The other draft PSNs use similar wording.

in place either in terms of funding or (in many cases) the readiness of authorities themselves to (re-)build systems. Micro- and local system-building – and the prevention of system collapse – may be all that is feasible and appropriate in the shorter term. Related to this, the longer-term reduction of vulnerability, while a laudable goal, inevitably takes second priority to the immediate vulnerabilities of the prevailing crises.

The PSNs provided an essential complement to the agenda set out in the draft CPD and help to make sense of that agenda. This evaluation fully supports the move towards sustainability, but it concludes that this agenda (as it is

currently framed) is premature in some respects and does not address the variety of contexts and capacities across the whole of Syria. For the foreseeable future, perhaps at least to the end of 2023, the commitment to fulfilling the CCCs is likely to dominate UNICEF time and available resources, complemented by increasing efforts to ensure the sustainability of Agenda A interventions and the scale of work on Agendas B and C.

A review of the assumptions underpinning the associated theories of change (ToCs) in the PSNs tends to reinforce this view. To take the example of the WASH PSN, the ToC in this case (see Box 5) is fairly straightforward:

Box 5: Extract from the WASH PSN

The UNICEF theory of change under this programme component is as follows:

If the WASH enabling environment is strengthened; ***if*** water and sanitation systems are restored to provide basic and equitable WASH services; ***if*** sector resilience is strengthened to ensure continuity of WASH services; and ***if*** WASH services are provided in humanitarian settings; then more children and people in Syria will have access to safe, affordable and sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene services.

The argument here is roughly: ‘if we help restore systems and provide more services, more children will have access to services’. That may be true, although of course (apart from barriers to access) the question of coverage will largely determine how many of those in need actually benefit. The PSN recognizes the challenge and states that *“UNICEF will support the gradual resumption of reliable water and sanitation services, starting with urban centres for at-scale impact and at a later stage in the rural areas”*. This provides an essential qualification to the more ambitious outcome statements, and the evaluation concludes that a greater degree of real-world focus across all the sectors would help to make the sector strategies a more realistic basis for programming.

The related statement of assumptions in the WASH PSN reads as follows:

- *The economic situation of the country will gradually improve;*
- *Gradual increase in government expenditures in WASH services;*
- *Internally displaced persons will gradually return to their areas of origin;*
- *Refugees will begin returning to Syria;*
- *Communities will support restoration of waste management and proper hygiene practices;*

- *Gradual replenishment of sector human resources;*
- *Some level of humanitarian needs will continue.*

Most of these assumptions have not held true in practice. The final assumption, while valid, greatly understates the scale of the humanitarian challenge as it is understood here. The evaluation suggests that, across all the PSNs, the assumptions need to be reviewed and the strategy revised accordingly. For example, in the education sector, the strategy is based on (among other assumptions) the “availability of qualified teachers”. But given the huge loss of effective teaching capacity – partly due to the economic situation – this is evidently not a reasonable assumption, especially in the short-term.

The education PSN also contains the following statement: *“Although many signs point to more stability and transitioning into recovery and reconstruction, there will be need for the development and review of education contingency plans to cater to the education needs of children affected by hostilities”*. This appears to treat ‘children affected by hostilities’ as a special sub-group, when in fact the great majority of children in Syria (and their education prospects) have been affected by hostilities. The analysis does not always seem to recognize the catastrophic nature of the change the conflict and its aftermath have brought to the country.



Outcomes and results structures

The PSNs set out the results frameworks (outcomes and outputs) for each sector. By way of illustration, Box 6 shows the framework for education, split between SCO and MENARO/Gaziantep responsibilities. These reflect the different perspectives from the different hubs, with the former more focused on policy and institutional capacities to address widespread educational deficits (including basic access), the latter exclusively focused on delivering EiE (Agenda A) in the non-government-controlled parts of Syria. This ‘humanitarian delivery’ support is framed as a complement to SCO-led operations and is currently largely restricted to cross-border support via Gaziantep – responsibility for humanitarian support (EiE in this case) to non-government controlled

areas of the northeast now lying with SCO through a cross-zone modality. The latter agenda is not specifically articulated in the framework, but we suggest it *should* be, given the scale and specific nature of the educational deficits in NES (comparable to those in NWS).

The difference in language is striking, the work in non-GCAs being framed in terms of addressing critical deficits through humanitarian action, while the work in GCAs is presented in more policy and systems language. In reality, we suggest, both approaches are necessary and should be understood within an expanded humanitarian agenda – though a different balance of approaches is likely to be needed across the different contexts.

Box 6: UNICEF results structure for education PSN

Government-controlled areas (from SCO 2016 results framework)

Outcome 3: School-age girls and boys, especially the most vulnerable, benefit from inclusive quality pre-primary, basic, secondary and non-formal education

Output 3.1 Policies, strategies and guidelines are available for efficient management and delivery of inclusive quality education

Output 3.2 Institutional capacities at national and governorate level are enhanced to ensure emergency preparedness and response in education

Output 3.3 Equitable access to quality education opportunities provided

Output 3.4 Education sector coordination

Output 3.5 Availability of adequate technical expertise to support the programme delivery and the office management.

Non-government controlled areas (from MENARO 2019 results framework)

Outcome 4: MENARO delivers timely, equitable and principled humanitarian action as a complement to country office-led operations where required, including through the cross-border component of the Syria programmes as part of the Whole of Syria response.

Output 6 (Amman) Syria's conflict-affected population have their critical education needs met, in line with the HRP and as part of the UNICEF JOP

Output 12 (Gaziantep) Syria's conflict-affected population have their critical education needs met, in line with the HRP and as part of the UNICEF JOP.

Programme alignment with the CCCs

In general, the evaluation found good alignment of the humanitarian components of the programme with the CCCs, but this varied by sector and by location.⁷⁸ Alignment has been most evident in NWS,

where the Agenda A component of the programme is dominant. Broadly speaking, all sectors developed their respective interventions around the CCC structure, with only nutrition limiting its focus to children under five and their mothers.

⁷⁸ An in-depth analysis of this alignment began during the inception phase of this evaluation and was re-assessed during the field missions to Türkiye, Jordan and Syria.

In some cases, the intent of the programme has run ahead of the ability to deliver against the commitments and to attain broader coverage. This is due both to immediate contextual factors and to the limits imposed on programmes by funding/donor conditions and by governing authorities. One example of this is in education, where the core agenda of 'equitable access to quality learning' must be understood in the context of both the massive deficits in educational capacity (including loss of infrastructure and teachers), and the fact that donor 'redlines' have largely prevented UNICEF and others from tackling the quality agenda through teacher training. Access to education, in particular for adolescents, children with disabilities and children in informal settlements, has been too limited to date. The remote learning agenda, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has rightly been pursued alongside more traditional approaches in attempting to address these gaps.

In other sectors, a similar mix of constraints has limited the ability of UNICEF to fulfil the CCCs through its own programme. A further constraint for the cross-border

work in NWS is inherent in the nature of that modality. For example, the child protection response is generally in line with the related CCCs, but the quality of services varies according to the capacities of implementing partners as well as donor redlines (e.g., assistance to gender-based violence survivors, case management of difficult child protection cases). Other challenges relate to the scale and nature of interventions in relation to the needs. For example, MHPSS interventions may be generally appropriate, but too limited given the extent and nature of the trauma suffered by children.

4.4 Programme coverage and targeting⁷⁹

Evaluating UNICEF programme coverage against assessed needs has been difficult for a number of reasons, and three in particular. The first relates to the process of needs assessment itself and the lack of reliable and recent baseline data, complicated by the demographic shifts involved in the massive displacement of families over the past few years. The annual humanitarian needs assessment

⁷⁹ Evaluation questions B5 *Has UNICEF target-setting and prioritization been appropriate in the light of priority needs, gaps and available resources? How good has the coverage and equity of response by UNICEF and partners been?* and C.1 *To what extent has UNICEF met its targets and programme objectives since 2018?* Although mainly concerned with the UNICEF programme, this section also considers the coverage achieved by the clusters / AoRs in which UNICEF has a leading role.

programme (HNAP) that has been used to identify 'people in need' for the HNO and HRP processes has only limited utility as a basis for actual programming. Partners in the education sector, for example, are encouraged not to base their programming on the HNO needs assessments. There is a pressing need for more reliable baseline and periodic joint assessments in all sectors and all parts of the country. As the security situation has increasingly stabilized and access has improved in many areas, this should in principle be possible, but will require both continued advocacy with the relevant authorities and leadership from UNICEF in the relevant clusters and AoRs.

The second (related) problem concerns the lack of 'granularity' of available data. This is most evident in the HNO and HRP⁸⁰ but also in internal UNICEF documents such as situation reports (SitReps). The lack of detail extends to the specific impacts of the crisis on children, which are sometimes assumed rather than assessed. This suggests that UNICEF targeting (and that of other agencies relying on these data) may be at best approximate, especially over a period that has been characterized in some parts of the country by major population movements.

The third problem in assessing coverage relates to uncertainty concerning the actual reach of the UNICEF programme. The agency's figures for 'reach' are largely based on programme assumptions about who will benefit from given outputs rather than being based on actual data from post-delivery monitoring, reporting and feedback. This is not unusual in highly volatile situations, where access may be restricted, but it leaves real uncertainty as to who actually benefits. With increasing stability in many regions, UNICEF and its partners need to find better ways to gauge both the reach and the impact of its programme interventions.

The way in which UNICEF and the clusters that it (co-)leads have targeted and prioritized their interventions is inevitably affected by these uncertainties and data gaps. Targeting has been based on the often-unreliable numbers generated by the processes mentioned above, and on vulnerability analyses of variable quality. While they may be generally accurate at the macro level (more so in GCAs), these analyses often fail to take into consideration displacements and beneficiary coping capacities. In some cases, particularly in NWS, the evaluation found that targeting has been as much

80 The HRP and HNO contain information about severity of needs across the sub-districts.

influenced by opportunities to programme as by assessed needs and priorities – for example, by the presence of an NGO in a certain area, or the ease with which a given area can be accessed.⁸¹ While this is understandable – humanitarian response is often the art of the possible – it means that targeting is often based on capacity to programme as much as strict prioritization of needs. For example, in education the cluster target is constructed on the basis of the aggregated targets in the HRP projects, including those submitted by UNICEF partners. Targets tend to be adjusted on the basis of the previous year's performance.

There is a general consensus that the targeting processes for both the clusters and UNICEF has been imprecise and determined by factors other than prioritized needs (whether this is judged by 'numbers in need' or 'severity of need'). Where they have been 'capacity-based', this too has sometimes been misjudged, and this is likely to be a major factor behind some of the instances of under- or over-performance by UNICEF sectors (see below under 'effectiveness'). An area-based approach, perhaps using zonal risk mapping to guide multi-sector

interventions, might prove a more effective basis for targeting interventions for at least some components of the programme.

Despite the limitations noted above, some things can be said about UNICEF and cluster coverage based on the available data. Across all sectors, UNICEF and the relevant clusters have targeted around 70-80 per cent of the assessed needs. However, within that figure, target achievement has been highly variable across sectors and geographic areas. Most sectors have struggled to achieve sufficient coverage even against Agenda A priorities. Nutrition consistently set relatively low targets compared to need, then often over-performed based on those numbers; however, information at field level indicates that coverage was at best around 70 per cent, with a lot of variability depending on area accessibility.⁸² Education and child protection coverage was also relatively low compared to need, and child protection targets were very low compared to assessed need. Even in the relatively strong WASH sector, UNICEF and cluster partners have struggled to achieve coverage and meet the needs.

81 KIIs with UNICEF and NGO staff in Gaziantep, including cluster coordinators and IMOs (IMOs were often double-hatting and so able to speak both to UNICEF and cluster targeting practices).

82 KIIs with UNICEF and NGO staff in Gaziantep; analysis of HPM data 2019–2020.

For example, over the evaluation period, reported education coverage by UNICEF and the cluster has been around 50 per cent of assessed need across WoS – relatively low in a context where around 2.7 million children were out of school in 2021 (see Figure 7 below for 2020 data). In this sector, UNICEF targeting strategy is largely based on partner capacity and reach, with adjustments made to targets on the basis of the results achieved in the previous year.⁸³

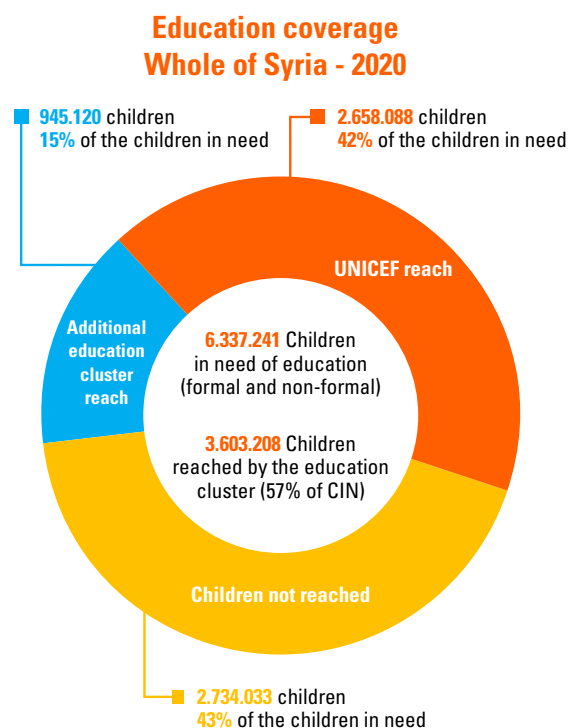
Within these ‘reach’ figures, the large majority are children reached through distribution of supply and light rehabilitation of schools. While the work is essential and appropriate, it cannot simply be correlated with increases in school attendance, let alone with improved educational outcomes.

4.5 Balance and coherence of UNICEF programme

Balance of the programme⁸⁴

The evaluation attempted to assess the question of balance of the UNICEF programme response across Syria as a whole (including each of the three main crisis areas) but found it difficult to do so. That balance has been affected by a number of factors over the past four years, including access, funding constraints and conditionality. As noted above, access to non-GCAs of NWS has been severely affected by conflict-related insecurity over this period, as well as the general constraints of operating primarily cross-border. Access to non-GCAs of NES has been contingent on securing the necessary authorizations from authorities on both sides.

Figure 7: Education coverage in Syria



⁸³ It should be noted that the large majority of children are reached through distribution of supply and light rehabilitation of schools. As SCO staff noted, “pedagogical quality improvements reached only a limited amount of beneficiaries given the redlines of not being able to engage in teacher training and systems strengthening”. Reach figures for 2020 and 2021 are affected by COVID-related school closures.

⁸⁴ Evaluation question B.4 *How well balanced and harmonized has the UNICEF programme been over the evaluation period?*

Part of the difficulty of evaluating the geographical balance of the UNICEF programme across different areas is that the organization's accounting for funds allocated and spent in these different areas is unclear. Figures are based on hub programming rather than areas covered; therefore, for the cross-zone work to NES, the evaluators were unable to obtain any data (see further section 6 below). This is clearly unsatisfactory and a significant gap both in terms of accountability and management of information. Using target data to assess the geographic balance of the programme is problematic for much the same reason (UNICEF did not set targets for NES). But here the problem is compounded by the factors noted earlier, and the fact that severity as well as the numbers in need have to be accounted for.

As noted above, most sectors have struggled to achieve coverage against assessed need across the whole country. Our overall conclusion is that areas beyond government control in the northeast have been relatively under-served over the last two years by the internationally-supported response, for populations beyond the camp in particular. Both on grounds of equity and for its own sake, this imbalance should

concern UNICEF.⁸⁵ Elsewhere, UNICEF appears to have found a reasonable programme balance. Although this has been weighted toward urban and peri-urban populations (as well as camps), this appears reasonable in terms of 'density' of needs. Beyond that, we have not been able to draw firm conclusions about geographic balance.

With regard to programme balance, UNICEF has adopted a broad-spectrum approach in its response, attempting to cover substantively all of the main sectors (within its remit) affecting children and adolescents. While delivery on those agendas has been inconsistent and implementing partner capacity in the different sectors has been variable, the evaluation found that UNICEF was right in the circumstances to maintain such a broad-spectrum response. The imbalances that were found were largely related to external factors, including access and funding. Of the sectors particularly affected by donor conditionality, education and ADAP stand out. Limits placed on the ability of UNICEF and others to work on these agendas led to some related imbalance in the overall programme response.

85 This conclusion is based on review of (limited) available data but also KIs with donors, UN agencies (OCHA, WHO) and NGOs.

Coherence of the programme

An important question for the evaluation was how well integrated the different components of the UNICEF programme have been, and in particular whether the different sectoral interventions were mutually reinforcing. A considerable degree of effective inter-sector planning and delivery was found in the sectors that have traditionally been associated with each other (e.g., child protection and education and WASH in schools). However, the integration of different sectoral interventions was found to have been largely ad hoc and opportunistic rather than planned as part of a deliberate strategy. The evaluators recognize the challenges involved, particularly in GCAs, where multi-sector programming often requires engagement with numerous different ministries, requiring in some cases formal vetting of all UNICEF interventions.

As suggested above, a more strategic approach to programming, based on an agreed inter-sector planning framework, would help to ensure more consistent delivery of multi-sector interventions. While WASH in schools has been a key component of the WASH programme and one of its indicators, WASH in health infrastructures is less evident, perhaps

largely explained by the fact that UNICEF cannot directly support the Ministry of Health, and rehabilitation work in health has been very limited, partly for lack of funding.⁸⁶

In its local communication work, UNICEF has shown its ability to address multiple agendas at the same time. For example, the rapid response teams set up for nutrition surveillance were able to raise awareness on a range of other issues. The RCCE mechanism – integrated in the broader COVID-19 response strategy – proved its worth both with regard to COVID-19 communication and to wider health messaging (although one key informant suggested that RCCE for COVID-19 was too narrowly focused and could be extended to other areas of the programme).

The evaluators found good integration of education and child protection thanks to standard teacher training on child protection and PSS. Child protection and PSS considerations are also integrated in non-formal education activities, and there is good and effective integration of mine risk education in Curriculum A and other curricula (including the accelerated learning and self-learning programmes). The ADAP programme in GCAs is also

⁸⁶ The evaluators noticed some examples in their field visits, e.g., the apparent lack of WASH facilities in a neo-natal unit the main hospital in Deir-ez-Zor.

designed in synergy with CP and education programming, but there have been challenges in making links between these sectors and the social policy programme.

Integration between education and nutrition is lacking; in fact the evaluation found no evidence of links between these two sectors of UNICEF. This needs urgent reconsideration given rising levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. WFP school feeding programmes are currently limited to dry rations.

Child protection mainstreaming is relatively weak, except in education and ADAP. Mine risk education is integrated in some interventions, such as immunization, polio campaigns and the school curricula in 2018–2019. In NWS, UNICEF as child protection AoR coordinator has developed (jointly with the gender-based violence AoR) guidelines for donors and third-party monitors on how to monitor child protection and gender-based violence programming, but similar guidance and standard operating procedures do not exist in other sectors.

Although relatively small compared to the scale of needs, the social protection programme for disabled children has

been successful and greatly appreciated by beneficiaries and local administrations. Its necessary links with child protection (case management) and education have been weak in the past but appear to have recently been addressed. There is potential to scale the programme up, funding permitting.

The results of the staff survey on coherence were mixed. While some pointed to good examples, most recognized there is room for improvement. One respondent reflected, *"I think this is work in progress as attaining integration / coherence / synergies within and across sectors / sections remains a challenge. ... There are opportunities that have yet to be fully explored"*. Others suggested that integration is driven by individuals, rather than being systematic: *("It depends how much the manager is aware")* and thus it *"requires behaviour change among programme staff as well as implementing partners"*.

4.6 Programme delivery and effectiveness⁸⁷

The ability to claim effectiveness for UNICEF interventions in Syria relies heavily

⁸⁷ Evaluation questions C1 *To what extent has UNICEF met its targets and programme objectives since 2018?* C2 *What have been the main challenges to delivering against the CCCs?* C4 *How good has UNICEF programme monitoring, reporting and quality assurance been? What do they show about the quality and effectiveness of UNICEF work?*

on assumptions about the link between outputs and outcomes. There are some components of UNICEF programming (e.g., vaccination) where the causal link between output and outcome is relatively clear. In other sectors, the link between output and outcome is less clear and the assumptions involved are more tentative. In education, for example, the fact that a child regularly attends school, while positive in itself, does not mean that he or she is receiving a good basic education. Quality factors have a major bearing on likely outcomes. In this case, support to the training of teachers and the provision of teaching materials is one route to helping assure this, but again involves assumptions (e.g., that teachers will be paid and will turn up for work)

that may not be safe to make in the Syria context.

Assumptions have to be checked against the prevailing reality – and re-checked, given the rate at which the context for families can change. To be confident that the interventions of UNICEF and its partners are having the intended effect generally requires monitoring of outcomes over time, engagement with and feedback from communities and local authorities as well as partners, and the ability to adjust accordingly. But this is an area where UNICEF and others have only limited means of data gathering and triangulation at their disposal, and outcome data are scarce. Some of the 'key lessons' identified



in the staff survey are about the importance of investing in evidence generation. Monitoring is largely concerned with the delivery of outputs, although there is some quality assurance component through third-party monitors and facilitators, which was recognized in the staff survey as essential. The lack of UNICEF presence in the field (complete in non-GCAs of NWS and NES, partial in GCAs) is a major barrier not only to needs assessment and programme monitoring but also to impact assessment.

Allowing that performance against targets can only be a rough proxy for effectiveness, the evaluation included an assessment of UNICEF target performance, supplemented by a review of the year-end SitReps and the humanitarian performance monitoring (HPM) reports.⁸⁸ This showed a high degree of variability between and within sectors, with most falling in the range 50-100 per cent, but with numerous significant outliers (both under- and over-performance) and a large degree of inconsistency between years. Similar trends are also observed in cluster performance.⁸⁹

Analysing in detail the inconsistencies in these trends is beyond the scope of this evaluation, but the evaluation team identified some factors that contributed to them. For over-performance, these included poor targeting based on underestimation of beneficiaries in the HNO (e.g., for EPI); access to new beneficiaries (displacements, newly accessible areas) and opportunities to intervene for unplanned response or sudden emergencies; and successful awareness campaigns (e.g., back-to-school). For under-performance, they included delayed start of intended activities (through lack of resources, logistics/administrative constraints, etc.); lack of NGO/implementing partner capacity; changes of strategy or operating constraints in other related sectors (e.g., WASH in schools in 2018; micronutrient distribution during EPI campaign in 2019); financial constraints; and shifts in sector strategy. In some cases, under- and over-performance seem to have been linked: under-performance in one year (perhaps due to funds being secured late) followed by over-performance the next, using unspent funds carried forward.

