

Final Evaluation of UNICEF's intervention 'Systems building and capacity strengthening of the Ministry of Education and its sub-national Directorates of Education for effective delivery of quality education outcomes' in Iraq

Final Report
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The Evaluation Team was independent and external, and the contents of the report including the findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations, are the responsibility of the team.

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List of Acronyms

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DoE	Directorate of Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQ	Evaluation Question
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDoE	General Directorates of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEDSI	Gender Equality/JbWMGB, Disability and Social Inclusion
GEROS	Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System
GESCG	Governorate Education Sector Coordination mechanism/Group
GESP	Governorate-level Education Sector Plan
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IS	Islamic State
JbWMGB	Justice between Women and Men, Girls and Boys
KII	Key Informant Interview
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoP	Ministry of Planning
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
QA	Quality Assurance
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SO	Specific Objective
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UN-SWAP	UN System-wide Action Plan

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Executive Summary

Overview of the intervention, Purpose, Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

1. The project 'Systems building and capacity strengthening of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and its sub-national Directorates of Education for effective delivery of quality education outcomes' was implemented by UNICEF in close collaboration with a linked UNESCO project, as well as with the Government of Iraq. The project targeted teachers at governorate level, as well as education planners, statisticians, and other relevant staff in the MoE at central and governorate levels. The indirect Rights Holders are the students and pupils visiting Iraqi schools, including vulnerable school children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers are secondary Rights Holders in this context. The project had a budget of EUR 5,094,577.95 and was implemented over a period of 46 months, from August 2019 to May 2023. The project was implemented in a subset of governorates and general directorates, namely Baghdad (Rusafa 2 and 3, and Karkh 1 and 3), Najaf, Anbar, Basra, Thi-Qar, Missan, Muthanna and Qadissiyah. It was focused on downstream project implementation and planning development, and had three strategic objectives (SO):
 - SO1: to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of education through roll-out of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and increase capacity of education planners, statisticians and educators at governorate level: UNESCO (national level), UNICEF (governorate and school levels).
 - SO2: to strengthen the capacity of the MoE at the central and governorate level to improve education services delivery: UNESCO (National Level), UNICEF (governorate level).
 - SO3: to enhance the quality of teaching and learning by operationalising the capacity development plan and developing teachers' capacities at central and governorate levels: UNESCO (national level), UNICEF (governorate and school levels).
2. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes of UNICEF's activities to strengthen the education system in Iraq and to identify areas for improvement. The evaluation is both formative and summative in nature and aims to generate insights that are useful for the design and implementation of future initiatives on systems strengthening in education and in Iraq more particularly, as well as to foster accountability for the performance of the intervention and the results achieved. The objectives of the evaluation were i) to assess the achievement of results, their sustainability and how valuable the results were to the intended targeted groups; ii) to understand how the design and implementation strategy could be improved; iii) to examine how well the intervention has adapted to changing contexts and to other factors influencing the achievement of the results, and how well the monitoring system of the intervention supported adaptive management decisions; iv) to identify lessons learned and good practices useful to inform future programming and policy decisions; and v) to provide actionable recommendations.
3. The **evaluation's scope** at **geographical level** covers the project's activities across **all the target governorates** for the project¹ and at **temporal level** covers the entire implementation period of the intervention, including the 10 months of the no-cost extension that was granted in July 2022 with the total period being 46 months, **from August 2019 to May 2023**.
4. The **key users** of this evaluation are the **UNICEF Country Office, the Ministry of Education in Iraq at both the centralised and decentralised levels, and the wider group of education stakeholders, including the Education Sector Group in Iraq and the main donor, the Delegation of the European Union to Iraq**.

Evaluation Methodology

5. This evaluation applied a **theory-based approach** rooted in **contribution analysis** of the **causal linkages based on the project's Theory of Change (ToC)**, which was developed during the inception phase. The evaluation's approach drew on the principles of **outcome harvesting**, by gathering data about the targeted outcomes, then working backwards and, guided by the results framework, determining the extent to which the interventions contributed to changes (if any) and particularly any unintended/unplanned effects.
6. The Evaluation Team used a **mixed-methods approach** of **data collection**, including primary qualitative data from **Key Informant Interviews (KII)** and **Focus Group Discussions (FGD)**, **secondary qualitative data** from the review of **relevant documents** as well as **primary quantitative data** from an **online perception survey** covering

¹ Baghdad (Rusafa 2 and 3, and Karkh 1 and 3), Najaf, Anbar, Basra, Thi-Qar, Missan, Muthanna, and Qadisiya. Not all output activities were implemented in all of these governorates alike (see table 3 for details).

key stakeholders of the intervention purposely sampled across three governorates. The evaluation utilised **appreciative inquiry** for shaping its data collection tools, in order to help interviewees and FGD participants uncover existing strengths and opportunities, as well as to explore challenges and issues in a constructive way. The approach to data analysis incorporated a **realist evaluation approach**, as this approach is designed to understand how and why interventions work in a given context. The evaluation design and tools received ethical clearance from an Ethics Review Board, prior to the beginning of the data collection. Taken together, these approaches helped to ensure the rigour of the data gathered, and thus the strength of the evaluation findings.

Key Conclusions on Findings

7. The project was overall successful at achieving results, particularly output-level results, and this in the face of some significant challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This success has to be balanced against weaker results related to achieving outcomes, due to the longer-than-the-project timeline for achieving them, as well as due to underestimating organisational change, which is a key element for achieving the outcome-level results. The project's overall success is attributed to a partnership approach that worked well, particularly in collaboration with UNESCO, though areas for improvement exist in engendering ownership and enhancing stakeholder engagement, especially with the Ministry of Education and local Directorates of Education. The project benefits however from the support of its stakeholders, which is an essential enabler for ultimately achieving the outcome-level changes. The key challenge is how to capitalise on that stakeholder support and commitment to build upon and consolidate movement towards project outcomes. These key themes are elaborated in what follows.

Output-Level Results Achieved, Outcome-Level Results not (yet) achieved

8. The project was overall successful in achieving its targeted output-level results, despite significant challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. A project design that was strongly in line with the needs of target groups and with the context, plus an adequate monitoring mechanism for activity and output-level results, were important factors that contributed to the strong achievement of output-level results. The key factor to this success however was the partnership approach, which worked well.
9. While the project demonstrated success at the output level, uncertainties linger regarding outcome-level results. Deep-rooted project design issues, including an extended timeline for outcome achievement and delayed activity implementation, contribute to this uncertainty. The intricate nature of organisational change processes within a large institution like the MoE adds further complexity. The usage of newly developed capacities and planning tools also requires organisational-level change, including appropriate incentivisation and ownership building measures in order to facilitate the move towards data-driven decision-making and planning and thus the achievement of the outcome-level results. This is also relevant for SO3's e-learning, not including measures to amplify the capacity building beyond the core group of teachers trained, via institutionalisation. A further observation is that the project's SOs were relatively siloed from one another. This reduced their ability to create synergistic change, which is particularly relevant given how an effective EMIS system should support governorate-level planning guided by a GESP and stronger staff capacities. The overall conclusion then is to call into question the project's implicit assumption that individual-level capacity building and the creation of sophisticated planning tools will on their own produce organisational-level change and ultimately system-level change (in Iraq's education system). It also underlines the need to manage the expectations given the large changes aimed at, including with the donors and with implementing partners.

Strong Adaptive Management and Stakeholder Commitment

10. A key strength of the project lies in its efficient execution of output results, attributed to robust adaptive management strategies and a high level of stakeholder commitment and coherence, particularly between UNICEF and UNESCO. Effective coordination mechanisms facilitated collaboration, allowing timely adjustments in timelines and resource sharing. However, this success has heightened expectations on the Ministry of Education (MoE) for sustained progress. The project now stands at a critical juncture, where continued engagement and follow-up with the MoE are imperative to capitalise on achieved successes and to ensure sustained momentum.

Use of Theory of Change and Outcome Monitoring

11. The project's Theory of Change did not fully grasp and address the complexity of the change process it was aiming to achieve. This is reflected in some linkages and assumptions not being sufficiently clear or strong. A more detailed ToC could have supported the movement from output- towards outcome-level results. This is also reflected in the strong monitoring of results at the output level, but weaker monitoring at the outcome level. Process indicators related to linkages between outputs and outcomes, stronger outcome-level

monitoring, as well as feedback loops would have informed analysis of what was working and what was not working in the move towards outcomes. This could in turn have informed a stronger response to improving those results through adaptive management approaches.

Highly Functional Partnership between UNICEF, UNESCO, and MoE

12. The project's success is attributed, in part, to a highly functional partnership between UNICEF, UNESCO, and the Ministry of Education (MoE). Effective communication and coordination mechanisms, both between the organisations as well as with some of the local-level stakeholders, fostered capable adaptive management strategies and skilfully navigated implementation opportunities and challenges. However, while strong horizontal connections between UNICEF, UNESCO, and the MoE were evident, weaker vertical feedback loops hindered quick communication of challenges up the line from local-level stakeholders from Directorates of Education (DoE) to the upper management level. This potentially contributed to delayed decision-making, thus impeding the achievement of the targeted outcomes.

Ownership Can Be Increased

13. The evaluation revealed a need for enhanced stakeholder ownership, particularly within the MoE. Insufficiently specific tasks assigned to the MoE diminished its ownership of the project, which underlines the importance of substantive engagement and clear roles. Strong ownership, coupled with the adoption of capacity building measures on EMIS within the MoE, could strengthen the project's sustainability. Hence, the need for continued engagement and follow-up with the MoE, in order to build on existing successes and ensure sustained commitment.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Measures lacking

14. The context in Iraq is particularly prone to climate-related fragilities, with potential impacts on education for example through population movements but also by virtue of the need to increase young peoples' awareness and to encourage their informed efforts to help combat it. Climate change mitigation and adaptation measures were not foreseen in the design of the project which is a significant weakness of the project given the context of Iraq and given the conceptual room to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation measures in the design of the project.

Integration of gender/JfWMGB Principles across the Project

15. The integration of gender principles across the project varied, with explicit attention given to SO2 and more implicit considerations in SO1. Despite gender-disaggregated data inclusion and analysis, there was a lack of a differentiated approach in terms of programming for boys, girls, men, or women. The monitoring system did not thoroughly address gender/JbWMBG issues, with gaps in articulating how gender would be prioritised and implemented across project components. While there is potential for gender considerations in the EMIS system's future use, explicit strategies were absent.

Lessons Learned

Partnerships

16. The evaluation underscores the pivotal role of strong partnerships in achieving robust project results. A successful partnership involves aligning roles with organisational strengths, establishing clear communication and feedback loops, and fostering long-term ownership. The project's success, particularly in navigating challenges and tight timelines, highlights the importance of assessing partners' strengths, reputation, and their ability to bring stakeholders onboard. The lesson learned is to conduct a thorough evaluation of partners' capacities and reputations in the national/sub-national context, facilitating the achievement of project results and ensuring successful collaboration.

Project Design and Implementation

17. A critical lesson emerges regarding the significance of a well-constructed project design rooted in a realistic Theory of Change (ToC). While individual-level capacity building and planning tools are vital, they alone do not guarantee organisational or system-level change. Collaborative efforts at the concept note and proposal stage are crucial, in order to ensure a strong and realistic ToC. This collaborative process helps articulate assumptions, appraise mechanisms realistically, and foster commitment from higher management. The lesson emphasises the importance of using the ToC to inform implementation and to adapt the project as needed, leading to realistic and achievable outcome-level results.

Gender, Equity, Human Rights, and Climate Change

18. The project highlights challenges in incorporating gender equity, human rights, and climate change elements due to a weak understanding of their integration. Mainstreaming these elements across all project components is crucial, yet the evaluation reveals a tendency for them to be somewhat lost in the approach or only

superficially integrated. Proactively addressing this weakness at the design and implementation stages is essential. The lesson learned is the importance of specifically reviewing and prioritising gender equity, human rights, and climate change elements throughout project development and implementation, leveraging expertise from UNICEF's specialists.

Project Monitoring

19. The evaluation identifies the importance of robust monitoring at both the output and outcome levels, coupled with effective feedback mechanisms. Weaknesses in outcome-level monitoring data and linkages between outputs and outcomes were observed. The lesson here is that strong outcome-level monitoring and feedback loops are crucial for adjusting the project's approach and facilitating progress towards outcomes. This includes monitoring organisational change-related outcomes using appropriate indicators, especially in contexts where adjustments to the project are likely to be required. Without such mechanisms, the chances of achieving outcomes are diminished, particularly in fragile or conflict-affected contexts.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Maintain and Expand Work on Focus Areas of the Project

20. UNICEF and its partners should plan for and implement further work on the focus areas of the project, to build upon its promising yet incomplete results. This should be done in the near-term, especially as the project's achievements will weaken/become progressively more outdated over time.

Recommendation 2: Revise and Fine-tune Theory of Change and Project Design at Large

21. To address challenges in design and implementation, UNICEF and its partners should revise and update the project's Theory of Change (ToC). This includes building the capacity and will to use new tools, plans, and capacities for organisational capacity building, system strengthening, and fostering ownership by engaging the MoE actively. Recommendations further emphasise involving the MoE in project design, ensuring widespread coverage of the EMIS system, creating stronger linkages between project components, and enhancing monitoring at output and outcome levels.

Recommendation 3: Strengthening the Project's Partnership Approach

22. The partnership between UNICEF, UNESCO and the MoE has been a key strength of this project, incorporating strong linkages between upstream and downstream components and capitalising on many of the institutional strengths of each partner. Furthermore, this partnership approach is in line with institutional commitments made in the UN Cooperation Framework for Iraq. The approach should thus be continued for future work projects.

Recommendation 4: Maintain Sensitivity to Shifting Needs of Target Populations in a Volatile Environment

23. UNICEF is advised to ensure the appropriateness of all components in future projects based on needs analysis and project proposals. While acknowledging that the thematic focus of this project's SO3 on e-learning was influenced by the COVID-19 crisis, the project should conduct regular needs assessments to inform decisions. This includes responding to shock events, while mitigating negative impacts on the project's longer-term objectives.

