



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
15 May 2020

Original: English

**For information**

---

## United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

**Annual session 2020**

29 June–2 July 2020

Item 6 of the provisional agenda\*

### **Annual report on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021**

#### *Summary*

The UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021, the organization's road map for promoting gender equality throughout its work, is closely aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. The present document is the second annual report on the implementation of the Gender Action Plan and includes an update on progress on the Plan's priorities, indicators and performance benchmarks.

---

\* E/ICEF/2020/6.

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



## I. Overview

1. The UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021, specifies how UNICEF will promote gender equality throughout its work, in alignment with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, and the United Nations reform process, towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Over the past two years, UNICEF saw marked gains in results for women and girls. This is particularly evident in areas such as quality maternal care, addressing gender-based violence in emergencies, and dignified menstrual health and hygiene (MHH), as well as in growing efforts to promote gender-responsive social protection. Stronger national and global partnerships – including through United Nations joint programmes – increasing use of multisectoral approaches, and an emphasis on innovation as a strategy to accelerate results, have been critical to success. There has also been progress in efforts to reduce child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), to accelerate human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccination, and to empower adolescent girls with skills. Additionally, UNICEF has made its institutional systems and strategies more gender-responsive, meeting 82 per cent of the benchmarks of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) by the end of 2019.

3. In response to the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and its identification of key ‘accelerator’ areas for renewed action, UNICEF will intensify investment in health-related outcomes for women and girls. This investment will aim particularly to reduce HIV infection among adolescent girls, and to lower maternal mortality rates, including through closing gaps in maternal care, such as the lack of perinatal care services affecting an estimated 40 per cent of women globally. UNICEF will more deliberately target the barriers underlying these gaps, including by supporting the (predominantly female) community health workforce, which plays a vital role in delivering health services to women and children. Tackling gender-based violence in diverse contexts is another area for accelerated action. Similarly, in humanitarian response, where gender integration has been limited, UNICEF will prioritize evidence-based gender analysis and clear standards throughout its programming. Finally, UNICEF will continue to strengthen internal gender capacity and the generation and use of gender-related evidence and data, particularly at country level, for enhanced programming.

4. An independent evaluation was carried out in 2019 to assess the implementation and results of the Gender Action Plans for 2014–2017 and 2018–2021. The evaluation noted significant progress made by UNICEF in the achievement of results. It also noted, however, that there is room for improvement, particularly in ensuring broad-based accountability and ownership across the organization for gender-equality commitments. Programmatically, the evaluation recommended greater investments in transformational gender programming, including in humanitarian contexts. The evaluation recommendations will inform consolidation and strengthening of the Gender Action Plan in the next two years, actions emerging from the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, and planning for the next iteration of the UNICEF gender equality strategy.

## II. Introduction

5. UNICEF commitments to advancing gender equality in programmes and the workplace are articulated in the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021. The present report highlights the emerging trends, challenges and progress made in the first two years of Plan implementation, emphasizing programming interventions in

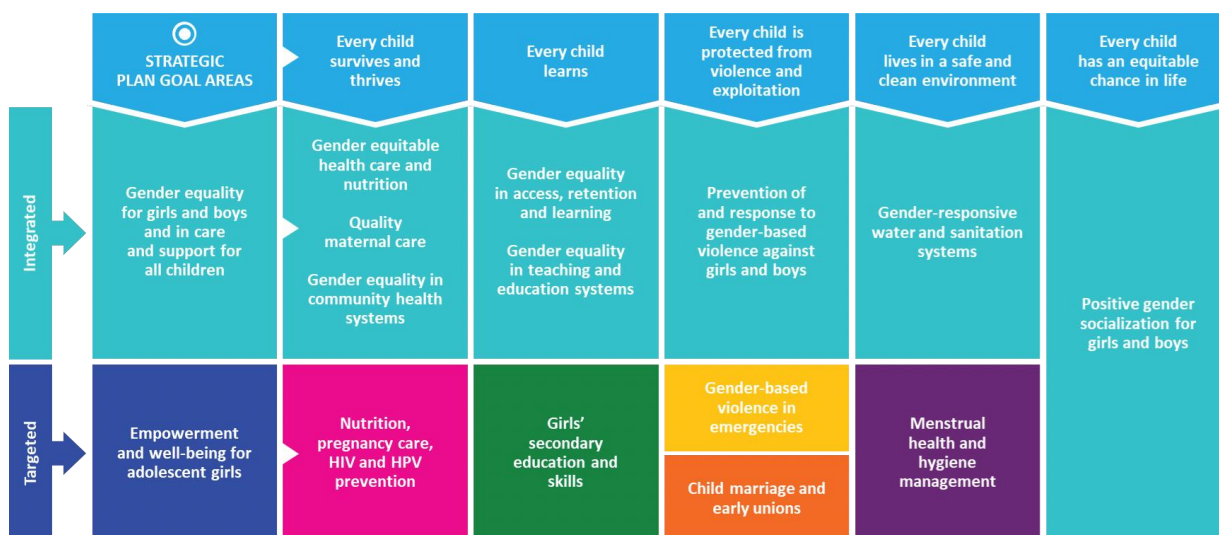
2019. The report also incorporates findings from the midterm review of progress towards meeting the objectives of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021.

### III. Programmatic results

6. The programmatic framework of the Gender Action Plan follows a twin-track approach to gender programming: (a) gender results integrated across the Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, and (b) five targeted priorities around adolescent girls' empowerment.

Figure I

#### Gender equality outcomes across the Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021

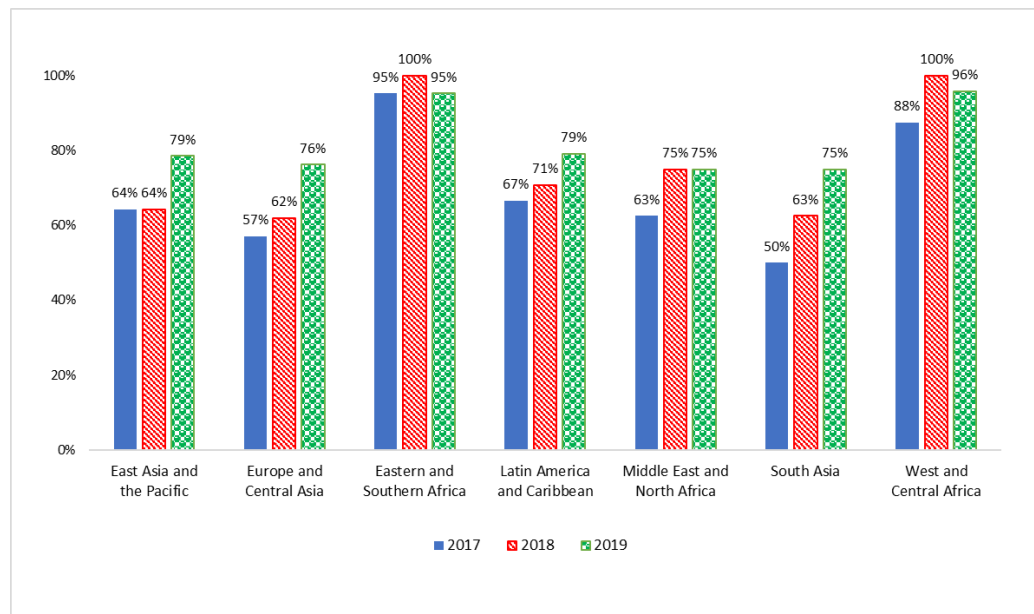


7. Underpinning this approach is the UNICEF commitment to innovation, a cross-cutting principle of the Gender Action Plan, and the need to integrate gender equality across development and humanitarian contexts.

#### A. Integrated gender results

8. In 2019, a total of 107 UNICEF country offices out of 128 included at least one or more integrated gender results in their programming – 15 more than at the baseline, and the highest number ever for UNICEF.

