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for every child

# Protecting child rights in a time of crises

UNICEF Annual Report 2021





Ten-year-old students in the school courtyard at Brigadeiro Gavião Peixoto State School, in São Paulo, Brazil.

# Protecting children from the impacts of conflict, climate change and COVID-19

In 2021, the second full year of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF worked tirelessly together with partners to protect children's rights in the face of the mounting impact of COVID-19 and other threats including armed conflict and climate change.

COVID-19's harm to children – largely from unintended consequences of efforts to manage the pandemic – is clear. A record rise in child poverty has left an additional 100 million children facing deprivations in critical areas. Setbacks to progress in routine immunization increased the number of unvaccinated children by 3.4 million.

Unprecedented disruption to education has increased learning poverty. And isolation and uncertainty are taking a serious toll on children's mental health, exacerbating a long-ignored crisis.

COVID-19 vaccines and new treatments began to blunt the deadly impacts of the virus in 2021, enabling widely vaccinated societies to tentatively reopen. But unequal access perpetuated the inequalities the pandemic had already deepened. Just 1 in 6 people in low-income countries have been vaccinated with at least one dose, compared to 3 in 4 in high-income countries.

Beyond the pandemic, conflicts including in Afghanistan, northern Ethiopia, Myanmar and Yemen unleashed grave violations of children's rights and displaced children and their families, driving record humanitarian needs.

Globally, approximately 1 billion children – nearly half of the world's children – live in countries that are at an 'extremely high risk' from the impacts of climate change. Its relentless progression fueled natural disasters, water scarcity, food insecurity and disease outbreaks, threatening children's health, well-being and security – especially those from the poorest, most disadvantaged communities.

The pandemic has exacerbated risks and cut opportunities for children affected by fragility and humanitarian crises, where conflict and climate change impacts have already devastated communities.

UNICEF continued its work to alleviate the impacts of COVID-19, poverty and crises on children while strengthening national systems to reach the most marginalized, excluded children and communities and to enhance preparedness and resilience in the face of future shocks. This work was possible thanks to strong public, private and civil society partnerships, including across the United Nations system, and voluntary funding.

The interconnected challenges facing the world in 2021 reinforced the urgent need for a reinvigorated multilateralism. To enable the United Nations system to provide more effective, coordinated support to countries, UNICEF contributed to its vision of a new social contract.

Despite facing multiple crises, today's young generation is more hopeful and confident that the world is becoming a better place. In 2021, UNICEF's Changing Childhood project surveyed over 20,000 people across 21 countries and found that instead of despairing in the face of inequality and the climate crisis, young people are more confident that the world is becoming a better place compared to those aged 40 and older.

In 2021, UNICEF commemorated its 75th anniversary, recommitting ourselves with a new spirit of urgency to work with partners, supporters and children and young people to ensure children survive and thrive into healthy, productive adulthood and to protect the most marginalized and vulnerable.

# UNICEF's 2021 Key achievements



**Responding to 483 new and ongoing humanitarian crises** in 153 countries in 2021, compared with 455 in 153 countries in 2020.

**In its role as procurement coordinator for the COVAX Facility, UNICEF led the procurement and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines.** In 2021, COVAX delivered 958 million doses (including donated doses) to 144 countries.

**Reaching 64 per cent of women with at least four antenatal care visits** in the 50 focus countries of the Every Newborn Action Plan compared to 51 per cent in 2016, and reaching 65 per cent of women with postnatal care compared to 48 per cent in 2016.

**Providing prevention and care interventions** through joint programming with UNFPA to 7.6 million adolescent girls at risk of child marriage, up from 2.1 million in 2017.

**Advocating for the release of children in detention,** leading to a major policy breakthrough. Since the beginning of the pandemic, over 45,000 children across 84 countries have been released from detention.





**Leading positive policy change and action** in 92 per cent of intended countries through global advocacy on vaccines, education, mental health, water, climate, and nutrition and child protection in humanitarian situations.



■ **Expanding access to safe water and basic sanitation** for 69.9 million people and basic sanitation for 59.6 million people from 2018-2021, reaching ambitious targets.