Recommendation 5: Include Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Measures

24. Future project iterations should integrate robust climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, particularly in education-related projects. The vulnerability of Iraq to climate-related challenges underscores the importance of embedding such measures into policy and learning. Recommendations emphasise mainstreaming climate change components into GESPs, the EMIS system, and capacity-building measures for key stakeholders. This involves adhering to UNICEF's institutional commitments related to climate change and incorporating appropriate measures into project design despite the challenging local context.

1. Introduction

25. This final report presents the findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations resulting from the evaluation of the intervention 'Systems building and capacity strengthening of the Ministry of Education and its sub-national Directorates of Education for effective delivery of quality education outcomes', also referred to as the 'EU-funded intervention on education systems strengthening'. This is also called 'the project' in the rest of the report.
26. This evaluation report provides an overview of the context and background of the intervention in Iraq, as well as its objectives. It also shines a light on the purpose, objectives and scope of this evaluation. Moreover, the evaluation framework is presented, as well as the evaluation approach and methodology. Finally, the report outlines findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations. These are aimed at informing relevant key stakeholders and decision-makers about the performance of the intervention. A further aim is to generate insights and support learning about possible future initiatives on strengthening Iraq's public education system for effective delivery of quality education outcomes.

1.1. Context and Background

27. The education system in Iraq was considered one of the best in the Middle East up until the early 1990s, with strengths including a strong track record on combating illiteracy. However, the country has experienced a series of conflicts since then, including the first Gulf War in 1991, the Iraq War from 2003 to 2011, and the fight against the insurgency of the 'Islamic State' from 2014 until 2021.
28. These various conflicts caused significant numbers of deaths and widespread suffering, destruction of infrastructure, large flows of internally displaced persons (IDPs) – compounded by hundreds of thousands of refugees from the civil war in neighbouring Syria – as well as very significant economic disruption. The resulting impacts upon the education system in Iraq have been significant: a drastic decrease in operating schools, a lack of qualified teachers, and an overall lack of appropriate investments and financing for the system. Indeed, government expenditures on education declined from just over 5 per cent of GDP in 2009 to only 3.9 per cent ten years later.²
29. This situation has had a strong impact on the **country's** student population. Evidence of this is the several million students who have been out of school for often long periods of time, as well as the large number of damaged schools and the need for multiple shifts in many schools. There has also been a significant decline in learning levels in the country, varying school completion rates between girls and boys (with 5 per cent more boys than girls completing primary school versus 6 per cent more girls than boys completing upper secondary school), declining pass rates in national leaving exams between 2009 and 2017, and clear evidence of weak reading skills as well as low maths and science levels. Moreover, these various impacts have been compounded by the effects of population growth as well as by the long school closures and economic disruptions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic: according to UNOCHA, school closures in Iraq were some of the longest in the world, lasting up to 63 weeks and affected some 11 million children.³
30. The impacts have also been significant in terms of further entrenching vulnerabilities, especially in the poorest population quintiles of the project Rights Holders (primary-school-age children from the poorest quintile are significantly more likely to be out of school than children in the richest quintile); and, girls in rural areas (only 80 per cent of girls aged 6 to 10 are in school, as compared to 90 per cent of rural boys). Furthermore, school closures related to COVID-19 aggravated the situation of vulnerable children and especially girls.⁴ Likewise, the IDPs in the country were also impacted by the many schools damaged due to the conflict (the number of IDPs remained over a million in 2023⁵), while children with disabilities were disproportionately impacted by the overall deterioration of the education system and were more likely to be out-of-school.⁶ Importantly, it is

² 'National Education Strategy for Iraq 2022-2031', Final Draft, Government of Iraq, Ministry of Education.

³ World Vision, *Child Protection and COVID-19: Iraq Case Study*, Relief Web, Iraq, 18 February 2022; United Nations Children's Fund, *Iraq Education Fact Sheets | 2020: Analyses for learning and equity using MICS data*, Iraq; '2020 National Education Strategy for Iraq 2022-2031', Final Draft, Government of Iraq, Ministry of Education.

⁴ UNICEF. "Iraq Country Report on Out-Of-School Children." New York: UNICEF, October 2014.

<https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/out-school-children-iraq>, accessed 24/11/2023.

⁵ UNHCR. "2023 Iraq Situation Overview." Accessed September 29, 2023.

<https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/iraq-situation#:~:text=The%20needs%20remain%20high%20in,or%20to%20effective%20local%20integration.>

⁶ Ibid.

presumed that intersecting identities exacerbate these exclusions and vulnerabilities (e.g. being a girl with a disability from a rural area).⁷

31. In response to this situation, the Government of Iraq has prioritised improving the education system. Areas of focus from the 2011-2020 National Education Strategy include raising the quality of education in the country, by better supporting schools and teachers and by enhancing the professional development for teachers. The National Development Plan 2018-2022 included a focus on improving enrolment rates; building thousands more schools and renovating thousands of damaged schools; improving the quality of teaching such as by building teacher capacities and modernising curriculums; and improving the management of education information as well as the capacities of education administrators. These various efforts are within a larger context, where the country is transitioning from being a conflict- and post-conflict state to a more stable and development-oriented one, and thus where work localised around the triple nexus of humanitarian-development-peace is ever more important.⁸

1.2. UNICEF in Iraq

32. UNICEF has been working in Iraq since the mid-1980s, focused on humanitarian needs and emergency response from the early 1990s to the late 2000s, including in the area of education. Beginning in 2009, the agency shifted its response to focus on working with the government to develop child-friendly social policies, modernise its institutions, and improve the nationwide delivery of basic services critical to the future survival and development of children. From 2019, UNICEF's agenda was focused on supporting the Government of Iraq to achieve **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which is to ensure an inclusive and equitable, accessible, quality education and lifelong learning for all**. The Government of Iraq emphasised these goals in its Second National Voluntary Review Report on the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (p. 62).⁹ This was to be done by: supporting the strengthening of the education systems in policy development, coordination, planning, budgeting and monitoring; supporting the generation of new strategic data for evidence-based advocacy; and, supporting the strengthening of systems and policy development including to decentralise education management, as well as the integration of life skills into the education system. UNICEF was also advocating for equitable and efficient allocation as well as use of resources to ensure equitable school access and to enhance quality education for children and particularly for girls.¹⁰
33. UNICEF's vision in Iraq is that "by 2024, children, adolescents and women in Iraq are better protected and have more equitable and inclusive access to quality basic services."¹¹ The outcome statement on education is that "... by 2024 children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, benefit from equitable access to quality and inclusive education."¹² There are multiple specific areas of focus for UNICEF, including strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Education to effectively plan, budget, implement and monitor equitable delivery of

⁷ UNICEF Guidance on Gender Integration in Evaluation (2019) Evaluation Office and Gender Section, UNICEF, New York.

⁸ Ministry of Planning, *Iraq National Development Plan 2018-2022*, MOP, Republic of Iraq, January 2018; United Nations Children's Fund, *UNICEF Iraq Proposal to the European Union: Systems Building and Capacity Strengthening of the MoE and its Sub-National Directorates of Education for Effective Delivery of Quality Education Outcomes*, UNICEF Iraq, May 2022; United Nations Children's Fund, 'National Education Strategy for Iraq 2022-2031', Final Draft, UNICEF; United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Country Programme Document: Iraq*, United Nations Children's Fund Executive Board, Second regular session 11–13 September 2019, Item⁵ (a) of the provisional agenda, UNESCWA, Limited Distribution, 16 July 2019.

⁹ MoP (2021) The Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning National Committee for Sustainable Development, *The Second National Voluntary Review Report on the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals 2021, Iraq And the Path Back to the Development*, July 2021, Government of Iraq Minister of Planning (MoP). Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/285062021_VNR_Report_Iraq_English.pdf (accessed on 28/10/2023).

¹⁰ <[unicef.org/iraq](https://www.unicef.org/iraq)>; United Nations Children's Fund, *Iraq Education Fact Sheets | 2020: Analyses for learning and equity using MICS data*, UNICEF, Iraq, 2020; United Nations Children's Fund, *UNICEF Iraq Proposal to the European Union: Systems Building and Capacity Strengthening of the MoE and its Sub-National Directorates of Education for Effective Delivery of Quality Education Outcomes*, UNICEF Iraq, May 2022.

¹¹ United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Country Programme Document: Iraq*, United Nations Children's Fund Executive Board, Second regular session 11–13 September 2019, Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda, UNESCWA, Limited Distribution, 16 July 2019.

¹² United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Country Programme Document: Iraq*, United Nations Children's Fund Executive Board, Second regular session 11–13 September 2019, Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda, UNESCWA, Limited Distribution, 16 July 2019.

quality education services, especially at governorate levels. Other areas of focus are curriculum revision, teacher development and training, and ensuring inclusion of the most vulnerable children. Additionally, drawing on the Country Programme Document's underlying Education Programme Strategy Note 2020-2024, the areas of focus are: (i) systems strengthening, (ii) access to basic education,¹³ and (iii) quality learning.¹⁴ All three outputs contribute to the education outcome on equitable access for all children and adolescents to quality and inclusive education. Furthermore, gender/JbWMGB is mainstreamed throughout the programme, with a particular focus on addressing gender-based violence. With the project that is the focus of this evaluation (see section 2), UNICEF aims to support the Government of Iraq in implementing this vision, as well as by continuing to work with other partners including UN agencies. This is part of a larger cooperative effort to address factors that hinder Iraq's broader progress towards sustainable development under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework IRAQ (UNSDCF).¹⁵

1.3. Teacher Training, EMIS systems and Governorate-Level Education Sector Plans (GESPs)

Teacher Training

34. A quality curriculum and effective instruction are key elements to ensure successful teaching and learning in schools. The main drivers of successful teaching and learning are teachers. Hence, quality teachers who can perform their responsibilities with commitment are prerequisites for successful and excellent education.¹⁶ This underlines that continuous learning and development among teachers is a necessity, and by extension that teachers who stop learning after their pre-service training will fail to fulfil their roles effectively. In turn this will lead to children not learning effectively. Importantly, teachers must remain reflective and continue to innovate in their teaching, based on evolving understanding of best practices and new developments. The alternative – of annually repeating the same experience, approach, knowledge and skills garnered and practised at the beginning of their careers without reflection and innovating – will produce weaker results for students. So teachers must adjust their teaching practices to ensure that they can produce students who are creative, critical and innovative, and thus able to meet the demands of the day.¹⁷
35. Teacher capacity development is especially vital in countries like Iraq, where instability and conflict have fragilised the education system in many different ways. Since 2013, there have been strong efforts to promote teacher capacity development and inclusive education in Iraq. One method of striving towards inclusivity has been to enhance teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes.¹⁸ To facilitate this, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has promoted the nationwide development of pedagogical training and academic development centres for teaching staff, in order to learn about innovative, competence- and student-centred teaching and learning processes. The project intends to build on these initiatives and those of other development partners, by enhancing teacher capacity to teach effectively.

EMIS Systems

36. Education Management Information System (EMIS) can be defined as all the operational systems and processes, increasingly supported by digital technology, that enable the collection, aggregation, analysis, and use of data

¹³ SDG 4) Target 4.1: "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes."

¹⁴ SDG 4) Target 4.c: "By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States."

¹⁵ United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Country Programme Document: Iraq*, United Nations Children's Fund Executive Board, Second regular session 11–13 September 2019, Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda, UNESCWA, Limited Distribution, 16 July 2019; United Nations Children's Fund, 'National Education Strategy for Iraq 2022-2031', Final Draft, UNICEF; United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF Country Programme Planning: Guidance to Achieve SDGs by 2030, UNICEF, New York, August 2022; United Nations Children's Fund, Evaluation Terms of References of the intervention *Systems building and capacity strengthening of the Ministry of Education and its sub-national Directorates of Education for effective delivery of quality education outcomes*, UNICEF Iraq Country Office, 18 April 2023.

¹⁶ Grigsby, B., Schumaker, G., Deckman, J., & Simieou. (2010). *A Principals's Dilemma: Instructional Leader or Manager*. Academic Leadership 8(3), 1-5.

¹⁷ Shulmen, L.S. (1987). *Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform*. *Harvard Educational Review*. 57(1), 4-14.

¹⁸ Bartels, Frederike & Vierbuchen, Marie-Christine (2022). *Teacher Training in Iraq—Approaches, Challenges, and Potentials in Building an Inclusive Education System*. 10.1007/978-981-19-2400-2. Available at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-19-2400-2_21 (accessed on 28/10/2023).

and information in education, including for management and administration, planning, policy formulation, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E). This definition insists on the systemic nature of EMIS – a fact that is often overlooked in efforts to reinforce government information systems.¹⁹

37. A comprehensive EMIS is defined as not only including administrative and graduates' destination data. This information should be available both at the individual and aggregate level and it should be used for policy-analysis and formulation, planning, monitoring and management at all levels of an education system.²⁰ "It is a system of people, technology, models, methods, processes, procedures, rules and regulations that function together to provide education leaders, decision-makers and managers at all levels with a comprehensive, integrated set of relevant, reliable, unambiguous and timely data and information to support them in completion of their responsibilities."²¹
38. Under Specific Objective 1 of the project (see section 2.3), UNICEF, in partnership with UNESCO and with funding support from the EU, has been working to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of education through the development and roll-out of the EMIS, and to increase the capacity of education planners, statisticians and educators at central and governorate levels.²² The establishment of an effective EMIS will be a key step to addressing planning and management inefficiencies in the sector; it will also help evidence-based decision-making at school, directorate and national levels. Data and reports derived from the EMIS should also support Governorate-level Education Sector Plans (GESPs) and facilitate other planning and administrative needs at the sub-national and national levels.