⁸⁸ Because the indicators in the HRP and UNICEF HAC are only partially aligned (except in education and child protection), this assessment is based mainly on the HPM indicators.

⁸⁹ For example, in 2019 the education target for children enrolled in formal education activities was overachieved by 187 per cent while in 2021 only 57 per cent of the target was achieved.

The evaluation concludes that the ability of UNICEF to gauge the effectiveness of its programme interventions is hampered by two main factors. The first is that to a large extent all sectors limit their effectiveness and impact analysis to *outputs* rather than outcomes. For example, in health and nutrition, the focus is on the number of consultations, but there is very limited information about drop-out rates and recurrence of malnutrition. The same could be said concerning education outcomes and indeed outcomes in most sectors. Too many external variables are involved for UNICEF to be confident that delivery of outputs will lead to achievement of outcomes.

The second (related) factor hampering the organization's ability to gauge effectiveness is the lack of direct access to and engagement with communities, and the heavy reliance on third-party monitoring (TPM) to supplement partner self-reporting. Most of those consulted about this (inside and outside UNICEF) agreed that this was a significant weakness, especially in non-GCAs of NWS. While much of this is related to access constraints beyond UNICEF control, the evaluation concluded that considerably more could be done to strengthen this aspect of UNICEF work (see further section 5.4 below).



5

WORKING WITH OTHERS: LEADERSHIP, COORDINATION, PARTNERSHIPS⁹⁰

5.1 UNICEF leadership and coordination roles

Besides its own programme, UNICEF has a range of system-wide roles. These include its role on the UNCT/Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in Syria and the Strategic Steering Group of the WoS mechanism; the related leadership of the regional director and the country representative for Syria; and more generally, based on its mandate and on the Convention on the Rights of

Child, the UNICEF advocacy role in seeking to protect the rights and best interests of children in all parts of Syria.

Feedback from external key informants (United Nations and others) suggests that senior leadership has been one of the particular strengths of the UNICEF role in Syria over the evaluation period, and a key part of the organization's added value in the region. The representative and regional director have contributed strongly to strategic leadership of the United Nations

⁹⁰ Evaluation questions D.1 *What has the UNICEF partnership strategy and balance of partnerships been?* D.5 *To what extent has UNICEF provided system-wide leadership on coordination of response and child-related agendas?*

as a whole and shown strong diplomatic and communication skills in engaging with the GoS, other controlling authorities and international actors. This has helped open the space for dialogue on policy and programming and demonstrated the possibility for progress on what have often been difficult and seemingly intractable agendas (such as education in NES and repatriation of foreign children).

In the rest of this section, we consider the more specific responsibilities related to UNICEF 'cluster lead agency' roles in WASH, nutrition and education, and its role as co-lead for the child protection AoR.

UNICEF cluster and AoR (co-)leadership

Although different terminology is used in different parts of Syria for the response coordination mechanisms (cluster, sector), UNICEF has played its expected cluster and AoR lead or co-lead role in all areas except non-GCA NES, where coordination has been NGO-led. As noted in the previous section, its performance in the cluster lead role – and in the WoS coordination role – has been variable across sectors and hubs. Here we consider briefly why this has been the case.

Coordination challenges for different areas of Syria and for the Whole of Syria

With regard to coordination in the three different crisis areas, each poses a

different set of challenges. Coordination in **government-controlled** parts of Syria (based on 'sectors' rather than 'clusters') is done in close collaboration with the relevant government departments and ministries. Here the different sectors are co-led with GoS or the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), with limited input from NGOs. In some cases (e.g., education) they have not followed agreed best practice by forming a strategic advisory group. UNICEF does not have a co-coordinator, and the perception of INGOs in Damascus (the 'DINGOs') is that they feel marginalized, with the sectors largely reflecting UNICEF programmes: "*The sector's agenda tends to be UNICEF's agenda*". This seems a missed opportunity, as some of the DINGOs could be important allies given their expertise (i.e., the Norwegian Refugee Council in education and child protection issues), especially now that new opportunities are emerging to work with various ministries on upstream issues.

For **(non-GC) northwest Syria**, the standard cluster system is based out of Gaziantep, with UNICEF playing its normal lead/co-lead roles. The performance of individual sectors in their external leadership and coordination roles has been variable (see below). The role of NGOs as co-coordinators in Gaziantep was reported to be largely effective and helped strengthen the coordination reputation of UNICEF.

In **(non-GC) northeast Syria**, the biggest challenge is coordination with the NGO Forum working group system, which largely mirrors the OCHA-led cluster system. Here, UNICEF alignment with the GoS is particularly sensitive for the INGOs working under the Forum. The WASH and child protection clusters have found ways to interact with their respective working group counterparts quite successfully, but the same cannot be said for nutrition and education. Besides the implications for these sectors, this is a reputational risk factor for UNICEF.

For the Whole of Syria, performance has been variable by sector. Again, WASH provides a largely positive example, including effective advocacy with donors on behalf of NGOs (not just its own partners) for the cross-border work in NWS, and strong liaison across hubs, including the NES Forum working group. The UNICEF-led WoS child protection AoR also has a good reputation with partners, and it is reported to have played a crucial role in harmonizing between hubs. There was particular appreciation from the NES child protection working group of the role played by UNICEF in this respect.

Education and nutrition have been less well coordinated for WoS. Although it has worked hard in the face of sometimes unrealistic expectations, the performance of the education coordination function has not been satisfactory; besides lacking a WoS strategy, it has lacked a dedicated cluster lead. Additionally, it has lacked a regional perspective, something that is important given the scale of the regional Syrian refugee diaspora and the prospects for return. Nutrition coordination across WoS has also lacked a clear strategy.

The challenge in resourcing the coordination function

UNICEF has struggled to resource its coordination lead function, particularly with regard to the cross-border work in NWS. Reliance on 'double-' and sometimes 'triple-hatting' for coordination and programme roles has been a problem at all levels, confirmed by numerous interviewees and by the internal UNICEF WoS review.⁹¹

The evaluation concludes that where, as in NWS, the practice of double-hatting has become (or is in danger of becoming) routine, UNICEF should assume that this

91 This finding is also echoed in the evaluation of UNICEF's cluster lead agency role ('CLARE II') available here: <https://evaluationreports.unicef.org/GetDocument?fileID=22654>

is not a suitable or sustainable option for a response with such complex coordination challenges. Both WoS and hub-level coordination functions have been affected.⁹² The evaluators acknowledge that these are not always easy posts to fill, given the mix of technical expertise, communication and people skills required. They also depend in part on interpersonal chemistry, and some of the current problems are rooted in difficult past relationships. While financial constraints may explain the practice of double-hatting, UNICEF needs to review and fix the structural issues affecting some of the clusters.



5.2 UNICEF collaboration with GoS, ministries and other authorities⁹³

The organization's presence in the country since well before the beginning of the conflict meant that it already had well-established relationships with key government ministries. But the conflict brought about profound changes to policy priorities as well as affecting government budgets, resources and personnel, and caused massive disruption to established

systems and capacities in the social and other sectors. As noted earlier, some of that disruption relates to the loss of key service delivery capacity at local level, through hospitals, health centres, schools, water and power plants and other public institutions. The loss of trained personnel in all sectors – from health and education to WASH and energy supply – coupled with destruction of critical infrastructure, has meant that many of the most immediate priorities revolve around the restoration of basic services. From a UNICEF perspective,

⁹² UNICEF could perhaps have made more use of standby partners here, as demonstrated by the very effective deployment of a SBP to the WASH cluster in Qamishli. While visa issues and some limits in SBP deployment exist (normally 3+3 months), there have been situations where SBP have been deployed for longer timeframes.

⁹³ Evaluation question D.2 *How effective and appropriate has UNICEF collaboration and engagement with government ministries and other relevant authorities been?*

priorities refocused from the longer-term agenda onto the short- to medium-term priorities for children. Development concerns gave way to more immediate humanitarian and recovery concerns. The politics of engagement with the Syrian government (and now with de facto controlling authorities in NWS and NES) are sensitive and complex. This is reflected, for example, in the conditions imposed by international donors, and in the redlines established in the Parameters and Principles of United Nations Assistance in Syria (see Section 2.2). As noted above, these have imposed major constraints on the ability of UNICEF and others to support anything beyond relief and basic rehabilitation. More generally, while the norms of humanitarian action demand engagement with warring parties, humanitarian policy and financing instruments – as well as the scale of humanitarian funding – limit the forms of that engagement.

The politics of engagement have a bearing on questions of humanitarian principles – independence, neutrality and impartiality – especially because Syria is such a profoundly divided country. This is partly a matter of perception, and the evaluation found that many of the NGOs operating outside areas of GoS control do not believe UNICEF in Damascus (or indeed other United Nations agencies there) are really independent of the GoS. This perception

is the primary cause of the long-standing mistrust between NGOs and the Damascus-based United Nations agencies. That mistrust is to some extent mutual, and the operations of NGOs working in non-GCAs are themselves subject to political factors relating both to the policies of controlling authorities in NWS / NES and to the policies of international donors.

These perceptions may be unsurprising given the politics and evolution of the conflict, and the fact that those living in non-GCAs are identified by the GoS as ‘opposition’ supporters. But from a humanitarian perspective, it is essential to demonstrate that UNICEF has equal concern for children and their families living in *all* parts of Syria. While UNICEF has generally done well in navigating the very complex political terrain in Syria, it needs to do more to demonstrate this equality of concern. In particular, it needs to forge a more collaborative approach to working with the NES Forum and its members, in order to achieve the shared goal of increasing coverage in non-GCAs of this region. This, of course, demands willingness and trust on both sides, but UNICEF has shown through its WASH and child protection work in NES that this is possible to achieve.

Work with GoS counterparts in GCAs has come increasingly to resemble a ‘normal’ UNICEF approach in post-conflict countries.

UNICEF interventions are in line with GoS priorities and have progressively shifted towards recovery and basic rehabilitation. Collaboration with ministerial counterparts appears overall to have been effective and, in some cases, is deemed excellent (WASH with the Ministry of Water Resources and education with the Ministry of Education). As noted above, such collaboration is sensitive in some quarters, but the evaluation concludes that it is both appropriate and necessary, so long as it does not lead to a relative de-prioritization of work in non-GCAs.

In WASH, close collaboration with the Deputy Minister of Water Resources allowed a relatively solid programme to be established in GCAs and some cross-zone interventions in areas of NES under self-administration control, as well as some (low-profile) cross-line support in areas of NWS, in coordination with Gaziantep. For health and nutrition, UNICEF worked in close coordination with the Ministry of Health, and programmes run by implementing partners were aligned with government systems and processes. All of

the related interventions were vetted and cleared by the ministry.

In education, there has been close and effective engagement with the Ministry of Education on issues such as information management, revision and alignment of curricula and facilitation of exams, as well as teacher training on child protection and PSS. In child protection, UNICEF has a good reputation for engaging with all the actors across the crisis on protection of children. Syria does not have a ministry dedicated to adolescents, resulting in gaps in the policy framework and a weak enabling environment for adolescent participation.⁹⁴ Social policy has recently started to take advantage of more flexibility and transparency from key ministerial counterparts and is increasingly becoming able to plan and implement potentially important upstream work on social services policy and financing.

In non-GCA NWS, the programme is implemented in areas under Turkish control or under the control of the 'Salvation Government' and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The interactions of UNICEF

⁹⁴ UNICEF has worked on some elements of the ADAP agenda with MoE and the Ministry of Culture.

⁹⁵ The exception to this is in child protection, where there is ongoing low-profile engagement on CAAFAG issues: recruitment, arbitrary detention, MRM reporting and preparing the ground for signing the Action Plan to End Recruitment and Use of Children in Armed Conflict as requested by the Security Council.

implementing partners with these entities is largely limited to access negotiations and broad agreements to work in particular areas.⁹⁵ Some (limited) work is done with the local administrations still in place. If the UNSC cross-border resolution is not renewed, the situation would not essentially change for the NGOs based out of Gaziantep, which could continue working cross-border in NWS. But the political control of these non-GCAs affects the potential for increasing cross-line support operations from GCAs: interactions of the United Nations agencies and NGOs with the Salvation Government in particular will likely be much more sensitive than those with the self-administration in NES. Recent attempts to scale up cross-line support show the difficulties involved in getting the necessary permissions from both sides of this divide.

One instance of apparent non-collaboration is the UNICEF decision not to engage with local administrations in education in NWS. It was not clear to the evaluation team why this choice was made, particularly in view of the extreme weakness of the education system in NWS; on the face of it, this decision sits awkwardly with the organization's commitment to the principle of equity and is perhaps overdue for review.

UNICEF work in northeastern Syria is dependent on both GoS and self-administration consent. This is relatively straightforward in towns (Qamishli, Al-Hasakah) under government control, as well as in the IDP camps under Kurdish control. It is more challenging in other areas of cross-zone support, although it appears that opportunities for expanding such interventions may be increasing. Child protection and WASH have been more effective than other sectors in making use of these opportunities. It is unclear whether this depends on different degrees of openness of key ministries to allow operations in Kurdish-controlled areas, or on better negotiation capacities of some UNICEF sectors.

As noted above, a key result in NES was the negotiation and signing with the self-administration of the 'Action Plan to End Recruitment and Use of Children in Armed Conflict'. For health and nutrition, there is limited cross-zone work beyond EPI, and the evaluators felt there was scope for expansion of some of the health work to hospitals outside government areas of control, and a need to better assess and address the deteriorating nutrition situation in the region. In education, there appears to be limited engagement with education authorities outside the formal camps and for schools in government-controlled areas.

5.3 UNICEF collaboration with United Nations agencies, SARC and NGOs⁹⁶

The evaluation found that overall, UNICEF had good collaboration and coordination with all its key United Nations agency counterparts at WoS and regional level. As noted above, UNICEF has a strong reputation and is considered by other agencies as a key interlocutor in the extremely complex and sensitive environment of the Syria response. Interactions at Damascus and Gaziantep levels are broadly good, although there were some challenges related to the different structures of the different agencies.

One key sector of collaboration has been health. UNICEF has worked closely with the World Health Organization (WHO), notably on the joint EPI programme, and on the COVID-19 response from 2020, but also in areas like WASH in health facilities. For the most part this collaboration appears to have worked well,⁹⁷ although problems were reported with the COVID-19 response and the supply of COVID vaccines by UNICEF (though as noted in section 4 above, this was largely outside UNICEF control).

The relationship with UNHCR is said to work well at the UNCT level,⁹⁸ and there are examples of effective collaboration on practical agendas, e.g., on WASH in IDP settlements, but there appears to be some divergence of approach on the core protection agenda. When UNHCR decided to move the WoS protection cluster to Damascus (as did the United Nations Mine Action Service with the mine action AoR), UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) agreed jointly to keep their respective AoRs based in Amman. The evaluators believe that this was the right strategic decision, and it was appreciated by cluster partners. Participation in the WoS protection cluster is reported to be more problematic since the cluster relocated to Damascus; it is less trusted by partners and UNHCR is perceived as less neutral, especially with respect to NES.⁹⁹

Work with the World Food Programme (WFP) has been relatively limited, and as noted above, there is a need for stronger collaboration on school feeding and approaches to dealing with moderate acute malnutrition (MAM). To date, WFP support to the MAM caseload has been limited, and this risks affecting the broader response to malnutrition in NWS, and specifically the

⁹⁶ Evaluation question D.3 *How well has UNICEF collaborated with other UN agencies?*

⁹⁷ UNICEF and WHO KIIs in Damascus and Cairo.

⁹⁸ KII UNHCR.

⁹⁹ KIIs AoR members.

UNICEF response to severe cases (SAM). The SENS survey carried out in NSW in 2021¹⁰⁰ confirmed very low MAM coverage in 2021 (12,000, out of c.126,000 children at risk). As nutrition cluster lead, UNICEF has a responsibility to advocate for stronger MAM coverage, and it should do more to forge a common agenda with WFP in this regard. For its part, WFP “*would like a more strategic and comprehensive approach by UNICEF education*” with regard to school feeding.¹⁰¹

UNICEF work with SARC has been extensive and the working relationship appears generally a good one. SARC is a partner to all United Nations agencies as well as many NGOs, and a large proportion of aid in GCAs is delivered through SARC and its extensive network of sub-offices, staff and volunteers. Supported by both the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), SARC has sometimes struggled to prove its political neutrality to donors and international agencies given its closeness with the GoS. However, it is generally recognized as a key intermediary in aid delivery in Syria. UNICEF engages with SARC primarily on relief (through the field

coordination and emergency section), WASH (as sector/cluster co-lead) and, to a limited extent, child protection through its SCO emergency section. Feedback from interviews with SARC senior staff suggests that while the relationship is greatly appreciated, UNICEF tends to be unduly reticent in leadership (e.g., on child protection) and sometimes slow to deliver.¹⁰²

The organization’s working relationships with NGOs – local, national and international – have varied in quality and type across the three main crisis areas. Political sensitivities and related restrictions on partnerships and partner presence have played a significant part in this. Some of the organization’s usual key partner INGOs are not present, particularly in Damascus, since INGOs have (for the most part) been unable to work simultaneously in GCAs and non-GCAs. The very different political contexts in NWS, NES and the rest of the country have had a major bearing on UNICEF partnership networks.

In non-government-controlled areas of **NWS**, UNICEF has been able to implement its programme through Syrian NGOs of notably high caliber and strong capacities.

100 Physicians Across Continents and United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Standardized Expanded Nutrition Survey, Idlib and Aleppo Governorates, north -west Syria’, PAC, Ankara, 18 June 2021.

101 KII with UNICEF and other organizations’ staff in Gaziantep and Damascus.

102 KII with senior SARC management.



Given the 'remote' nature of programming in this region, UNICEF has relied heavily on the ability and trustworthiness of these partners to deliver and account for good quality interventions. The results from TPM suggest that this trust has largely been well placed, although as noted above, the lack of direct UNICEF presence in the region leaves an uncomfortable degree of exposure to risk and uncertainty concerning outcomes.

As the process of expanding cross-line operations into non-GC NWS is likely to be complex and slow, UNICEF needs to maintain its support (at least indirectly) to the cross-border work through its partnership and coordination networks

while seeking to ensure continuity of services and avoidance of service gaps. In **GCAs**, the evaluation found that the UNICEF decision to work with local (GoS-approved) implementing partners and private contractors has largely proved appropriate. The evolving context and the opening of new upstream work opportunities suggest the need to expand the partnership network to include selected Damascus-based INGOs. Apart from accessing their sector-specific expertise, this would have the added benefit of helping address perceptions that UNICEF is too much focused on its own relationship with GoS and the sectors are too UNICEF-dominated.

In non-government-controlled areas of **NES**, formal partnerships are currently possible almost exclusively with local NGOs recognized by the GoS, as well as with private contractors. Child protection is a limited exception, through contracts managed by Amman. While this arrangement is not ideal, it has allowed crucial expertise to be accessed and supported, which is important given the extent of needs. As noted above, it is essential for UNICEF to strengthen its communication and coordination with the NGO Forum actors (mainly INGOs), especially in some of the currently under-supported sectors. This would allow better harmonization of field assessments and interventions, address problems and issues affecting specific sectors (e.g., provision of nutrition supplies to INGOs) and expand response coverage.

Concerning the quality of partnerships, interviews conducted for the evaluation and the results of the online survey of implementing partners suggest that overall, NGO partners have been very satisfied with their partnership with UNICEF. A number of implementing partner respondents in NWS highlighted the quality of the collaboration, and (for WASH in particular) described this as a 'real partnership and not a financial transaction'.

In some sectors (notably education and child protection in NWS), there has been a particular need for technical capacity development. National NGOs reported a high degree of satisfaction and appreciation of UNICEF technical support and flexibility throughout the partnership agreement.

In child protection, efforts were made to strategically select and train partners at technical level, and to build technical expertise and communities of practices through the AoR. These efforts extended support for the CAAFAG taskforce in NES. In child protection work in GCAs, although it operates through NGOs, UNICEF seems to invest less in partnerships and is more oriented toward working with the Ministry for Social Affairs and Labour and the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and Population. There is scope to expand partnerships with NGOs, e.g., through INGOs and the sector. NGOs can play an important role in scaling up child protection services in the prevailing circumstances and in building the culture needed to address the most serious protection concerns (e.g., gender-based violence, children in detention).

5.4 Accountability to and engagement with affected populations¹⁰³

Accountability to affected populations (AAP) – and more generally, engagement with communities – has been one of the weakest aspects of UNICEF practice to date. This is recognized among staff, who identified AAP as an area for improvement in the staff survey. This is largely a function of context: UNICEF itself has limited presence in many areas, and little or none in the non-GCAs. As a result, it has little direct contact with communities in these areas and is heavily reliant on its partners and third-party monitors. In GCAs, while UNICEF has more access, its ability to engage and consult with communities is restricted by the GoS. While some elements of the programme (notably social protection) have made progress in getting feedback from communities, the C4D/RCCE mode of engagement has largely been used to deliver messages rather than generate feedback or assess perceptions. So while AAP is generally incorporated in the design of projects, in many cases this appears to reflect an aspiration rather than the current reality.

In GCAs and non-GC NES, the evaluation did not find any evidence of a structured AAP approach embedded in the response. The recent supplementation of the facilitator network with an experienced cadre of third-party monitors with specific responsibility for AAP indicates that SCO is aware of this weakness, and this is a step in the right direction. It will not be sufficient in itself: in NWS, some limited AAP initiatives implemented by third-party monitors already exist, but staff acknowledge this is not sufficient to assess the relevance and impact of interventions from the perspective of intended beneficiaries.

