

Yemen

Update on the context and situation of children

Yemen remains one of the world's largest and complex humanitarian crises. Millions of people continue to suffer from the compounded effects of more than nine years of armed conflict, ongoing economic crisis, recurrent natural hazards, the COVID-19 pandemic, and disrupted public services. Yemen is ranked 183 out of 191 countries in the Human Development Index with a score of 0.455 in 2021/2022. Over 80 per cent of the country's population struggles to access adequate nutrition, safe drinking water and decent health services. Most public sector employees, including teachers and health care workers, have not received a regular salary in years. In 2023, an estimated 21.6 million people, two thirds of the population, including 11 million children, needed humanitarian assistance and protection, with 4.5 million people, including about 2.3 million children, displaced.

The political environment changed in April 2022 after the assumption of power by the Presidential Leadership Council and announcement of the UN-brokered truce. The subsequent six-month period, up to the truce's expiry on 2 October 2022, resulted in decreased civilian casualties and displacement. Nevertheless, localised clashes continued in some areas, and landmines and explosive remnants of war still pose serious risks. Despite extensive efforts, a formal agreement to extend the truce was not reached during 2023, but a 'no war, no peace' situation prevails.

The operating environment in Yemen remains extremely complex. Insecurity, bureaucratic impediments, and dual-authority structures pose significant challenges in delivering critical life-saving services to vulnerable children and families. Development and humanitarian partners in Yemen continue to engage with institutional partners in Aden and Sana'a to address these challenges for a sustained and principled delivery of programme.

Reliable information on the fragile economy is scarce, as official statistics are no longer produced. Competing monetary policies by the International Recognized Government and De Facto Authorities have resulted in a large divergence of the exchange rate of the Yemeni rial (YER) between the southern and northern governorates. Largely reliant on imported food and goods, Yemen is extremely vulnerable to fluctuations in global prices. Throughout 2023, pressures on international supply chains, stemming from the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, contributed to increased food prices and the continued depreciation of the YER resulted in high inflation. The national poverty rate was estimated at about 75 per cent in 2023, up from 49 per cent in 2014.

Impact on Children and Adolescents

Children in Yemen are exposed to multiple deprivations, including constrained access to social services, violence, abuse, exploitation, child marriage, and growing rates of poverty, with a devastating impact on their physical and psychological well-being. Adolescents (10-19 years), an estimated 6.3 million across Yemen, are among the most affected by the protracted conflict. Adolescent girls face multiple risks, particularly rural girls. Adolescents often have very limited access to social services such as health care, education and vocational training, while generally being exposed to poor living conditions.

Yemen's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains constrained: **SDG 2 - Ending all forms of malnutrition:** Food insecurity and malnutrition continue to remain of great concern, with pockets of the country experiencing extreme hunger. Yemen has one of the highest child malnutrition rates globally, driven by insufficient food consumption, poor sanitation and hygiene,

infectious diseases and conflict. According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2022-2023, 49 per cent of children under five in Yemen have chronic malnutrition (low height for age), and 21 percent are severely stunted. 17 percent of children under five are moderately or severely wasted, while 41 percent are underweight. About 1.3 million pregnant or breastfeeding women, and 2.2 million children under five, were estimated to require treatment for acute malnutrition in 2023.

SDG 3 - Ensure healthy lives and well-being for all: Some 50 per cent of health facilities in the country are functional, negatively impacting service delivery for the most vulnerable. The 2022-2023 MICS showed Yemen's neonatal mortality rate to be 21 deaths per 1,000 live births (17 for girls and 25 for boys), the infant mortality rate 35 per 1,000 live births (28 for girls and 41 for boys) and the under-five mortality rate 41 per 1,000 live births in 2021 (35 for girls and 46 for boys). This means no significant change in the trend for all childhood mortality rates over the last fifteen years. The immunization coverage has stagnated nationally, with 28 per cent of children under two not having received any routine vaccinations. The country continues to suffer from regular outbreaks of cholera, measles, diphtheria and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