■ **Helping 48.6 million out-of-school children access education**, including 6.4 million children on the move and 31.7 million in humanitarian settings.

■ **Reaching 154 million children with life-saving screening for severe wasting** through simplified, community-level approaches despite pandemic-related service disruptions, up 9 per cent from 2020 and treating nearly 5.5 million children, up 10 per cent from 2020.

■ **Providing services to prevent stunting and other forms of malnutrition**, reaching nearly 336 million children, 38 per cent more than in 2020.

■ **Procuring \$7.2 billion in supplies and services** from nearly 11,150 suppliers.

# Renewed ambition toward 2030

## UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025

**The COVID-19 pandemic struck as progress towards most of the Sustainable Development Goals was already off-track, fueling a global crisis that threatens progress for children, aggravating deep-rooted poverty, and increasing inequality and discrimination.**

In 2022, UNICEF is embarking on its next four-year Strategic Plan, providing a global framework for all UNICEF offices, country programmes and National Committees. UNICEF will focus on systemic changes that are critical to addressing the underlying causes of children's mortality, poverty, vulnerability, gender inequality and exclusion.

Through these systemic changes, transformative progress can be achieved on vaccine equity, education, mental health, and addressing the climate crisis, reaching those who have been left behind.

UNICEF will build upon successful programming adaptations and innovations during the pandemic that enabled continued service delivery and support to strengthen national systems amid disruptions including flexible, community-based approaches and digital modalities. In 2021, it became clear that UNICEF-supported investments in systems strengthening before the pandemic made a critical difference in enabling countries to regain progress that had stalled.

To meet the ambitious goals of the Strategic Plan, UNICEF will draw on its strengths: a vast, broad network of partners across sectors; local presence in over 190 countries and territories; and deep expertise and thought leadership based on field evidence, research and data.

But UNICEF cannot do it alone. UNICEF will mobilize other stakeholders to catalyse sustainable change at scale. Partnerships and engagement – with the public and private sectors, civil society and community organizations, children and youth, and within the United Nations system – are essential.



A UNICEF staff member plays with a girl in a kindergarten playground in Verishen village, Armenia. UNICEF is working with partners to renovate, refurbish and equip the kindergarten with toys and learning materials.

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# Partnerships and funding

## Flexible, quality funding is essential to UNICEF's ability to manage complexity and build responsive programmes at the country level.

Across the 2018-2021 Strategic Plan, progress for children was higher in programme areas with a larger proportion of regular resources (flexible, unrestricted funding). Yet overall, UNICEF income trends reflect increasing earmarking and decreasing funding flexibility and predictability.

UNICEF revenue saw a good year in 2021, with 2018-2020 showing an overall increase of 30 per cent compared to 2014-2017. However, challenges continued in funding humanitarian appeals – despite record-level humanitarian needs – and in raising regular resources and other flexible funding that are key to the organization's ability to respond quickly, innovate and adapt to children's evolving needs, as the COVID-19 response has shown.

In 2021, total public sector revenue (from governments, intergovernmental organizations

and interorganizational arrangements) increased by \$393 million (up 7 per cent from 2020), totaling over \$6 billion. The largest government contributions in 2021 came from the United States of America, Germany, European Commission, Sweden and Japan.

Private sector revenue (from National Committees, individual donors, non-governmental organizations and foundations) increased by 34 per cent since 2020, to \$2.2 billion in 2021.

National Committees for UNICEF contribute significant results in income and influence. In 2021, National Committees generated \$1,758 million, 84 per cent of total private sector revenue and approximately 47 per cent of total UNICEF regular resources. National Committees reached more than 4.5 million children through Child Rights Education, 14 million children through the Child Friendly Cities platform and over 108 million children through engaging with the business sector.

For more information on UNICEF's funding, visit [www.unicef.org/funding](https://www.unicef.org/funding).

A UNICEF health and supply team member works on the procurement process of vaccine cold storage equipment.



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## GOAL AREA 1

# Every child survives and thrives



In 2020, **5 million** children under age 5 died - 13,800 children every day.