Some sectors have made progress towards AAP in NWS. For example, in health and nutrition, feedback from beneficiaries is collected by the third-party monitors and shared with UNICEF, although the beneficiaries are not directly involved in the selection of specific programme activities. Banners with beneficiary rights and entitlements are printed and shown at health facilities, and these include phone numbers and e-mail address to lodge complaints. UNICEF coordinates with other agencies for the collection and follow-up of these feedback and complaints.

¹⁰³ Evaluation questions C.3 *How accountable and responsive has UNICEF been to affected populations? To what extent have they engaged communities in programme design and implementation?* D.4 *How successful have UNICEF and its partners been in community mobilization, outreach initiatives and working with and through local volunteers?* E.3 *How well has UNICEF used C4D and awareness-raising campaigns to support programmes?*

Child protection and WASH in NWS have attempted something more comprehensive. Local councils and beneficiaries are reported to be involved in project initiation and planning, needs assessments, selection criteria, implementation and project closure. Emphasis is given to prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable groups (including people with disabilities and female-headed households), and special emphasis is given to the participation of adolescent girls and women, partly with a view to reducing the potential for gender-based violence. Multiple channels are used to receive feedback/complaints, and an inter-agency hotline for reporting sexual exploitation and abuse and other concerns from beneficiaries and aid workers was established in 2019.¹⁰⁴ The evaluation team was unable to verify the extent to which these measures have worked in practice.

UNICEF is aware of the AAP and community engagement challenge and is taking some steps to address it. Social policy has set a useful lead here in conducting beneficiary perception surveys of its programme components. But more comprehensive work on AAP will become increasingly important within the expected expansion of UNICEF cross-zone/cross-line operations in NES and NWS, not least in identifying possible implementation challenges. For example, will people living in non-GCAs of NWS accept vaccines coming from Damascus? What is the level of acceptance in NES for education in Arabic? Such issues can only be addressed if beneficiaries are properly consulted from the outset.

104 Such mechanisms have also been established for GCAs and non-GC areas in NES.



6

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT¹⁰⁵

6.1 Whole of Syria management and support arrangements

The system-wide WoS structure and mechanisms, led by OCHA, were introduced in 2015 (see section 2 above). The UNICEF WoS structure, designed in part to complement the system-wide structure, is the arrangement by which UNICEF humanitarian activities mounted

from different ‘hubs’ inside and outside Syria have been overseen, supported and coordinated through MENARO, including a dedicated WoS team in Amman.

This structure has both UNICEF-specific (internal) and wider (external) functions. Internally, it has provided the means to coordinate UNICEF programmatic interventions and messaging from within Syria (SCO) with cross-border interventions

¹⁰⁵ Evaluation questions E.5 Have UNICEF management structures and arrangements enabled the most effective and efficient response? E.5.1 With regard to UNICEF Whole of Syria structures and processes, how clear have the lines of accountability been? How well have those accountabilities been managed and delivered on?

from Türkiye (Gaziantep), Jordan and Iraq. Related to this, it established lines of management accountability for the external hubs directly through to the regional director (i.e., to the GEC) as well as oversight and operational support for the 'standalone' Gaziantep office. Externally, as part of the system-wide WoS mechanism led by OCHA from Amman, the structure housed WoS coordination functions for the sectors and sub-sectors in which UNICEF was lead or co-lead agency. These have been largely related to fulfilling humanitarian planning cycle (HPC) functions.

The UNICEF WoS arrangement was established when there were a number of active UNSC-authorized border crossings providing support into Syria from Türkiye, Jordan and Iraq. This was clearly appropriate and necessary at the time due to the need for a remote management, coordination and oversight function in a secure location. The structure has provided a link between geographically separate programmatic activities, as well as a valuable cluster coordination function – although some clusters have proved more effective than others, as noted in section 5 above. The regional office has also provided necessary financial, HR, supply, and communications support, with the latter being particularly important with respect to reporting ongoing child rights violations that would have been difficult

for in-country staff to report without facing institutional and individual repercussions.

Overall, the arrangement has been effective in enabling UNICEF to respond without excessive political interference. But like other agencies working with WoS structures, UNICEF has struggled to make a coherent whole of the various parts of its response across the different response hubs. This is reflected in the lack of an overarching WoS strategy and the tendency to treat the cross-border work into NWS as anomalous or even peripheral to its strategy for Syria. The evaluation concluded that one reason for this was the lack of a coherent overall vision for the UNICEF Syria humanitarian response.

One feature noted by UNICEF staff is the lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities – and related lack of clarity of accountabilities – within the existing WoS arrangements, including where the locus of decision-making lies. This is something that needs ultimately to be decided by the regional director in discussion with colleagues in SCO, Amman, Gaziantep and HQ.

This disconnect in thinking across the different hubs, reflected in the tendency to use 'Syria' to refer only to the areas covered by the Syria country office, is not unique to UNICEF. But it has been perpetuated in part by limited communication between staff in different

hubs. What was originally an appropriate system of ‘firewalls’ within the WoS arrangement – designed to protect the security of staff, partners and data – has tended to foster an atmosphere of mistrust across the different UNICEF hubs. While this has reportedly improved, it is a situation that continues to date, and it extends to attitudes to NGOs working in non-GCAs. The evaluators noted a ‘them and us’ attitude during field missions, fuelled in part by personality clashes, but also reflecting the political fractures across Syria. This situation represents a barrier to effective collaboration both within UNICEF and between UNICEF and NGOs, particularly in NES, and it is essential to address it immediately.

With the closure of all but one of the UNSC-authorized cross-border routes in 2020 (Bab al-Hawa from Türkiye to NWS), the rationale for the current structure has become less clear, and the high cost of maintaining it somewhat harder to justify in the face of declining funding. An internal UNICEF review is currently considering how future WoS coordination support should be structured and resourced. This evaluation has not undertaken sufficiently detailed analysis to advise on a revised structure, but it has considered the functions performed by the WoS mechanism to date and their continued relevance. The essential functions of the current UNICEF WoS arrangement appear to be:

- i. Internal** (enabling UNICEF response).
Inter-hub response coordination;
WoS communication and advocacy;
management oversight and technical support to cross-border response;
- ii. External** (enabling system-wide response). Funding, supply and technical support for Syrian and international NGOs working cross-border into NWS, through the Gaziantep hub. Provision of WoS cluster / AoR coordination and leadership. WoS needs assessment (HNO) and contribution to HRP.

We consider below the value and continuing relevance of each of these functions.

Inter-hub UNICEF programme coordination has perhaps been the least prominent function of the WoS mechanism over the evaluation period – and indeed this is not (with limited exceptions) considered part of its role, which is mainly focused on sector-wide rather than UNICEF programme coordination. One result is that the hubs have been working to largely distinct and unconnected strategies and agendas. The requirement for close coordination between cross-zone/cross-line and cross-border operations has been met in part by the ‘joint operational planning’ process, although this was intermittent over the latter part of the evaluation period. Given the likely need for UNICEF to continue to provide support services to



the humanitarian system from Gaziantep while growing the scale of cross-line support from Damascus and Aleppo, the importance of this internal programme coordination function is likely to grow and to require liaison via Amman, given the difficulties of coordinating directly between Gaziantep and government-controlled Syria.

A staff member summarized the challenge in this way: *“While the JOP leads to joint programming targets with distribution between hubs, the technical side of implementation (standardization of practices, etc.) and coherence of programming is rarely discussed in my section. There are no regular discussions between SCO and Gaziantep or previously with Amman hub regarding*

such programmatic issues. The only communications are around managing funding and expenditure and meeting donor redlines. ... [T]here is not enough time for leads of the sections in hub to think about this as they are dealing with multiple roles and demands.”

Having a ‘remote’ communications function beyond the hub level has proved important over the evaluation period (see below) and the need for this remains, regardless of the UNSC decision on the further extension of the cross-border mandate. This role remains important for communications and advocacy relating to all parts of Syria, at a time when communication about the situation in all three crisis areas is still politically sensitive. Maintaining a ‘distanced’ communications function helps to provide a protective firewall for the Damascus office in particular.

With regard to the WoS coordination function, the evaluation found that the value of this depended on how it was interpreted and implemented in practice. This varied considerably across the different sectors. The WASH and child protection sectors both found a way to add real value in this regard, helping ensure that needs were addressed across all areas of Syria. Some sectors (nutrition, education) struggled to fulfill this WoS coordination role effectively. A UNICEF-internal Whole of Syria coordination

review conducted in 2021 found that understanding of cluster lead agency (CLA) accountabilities varies among staff within UNICEF, and that this was often seen more as an extension of its programmatic role rather than a contribution to the wider humanitarian system.¹⁰⁶ The review also found that UNICEF is considered the most neutral and influential of the agencies, but that UNICEF strategic leadership and advocacy as the CLA for four clusters needed to be stronger to ensure the agency can make the best use of this influence.

Management support and oversight of the office in Gaziantep has been an essential function of the WoS unit. As long as the Security Council resolution is extended, there is clearly a need to maintain a separate office to manage and support cross-border activities from Türkiye. Even if the UNSC mandate is not renewed, the need to maintain Gaziantep-based cluster and AoR coordination functions would remain, providing technical support and coordination to those Syrian NGOs still working in NWS. As noted above, there would also need to be increased collaboration with the Damascus and Aleppo offices, requiring a liaison function.

Supporting work cross-border in NWS

Among the functions listed as ‘external’ above are the provision of funding, supply and technical support to NGOs working in non-GCAs of NWS. Although this currently revolves around UNICEF work with implementing partners of its programme activities in these areas, it must be seen in the wider context of the overall system response. These are, in that sense, ‘external’ functions, and they are essential from a system-wide perspective. Concern about how to maintain or transfer these functions to others, together with what ongoing coordination role UNICEF should play in NWS (see below), is the subject of ongoing contingency planning around the potential closure of the Bab al-Hawa crossing.

The most immediate challenge facing UNICEF and others is how to maintain coverage of the more acute and high dependency needs (Agenda A) in NWS given the combined constraints of access, authorization, available implementing partners and declining funding. Access may soon become the primary constraint if the final border crossing from Türkiye is closed to United Nations agencies.

¹⁰⁶ The review attributed this to “different understandings of the CLA role (significantly influenced by the location) and lack of internal clarification on roles and responsibilities”. United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Whole of Syria Coordination Review’, summary note, UNICEF, Amman, January 2022. These findings echo those in the CLARE II evaluation.

Because it has no direct presence in non-GCAs of NWS, UNICEF has very limited ability to 'read' the context and assess changing needs, and cannot engage directly with communities. This 'arm's-length' approach raises questions about oversight, effectiveness and quality assurance (entirely reliant on partner self-reporting

supplemented by TPM). The question for UNICEF is what role it should continue to play in this endeavour and where its added value lies. This is likely to require capacity in the Gaziantep to be maintained at least at current levels, even if the functions are reconfigured.

Box 7: Support and engagement from MENARO and UNICEF HQ

According to the UNICEF Procedure on Corporate Emergency Activation for Level 3 (L3) Emergencies, the support provided by the regional office (RO) is to be "enhanced in comparison to the support regularly provided to emergency preparedness and response", and HQ divisions are to "organize themselves to provide enhanced and prioritized support and coordination to the RO and [country office]".* Because the Syria country office has built up the capacities needed for an emergency of this kind, the need for enhanced support from other parts of the organization has waned over time, and the L3 emergency status of the Syria response was discontinued as of February 2022. The evaluation team's consultations about the role played in the Syria response by different offices across the whole organization under L3 – and the way in which these were coordinated – elicited generally positive views.

Headquarters has been particularly engaged in terms of fundraising, communications and behind-the-scenes advocacy. The in-country visits from HQ sectoral experts to Syria were reported to have been beneficial. Financially, the response has been supported by HQ with the cancellation of emergency loans and the use of HQ overhead for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse initiative. Support from MENARO has primarily been provided by the regional director (RD) as Global Emergency Coordinator for the Syria response, and by the dedicated WoS unit. The RD was felt by external United Nations informants to have played a key role in regional negotiations. Useful support was also provided by regional advisers in MENARO.

*UNICEF Procedure on Corporate Emergency Activation for Level 3 Emergencies, p. 3.

6.2 Finance and risk management¹⁰⁷

Expenditure against budgets

Each year, spending trends have differed by sector and between hubs. Overall spending rates¹⁰⁸ of cross-border activities (predominantly from Gaziantep since 2019) have ranged from 70-86 per cent between 2018 and 2021 (year to November), while those in GCAs managed by the SCO have been substantially lower. Some sectors have struggled more than others in terms of spending rates: for example, SCO health and nutrition and child protection, together with cross-border non-food items (NFI), have some of the lowest rates. Sectors with the lowest spending rates tend to be those with the lowest funding levels. Generally good spending rates can be seen in most sectors operating out of Gaziantep, perhaps because they are less affected by delays associated with acquiring GoS approvals.

One important issue – and a significant limitation for the evaluability of the programme – is that UNICEF appears unable to provide a breakdown of expenditure relating to cross-zone activity into NES. Currently, it would require a

manual extraction exercise to identify such costs, something that does not seem to have occurred to date.¹⁰⁹ This information would appear to be essential for section heads and senior management, as well as for donor reporting, and its lack is a deficit that should be rectified.¹¹⁰

Risk management

Beyond the specific mechanisms for managing financial and fiduciary risk, UNICEF has a structured system in place across the WoS to identify operational, strategic, programmatic, contextual, and institutional risk on an annual basis. Reputational risk is assessed against all of these categories. While this system seems to work quite well, the ongoing review process would benefit from being more regular, perhaps quarterly, rather than once in the second half of the year.

One major risk factor in the short term relates to the potential closure in 2022 of the UNSC-authorized border crossing into NWS from Türkiye. Contingency plans for the closure of the border have been established. For example, in Gaziantep contracts for six months after the possible closure had already been established

107 Evaluation question E.4 *How well have the general finance, control and risk management functions performed?* This topic falls more within the scope of the recent (2022) audit of SCO. It is reviewed here only with a view to identifying any major issues arising. See the audit for a more definitive analysis, particularly on financial management.

108 This refers to planned budget vs. expenditure (i.e., utilization) and not expenditure against funds received.

109 While overall expenditure can be inferred from data relating to transfers between MENARO and SCO, this is not an adequate proxy for sector-specific expenditure.

110 This could reportedly be solved should HQ agree to an additional 'output' code within the chart of accounts.

and supplies and stocks procured and delivered into NWS. Contingency planning for the earlier (2020) closure of the United Nations cross-border route from Iraq is also reported to have been extensive and effective. While these are positive examples of risk mitigation, there is more work required to make the 2022 plan viable. This includes the need for much closer collaboration between the SCO and Gaziantep offices on the practicalities of increasing cross-line support to NWS and harmonizing this with continued 'external' support (e.g., through global procurement) to NGO activities in NWS.

The evaluation notes some persistent reputational risks for UNICEF in Syria. Some of these concern transparency and accountability with regard to the programme:¹¹¹ the ability to account properly for what UNICEF and its partners have been able to deliver, and also what they have not been able to deliver (and why). This was raised as a concern in the 2019 audit and was an issue raised by a number of UNICEF donors.

Some respondents to the evaluation felt that UNICEF has been too risk averse in some respects. While the 'no unnecessary risks' approach cited by the SCO¹¹² appears

reasonable, it is debatable whether UNICEF has taken the 'necessary' risks for the organization in order to fulfil its mandate, to be effective and meet the needs of children across WoS. Physical and security risks have been almost completely passed on to partners in NWS, and also to a lesser extent in SCO/NES, although both UNICEF and its partners share the reputational risk. Particularly with regard to Agenda A (emergency and high dependency), UNICEF had considerable operational flexibility available to it through simplified standard operating procedures (SSOPs) and L3 procedures, yet it does not seem to have fully availed itself of these more flexible options; rather, it appears that procedures had reverted to 'standard' before the L3 status was rescinded in 2022.

Some of the main reputational risks for UNICEF relate to matters of humanitarian principle. As noted in earlier sections, responding proportionately and solely on the basis of need (i.e., impartially) is difficult to ensure given the operating constraints, limited implementing partner availability and the lack of reliable data on needs. While this evaluation has noted areas of need that have been underserved, it found that UNICEF has generally managed to prioritize its response

111 KII with donors.

112 UNICEF KII Damascus.

appropriately. Independence of policy and political neutrality, while linked to questions of impartiality, are often a matter of perception. The terms on which UNICEF engages with the relevant authorities in Damascus and elsewhere, and its policy independence from those authorities as well as from donors, all have a bearing on actual and perceived independence. To some extent this is dictated by United Nations-wide frameworks, including the Parameters and Principles of United Nations Assistance in Syria (see section 2), but it is also dictated by the extent of the 'space' that UNICEF has been able to carve out and the quality of its relationships with the authorities in question.

6.3 Staffing and human resources¹¹³

As part of its analysis of the core questions about role and performance, the evaluation considered how well UNICEF had managed its human resources in support of the crisis response.¹¹⁴ This includes the balance of staffing across the WoS and the nature and timeliness of staff deployments.

Levels of staffing across WoS were found to be largely appropriate, with one significant exception: the staffing of the cross-border work from Gaziantep. The Gaziantep office has been understaffed throughout the evaluation period relative to its expected functions and workload, resulting (inter alia) in sectoral heads routinely double-hatting as cluster leads, and having to manage programmes with inadequate numbers of staff. It has also resulted in high levels of staff stress and frequent turnover, particularly in the earlier part of the evaluation period. This appears less to do with problems in recruitment (though there have been constraints here), than with financial and budgetary constraints. It also relates to the fact that the Gaziantep office has historically been treated as a temporary (short-term) expedient, that it has had limited autonomy of decision-making, and has generally been an anomaly in terms of UNICEF country and regional structures. Had this been a country office responsible for management and support of a major crisis response involving some \$50 million expenditure annually, on top of its system-wide responsibilities, it might be expected to have been substantially better resourced.¹¹⁵

113 Evaluation question E.1 *How well has the UNICEF HR function worked to support programme and operational needs?*

114 A more specific analysis of how well the HR function itself has performed in relation to the Syria response is given in the recent internal audit (April 2022). Here we note that the 2019 OIAI Audit had recommended that the recruitment procedures in place should be simplified in order to shorten the time taken to deploy new staff. This does not appear to have happened. An estimated 50 per cent of staff are recruited within 60 days, 25 per cent within 90 days and 25 per cent within 150 days.

115 A similar point was made in 2017 in an independent review focused mainly on UNICEF's potential role in a post-conflict Syria: "UNICEF should reconsider the policy of having a cap on staff in Gaziantep and provide the Gaziantep hub with resources matching its responsibilities as long as demands for cross-border programming remain high". Concord Consulting, 'Post-Conflict Recovery in Syria: Orientations for UNICEF's contribution', Concord Consulting, October 2017, p. 7.

The understaffing of the Gaziantep office was highlighted by partners in the survey. One respondent explained that UNICEF staff are very supportive but *“more are needed, there are not enough”*, and another stated that many of the challenges in the partnership boil down to the fact that *“there are too few staff to follow all the partners”*. Other weaknesses in UNICEF partnerships in Gaziantep highlighted in the survey also point to an overstretched office: lack of follow-up, little assistance in resolving problems, lack of regular meetings, and failure to learn lessons and use them when designing new projects. Several partners commented on the negative effects of the high turnover. As one respondent expressed it, there are *“too many changes in the positions of the staff. ... Each new staff needs a lot of time to learn and to build on what was done already but what we are facing is that new staff will neglect the previous work and start over”*. Another blamed the *“inconsistency in interventions and processing of project activities”* on *“staff turnover during project implementation”*.

This suggests that the ‘true’ cost of adequately managing and supporting the cross-border operations – both programme and sector leadership – is considerably higher than that budgeted by UNICEF. Coordination and programme management

functions were inevitably compromised as a result. Funding scarcity has played a significant part in this, but lack of prioritization also plays a role.

The contrast with staffing levels in the SCO is striking. The Damascus office and hubs in GCAs have generally been well resourced and properly staffed. The current number of staff in SCO is approximately 222, working with the support of 70 technical facilitators. This compares with 31 staff members within the Gaziantep office under the latest programme budget review (PBR). This constitutes a ratio of nearly 10:1 in staffing levels against an annual workplan budget ratio of approximately 4:1. This is not to suggest that the SCO and its sub-offices are over-resourced, but rather to highlight the ‘shoestring’ nature of the Gaziantep-based operation – even allowing for the different working modalities involved and the support provided by the WoS team in Amman. Gaziantep staff appear to have been permanently stretched and overloaded, affecting both the effective delivery of the programme and the effectiveness of sector coordination. Without qualified deputies, some Gaziantep staff have reported having to work while on leave. The possibility of taking greater advantage of standby partner staff in Gaziantep should be considered. None were used in 2019, (although six stretch

staff were assigned) and only four were used in 2020–2021.¹¹⁶

With respect to prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse within ongoing operations, substantial progress has been made in recent years in rolling out training and awareness-raising with UNICEF and implementing partner staff, as well as establishing a prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse network across hubs and regionally. However, there is reason to believe that this is a seriously under-reported issue¹¹⁷ and much more needs to be done to raise awareness amongst beneficiaries and establish case management protocols at a community level so that beneficiaries are empowered to report incidences of sexual exploitation and abuse and other abuses.¹¹⁸ UNICEF staff, partners and third-party monitors need to be enabled to follow up on any cases and undertake investigations. This will require greater levels of specialist support.

Further progress on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse will need a



concerted effort. This is a difficult topic to address in a culture where discussion of such issues is discouraged, and complainants may face risks. It may take a number of successful complaints (leading to action) for communities to have confidence in the system. There is currently no agreement with the Government of Syria concerning the establishment of necessary oversight, investigative and follow-up processes.

116 According to the Gaziantep Surge Plan, 2020–2021. The recent PBR process led to a somewhat longer-term perspective being adopted, with international positions being made fixed-term rather than temporary – something that should have happened earlier. But the PBR process also adopted the smallest possible structure for this office. Without a more radical reformulation of the functions of the Gaziantep office, this is likely to perpetuate the problems noted.

117 The HNAP household survey conducted in June 2020 reported that “3 per cent of the households (across Syria) who have received assistance indicated that they were asked a favour in exchange for assistance, of which 14 per cent reported being propositioned with a physical/emotional relationship in order to access assistance”. Whole of Syria Inter-Agency PSEA Network, ‘SEA and Humanitarian Assistance: Household perceptions of favours in exchange for aid’, October 2020, p. 4.