Figure II  
**UNICEF country offices that included an integrated gender priority from the Gender Action Plan in their country programme document, 2017–2019**



### 1. Quality and dignified maternal care

9. UNICEF continues to prioritize the treatment of mothers and the quality of perinatal care according to the World Health Organization (WHO) standards of quality, equity and dignity.<sup>1</sup> In 2019, eight more countries supported by UNICEF (compared to 23 in 2018) were implementing plans to strengthen the quality of maternal and newborn primary health care. This number is 10 times the baseline. Steady increases were also reported across other indicators, placing UNICEF on track to either meet or surpass the 2021 targets. The percentage of pregnant women receiving at least four antenatal visits increased from 57 per cent in 2018 to 60 per cent in 2019 towards an overall target of 65 per cent by 2021. The proportion of mothers receiving postnatal care increased to 60 per cent from 48 per cent at the baseline, exceeding the 2021 target. In 2018 and 2019, in 52 high-burden maternal mortality countries, 55 million live births took place in health facilities supported by UNICEF – 27.4 million live births in 2019 alone. Seventy-six per cent of live births were attended by skilled health personnel, with UNICEF on track to meet the 2021 target of 77 per cent.

10. In 2019, UNICEF continued to support strengthening health systems through improved facilities and attention to respectful maternal care. In Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and the United Republic of Tanzania, mechanisms to improve rights-based care in health facilities included processes to report abuse, leading to a reduction of all forms of abuse. Mobile clinics helped to scale up coverage of health services in Afghanistan, reaching over 1.4 million vulnerable women and children in remote areas with perinatal care, immunization and medical treatment for newborn and childhood illnesses.

11. Complementing these efforts, UNICEF health programmes are increasingly investing in care and support for parents and caregivers to promote early childhood development. In Mali and Sierra Leone, UNICEF rolled out pilot programming in

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, Quality, Equity, Dignity: Improving quality of care to achieve ambitious SDG targets to end preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths, 2017.

2019 to enhance the skills of community health workers to address the specific needs of mothers, including pregnant and parenting adolescents.

## **2. Equal health care and nutrition for girls and boys**

12. By end-2019, 67 countries had multisectoral and gender-responsive national plans to reach targets on adolescent health, up from 50 countries in 2018 (25 at baseline) and surpassing the 2021 target of 45 countries. In Madagascar, UNICEF supported increased access to and quality of community health services for adolescent girls and boys, reaching 20,400 of them with sexual and reproductive health and rights-related information. The Let Youth Lead initiative in Lesotho led to an improvement in adolescents' knowledge about sexual and reproductive health (from a level of 30 per cent to 72 per cent).

13. Sixty-eight countries integrated nutrition counselling in their pregnancy-care programmes, compared to 57 in 2018 and exceeding the 2019 target by 8. Over a third (36.6 per cent) of pregnant women in programmes supported by UNICEF received iron and folic acid supplementation to prevent anaemia, exceeding the 2019 benchmark (35 per cent). In Bangladesh, for example, supplementation reached 3.7 million pregnant and lactating women in 2019 (up from 2.7 million in 2018). In humanitarian settings, UNICEF focused on hard-to-reach women and children. In the Syrian Arab Republic, for example, through social mobilization, UNICEF reached over 385,000 caregivers with messages on complementary feeding and promotion of diet diversity, contributing to 1.3 million women and children being screened for malnutrition and 5,116 children under 5 years of age (55 per cent girls) receiving life-saving treatment for severe acute malnutrition.

14. Progress in prevention of mother-to-child-transmission (MTCT) of HIV has flatlined, partly because of a global decline in resources. In 2019, some 989,500 pregnant women living with HIV received antiretroviral treatment to reduce the risk of MTCT through UNICEF-supported programmes, compared to 988,900 in 2018. UNICEF and partners need to significantly scale up proven interventions. In Eswatini, for example, the transmission rate at 18 months fell from 7.8 per cent in 2018 to 4.8 per cent in 2019, exceeding the global elimination criteria of under 5 per cent.

## **3. Gender equality in health systems and among the workforce**

15. Professionalization of community health workers – the majority of whom are women – is a priority result under the Gender Action Plan. This will help to ensure that the valuable frontline workforce not only is formally recognized but also is given adequate remuneration, job security and training. By end-2019, the 25 countries with a high burden of childhood illnesses (8 at baseline) had accounted for such workers in their health systems.

16. UNICEF supported skills-building for community health workers. In the 25 high-burden countries that reported data between 2016 and 2019, a total of 190,315 workers (35,840 in 2019 and 60,376 in 2018) enhanced their skills in integrated case management, exceeding the UNICEF 2021 target of 160,000 (cumulative). In humanitarian settings, where health systems are extremely fragile, community health workers are frequently the only lifeline for people to access basic and emergency health services. In Somalia and Yemen, UNICEF built the capacity of more than 1,500 workers to provide local communities with critical health information and nutrition services, and to make timely referrals for malaria, tuberculosis, HIV, and gender-based violence counselling services. Approximately 75 per cent of these health workers were women, and most reported improved self-esteem and a sense of professionalism after the training.

17. Female community health workers play a crucial role in global immunization. For example, women make up over 87 per cent of recruited polio vaccinators in Nigeria, and 63 per cent in Pakistan. Working with partners that include Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and WHO, UNICEF is developing tools to help countries to identify the gender-related barriers to women being engaged as community health workers. UNICEF and its Global Polio Eradication Initiative partners are adapting gender-responsive local approaches to increasing women's participation in polio interventions, while also monitoring countries' performance in engaging women as polio workers.

#### **4. Equality in education for girls and boys**

18. In the past two decades, gender disparities in the number of out-of-school children globally have narrowed considerably, although wide regional variations exist, and progress is slowing. At the primary level, more girls are completing school than ever before, although 5.5 million more girls than boys are out of school today.<sup>2</sup>

19. UNICEF and its partners continue to invest substantially in improving educational access, retention and learning opportunities for girls and boys. In 2019, over 17 million out-of-school children participated in early learning and primary or secondary education through UNICEF-supported programmes, compared to nearly 12 million in 2018. In humanitarian settings, this number was 7.4 million children, compared to 6.9 million in 2018. Overall, 8.4 million girls benefited in 2019, compared to some 5 million in 2018.

20. In 2019, 49 per cent of UNICEF-supported countries (11 per cent more than 2018) had effective mechanisms to prevent and respond to school-related gender-based violence, a major barrier to children's education access and learning. The Zero Tolerance project in Nepal, using a system-level multipronged approach, provided nearly 65,000 students (34,600 girls) with life skills, and trained 5,000 school staff members to respond to and refer cases of violence. Surveys showed that the number of students who viewed violence as unacceptable rose from 36.5 per cent to 70.3 per cent, while the number of students who took action because a friend/classmate experienced violence increased by more than a third.

#### **5. Gender equality in teaching and learning systems**

21. UNICEF support contributed to advances in several countries in gender-responsive systems-strengthening of teaching and learning systems. In 2019, 45 countries (an increase of 25 per cent over the baseline) had gender-responsive education systems. Likewise, 37 countries with UNICEF-supported programmes had gender-responsive teaching and learning systems that integrated principles of gender equality into education programming, training and measurement activities. This represents 40 per cent of countries reporting, compared to 31 per cent in 2018, and 18 per cent in 2017.

22. UNICEF support in Kyrgyzstan contributed to system-wide integration of gender and anti-discrimination methodologies so that all new textbooks for primary and secondary schools are free of gender stereotypes and promote positive gender norms. Similarly, in Bangladesh, UNICEF support to national partners led to the first comprehensive curriculum that specifically incorporates teaching around gender equality.

23. In 2019, over 4 million children (2.3 million girls) participated in skills-development programmes, increasing from 2 million in 2018. In humanitarian settings

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, UN-Women and Plan International, *A New Era for Girls – Taking stock of 25 years of progress*, New York, 2020, <[www.unicef.org/reports/new-era-for-girls-2020](http://www.unicef.org/reports/new-era-for-girls-2020)>.

since 2017, nearly 7.4 million children have benefited from such programmes. In Myanmar, UNICEF supported the Learning Together programme, which uses a gender lens to promote an inclusive environment and improve educational outcomes.

24. Sexual and reproductive health information is increasingly being integrated into life skills curricula to counter harmful gender norms and stereotypes. In Viet Nam, through government support from UNICEF and its key United Nations partners, comprehensive sexuality education was incorporated into the newly approved national school curriculum, and Cambodia, Malaysia and Myanmar incorporated it into their school-based programming in life skills.

25. Overall, despite promising gains, progress for gender equality in education remains uneven, particularly in learning outcomes, which are not on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. UNICEF has identified the ‘learning crisis’ as a key midterm review area for acceleration, particularly for marginalized girls, and will intensify investment in confronting systemic barriers to learning, particularly the interlinked challenges girls face and the rigid social norms that underpin them.