The current neonatal mortality in Yemen is estimated at 21 per 1,000 live births while the infant mortality rate, often used as an

SDG 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education: The 2022-2023 MICS revealed 25 per cent of children of primary school age were not attending any level of education. In total, over 2.7 million school-aged girls and boys are out of school, and many of the 870,000 children with disabilities have had their education abruptly cut due to multiple displacements. Some 8.6 million school-aged girls and boys require support to continue their education. Some 2,783 schools are destroyed, damaged or being used for non-educational purposes.

SDG 5 - Gender: Yemen currently **ranks 178 of 189 countries in the Gender Inequality Index, showing huge gender disparities.**

SDG 6 - Water and sanitation for all: An estimated 15.3 million people, including eight million children, lack access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. Limited access to WASH is associated with diseases such as cholera and dengue. Inadequate access to soap and other hygiene items combined compounds the risk of disease.

SDG Target 16.2 Ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children: Between March 2015 and the end of September 2023, over 11,500 children have been killed or maimed as a result of the conflict in Yemen, according to the UN Country Taskforce on Monitoring and Reporting Grave Violations against Children – almost four per day since the escalation of the conflict in 2015. The true toll is likely to be far higher.

Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2023, UNICEF mobilised \$353 million (across 37 grants) through a broad range of partnerships, in addition to funds carried over from 2022. The total actual expenditure for 2023 was over \$437 million. The resources mobilised for the Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeal amounted to over \$175 million (of which \$99 million was new funding) or 36 per cent of the appeal target of \$484 million. In 2023, UNICEF continued to operate in Sana'a and five Field Offices, covering 22 governorates, with 289 national and 71 international staff based in Yemen, supported by 18 national and 15 international staff at the Yemen Outpost in Amman (Jordan) as well as one national staff in Salalah (Oman), in total 394 staff.

The following highlights the key results achieved during 2023, the first year of the UNICEF Country Programme for 2023-2024, prepared in consultation with national authorities in Yemen, and fully aligned to the 2022-2024 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

(UNSDCF). In addition to providing the necessary practical assistance to children, adolescents and their families through a broad range of partners in many sectors, UNICEF also actively supported the development and implementation of national sector strategies and action plans. These are essential to move away from humanitarian-focused annual planning cycles and adding value to systems strengthening.

Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives

In 2023, UNICEF supported the further strengthening of Primary Health Care (PHC) service delivery in Yemen by scaling up the Minimum Service Package (MSP) to 2,800 PHC facilities, representing 58 per cent of the total number of PHC facilities across Yemen. UNICEF focused on providing lifesaving interventions through community-based activities and on sustaining access to PHC at community and facility level. UNICEF provided monthly per-diems to over 15,784 health care workers, 200 doctors and 3,600 community health workers.

About 5.2 million mothers and children received primary health care services in 2023 through UNICEF support, including high-quality specialized referral care in hospitals. About 40,000 PHC kits including life-saving medicines and health supplies worth US\$ 19.4 million were procured and distributed to PHC facilities and mobile teams. Overall, 2,800 PHC facilities were provided with vaccines and supplies for the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI). Almost 1.4 million children in the southern governorates were vaccinated through an integrated measles campaign and one polio campaign.

To enhance the Primary Health Care system, UNICEF supported the training of over 2,700 health workers in maternal and newborn health interventions, IMCI and other areas. A total of 160 community midwives (CMWs) enrolled in a three-year pre-service training to improve access to reproductive health care for those in hard-to-reach areas. About 10,000 mothers and 10,000 newborn babies with medical complications received quality referral care in hospitals. In addition, almost 4,200 were sensitized on Infection Prevention and Control.