118 There is a PSEA hotline in Gaziantep that all UNICEF partners and beneficiaries can use, but the sensitivity of the issue means people are unlikely to talk about this on the phone. So far, no PSEA cases been reported in Gaziantep or SCO areas.

6.4 Supply and the procurement of goods and services¹¹⁹

The internal audit report of 2019 reported a large number of items procured within Syria being delivered outside of the UNICEF 30-day standard for procurement, and the situation appears not to have improved. The evaluation team received consistent feedback from implementing partners interviewed in Syria concerning the late arrival of supplies, and this was echoed in the partner survey, which listed delays in delivery of supplies and equipment as the main weakness in their partnership with UNICEF.¹²⁰

Considering that around 90 per cent of procurement for SCO is done 'locally' (only vaccines and medical supplies are managed through Supply Division in Copenhagen), a review supported from MENARO and / or Copenhagen would be beneficial to determine how performance can be improved and procedures made more efficient. This could include changes to supply protocols and contract clauses that would allow greater flexibility. This is especially important as the current procurement environment

in government-controlled areas of Syria is more challenging than ever, taking into account the prevailing economic difficulties, ongoing sanctions, donor conditionality, security constraints, and the reduced performance of previously reliable suppliers, who are now cancelling long-term agreements due to exchange rate uncertainties and availability of raw materials.

Responsibility for delays does not lie only with the supply section. Issues such as access, inadequate supply planning, the late arrival of donor funds, and the late submission of requests by section chiefs are also contributing factors. For future delays to be reduced there needs to be a concerted effort from all parties concerned. We suggest that a task force be established within the SCO comprising section staff and supply staff, together with fundraising staff and senior management, to agree on an action plan to address this and to monitor progress. Consideration should be given to building the size of the SCO supply team (including filling the vacant head of supply section position) as well as the capacity of the staff in programme sections responsible for supply planning.

119 Evaluation question E.2 *How well has the UNICEF supply function worked to support the programme? How well has it been integrated within overall response planning?*

120 Field visits, Aleppo; online survey of UNICEF partners. Summary performance slides taken from Insight prepared by Supply Division support this view.

Supply cross-border into NWS has also been affected by significant delays over the evaluation period, although this has improved. The supply function in Gaziantep seems to have worked relatively well, particularly with respect to the prepositioning of supplies in NWS as part of recent contingency planning. The major exception has been the winterization programme, when goods have arrived late each year as the winter comes to a close, seriously undermining the benefit of the programme and affecting the organization's reputation. While this appears to relate more to late identification of funding than to the procurement process, the most recent SCO winterization programme has also been delayed despite funding being identified early in 2021, suggesting there may be multiple factors involved. Overall, in order to improve supply function performance, there is a need for a concerted joint effort from all departments involved to try to identify and address current bottlenecks and improve the timing of supply to third parties and implementing partners. The decentralization of some SCO procurement responsibilities to its field offices is a step in the right direction, especially as this will also enable heads of field offices to better support local

businesses. UNICEF has demonstrated that it is capable of rapidly and effectively scaling up to meet the supply needs of major new emergencies, for example in Eastern Ghouta, Idleb and Rukban. However, challenges clearly remain, and until these are addressed there remains an ongoing reputational risk related to the supply function for Syria.

6.5 Programme monitoring, quality assurance and beneficiary feedback¹²¹

Restricted access poses a major challenge to UNICEF with regard to programme monitoring, quality assurance and community engagement. One concern raised by the 2019 internal audit was that results as reported by implementing partners were not being independently verified. To address this, the SCO currently has approximately 70 technical facilitators to support programme officers with programme monitoring and implementation. These are reported to have been particularly beneficial in terms of monitoring WASH construction work. However, having become embedded within the sectoral teams, these technical

¹²¹ Evaluation question C.4 How good has UNICEF programme monitoring, reporting and quality assurance been? What do they show about the quality and effectiveness of UNICEF work?

facilitators cannot be considered completely independent. In recognition of this, the SCO has now hired a firm of third-party monitors to improve the impartiality and coverage of programme monitoring.

In its cross-border work from Gaziantep, UNICEF has been entirely reliant over the evaluation period on TPM to supplement partner self-reporting. Although there are concerns about heavy reliance on a single company for this purpose, the complications of trying to establish additional TPM processes (including the steps necessary to establish trust with actors in NWS) have so far prevented expansion of this approach.

While important and necessary, TPM will never be able to replace UNICEF programme managers' direct (in-person) supervision and oversight of programme activities, or regular engagement with beneficiary communities. The organization's heavy reliance on TPM in NWS does not sit well with either programmatic staff or donors. A further concern is that performance monitoring would appear to be more at a (quantitative) output level rather than measuring (qualitative) impact. In this regard, calculations of 'people reached' with a given output – itself a very imprecise measure – may say little about programme effectiveness and the qualitative experience of intended beneficiaries.

UNICEF needs to find better ways to establish the impact of its programme interventions. The very limited scope of beneficiary feedback and community engagement mean that UNICEF lacks one of the key means of verification concerning both its own programme (delivery, relevance, quality, effectiveness) and of the wider context and families' evolving priorities. While some AAP activities have been initiated in NWS, the results of feedback go to the third-party monitors rather than to UNICEF directly. It is unclear how this feedback is used, but the evaluation concludes that more could be made of this source of direct feedback.



6.6 Knowledge and information management¹²²

Section 4 above describes some of the ways in which a lack of evidence-based context analysis hampers UNICEF at all levels of the programme: the ability to identify priorities for intervention and target assistance accordingly, to gauge the quality and effectiveness of its programme interventions, and the ability to determine the effectiveness and continued relevance of those interventions. This is an agenda that extends far beyond UNICEF and demands collaborative action.

The annual SCO integrated monitoring and evaluation plan lists the many studies and reviews ongoing or undertaken with a wide variety of partners, including government ministries, ranging from large nationwide sectoral surveys, such as the SMART nutrition survey and immunization reviews, to more specific initiatives and evaluative studies. While such initiatives can be assumed to have a positive impact on improving contextual and programmatic knowledge for UNICEF, the organization has a wider set of responsibilities on this agenda at the cluster level, where

information management is a key element of the UNICEF coordination role. Unfortunately, UNICEF has frequently been short-staffed in terms of dedicated cluster leads and information management personnel, especially in Gaziantep.

Effective information management depends in part on good communication, and here there is a particular need for improved communication and information-sharing between SCO and the Gaziantep office. While the need remains to respect confidentiality of partner and beneficiary identities, and more generally to recognize the sensitivity of information, the need to harmonize cross-border and cross-line support is growing. What had become largely discrete programme areas cannot remain so, therefore it is imperative to strengthen communication between these hubs.

6.7 Fundraising¹²³

During the period covered by this evaluation (2018–2021), UNICEF appealed for \$1.2 billion and raised \$902 million, or 73 per cent of funds requested.¹²⁴ Funding has been relatively stable: UNICEF raised

¹²² Evaluation question E.7 *How well has UNICEF learned from past evaluative exercises, audits, reviews and other studies?*

¹²³ Evaluation question E.6 *How well has the response been supported by fundraising and by communications?* C.5 *How effective an advocate has UNICEF been for children in Syria?*

¹²⁴ In 2020, funds for the response to COVID-19 were raised in a separate appeal but included in the 2021 HAC.

between 73-78 per cent of its targets until 2021, when it raised 65 per cent. Despite the obvious shortfalls, the UNICEF response in Syria is better funded than in many other crises and the pattern of funding is consistent with that of other United Nations agencies. Recent declines in funding relate more to the fact that donors are stretched or have other priorities than to a lack of confidence in UNICEF.¹²⁵

These funds are shared between the SCO, the Gaziantep office and the WoS-related work in Amman. Funding for the SCO has been more stable, consistently around 78-79 per cent of its expressed needs (though in 2021 it dipped to 70 per cent). Funding for the cross-border and WoS work has again been reasonably stable, though at a lower level (around 50 per cent for Gaziantep, 80 per cent for Amman hub).

Most UNICEF programme sectors have suffered from funding deficits or late arrival of funds, and these deficits and delays have affected UNICEF capacity to implement the related interventions. Some sectors have fared relatively well, while nutrition and health have raised only 40 per cent and 30

per cent of their targets, respectively. In addition to the quantity of funding, the nature of that funding is also important. Most funding is for a single year. Short funding cycles are passed on to UNICEF partners which, particularly if combined with delayed approvals and release of funds, make it very challenging for partners to implement programming smoothly. Short funding cycles are not suitable for sustainable community development or programming designed to support systems.

The conditions attached by donors to their funding have negatively affected programming. Many staff surveyed for this evaluation identified donor conditionalities as the primary barrier to success. As one respondent commented, the main challenge is *“types of resources with many conditions that make it very complex and difficult and time-consuming to implement activities in an effective, quality and sustainable manner and at scale”*. Pooled funding (specifically the country-based pooled funds and Education Cannot Wait) was noted to be particularly challenging;¹²⁶ when every donor’s specific redlines are

125 Donor and UNICEF KIs. For example, although the UK (FCDO) recently stopped funding UNICEF, this decision was due to wider aid cuts, not lack of confidence in UNICEF, which received a high rating from FCDO.

126 The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), by contrast, was said to be more flexible, though until 2021–2022 it played only a very limited funding role in Syria (communication from MENARO).

applied to the entire pooled fund, the use of those funds becomes even more restricted. This makes it particularly difficult to support Agendas B and C, which are essential to the short and medium-term well-being of children and their families.

Since 2018, the UNICEF share of funds raised for the system-wide response (against the HRP) has decreased from twelve to nine per cent. Additionally, although the funding levels received for 2021 were on par with previous years, the 2021 appeal was more than 13 per cent larger than previous years, as the needs are increasing. Already, some programmes have begun prioritizing activities to ensure the most critical services are provided, and programme documents for cross-border work have recently included a clause stating that if no funding is available, activities will have to stop. Donors interviewed for this evaluation indicated that although UNICEF has performed well, more transparency about programming was needed, particularly about programming in the non-government held areas of the northeast and northwest.

Work is underway to diversify the funding base, as recommended by the 2019 audit report. Although significant alternative funding sources had not materialized at the time of writing, the evaluation team believes it essential to continue this effort.

6.8 Communications and public advocacy

UNICEF communications about Syria are mostly managed from MENARO, with the support of Communications Division in HQ. The arrangement is an appropriate one: it means the organization can report rights violations while protecting the staff inside the country. The communications team has an overview of programming in both GCAs and non-GCAs, allowing it to harmonize messages. In recent months, however, the team based in Damascus has been more active in engaging with the media and is currently recruiting a communications specialist.

In addition to releasing press statements about rights violations and other incidents, the communications team has organized campaigns on a variety of themes on the anniversary of the conflict, using traditional media, digital channels and multi-media to push key messages. Syria was an early adopter of the agency's 'digital transformation', and as such its media footprint is measured and analysed monthly. However, generating coverage on Syria is challenging. Public interest in the conflict is declining, there are few foreign journalists in the country, and because INGOs have limited presence, their voices are largely absent. A new approach to communicating about Syria is reported to be under development.

Despite the high quality of UNICEF communications work, there is a perception among UNICEF partners that the organization is better at highlighting its own programming than raising the alarm about children's unmet needs. This sentiment was echoed in the staff survey, in which one respondent commented that the communications team should "*not only focus on success stories, but also on projecting the situation and reflecting the need on the ground using the voices of children, highlighting the unmet gaps*". Several interviewees pointed to the fact that although there have been attacks on both healthcare and educational facilities, the former has received notably more media coverage. The need for UNICEF to be more vocal about attacks on schools was a frequent refrain in interviews. The evaluation acknowledges the need for UNICEF to balance its public messages with ongoing private advocacy, but concludes there is space for UNICEF to raise its voice more forcefully about children's rights violations.

Both staff and partners in Gaziantep expressed the need for UNICEF to communicate more about the situation in the non-GCAs of the northwest and expressed some frustration that staff there are unable to speak to the media. The result was sometimes delays in raising issues. The evaluation team believes the communication function should continue

to be supported from MENARO in order to prevent fragmented messaging, but that this has to be more responsive to issues as they arise. Should the UNSC cross-border mandate not be renewed, UNICEF should continue to support Syrian NGOs in non-GCA NWS with communications to reach international audiences.



7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS¹²⁷

7.1 Overall conclusions

Asked in an online survey to comment on the main strengths of the UNICEF response to the crisis in Syria, staff from Damascus, Gaziantep, Amman and other offices highlighted in particular the commitment, professionalism and expertise of UNICEF staff; the agency's strong relations with other actors, including with authorities, NGO partners and donors; and its strong

reputation in the region. The evaluators agree with this assessment, which is echoed in the results of a parallel survey with partners. The UNICEF response to the crisis, while variable across sectors and locations, has been strong overall in what has often been an extraordinarily challenging context. The organization has managed to find the right roles for itself, even as it has struggled – largely for reasons beyond its control – to mount a response proportionate to the scale of

needs. The hard work and commitment of UNICEF staff and partners has helped protect millions of children across all parts of Syria from the worst effects of the crisis over the past four years.

UNICEF has implemented a wide range of different intervention types over the evaluation period.¹²⁸ This has included emergency interventions (e.g., in Eastern Ghouta 2018, Idlib 2019–2020) and aid to new and existing IDP populations, support to basic service provision for the general population, and policy, advocacy and systems work with the relevant authorities. While programme access and coverage have often been limited, UNICEF has rightly chosen to respond across a broad spectrum of sectoral interventions matching the key threats to children's well-being, security and development. In addition, the organization's chosen *modes* of engagement and support – including direct service delivery, technical assistance, supply, coordination, policy and advocacy work – have generally reflected the needs of the wider system, the opportunities available, and the specific competencies and added value of UNICEF. External informants stressed that UNICEF senior leadership at representative and regional director levels has been one of

the strengths of UNICEF in Syria over the evaluation period and a key part of its added value regionally.

The evaluation found that while UNICEF has done well to navigate the sensitive political space across different parts of Syria and to find the right roles for itself, it has not always been able to fulfil those roles as it should. Sector leadership and coordination, although just as significant as the UNICEF programme itself, has been lacking in some sectors, largely because UNICEF has struggled to resource this function properly. Within the programme, performance has been mixed, with consequences for children and their families. There are multiple causal factors here, many relating to external constraints – limited funding, donor conditionalities, lack of access, denial of permissions – but others relate to UNICEF performance.

The more recent context in Syria is quite different to that prevailing in the period 2015–2017, yet equally demanding of the organization's full and continued engagement. The humanitarian component of UNICEF work remains by far the largest part of the programme in terms of funding. Given the scale and severity of current needs, ongoing access and funding

¹²⁸ For a useful summary of the range and impact of UNICEF interventions over the past ten years, see the 'Strategic Shift Think Pieces' for child protection, education, health, nutrition and WASH (March 2022). These also provide a summary of the proposed direction for key elements of the UNICEF programme in 2022–2024.

challenges, major uncertainty concerning non-government-controlled areas of northwestern Syria in particular, and the importance of increasing the reach of interventions across all parts of Syria, **the evaluation concludes that UNICEF needs to review its approach to the humanitarian agenda (in its wider sense) across Syria as a whole.**

Understanding the humanitarian challenge

The complexities of the context and sheer scale of needs in Syria have posed severe challenges for the response. As the crisis has evolved since 2016, the nature of the humanitarian agenda has changed from one dominated by the *direct effects of conflict* – including populations under siege, mass displacement and attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure – to one where the dominant threats relate more to the *indirect effects of conflict* and its aftermath. Yet the threats posed to children and their families remain severe throughout Syria. Since 2018, and particularly in the past two years, the collapse of the Syrian economy has led to the *acute impoverishment* of much of the population. In NWS, ongoing insecurity and mass displacement (up to 2020) has been a feature of the evaluation period. High levels of aid dependency, particularly among formal and informal IDP camp populations, characterize both NWS and NES. More recently, COVID-19 has posed a threat that vaccination campaigns have

so far addressed in only a limited way. Taken with other prevailing threats, notably related to climate, these factors make risk management particularly challenging.

Figures from the HNO/HRP 2022 *suggest that the overall situation continues to deteriorate* against key humanitarian indicators, particularly food insecurity. This is not, for the most part, measured in terms of excess mortality, morbidity and malnutrition (although these rates have been worsening in some areas) but rather in terms of the basic safety, well-being and development of children. The current crisis of acute impoverishment has evolved quickly, leaving families little time to adapt and develop viable coping strategies. The wider economic, development and demographic catastrophe resulting from the conflict has transformed Syria from a low-middle-income to a low-income country.

It has become increasingly necessary to recognize the **distinct challenges** of responding to needs **in government-controlled areas (GCAs)** on the one hand **and non-government-controlled areas** of NWS and NES on the other. The former (GCAs), which now constitute around 70 per cent of the country, have the highest number of those judged to be ‘people in need’. The non-GC areas, on the other hand, have the highest concentration of those said to be in most severe need –

around 50 per cent of those in the two highest severity categories. Working cross-border to enable the work of NGOs in NWS has proved an essential but blunt instrument, and a politically contingent response modality that may soon be closed to the United Nations. Meanwhile, major questions hang over the ability to meet needs effectively cross-line, yet increasing weight is being put on the success of this modality. The need for a concerted plan to address this new potential reality is urgent.

The evaluation found that the humanitarian agenda across the whole of Syria has not been adequately defined by UNICEF. We suggest there are **three priority agendas for children**, which are inter-related but distinct. The first (Agenda A) is where the humanitarian imperative is clearest: it concerns specific emergency or high aid-dependency situations that pose severe, acute threats to child health, well-being and safety. The second (Agenda B) relates to less acute but widespread, severe and persistent threats to child health, security or well-being. The third (Agenda C) concerns critical threats to child development and life chances, including lack of access to basic education and lack of opportunities for adolescents. These agendas overlap, and they are also causally inter-related: failure to address one risks exacerbating the others.

Taken together, these three agendas constitute an **extended humanitarian agenda** for UNICEF in Syria. Each requires a different response approach. The first typically requires (sustained) direct service delivery. The second and third require support to basic service provision and support to related systems (including prevention of system collapse). The challenge here is to achieve scale, quality and complementarity of services, which is increasingly likely to require area-based, multi-sector and multi-agency approaches. In GCAs, such approaches need to supplement and complement service provision through the GoS and locally-run systems. In other areas, alternative approaches to sustainability and ownership are needed, albeit more challenging to identify.

Framing its agenda in terms of priorities for children across these agendas would help provide an overarching framework for UNICEF decisions about humanitarian priorities and the relationship between them, as well as a programmatic and policy bridge through recovery to future development priorities. From this could be developed a common planning framework that pulls together strands from existing sector-specific strategies to enable **stronger multi-sector approaches**.

Addressing this multi-faceted agenda is greatly complicated by the current political landscape and related **access and programming constraints**. On the one hand, relative stability and increased access over the past three years have enabled greater reach and continuity of services in many areas. On the other hand, there are multiple constraints to programming and to the wider recovery agenda, some related to donor conditionalities on work in GCAs, others to GoS restrictions, bureaucratic impediments or ongoing insecurity and lack of freedom of movement.

In the non-GC areas of NWS and NES, UNICEF and other United Nations agencies continue to work largely remotely through NGOs and private sector partners, with all the attendant problems of accountability, quality control and adaptiveness, compounded by logistical challenges. The lack of proximity to the people they are seeking to assist – and related limits on community engagement – is one of the major inherent weaknesses in both the cross-border and cross-line / cross-zone modalities of the United Nations. Their success depends on the quality of partnerships, collaboration and coordination with both Syrian and international NGOs. While these have worked relatively well in NWS (albeit remotely), strained relations and a legacy of mistrust with the NGOs operating in

non-GCAs of NES have hampered effective response in those areas.

UNICEF strategy and response

UNICEF has faced major strategic choices over the course of the crisis. The decision in 2012 to pivot to humanitarian response was clearly demanded by the context, though it presented major challenges in scaling up the response. Following that were important decisions about where and how to work – including cross-border support to work in NWS, NES and southern areas, as well as cross-line and cross-zone support – and decisions about the architecture best suited to managing the Whole of Syria response. **The evaluation concludes that these decisions were largely appropriate and remained so throughout the evaluation period**, although UNICEF has sometimes struggled with implementation and resourcing of the related programme and coordination functions.

Since 2016 and in its new draft CPD, UNICEF has signalled its intent to shift its country programme away from emergency service delivery and more towards building resilience of communities and systems. The 'strategic shift' proposed by SCO rightly addresses the challenge of sustainable service delivery. However, in the view of the evaluators, what is required is an evolution of the UNICEF approach to the

humanitarian agenda. Delivering on its CCCs across Syria as a whole requires a balance between continued direct engagement (with partners) in essential service delivery, shifting as far as possible to more sustainable modes of delivery, and support to (or at least complementing of) relevant official mechanisms of service delivery. Risk communication and related policy and advocacy work are the essential complement to this, and UNICEF has a unique role to play in this regard.

In common with other agencies working with Whole of Syria structures, **UNICEF has struggled to make a coherent whole of the various parts of its response across** the different response hubs inside and outside Syria. This is reflected in the lack of a WoS strategy and the tendency to treat the cross-border work as anomalous or even peripheral to its strategy for Syria. The evaluation found that one reason for this was the lack of a coherent overall vision for its Syria humanitarian response.

This disconnect in thinking has been perpetuated in part by lack of communication and some lack of trust between staff in different hubs. As noted above, this is a persistent challenge that urgently needs to be addressed, as it represents a barrier to effective collaboration both within UNICEF (e.g., between SCO and Gaziantep) and between UNICEF and NGOs, particularly in non-GC NES.

Related to this is the question of responsibilities for delivery on the WoS agenda. The need to review the WoS architecture and clarify related frameworks of responsibility and accountability is recognized by UNICEF. Although the evaluators did not feel they possessed enough information to specify how this should be done, the essential point is that there needs to be greater clarity on who is responsible for the oversight and delivery of a WoS humanitarian strategy. Clearly, the design and implementation of that strategy involves multiple participants, but oversight and authority is currently too fragmented. Where such authority should lie (i.e., with which office) needs ultimately to be decided by the regional director in discussion with colleagues in SCO, the wider region and HQ. While no longer acting as GEC, the RD should remain the ultimate arbiter on WoS issues.