## **6. Addressing gender-based violence against girls, boys and women**

26. UNICEF programming gained significant momentum in 2019 to tackle gender-based violence, including in humanitarian contexts. The Safe to Learn initiative, for example, targets violence in schools, with a focus on gender. As part of the Spotlight Initiative, which is making targeted, large-scale investments to respond to and prevent gender-based violence, UNICEF began implementing the programme in 2019 in 13 country programmes in Africa and Latin America. For instance, in Uganda, at least 15,000 parents and caregivers were reached with community engagement to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and violence against children, through promoting non-violent parenting practices and challenging harmful gender norms.

27. UNICEF intensified efforts to scale up violence prevention and response to child victims of violence in 141 countries in 2019, compared to 134 in 2018. Over 2.7 million children who experienced violence were reached by health, social work or justice and law enforcement services through UNICEF support (compared to over 2.3 million in 2018). Low reporting rates worldwide, however, continue to dampen progress. Promising programming is taking place in Ghana, Namibia, Nepal, the Philippines and Turkey to train justice, health and social service professionals. In Nepal, UNICEF trained 350 law enforcement and justice officials to apply gender and child-friendly approaches to case management, victim assistance and witness protection. This contributed to an increase of nearly 50 per cent in reported cases concerning rape, child marriage and domestic violence between 2018 and 2019.

28. The 2019 evaluation of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation reinforced the potential of joint action to accelerate progress. With its partners, UNICEF contributed to strengthened national legal frameworks, enhanced coordination among child protection actors, and improved awareness about FGM-related health risks, and generated changes in discourse related to FGM in the 21 countries with FGM programmes (including 17 countries that are part of the Joint Programme). An estimated 135,000 girls and women received health services, while over 23,400 received FGM-related social and legal services. In addition, some 8.5 million people participated in UNICEF-supported education, community dialogue and social mobilization platforms promoting FGM elimination, up from 6.8 million in 2018. In 2017, 61 per cent of women and 57 per cent of men believed that FGM should be eliminated; in 2019, these numbers had increased to 65 per cent and 62 per cent, respectively.

## 7. Gender-responsive water, sanitation and hygiene systems

29. In both development and emergency settings, UNICEF continued to prioritize gender-responsive water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems-strengthening, making women and girls central to WASH decision-making processes, and promotion of positive social norms on gender. Disaggregation of data by gender has progressed. In 2018, just 28 per cent of sanitation and water data (in development settings) was gender-disaggregated; this percentage rose to 87 in 2019.

30. Through UNICEF-supported programmes, nearly 18.3 million additional people (8.3 million women and girls in 47 countries reporting sex-disaggregated data) gained access to safe drinking water in 2019, bringing the total since 2017 to 37 million. Almost 15.5 million additional people (7.6 million women and girls in 62 reporting countries) gained access to basic sanitation services, compared to 10.8 million in 2018. In humanitarian situations, UNICEF provided access to safe water to 39.1 million people in 64 countries (100 per cent of the targeted population; 19.6 million females), and sanitation facilities to 9.3 million people in 50 countries.

31. UNICEF promotes the meaningful participation of women and girls in community water-management committees, especially in leadership positions, including in Eritrea, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan. Programmes also encourage women's participation in training programmes. In Yemen, for example, 48 per cent of trainees for positions as sectoral water authorities and in government departments were women. In India, UNICEF support for alternative credit models through women's self-help groups helped women to access 15,000 affordable WASH-related loans.

32. Between 2017 and 2019, UNICEF supported improved gender-segregated WASH facilities and programmes in 13,000 schools in 63 countries. Upgrades in 200 schools in Papua New Guinea, for instance, provided more than 40,000 schoolchildren with age-appropriate, inclusive, accessible and gender-segregated WASH facilities, including MHH rooms, and incinerators for sanitary waste.

## 8. Positive gender socialization for girls and boys

33. Programming on positive gender norms and socialization is being done in 120 UNICEF country programmes in all regions. It is particularly focused on gender-responsive school curricula, positive parenting, and multisectoral interventions addressing gender norms linked to harmful practices. In 2019, 30 country programmes identified positive gender socialization as a priority gender result, up from 25 in 2018, and 22 in 2017. Nine more countries than in 2018 (36) reported implementation of large-scale programmes addressing gender-discriminatory roles and practices among children. Yet implementation faces challenges, such as a lack of data and measurement methodologies to assess norms-change over time, and limited funding. In response, UNICEF is investing in developing stronger data generation and analysis in this area and pursuing greater resource mobilization.

34. The Global Thematic Fund for Gender Equality, with contributions from the Governments of Canada and Luxembourg, was instrumental in catalysing gender socialization work in 2019, towards developing quality programming models poised for scale and sustainability. Eight countries (Armenia, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ghana, Nepal, the United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam) and Kosovo,<sup>3</sup> as well as three regions (East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin

<sup>3</sup> All references to Kosovo in this document are made in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



America and Caribbean) were allocated thematic funding to pilot, test and accelerate interventions.

35. Several strategies were employed to address harmful gender norms, including through edutainment interventions, gender-responsive parenting practices, and legal frameworks for more equitable caregiving. With UNICEF support, India developed gender-sensitive guidelines for the free national public television broadcaster, which reaches 99 per cent of the population. UNICEF-supported advocacy around family-friendly policies contributed to legislation extending paid maternity leave in the Philippines, and paternity leave in the Dominican Republic. In Argentina, 120 companies joined a Corporate Promotion Group established by UNICEF to promote family-friendly policies both internally and among companies' clients and suppliers. These policies include improving parental leave, breastfeeding spaces, telecommuting options and diversity programmes.

36. In 2019, a UNICEF Global Social Protection Framework was launched, focused on the transformational potential of inclusive, gender-responsive social protection programming, including changing harmful gender norms. Cash and in-kind transfers can substantially increase access for the poorest to health, education and other services. In 2019, UNICEF-supported cash transfer programmes reached 13.9 million girls and 10.9 million boys, across 36 countries that reported sex-disaggregated data. In Rwanda, UNICEF supported scale-up of a public infrastructure social protection scheme, expanding jobs for extremely vulnerable households that provide longer-term employment, flexible hours and closer work sites. In 2019, the programme reached nearly 30,000 households, of which 67 per cent were female-headed.

## **B. Targeted priorities on empowering adolescent girls**

37. Across the five targeted priorities in the Gender Action Plan, UNICEF emphasizes cross-sectoral approaches centred on the interconnected challenges facing adolescent girls, especially the disadvantaged. In the areas of child marriage, HIV, and increasingly, gender-based violence and MHH, strong partnerships and global frameworks have achieved significant results.

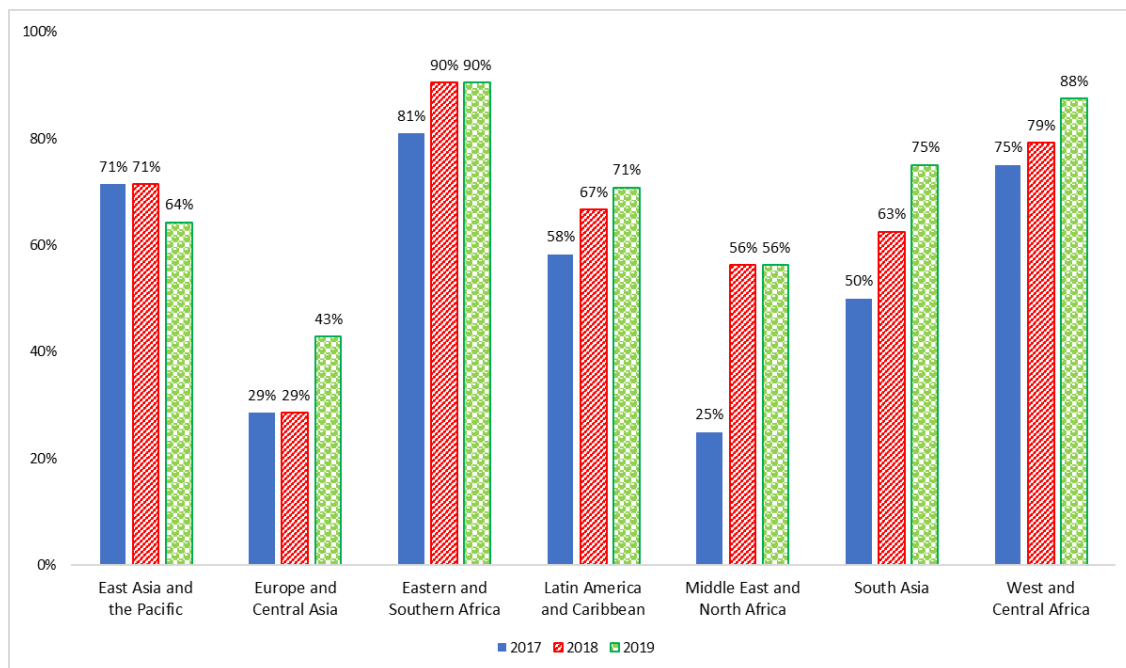
38. In 2019, 90 UNICEF country programmes included results in one or more of the targeted gender priorities, increasing from 84 country programmes in 2018, and 73 at baseline. Interventions around MHH, HPV vaccination, and gender-based violence achieved progress in 2019.