Throughout the year UNICEF provided technical assistance to the health authorities in Yemen to develop national strategies such as the national child and adolescent health strategy, the maternal and newborn health strategy and the midwifery strategy, while supporting the implementation of specific action plans such as the multi-sectoral nutrition action plan (MSNAP). This has been critical for systems strengthening and identifying medium-term goals.

During 2023, UNICEF continued to support the scale-up of the Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) programme. About 400,000 children with SAM benefitted from Outpatient Therapeutic Programmes (OTP) and in collaboration with the Ministries of Health the number of OTP sites increased to 4,750 by the end of 2023. The quality of SAM treatment remained above the SPHERE standards with a 92 per cent cure rate, while the coverage of SAM treatment services in Yemen remained high at 93 per cent.

During the year, 3.7 million caregivers of infants (0-23 months) received counselling on appropriate infant and young child feeding (IYCF), while about 1.7 million pregnant and lactating women (PLW) received iron supplementation and 310,000 adolescent girls.

Goal Area 2: Every child learns

In 2023, UNICEF supported the functionality of schools and child-friendly learning environments by providing teachers' incentives to 34,834 teachers and 2,135 Rural Female Teachers, supporting about 91,000 children. The provision of incentives to these female teachers in conservative rural areas, where there is an acute shortage of female teachers, is designed to increase the enrolment and retention of girls in these areas. Furthermore, UNICEF's support during emergencies ensured access to learning for the most vulnerable, with 296,412 children (48 per cent girls), accessing learning opportunities.

UNICEF continued to support the provision of quality, sustainable access for 22,409 (11,868 boys and 10,541 girls) through remedial classes and the rehabilitation/provision of 3,331 learning spaces, benefitting an estimated 133,240 students (47 per cent girls, with an average of 40 students per class), the provision of school supplies, benefitting 810,642 children (422,318 boys and 388,324 girls). A total of 12,613 teachers and father-mother councils (8,151 fathers and 4,462 mothers) in 20 governorates were trained in active learning, psychosocial support, safe schools, distance learning and community participation. In addition, financial and technical support was provided for the timely operation of national examinations for 527,313 Grades 9-12 students.

Throughout 2023, UNICEF contributed to strengthening the education systems in Yemen and continues to enhance partnerships and coordination mechanisms with the education stakeholders in key sector platforms, such as the Local Education Group (LEG), the Development Partners Group (DPG), and the Education Cluster. Significant partnerships included the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) through the Restoring Education and Learning project (REAL) and the European Commission for the delivery of quality education services.

In partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Ministry of Education (MoE), the development of the EMIS roadmap (phase II) was initiated, aiming to enhance the capacity of MoEs (in Sana'a and Aden) to generate and use reliable data for evidence-based system-wide planning for the education sector nationwide. The EMIS roadmap is expected to be completed by mid-2024, setting the stage for a national education census for the Whole of Yemen in 2024/2025. In addition, UNICEF actively supported the MoEs in Sana'a and Aden in developing and implementing an education strategic plan for out-of-school children, identifying key barriers and bottlenecks, and proposing programmatic solutions.

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

In 2023, UNICEF through various partnerships supported the provision of essential child protection services and care for over one million children at risk. A total of 2.5 million children were reached through Explosive Ordnance Risk Education, while support was also provided for critical case management services, birth registration, psychosocial services through Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS) and responding to gender-based violence (GBV), child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on children and armed conflict was strengthened for evidence-based advocacy with Recognized Government and de Facto Authorities to ensure that children are protected and prioritized.

Overall, the child protection environment remained constrained in Yemen, with bureaucratic impediments and deeply rooted social norms intensified by the conflict. Therefore, as a mitigating strategy, as much as possible child protection interventions are integrated in other sector responses to reach the most vulnerable children.