Governorate-Level Education Sector Plans (GESPs)

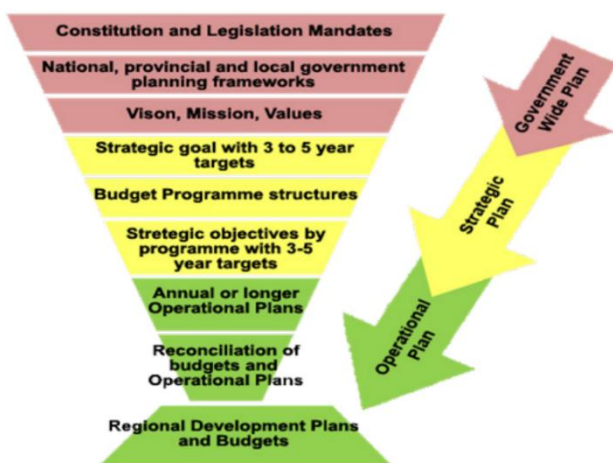


Figure 1: The hierarchy of relationships between planning concepts

39. Planning is part of a hierarchy that ultimately determines how an education system functions. A typical hierarchy of the relationships between different education planning concepts and directives is shown in the figure to the left.²³ An Education Sector Plan is a tool to effectively describe the inputs, processes and resulting outputs, outcomes and impacts for the education system as a whole. Sector Plans assist Ministries of Education and involve stakeholders in prioritising and planning the progressive implementation of legislative mandates, policies and programmes in the sector. Strategic Plans are important for effective management – including planning, budgeting, implementation, reporting, monitoring and evaluation. Plans should indicate the likely sequencing of implementation in the period ahead. This is important for guiding implementation and assessing progress.²⁴

A Governorate-level Education Sector Plan (GESP) should include the activities for education development within each governorate. It should also include activities of development partners and non-government providers, so as to provide a whole-of-sector 'story'. The GESP should align with Iraq's National Education Sector Plan and the National Education Strategy 2020-2030, which is being supported through UNICEF, World Bank, UNESCO and the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). Ideally, the Strategic Plan should not simply represent the forward work plan of the Ministry of Education, but also account for the roles of other actors in the sector. GESPs enable three to eight-year plans for governorates: they can also have a major impact on planning in environments where resource allocation and support to schools is the responsibility of governorates.

¹⁹ UNESCO, *Working Papers on Education Policy Re-orienting Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning* (Working Paper 5, 2018).

²⁰ Abdul-Hamid, H, *SABER EMIS Framework Paper* (World Bank, 2014).

²¹ UNESCO. *Education for All by 2015: will we make it? EFA global monitoring report* (Paris: UNESCO, 2008).

²² UNESCO has been working at the national level and UNICEF at the governorate and school levels.

²³ *Framework for Strategic Plans and Annual Performance Plans, National Treasury*, Republic of South Africa, 2010, page 13.

²⁴ DFAT (2019) *Education Learning and Development Module, Education Planning, Foundation Level*. Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/education-planning-practitioner.pdf> (accessed on 03/10/2023).

40. Education Sector Planning at national and decentralised levels is a new area for the Iraqi Ministry of Education. So there are considerable capacity and organisational development needs to consider, such as the formation of Governorate Education Sector Coordination mechanisms/Groups (GESCGs). GESPs should ideally be supported by annual work plans for implementation and monitoring of progress towards planned results. UNICEF has supported the generation of first-generation GESPs for 11 Governorates and the General Directorates of Education (GDoE). The GESPs are required to provide support to plan, implement and coordinate for an entire annual planning and monitoring cycle, in line with the national plans. GESPs should also be supported by robust monitoring and review mechanisms to support their implementation, including joint sector reviews in collaboration with education partners and donors at national and decentralised levels. The development of EMIS should run concurrently with development and monitoring of GESPs, in order to enable plans to be informed by and monitored using robust empirical data.

2. Object of the Evaluation

2.1. Description of the Intervention

41. The project 'Systems building and capacity strengthening of the Ministry of Education and its sub-national Directorates of Education for effective delivery of quality education outcomes' was implemented by UNICEF in close collaboration with a linked UNESCO project, as well as with the Government of Iraq. The project targeted teachers at governorate level, as well as education planners, statisticians and other relevant staff in the MoE at central and governorate level. The indirect Rights Holders are the students and pupils visiting Iraqi schools, including vulnerable school children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers are secondary Rights Holders in this context. The UNICEF project had a budget of EUR 5,094,577.95, consisting of direct costs of EUR 4,754,710.06 and indirect costs of EUR 339,867.90. It was implemented over a period of 46 months, from August 2019 to May 2023, which included a 10-month no-cost extension that was submitted in May 2022 and granted in July 2022. The project was implemented in a subset of governorates and general directorates, namely Baghdad (Rusafa 2 and 3, and Karkh 1 and 3), Najaf, Anbar, Basra, Thi-Qar, Missan, Muthanna and Qadissiyah (see maps in Annex 10). It was focused on downstream project implementation and planning development, and had three main specific objectives, outcomes as well as linked outputs (see table below):

Table 1: The Specific Objectives (SO), Outcomes and Outputs of the Intervention

SO1 To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of education through roll-out of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and increase capacity of education planners, statisticians and educators at governorate level: UNESCO (national level), UNICEF (governorate and school level).	SO2 To strengthen the capacity of the MoE at the central and governorate level to improve education services delivery: UNESCO (National Level), UNICEF (governorate level).	SO3 To enhance the quality of teaching and learning by operationalising the capacity development plan and developing teachers' capacities at central and governorate levels: UNESCO (national level), UNICEF (governorate and school levels).
Outcome 1 Improved capacity to identify gaps in access and quality of education using reliable and frequently collected EMIS data and to allocate appropriate resources, including qualified teachers, to address them.	Outcome 2 Capacity of education planners, statisticians, and educators to make timely and accurate decisions at central and governorate levels is increased, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of education and improved capacity to develop and implement policies at central and governorate levels.	Outcome 3 Enhanced quality of teaching and learning improved.

<p>Output SO1</p> <p>Roll out the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and increase capacity of education planners, statisticians and educators at central and governorate levels. UNESCO (national level), UNICEF (governorate and school levels); main activities include: EMIS system developed and piloted; Call centre for the EMIS established and operational; Staff capacity in the targeted governorates enhanced (24,640 training days for 4,928 staff); School and literacy centre data entered into EMIS and planning, monitoring and evaluation reports generated; Developed supporting EMIS policies and guidance.</p>	<p>Output SO2</p> <p>Education Section Plans are available at national and governorate levels and for ensuring leadership and ownership of the process to develop national capacity development and implementation plans is evident; main activities include: 5-year National Education Capacity Development plan developed at central level; Governorate Education sector plans and capacity development plans developed at selected governorates; 3-year capacity development implementation plan developed at central level; 3-year capacity development implementation plan developed in 4 governorates; Disseminate the capacity development plans to all relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>Output SO3</p> <p>Operationalised capacity development plan and developing teachers' capacities at central and governorate levels (UNESCO at central level and UNICEF at governorate and school level); main activities include: Design pilot training course; Pilot training materials developed; Master trainers trained on developed materials; Roll-out of the training at governorate level; Teachers participated in developing the capacity building plans and teachers training.</p>
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42. In the following section, the Theory of Change for the project is reconstructed. Then the three specific objectives are described in further detail – including their rationale, intended Rights Holders, implementation status and locations, as well as their key stakeholders. Regarding their implementation status, what is presented is based on the monitoring data and should not be seen as an evaluative statement.

2.2. The Specific Objectives in more detail

43. While the rationale for the project is linked to the context outlined in section 1 of this report as well as UNICEF's organisational priority areas of work, there are also more specific, objective-level rationales. These are detailed below along with descriptions of each of the Specific Objectives (SOs), their intended Rights Holders, their implementation status, their implementation locations, and their key stakeholders. The formal logical framework of the project is also contained in Annex 2. The project's financial information is examined in the sub-section 'Overview of Project Financial Information' below, in this section of the report.

Specific Objective 1: Functional Education Management Information System (EMIS) established and rolled out

44. The rationale for **Specific Objective 1** is linked to the Ministry of Education's historical reliance on decentralised systems that held summary information about schools, with school data about facilities, academic and administrative staff counts as well as student counts being paper-based and collected annually. That data were aggregated and sent to the Directorates of Education at governorate level for data entry, and then sent on to the MoE for consolidation into one database, and subject to analysis and reporting. These systems meant a reduced degree of accuracy of forecasts for staffing schools, providing adequate facilities, and preparing school materials, supplies, and books. The systems were also insufficiently responsive to the dynamic and changeable environment in the country, and were not able to account for all children. Specific Objective 1 then is part of an effort to ensure more timely data through the provision of a robust, modern, and efficient information management system supporting harmonised and timely collection, processing and dissemination of data.

Description of Specific Objective 1

45. This specific outcome involved providing EMIS training for school personnel as well as for instructors and staff at Illiteracy Elimination Centres (IECs) and monitoring training of data entry users, with UNESCO's upstream work involving procuring equipment and services, developing training programmes and training master trainers, as well as undertaking capacity building of key MoE personnel responsible for maintaining and updating the EMIS programme. The MoE also played a more managerial role, including ensuring leadership and ownership of the EMIS solutions, assigning responsibilities, ensuring timeliness, developing supporting policies and guidance, identifying school-level end-users for training, as well as maintaining the EMIS platform.

Intended Rights Holders of Specific Objective 1

46. The direct intended Rights Holders of this objective are staff in the targeted governorates, including teachers and administrative staff who are able to use the EMIS system. The specific numbers of Rights Holders targeted and reached, as well as their geographical locations, are detailed in the table in Annex 3. The ultimate (indirect) Rights Holders are the children who will eventually benefit from the specific objective's work.

Key Stakeholders and their contributions for this specific objective

47. Table 2 (below) outlines the key stakeholders for the specific objective, including the implementing agencies, development partners, duty bearers and Rights Holders. A brief outline of each stakeholder's contributions is also incorporated into the table, with the detailed outline of this role contained in the earlier sub-section 'Description of Specific Objective 1'.

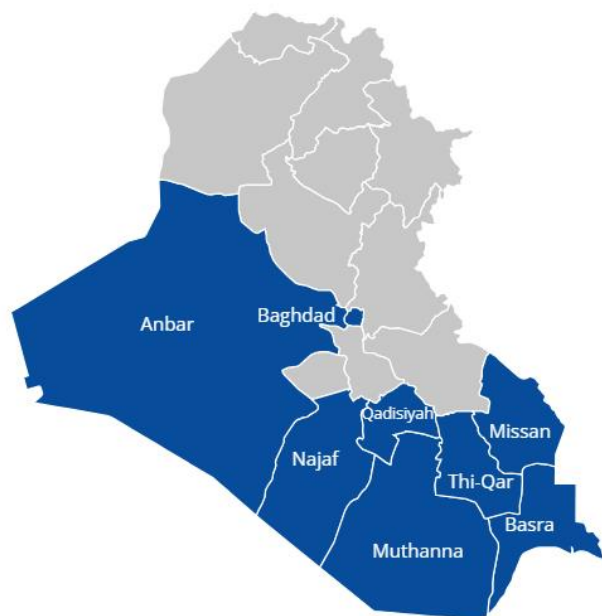
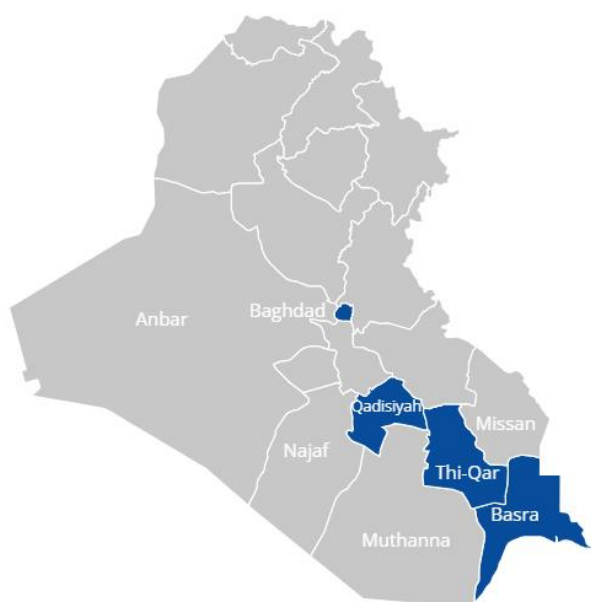


Figure 2 Geographic Scope of implementation of SO1 by Governorate (highlighted in blue)

Specific Objective 2: Developing Education Capacity Development Plans at National and Governorate Levels

Figure 3: Geographic Scope at Governorate level of SO2 activity 'Development of Capacity Development Implementation Plans' (highlighted in blue)



48. The rationale for **Specific Objective 2** was linked to the Iraqi education system's lack of capacity to effectively deliver quality education programmes responding to needs. This capacity gap was linked to the lack of a systematic approach to evidence-based policy-making and to a capacity deficit among the education system staff at multiple levels. The Government of Iraq therefore asked for support in the development of a new education strategy, and it was determined that this plan's strategic priorities should be linked to assessments of capacities, so that there would be sufficient necessary capacities to implement the plan. Furthermore, the government has prioritised decentralisation of service delivery in the education sector, with DoEs at governorate level responsible for overseeing the implementation of education policies and plans, the management of human resources, supervision of schools, and the management of educational infrastructure, etc. through their own planning departments. Those planning departments are supposed to coordinate the development and implementation of education plans, in consultation with the Ministry of Education. Yet capacities at the

governorate levels were found to be weak and needed strengthening, and it was found that Governorate-level Education Sector Plans (GESPs) were required. Specific Objective 2 is therefore part of an effort to strengthen the human capacity of MoE at central and governorate levels, in order to improve education services delivery.

Description of Specific Objective 2

49. This specific outcome involved supporting the development of GESPs, as well as capacity development and implementation plans. It also involved working collaboratively with UNESCO and MoE to ensure alignment between the national education strategy and GESPs, and between national and governorate capacity development plans. UNESCO's upstream work involved supporting the development of the national capacity development and implementation plan, as well as undertaking the collaborative work just described. The MoE

Figure 4: Geographic Scope at Governorate level of SO2 activity 'Development of GESPs and capacity development plans' (highlighted in blue)



had to focus on leadership and ownership of the process to develop national capacity development and implementation plans. This involved supporting the processes for developing governorate-level sector plans and capacity development and implementation plans, identifying all relevant stakeholders to participate in the processes, and disseminating the capacity development plans to all relevant stakeholders.

Intended Rights Holders of Specific Objective 2

50. The direct intended Rights Holders of this objective are MoE staff at central and governorate levels targeted by the capacity building efforts.²⁵ These staff will eventually use the GESPs, with UNICEF's contribution concentrated on key actors at the governorate level as well as support for harmonisation with the work done by the two other project partners (UNESCO and MoE). The specific numbers of Rights Holders targeted and reached, as well as their geographical locations, are detailed in the table in Annex 3. The ultimate (indirect) Rights Holders are the children who will eventually benefit from the specific objective's work.