### **1. Girls' nutrition, pregnancy care, and HIV and HPV prevention**

39. Since 2018, gender programming has broadened in relation to teen pregnancy prevention and care, HPV vaccination, and gender-responsive adolescent health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights. Nutrition outcomes have remained largely focused on anaemia prevention, with some emerging work around dietary diversity and body confidence.

40. In 2019, 60 million adolescent girls and boys were reached with services to prevent anaemia and other forms of malnutrition. UNICEF support to the health and education systems in Ghana led, in 2019, to over 250 schools in five regions promoting better diets and healthy dietary practices, while a nationwide roll-out of iron and folic acid supplementation for adolescent girls showed a promising reduction of 26 per cent in anaemia levels among targeted girls. In Afghanistan, nearly 1 million girls received weekly iron and folic acid supplementation through school, a scale-up due to programme expansion to non-formal Accelerated Learning Centres.

Figure III  
**Country programmes that include results on adolescent girls' targeted priorities, 2017–2019**



41. UNICEF continued to support 52 Every Newborn Action Plan countries to provide quality maternal care for adolescent mothers (aged 15–19), contributing to 74 per cent of live births to mothers aged 15–19 being attended by skilled health personnel, compared to 67 per cent at baseline. Progress was more limited regarding perinatal care: the percentage of mothers receiving postnatal care rose by just 2 percentage points in 2019, while there was a slight drop from 53 to 52 per cent in 2018 and 2019, respectively, in the percentage of adolescents receiving at least four antenatal visits.

42. Social mobilization and technology-based innovation helped to improve adolescent health-seeking behaviour, including around sexual and reproductive health and rights. The ‘SHNET’ mobile application, developed by a young adolescent girl in Kosovo, provides vital, accurate information on sexual and reproductive health there, and has been downloaded by over 5,000 adolescent users. In Thailand, a UNICEF-supported online health platform has exponentially increased its number of users – from 150,000 in 2017 to 1.8 million in 2019 – seeking information on adolescent reproductive health.

43. Global efforts to improve access to the HPV vaccine and increase coverage among girls are gaining ground. In partnership with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the WHO Global Initiative Against HPV and Cervical Cancer, UNICEF supported 8 countries (the target for 2019 is 12, compared to 4 in 2018) to scale up vaccination (Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Solomon Islands, Uzbekistan and Zambia). In five countries reporting coverage, nearly 1 million girls received the full schedule of vaccination.

44. There has been only tentative progress in addressing HIV among adolescents, particularly girls. More girls are getting tested and know their status than before – 13.5 million in 2019 compared to 10.6 million in 2016 – and more so than boys; yet they remain far more vulnerable to HIV. UNICEF, as a member of the global prevention coalition, is addressing the multiple vulnerabilities experienced by

adolescent girls and young women through health facilities, schools, community structures and other places. Community-level, peer-led interventions are being undertaken by several countries, including through the inter-agency programme 2gether 4 SRHR, which addresses gender-related barriers associated with HIV prevention and unintended pregnancies among adolescents and young women. For example, the Young Mentor Mothers Community Initiative in Lesotho, Malawi and Zimbabwe trains young mothers who are living with HIV to fulfil a peer-support role for other such young mothers. Early results indicate that there is an increase in service usage, improved opportunities for young child stimulation, and stronger linkages between health facilities and communities. In Malawi, for instance, young mentor mothers made 2,200 home visits and reached 289 pregnant and breastfeeding adolescents living with HIV in 2019.

## 2. Girls' secondary education and skills-building

45. UNICEF and partners are continuing efforts to remove the barriers that prevent adolescent girls, especially the most marginalized, from accessing education, and developing the skills they need for their future lives and employment. Against a 2019 target of 8 per cent, 23 per cent of countries (out of 99 reporting) with UNICEF-supported programmes implemented systems that institutionalize gender-equitable skills for earning a living, personal empowerment, active citizenship and/or employability (compared to 16 per cent in 2018).

46. Over 4 million adolescents (61 per cent girls) across 113 countries participated in or led civic engagement activities through UNICEF-supported programmes in 2019, above the target of 3.2 million. Thirty-one per cent of UNICEF country offices routinely engaged adolescents, including adolescent girls from marginalized backgrounds, in planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of programmes, exceeding the 2019 milestone of 30 per cent.

47. The number of out-of-school girls of secondary-school age has dropped significantly in the past two decades. Still, 97 million secondary-age girls are not in school, and just two out of five complete upper-secondary school today.<sup>4</sup> UNICEF supports Governments to strengthen the gender-responsiveness of education systems by addressing the bottlenecks that keep girls from learning. In Ethiopia, where girls drop out at high rates due to child marriage, pregnancy and gender-based violence, clubs for young people, especially adolescent girls, are being institutionalized by the Ministry of Education, with UNICEF support. The clubs, which offer life-skills programming and provide information on health care and responding to gender-based violence, are expected to benefit an estimated 8.6 million adolescent girls in 2020.

48. In many countries, progress in educational achievement among girls and young women is not translating into employability because of barriers to skills-development opportunities, such as restrictive gender norms. While the number of UNICEF country offices working on girls' skills development remains limited, dedicated quality programming has gathered private sector support. For example, through the Generation Unlimited partnership, UNICEF and its partners are working in 25 front-runner countries to bridge education and training with employment and entrepreneurship for youth, including stepping up investment in building girls' skills. Promising examples include the Youth Innovation Lab in Montenegro, which was expanded in 2019 with UNICEF support to reach 40,000 adolescents (65 per cent female), comprising 45 per cent of the adolescent population in Montenegro. Learning from the programme is informing the development of similar initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Morocco and Serbia. Seventy-eight per cent of the alumni from the skills-to-employment initiative TechnoGirls in South Africa, which targets

<sup>4</sup>UNICEF, UN-Women and Plan International, *A New Era for Girls*.

marginalized adolescent girls, are studying in a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) field now, and employed graduates have seen their yearly household income increase from less than \$5,000 to \$36,000.

### **3. Gender-based violence in emergencies**

49. In 2019, just over 3.3 million women, girls and boys in emergencies were reached with interventions on risk mitigation, prevention or response to address gender-based violence through UNICEF-supported programmes. The interventions reached 116 per cent of the estimated target population, almost triple the number of girls and boys reached in 2018. The large numbers underscore the escalation of humanitarian crises and concomitant gender-based violence in all its forms.

50. UNICEF continues to strengthen its partnerships, and its high-impact contributions to the humanitarian community of practice, while scaling up support to countries to institutionalize gender-based violence response, prevention and risk mitigation. The goal to address gender-based violence in at least 50 per cent of emergencies in the 2020 Humanitarian Action for Children appeals was surpassed by year-end. Action to address gender-based violence was eventually integrated into 71 per cent of the 2020 appeals. Further, UNICEF launched its Operational Guide and Resource Pack on gender-based violence in emergencies and co-led the development and launch of the Inter-agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies.

51. On prevention, UNICEF supported a range of awareness-raising, information dissemination, life skills and risk-mitigation activities, such as cross-sectoral participatory safety audits. For example, in Somalia, the multisectoral Communities Care programme, which uses community dialogue to challenge social norms around child marriage, violence against children and women, and FGM, has engaged more than 190,000 people. Safety audits carried out in 58 sites in 2019, with follow-up programming, benefited some 1.2 million people.

52. Innovation continues to be a key strategy to step up response. An example is a new UNICEF-UNFPA initiative in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, which uses the information-sharing Primero/GBVIMS+ platform to support case management. Testing of the platform involves 200 service providers across 14 organizations and will inform expected roll-out in Lebanon, Libya and Nigeria.

53. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse remained a top organizational priority. UNICEF led the development of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Plan for Accelerating Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Response at Country-Level. This commits to a scale-up of such protection through collective action and investment across all humanitarian and refugee response plans. By the end of 2019, UNICEF was actively scaling up protection in 32 countries across six regions that have a humanitarian response.

### **4. Child marriage and early unions**

54. A 2019 independent evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage found that it plays a strong role within the global movement to end child marriage, including through fostering stronger, sustainable systems and critical capacity to accelerate solutions that put achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 5.3 within reach. Importantly, its successes – such as evidence-generation and multisectoral platforms – have catalysed efforts outside the programme, so that more countries than ever before are working to end child marriage and early unions. In 2019, 46 UNICEF country programmes included this area as a gender priority, an increase from 38 in 2016.

55. Legislative and policy advances occurred in several countries in 2019. Amendment to the Family Code of Uzbekistan equalized the age of marriage for men and women to 18 years. Similarly, in Indonesia, amendment of the Marriage Act raised the marriage age for girls (with parental permission) from 16 to 19 years, in line with that for young men. In addition, UNICEF is partnering with two Islamic faith-based organizations with over 32 million members, to develop gender-responsive religious decisions and policies to promote greater community support for ending child marriage.

56. UNICEF continues to support national partners to implement and resource national plans for girls' protection, health and well-being. Countries that had approved national and subnational strategies and action plans to end child marriage rose from 33 in 2018 to 42 in 2019. Of these, 24 have costed action plans (up from 15 in 2018) and 12 have gender-responsive budgetary allocations (up from 10 in 2018). Belize became the first country in Latin America and the Caribbean to develop a national road map to end child marriage and early unions. In India, UNICEF supported the development of six costed state-level action plans for adolescent empowerment related to ending child marriage, and expansion of community engagement from 16 to 80 districts, reaching millions of parents and adolescents.

57. In 2019, some 5.7 million adolescent girls received UNICEF-supported prevention and care interventions related to child marriage, including through life-skills initiatives and links to health-related services. This number was almost a million more than in 2018, and far exceeds the 2021 target of 670,000. Quality programmes are emphasizing reaching the most vulnerable. For instance, in Burkina Faso, where political instability is hampering outreach, especially to marginalized girls, village child protection committees carry out door-to-door household visits in targeted communities and camps for internally displaced persons. This led to more than 310,000 at-risk adolescent girls being enrolled in adolescent clubs and empowered with information on life skills and health, an important strategy to reduce child marriage.

## **5. Dignified menstrual health and hygiene**

58. UNICEF support for MHH across country programmes continued to expand in 2019, with activities in 72 countries (in both development and humanitarian settings) and extensive global support for capacity-building, policy formulation and the promotion of innovative programming.

59. In 2019, UNICEF provided MHH-related services – distribution of dignity kits, provision of private washing and disposal facilities, and MHH information – to 1 million women and girls from 39 emergency countries. This included 24,232 women and girls living with disabilities.

60. UNICEF continued to support national partners to institutionalize MHH into national education and health systems. In 2019, 51 countries reported that national WASH in Schools strategies included MHH targets. A new multisectoral national strategy on MHH was formulated in Bangladesh, while in Malawi, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, new policies on sanitation and WASH incorporated MHH components.

61. UNICEF also supported schools with MHH services (20,495 schools, up from 18,000 in 2018, and far surpassing the 2019 cumulative target of 4,500). This included the construction of private and secure sanitation and washing facilities, menstrual-pad disposal facilities, and MHH/hygiene education. In Ghana, increased access to sanitation benefited over 44,000 children from 130 schools with gender-separated and child-friendly WASH facilities, while about 150,800 children (about 50 per cent girls) received information on hygiene practices and MHH using the 'Be Amazing. Period!' education curriculum developed with UNICEF support.

62. Innovation accelerated MHH results. The Oky period-tracker mobile app, developed by UNICEF, was launched on Google's Android platform to help girls to access accurate and context-specific information about menstrual health. In Ukraine, a social media campaign – reaching about 3.7 young people — aiming to break taboos about MHH among young people, and to generate evidence, used the UNICEF U-Report platform to assess what adolescents wanted to know about MHH. Further, the Duke (University)-UNICEF Innovation Accelerator was launched in 2019 with an initial focus on MHH in East Africa. Six entrepreneurs received grants to test and scale their innovations to improve the knowledge, facilities and supplies girls need to manage their menstruation without stress or stigma.

## **IV. Institutional strengthening**

### **A. Gender equality in quality programming at scale**

63. UNICEF invests in making its institutional systems and strategies more gender-responsive, and ultimately more transformative. Reflecting these investments, UNICEF performance in the UN-SWAP has improved steadily. In 2019, UNICEF met or exceeded 82 per cent of all benchmarks (up from 76 per cent in 2018), becoming one of the highest-performing participants.

64. A series of institutional accountability benchmarks are used to track country-level gender mainstreaming, including gender analysis in programme design, integration of gender priority results into programmes, monitoring, resourcing, capacity and accountability. Using 2018 as the baseline, a composite GAP Institutional Standard was developed in 2019 to monitor whether country offices meet organizational standards on implementation. In 2018, 49 per cent of UNICEF country offices (63 out of 128 offices) met the standard; in 2019, 65 per cent did (83 offices).

65. Most regions have maintained a similar level of engagement on the benchmarks. Notable improvements occurred in East Asia and the Pacific and in South Asia, for meeting the standards for integration across sectors, gender expenditures and conducting gender analysis. Globally, the number of gender programmatic reviews led by country offices increased from 55 to 71. Yet variation in the reviews' quality contributed to a decline in the number of country offices that met the quality standard for gender integration into their country programme documents.

#### **1. Gender-responsive programming**

66. Throughout 2018, UNICEF developed a comprehensive set of tools on how to systematically apply gender analysis in country programme design, planning and implementation. In 2019, UNICEF focused on increasing use of these tools to improve the quality of gender reviews and provision of technical support on gender from headquarters and regional offices to countries. Forty-one countries received support on data collection/analysis, training, partnerships and communications.

67. Notably, the India Country Office took steps in 2019 to establish a compulsory, automated mechanism to ensure more effective results assessment module reporting on gender. In four field offices (serving seven states), 'state-level' gender action plans were also developed, linked to existing budgeted workplans.

68. Beyond planning, however, key gaps concerning gender capacity and accountability could affect programme implementation. For example, while 85 per cent of country offices 'mentioned' accountability to achieve gender results in their country management plans, only 12 per cent had this 'fully fleshed out' (meaning that leadership, and roles and responsibilities for each sector were clearly articulated).

Only 55 per cent of country offices had the requisite management oversight to support implementation of gender results (a slight increase of 3 per cent from 2018). This reflects the evaluation finding that greater accountability is needed at various organizational levels.

69. As noted in the evaluation (as well as in UNICEF humanitarian-related evaluations), gender integration into the organization's humanitarian programming has been limited mainly to a focus on gender-based violence in emergencies, and improvements in recent years in collecting sex-disaggregated data more consistently. In response, UNICEF is increasing efforts to integrate gender analysis into its humanitarian programmes, including by revising the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action by 2020, so that it includes clear standards and benchmarks to ensure that the voices of girls and women are central in the design and delivery of programming.