In 2023, UNICEF supported the implementation of the Action Plan that Houthis signed with the UN in April 2022 to protect children and prevent grave child rights violations in the context of the conflict. This Action Plan commits the authorities and their forces to comply with the prohibition of the recruitment and use of all children in armed conflict, including in support roles. It includes provisions to prevent the killing and maiming of children, and protect health and education facilities, and their personnel. With the implementation of the Action Plan, in 2023 the number of children killed and injured declined by over 50 percent compared to 2022, and less violations were reported. At the same time, the implementation of a dedicated Action Plan and Roadmap continued in Aden. Throughout the year, UNICEF supported the MRM on children and armed conflict in Yemen.

In 2023, UNICEF provided Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to about 249,817 individuals, including 213,722 children (48 per cent girls), contributing to improving the overall wellbeing of these children and their caregivers. This was accomplished by strengthening the capacity of service providers and supporting partnerships with other sectors such as education and health. MHPSS was provided in health facilities, schools, child-friendly spaces, community centres and IDP camps.

UNICEF also continued to provide life-saving Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) to a total of 788,729 conflict-affected people, including 521,274 children (46 per cent girls) and 267,455 adults (47 per cent women). Technical support was provided to the Child Protection Area of Responsibility and the Mine Action Coordination Framework under the auspices of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office. UNICEF worked with other UN agencies, authorities as well as national and international NGOs to address and prevent harmful social norms and practices.

Child marriage is a serious problem in Yemen: about 7 per cent of women aged 20-24 years were first married before their 15th birthday and about 30 per cent before their 18th birthday, according to the 2022-2023 MICS. During 2023, UNICEF and UNFPA continued to implement a Joint Programme to end child marriage and a Joint Programme to end female genital mutilation, reaching 148,592 people (26 per cent girls, 32 per cent boys, 18 per cent women and 23 per cent men). During the year, about 1.2 million people were reached with GBV services, risk mitigation and prevention.

UNICEF and partners reached over 12,000 children (36 per cent girls) with critical case management services, including 4,896 children (32 per cent girls) at risk and in contact and conflict with the law as well as 14,759 children (36 per cent girls) with multiple and critical child protection needs. With UNICEF's support, birth registration services continue to be available in all governorates of Yemen. In 2023, a total of 227,121 children (40 per cent girls) received birth certificates through regular, routine birth registration and outreach campaigns.

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

During 2023, UNICEF continued to pursue a dual approach of linking humanitarian and development programming. Under humanitarian programming, UNICEF provided immediate access to water and sanitation and responded to disease outbreaks, while as part of development programming, UNICEF supported interventions that strengthened the resilience of local systems and the capacities of local communities to achieve more durable and cost-effective results.

In 2023, over 1.9 million people benefitted from the UNICEF-supported rehabilitation of 56 water systems and 12 urban sanitation systems across Yemen. An additional 1.2 million people living in IDP camps benefitted from UNICEF-supported life-saving WASH interventions, which included the delivery of clean and safe drinking water through water trucking, construction and desludging of overflowing septic tanks and hygiene promotion in IDP camps. As part of the shift towards climatefriendly WASH programming, UNICEF solarized 56 water supply systems, which contributed towards reducing the operational costs.

About 1.7 million people were reached with critical sanitation interventions through operational support, including the rehabilitation of wastewater treatment plants and sewerage networks in seven urban and three peri-urban settings. Over 1.9 million people across Yemen were reached with messages on good hygiene practices, while about 700,000 people benefitted from basic and consumable hygiene kits distributed in communities.

UNICEF led several strategic initiatives for capacity strengthening of WASH sector institutions at national and sub-national levels. For example, UNICEF completed a thorough Climate Landscape Analysis for Children (CLAC), which identified how climate affects children, their rights and their access to specific services, such as health, education, water supply and sanitation, while identifying entry points for effective climate programming. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Ministry of Water and Environment (MoWE), a fuel exit strategy for 17 major cities was finalized, identifying key actions to be implemented in each Local Water and Sanitation Corporation (LWSC) to reduce its fuel reliance through the introduction of renewable energy systems, the reduction of non-revenue water and improved energy efficiency of existing thermal systems.