Nearly **50 million** children suffer from **wasting**, the most life-threatening form of malnutrition. This figure could increase by 9 million due to the pandemic's impact on children's diets, nutrition services and feeding practices.

COVID-19 has upended progress on every measure of child survival, health, growth and development.

The number of preventable under-five deaths continues to be unacceptably high. Global coverage of diphtheria tetanus toxoid and pertussis (DTP3) immunization, stagnant since 2010, is now falling, from 86 per cent in 2019 to 83 per cent in 2020. Despite progress in reducing child stunting since 2000, wasting persists at alarming rates, and rising rates of overweight will require a reversal in trajectory to achieve the 2030 target.

In 2021 UNICEF adjusted its programming as the world started to move from fighting COVID-19 to living with it. The pandemic highlighted the dire consequences of weak health systems and the importance of investing in these systems.

Looking ahead, UNICEF is sharpening its focus on strengthening primary health care as the cornerstone of resilient health systems and as the key to universal health care that promote health and well-being across the life cycle, so that children not only survive, but thrive.

### KEY RESULTS

The number of live births delivered in health facilities increased to **38.9 million**, and the proportion attended by skilled health personnel increased to 80% in the 50 focus countries of the Every Newborn Action Plan.

In 25 high-burden countries, **8.75 million** children with suspected pneumonia received antibiotics.

UNICEF reached **nearly 336 million** children with services to prevent stunting and other forms of malnutrition (a 38% increase over 2020), and **67.4 million** adolescents with services and support to prevent anaemia and other forms of malnutrition (a 91% increase from 2020).



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## GOAL AREA 2

# Every child learns



By September 2021, schoolchildren around the world had lost an estimated 1.8 trillion hours of in-person learning due to COVID-related school closures, which will have profound long-term, unequal social and economic effects.



Over 50 per cent of 10-year-olds in low-income and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school.

In 2021, the COVID-19 crisis brought education systems across the world to a halt, with school closures exacerbating a global learning crisis. While nearly every country offered remote learning opportunities for students, their quality and reach varied greatly, and they provided at best partial substitutes for in-person learning. This generation of school-aged children now risks losing \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings as a result of school closures, far more than the \$10 trillion estimated in 2020.

### KEY RESULTS

**48.6 million out-of-school children** accessed education, bringing the total to 149 million since 2016. Among them were 6.4 million children on the move and 31.7 million children in humanitarian settings.

UNICEF-supported skills development programmes benefited **33 million** children in 91 countries.

**42 million children** (18.1 million in humanitarian settings) received learning materials, bringing the total since 2016 to 137 million children.



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## GOAL AREA 3

# Every child is protected from violence and exploitation



In a majority of countries, **more than 2 in 3** children are subjected to violent discipline by caregivers.



**12 million girls per year** are married before their 18th birthday and more than 150 million additional girls are at risk of becoming married in childhood by 2030.

Decades-long progress in children's protection and well-being have resulted in increases in birth registration and reductions in child marriage and female genital mutilation. Yet child labour rates have stagnated and are at risk of increasing. And current projections indicate that impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic may erode these gains, jeopardizing progress towards protection-related SDGs.

### KEY RESULTS

**4.4 million children** who had experienced violence reached across 129 countries with health, social work and justice services, 80% more than in 2017.

Community-based mental health and psychosocial support, including targeted awareness campaigns, reached over **8.4 million children and adolescents** in 111 countries (up 170% over 2017) and **3.6 million parents and caregivers** in 97 countries.

**7.6 million adolescent girls** across 47 countries received child marriage prevention and care interventions through regional alliances, particularly with the African Union, and the traction gained by the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

A major result in 2021 was the largest-ever release of children from detention. Since the beginning of the pandemic, **over 45,000 children across 84 countries** have been released. In 2021, child-friendly justice services reached 384,000 children in 81 countries.



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## GOAL AREA 4

# Every child lives in a safe and clean environment



Globally, approximately 1 billion children – **nearly half of the world's children** – live in countries that are at an 'extremely high risk' from the impacts of climate change.