Specific Objective 3: Enhancing teachers' capacities in service delivery at central and governorate levels

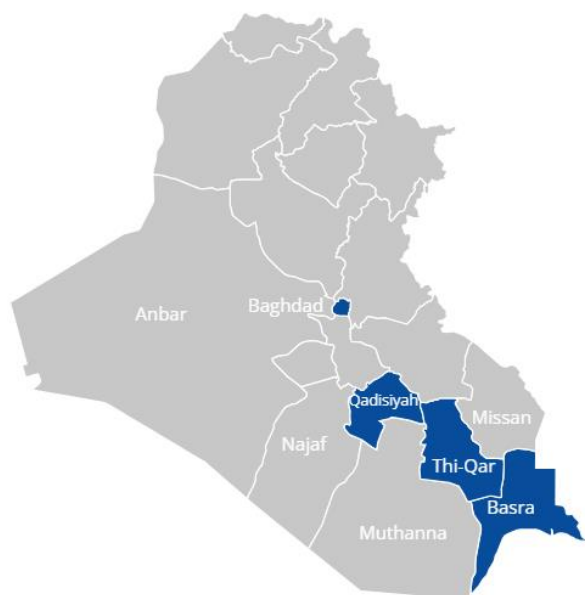
51. The rationale for Specific Objective 3 was linked to a determination that teachers needed capacity building in order to improve learning outcomes, specifically related to training on child-centred methodologies, activity-based learning, positive discipline, psychosocial support, etc. Relatedly, it was determined that there was a need for coherent and coordinated teacher training plans to be designed and implemented at both national and General Directorate levels, including for the development and piloting of new training courses and delivery mechanisms that could help to bridge immediate skills and knowledge gaps. Specific Objective 3 is therefore part of an effort to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, by developing teachers' capacities.

²⁵ The information team could not identify reliable data on the exact number of MoE staff or their predominant gender, due to the administrative nature of SO2's intervention.

Description of Specific Objective 3

52. This specific objective involved rolling out a pilot training programme to selected teachers in Baghdad (Rusafa 3), Basra, Qadissiya, and Thi-Qar, with UNESCO's upstream work involving support for the design of the pilot training course, development of materials, and training of master trainers. The MoE was in turn tasked with designing the pilot training course and identifying participants for the master training, as well as supporting the roll-out of the training at the governorate level. It should be underlined that the training programme was

Figure 5: Geographic Scope of Implementation of SO3 by Governorate



focused on e-learning – a choice taken within the context of COVID-19 and related limitations on movements – and not the broader set of capacity building measures identified in the rationale paragraph above. This fact is commented on in the findings of the evaluation report.

Intended Rights Holders of Specific Objective 3

53. The direct intended Rights Holders of this objective are the teachers and master trainers whose capacities were to be built as part of the specific objective, with UNICEF's contribution concentrated at the governorate level and in supporting harmonisation with the work of UNESCO and the MoE. The specific numbers of Rights Holders targeted and reached, as well as their geographical locations, are detailed in the table in Annex 3. The ultimate (indirect) Rights Holders are the children who will eventually benefit from the specific objective's work.

Table 2 (below) outlines the key stakeholders for the specific objective, including the implementing agencies, development partners, duty bearers and Rights Holders. A brief outline of each stakeholder's contributions is also

incorporated into the table, with the detailed outline of this role included in the earlier sub-section 'Description of Specific Objective 3'.

2.3. Key Stakeholders

54. This section outlines the mapping of the range of stakeholders involved for the whole intervention, across its entire implementation period.
55. There is a range of stakeholders to consider, including: the EU as the funder; UNICEF, UNESCO and the MoE as project implementers/partners; service contractors (Developers of EMIS and of the GESPs); DoEs in targeted governorates (Basra, Qadissiya, Thi-Qar, Missan, Muthanna, Anbar, Najaf, and Baghdad); provincial and local government institutions; teachers; and, Rights Holders. The stakeholders include multiple duty bearers (the UN agencies as well as the Government of Iraq and its representatives, primarily at the local level) and Rights Holders being the students in Iraq as well as their teachers as secondary Rights Holders.
56. As will be detailed in later sections of this report – see the evaluation matrix (section 6) as well as section 7 (evaluation approach and methodology) – data collection for the evaluation, including for gender/JbWMGB as a cross-cutting area of analysis, focused on all the key stakeholders with the exception of students. The rationale for not targeting students is included in section 6, sub-section 'Brief evaluability assessment'.

The table below represents the project's targeted stakeholders:

Table 2: Key Stakeholders and their contributions, project-wide

Stakeholders	Type	Role in the project	Specific Objective 1 (EMIS)	Specific Objective 2 (GESp)	Specific Objective 3 (Teacher Training)
European Union	Donor	Provide financial resources to the project and supervise the overall design and implementation of the project			
Germany	Donor	Provide financial resources to the project			
UNICEF	Direct Implementer Duty bearer	Responsible for the downstream work at the governorate and school levels	Governorate and school-level work related to objective	Governorate-level education sector plans and capacity development/implementation plans	Roll-out of pilot training programme at governorate levels
UNESCO	Implementing partner Duty bearer	Responsible for the upstream work at the central level	National-level work related to objective	National-level work related to objective	Supporting design of the course, development of materials and training of trainers
Ministry of Education	Federal Government/implementing partner Duty bearer	Leadership role including in designing the capacity building and its roll-out, overall ownership, monitoring and feedback on progress	Primary user of the EMIS system, and contributing to building and roll-out of system	Leadership of the national process, supporting the governorate-level process, identifying stakeholders and dissemination	Designing the course, identifying participants for master training, supporting governorate-level roll-out
Formal and Informal Education Directorates	MOE Duty bearers	Use a functional EMIS to inform education decision-makers of the situations and needs of their institutions	Will become users of the system in the future.		
DOEs in targeted governorates	Sub-national level (Basra, Qaddissiya, Thi-Qar, Missan, Muthanna, Anbar, Najaf, and Baghdad) Duty bearers	Provide the necessary infrastructure, system, and support for capacity development to access and use a functional EMIS; collect EMIS data, consolidate and analyse for evidence-based decision-making	Primary user of the EMIS system, and contributing to building and roll-out of system	Primary user of the new strategy/plans	

Teachers and instructors	Direct Rights Holders Duty bearers	Ensure quality teaching and quality reporting into EMIS	Primary user of the EMIS system, and contributing to building and roll-out of system		Staff (teachers) are primary users of the training
Students in Iraq	Indirect Rights Holders Rights holders		Rights holders who benefit from enhanced data management and planning	Rights Holders who benefit from enhanced planning and capacities	Rights Holders who benefit from enhanced teacher capacities
GESPs development (external consultants)	Implementing partner	Provide technical support to DoEs on developing the Governorate Education Sector Plans and Capacity Development Implementation Plans			
EMIS development and maintenance (external consultants)	Implementing partner	Develop the EMIS system and provide technical support for its maintenance			

2.4. Overview of Project Financial Information

57. The initial proposed budget for the 36-month UNICEF project was EUR 4,613,639.91, of which EUR 4,250,000.00 was sought from the EU, with UNICEF to contribute EUR 363,639.91.²⁶ The EU agreed to this proposal and proposed budget, and so the final proposed project budget was: EUR 4,613,639.91. A 10-month, no-cost extension was granted in July 2022, bringing the total time of the project to 46 months. Co-financing by Germany and Global-Education Thematic provided an additional EUR 963,820.92, consisting of direct costs of EUR 894,189.47 and indirect costs of EUR 69,631.45.

2.5. Theory of Change

58. The project's **Theory of Change (ToC)** (see Figure 2 below) was developed on the basis of the short TC included in the evaluation's Terms of Reference – which was insufficiently detailed to guide a theory-based evaluation. So the ToC was further developed in the inception phase by the Evaluation Team – as well as the project design²⁷ and preliminary discussions with key stakeholders during the inception phase. This ToC was validated during the inception phase by the Evaluation Steering Committee as part of the inception report. The ToC reflects the objectives and modalities of the project, and has been used as a framework to help visualise relationships between the different contributions towards its desired outcomes. **A more detailed description of the project's ToC is included in Annex 9, and a graphic representation of it are included in Figure 2 below.**
59. The Project Results framework aligns with the ToC and provides a basis for monitoring progress towards outcomes. The results framework gives a thematic breakdown of outputs and outcome areas; it also details the baselines, targets and means of verification (MoV) for each output. The overall objective of the project is to provide improved learning outcomes as well as equitable and inclusive education for all girls and boys in Iraq (see the detailed Outcomes described in Table 1 above). The ToC highlights the main activities required to achieve each outcome. The ToC lists the causal assumptions, which present the underlying logic to bring about the changes in the ToC. If these assumptions are not realised, they may have an impact on the project's performance. However, unlike external assumptions, causal assumptions can be changed by the project management, e.g. based on the results of monitoring and evaluations. An example of a causal assumption is that 'National government and governorates are willing to take on increased responsibilities and leadership'. If they cease to show commitment, then the project management can review the situation and adjust the approach, e.g. through capacity building, to ensure commitment is strengthened. The external assumptions can be decisive for the project performance, if they are not realised. They present a given critical context that must be fulfilled, if the project is to take place as planned. An example of an external assumption is 'Continued ability to be able to operate within the regions selected'. The key external assumptions for the project logic are shown in the ToC, and they may be determined on the basis of the project modalities and funding.
60. **Gender equality/JbWMGB, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) is mainstreamed through all activities, inputs and approaches for the project.** Moreover, a gender/JbWMGB lens is applied to all outputs and outcomes, including development of the EMIS and of EMIS reports, planning documents, training, and participation in all capacity building activities. A particular focus is applied to gender-based violence, commitments to sustainable development, as well as gender equality/JbWMGB and disability rights.
61. The **barriers, challenges and constraints** are highlighted in the ToC. They are colour coded to match the outputs and outcome they most align with. Some are coloured white, indicating that they are general barriers, challenges and constraints affecting the whole project. **Not shown in the ToC but also likely to be significant risks** are: climate & disaster vulnerability, including epidemics and pandemics other than Covid-19 that risk disrupting the development pathways. An example is the 2017 earthquake of 7.3 magnitude, which occurred 32 km from Halabjah, Iraq.²⁸

UNICEF (2022) *Systems Building and Capacity Strengthening of the MoE and its Sub-National Directorates of Education for Effective Delivery of Quality Education Outcomes*, MIDEAST/2019/407-544, UNICEF Iraq Proposal to the European Union, Addendum 1, Submitted by UNICEF Iraq, May 2022,

²⁷ UNICEF (2019) *Systems Building and Capacity Strengthening of the MoE and its Sub-National Directorates of Education for Effective Delivery of Quality Education Outcomes*. UNICEF Iraq Proposal to the European Union, UNICEF Iraq, February 2019.

²⁸ Source: <https://earthquaketrack.com/quakes/2017-11-12-18-18-17-utc-7-3-19> (accessed on 27/06/2023).

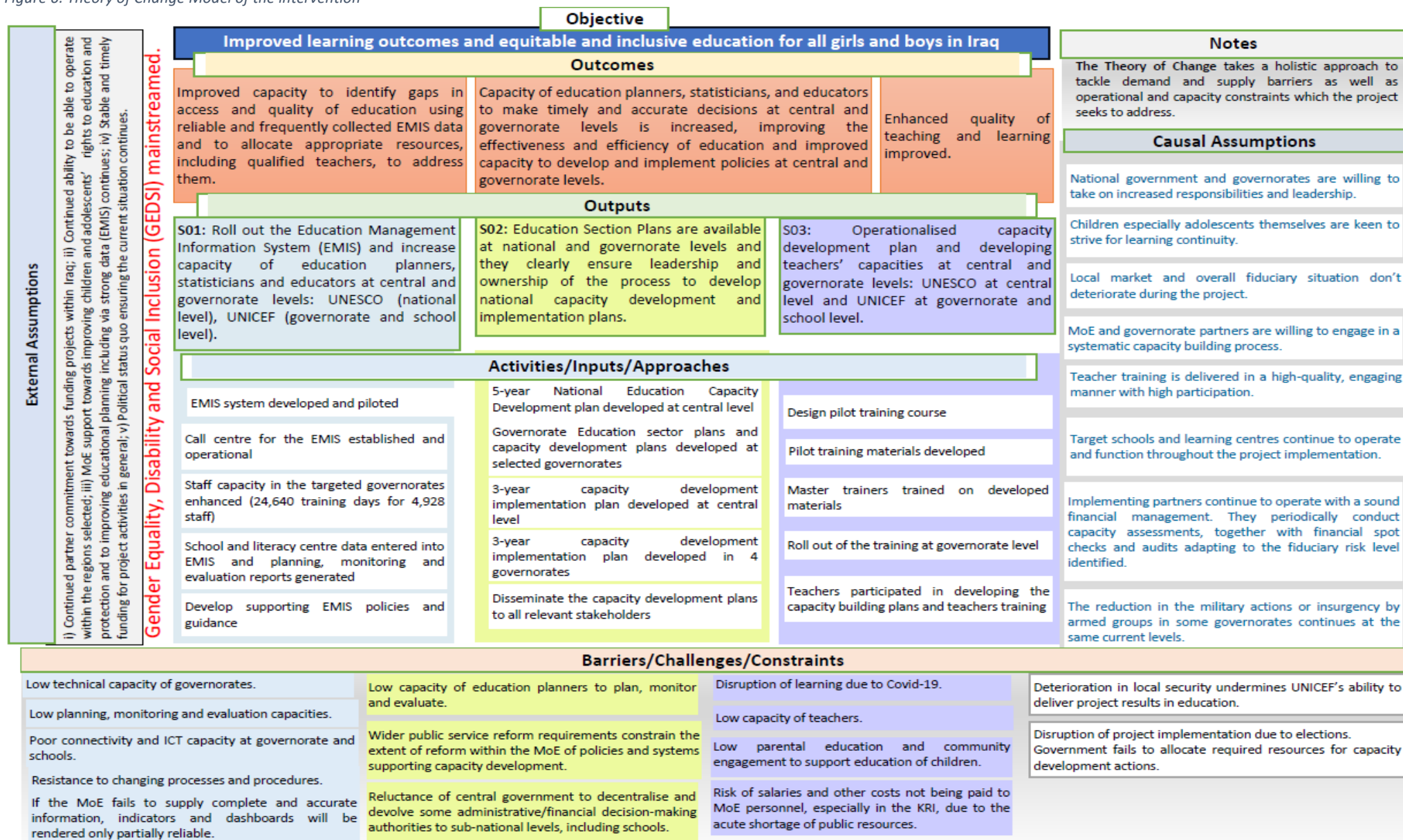
62. In the move **from outputs to outcomes**, the ToC shows strong synergistic causal linkages. The key assumption underlying those linkages is that capacity building and improved information – including plans and the EMIS (at the output level) – will lead to improved capacities and the deployment of those improved capacities in stronger decision-making and teaching informed by better data (at the outcome level). Similarly, the **linkages between the outcomes and overall objective** are strong, with the key assumption being that the outputs and outcomes lead to national-level change for all girls and boys in Iraq. This implies a strong and sustainable roll-out of the project activities nationally and the addressing of any inequities or exclusions, e.g. for particular target groups or geographical regions. Finally, the project is linked to one of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.²⁹
63. **SDG 4 – Quality Education.** The project’s three SOs are linked to SDG 4, with SO3 most directly linked by virtue of focusing on strengthening the quality of teaching and learning, which is in line with the target of substantially increasing the supply of qualified teachers (target 4.c). SOs 1 and 2 are also linked by virtue of strengthening data and planning related to the education system: so they ultimately support multiple targets, including that all girls and boys enjoy complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education (target 4.1); and, eliminating gender disparities/JbWMGB in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable (target 4.5). However, due to the intermediate nature of the three SOs’ interventions, this evaluation could not realistically assess the impact of the project on the relevant indicators of SDG 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.5.1 and 4.c.1.³⁰
64. Lastly, it is worth noting the degree to which the project conforms with the United Nations (UN) convention on the rights of the Child.³¹ The project upholds the general tenets that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms, “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (Article 2). This tenet is upheld through the capacity development in all SOs, as is Article 28 concerning the right of a child to education and Article 29 concerning child development. SO1 has considered Article 8, in which “States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference,” through protection of data privacy. SO3, in the development of e-learning materials, has considered Article 13, in which the child shall have the right to freedom of expression, Article 17 concerning access to information and material from diverse national and international sources, and to a lesser extent Article 23 concerning self-reliance for CWD, by being able to access learning materials at home.