In addition to leading the WASH cluster, UNICEF continued its leadership of the WASH

Development and Resilience Partners Coordination Group for Yemen. UNICEF also supported intercluster coordination between the WASH and Nutrition clusters by providing technical guidance and follow-up with WASH partners to prioritise districts with high SAM rates. Capitalizing on its dual role as WASH cluster lead and the biggest WASH implementing agency, UNICEF started assembling the key building blocks to enable the update of the national WASH strategy.

Goal Area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life

The delivery of life-saving cash assistance and strengthening the national social protection systems, ensuring an increased focus on children, remained one of UNICEF's priorities in 2023. UNICEF with support from the World Bank provided unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) to 1.4 million households in 2023, impacting 9.6 million people, who used the cash mainly for food and health care. UNICEF also further strengthened national social protection systems and institutions, including the Social Fund for Development (SFD) and the Social Welfare Fund (SWF).

The SWF and the Handicap Care and Rehabilitation Fund (HCRF) were supported to implement an integrated social protection and services scheme (Cash Plus) which reached 30,985 beneficiaries in 2023. Cash plus targets the family members of households receiving UCTs and is implemented in parallel with the UCT payment cycles. It aims at maximizing the benefit of the cash by linking it to information and facilitating access to services related to health, nutrition, education and protection. During the year, digital payments were successfully piloted in eight districts with 6,500 households receiving their cash transfer directly onto their mobile phones instead of physically collecting it at the payment sites, impacting an estimated 49,000 people.

UNICEF continues to focus on children with disabilities. A case management system at the HCRF was established with support from UNICEF. As a result, 14,464 persons with disabilities were supported through case management and referrals.

In terms of systems strengthening, UNICEF continued to support the national Social Protection Consultative Committee (SPCC) to play its role as a key national advisory platform on social protection. Supporting the development of a national Social Protection Strategic Framework (SPSF) is another example of systems strengthening. The first of its kind in Yemen, this framework is being developed with the SPCC through a participatory and transparent approach, involving all the main social protection actors.

UNICEF also supported evidence generation as a key enabling factor for informed decision-making. In 2023, data collection and analysis for the 2022-2023 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) was completed, a significant achievement considering the many challenges that had to be overcome. The final comprehensive MICS report was officially launched by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO) in November 2023, providing updated data for many different indicators on children and women that will be used for programming in Yemen.

In 2023, for the first time a Multi-dimensional Poverty Analysis was initiated. This will inform more evidence-based policies, programming and public financing for children in Yemen. UNICEF also supported the preparation and publishing of the Yemen Socio-Economic Update (YSEU). Three in-depth analyses focused on social protection issues to inform programming on support for children and their families.

To further enrich the evidence base, three studies were commissioned in 2023, including a behavioural assessment on routine immunization, a community perceptions survey to inform a systemwide humanitarian response, and a knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) study on malnutrition and the utilization of micronutrients. All these informed and improved specific programming for children, women and men.

Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) as well as Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) interventions were integrated in programme interventions to promote positive practices on IYCF, nutrition, hygiene and learning, and also to address information needs of vulnerable communities, including during outbreaks of cholera, measles and polio.

Over 12,300 influencers, including community volunteers, young people, religious leaders and health workers, were supported to engage about 9 million people on a range of life-saving practices through house-to-house visits, social gatherings, school-based activities and awareness sessions in mosques.

UNICEF also led the inter-agency coordination of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), training frontline workers on community engagement principles and AAP commitments for humanitarian partners. In 2023, UNICEF also supported and promoted beneficiary complaints and feedback mechanisms. UNICEF continued the expansion of its call centre and grievance management modules to cover all programmes by adding modules on Child Protection, WASH and Nutrition to those of Health and Education already established in 2022, enabling anyone to provide feedback or file complaints about all UNICEF's support. In 2023 the call centre served over 111,000 calls, including about 9,000 complaints that required redressal, and about 102,000 inquiries that were addressed by the call centre agents.