## **2. Gender data and evidence**

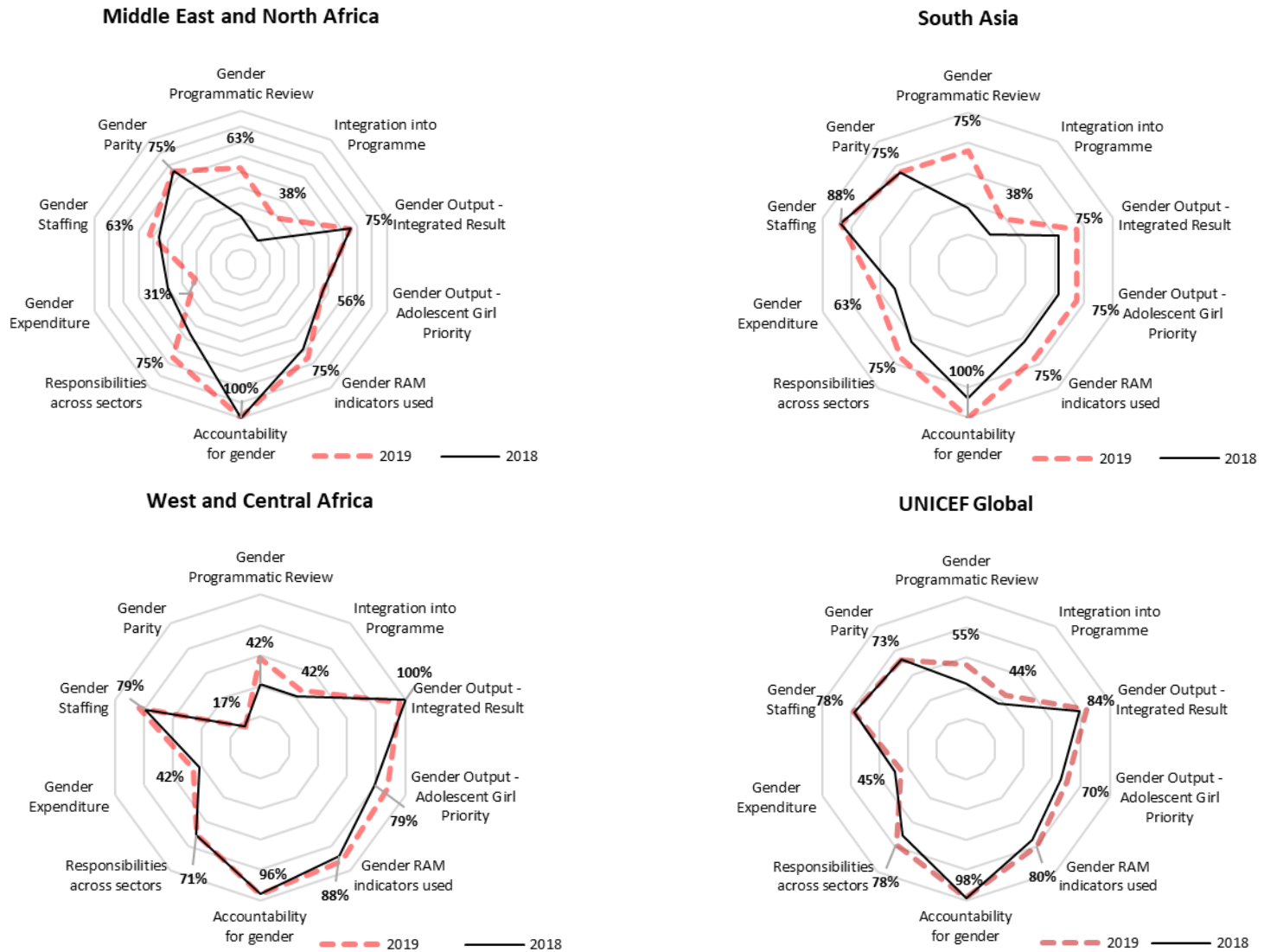
70. A UNICEF gender data strategy was launched in 2019, outlining how UNICEF uses cutting-edge methodologies and gender analyses, technical support and gender-data dissemination to strengthen the evidence base for gender-responsive policy and programming.

71. Innovative methodologies are helping to close critical gaps in gender data. In 2019, these included a multiple indicator cluster survey module. This includes measuring children's time use; gender- and age-sensitive estimations of multidimensional child poverty; and guidance on strengthening administrative data systems to address gender-data discrepancies.

72. UNICEF inter-agency participation remains significant in this area. The organization serves on the steering committee for the Making Every Woman and Girl Count programme on gender statistics and is a member of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics, the coordinating and guiding body of the Global Gender Statistics Programme, implemented by the United Nations Statistics Division. UNICEF also participates in the technical advisory group to Equal Measures 2030, a global partnership of civil society organizations developing an SDG Gender Index to connect gender data and evidence with country-level advocacy.

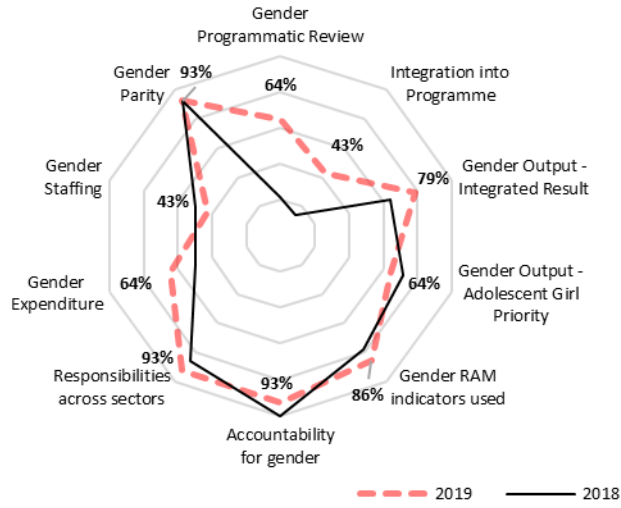
73. To address the still-persistent challenge of limited collection, use and analysis of gender data by UNICEF country offices in their programming, UNICEF is working to enhance online data portals and is partnering with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to support national statistical offices to improve collection of gender data. For 2020, UNICEF aims to improve its research and evidence agenda.

Figure IV  
**Percentage of UNICEF country offices that met institutional benchmarks globally and across regions, 2018 and 2019**

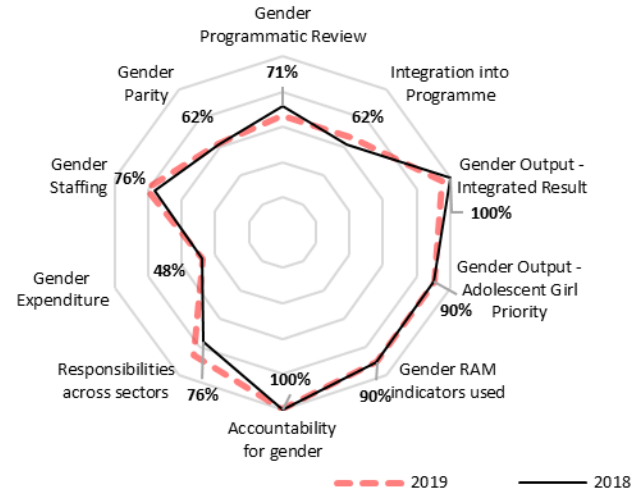




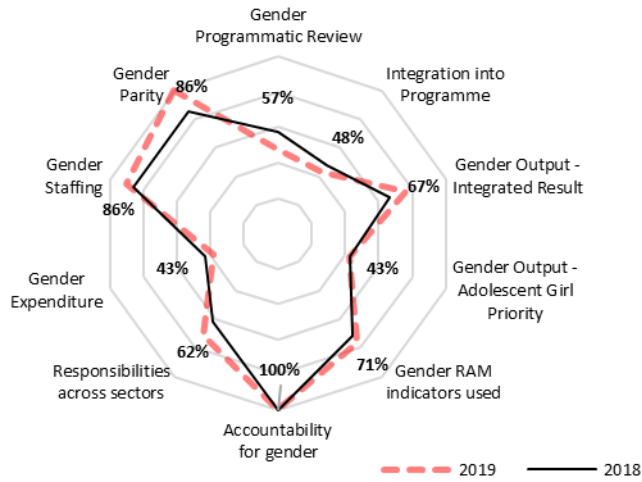
### East Asia and the Pacific



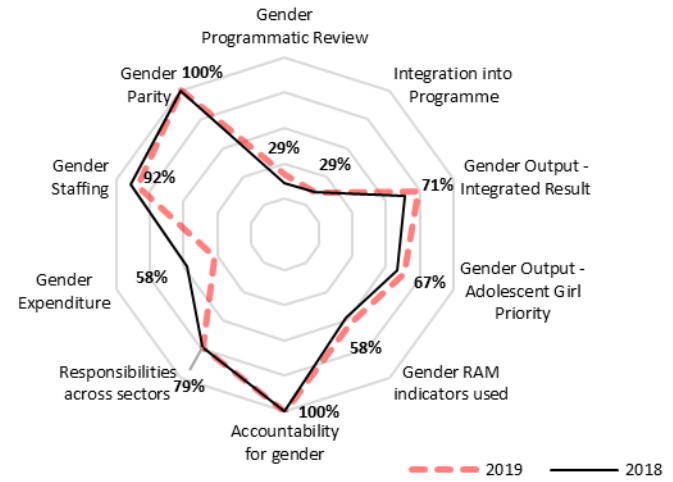
### Eastern and Southern Africa



### Europe and Central Asia



### Latin America and Caribbean



### **3. Strategic partnerships and communications**

74. Partnerships with other United Nations agencies, national partners, global organizations, civil society and the private sector are crucial for UNICEF to fulfil its mandate on gender equality, meet the Sustainable Development Goals and advance the United Nations reform agenda.