Given the multiple constraints on operating space noted above, the evaluation finds that UNICEF has generally done well in navigating and in some cases expanding that space; indeed it has set an example among United Nations agencies in this regard. The **most immediate challenge facing UNICEF** and others is how to maintain coverage of the more acute and high dependency needs (Agenda A) in NWS and NES, given the combined constraints of access, authorization, available implementing partners and declining funding. The access constraints

in NWS may soon become the primary constraint if the final border crossing from Türkiye is closed, and effective contingency planning for this eventuality is crucial. At the time of the evaluation, there appeared to be a lack of joined-up thinking on this, lack of discussion between hubs, and too much reliance on the potential for cross-line support.

The evaluation found that UNICEF has over-estimated its ability to continue to programme in non-GCA NWS and ensure programme quality and delivery in an area where it has no direct access or presence, while at the same time fulfilling its system-wide sector lead responsibilities. It concludes that *the 'true' cost of adequately managing and supporting the cross-border work is considerably higher than that budgeted by UNICEF*. 'Double-' or even 'triple-hatting' of programme and coordination functions, besides putting intolerable pressure on the individuals concerned, blurs the line between UNICEF programme interests and those of the wider sector. It has become a structural feature of the cross-border programme rather than a temporary expedient, and the evaluators suggest that any situation where this is the case should cause UNICEF to reflect and revise its approach.

Because it has no direct presence in NWS (non-GCAs), UNICEF has very limited ability to 'read' the context and assess

changing needs and cannot engage directly with communities. This arms-length approach raises questions about oversight, effectiveness and quality assurance (reliant on partner self-reporting supplemented by TPM).

The majority of UNICEF partners in NWS are strong, have considerable capacity, and appear to have demonstrated their ability to provide aid impartially on the basis of need. The evaluators believe that those NGOs and their crucial role could be directly funded by donors or through pooled funds, or (in the case of Syrian NGOs) through INGOs, rather than being effectively sub-contracted through UNICEF, and that UNICEF support would be better focused on technical support to the sectors, supply, coordination and advocacy. This conclusion applies whether or not the cross-border mandate is further extended by the UNSC in 2022 and is based on a consideration of the organization's real added value in this context as well as the need to plan for potential future scenarios where direct programming is no longer possible. It is consistent with the principle of localization but is *dependent on the willingness and ability of donors to fund NGOs* either directly or through pooled funding. However, given the scale and severity of needs in NWS, *the priority must be to ensure continuity of support to affected people in this region*.



This conclusion partly reflects the lack of resources allocated to the Gaziantep office in relation to its expected functions. That office has generally done well within its limited resources, but it has inevitably struggled to fulfil this role alongside its system-wide coordination functions.

Navigating the political terrain

UNICEF has been right to engage as it has done with the GoS and the various ministries and local authorities in GCAs. Indeed, this is a key part of its added value, and no other international agency has a comparable breadth and depth of contact with the government. This is essential in responding to the short- to medium-term priorities for children, and as space opens up, it provides a potential platform for more system strengthening and policy work. At the same time, UNICEF has done well to forge working relationships with the self-administration

in NES on some key agendas for children, to foster contact between the GoS and the self-administration, and to show the potential for collaboration or at least policy harmonization across lines.

Based on these established relationships, UNICEF could now do more to help create space for others to engage more fully in GCAs (e.g., the INGOs in Damascus) and to promote a wider range, depth and coverage of programming for children and their families. In doing so, it must avoid prioritizing its own programme and access (or being perceived to do so) at the expense of the wider sector needs. Crucially, in maintaining this relationship with the GoS, UNICEF needs not to lose its independence or compromise its advocacy voice for children, as some have suggested it did on the issue of attacks on schools. Related to this, it is essential for UNICEF to continue to demonstrate in practice an equality of concern for children living in

all parts of Syria, whether government-controlled or not. This means being consistent in its approach to programming and advocacy in both GCAs and non-GCAs, and being prepared to forge an effective working relationship with NGOs and authorities in 'opposition' regions.

7.2 Programme, coordination and partnership conclusions

In evaluating the UNICEF response to the crisis since 2018, one overall qualification should be made. The needs in Syria are huge in scale – even in the 'emergency and high-dependency' class (Agenda A) let alone in Agendas B and C, which relate more to what is generally classed as 'recovery' or 'rehabilitation'. The latter arguably requires something on the scale of a Marshall plan, or at least funding on a scale that the World Bank might provide in other circumstances. Yet UNICEF and others have been working largely with (limited and decreasing) short-term humanitarian funding, and even that has often been subject to extremely tight conditionality, particularly in government-controlled areas. Taken together with access and security constraints – as well as the wider effects of a collapsed economy and tight economic sanctions – the result is that UNICEF, in common with other agencies, has struggled to work on the

scale that the situation demands. It has also had limited opportunity to work on systems, capacity and policy agendas that could bring wider and more sustained benefits to children, given a concerted and properly resourced recovery plan.

Programme relevance and adaptation to context

The evaluation found that since 2018, UNICEF has largely managed to implement programmes appropriate to the different contexts of GCAs and non-GC areas of northwest Syria, and to adapt its approach to changing circumstances over the evaluation period. While each region has posed different challenges, lack of up-to-date data on needs – and limited ability to monitor the effects of interventions – has been a common factor across the whole country. These challenges have been particularly acute in non-GCAs.

Within this overall picture there is considerable variation. In non-government held areas of the NWS, UNICEF and its partners have done well to adapt to the rapidly evolving context, including mass displacements in 2019–2020. Across all sectors, UNICEF and its partners have also made some progress toward sustainability even on the dominant Agenda A agenda. In non-government-held areas of the northeast (Al-Hasakah, Ar-Raqqah, Deir-ez-Zor), since 2020 and the closure of the cross-border route from Iraq, while

the nutrition programme has struggled to adapt, the evaluation found positive examples of programme adaptation by UNICEF, particularly in EPI and WASH. Complex work on child protection – including with third-country nationals and CAAFAG – has been innovative and appropriate, and a good demonstration of the organization’s added value and distinctive competence (as well as its unique mandate). This has required high levels of diplomatic engagement with both the GoS and self-administration, and is an excellent example of effective collaboration across the whole organization (SCO, MENARO, HQ). UNICEF has also done well to work across different authorities on education policy, though its work on access to basic education has been limited in scope.

The organization’s work in GCAs over the evaluation period has seen increasing engagement with government counterparts and local administrations, which has allowed UNICEF to pursue a shift towards a recovery strategy, tackling Agendas B and C (basic service strengthening, rehabilitation, etc.), although this remains constrained by multiple factors. This approach is appropriate given the relative stability of the environment of GCAs, and reflects the widespread and persistent nature of the threats to children in these areas and the corresponding need for approaches that go beyond relief and

service delivery. However, UNICEF interventions are dwarfed by the scale of destruction of systems and infrastructure, the effects of the economic collapse, and the loss of professional personnel, particularly in health and education. Donor conditionalities on funding in GCAs have heavily constrained work on education and ADAP in particular and have limited the organization’s ability to support the formal education system.

Making progress in GCAs will require continued advocacy and more collaborative working. Area-based approaches in urban areas will increasingly be needed in conjunction with multi-sector and inter-agency programming, possibly through specially-established consortia working to a single strategy and operational plan. This approach may require a distinction to be drawn between work on micro/local systems and work on national systems, while emphasizing the links between them.

Programme strategy and logic

While the situation in the country has changed dramatically since it was drafted, the 2016 CPD has been rolled over annually and has not been formally revised. However, the programme has in practice continually adapted over the evaluation period in ways that have been largely ad hoc, reactive and opportunistic. While this is in many ways appropriate in the context of crisis response, the evaluation found that

the lack of a unifying UNICEF humanitarian strategy has tended to perpetuate disconnected and sometimes inconsistent thinking across the whole programme. It has also meant that UNICEF has lacked a consistent basis for prioritization of interventions in the face of substantial resource and access constraints.

In practice, the various sectors in Gaziantep designed their own approach, essentially applying 'emergency' programme logic to what has been a largely Agenda A context, with some longer-term interventions when the context and conditions allowed. Short-term logic has in fact characterized the programming approach for much of the work across Syria, even in some of the work in GCAs where at least a medium-term perspective is indicated (Agendas B and C). While this partly reflects the need to focus on immediate priorities for children, it also reflects the funding, access and programming constraints within which UNICEF has had to work.

Many of the basic assumptions in the draft programme strategy notes – e.g., concerning investment in services and gradual replenishment of sector human resources – have not held true in practice. The evaluation concludes that these assumptions need to be reviewed and the strategy revised with a view to providing a more realistic basis for programming

decisions in the prevailing circumstances. The evaluation found that the UNICEF programme has not been as coherent as it should have been, either by sector or geography. While the traditional forms of collaboration between sectors (e.g., child protection and education) have worked well, in other ways the programme often appears 'stovepiped'. This is partly a reflection of the way in which programmes are designed and planned based on individual sectors. The evaluation concluded that UNICEF has some way to go in achieving the multi-sector programming approach that it aspires to and that area-based programming is probably a necessary element in achieving greater programme coherence. This should also be seen in the context of multi-agency collaborations, for which there is likely to be a growing need.

Programme coverage and targeting

Across all sectors, UNICEF and the relevant clusters have targeted (but not always met) around 70-80 per cent of the assessed needs. Within that figure, target achievement has been highly variable across sectors and regions. While some sectors (WASH, health) have achieved relatively high coverage, others have been unable to achieve adequate coverage.

Evaluating UNICEF programme coverage

against assessed needs proved difficult for a number of reasons, including major uncertainties concerning the reliability of needs assessment data and related ‘people in need’ figures. The specific impacts of the crisis on children were often *assumed* rather than assessed, with access for assessment severely limited across the whole country. Likewise, UNICEF figures for ‘reach’ were sometimes based on planning assumptions about who and how many would benefit from given programme outputs rather than being based on data and feedback concerning benefits actually delivered. This is not unusual in such a volatile context, but it reflects how distant UNICEF often is from its intended beneficiaries, and is harder to justify in the relatively more stable context that has emerged over the past two years.

The way in which UNICEF and the clusters have targeted and prioritized their interventions is inevitably affected by these uncertainties and data gaps. The evaluation found that targeting had often been influenced as much by *opportunities to programme* as by assessed needs and priorities, meaning that targeting cannot be said with confidence to be based on strict prioritization of needs. All this points to the need both to strengthen the processes of (ongoing) needs assessment across all areas and to extend the coverage and reach of UNICEF programme partnerships.



Programme effectiveness

The ability of UNICEF to gauge the effectiveness of its interventions suffers from many of the same limitations noted above with regard to needs assessment and coverage. Assessing whether a given programme intervention worked to achieve the desired result has relied too heavily on output delivery / target achievement data and the logic of the programme itself. Sometimes this is justified, as in the case of child vaccination. In other cases, much more evidence is required concerning quality of output delivery (e.g., of teacher training) and actual outcomes (retention and attendance of teachers at school, data on educational outcomes). The lack of feedback from communities themselves is one essential missing component here.

UNICEF needs better ways of establishing that its interventions – and those of its partners – are helping achieve the intended outcomes. Achievement against (proxy) indicators is an important but often insufficient metric of performance and effectiveness. Along with better data on needs and vulnerabilities, it is essential to find better ways to track the actual effect and benefit delivered by programme components to children and their families, both at the population level and at the community and household levels. The evaluation noted a tendency by UNICEF to overestimate its reach and performance by taking specific indicators and drawing more general conclusions from them.

These limitations have greatly affected the evaluability of the UNICEF programme with regard to effectiveness. Limited coverage and achievement against targets would suggest limited overall effectiveness, but the evaluation draws some more specific conclusions about the effectiveness of particular programme elements. The importance of the agency's role in public health risk communication and in related programming (vaccination, including COVID-19, WASH) emerges as one clear area of major impact for which effectiveness can reasonably be inferred from the level of coverage.

UNICEF sector coordination and leadership

UNICEF (co-)leadership of sectors and the child protection AoR is agreed by all informants to be central to its added value, but its record in Syria is highly uneven across the different sectors. Child protection and WASH have been strong in most areas of coordination, both at WoS and hub levels. They have also shown the potential for effective coordination cross-zone in NES, something on which UNICEF and others need to build. In education and nutrition, UNICEF has not been able to provide the leadership needed, and this needs to be rectified. Some of this is a matter of resourcing: the evaluation found that the practice of double- or even triple-hatting was clearly having a negative impact on this aspect of the organization's role.

The organization's system-wide roles – in sector coordination, supply, advocacy and more general leadership on child-related issues – are essential to its added value in the Syria response and to the quality of the system-wide response as a whole. UNICEF should refocus to give as much attention to these roles as it does to delivering its own programme. This has particular urgency in relation to the functions currently performed through the cross-border programme into NWS.

Collaborations, partnerships and community engagement

Working relationships with sister United Nations agencies were found generally to have been constructive and effective, although there are significant areas in which these need to be strengthened, e.g., with WFP on school feeding, with WHO on aspects of the COVID-19 response, with UNHCR on work with displaced and returning populations. The relationship with SARC has been mainly on emergency elements of the programme, and this appears to have been a largely productive collaboration.

Working relationships with NGOs – local, national and international – are central to the implementation of the UNICEF programme. From a wider perspective, they are also essential to the effective resourcing, support and capacity-building of Syrian NGOs who have been key actors

in the delivery of essential services across WoS, particularly in non-GCAs. These partnerships have varied in quality and type across the three main crisis areas, in part because of restrictions on partnerships and partner presence. UNICEF lacks some of its usual key partner INGOs, since INGOs have (for the most part) been unable to work simultaneously in GCAs and non-GCAs, but there remains more scope for INGO partnerships in Damascus and beyond.

The online survey conducted for this evaluation suggests that overall, NGO partners have been very satisfied with their partnership with UNICEF. In particular, local NGOs have appreciated the technical support and capacity-building role that UNICEF has played. The evaluation also found that there were some areas of the programme (particularly in GCAs and NES) where a wider range of partnerships was needed in order to achieve the necessary coverage of needs for children and their families.

The evaluation found that accountability to affected populations – and more generally, engagement with communities – had been one of the weakest aspects of UNICEF practice to date. This is related to the organization's limited presence in many areas (almost none in the non-GCAs), necessitating a 'remote' approach that depends heavily on third parties. More

recently, UNICEF (particularly SCO) has taken steps to extend its ability to garner such feedback, but the relative lack of proximity and community engagement remains a major constraint on the organization's ability to account for and ensure the effectiveness and relevance of its interventions.

7.3 Management and support function conclusions

Whole of Syria arrangement in UNICEF

The UNICEF WoS arrangement was established when there were a number of active external hubs providing support into Syria from Türkiye, Jordan and Iraq. It was very much relevant at the time due to the need for remote management, coordination and oversight from a secure location of multiple interventions that needed to be managed discretely. Overall, the structure in place has been effective in enabling UNICEF to respond in parts of NWS, NES and other areas within Syria that could not be effectively or safely accessed from within the country.

This structure has had both UNICEF-specific (internal) and wider (external) functions. The evaluation concludes that UNICEF has only been partly successful in its external role as the interface with the system-wide, OCHA-led Whole of Syria structures and processes. The WASH

and child protection sectors have been relatively strongly coordinated across WoS (including on needs assessment and programme delivery); education less so. The nutrition sector has not been as strongly coordinated, and for NES in particular has been largely disconnected from other key actors. The functions performed by UNICEF in support of (mainly Syrian) NGOs in NWS – including financing, supply and technical support functions currently provided through 'implementing partnerships' – should be seen as external functions in the wider context of the overall system response. The question of how to maintain or transfer these functions to others – together with what ongoing support role UNICEF should play in NWS – is central to the necessary contingency planning around the potential closure of the Bab al-Hawa crossing.

With regard to the internal functions of the WoS structures, this appears to have caused some confusion. Staff have been unclear about the WoS coordination roles in relation to the hub-specific coordination and programmes and this has not always been well explained. There has also been some confusion between the cross-border support functions in NWS and the WoS agenda. The internal firewalls, while serving an important purpose, have also contributed to a lack of effective communication and (often) an atmosphere of mistrust between the hubs.

The evaluation concludes that while the WoS arrangement needs to evolve to reflect the change of circumstances, many of its functions remain essential. This includes the provision of support and coordination for humanitarian work in non-GC NWS. While the financing function may need to evolve, the supply, technical support and sector coordination functions can only be provided by UNICEF – though we propose this be done at a cluster level – and cannot at this point be provided through the SCO. From an internal perspective, this needs to be much better harmonized with UNICEF cross-line support to NWS. The WoS arrangement should provide a platform for assessing needs and coordinating interventions to all parts of Syria according to a common humanitarian strategy and plan.

Finance and risk management

While the evaluation did not attempt an in-depth review of these aspects of UNICEF management (which is largely the domain of internal audit), financial management and control appear to have been largely well conducted despite the multiple challenges involved, including late and uncertain funding flows and the specific challenges of managing ‘remote’ programmes in which there is heavy reliance on partner self-reporting. One major set of external risk factors concerns the potential closure of the last remaining authorized border crossing from Türkiye.

While contingency planning for this is ongoing, the evaluators found that this was not yet as advanced as it should be and was not sufficiently joined up between SCO and Gaziantep. This demands urgent action.

More generally, the evaluation notes some persistent reputational risks for UNICEF. Some of these concern transparency and accountability with regard to the programme: the ability to account properly for what UNICEF and its partners have been able to deliver, and also what they have not been able to deliver (and why). This was raised as a concern in the 2019 audit and has been persistently raised as an issue by major donors. The work in NES is of particular concern in this regard, and the SCO was not able to provide a breakdown of expenditure relating to cross-zone activity into non-government-controlled NES. The evaluators consider this essential management information.

Staffing and human resources

Levels of staffing across WoS were found to be largely adequate to the functions being performed, with the exception of the Gaziantep office, which has been understaffed throughout the evaluation period relative to its expected functions and workload. The recent PBR process has rightly led to a somewhat longer-term perspective being adopted, with international positions being made fixed-

term rather than temporary, but staffing levels remain very low compared with the expected functions.

In contrast to Gaziantep, the Damascus office and field offices in GCAs have generally been adequately resourced and properly staffed, although double-hatting between programme and coordination functions is still an issue in some of the field offices. An appropriate balance seems have been found of international and national staff. In addition to core staff, the SCO and field offices have employed the services of technical facilitators to extend their reach and capacity. This model, which allows auxiliary human resources to be charged to programme budgets, appears to have worked well and has increased effective staffing levels for the GCAs programme to nearly 300. This is now being supplemented with (and partly replaced by) contracted third-party monitoring capacity.

With regard to safeguarding and specifically prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, while substantial progress has been made in recent years in rolling out training and awareness-raising with UNICEF and implementing partner staff and establishing a network for the

prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse across hubs and regionally, this appears to remain a seriously under-reported issue. Much more needs to be done to raise community awareness, although the evaluators recognize the cultural and institutional barriers to doing this.

Supply and procurement

UNICEF has played a key (sector-wide) role in vaccine procurement and distribution across the whole of Syria. The main issue identified under this heading concerned the supply function in SCO. The internal audit of 2019 reported a significant problem with delayed procurement, and this situation appears not to have been resolved.¹²⁹ Such delays are not the sole responsibility of the supply section: issues such as sanctions, government permissions, the late arrival of donor funds, and the late submission of requests by section chiefs have also been contributing factors. However, given the particular challenges of local procurement in Syria, the evaluation concludes that a thorough review of the supply function is now needed to propose suitable solutions to those challenges.

The supply function in Gaziantep seems to have worked relatively well over the evaluation period. Supply cross-border into NWS

¹²⁹ This is reflected in the recent April 2022 internal audit report, which found that supply remains subject to substantial delays in a high proportion of cases. This was also a consistent theme of evaluation interviews with implementing partners.

has been affected by significant delays, but this is reported to have improved significantly. The major exception has been the winterization programme. Even more importantly, supply shortages appear to have affected the supply of ready-to-use therapeutic food for emergency nutrition programmes in both NWS and NES.

UNICEF has done well to pre-position stocks as part of recent contingency planning in NWS. One immediate further challenge to be addressed is the identification of alternative supply modalities in the event that the cross-border route from Türkiye is closed.¹³⁰

Programme monitoring, quality assurance, feedback

Restricted access in GCAs and non-GC NES, and complete lack of access in non-GC NWS, has posed a major challenge to UNICEF with regard to programme monitoring, quality assurance and community engagement. The 2019 internal audit raised the concern that results as reported by implementing partners were not being independently verified, and UNICEF has adopted various measures to address this. For GCAs, the SCO has employed the services of 70 technical facilitators to support programme officers with programme

monitoring and implementation. These have been particularly beneficial in terms of monitoring WASH construction work and are generally considered a very useful addition to the programme teams. However, having become embedded within the sectoral teams, these technical facilitators cannot be considered completely independent. In recognition of this, the SCO is now in the process of hiring a firm to provide third-party monitors to improve the impartiality and coverage of programme monitoring.

In its cross-border work from Gaziantep, UNICEF has been entirely reliant over the evaluation period on TPM to supplement partner self-reporting. Gaziantep uses a single TPM company to monitor the implementation of the activities it supports in NWS. This is a well-established company that appears reliable and professional, having worked closely with UNICEF to develop its data-collection methods. Although there are concerns about such heavy reliance on a single company, establishing additional TPM processes in NWS is understood to be difficult.

While acknowledging the challenges of monitoring the programme in non-GC NWS, the evaluators found that the lack of proximity of UNICEF both to its partners

¹³⁰ Action is now reported to have been taken to identify such alternative supply modalities.

and to the communities concerned remained a major obstacle to assessing needs, to assuring delivery and quality, and to assessing the impact of its programme. While circumstances have largely made this the price of operating in this area, the evaluation concludes that UNICEF needs to find better ways of addressing these issues if it is to continue to programme in NWS.