**2.3 billion** people lack soap and water at home, 900 million children lack soap and water at their school, and 40% of healthcare facilities are not equipped to practice hand hygiene at points of care.

Despite significant progress in WASH, the world will struggle to achieve SDG 6, leaving the rights of all children and their families to safe water and sanitation unfulfilled. As of 2021, 3.6 billion people still lack access to safe sanitation, one quarter do not have safely managed water services, and one third do not have a handwashing facility with soap in their homes.

From 2018 to 2021, UNICEF reached 69.9 million people with access to safe drinking water and 59.6 million with basic sanitation, against a target of 60 million each – the most ambitious target set, and reached, to date.

### KEY RESULTS

**106 countries** implemented national community-based handwashing programmes with UNICEF support, exceeding the target of 78.

Through UNICEF humanitarian relief programmes, **33.3 million people** gained or regained access to water services for drinking and hygiene, and **8.4 million** to sanitation services.



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## GOAL AREA 5

# Every child has an equitable chance in life



More than **1 billion children worldwide** now suffer at least one deprivation in critical areas of their rights.



COVID-19 has exacerbated barriers facing the world's **240 million children with disabilities**, who account for 1 in 10 children, based on new estimates from over 40 countries published by UNICEF in 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed an estimated 100 million additional children into multidimensional poverty. The crisis significantly increased the vulnerability of women and girls, putting an additional 10 million girls at risk of child marriage, on top of pre-pandemic projections of 100 million more child brides by 2030.

### KEY RESULTS

UNICEF supported **78 countries** in building capacity on child poverty measurement, and 33 countries reported that measurement, analysis or advocacy led to policies and programmes that reduced child poverty.

UNICEF supported cash-transfer programmes reached **nearly 133 million** children in 95 countries, including in fragile contexts and humanitarian crises.

In 2021, UNICEF reached more than **4.8 million** children with disabilities across 148 countries through disability-inclusive programming, including in humanitarian situations, more than double the 2.2 million reached in 2020.



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## Gender



Globally, **22% of adolescent girls** aged 15-19 are not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to 12% of boys of the same age.

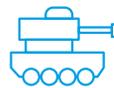


Around **1 in 3 girls** aged 15-19 today have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) in the 30 countries where it is concentrated.

Progress in areas such as menstrual health, girls' learning, child marriage prevention, gender-responsive social protection, WASH and maternal health illustrate the importance of deliberate gender results, with clear indicators and targets, and of gender-targeted resourcing.

But other areas such as gender-based violence, harmful practices, and girls' secondary education, remain under-resourced by partners in some cases and plagued by deep-rooted and persistent barriers to progress, and have been subjected to alarming risks of setbacks owing to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Humanitarian



Globally, **426 million children** – nearly **1 in 5** – live in conflict zones that are becoming more intense and taking heavier toll on civilians, disproportionately affecting children.



An estimated **35 million (42%)** of the 82.4 million forcibly displaced people as of mid-2021 were children below 18 years of age, many unaccompanied or separated from their families.

Amidst the unprecedented global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, 235 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2021 – the highest number in decades, projected to rise to 274 million in 2022. Conflict remained the key driver of humanitarian needs. Disease outbreaks continued to increase, while climate change and natural disasters caused an increasing number of extreme weather events and continued to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, particularly in countries beset by violence.

### KEY RESULTS

UNICEF responded to **483 new and ongoing humanitarian crises** in 153 countries in 2021, compared with 455 in 153 countries in 2020.

# For every child

Whoever she is.  
Wherever he lives.  
Every child deserves a childhood.  
A future.  
A fair chance.  
That's why UNICEF is there.  
For each and every child.  
Working day in and day out.  
In more than 190 countries and territories.  
Reaching the hardest to reach.  
The furthest from help.  
The most excluded.  
It's why we stay to the end.  
And never give up.

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Data in this report are drawn from the most recent available statistics from UNICEF and other United Nations agencies, annual reports prepared by UNICEF country offices, and the Annual Report of the Executive Director of UNICEF, to be presented to the Executive Board in June 2022.

#### Photography credits

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