75. UNICEF is a joint implementer of the common chapter of the strategic plans of the United Nations Development Programme, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women, which includes a stand-alone result on gender equality. UNICEF continues to be a member of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, the UNDG Task Team on Gender, and the United Nations Task Force on Violence Against Women. It also serves as a Programme Appraisal Committee member of the Programme Advisory Committee for the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. UNICEF also co-leads a subgroup on gender and innovation for the inter-agency innovation group, participates in working groups of the High-level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality, and in the Women in the UN System group. At the country level, UNICEF is an implementing partner in all Spotlight Initiative countries, works with the Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, on HPV, gender, and equity, and is represented in the Joint United Nations Global Programme on Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control.

76. Several new initiatives for gender equality have been launched with private sector companies. UNICEF is a lead partner in Generation Unlimited and is an active member of the Unstereotype Alliance, a platform convened by UN-Women with multiple private sector companies to tackle harmful gender portrayals in advertising and marketing.

77. UNICEF communication and advocacy strategies for gender equality included an updated 2019–2020 advocacy strategy, which emphasizes empowering young people (particularly girls) to advocate for their rights. During the International Day of the Girl Child, the United Nations General Assembly and World Children's Day, UNICEF contributed to major public campaigns and events on gender issues, for example, generating 26,708 mentions of the International Day of the Girl Child on major social media. This effort produced nearly 1.4 million engagements.

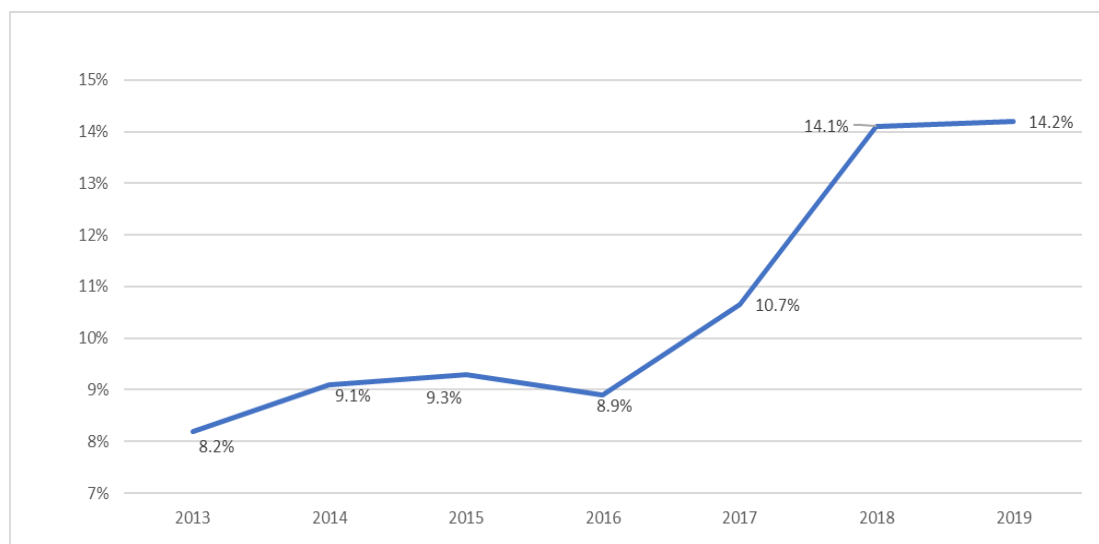
### **4. Resources**

78. UNICEF uses a gender equality marker (GEM) and gender tags to track resource allocation and expenditure in relation to gender-related programme results. All of UNICEF financial expenditure is coded against the GEM. Out of 293 UNICEF standard activities, 119 are considered to have a gender focus.

79. Following UN-SWAP best practice, UNICEF uses a financial benchmark of 15 per cent of programme expenditure to be spent on advancing gender equality. This expenditure is calculated by weighting the gender-tagged activities that fall under outputs having gender equality as the principal or significant objective. Based on this formula, expenditure on gender-transformative results in 2019 was 14.2 per cent, slightly more than the 14.1 per cent reported in 2018. Further, it is estimated that 69 per cent of total expenditure (approximately \$3.7 billion, and 6 per cent higher than in 2018) contributes to gender mainstreaming as measured by outputs having gender equality as either a significant or marginal objective. Concerted efforts are needed to leverage and earmark funding, including humanitarian funding, for gender equality.

80. In response to the evaluation, which noted some challenges with the accounting system, UNICEF is planning a comprehensive review of the formula and will make adjustments accordingly.

Figure V  
Trends in gender expenditures, 2013–2019



## B. Capacity and accountability on gender results

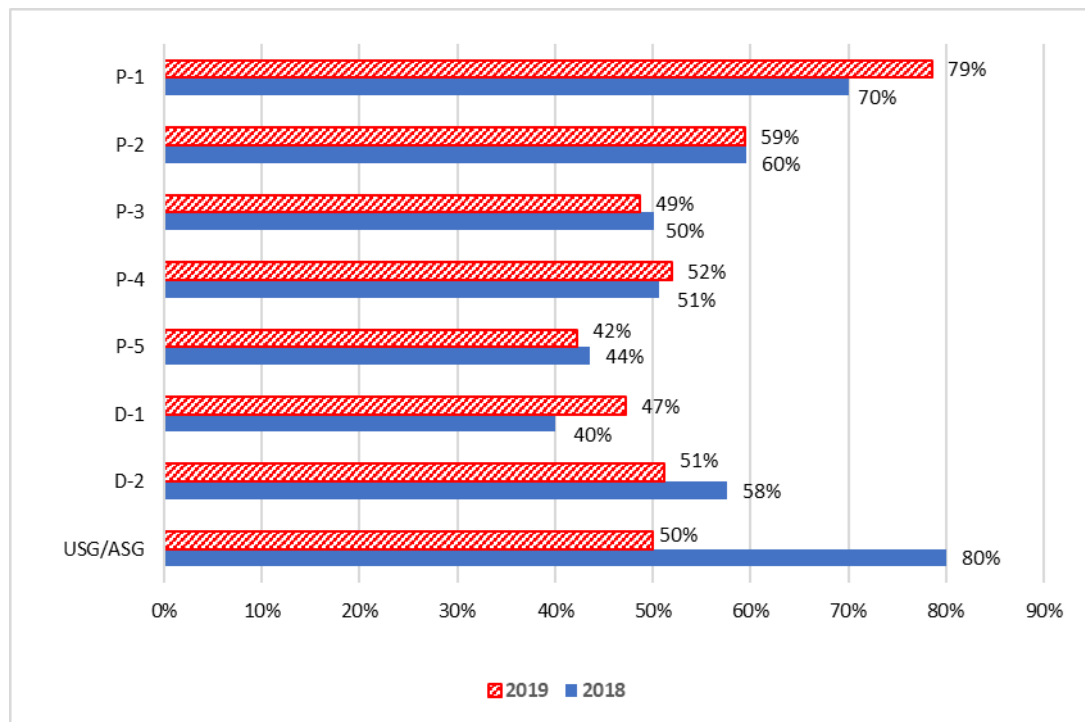
### 1. Gender capacity and gender parity

81. UNICEF has taken a broad-based approach to capacity-building in gender, focusing mainly on specialized training for sector professionals. In 2019, for example, 258 UNICEF education-sector staff members and 48 external partners completed training on gender integration in education systems through GenderPro. This is the first-ever globally accredited course on gender equality.

82. While these and other efforts are promising, as noted in the Gender Action Plan evaluation, capacity needs are extensive for all staff. Further investments are needed in capacity development, especially for leaders and managers, and during the onboarding process.

83. UNICEF achieved gender parity among professional staff members in 2019, in line with “virtual parity” (53/47) in the UN-SWAP: 48 per cent (7,311) of staff members were women and 52 per cent (7,967) men; the slight imbalance in favour of men is attributed to the addition of supernumerary positions (special advisory roles). Long a struggle, especially at senior management levels, gender parity was made a top priority in leadership recruitment in 2019. The Leadership Talent Group, the main source of candidates for the Senior Staff Rotation and Reassignment Exercise, had gender parity in 2019. By end-November, 48 per cent (aggregate) of colleagues belonging to the Senior Staff Review at D-2, D-1 and P-5 levels were women (compared to 44 per cent in 2018).