7.4 Cross-cutting issues

Issues of humanitarian principle were considered across various aspects of the UNICEF response. Largely for reasons of operating restrictions and lack of data, UNICEF cannot with confidence say that it has always responded on the basis of need, consistent with the principle of impartiality. Although the evaluation found that the response was broadly equitable and needs-based, some priority agendas have been under-served, as noted above.

Greater transparency would help to address the concerns about perceived lack of *independence* noted above. The evaluation found that UNICEF engagement with the Government of Syria and with de facto authorities in areas outside government control had been appropriate and necessary. However, UNICEF must be careful not to compromise its ability to support work in non-government-controlled areas; its mandate applies to all

children equally in Syria and this should be the foundation of discussions with the GoS as well as with other authorities. That equality of concern needs to be reflected in the coverage and impartiality of the overall response.

The gender-related aspects of the crisis were found generally to have been well reflected in the UNICEF response, particularly with regard to girls' access to primary education. However, given the highly gendered impacts of the crisis – including the vulnerabilities of women and girls in particular to violence and coercion – this remains a crucial area of concern and one on which UNICEF should continue to work closely with other agencies. The situation of adolescents (girls and boys), including access to education and training, and related issues of child labour and early marriage, is an area that needs more international attention and UNICEF has an important role to play here.

According to the 2022 HNO, of the 14.6 million people in need inside Syria, some 4.2 million have a *disability*. The majority of children with disabilities aged 12-17 are not attending school and households that have persons with disabilities are some of the most vulnerable in Syria, both in terms of access to basic needs and protection. UNICEF has done important work to support such households through its social protection programme, but it has

not been able to mount such work on a scale commensurate with need. Given both the priority of the need and the impact that UNICEF has demonstrated in this area, the evaluation concluded that this should be a priority for future action and advocacy with donors and the relevant authorities.

7.5 Recommendations

Arising from the findings and conclusions presented above, these recommendations reflect the fact that the evaluation is strategic rather than technical in nature. Our purpose is to suggest changes in approach where we believe this is necessary, and to suggest ways in which existing initiatives can be built on. These recommendations are made on the understanding that UNICEF staff are best placed to make decisions about the detail of strategy, programme design, management structures and so on. As a result, they provide proposals for rethinking elements of the organization's approach, together with some specific proposals, rather than a detailed blueprint for action. The format involves a general recommendation (R1, R2, etc.) followed by more specific proposed actions (R1.1, etc.). We use the term 'humanitarian' here as it is used in the HRP, to encompass work on early recovery, rehabilitation, securing basic services and addressing critical threats to children's development (Agendas

B and C) as well as emergency relief and protection priorities (Agenda A). In that sense, it covers most of the organization's priorities in Syria.

We recognize that UNICEF has already made progress on some of the agendas below since the fact-finding for the evaluation was conducted. We also recognize that implementation of these recommendations may depend on factors (funding, access, etc.) over which UNICEF has limited control or influence. We propose them here as steps we believe necessary in order to substantially strengthen the response for children and their families, while recognizing that their achievement may in some cases be contingent on other factors.

R1. Reframe the Whole of Syria agenda and related humanitarian strategy

The UNICEF crisis response in Syria, for all its strengths, has been hampered by the lack of a coherent strategy for its humanitarian work. Disconnected strategies across the whole of Syria have reflected the fragmentation of the country: cross-border and cross-line efforts have not been well harmonized, and both appear to be disconnected from work in GCAs. Over the course of the evaluation period, the humanitarian situation in Syria has largely evolved into three distinct

crises, each posing different challenges for humanitarian response and recovery efforts. UNICEF needs to find a way to encompass these within a single strategy and analytical framework. Doing so requires fully recognizing the scale of the overall humanitarian crisis and the distinct characteristics and priorities of each 'sub-crisis', as well as the linkages between them.

While the political and security context (national and international) will largely continue to define what is possible by way of effective intervention, UNICEF must maintain the position that its mandate applies to all children equally across Syria, and that this requires it to work across political boundaries. This should be the foundation of discussions with both the GoS and with de facto authorities in NWS and NES.

R1. Frame a common humanitarian strategy for the whole of Syria. This should distinguish between different categories of priorities for children (we suggest in this report a possible three-fold general classification) and articulate the main response strategies related to each. The strategy should facilitate an integrated approach across different sectors and a mix of approaches according to prevailing priorities, opportunities, systemic gaps and UNICEF added value.

R1.2 Review the assumptions on which the 2021 programme strategy notes are based and revise the strategies accordingly, with a view to ensuring their 'real world' relevance to the prevailing situation across Syria.

R1.3 Harmonize existing GCA, cross-border and cross-zone/cross-line strategies to ensure coverage and consistency of support to children across the whole of Syria. Key to this is improving collaboration between the SCO, Gaziantep and the WoS office in Amman. The expected increasing role of SCO in NWS calls for strategies adapted to the true scale and severity of needs in this area (which are still largely Agenda A). The potential closure of the last remaining United Nations-authorized cross-border route gives this particular urgency and demands close coordination between the SCO and Gaziantep office.

In northeastern Syria, the strategy for 'cross-zone' support to non-GCA NES (camp and non-camp) needs to be better harmonized with the efforts of NGOs working in that area, and urgent efforts made to extend the reach of critical services (see below).

(For action by MENARO in collaboration SCO, WoS, Gaziantep Outpost Office and EMOPS)

R2. Review Whole of Syria arrangements

The UNICEF WoS arrangement needs to evolve to reflect the change of circumstances since it was established while maintaining certain key functions. Specifically, it needs to provide a stronger platform for assessing needs and coordinating interventions to all parts of Syria according to a common humanitarian strategy and plan. This includes much stronger harmonization of cross-border and cross-line support. The WoS office in Amman and SCO need to collaborate closely on this agenda.

More generally, the arrangements need to provide a clearer framework of responsibilities and accountabilities for each hub and the functions located within them. Lack of clarity on this has been a significant barrier to effective and harmonized working for UNICEF across WoS.

(For action by MENARO in collaboration with SCO, WoS, Gaziantep Outpost Office and EMOPS)

R3. Ensure continuity of Agenda A support to areas of north-western Syria outside GoS control, while adapting the support strategy to reflect the evolving situation

Ensuring continuity of support for the needs of children and their families in non-GC NWS must continue to be a priority for UNICEF, given the scale and severity of needs involved. The situation remains fluid and levels of vulnerability (as well as levels of aid dependency) are high. Uncertainty over the future of cross-border support and challenges to increasing cross-line support from GCAs add to that vulnerability and planning against future scenarios is an immediate priority.

R3.1 As a priority, UNICEF should *finalize* and implement (as appropriate) *contingency planning* for the potential closure to the United Nations of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing from Türkiye. This should involve close and detailed collaboration between Gaziantep, Damascus and MENARO as well as with other agencies and with donors.

R3.2 Both as part of contingency planning and for its future strategy, UNICEF should actively *seek to ensure that its implementing partner NGOs in NWS can access direct funding* from donors or from pooled funds rather than being dependent on funding through UNICEF. Again, this requires close collaboration with other agencies and with donors. As part of this, UNICEF should seek to ensure continuity of programme services currently provided through implementing partnerships, while aiming to phase out its role as a funding partner to the NGOs concerned.

R3.3 As a corollary to this, *UNICEF should take urgent steps to ensure* – in the event that SCR 2585 is not renewed – *that it can continue to fulfil essential functions on behalf of its partners and the wider humanitarian system*, including: leadership on cluster / AoR coordination, advocacy and communications, technical support and training, and essential bulk procurement services on behalf of humanitarian actors working in IDP camps and non-government controlled areas of NWS. This is likely to require current capacity levels in the Gaziantep office to be maintained, with some roles reconfigured.

(For action by MENARO in collaboration with SCO, WoS, Gaziantep Outpost Office and EMOPS)

R4. Repurpose the strategy for support to non-government-controlled areas of northeastern Syria

UNICEF has made real strides in opening space and responding to critical needs, but there are key service gaps (e.g., in nutrition and education) and the scale and coverage are insufficient, particularly in areas outside the formal IDP camps. Progressively extending the support provided cross-zone will require closer collaboration with NGOs as well as de facto authorities (self-administration) together with higher-level

advocacy to increase the operating space. Doing this will involve rebuilding trust and will require more transparency and better communication on both sides. This is also essential for securing the trust of donors, who currently express understandable confusion as to the nature and extent of aid efforts in NES (by UNICEF and others) and concern at the lack of coordination and collaboration between the United Nations and NGOs. For its part, UNICEF must be more open about the extent and limits of its ability to support work cross-zone, even within the camps where it currently operates.

R4.1 Building on excellent work to date on WASH, health (EPI), child protection (CAFAAG, third-country nationals) and education (curriculum development, exams) and on established relationships with self-administration as well as GoS counterparts, *UNICEF should develop a plan* within the wider humanitarian plan proposed above *for extending its effective reach in NES*. This should include high-level advocacy and should seek to maintain essential work in camps while extending beyond these – or supporting the NGOs to do so. Critical service gaps, notably in nutrition, should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

R4.2 In concert with other United Nations agencies, UNICEF SCO and Qamishli office (in collaboration with the WoS office

in Amman) should *seek to forge a new partnership with the NES Forum* with a view to ensuring that cross-zone initiatives link more strongly with work undertaken by NGOs in self-administration areas and that overall coverage of needs (camp/non-camp) improves. As part of this, all UNICEF sectors – including both programme and coordination staff – should work to improve communication and coordination with the respective working groups in the Forum. Lessons from the successful work of the WASH and child protection sectors in bridging this gap with the NGO Forum should be reviewed by other sectors.

(For action by SCO and WoS in collaboration with MENARO and EMOPS)

R5. Build the scale of work in GCAs through enhanced partnerships and consortia

UNICEF has done well to work with national and local authorities, SARC and approved NGOs in GCAs despite the multiple limitations imposed by donor conditionalities, as well as limits imposed by the government on needs assessment and response. The main challenge identified by the evaluation is one of scale: UNICEF needs to find ways to better address the humanitarian agenda for children in GCAs at scale, through wider partnerships, integrated programming

and area-based approaches. While this is dependent on donor willingness to fund as well as GoS permissions, joint inter-agency approaches – possibly using consortium or even joint venture models – could help to provide assurance as well as a potential scale multiplier effect.

R5.1 Building on positive existing relationships with GoS ministries and local authorities, *UNICEF should continue to seek to expand the space for both data gathering and programming*, on its own behalf as well as that of the wider system. This should form an integral part of the proposed humanitarian strategy and plan and should be based on priority areas of concern. The proposed multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS) process should form part of this, in order to help provide essential baseline data, and should be supplemented by mechanisms for routine situational monitoring against key indicators of concern for children.

R5.2 Again as part of the proposed humanitarian plan, UNICEF should actively seek *new collaborative business models* – including multi-agency initiatives, sector-specific response consortia, and area-based multi-sector approaches. These should include work with other United Nations agencies, SARC and NGOs, working in partnership with local authorities and potentially with private sector actors. An area-based approach to

programming, particularly in urban areas, may be necessary to properly address the complexity and density of needs, to foster inter-sectoral planning, and to contribute to social cohesion in areas containing multiple identity groups.

R5.3 In light of the stabilization of large parts of the country and increased opportunities for upstream work, the SCO should explore the scope for new *partnerships with international NGOs in Damascus*. This would allow it to tap into their sector-specific expertise (especially for child protection, education, social policy) which is much needed. It would also help to address the element of mistrust of civil society which has developed during the last few years and would complement advocacy with the GoS to open space up for greater contributions from civil society in general.

(For action by SCO in collaboration with MENARO, DAPM and EMOPS)

R6. Address critical service gaps and maintain key services

Consistent with the wider humanitarian strategy, UNICEF should identify critical service gaps across the whole of Syria, analyse the reasons behind them, and take steps to address them as a matter of priority. Some of these (nutrition is a key example) cannot wait. Others may take

some time to address but should be treated with the urgency they deserve. Some demand strengthening not only the UNICEF programme response but the wider sector response and its coordination.

R6.1 Nutrition sector. In light of the deteriorating nutritional situation, UNICEF should strengthen its nutrition sector response by:

- (i)** Undertaking a SMART survey as comprehensive, extensive and in-depth as possible to properly assess the extent and magnitude of the ongoing malnutrition crisis;
- (ii)** Revising and strengthening its nutrition cluster / sector coordination team and processes, ensuring that NES is soundly covered and that UNICEF nutrition staff (programme and coordination) are interacting effectively with the NGO Forum nutrition working group;
- (iii)** Addressing all nutrition supply issues (provision of RUTF, micronutrients, etc.) under UNICEF responsibility as global cluster coordinator for nutrition. If these issues cannot be resolved in-country, they should be taken up at the appropriate level;
- (iv)** Working with WFP to ensure that the current minimal school feeding programme (i.e., based on daily provision of high energy bars) is incorporated across all schools and possibly expanded to include more nutritious foods.

R6.2 Education sector and ADAP. Develop a conflict-sensitive education strategy for the WoS and for Syrian refugees in the region to allow all Syrian children to access quality and certified education. An analysis of the conflict dynamics in relation to education policies and programmes should be the first step of building the strategy, so as to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts of education policies and programmes on conflict. To this end:

(i) Beyond continued efforts to extend access to education, UNICEF should, as part of its education strategy, devise a WoS plan for better assessing and working on the issue of educational quality and impact. Allowing that this is a very large agenda, incremental progress should be the aim, including through discussion with the MoE in Damascus.

(ii) The education cluster should be strengthened, including adequate staffing (dedicated coordinators and information management officers), increased participation of the cluster partners (e.g., establishing strategic advisory groups) and improved coordination between the hubs and across the wider region.

(iii) UNICEF should capture lessons learned from using alternative education modalities due to the pandemic (e.g., online and remote learning), which might offer opportunities to expand access to accredited education in the region (e.g., learning passport).

(iv) With regard to ADAP, UNICEF should aim to harmonize its approach with education to focus on the crucial issue of providing a bridge between ‘learning’ and ‘earning’ for adolescents.

R6.3 WASH and health (EPI/COVID-19)

R6.3.1 WASH: Building on effective collaboration with the MoWR to date, the WASH section should continue to expand the coverage and scope of its basic infrastructure and system rehabilitation interventions in GCAs, as well as in non-GC areas of NES.

R6.3.2 Health: Building on effective collaboration with the MoH, the health section should continue to expand the coverage and scope of its system-based interventions in GCAs, and, building on the cross-line and cross-zone experience of the EPI and COVID-19 vaccination programmes, progressively expand its coverage in NES.

(For action by SCO and WoS in collaboration with MENARO, Programme Group, EMOPS, and Gaziantep Outpost Office)

R7. Strengthen needs assessment, situational monitoring and targeting across WoS

Related to R4.1 above, UNICEF needs a plan to strengthen its ability – and that of the sectors for which it has lead responsi-

bilities – to better gauge the evolving picture of needs and vulnerabilities across all parts of Syria, including with regard to under-5 malnutrition. The methods employed may vary somewhat across the three crisis areas, but a common analytical framework should be used at sector and inter-sector levels. This needs to allow for more ‘real-time’ and baseline data gathering.

(For action by SCO and WoS in collaboration with Gaziantep Outpost Office, MENARO and EMOPS)

R8. Strengthen monitoring and accounting for programme delivery and performance

UNICEF needs to be better able to account (internally and externally) for its programme interventions through partners in all parts of Syria. The inability to do so reliably is a reputational risk and means that UNICEF lacks a sound basis for programme management. As part of this, UNICEF needs to be significantly more transparent in reporting both what it does (and where), and what it is unable to do. It also needs to ensure comparable transparency concerning the work of clusters and AoRs for which it has lead responsibilities.

R8.1 Strengthen the basis on which programme performance is measured.

This should take account of immediate

priorities (such as nutrition) and establish specific delivery targets for key elements of the programme that are monitored at least quarterly for each of the three crisis areas separately as well as in aggregate. More generally, it should involve (as part of humanitarian planning) a review of programme indicators to provide a more reliable guide to performance.

R8.2 Optimize programme monitoring capacity and quality. Recognizing the challenges to monitoring, especially in non-GCAs of NWS and NES, the SCO and Gaziantep offices should review the functions expected of third-party monitors and facilitators. Their technical capacities should be reinforced for all sectors and their tasks refined. At the same time, monitoring focus should shift from output to outcome level, and increasingly assess impact of specific interventions, as far as possible through direct engagement with affected communities.

R8.3 Review the way in which programme coverage and reach are reported. UNICEF must ensure that a realistic picture is painted – and crucially, it must highlight what it has not been possible to do rather than reporting only ‘positive’ news of achievements. UNICEF owes a duty both to children and to the wider sectors in which it works to consistently report the gaps in coverage of essential services, even where lack of effective delivery means UNICEF

may itself be partly responsible. The organization's credibility with donors and other actors would be enhanced as a result.

R8.4 Strengthen the AAP approach and community engagement. Directly linked to the above recommendation, UNICEF should embed specific AAP commitments (as per the CCCs) into its programme components and partnership agreements, defining a specific role to be played by third-party monitors and facilitators. This should not be limited to complaints mechanisms, but build more on beneficiary satisfaction and impact surveys, drawing on the experiences of the social policy section in this regard.

(For action by SCO and WoS in collaboration with Gaziantep Outpost Office, MENARO and EMOPS)

R9. Strengthen cluster and AoR leadership and coordination

While in some sectors, UNICEF leadership and coordination have been strong, in other areas they have been relatively weak at both hub and WoS levels. UNICEF must make sure that its own programme delivery is not privileged over fulfilment of its essential system-wide roles. Double- and triple-hatting has seriously affected UNICEF performance and the well-being of the staff concerned.

R9.1 Strengthen coordination systems and capacities. UNICEF should aim to have dedicated and high calibre sector coordinators and information management officers at hub level. Cluster coordinators need to have both sufficient seniority and the experience to be able to inspire confidence within the clusters and ensure that the concerns of the wider sector are differentiated from those of the UNICEF programme. The formation of strategic advisory groups could help with this, and with providing greater strategic focus.

R9.2 Maintain coordination capacity at Gaziantep level. In the framework of the ongoing contingency plans for NWS, UNICEF should plan to maintain strong coordination capacity in Gaziantep. This would enable both a better coordinated response from those operating cross-border and from within this region, and better harmonization of this response with cross-line support from GCAs. One aim should be to reduce the risk of a disconnect arising between a possible NGO-led coordination system in Gaziantep and the United Nations-led one in Damascus.

(For action by WoS, SCO and Gaziantep Outpost Office in collaboration MENARO and EMOPS)

R10. Strengthen the supply function

Supply for the programme in GCAs and cross-zone in NES has been a persistent problem, related in part to the economic crises in Syria and Lebanon. **The SCO should request expert support from MENARO or Supply Division** to help identify steps necessary for improvements, as well as to provide general support to the supply section. A head of section needs to be recruited as soon as possible. The evaluation suggests that a task team be established, including programme and fundraising staff, to monitor progress on agreed steps and report to senior managers on progress. This is a core function for UNICEF, the performance of which has system-wide implications.

(For action by SCO in collaboration with MENARO and Supply Division)

R11. Enhance risk management and control processes

While UNICEF risk management and control processes appear relatively strong, the review of risks should happen more regularly than it does at present (we suggest quarterly). Collaboration on due diligence and spot checks under the HACT system could be extended beyond the current United Nations partners. On safeguard-

ing and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, while good progress is being made internally, more needs to be done to raise awareness amongst beneficiaries and establish case management protocols at a community level. Continued advocacy at a governmental level is required to enable wider progress on this agenda.

(For action by SCO and WoS in collaboration with Gaziantep Outpost Office, MENARO, DAPM, PG and EMOPS)

R12. Strengthen communication and advocacy efforts

While UNICEF (SCO/RO) has made good use of private advocacy channels with authorities across Syria and in the wider region over the evaluation period, it needs to be more consistent and responsive in its public advocacy and condemnations of gross abuses of child rights (it has sometimes been too risk-averse in this regard). Such communication needs to be distinguished from communications designed primarily to promote UNICEF and its work. The current practice of routing such advocacy mainly through MENARO is appropriate.

While UNICEF has tended to highlight its own (positive) role, not enough communication work is done to highlight the gaps in coverage for children across

WoS, and particularly in NWS. Given the limited presence of INGOs across the various hubs, this is an especially important agenda for UNICEF. An advocacy strategy and rollout plan should form part of the proposed humanitarian strategy and plan (R1).

(For action by MENARO, WoS and SCO in collaboration with Global Communication and Advocacy Division and EMOPS)

Annex 1. Terms of References

Evaluation of the UNICEF response to the L3 Humanitarian Crisis in Syria

Introduction

In 2021, the UNICEF Evaluation Office will evaluate the organization's response in the Syrian Arab Republic. This document outlines the requirements for and expectations of a team of five consultants to undertake this exercise.

Background on humanitarian situation in Syria

Starting with peaceful demonstrations in early 2011, the Syrian Arab Republic descended into an all-out conflict, inflicting untold suffering and hardship on civilian populations. To date, the scale, severity and complexity of humanitarian needs remain extensive; as of December 2020, the United Nations estimates that more than 13 million people inside Syria need humanitarian assistance.¹³¹ Some 4.8 million children are in need of assistance in 2021.¹³² The

humanitarian crisis in Syria is one of the biggest and most complex crises in the world.¹³³ The humanitarian situation is the result of continued hostilities, new and protracted displacements, spontaneous returns and the sustained erosion of communities' resilience during a decade of crisis.

Following a decade of conflict and humanitarian crisis, hostilities in parts of the Syrian Arab Republic continue to intensify. The destruction of civilian infrastructure, depleted savings and limited economic opportunities have forced many to resort to harmful coping strategies. The result is extreme vulnerability. Those particularly at risk are children, pregnant and lactating women, people with disabilities, the elderly and other groups or individuals with specific needs or diminished coping mechanisms. Four

131 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Syria Humanitarian Response Plan, 2020', Geneva, <https://hum-insight.info/plan/1044>, accessed 7 January 2021.

132 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Humanitarian Action for Children, 2021', UNICEF, New York, accessed 7 January 2021.