²⁹ Besides SDG 4, the project also had a minor indirect linkage with SDG 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; target 13.3, indicator 13.3.1.(c)). The project did not directly plan to integrate SDG13 in its intervention design, hence, the project’s performance in this regard is addressed in Finding 15.

³⁰ United Nations General Assembly, ‘Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.’ United Nations Statistics Division: New York, NY, USA (2017), 2023 Update.

³¹ United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, General Assembly resolution 44/25.

Figure 6: Theory of Change Model of the intervention



2.6. Gender Analysis

65. The project proposal positions gender equality/JbWMGB and empowerment as a cross-cutting issue in the project, alongside other cross-cutting issues (environmental considerations; human rights; conflict sensitivity). As per the Government of Iraq's request, gender is referred to as 'Justice between women and men, girls and boys (JbWMGB)'.³² From the evaluation's perspective, there has been inclusion of evaluation questions focusing specifically on gender (EQ 15) as well as on GEDSI (Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion) across evaluation questions as appropriate. Furthermore, gender has been included in the Theory of Change as a cross-cutting issue that is in line with the theory-based approach to the evaluation, and has guided the Evaluation Team's work. Evaluation data were gathered in a manner that prioritised understanding if/how/to what extent gender was incorporated into the project, including via direct questions and by ensuring disaggregated data gathering (male and female FGDs; disaggregation of survey respondents by gender) and analysis. Overall, the evaluation was guided by the principles of UN-SWAP in its approach to analysing gender.³³

3. Evaluation purpose, objectives and scope³⁴

3.1. Purpose

66. This final evaluation will serve an accountability and learning function, and this evaluation has both a formative and a summative component:

- **Formative:** it aims to generate insights and learning that can inform the design and implementation of UNICEF's future initiatives aimed at strengthening the public education system for effective delivery of quality education outcomes, relevant to the education context in Iraq and the UNICEF approach on systems strengthening in education.
- **Summative:** it aims to hold UNICEF accountable for the performance of the intervention and the results achieved in terms of systems strengthening for effective delivery of quality education outcomes.

67. The evaluation is intended to be used by **key users as follows:**

- For **UNICEF**, the evaluation helps to strengthen understanding of the contributions of systems strengthening to quality education outcomes, and will inform its programme strategy on education in the next Country Programme for Iraq. It will also inform its work to support the design and implementation strategy of its system strengthening interventions, as well as to support advocacy on system strengthening for quality education outcomes.
- For the **Ministry of Education in Iraq**, the evaluation helps to strengthen understanding of the contribution of systems strengthening to the effective delivery of quality education outcomes, and to suggest priorities for future action.
- For the **Delegation of the EU to Iraq**, the evaluation helps to provide insights on the performance of the intervention and thus to inform assessment of the EU support to quality education outcomes through education systems strengthening in the country.
- For the **Education Sector Group in Iraq** and the **wider group of education stakeholders**, the evaluation helps to improve understanding of how outcome-level change happens and to inform adaptation of mental models/narratives on how to achieve better quality education outcomes through a systems strengthening approach.

³² In this report, the acronym JbWMGB (Justice between Women Men Girls and Boys) is therefore systematically used together with Gender.

³³ UN Women (2022) UN-SWAP 2.0, A UN system-wide accountability framework to mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of women. Available at:

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Howper cent20Weper cent20Work/UNSystemCoordination/UN-SWAP/UN-SWAP-2-brochure-en.pdf> (accessed on 01/11/2023).

³⁴ This section draws significantly on the ToR for the evaluation.

68. Overall, the purpose of this evaluation is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes of UNICEF’s activities to strengthen the education system in Iraq, as well as to identify areas for improvement to better serve the needs of students and educators and the governing bodies of Iraq’s education system.

3.2. Objectives

69. There are five objectives for the evaluation based on the ToR, many of which can be linked to specific evaluation criteria and are thus incorporated into the evaluation matrix (see Section 9 of this report). The five objectives are:

- Assess to what extent **output and outcome-level results** have been achieved, how **well achievements are expected to last**, how **valuable** outcome and output-level results were **to the intended targeted groups** and to what extent **unintended results** have been produced (positive and negative).
- Understand how the **design and implementation strategy** could be improved, by examining what worked well and what did not work well in the intervention’s design and in its actual implementation strategy – especially on the **linkages between the output and outcome-level results** and the **linkages with the other implementing actors** including UNESCO.
- Examine **how well the intervention has adapted** to changing contexts and to other factors influencing the achievement of the outcome-level results, and **how well the monitoring system of the intervention** supported adaptive management decisions.
- Identify **lessons learned and good practices** useful to inform future programming and policy decisions.
- Provide **actionable recommendations** that are logically linked to the conclusions and findings of the evaluation and that draw upon lessons learned as identified through the evaluation.

3.3. Scope

Intervention Scope

70. The evaluation focuses on the aspects of the **EU-funded project ‘Systems building and capacity strengthening of the Ministry of Education and its sub-national Directorates of Education for effective delivery of quality education outcomes’** that were **directly implemented by UNICEF** (based on the intervention description and results framework). It also gives consideration to upstream/non-UNICEF components, to the extent that these inform understanding and assessment of the UNICEF project. Moreover, the **evaluation’s focus** ranges from **project inputs to activities and outputs to outcome-level results**, and covers the role of the key-actors involved in implementing the programme (MoE and DoE), and the influence of the work addressed by the upstream work by UNESCO and MoE on the downstream work and vice versa.

Temporal Scope

71. The evaluation covers the entire implementation period of the intervention, including the 10 months of the no-cost extension that was granted in July 2022. Thus, the total period is 46 months, from August 2019 to May 2023.

Geographical Scope

72. The evaluation’s geographical scope covers all the target governorates for the project in the Federal Government of Iraq. These are shown in Figures 1-4 in Section 1.3. The eight governorates as well as the specific general DoEs targeted by the intervention are also listed in the table below, for each of the project’s three specific objectives as specified in the Terms of Reference. See the maps of the governorates of implementation of the intervention in Section 7.

Table 3: List of Implementation Regions

Governorate/ General Directorate	S01 (EMIS)	S02 (GESP)	S03 (Teacher Training)
Baghdad (Rusafa 2 and 3, and Karkh 1 and 3)	X	Rusafa 2 and 3, and Karkh 3 in Baghdad	Rusafa 3 in Baghdad
Najaf	X		
Anbar	X		

Basra	X	X	X
Thi-Qar	X	X	X
Missan	X	X	
Muthanna	X	X	
Qadissiyah	X	X	X

3.4. Deviations from the Terms of Reference

73. There were no deviations from the Terms of Reference for the evaluation.

4. Evaluation Approach and Methodology

4.1. Evaluation Design

74. The evaluation was guided by **UNICEF's revised Evaluation Policy (2018)**,³⁵ the **United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016)**,³⁶ **UNEG Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation (2014)**,³⁷ **UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020)**,³⁸ **UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards and Research**,³⁹ **Evaluation and Data Collection and Analysis (2021)** and **UNICEF-Adapted UNEG Evaluation Report Standards (2020)**.⁴⁰ Moreover, the evaluation has taken into consideration the issues of equity, gender equality/JbWMGB (see footnote 32) and human rights. It has also considered triangulation, sampling, ethical considerations (including ethical clearance) as well as methodological limitations and mitigation measures.
75. The overall approach for the assignment, in line with the ToR for the evaluation, is a **theory-based approach** rooted in **contribution analysis**.⁴¹ A main tool was the ToC, which was developed during the inception phase. The evaluation's approach also drew on the principles of outcome harvesting, by gathering data about the targeted outcomes, then working backwards and, guided by the results framework, determining the extent to which the interventions contributed to changes (if any) and particularly any unintended/unplanned effects. Taken together, these approaches helped to ensure the rigour and collective ownership of the data gathered, and thus the strength of the evaluation findings.
76. The evaluation utilised appreciative inquiry to help participants uncover existing strengths and opportunities as well as to explore challenges and issues in a positive way. This helped to ensure the evaluation was constructive and inclusive, in addition to promoting ownership of its findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations. The approach to data analysis also incorporated **a realist evaluation perspective**, alongside **mapping of causal paths**.⁴² Key to the realist approach is the assumption that nothing works everywhere or for everyone, and that **context is critical for project results**. This requires a good understanding of the context,

³⁵ UNICEF (2018) *Revised Evaluation Policy of UNICEF*, [E/ICEF/2018/14]. Available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/documents/revised-evaluation-policy-unicef-2018>. (Accessed on 01/02/2023)

³⁶ UNEG (2016) *UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation*. Available at: <https://www.betterevaluation.org/tools-resources/uneval-norms-standards-for-evaluation-2016> (accessed on 01/02/2023).

³⁷ UNEG (2014) *Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation - Towards UNEG Guidance*. Available at: <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/980> (accessed on 01/02/2023).

³⁸ UNEG (2020) *UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation*. Available at:

https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/summary/UNEG_Ethical_Guidelines_for_Evaluation_2020.pdf (accessed on 01/02/2023).

³⁹ UNICEF (2021) *UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis*. Available at:

<https://gdc.unicef.org/resource/unicef-procedure-ethical-standards-research-evaluation-data-collection-and-analysis> (accessed on 01/02/2023).

⁴⁰ UNICEF (2017) *UNICEF Adapted UNEG Evaluation Reports Standards*. Available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/media/816/file/UNICEF-Adapted-UNEG-Evaluation-Report-Standards.pdf> (accessed on 01/02/2023).

⁴¹ This approach focuses on understanding the contribution(s) made by the intervention under assessment relative to the observed results, through an improved understanding of why the observed results have or have not occurred and the roles played by the intervention as well as other internal and external factors.

⁴² The realist evaluation approach sets out to explain what works, how, why, for whom, to what extent, and in what circumstances. It assumes that programme effectiveness will always be conditional, and it is designed to improve understanding of the key contexts and mechanisms contributing to how and why interventions work.

which has been ensured through a comprehensive context analysis to frame the analysis of the initiative, including giving consideration to the various conflicts as well as the impacts of Covid-19 during the period of the project. The evaluation also drew on the **COM-B model for behaviour change** in analysing the project's weak movement towards outcomes (the model is explained in the relevant finding). Finally, the evaluation incorporated a strong **human rights-based approach** (HRBA) approach throughout the evaluation process, to ensure rigorous consideration of gender/JbWMGB, equity and human rights. The approach is incorporated into the tools used for data collection (Annex 6: Draft Data Collection Instruments and Protocols). Moreover, the approach is detailed under the section on data analysis and the section on Ethical Considerations, Confidentiality and Data Protection.

4.2. Evaluation Matrix

77. To ensure consistency during the data collection and analysis, an **Evaluation Matrix** was developed. This was based on the **key questions presented in the ToR**, and it provided the relevant evaluation criteria based on the **OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability**.⁴³ Accordingly, the Evaluation Matrix contains an overview of the evaluation questions, key assessment criteria, main sources of information, and main data analysis collection and analysis tools. The full matrix is included in Annex 5.

4.3. Evaluation Methodology

78. The methodology for the evaluation has been **mixed methods**, including both qualitative and quantitative elements. Such a methodology helps to ensure the rigour of the evaluation's findings, lessons learned and recommendations, by virtue of incorporating multiple types and layers of data.⁴⁴ The evaluation's methodological approach to data gathering and data analysis are outlined below.