Assistance was provided to hotlines managed by the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MoPHP), whereby health professionals responded to peoples' queries, concerns, provided referral support and medical consultations on vaccines. A total of 63,520 calls were responded to through these hotlines in 2023. In addition, community volunteers and religious leaders were supported by UNICEF to establish a platform for two-way communication using WhatsApp, engaging approximately 70,000 people.

In 2023, UNICEF continued to lead the UN inter-agency Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Network, which pro-actively reinforced the coordination of collective efforts to address prevention, response and assuring accountability on PSEA.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In 2023, UNICEF worked closely with the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in implementing the 2022-2025 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, while UNICEF continued to partner with other UN agencies in both humanitarian and development programming to enhance UN coherence and effective coordination.

In the health sector, UNICEF worked closely with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) under the stewardship of the MoPHP and local authority counterparts. The World Bank, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) and the United Kingdom remain the major donors to sustain the gains at PHC level, with new funding awarded by Germany at the end of 2023 to support further PHC interventions.

UNICEF closely collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and WHO on food security and nutrition assessments and jointly supported the release of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and Acute Malnutrition assessment findings in May 2023. UNICEF worked closely with WHO and WFP in jointly implementing CMAM services and ensured the seamless referral of children within different treatment programmes. During 2023 implementation continued of the three-year UN Programme 'Joint Actions for Food Security and Nutrition' (PROACT), a partnership between UNICEF, FAO and WFP.

During 2023, UNICEF and UNFPA continued to implement a Joint Programme to End Child Marriage and a Joint Programme to End Female Genital Mutilation, reaching 148,592 adolescents and adults, addressing gender-based violence, including awareness messages and increased engagement of men and women to prevent child marriage and FGM in their communities. UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoSAL) in Aden to develop a National Action Plan on Child Protection and hopes to replicate this in the north in 2024. In addition, UNICEF provided critical

support to the Central Statistical Organization in finalizing the National Gender Statistics Framework, an important step in strengthening gender and social statistics in Yemen.

UNICEF co-chaired the UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) on Grave Violations Against Children in Yemen.

UNICEF continued to strengthen its collaboration with the World Bank, with additional financing for the Yemen Emergency Human Capital Project (EHCP) approved in October 2023 for US\$ 78 million. This is a partnership between the World Bank, UNICEF, WHO and the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) that was initiated in 2021 and is supporting investments in nutrition, health, WASH and other areas. Negotiations are ongoing for additional financing of US\$ 150 million under the Emergency Social Protection Enhancement and COVID-19 Response Project, also known as the Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) Project. The Yemen Country Office also finalized a new agreement with the World Bank, MoPHP, WHO and FAO for the Yemen Pandemic Preparedness and Response Project, which provides support for 2023-2026 to strengthen preparedness for epidemic risks and vulnerability.

Strategic partnerships with national authorities, local organisations, religious leaders, women's and youth groups, UN agencies as well as national and international non-governmental organisations were sustained throughout 2023, including on community engagement and Accountability to Affected Populations, and RCCE for outbreak responses.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

A number of lessons learned, and challenges identified in 2023 and in previous years were taken into account in programming and UNICEF's 2023-2024 Country Programme for Yemen, focusing more on integrating various programme interventions and enhancing cross-sectoral approaches to maximise quality results for children.

Humanitarian funding in Yemen remains constrained. In 2023, partners accelerated the discussion on more integration of the humanitarian and development programmes factoring in the chronic situation in Yemen. UNICEF remains an active partner in various forums for the humanitarian-peacedevelopment nexus, including the Yemen Partners Group.