133 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'About OCHA Syria', Geneva, <https://www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/about-ocha-syria>.

out of five people in Syria live below the poverty line,¹³⁴ and many families' coping mechanisms are depleted. Families face making hard choices in order to survive, e.g., pushing children into extreme survival measures such as child labour, early marriage and recruitment into the fighting in order to help their families make ends meet.¹³⁵ The humanitarian context has been further challenged by an unprecedented economic downturn in Syria in 2020 that has had profound impacts on the welfare of a significant proportion of the population.¹³⁶ These economic hardships have revealed the pre-existing and underlying fragility of the Syrian economy and have been compounded by multiple shocks over the past 12 months, including the regional financial crisis – the most significant of which has been the banking crisis in neighbouring Lebanon, and the imposition of new and further-reaching unilateral coercive measures which have further complicated procurement processes and limited the transfer of funds to partners operating from within Syria.¹³⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic has caused

disruption of basic services. Notably, the government closed schools between March and September 2020. Health and nutrition surveillance activities were disrupted and vaccination coverage for children fell by 40 per cent.¹³⁸

UNICEF response in Syria

The crisis has been the focus of organization-wide support since January 2013, when UNICEF declared it a Level 3 (L3) emergency and put in place its corporate emergency activation procedure (CEAP).¹³⁹ This radically transformed what was previously a small, upstream-focused country office (CO) into a large-scale, emergency-oriented programme. This scale-up facilitated support in entirely new areas of programming and the opening of new field offices to support children located in hard-to-reach areas.

Since 2013, UNICEF has appealed for almost \$2.5 billion and has received almost \$1 billion. The UNICEF response is outlined in its annual Humanitarian Action for

134 Ibid.

135 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Syria Crisis Fact Sheet, August 2019', UNICEF, New York, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/syria-crisis-fast-facts>.

136 Syria Humanitarian Response Plan, 2020.

137 Ibid.

138 United Nations Children's Fund, 'End of Year Results Summary Narrative, 2020', UNICEF, New York, 2020.

139 An L3 emergency is declared on the basis of: scale, urgency, complexity, capacity and reputational risk to UNICEF and/or the United Nations. In an L3 emergency, UNICEF calls for an institution-wide and global mobilization through its CEAP. Predefined emergency procedures allow UNICEF to respond effectively and immediately to the situation. A Level 2 (L2) emergency is led and managed by a regional office.

Children appeal, which is in line with the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan, the framework within which the humanitarian community responds to humanitarian and protection needs. UNICEF has been delivering its response from three separate locations: the UNICEF Syria country office, and two other 'hubs', one in Amman, Jordan for southern Syria and northeast Syria, and one in Gaziantep, Türkiye for northwest Syria. The country office has field offices in Homs, Aleppo, Tartous, Qamishli, Deir-ez-Zor and Damascus.

UNICEF works in Syria in the following areas to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable children and women to address their urgent needs, while ensuring sustainable programming throughout the protracted crisis: 1) health and nutrition, 2) education, 3) water, sanitation and hygiene, 4) child protection 5) social policy and social protection and 6) adolescent participation and development.

Given the protracted nature of the crisis, UNICEF has a dual focus of direct life-saving assistance and multi-sector resilience-strengthening through partners and field offices, in line with efforts to strengthen nexus-oriented programming.

Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The planned evaluation is intended to serve both accountability and learning functions. The purpose of the evaluation is to strengthen UNICEF performance in protecting children's rights and well-being in the country, and in responding to large-scale emergencies.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

- **Provide a comprehensive assessment of the overall UNICEF response to the crisis within Syria** (including cross-border programming) against its own mandate and standards, its stated objectives and standard evaluation criteria;
- Based on collation and analysis of relevant data and information, **generate evidence, conclusions and key lessons and make recommendations to improve the response in Syria and similar responses elsewhere and in the future.**

There are also corporate requirements for an evaluation of the response in Syria. The 2018 UNICEF evaluation policy states that the responses to protracted humanitarian

crises ought to be evaluated every three years.¹⁴⁰ An evaluation of the UNICEF response in Syria was last undertaken in 2015.¹⁴¹ Additionally, an audit of the Syria country office, conducted in 2019, reinforced the need for a corporate evaluation of the response. It indicated that the evaluation should review “the effectiveness of UNICEF management structures and arrangements in the scope of the Level 3 global evaluation of Whole of Syria response, to identify good practices and lessons learned that can be applied in future similar situations”.

Expected users

The evaluation is primarily intended for UNICEF staff, including:

- UNICEF staff in Syria and the hubs in Jordan and Türkiye responsible for the programme implementation
- UNICEF staff in the Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO) (RD office, humanitarian section and technical sections) and HQ divisions (EMOPS, PG, DAPM, Supply Division, DEDs, etc.) responsible for coordinating and supporting the L3 humanitarian response

- UNICEF Syria cluster and coordination leads responsible for contributing to the humanitarian country team-led interagency humanitarian response in Syria

Beyond UNICEF and its immediate stakeholders, the report should be of interest to all actors who share responsibility and concern for the welfare of crisis-affected communities in Syria. Ultimately, the evaluation is intended to benefit people affected by the crisis, and above all the children of Syria. The final evaluation report will be publicly available on the UNICEF evaluation page.

Evaluation scope

Key focus areas

The evaluation will focus on the following themes, which will be further specified during the scoping and inception phases of the exercise:

- 1 Relevance and appropriateness of UNICEF strategies and programme designs to context and needs
- 2 Cross-cutting principles (humanitarian principles, do no harm, gender, human rights, accountability, etc.)

¹⁴⁰ United Nations Children's Fund, 'UNICEF Evaluation Policy', UNICEF, New York, 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/media/54816/file>

¹⁴¹ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Evaluation of UNICEF's Humanitarian Response to the Syria Crisis', UNICEF, New York, 2015, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/reports#/detail/744/evaluation-of-unicefs-humanitarian-response-to-the-syria-crisis>

- 4 Programme performance
- 5 Coordination and collaboration with government, local authorities and partners in the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- 6 Quality of supporting functions: supply, human resources (HR), planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) (including data quality, needs analysis, programme and end-user monitoring, fit-for-purpose reporting)
- 7 Effectiveness of UNICEF management structures and arrangements
- 8 Risk identification, management and mitigation
- 9 Lessons

Programmatic scope

The evaluation will include an assessment of the appropriateness of the UNICEF strategy and programme designs in the sectors supported by UNICEF, including the delivery modalities in the different parts of the country, also for hard-to-reach populations.

It will also include an assessment of coverage, results, effectiveness, quality and efficiency, as well as a review of the quality and use of evidence, assessing how well the response has used previous evidence such as reviews and evaluations to inform or adapt current programming,

and what systems are in place to monitor the situation and UNICEF performance. The evaluation will investigate UNICEF leadership of the clusters / areas of responsibility (AoR), their coordination with other actors, coherence with other sectors and implementation. In addition, the evaluation will assess to what extent UNICEF has upheld humanitarian principles, mainstreamed protection and gender, identified, managed and mitigated risk. Finally, it will include an assessment of the management structures and arrangements, and the quality of the supply, HR and PME functions.

Geographic scope

The evaluation will focus on UNICEF programming inside Syria (including cross-border operations). Given the scale, extent and duration of the UNICEF response in Syria and the sub-region, it will not be possible to evaluate the response in refugee-hosting countries. It is important to consider where UNICEF has not been able to programme, despite the existence of humanitarian needs, and why this was so.

Temporal scope

The evaluation will consider the UNICEF response from 2018 to the present. Recommendations will be made based on the understanding of the future challenges likely to face UNICEF and the wider humanitarian system in Syria.

Indicative evaluation questions

Key evaluation questions (KEQs) will be further defined once the scope / themes are agreed upon by the reference group. The following questions are indicative. It is expected that in answering each question, factors that contributed to strong or weak performance will be identified.

0. Introductory question (descriptive) What has been the UNICEF contribution to the wider effort to provide vulnerable people inside Syria with assistance? What is the context for the UNICEF response? How has the context affected UNICEF work?

1. Relevance and appropriateness of strategies and programme design to context and needs

- How appropriate are the overall UNICEF strategy and specific programme strategies to the context?
- Considering the context and needs, were the forms of intervention chosen by UNICEF the right ones (sectors, sub-agendas)? Did they take account of the roles and capacities of other actors? Has UNICEF employed the most effective operational modalities? Were the interventions developed considering cross-sectoral links and synergies?
- How comprehensive have the situational and needs analysis underpinning UNICEF programme and strategy decisions been?

- Were targets set proportionate to need, in light of other capacities, funding and resourcing issues? Was appropriate adaptation made to targets as needs evolved?
- How appropriate is the UNICEF response in the context of the overall UN strategy, and the government's strategy?

2. Cross-cutting principles

- Has the response been consistent with humanitarian principles?
- How well has UNICEF mainstreamed protection (applying the 'centrality of protection' principle), including do no harm?
- How accountable have UNICEF and its partners been to affected populations? What has been the extent / quality of community engagement?
- Has UNICEF response been equitable?
- Was the Leave No One Behind principle consistently applied?
- Have gender equality, disabilities, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and human rights issues been properly addressed?

3. Programme performance

- What has been the scale, coverage and reach of the UNICEF L3 programme relative to needs / vulnerability? Were they adapted to changing needs and context?

- What have been the main threats to children's security, well-being and development in the period January 2018 to date?
 - How does this break down by time, location and demographic group (including location, urban and rural populations, age group, gender)?
- To what extent did UNICEF deliver against its Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)? Where it did not, what were the main reasons?
- Has UNICEF been effective in meeting its stated programme objectives?
- Has the response been timely?
- Has it delivered for the most vulnerable groups?
- To what extent has UNICEF contributed to resilience of individuals, communities and systems in Syria?

4. Coordination and collaboration with government, local authorities and partners in the UN system and NGOs

- How well has UNICEF performed in its system-wide coordination roles (in leading the clusters co-lead / AoR) and leadership roles (in influencing the wider system through advocacy, including advocacy for IHL)?

- How well have UNICEF implementing partnerships worked? Does UNICEF have the right partnership model? How well has UNICEF advanced the localization agenda?
- How well has UNICEF managed its relationship with government and other stakeholders?

5. Quality of supporting functions: operations, funding, supply, HR, PME (including data quality, needs analysis, programme and end-user monitoring, reporting), communications

- To what extent has HR in Damascus and Amman supported the response to achieve its programmatic and operational needs?
- To what extent has PME in Damascus and Amman supported the response (including data quality, needs analysis, programme and end-user monitoring, reporting)?
- How has the supply function performed?
- How have the finance and administrative functions performed?
- How well has the response been supported by fundraising, communications and advocacy?
- How well has UNICEF learned from past evaluative exercises and reviews?

6. Effectiveness of UNICEF management structures and arrangements

- To what extent have the management structures and arrangements enabled the most effective response?
- How well has cross-border programming worked?

7. Risk identification, management, and mitigation

- How well has UNICEF identified, managed and mitigated risks to the response, to the programme and to the affected populations, children in particular? Has this been reactive or proactive?

8. Key lessons

- Overall, what are some of the most important lessons from programming in Syria?

Special considerations

The design of the evaluation will pay due consideration to other ongoing evaluative exercises / reviews that have been undertaken in the past. This is to avoid duplication and maximize the work already undertaken. Those undertaken include the Syria Corporate Review (2019); the Evaluation of UNICEF's Coverage and Quality in Complex Humanitarian Situations (of which Syria was a case study country through a desk review and

remote interviews); ongoing / scheduled exercises, such as the ongoing review of the coordination for the Whole of Syria, being implemented by the global cluster coordination unit (GCCU); as well as the resilience evaluation being implemented by the Syria CO. While these exercises respond, by design, to different information needs and objectives, the evaluation will make sure to harness information that will be yielded by these exercises.

Methodology and approach

Given the combined accountability and lesson-learning purposes of the evaluation, a balance will need to be struck between independent scrutiny and participatory approaches. With respect to the latter, a relatively high level of participation is anticipated in terms of feedback and discussion of interim and final findings and recommendations. That said, the intention is not to produce a consensus report, but rather one that reflects the judgement of the evaluation team, fully informed by evidence and feedback.

The precise evaluation questions to be answered and the methods for answering them will be determined during the inception phase, but overall, the evaluation will employ a mixed-method approach, using qualitative and quantitative techniques and triangulation of data to compile a robust and credible evidence

base in order to assess the UNICEF response to the Syria crisis at the global, regional and country levels. It is expected that the evaluation will use the following methods at a minimum:

- **Key informant interviews and focus group discussions:** The evaluation team is expected to interview or conduct focus groups with key informants in person or remotely. Key stakeholders will include, but not be limited to, UNICEF staff in Syria, Gaziantep, and Amman hubs, regional office, headquarters; cluster / AoR members and partners (including UN and NGO partners), donors, and, if possible, national and sub-national authorities and members of the affected population. Specific protocols for the consultations will be designed by the evaluation team based on the UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluations and Data Collection and Analysis.
- **Formal desk review:** In addition to rapid review of data in the scoping and inception phases, the evaluation team will conduct a systematic and detailed desk review of documents, data and other inputs, including from surveys. The evaluation team will use appropriate data collection tools to organize the information, in collaboration with the Evaluation Office, DAPM, EMOPS, SD and PG. A reference library of

documents is being compiled, and compilation will continue during the inception phase.

- **Surveys:** Short online surveys will also be designed and will be directed at two main stakeholder groups: UNICEF staff (including relevant staff in field offices who because of time constraints may only be reached to a very limited extent) and UNICEF partners.
- **Direct observation (if possible):** To the extent that the situation allows, the evaluation team will undertake field visits to observe the UNICEF response directly and conduct interviews with communities and affected populations to determine their view of UNICEF programmatic and operational responses. Methods for consulting effectively with affected populations will need to be developed in consultation with UNICEF staff and partners in the relevant locations, with a particular focus on the 'do no harm' principle, i.e., ensuring that the safety and security of beneficiaries and partners is not compromised by any actions on the part of the evaluation team.

The evaluation will be conducted in the *proposed* phases as follows (to be discussed and finalized by the reference group):

Phase 1: Scoping phase / Inception phase (May–June 2021)

The scoping phase will involve consultations with key internal and external stakeholders in the Syria country office (SCO), hubs, MENARO, and at headquarters (HQ) (including staff from EMOPS, PD, DAPM, PPD, SD) concerning the purpose and essential elements of the evaluation, together with a preliminary desk review of the availability of relevant data and documentary evidence.

This phase will enable the evaluation team and UNICEF to reach a common understanding as to the nature of the task, the questions to be addressed, the sources and methods to be used, and the outputs to be delivered. It will also enable the evaluation team to undertake initial consultations with key informants, and also to review the available data and documentary material, including material generated in the scoping phase.

The primary output from this phase will be an inception report, a draft of which will be circulated for comments internally, and this will form the mutually agreed basis for conducting the evaluation. It should include a contextual analysis and an evaluation matrix detailing the questions to be asked, together with related indicators and likely sources of verification.

Phase 2: Field mission / data gathering / analysis / preliminary briefings (July–August 2021)

This is the main data-gathering phase. The timing, schedule and itinerary will be agreed with the regional office (RO) and CO(s). Given COVID-19 travel restrictions, the situation will be assessed to determine if it will be possible to undertake any travel (either within Syria, to Amman or Gaziantep). It is envisaged that the field component should commence in the first week of June and last for approximately three weeks. Based primarily on key informant interviews, focus-group discussions and direct observation and documentary review, the team should by the end of this phase have produced a preliminary briefing report for discussion with UNICEF staff. The purpose of this is two-fold: (i) to feed into relevant strategic planning and policy review processes; and (ii) to provide an initial basis for validation of findings.

Prior to the writing of the preliminary briefing report, a presentation on the initial findings should be given, and it is envisaged that a discussion of these initial findings with UNICEF staff in the sub-region should help inform the writing of the preliminary briefing report.

The main outputs from this phase will be: (i) a presentation on the preliminary briefing from the field mission; and (ii) a preliminary briefing report.

Phase 3: Validation of findings and production of first draft report (Aug–Sept 2021)

This phase is intended to allow time for more detailed follow up on key areas of the evaluation, cross-checking and validation of the provisional analysis from Phase 2, and filling of gaps in documentation, key informant interviews and other consultations, including with HQ staff. This phase should also allow time for conducting and analysing the results of a survey (or multiple surveys) on relevant aspects of the UNICEF response. During Phase 3, a draft of the evaluation report will be prepared.

The main output from this phase will be a first full draft of the evaluation report as a basis for consultation.

Phase 4: Consultation on draft report, revision and production of final report (Oct–Nov 2021)

This phase allows for full consultation with internal stakeholders on the draft report. Two main rounds of consultation and revision are envisaged (second draft, third draft). This phase will also involve a recommendations workshop in which the team will present the findings, conclusions and tentative recommendations and lead a discussion among key stakeholders.

The main output from this phase is the production of a final evaluation report that takes due account of feedback received.

The consultants will be responsible for compiling feedback in the form of a comment matrix for each round of consultation.

Phase 5: Dissemination (Nov. onwards)

The team will make a presentation to communicate the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation, to facilitate strategic reflection on the response and to discuss the uptake of lessons learned and recommendations. One or more facilitated, participatory workshops will be conducted with staff from the regional offices, country office and hubs, potentially also including key UNICEF partners. This is subject to further discussion with the regional offices and country offices at the inception phase and later stages of the evaluation.

The outputs for this phase are a summary PowerPoint presentation and the delivery of the workshops.

Limitations and anticipated challenges

There are several limitations, such as the potential inability of some members of the evaluation team to travel to Syria and field locations due to safety concerns, COVID-19 and the issuance of visas, the lack of access and availability of data in emergency contexts and the need to balance timeliness with depth of information and well-substantiated findings. Additionally, limited

internet access and available technologies may limit use of collecting data remotely.

Norms and standards

Guidance documents mentioned below are those that the evaluation team is expected to comply with:

- ***Evaluation Office standards and sector-wide standards for independent evaluation of humanitarian action***¹⁴²
- United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System 2016¹⁴³ (including impartiality, independence, quality, transparency, consultative process);
- UNEG ethical guidelines for UN evaluations;¹⁴⁴
- UNICEF ethical guidelines and standards for research and evaluation;¹⁴⁵
- UNEG guidance on integrating human rights and gender equality and UN System-Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on gender equality;¹⁴⁶

- Relevant ALNAP guidance for evaluation and real-time evaluations of humanitarian action;¹⁴⁷ results-based management principles (theory of change applied in the emergency should be determined by the evaluation team).

The inception report and relevant data collection tools will, if necessary, undergo ethical review by an ethical review board.

Management and governance arrangements

The UNICEF Evaluation Office will manage the evaluation, in close collaboration with the CO, RO and key HQ divisions concerned with the Syria crisis. A senior evaluation specialist, supported by an evaluation specialist, will manage the evaluation process, under the guidance of the UNICEF Director of Evaluation. The Evaluation Office will commission a team of external consultants to undertake the evaluation.

A reference group for the Syria humanitarian evaluation will be established

142 L3 evaluations are included in the Plan for Global Evaluations, 2018–2021, which makes provision for evaluating Level 3 emergencies from the corporate level, given the substantial investments being made by UNICEF in humanitarian action.

143 United Nations Evaluation Group, 'Norms and Standards for Evaluation', UNEG, New York, 2016. Available at: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>.

144 United Nations Evaluation Group, 'Ethical Guidelines', UNEG, New York, 2008. Available at: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102>

145 United Nations Children's Fund, 'UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis, 2015', UNICEF, New York, 2015, https://www.unicef.org/supply/files/ATTACHMENT_IV-UNICEF_Procedure_for_Ethical_Standards.PDF

146 United Nations Evaluation Group, 'Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation', UNEG, New York, Available at: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1452>.

147 <https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/alnap-evaluation-humanitarian-action-2016.pdf>
https://evaluation.msf.org/sites/evaluation/files/real_time_evaluations_of_humanitarian_action.pdf

at the outset of the evaluation to ensure the relevance, accuracy and credibility and therefore the utility of the exercise. The reference group will serve in an advisory capacity and its main responsibility will be to provide feedback on the main evaluation deliverables. The reference group will be chaired by the Director of Evaluation, with membership composed of members from the CO, RO and a few HQ divisions. A terms of reference outlining the roles and responsibilities of the reference group will be shared.

The UNICEF RO and CO will be kept informed of the evaluation progress on a regular basis by the regional evaluation advisor and the multi-country evaluation specialist.

Deliverables

The team will be responsible for the following deliverables.

- Draft inception report (include a context analysis and evaluation matrix) and final inception report
- Draft evaluation report, final evaluation report
- Slide deck, recommendations workshop
- Summary of evaluation report in a PowerPoint presentation, final presentation

Timeline

Task/Deliverable	Timelines
Concept Note/Draft ToR drafted	January 2021
Set-up of RG and discussions (with COs, RO and HQ divisions) on the evaluation scope/approaches/KEQ, etc (and finalization of draft ToR)	March 2021
Evaluation team recruited	April 2021
In-depth scoping/inception	May 2021
Field mission/data gathering/ preliminary briefings– Syria, Türkiye and Jordan (as situation allows)	June-July 2021
Validation of findings, analysis, and production of first draft report	August-September 2021
Consultation on draft report, revision and production of final report	October-November 2021
Other dissemination activities	November 2021 onwards

Annex 2. Evaluation Matrix

Overall evaluation questions

How well has UNICEF served the best interests of children (short and longer-term) across the whole of Syria since 2018? What has been the main added value of UNICEF interventions? What can be learned from this for the future of UNICEF work in the country, region and globally?