- a) **Literature review** of background documents and other relevant data, including a literature review of project reporting and monitoring data, implementing partner reports and financing and design documents. Literature referenced is contained in the footnotes to this report, and a full bibliography is contained in Annex 7.
- b) Semi-structured **key informant interviews** with a variety of key stakeholders (listed in the table on the next page). See also Annex 6 for the precise protocols and data collection tools.
- c) **Focus group discussions** with teachers trained on EMIS, with teachers trained on the e-learning module, and with master trainers (listed in the table on the next page). See also Annex 6 for the precise protocols and data collection tools.
- d) Two **online perception surveys** aimed at gathering a wider set of data focusing on the understandings, experiences and perspectives of respondents. One survey focused on teachers who had received EMIS training, the other focused on teachers who had received e-learning training, and the third focused on MoE administrative staff who are end-users of the EMIS system and who received EMIS training.⁴⁵ See also Annex 6 for the precise protocols and data collection tools.
- e) **Field Observations** included visiting sites of project implementation (particularly training centres, including at DoEs), to help understand the contextual conditions and challenges faced. These were combined with FGDs and/or KIs to most efficiently use the Evaluation Team's time in the field. There were no classroom observations, due to the evaluation's data gathering phase relative to when students are back in class. Field observations were done by the team leader and the national evaluation experts.
- f) **Review of the external environment** influencing the project, including other partner programmes and reports, government initiatives and the external environment and education sector data.

⁴³ This evaluation will not evaluate the project's impact since this was not requested in the ToR given the low evaluability of this criterion.

⁴⁴ Bamberger, M. InterAction, *Introduction to mixed methods in impact evaluation* (No. 3.), 2012. Retrieved from website: <http://www.interaction.org/sites/default/files/Mixedper cent20Methodsper cent20inper cent20Impactper cent20Evaluationper cent20per cent28Englishper cent29.pdf>

⁴⁵ For EMIS teachers, the survey concentrated on their perceptions of EMIS, including the quality of the training they received, and ease of use/challenges faced. For e-learning teachers, the survey focused on their perceptions of the teaching capacity building activities that they were exposed to, including their quality, what worked well and what did not work well, and if/how/to what extent it is or will impact on their teaching. For MoE administrative staff, the survey concentrated on their perceptions of EMIS, including the quality of the training they received, and ease of use/challenges faced.

Sampling Strategy and Primary Data Collection

79. Primary data collection involved Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGD), field observations and the perception surveys as shown in the table below. The qualitative tools and data collection instruments and protocols can be found in Annex 6. **The sampling for primary data collection was purposive**, ensuring appropriate representation of each respondent group and Rights Holders benefiting from each output area for the project.⁴⁶ A table **outlining the detailed sampling approach per Specific Objective can be found in Annex 11**. As agreed with the evaluation steering committee during the inception phase, Children Rights Holders and other vulnerable groups were not sampled in this evaluation. That is because their relationship with this project is very indirect and it was unlikely that the data collected from them could have provided useful insights on the project's evaluation criteria.

The following table shows the number of respondents by gender for each data collection method and type of respondent.⁴⁷

Table 4: Primary Data Collection Respondents by Gender

Category	Stakeholders	FGD			KII			Perception Survey			Total		
		F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T
Development Partners	UNICEF, UNESCO	0	0	0	9	6	15	0	0	0	9	6	15
Funding Agency	EU	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Partner Implementing Agencies	Cambridge Education (company that designed EMIS)	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	2
Primary Duty Bearers	Government of Iraq, Ministry of Education	0	0	0	1	5	6	27	30	57	28	35	63
Secondary Duty Bearers	Principals and Teachers	110	133	243	40	49	89	808	538	1346	958	720	1678
Grand Total		110	133	243	51	62	113	835	568	1403	996	763	1759

⁴⁶ Purposive sampling criteria included: i) A mix of locations in central and in southern Iraq for each SO, to ensure that similar and different contextual conditions and implementing conditions in each region were captured; ii) Two different directorates within a governorate where feasible; iii) A mix of teachers from higher performing and lower performing schools for KIIs and FGDs; iv) A mix of locations where implementation was relatively smooth and where it was relatively more challenging, based on the following factors: degree of local political support for the project; level of accessibility for the project team; quality of facilities and strength of capacities (linked to wealth of location); quality of infrastructure (e.g. Internet).

⁴⁷ Some of the respondents amongst the principals and teachers surveys did not specify their gender (42 respondents out of the total of 1388 respondents). If multiple KIIs were conducted with the same person, they were only counted once and so are shown as one KII in the table. Note that data given in this evaluation is not in relation to ratios in the total population.

80. Overall, the Evaluation Team ended up conducting a total of 26 FGDs with 243 (110 women, 133 men) participants consisting of secondary duty bearers (mostly school principals and teachers). Furthermore, the team members conducted 113 KIIs with a total of 51 women and 62 men across all levels of stakeholders: these included staff and representatives of UNICEF, UNESCO, the EU, Cambridge Education, the Government of Iraq, the Ministry of Education as well as 89 principals and teachers (40 female, 49 male). With the online perception survey, we reached a total of 1403 respondents (835 female, 568 male), of which 1346 were school principals and teachers (808 female, 538 male) and the remaining 57 were government or DoE staff (27 female, 30 male).

Data Analysis and Triangulation

81. To facilitate rigorous data analysis including between different team members, the software **Dedoose**⁴⁸ was used. Analysis of quantitative (survey) data was done in **MS Excel** and involved linking the data to evaluation questions to detail the perceptions of respondents (coding). The approach was primarily descriptive and aimed to seek out how many and to what extent respondents felt a certain way about particular questions, including seeking out patterns that could inform the evaluation's responses to the evaluation questions, e.g. through disaggregation by geographical region and gender.

82. **Triangulation** was used as a key tool for validating and analysing findings. In response to the realist evaluation approach mentioned above, the analysis included: contribution analysis, involving a systematic analysis of the results observed relative to the Theory of Change, while also giving consideration to any unintended results; analysis of data about the outcomes observed and determining if/to what extent the project contributed to them (informed by outcome harvesting principles and the COM-B Model of behavioural change). The Evaluation Team also used financial process and cost-effectiveness analysis in analysing secondary data.

Risks, Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

83. The risks, limitations and mitigation strategies for this evaluation included:

- a) The risk of limited access to information due to **staff turnover** was addressed by implementing contingency plans, such as reaching out to former UNICEF staff for insights. Additionally, **mixed methods and triangulation** were employed to help validate data and mitigate recall bias.
- b) The challenge of **insufficient monitoring data** was tackled by developing a **comprehensive Theory of Change and emphasising the use of mixed methods** as well as a robust data gathering plan. Ensuring the collected data reflected intended results was crucial, along with transparently acknowledging evaluability limitations.
- c) Concerns about **reporting bias** were met with culturally appropriate data collection protocols, and emphasis on **anonymity and confidentiality, triangulation, and the application of the Appreciative Inquiry Approach** to address bias in a non-threatening manner.
- d) The risk of **compromised data quality or timeline delays** due to resource constraints and a small team was mitigated by selecting an expert team based on competence and availability. Close **management support, a detailed workplan, and early engagement for ethical clearance contributed to efficient timelines**.
- e) **Seasonal availability** issues during summer were addressed by **early engagement with stakeholders** for scheduling flexibility, regular updates with UNICEF, and **clear communication about limitations**. Alternative strategies were developed where possible.
- f) The volatile security context in Iraq necessitated **comprehensive security assessments**, regular monitoring, clear communication channels, and contingency plans. These included alternative data collection sites or methods, planning for possible remote data collection via secure channels, and adherence to security protocols and procedures. Fortunately, the Evaluation Team experienced no security challenges during the data collection process.
- g) The **tight timeframe for the data collection** (largely in the month of August, with some further data gathering in September) and for the conduct of the evaluation was mitigated through **strong coordination with UNICEF** and in particular the evaluation focal points, e.g. via weekly update meetings.

⁴⁸ Dedoose makes it possible to code different types of qualitative data to the questions in the Evaluation Matrix and then to do queries on those questions that draw together the different relevant data sources. This process helps to increase the depth and rigour of the data analysis. Source: <https://www.dedoose.com/>

84. The detailed description of the identified risks, limitations and their mitigation strategies that ensured the evaluation findings' robustness can be found in Annex 12.

Quality Assurance of the Evaluation Process

85. The Quality Assurance process was tailored to the specific needs of the evaluation at hand and the ethical frameworks followed by UNICEF, as well as of the key stakeholders and their organisations or customs at a local level. To ensure high quality and effective evaluation, Cowater undertook the following measures:
- Hiring of a seasoned expert team leader as internal quality assurance expert who reviewed all deliverables before submission to UNICEF.
 - Detailed study and interpretation of UNICEF's evaluation policy as well as the UNICEF-adapted Evaluation Report Standards and the UNICEF GEROS Handbook applied in accordance with the requirements of this evaluation.
 - Clear allocations responsibilities for the QA process: the QA expert was responsible for the technical validity of all deliverables and the project manager was in charge of overseeing contractual and ethical compliance of the commitments made to UNICEF.
 - Creation and following of Quality Assurance and Ethical Compliance Check Lists.
 - Regular communication with UNICEF Stakeholders, to ensure a clear understanding of the needs of the users of this evaluation.

4.4. Ethical Considerations, Confidentiality and Data Protection

86. Throughout the evaluation and in close consultation with UNICEF and all relevant stakeholders, Cowater ensured adherence to all ethical considerations, in line with the [UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation and Data Collection and Analysis](#) and the UNEG ethical guidelines.⁴⁹
87. The following measures were taken in order to adhere to these principles (described in more detail in Annex 14):
- Vetting for Conflict of Interest:** the Evaluation Team was vetted for potential conflicts of interest, and none turned out to have worked in essential roles related to the project prior to the beginning of this evaluation: hence no conflict of interest could be detected and all Evaluation Team members were approved by the UNICEF evaluation managers.
 - Basic Ethics Training:** Evaluation Team members completed UNICEF's Agora online course on ethics to familiarise themselves with all ethical aspects of the evaluation.
 - Personal and Professional Integrity:** the team signed the 'UNICEF Pledge of Ethical Conduct in Evidence Generation' and respected confidentiality.
 - Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation:** participation in this evaluation was voluntary and participants were fully informed, signed permission forms in the case of KII and FGD participants, and were clearly told that they could withdraw consent at any time without penalty.
 - Avoiding Harm:** mechanisms were in place to address health and safety risks, including those related to Covid-19. For example, by informing all participants in this evaluation on reporting channels about any instances of risks to the health and safety of children and personnel involved in the intervention. (See Annex 14 and consent forms in Annex 6.)
 - Sensitivity to Social and Cultural Environment:** the data collection protocols and tools considered cultural differences, discrimination, and gender/JbWMGB issues. This was ensured also by the support of two local Evaluation Team members (male and female). Details on that can be found in Annex 14.
 - Dealing with Sensitive Issues:** protocols were in place for reporting instances of sexual harassment, abuse, or violence: none were reported.
 - Communication of Reporting Channels:** clear reporting channels for misconduct or unethical behaviour were communicated on all data collection tools. (See Annex 6.)
 - Protection of Confidentiality:** the authors of this document made sure that sensitive information is not traceable throughout this report to any individuals, and that data storage follows UNICEF's protocols. Only the Evaluation Team members know the answers of individual respondents in interviews. The data is stored in a safe password-protected Tresorit Cloud Drive and will be handed over to UNICEF after the end of this evaluation. Our own copies of the raw data will be destroyed. Details on this point can be found in Annex 14.

⁴⁹ United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

- j) **Ethical Review Mechanisms and Ethical Clearance Process:** the evaluation's inception report and all data collection tools underwent an ethical review, and prior clearance was sought and obtained from UNICEF and the Ethical Review Board.
 - k) **Permission and Acknowledgment:** the Evaluation Team has committed to not communicate evidence or publish the report or any other information related to this evaluation without explicit permission from UNICEF, including acknowledgment of UNICEF in sharing findings.
88. The Evaluation Team did not encounter challenges to its independence, impartiality, or conflicts of interest during the implementation of the evaluation exercise.

4.5. Timeline of the Evaluation Process

89. This evaluation process was launched after the signature of the contract on 31 May 2023. A kick-off meeting involving the key users of this evaluation took place on 30 May 2023. The first draft of the inception Report was submitted on 5 July 2023. The Steering Committee Meeting to approve the Inception Report took place on 20 July 2023. Ethical Approval was requested and received by the UNICEF ERB on 6 August. The Field mission data collection in Iraq began on Monday 7 August and was concluded on 18 August, apart from a few remaining remote interviews. The preliminary findings workshop to share the first insights of the evaluation with key stakeholders took place on 12 September. The first draft of the final evaluation report was submitted on 1 October 2023. The Validation Workshop with the key stakeholders on the Recommendations of the Final Report was held on 26 November 2023, in Baghdad: this was followed by the finalisation and approval of the Final Report by UNICEF.

5. Findings

90. This section presents the findings of the evaluation. The findings were guided by the questions and criteria from the Evaluation Matrix, which is contained in Annex 5. The findings draw on the evaluation's data collected and the team's analysis of that data, as detailed earlier in this report. The findings are organised by the evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and gender/JbWMGB, human rights, and climate change.

5.1. Relevance

This section analyses the extent to which the **intervention design was sensitive to the actual needs in the specific context of Iraq** and remained so under changing circumstances. The **sensitivity in the design of the downstream work to the upstream work and vice versa**, is an additional focus of this section. **The sensitivity of the intervention design of the downstream work with the upstream work and vice versa** is addressed under the evaluation criteria of coherence.

This section addresses the evaluation questions **EQ 1 and EQ2** (see Evaluation Matrix in Annex 5):

Finding 1 (relates to EQ1): To what extent was the intervention design sensitive to the actual needs of the target groups and to the context of Iraq at governorate and school level?

91. **The project's design was overall sensitive to the needs of target groups and the context. This is because the EMIS system and the capacity to use it (SO1⁵⁰), as well as the GESPs and the capacity to implement them (SO2⁵¹), were strongly in line with those needs, including from the perspective of GEDSI. The two SOs were also in line with the overall objective of improving learning outcomes and equitable and inclusive education for all girls and boys in Iraq. This was similarly true of the building of teachers' teaching capacities (SO3⁵²), with the caveat that the longer-term relevance of e-learning to doing this is more ambiguous.**
92. **Appropriate needs assessments about the context in Iraq, and how to strengthen its education system, contribute to the overall objective of improving learning outcomes and equitable and inclusive education for**

⁵⁰ To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of education through roll-out of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and increase capacity of education planners, statisticians and educators at governorate level.