To holistically address the needs of children in Yemen, during 2023 substantial efforts were made towards further programme integration to improve impact and service coverage. For example, as part of the EHCP, WASH services were delivered as a package at both facility and community levels. Programmatic intersects between child protection/education and health included integrated approaches to provide psychosocial support to children and their caregivers through health facilities and schools. Vulnerable children were identified by experienced social workers who regularly visited health facilities and referred children to be provided with critical child protection services.

These integrated approaches helped to maximise results for children, providing quality services while accessing more vulnerable children. However, putting in place such integrated programmes requires an extended period of coordination and harmonisation across multiple sections. This remains challenging to implement with short-term funding and certain conditionalities of available funding.

In the area of social protection and inclusion, working with and through existing systems such as the Social Welfare Fund as well as the Handicap Care and Rehabilitation Fund resulted in better access and responsiveness to the needs of the most vulnerable children and their families. However, there is a need to continue investing in partners' capacity in the coming years. While cash assistance has a powerful impact on the survival and thriving of children, the needs are huge, so it is necessary to

scale up linkages between unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) and services for a more effective response to children's needs and also to scale up UCTs to cover additional vulnerable groups.

The multiple crises in Yemen led to a further deterioration of the already challenging situation of vulnerable groups such as the Muhamasheen, a minority faced with caste-based discrimination, and children with disabilities. This highlighted the need for an integrated multi-sectoral social protection response to multi-dimensional poverty and vulnerabilities, hence the importance of the Cash Plus approach.

External communication is central to UNICEF's advocacy and during 2023 UNICEF provided a broad range of interviews and content to local and international media outlets. The engagement of young people in the development of UNICEF's advocacy products has been critical to provide a clear venue for their participation and engagement.

Restrictions on Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), particularly in the northern governorates, remained a major challenge throughout 2023. These restrictions included impounding supplies (such as the toolkits of community volunteers and reusable face masks), obstructing certain community engagement activities, such as Mother-to-Mother clubs in some locations, as well as the reluctance of authorities in Sana'a to vaccinate children and adults. One of the lessons learned is the need to further strengthen the role of religious and community leaders in RCCE to address misconceptions derived from distorted religious beliefs that affect the adoption of promoted practices or vaccination acceptance.

The continuous collaboration between the different clusters and UNICEF programme teams at central and field office level continued to be important for timely and effective emergency planning and preparedness. Under UNICEF's cluster leadership, the focus remained on ensuring an integrated response to meet needs rather than a siloed sectoral approach.

Evidence generation activities continue to show that health professionals are highly trusted by their communities. The mobilisation and integration of trained medical doctors and midwives to engage their community and respond to their concerns contributed to addressing various rumours and misconceptions, especially about vaccines. Where mobilised and provided a platform, young people often become agents for social and behaviour change within their own community, encouraging their peers and families to adopt positive practices. To provide critical information for nutrition programming, six SMART (Standardised Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions) surveys were conducted in various governorates in 2023 with UNICEF support.

One innovation in 2023 was the roll-out of a new programme for young and emerging evaluators to be part of reference groups for UNICEF-commissioned evaluations, one way to support national evaluation capacity development. Another new development was the decision to ensure Arabic language evaluation products at all stages of evaluations, leading to more substantive engagement by key stakeholders, including ministries and other partners.

In 2023, a major initiative to support prioritisation efforts included the development of the Child Composite Deprivation Index (CCDI) with the objective to establish evidence-based, robust targeting criteria to direct interventions to the most deprived geographical areas in Yemen. The CCDI promotes synergies and ensures that a costed Minimum Service Package (MSP) of interventions will be progressively delivered to the most vulnerable children in deprived governorates and districts through five identified gateways (primary health care centres, schools, social service centres, IDP camps and communities), thereby contributing to achieve stated SDG and UNICEF Country Programme

outcomes. This approach will guide interventions at sub-national level by UNICEF Yemen and will also serve as a resource mobilisation tool to ensure the prioritisation of resources according to needs.