Figure VI  
**Percentage of women staff at professional and senior management levels,  
 2018–2019**

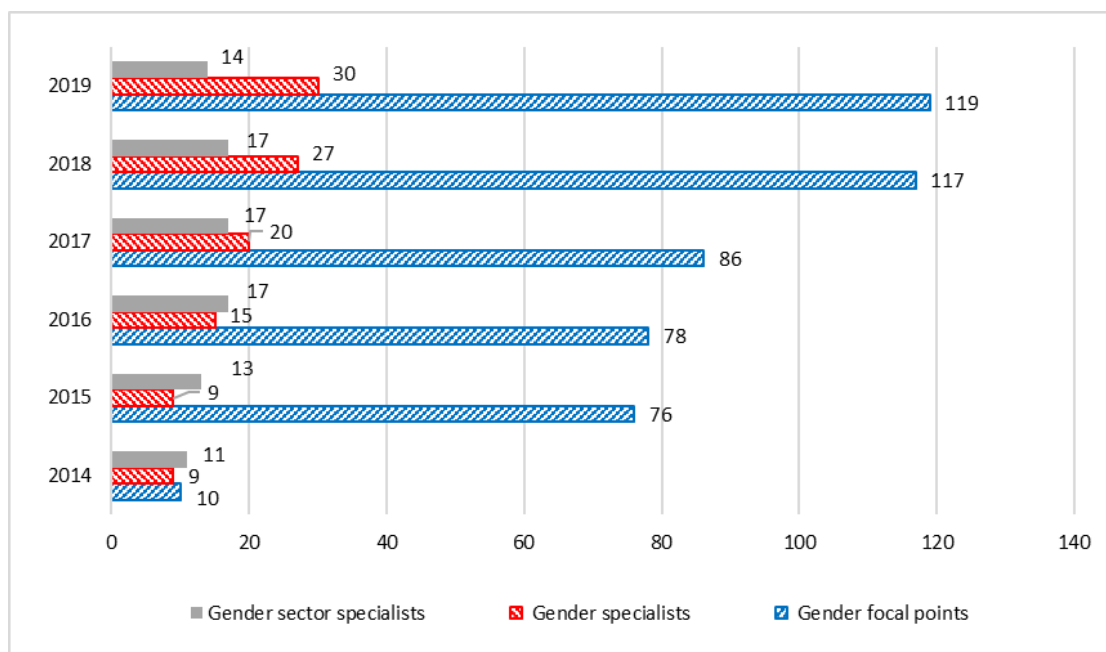


Note: P-1 to P-5 = Professional level; D-1 and D-2 = Director level; USG/ASG = Under-Secretary-General/Assistant Secretary-General.

84. There is, however, a downward trend at the P-5 level (from 44 per cent in 2018 to 42 per cent in 2019). Further, a historical gender pay gap analysis was conducted, and while no major gender differences were noted among staff advancing from levels P-3 and P-4 to P-5, and within P-5+ to the next level, the ratio of separation from UNICEF of senior women is higher than that of men. To address these gaps, UNICEF is developing measures to address barriers to equality and to ensure parity at the P-5 level by 2021.

85. Recognizing the need for strong internal capacity on gender mainstreaming and programming, UNICEF continues to expand its gender expertise at all levels. To date, 166 gender focal points have been appointed in 119 country offices, compared to 117 in 2018. However, although 119 countries had an appointed gender focal point (with 20 per cent of their time dedicated to gender-related priorities), in only 30 countries was there a full-time gender specialist.

Figure VII  
Trends in gender staffing: country offices with gender staff, 2014–2019



86. UNICEF must ensure that staff consistently adhere to guidance and that gender focal points receive more support and training. UNICEF provides training on gender equality to all new senior managers during their orientation, and its Management MasterClass aims at strengthening personal leadership and managerial capacity of staff at P-3 to P-5 levels. In response to the Gender Action Plan evaluation, UNICEF will review existing learning and training initiatives and develop an innovative training series for all staff (including at senior leadership levels) on how to integrate gender equality into their work. UNICEF will also coordinate with key United Nations partners, including UN-Women, to promote joint efforts in capacity development through the United Nations country teams.

## 2. Organizational leadership and accountability

87. UNICEF continues to exemplify leadership support and a strong willingness to drive the organization to becoming a more gender-sensitive and gender-equal workplace. A report by the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority was released with recommendations, prompting organization-wide discussions on how to adequately address concerns and begin transforming the work culture. First steps included appointing a Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture to carry the reforms forward, and a high-level group to work on the specific details of the recommendations. Further, several all-staff town hall meetings were held, where senior leadership prominently mentioned gender concerns. An internal communication strategy to improve work culture among UNICEF employees will be launched in 2020. Finally, the Executive Director and Deputy Executive Directors have continued their engagement with the Gender Push group – an informal community of colleagues across UNICEF advocating for family-friendly policies.

88. On accountability for delivery of gender results, the evaluation found that collective responsibility is explicit in the current and prior gender action plans. However, this reflected a high-level approach, rather than one focused on individuals – beyond gender-dedicated staff – holding responsibility (and being held accountable) for implementation. For a highly decentralized institution like UNICEF, this has

manifested most clearly in the persistent challenges of integrating gender into country accountability systems. Further, while senior leadership has been significantly engaged on gender-related issues, UNICEF needs to redouble efforts to clearly reference and communicate existing corporate principles of gender equality for accountability purposes across the entire organization.

89. In response, UNICEF will intensify efforts to improve capacity and accountability to deliver on gender results at the field level, while also bolstering leadership at all levels. This will mean making institutional adjustments in several areas, including: strengthening corporate monitoring systems, and the capacity of country-level staff to use them; instituting clearer requirements for gender integration in programme design, execution and monitoring; and defining a more deliberate accountability process for implementation that incorporates clear regional and country-level responsibility for results. Importantly, it will also mean securing enough resources (both human and financial) to achieve gender equality targets reflected in current and future gender action plans and UNICEF strategic plans.

## **V. Lessons learned and the way forward**

90. Since the start of the first Gender Action Plan in 2014, UNICEF has made significant strides to promote gender equality results throughout the institution and its programming. But progress has been uneven. Bottlenecks in capacity and accountability, along with still-inadequate practical understanding of gender mainstreaming at the country level, have affected the organization's ability to move decisively forward to fulfil its mandate, mission and global commitments to gender equality.

91. In this context, and at the midpoint of the second Gender Action Plan, important lessons exist to inform strategic efforts over the next two years. The evaluation validated many programmatic and institutional positives and negatives that are already recognized, and it highlighted critical issues for attention if UNICEF is to fully embrace its aspiration to be a global champion of gender equality.

92. Responding to the calls for a bolder vision and more systematic accountability for the UNICEF gender-equality agenda, UNICEF commits to increasing leadership accountability at all levels of the organization and to undertaking important institutional-strengthening efforts. In conjunction with the midterm review, UNICEF will make institutional adjustments, pertaining especially to the gender mainstreaming priorities in the Gender Action Plan. The organization will establish or strengthen accountability mechanisms to achieve results and grow the staff's sense of ownership and responsibility for gender integration at all levels. The priority-programming focus for UNICEF over the next two years will be the acceleration of results for girls and women, including in the key areas identified in the midterm review, and with an increased emphasis on humanitarian contexts. To do this, UNICEF, in coordination with other United Nations agencies, will promote investment in targeted areas, such as adolescent girls' empowerment and well-being and ending child marriage. It will simultaneously strengthen leadership, accountability and capacity across key sectors, such as health, education, nutrition and WASH. Growing partnerships and investments in evidence generation, gender data and innovations will be instrumental to success.

93. The Secretary-General's call for a Decade of Action compels all United Nations agencies to accelerate action towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. For UNICEF, this requires raising its aspirations for gender equality, both programmatically and institutionally, and as a member of the United Nations system. Building on advances made and systems already in place, UNICEF is poised to

advance towards a firmer corporate framework, robust accountabilities and strong leadership – all within the context of ever-stronger inter-agency partnerships and coordination, and the universality of the Sustainable Development Goals.

---