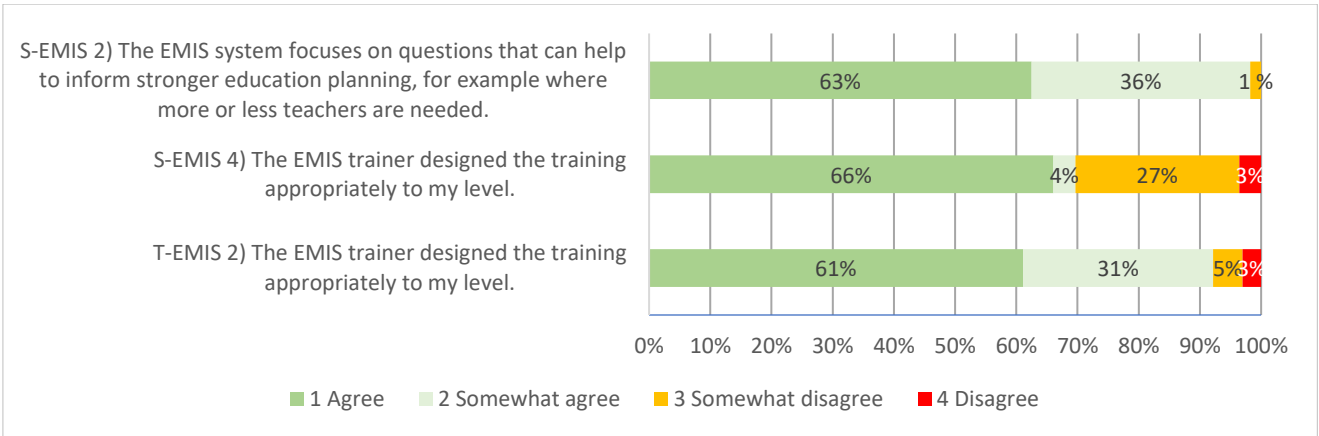
⁵¹ To strengthen the capacity of MoE at the central and governorate level to improve education services delivery.

⁵² To enhance the quality of teaching and learning by operationalising the capacity development plan and developing teachers' capacities at central and governorate levels.

all girls and boys in the country. This **emerges clearly in the project proposal**. It was also **validated in evaluation interviews with multiple UNICEF respondents**, who corroborated the proposal’s description of the design and what fed into its development. The proposal appropriately analyses the relevant context in Iraq as part of the rationale. This includes describing an education system that has been in decline since the 1990s due to multiple conflicts and their effects, compounded by declining investment and financing over that period. The result has been a decrease in learning levels in the country, and a decision by the government of Iraq to prioritise education as a sector. As the proposal argues, part of addressing the issues identified is related to stronger data for planning, capacity building to use that data, and more general capacity building to strengthen the quality of teaching.⁵³ This analysis can be broken down further, by considering the various project components.

93. The **EMIS system and related capacity building to use it (SO1) is aligned with the needs identified**, including because it builds on previous work on an Iraqi EMIS system that has been ongoing since 2013. Several key informants familiar with the evolution of the system since 2013 also underlined that while it proceeded in stops and starts, it generally sought to adapt to changing needs based on feedback loops with end-users and in line with the evolving context. This helps to reinforce EMIS’s alignment over time. EMIS systems, which were defined in detail earlier in this report, enable the collection, analysis, and use of information in education. These uses include for management and administration, planning, policy formulation, and monitoring and evaluation. The relevance of such a system is clear, given Iraq’s usage of a decentralised, often paper-based planning system that faces many challenges in responding to the complex and contextually dynamic demands of the country’s education sector. Also relevant is that the **system includes gender disaggregated data, data on other vulnerabilities including learning difficulties or disability status or challenges faced by particular students**, and a **socio-economic profile that could be used as an indicator of potential vulnerabilities** such as the likelihood of dropping out of school early. Interviews and FGDs with master trainers, teachers and UNICEF staff – as well as online perception survey results in all regions – also made clear that **levels of computer skills among the teachers that would input data to the system were overall relatively low**. This underlines the relevance of incorporating linked capacity building as part of SO1.
94. Regarding survey data on the EMIS system, as can be seen in Figure 7, 92 per cent of all teacher respondents in Baghdad, Basra and Qadissiyah indicated that they either fully or somewhat agree that **the EMIS trainer designed the training appropriately to their levels** (T-EMIS 2). A survey among government staff revealed equally high numbers of satisfaction: 92 per cent agree or somewhat agree that **the design of the EMIS training was appropriate to their capacity level** (S-EMIS 4). And 98 per cent of respondents also agree that **the EMIS system focuses on questions that could help to inform stronger education planning to allocate teachers more optimally according to real needs** (S-EMIS-2). Open-ended feedback on the EMIS system training from

Figure 7: The online survey showed that government staff (n=56) largely agreed that EMIS is a system that is highly relevant to inform stronger education training (S-EMIS 2), however, their impression of the appropriateness of the EMIS training turned out to be a bit lower (S-EMIS 4) than as it was perceived by teaching staff (n=918) (T-EMIS 2).



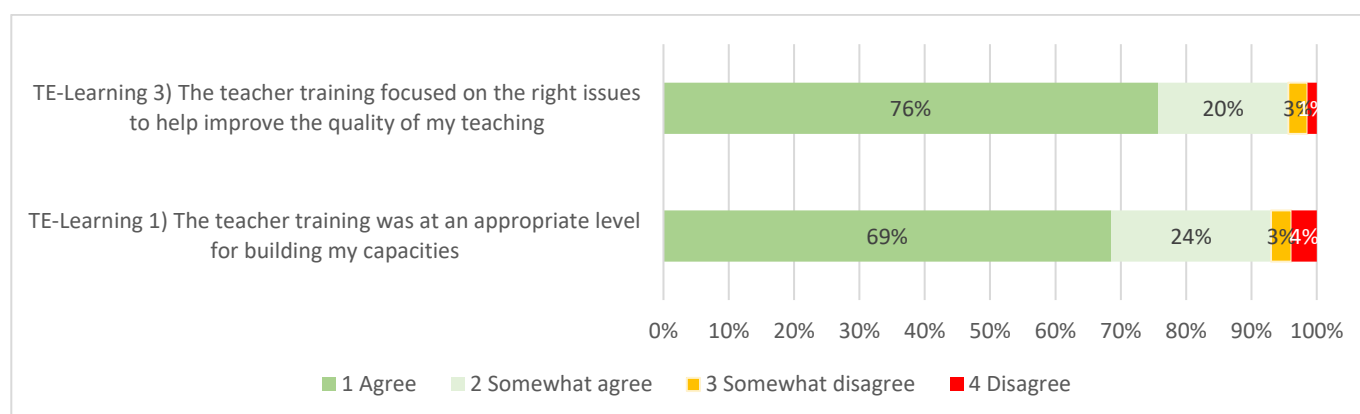
95. the teachers indicated **concerns about the short duration of training, the complexity of the system for some, and issues related to Internet access**. What this survey data underlines then is the **perception among**

⁵³ ‘Systems Building and Capacity Strengthening of the MoE and its Sub-National Directorates of Education for Effective Delivery of Quality Education Outcomes’, UNICEF Iraq Proposal to the European Union. Submitted by UNICEF Iraq, February 2019.

respondents of the high degree of relevance of the EMIS training, though with a strong interest in further training to continue to enhance capacities.

96. The **GESPs and the capacity building plans linked to them (SO2)** are relevant, given the Government of Iraq's decision to implement a new National Education Strategy that includes a commitment to decentralised planning. This commitment means that the strategy must be translated to the governorate level, as part of appropriately adapting it to the different governorates. Also relevant is that **SO2 assessed what capacities would need to be built to ensure the effective implementation of the GESPs**, through the capacity building plans. A further dimension of the relevance of SO2 is the **strong inclusion of gender disaggregated data in the GESPs**, with their analysis giving good consideration to the particular **vulnerabilities of and disparities between girls**. They also **incorporate strategies for improving access** and equity, including for children with special needs and for children outside the formal education system.
97. The project's focus on capacity building of teachers (SO3) was relevant, given the overall goal of improving learning outcomes and the capacity levels of teachers reported by multiple key informants – especially master trainers in evaluation KIIs and FGDs. Moreover, the e-learning module that was rolled out under this specific objective was highly relevant, given the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and related quarantines and limits on movement. But it is less clear that this module will remain as relevant in the longer term with the aim of strengthening teacher capacities and thus learning outcomes. The observation being made here is that it is likely that there were other thematic areas that could have been focused on for capacity building. These would have had greater longer-term relevance, because they are core areas of teaching expertise and so are more directly linked to improvement of learning outcomes. To quote from the project proposal, "...teacher capacity needs continuous strengthening in terms of pedagogical skills, subject matter content, and pastoral care for students, as well as duration and quality of contact with student. Thus, teachers need to be trained on child-centred methodologies, activity-based learning, positive discipline, psychosocial support, etc." This list of identified needs remains unaddressed through the project, other than the component on duration and quality of contact with students. The decision made upstream by the Government of Iraq to focus on e-learning as the priority module, has affected the ability of UNICEF to address the initially targeted results and thus the relevance of this project component.
98. The survey data on the e-learning was also very positive, with 93 per cent of respondents fully or somewhat agreeing that the teacher training was at an appropriate level to build their capabilities (T-E-Learning 1), and 95 per cent of respondents agreeing or somewhat agreeing that the E-Learning teacher training focused on the right issues to help improve their quality of teaching (T-E-Learning 3). This strengthens the earlier observation that e-learning was relevant to needs.

Figure 8: The online survey showed that that teaching staff (n=572) participating in E-Learning training sessions largely agree that the teacher training is relevant (T-E-Learning 3) and at an appropriate level to strengthen the teachers' capacities (T-E-Learning 1)



Finding 2 (relates to EQ1): To what extent was the intervention design sensitive to the actual needs of the target groups and to the context of Iraq at governorate and school level?

99. The design had weaknesses in terms of planning for the usage of the EMIS and to a more limited extent of the GESPs. This is because the project did not build in mechanisms to facilitate fostering of organisational

change processes to support their usage, and did not address the implementation of the capacity building plans or the broadening of SO3⁵⁴ capacity building beyond the core group of trained teachers.

100. The overall strength of the design from a relevance **perspective** as outlined in Finding 1 is somewhat tempered by some **weaknesses in terms of anticipating how movement towards the project's specific objectives would be achieved**.
101. As regards SO1, the decision to implement the EMIS system in multiple Directorates of Education, and partially in many governorates, meant that **the system could not and still cannot be used for governorate-level planning processes**. This is because governorate-level planning would require all the schools in the governorate to be included – yet as multiple key informants from UNICEF, UNESCO, the MoE, DoEs, as well as teachers and others underlined, **no governorate has complete coverage**.⁵⁵ In turn this means that a valuable opportunity for a 'demonstration effect' about how the system can facilitate more effective planning was lost; there was therefore also a lost opportunity to engender **greater** interest in and commitment to the system. More fundamentally, the move towards a nimbler, data-driven planning process within the Ministry and the Directorates of Education requires more than simply putting in place a strong system with up-to-date data. Because ensuring usage of the system, and thus movement toward the SO's aim of **improving the effectiveness and efficiency of education, would require fostering of an organisational change process**, as in any other organisation moving away from an entrenched way of working. Moreover, such a change process is not explicitly articulated in the project, underlining a weakness in the relevance of its design.
102. Turning to **the GESPs, the project's design did foresee governorate-level sector coordination mechanisms** to help to bring together key actors involved and thus to facilitate their implementation. Yet it is not clear now to what extent these mechanisms are aimed at fostering the sort of deep organisational change processes required to shift towards the complex and more data-driven planning processes envisioned by the GESPs. This observation is somewhat muted by the **capacity gaps assessments and development plans undertaken as part of this specific objective**, to help to ensure the effective implementation of the GESPs. The reason is that such assessments and plans could potentially help to foster such deep organisational change processes. But the challenge is that **a clear strategy for actually implementing these plans was not agreed, including about who would take the lead in implementing them**.
103. Regarding the teacher capacity building (SO3), the previous finding made clear its relevance in terms of contributing to the aim of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning at governorate and school levels. But **the weakness at a design level** is, as multiple teachers and trainers underlined in KIIs, seen in **foreseeing capacity building amplification measures**. Here the observation is that there was **no formal plan for having teachers who trained under the project subsequently train others at their schools**. Nor was there a formal plan to ensure that school heads would be committed to supporting such amplification measures by getting their buy-in to the e-learning. What resulted then was that some teachers took the initiative to train others, but most did not.
104. What these various observations point to is weaknesses in the ability to reach the larger specific objectives, unless there is either a follow-on project to implement the measures needed to achieve them or some other mechanism by which they would be achieved of their own accord. This is a weakness in the project's relevance from a design perspective.

Finding 3 (relates to EQ2): Did the intervention design continue to remain sensitive to the needs of the target groups and to the context of Iraq under changing circumstances?

105. **The intervention design remained relevant to needs, both by continuing to focus on those needs that did not change despite shifting circumstances and by adapting to those that did, with the latter particularly visible in SO3's⁵⁶ focus on e-learning during COVID quarantines.**

⁵⁴ To enhance the quality of teaching and learning by operationalising the capacity development plan and developing teachers' capacities at central and governorate levels.

⁵⁵ The analysis here is about governorate-level planning. Yet it should be noted that Rusafa 3, which is a directorate that is part of the governorate of Baghdad, did have all schools entered into the EMIS system (with funding from the EU and the German government). Yet it was not able to demonstrate significant progress in data-driven planning and thus to produce a demonstration effect.

⁵⁶ To enhance the quality of teaching and learning by operationalising the capacity development plan and developing teachers' capacities at central and governorate levels.