Question Number	Main question	Sub questions/topics	Indicators, metrics & lines of enquiry	Sources
A. Evolution of Syria context, priority issues for children and the operating context (appropriateness and relevance)				
A.1	<p>How has the general Syria country context evolved over (i) the decade 2011–2021, (ii) evaluation period (2018 to date)?</p> <p>Distinguishing WoS, GCA and non-GCA over these periods</p>	<p>A.1.1 Political and security context Including the course of conflict, geopolitics and international interventions, human rights issues</p> <p>A.1.2 Demographic context Including population distribution, displacement, ethnicity, age and gender profiles, etc.</p> <p>A.1.3 Social and economic context Including comparison of pre-war (MIC) with current (LIC) context</p> <p>A.1.4 Changes in capacity of relevant systems (health, education, etc.)</p>	Relevant national and sub-national demographic, socio-economic, health and social welfare systems data	Documentary review: Multiple sources, including CPDs, HRPs, external sources

A.2	<p>How has the humanitarian context evolved, specifically for children and women? Needs and vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Across WoS, NWS and NES</p>	<p>A.2.1 Health A.2.2 WASH A.2.3 Nutrition A.2.4 CP and GBV A.2.5 Education and ADAP issues A.2.6 Social protection</p> <p>Including issues related particularly to displacement (IDPs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant development baseline data (e.g. literacy, school attendance, infant / maternal mortality, household income and asset levels, etc.) – most recent/reliable, noting data gaps • Evolution of priority needs, threats and vulnerabilities (across all sectors) 2018 – present. Including health, nutrition, CP, GBV, education • Changing levels of access to services / effective protection / social welfare systems 	<p>As above, plus HNOs, UNICEF PSNs, UNICEF 2018 Situation Analysis of Children and Women</p>
A.3	<p>How has the context for humanitarian intervention by international and national/local organizations evolved since 2018?</p>	<p>A.3.1 Evolution of humanitarian space / access options since 2018? A.3.2 The role and structures of the UN and international organizations (including WoS) A.3.3 Patterns and levels of international funding and in-kind support (including COVID-19) A.3.4 The role and capacities of local and national civil society orgs (including cross-border)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of humanitarian operating context (i) pre- and post-2018; (ii) since 2018 • Comparison of UNICEF WoS structure with those of other UN agencies • Humanitarian funding trajectory since 2018 and likely future • Changes in access /security 	<p>Document review of FTS, UN/OCHA documentation, KIs, partner survey</p>

A.4	What have been the main operating challenges for UNICEF and its partners?	<p>A.4.1 Funding constraints and % funding 2018–2021 by (i) whole programme and (ii) sectors</p> <p>A.4.2 Challenges related to donor funding conditionality and areas of work not funded</p> <p>A.4.3 Operational challenges for UNICEF (including access, permits)</p> <p>A.4.4 Other implementation challenges for UNICEF (including identification of suitable partners)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding patterns and trends over evaluation period – overall and by sector. UNICEF future funding prospects • Limits imposed by donor funding conditionality and areas of non-funding • Fundraising constraints and the splitting of funds between SCO and XB • Effect of gov't partner approval delays on programme implementation • Effect of government influence on inter-hub cooperation • Ability to communicate between hubs while managing data security • UNICEF reputation amongst donors. • WoS management structure. • Internal delays re: signing of LTAs 	Documentary review: KIs, fundraising documentation, review of PDs, partner survey, UN +other documentation
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B. UNICEF strategy, needs assessment, planning and programme design (Relevance, appropriateness, coverage, equity, coherence)

B.1	<p>Has UNICEF found the right role for itself in Syria over the evaluation period? How well did its strategy support this? Was the response consistent with UNICEF global and regional commitments?</p> <p>For WoS + GCA/non-GCA</p>	<p>B.1.1 What role has UNICEF played in Syria over the evaluation period (2018 to date)? How consistent has this been with the organization's mandate, corporate commitments and global strategic plans?</p> <p>B.1.2 How well has UNICEF used its strengths and comparative advantages relative to other agencies in Syria? Where and how did it add most value? Where did it add least value?</p> <p>B.1.3 Has UNICEF had a clear strategy for its programme (including WoS)? How well suited has this been to the context?</p> <p>B.1.4 How have the role and strategy evolved since 2018? Where are they now heading? Are they going in the right direction?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judged against UNICEF mandate, GSP, CCCs and the context • Comparison with other UN agencies' role and approach • UNICEF comparative advantage vs. others' capacities, gaps, opportunities 	<p>UNICEF plans/ strategies, HRP, cluster strategies, JOP plans, contextual information from UN sources, CCCs, KIs</p>
B.2	<p>Has UNICEF programme logic been clear, cogent and based on realistic assumptions?</p> <p>Has the programme been internally coherent and has it been harmonized between GCA/NWS/ NES?</p>	<p>B.2.1 What has been the essential logic of the UNICEF approach in Syria? Has this proved sound? Does it still hold good?</p> <p>B.2.2 Has there been a clearly articulated logic for interventions in (i) GCA, (ii) non-GCA, (iii) WoS?</p> <p>B.2.3 How well designed was the UNICEF programme and its component parts? To what extent were communities and partners engaged in the design process?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of logic as it appears from strategy and planning documents (CPD, JOPs, etc.) • As above plus HRP, HAC, etc. 	<p>Strategy and planning documents (CPDs, JOP, PSNs, HACs, sectoral strategies, PPTs for planning meetings) CCCs, partner survey, AAP documentation</p>

		<p>B.2.4 Specifically, have there been clearly defined goals, objectives and strategies for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Child protection and GBV o Social protection o Education and ADAP o Health and nutrition o WASH <p>B.2.5 Was the programme logic sound in each case? On what assumptions was it based, and did these prove realistic?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of sector logic as it appears from PSNs, etc. 	
B.3	<p>Has the UNICEF programme been relevant and appropriate to the evolving context?</p> <p>What has been the quality of UNICEF needs assessment and situational monitoring?</p>	<p>B.3.1 How well has UNICEF assessed and monitored needs and vulnerabilities since 2018?</p> <p>B.3.2 Given the assessment of priority needs, how well fitted to the context were the organization's overall and sector-specific objectives/ outcomes and outputs?</p> <p>B.3. How coherent was the overall programme? Were the sector interventions designed in such a way as to take account of related sectors? Were these inter-linkages made explicit in assessments and designing the programme components?</p> <p>B.3.3 Has the UNICEF programme been more than the sum of its parts? What has been its added value across sectors?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularity of sectoral assessments • Quality of UNICEF PDM reports. • Quality of TPM activities and reporting • Access to and awareness levels of programmatic activities • Comparison of needs and programming 	<p>Context analysis (sources as above) UNICEF plans/strategies (as above), KIIs, partner survey</p> <p>Assessment reports PDM reports TPM reports Site visit reports SitAns</p>

B.4	<p>How well balanced and harmonized has the UNICEF programme been over the evaluation period? As between GCA and non-GCA?</p> <p>What has been the balance of the UNICEF programme over the evaluation period between areas, demographic groups, sectors of intervention and operating modalities?</p>	<p>B.4.1 What was the programme balance between GCA and non-GCA areas? And within those areas by sector, geography, demography, etc.? Did this properly reflect priority needs and vulnerabilities?</p> <p>B.4.2 What was the balance between different programming modalities: service delivery (direct/ indirect), technical advisory, capacity-building, system strengthening, policy advice, advocacy, etc. (categories to be agreed – probably just 3 or 4). Did this reflect UNICEF comparative advantage and added value?</p> <p>B.4.3 How well harmonized was the programme as between GCA and non-GCA (X/B & X/L) components?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well have XB and XL activities been reported on? • Comparison of needs and programming • Analysis of various modalities • Evidence of harmonization between GCA, non GCA 	Needs assessments (OCHA, ACPAS, HNO, others), UNICEF reporting (COAR, SitReps, InSight), KIs
B.5	<p>Has UNICEF target setting and prioritization been appropriate in the light of priority needs, gaps and available resources?</p> <p>How good has been the coverage and equity of response by UNICEF and partners?</p>	<p>B.6.1 Has UNICEF prioritized its interventions in appropriate ways, given limited resources and access?</p> <p>B.6.2 What has been the coverage of assessed needs through the UNICEF programme?</p> <p>B.6.3 To what extent has UNICEF addressed the needs of the most vulnerable children and women?</p> <p>B.6.4 Did the programme design and targets properly reflect UNICEF commitments in the Core Commitments for Children?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of needs, targets, results overtime • Comparison of programme design with 2010 and 2020 CCCs 	KIs, HNOs, UNICEF planning documentation, EL/FB results table

		<p>B.6.5 Were targets set by UNICEF appropriate, realistic and proportionate to need, in light of other capacities?</p> <p>B.6.6 Was appropriate adaptation made of targets in response to changing needs or other factors? How was this affected by funding, resourcing, access or other issues?</p>		
B.6	What have been the main lessons arising from UNICEF strategy and programme design since 2018?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of strategic changes as a result of review processes. • Changes in programmatic focus • Changes in implementation methodologies 	Review meeting reports
C. Programme performance and impact (Quality, results, effectiveness)				
C.1	<p>To what extent has UNICEF met its targets and programme objectives since 2018? By sector?</p> <p>For WoS + GCA/non-GCA</p>	<p>C.1.1 Results against targets (%), by sector/programme component and for whole programme annually. What have been the reasons behind target achievement or shortfall in each case?</p> <p>C.1.2 Results against objectives (outputs and outcomes)</p> <p>C.1.3 What has been the real world impact in each sector? What is the quality of evidence UNICEF has for this?</p> <p>C.1.4 Where has UNICEF been unable to achieve its objectives, why has this been?</p>	Analysis against output and outcome indicators, analysis of contributing factors, bottlenecks	EL/FB results table + JD results table (from HAC, AWPS, SitReps), KIs, TPM reports, partners reports

C.2	What have been the main challenges to delivering against the CCCs?	<p>C.2.1 To what extent did UNICEF deliver against its own CCCs?</p> <p>C.2.2 What have been the main constraints to fulfilling these commitments, and how effectively were these addressed?</p>	Compare programme design/plans (B.2.6 above) with actual delivery	See B.2.6 above, KIIs
C.3	How accountable and responsive has UNICEF been to affected populations? To what extent has it engaged communities in programme design and implementation?	<p>C.3.1 How accountable have UNICEF and its partners been to affected populations? Were there effective feedback mechanisms? What have been the common concerns of beneficiaries? How well has UNICEF responded to beneficiary feedback?</p> <p>C.3.2 What has been the extent and quality of community engagement in programme design and implementation?</p>	Evidence of AAP in UNICEF documentation, evidence of AAP data used to adapt/design programming	<p>AAP documentation, KIIs, partner survey</p> <p>See B.2.3 above</p>
C.4	How good has UNICEF programme monitoring, reporting and quality assurance been?	<p>C.4.1 How well has UNICEF monitored programme implementation and the work of its partners? Including through TPM.</p> <p>C.4.2 Specifically, how effectively has UNICEF monitored the quality of programme implementation? What quality assurance measures has it adopted? Have they worked?</p> <p>C.4.3 What controls have been put in place to ensure the effectiveness of UNICEF monitoring processes, particularly with respect to cross-border and cross-line activities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judged against UNICEF HPM and other monitoring standards and indicators • Quality of UNICEF PDM reports. • Quality of TPM activities and reporting • Access to and awareness levels of programmatic activities • Donor satisfaction re: reporting received. • Appropriateness of AAP activities and their effect on programme implementation modalities. 	<p>See B5 above,</p> <p>PDM reports</p> <p>TPM reports</p> <p>Site visit reports</p> <p>AAP documentation</p> <p>KIIs</p>

	What have been the main challenges to delivering against the CCCs?	<p>C.4.4 How has UNICEF acted on the results from its own and third party monitoring? Has it led to programme adjustments?</p> <p>C.4.5 What has been the quality of reporting from UNICEF, its partners and third party monitors?</p> <p>C.4.6 Have reports been produced on a timely basis and to the satisfaction of donor requirements?</p> <p>C.4.7 What do reports reveal about the relevance, effectiveness and quality of related interventions?</p>		
C.5	How effective an advocate has UNICEF been for children in Syria?	<p>C.5.1 How effective has UNICEF been as an advocate for children across the whole of Syria? With regard to alleviating short-term threats to children's well-being and safety? With regard to child-related policy? In other ways?</p> <p>C.5.2 Has UNICEF had a clear influencing strategy? How did this evolve over time? What evidence does UNICEF have of impact?</p>		Advocacy strategy, advocacy materials, KIIs
C.6	What have been the main lessons arising from UNICEF programme performance and implementation since 2018?		Evaluative judgment based on answers to the questions above	

D. Partnerships, coordination and collaboration (Coverage, external coherence, connectedness, efficiency)

D.1	<p>What has been the UNICEF partnership strategy and balance of partnerships?</p> <p>For WoS + GCA/non-GCA</p>	<p>D.1.1 What has been the overall UNICEF partnership strategy in Syria? How has this evolved?</p> <p>D.1.2 What has been the balance of partnerships with (i) LNGOs, (ii) INGOs, (iii) UN and Red Cross/ Crescent agencies, (iv) Government ministries or local authorities? How did this change over the evaluation period? What is the appropriate future balance?</p> <p>D.1.3 Overall, does UNICEF have the right partnership model? What have been the challenges to finding appropriate partners and how has UNICEF addressed these? To what extent has UNICEF been able to advance the localization agenda?</p> <p>D.1.4 How well have UNICEF implementing partnerships worked in practice to deliver the programme?</p> <p>D.1.5 Has UNICEF been a good partner? How well has it supported implementing partners? To what extent has it helped build capacity?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner strategy documentation • The extent to which partners have extended programmatic coverage. • Quality of partner performance review documentation and protocols • Quality of partner reports and the extent of programmatic achievements • Achievements of partner capacity building activities • Partner feedback on UNICEF support 	<p>Partner review documents</p> <p>Partner reports</p> <p>KIIs</p> <p>Partner survey</p>
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D.2	How effective and appropriate has UNICEF collaboration and engagement with Government ministries and other relevant authorities been?	<p>D.2.1 How effectively has UNICEF collaborated with GoS bodies (central line ministries, governorate and local authorities, other)?</p> <p>D.2.2 Across WoS, how effective has UNICEF engagement been with local governing authorities in GCA and non-GCA?</p> <p>D.2.3 How appropriate has UNICEF engagement with state and non-state authorities been given the requirements of independence and impartiality?</p> <p>D.2.4 How should UNICEF seek to shape its future engagement with state and non-state authorities?</p>	Evidence of effective collaboration with various partners	Kills, MOUs
D.3	How well has UNICEF collaborated with other UN agencies?	<p>D.3.1 How well has UNICEF collaborated with other UN agencies in Syria on agendas of shared concern?</p> <p>D.3.2 What further areas of collaboration might better enable UNICEF to address the priority needs of children and women?</p>	Evidence of collaboration effectiveness	Kills, documentation of joint work, HCT meeting minutes, cluster meeting minutes/decisions
D.4	How successful have UNICEF and its partners been in community mobilization, outreach initiatives and working with and through local volunteers?	<p>D.4.1 Extent and effectiveness of community mobilization and outreach approaches?</p> <p>D.4.2 Extent of use of volunteers and local committees? Effectiveness of this approach?</p>		<p>Community mobilization and outreach documentation</p> <p>Partner survey</p>

E.2	<p>How well has the UNICEF supply function worked to support the programme?</p> <p>For WoS + GCA/non-GCA</p>	<p>E.2.1 How well has the UNICEF supply function serviced the needs of UNICEF and partners by sector of activity (health, education, etc.)?</p> <p>E.2.2 Are there ways in which the UNICEF supply function in Syria could be made more efficient and effective? (Including X/B and X/L)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness of procurement and delivery to destination. • Significance of any pipeline breaks on programme implementation. • Timeliness of LTA signature processing • Identification of other operation constraints related to supply/logistics, e.g. transportation across lines/border, warehousing, etc.? 	<p>Procurement documentation</p> <p>Delivery analysis</p> <p>Pipeline break analysis</p> <p>LTA signature tacking documentation.</p> <p>Klls</p>
E.3	<p>How well has UNICEF used C4D and awareness-raising campaigns to support programmes?</p>	<p>E.3.1 Extent of use of C4D and awareness-raising campaigns</p> <p>E.3.2 Evidence of effectiveness of these approaches?</p>		<p>C4D programme progress reports</p> <p>Klls</p>
E.4	<p>How well have the general finance, financial control and risk management functions performed?</p>	<p>E.4.1 Finance and control function</p> <p>E.4.2 Risk management, including operational risk and due diligence in partner selection</p> <p>E.4.3 How well has UNICEF managed the PSEA agenda?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timely availability of annual plans and variance analysis reports. • Timeliness of cash transfers to partners and sub-offices. • Efficiency and effectiveness of HACT procedures management • Effectiveness of risk analysis protocols and procedures • Extent of PSEA implementation and adoption 	<p>Finance and budgetary analysis reports</p> <p>HACT documentation</p> <p>Annual risk assessment reports</p> <p>Due diligence protocols</p> <p>PSEA procedures, protocols, and update reports</p>

D.5	To what extent has UNICEF provided system-wide leadership on coordination of response and child-related agendas?	<p>D.5.1 How well has UNICEF performed in its system-wide coordination roles (as cluster / AoR lead or co-lead)?</p> <p>D.5.2 Did UNICEF have to step in as provider of last resort in any case, or should it have done so?</p> <p>D.5.3 How well has UNICEF coordinated its own activities with those of other actors (strategy, design, implementation)?</p> <p>D.5.4 How effective has the UNICEF leadership role been (in the UNCT and more widely) in influencing the humanitarian and longer-term agendas in the interests of children?</p>		Cluster documentation (meeting minutes, strategies) KIs, HCT documentation, partner survey
E. Management, operations and support functions (efficiency and control)				
E.1	How well has the UNICEF HR function worked to support the programme and its operational needs?	<p>E.1.1 Have staffing levels been adequate for the programme and support functions? Have deployments been timely?</p> <p>E.1.2 Has UNICEF found the right balance of temporary/surge and longer-term deployments? International and national staff?</p> <p>E.1.3 Was the right mix of skills and experience achieved?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which having L3 status has facilitated staff recruitment. • Timing and efficiency of staff recruitment. • Appropriateness of staff deployed • Staff turnover rates • Staffing of UNICEF-led clusters 	<p>HR documentation</p> <p>KIs</p> <p>Annual reports</p> <p>Audit reports</p>

E.2	<p>How well has the UNICEF supply function worked to support the programme?</p> <p>For WoS + GCA/non-GCA</p>	<p>E.2.1 How well has the UNICEF supply function serviced the needs of UNICEF and partners by sector of activity (health, education, etc.)?</p> <p>E.2.2 Are there ways in which the UNICEF supply function in Syria could be made more efficient and effective? (Including X/B and X/L)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness of procurement and delivery to destination. • Significance of any pipeline breaks on programme implementation. • Timeliness of LTA signature processing • Identification of other operation constraints related to supply/logistics, e.g. transportation across lines/border, warehousing, etc.? 	<p>Procurement documentation</p> <p>Delivery analysis</p> <p>Pipeline break analysis</p> <p>LTA signature tacking documentation.</p> <p>Kills</p>
E.3	<p>How well has UNICEF used C4D and awareness-raising campaigns to support programmes?</p>	<p>E.3.1 Extent of use of C4D and awareness-raising campaigns</p> <p>E.3.2 Evidence of effectiveness of these approaches?</p>		<p>C4D programme progress reports</p> <p>Kills</p>
E.4	<p>How well have the general finance, financial control and risk management functions performed?</p>	<p>E.4.1 Finance and control function</p> <p>E.4.2 Risk management, including operational risk and due diligence in partner selection</p> <p>E.4.3 How well has UNICEF managed the PSEA agenda?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timely availability of annual plans and variance analysis reports. • Timeliness of cash transfers to partners and sub-offices. • Efficiency and effectiveness of HACT procedures management • Effectiveness of risk analysis protocols and procedures • Extent of PSEA implementation and adoption 	<p>Finance and budgetary analysis reports</p> <p>HACT documentation</p> <p>Annual risk assessment reports</p> <p>Due diligence protocols</p> <p>PSEA procedures, protocols, and update reports</p>

E.5	Have UNICEF management structures and arrangements enabled the most effective response?	<p>E.5.1 How appropriate, effective and efficient have the WoS management arrangements been? Do they remain fit-for-purpose?</p> <p>E.5.2 How well has planning and management of the cross-border and cross-line work been harmonized with that of GCA-related programme? Have these strands been effectively brought together in an integrated plan?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well has the current WoS structure managed to date? • What future structure would be most appropriate for future contextual and programmatic realities? • What factors are stopping the current structure from being effective? • How and where are current programmatic and operation activities consolidated? How effective are such processes? 	<p>Audit report</p> <p>KIIs</p>
E.6	How well has the response been supported by fundraising and communications?	<p>E.6.1 Fundraising</p> <p>E.6.2 Communications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has fundraising been able to meet funding requirements (SCO and XB)? • What factors have affected this? How could this be improved? • How well have UNICEF been able to retain major donors? • To what extent has the communications function contributed to donor satisfaction, and kept donors and other stakeholders up to date with UNICEF activities? 	<p>Funding figures by sector by year (SCO and XB)</p> <p>Donor KIIs</p> <p>Donor survey results</p>

E.7	How well has UNICEF learned from past evaluative exercises, audits, reviews and other studies?		Examples of changes made as a result of evaluation/audit feedback and recommendations?	<p>Previous evaluation reports</p> <p>Audit reports</p> <p>Management feedback documentation</p> <p>Peer meeting review documentation</p> <p>KIIs</p>
F. Cross-cutting issues				
F.1	How well has UNICEF learned from past evaluative exercises, audits, reviews and other studies?	<p>F.1.1 Has the response of UNICEF and its partners been consistent with core principles of humanitarian action?</p> <p>F.1.2 Has the response been consistent with other key principles (including do no harm and centrality of protection)?</p> <p>F.1.3 How well has UNICEF applied the principles of equity and Leave No-One Behind?</p> <p>F.1.4 How well has UNICEF addressed gender and other human rights issues?</p>		

F.2	How well has UNICEF learned from past evaluative exercises, audits, reviews and other studies?	<p>F.2.1 What is the UNICEF approach to resilience, recovery, the HPD nexus?</p> <p>F.2.2 How appropriate is this approach, given the context and outlook for Syria's future?</p>	Analysis of context and UNICEF LHD/ resilience programming	Context analysis (See above), CPDs, HACs, KIs
F.3	How well has UNICEF responded to COVID-19 and its impacts?		Evidence of appropriate and effective response to COVID-19	COVID-19 documentation, KIs, partner survey

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For further information, please contact:

Evaluation Office
United Nations Children's Fund
Three United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
USA



www.unicef.org/evaluation/



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evalhelp@unicef.org