106. The design of the project remained relevant to needs, given the continuing relevance of the initially assessed needs as well as new needs that arose over the period from when the concept note was first drafted in 2018 to its implementation from 2019 to 2023. This is most visible in the decision taken to prioritise the e-learning module as part of SO3, once the COVID-19 pandemic had started. That area of focus showed a pro-active response to the quarantines and resulting limitations on movement within the country, since students could still be connected with teachers: this enabled some continuity in student learning.
107. More broadly, the changing circumstances in Iraq during the period of the project did not fundamentally alter the underlying needs that the project sought to address, in term of strengthening the education system through capacity building and data-based planning tools. Given this, the project's ongoing focus on addressing these needs shows that it continued to remain sensitive to the needs of the target groups and to the context.

5.2. Coherence

The section on coherence analyses the **extent to which the intervention was compatible with other interventions in Iraq**, the objectives established by development partners, as well as the objectives of the Government of Iraq for the Education sector. The evaluation focuses on **internal coherence**, which is the extent to **which synergies and linkages** have been established between the upstream and the downstream work, and the extent to which they have contributed to achieving outcome-level results or hindered the achievement thereof. Reference is also made to **external coherence** being the **consistency of the intervention with other actors' interventions and objectives**, with emphasis on those of the Government of Iraq.

This section addresses the evaluation questions **EQ 3 and EQ 6** (see Annex 5):

Finding 4 (relates to EQ3 and EQ6): How was the intervention design of the downstream work sensitive to the upstream work and vice versa, and to which extent did synergies and linkages between the upstream and the downstream work contribute to achieving outcome-level results or hinder the achievement thereof?

108. The **internal coherence** between the upstream and downstream work was **overall good**, though **weaker in terms of linkages between downstream components**. Regarding the upstream-downstream dimension, there was strong accounting for the necessary steps to carry out each SO's activities, and good alignment between roles assigned and the areas of expertise/strengths of UNICEF and UNESCO, with some weakness in terms of assumptions and fostering ownership by the Ministry of Education. The internal linkages thus supported movement towards outcome-level results, as project design realistically aimed at these. The project was also in line with the UN Cooperation Framework for Iraq, and with multiple SDGs.
109. The **design of the intervention was notable for strongly linking upstream work with downstream work**, with the former feeding into the latter. If we take SO1 as an illustrative example of this, design of and technical support for the EMIS system, procurement of computers and designing of training for implementing it by UNESCO were all done at the upstream level, which then fed into UNICEF's work at the downstream level to implement the training about the system on the provided computers. This was complemented by the MoE helping to ensure coherence, assigning responsibilities, identifying end-users for training, as well as ultimately maintaining the EMIS platform as part of its ownership role. From a design perspective, these components fit together well and so can facilitate movement towards the outputs aimed at by the specific objective. The weakness from a design perspective can be seen in the assumption that producing a strong system or plan and building capacities will lead to the usage of those systems and plans and deployment of those improved capacities in stronger decision-making and teaching informed by better data. This weakness is discussed further in the effectiveness findings.
110. There were also **generally good coordination mechanisms between project partners responsible for the upstream and downstream work**, marked by regular meetings and communication and with UNICEF leading at the governorate level as envisioned in the design. That said, some UNICEF, MoE and UNESCO **KIs highlighted examples of bilateral meetings between the MoE and UNESCO focusing on upstream components**, and the MoE and UNICEF focusing on downstream components. This was characterised as reducing the ability of the project partners to operate as coherently as they might have, especially given that the upstream and downstream components were so strongly linked together from a design perspective.

111. It is also relevant to consider **internal coherence between the downstream components**. Here, a **weakness of the design is the linkages between the project SOs**. The observation is that horizontal linkages between the EMIS and related capacity building, the GESPs and related capacity building, and the e-learning were relatively siloed. This means that the **EMIS work was not designed to feed into and thus to strengthen the development of the GESPs**, with the result that the groundwork for the ultimate usage of the system/plans would not be laid. Consequently, **the various capacity building components of all three SOs were not linked together**: if they had been linked, this might have amplified their results. This is a lost opportunity then for the project overall.
112. Furthermore, and as was emphasised by multiple interviewees at UNICEF, UNESCO and the MoE, the design assigned roles to partners that were in line with their particular areas of expertise and experience. For UNICEF, this was particularly its strong relationships and network at the sub-national level across Iraq, and its strong capacities in terms of organising training that especially focused on education as a thematic area.
113. Regarding roles, **ownership by the MoE** is a more complicated area. If we are to take ‘ownership’ as understood in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (“Developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, improve their institutions and tackle corruption.”⁵⁷), then the ownership role was strong from a design perspective. This is because the MoE was and is strongly in favour of this project and its components at a theoretical and policy level. But ownership should also be understood more broadly, a point that was underlined in several key KIIs during the evaluation. This is especially true, given that the design assumed the government would ultimately take on the various components and run them (EMIS) and use them (GESPs and having its staff put into practice their acquired teaching capacities). Here, the observation is **that a further dimension of strong ownership typically comes from actively participating in designing and implementing project components and thereby becoming progressively more committed to them and their success** by virtue of experiencing them as (at least partially) one’s own. But **from a design perspective, the MoE’s role was less active, with most components done by the UN partners** and relatively few irrevocable, concrete commitments along the way by the MoE. This has the effect of **decreasing the MoE’s active ownership of the project**. This partly explains some of the observations in later findings, e.g. related to weak project sustainability.
114. There is also some **internal incoherence regarding planning and funding priorities between the MoE and the DoE** that several DoE, UNICEF and MoE interviewees remarked on this. This incoherence is linked to the push-pull within the government between decentralisation and centralisation, and it could hamper the future achievement of project outcomes. This issue is somewhat exacerbated by the **project’s division of responsibilities for the national and governorate levels between UNICEF and UNESCO**, because they map onto and thus reinforce the Ministry’s own internal divisions.
115. The UN Cooperation Framework for Iraq emphasises the need for strong partnerships, including between UN agencies and with national partners. The partnership approach adopted for the project is strongly coherent with this framework.
116. Lastly, the **project is coherent with multiple SDGs at a design level**. As already mentioned in section 2.5, for SDG 4 – Quality Education, SO3’s focus on improving the quality of teaching and education was in line with the target of increasing the supply of qualified teachers. As a result, SO1 and SO2’s strengthening of data and planning were in line with the targets that all girls and boys should enjoy completely free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education; they were also in line with eliminating gender disparities/JbWMGB in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable. The three SOs are somewhat in line with SDG 5 – Gender Equality, since they aim to mainstream effective female inclusion. But this is not seen in specific activities, outputs and outcomes undertaken by the project. Moreover, the overall project is indirectly in line with SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals, particularly the target of enhancing the global partnership for sustainable development through multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources by virtue of its partnerships and collaborative approach between the Government of Iraq, UNESCO and UNICEF. However, there are no specific activities, outputs and outcomes addressing SDG17.

5.3. Efficiency

The section on efficiency analyses the **extent to which the intervention design delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way**. This section examines how far the inputs have been

⁵⁷ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>

converted into output and outcome-level results in a timely way across all strategic objectives of the project, and to what extent the project considered cost when making technical choices.

This section addresses the evaluation questions **EQ 4 and EQ5** (see Annex 5):

Finding 5 (relates to EQ4): How well have the inputs been converted into output and outcome-level results in a timely way?

- 117. The project was ultimately efficient in converting inputs to outputs from a timeliness perspective, overcoming very significant bottlenecks and slowdowns (especially those related to COVID and more predictable challenges such as Internet access) with the help of a 10 month no-cost extension. It was also fairly efficient in moving towards outcomes, with limitations linked to project design.**
- 118.** The efficiency of the project from a timeliness perspective must be seen through the lens of the time period in which it was implemented: this observation was underlined by multiple interviewees within UNICEF, the MoE and DoEs, as well as others. Because although the initial transfer of funds from the EU proceeded in a timely manner, **work was largely suspended in early 2020 when the COVID pandemic caused government offices to shut and slowed down work at UN offices as staff adjusted to remote working.**
- 119.** Regarding the **EMIS (SO1)-related components**, UNICEF, DoE and other KIIs made clear that by the time work properly restarted months later, **many of the tenders were out of date and so had to be re-advertised.** When the project eventually began to move forward again, there were **challenges in terms of sourcing supplies and particularly laptop computers** – due to global supply chain disruptions – though also some slowdowns in the training of trainers. These **upstream challenges had cascading effects on downstream work**, though they were ultimately overcome by the **UNICEF project making a very strong push in its latter stages.** More particularly, **significant staff resources were dedicated** to this push in those latter stages. Furthermore, project funds that had been used at a low level earlier in the project began to be used much more heavily, with non-EU funding also brought in to cover the increased costs of laptops linked to COVID supply chain issues. Also **important were the upstream efforts made to overcome these issues**, e.g. by speeding up the purchasing process of computers as much as possible (several interviewees said that implementing partners proactively reached out directly to suppliers on this). The **project had also anticipated free Internet access for teaching staff** to input data to the EMIS system. **Yet this access was not made available, which slowed down data entry.** The problem was overcome by teachers making a significant effort to enter the data through their personal Internet connections, and by working in the evenings, since staff time for data entry was not given during the working day period.
- 120.** This push to ensure overall timeliness was helped by the **10 month no-cost-extension, granted by the donor.** This, along with the additional budgetary support, also **made it possible to add about 200 more schools to the EMIS system and to train about 400 more teachers.** From the perspective of efficiency, this is a positive outcome, as it will contribute to a greater critical mass for the EMIS, which is currently only active in selected schools in the various governorates.
- 121.** However, it should be noted that there are **risks associated with placing the training and roll-out of EMIS near the end of the project.** Without a new phase to the EMIS, follow-up support and training will be dependent on the MoE, whose capacity by the end of the project was not sufficient to independently support it. This issue was particularly linked to the late start on training in the project cycle. But it is also due to the **high levels of training required, given the complexity of the system training, which requires significant time and effort.** It is also worth noting that the concurrent development and roll-out of the GESPs and EMIS meant that the GESPs could not be fully informed by data derived from the EMIS. This set of observations underlines the challenges for moving towards project outcomes, which is discussed in more detail further below in this finding.
- 122.** The **process was somewhat different with SO2.** UNICEF, DoE and other KIIs made it clear that the **GESPs were slowed down initially by COVID-related interruptions.** Yet once work got going again, many sessions took place online during the quarantines, but also because the contracted company leading on the GESPs could not travel to federal Iraq for security reasons. **These sessions were deemed less efficient by participants, given the limitations of the online format for complex data gathering and planning processes, building the relationships to support these, as well as Internet access challenges in Iraq.** **Longer-term contextual factors** also contributed to these slowdowns, as was underlined by several of the interviewees. The point they made is that **decades of instability and related underinvestment in capacity development and planning** in Iraq had weakened the bases

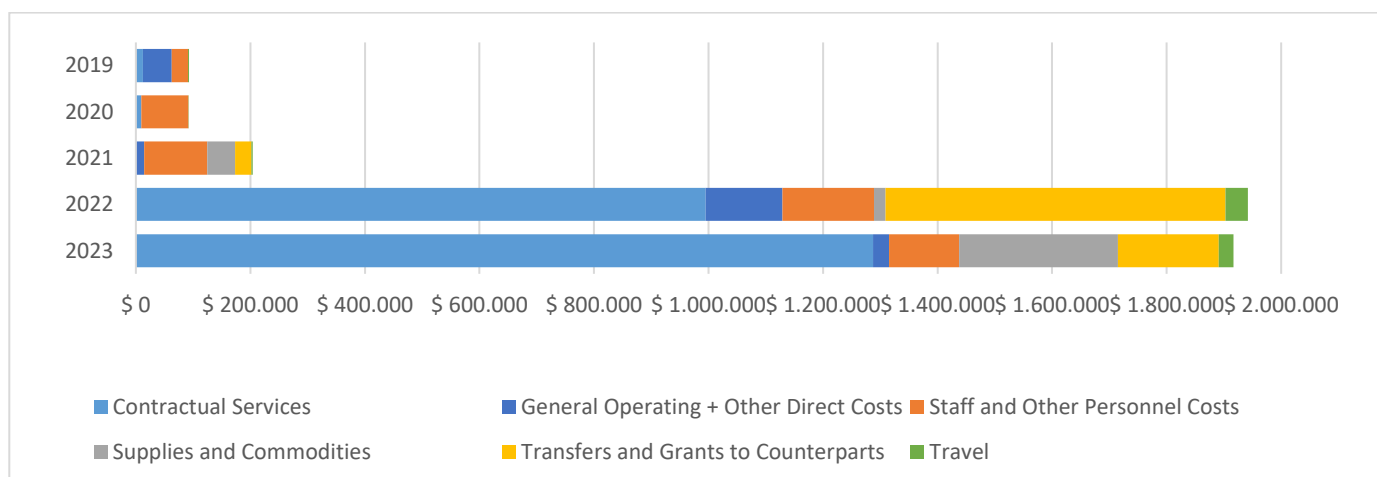
for the core collaborative work, at the governorate level, that SO2 was aiming to accomplish. This in turn **impacted on the timeliness of the SO's roll-out**. However, like with SO1, interviewees at UNICEF, the MoE as well as several DoE respondents made it clear that these **challenges were ultimately overcome by the concerted work of the various stakeholders**, especially near the end of the project period, and including efforts made by the contracted company.

123. **SO3 was similarly slowed down by COVID**. Once work started on SO3, UNICEF, UNESCO, and DoE KIs underlined that new **timeliness-related challenges arose when selecting trainers**, because **many** of those initially selected **did not have the required technical (information technology) skills**. This meant that many new trainers had to be selected. A review of the module and training manuals was also somewhat slowed down, partly due to COVID staffing issues and partly due to approval processes within the Ministry. These in turn had cascading effects on the timing of UNICEF's project. Once training did begin, **COVID also impacted on timeliness, since large numbers of teachers could not be gathered together** because of the need for spacing to reduce the risk of infection: this observation was made by many teachers to the Evaluation Team. **The lack of Internet access also slowed down implementation**: those trained could not easily practise what they were taught. Yet despite these various slowdowns, the previously noted dedication of significant staff resources – together with the 10-month, no-cost extension that was granted by the funder – meant that the project completed work on this SO within the timeframe.
124. While this finding has painted a picture of many delays for the three SOs, it has also underlined that the key dimension – COVID-related measures – was one that could not reasonably be predicted. Furthermore, it has highlighted how the **project adapted to the evolving context** by making up for time lost due to COVID-related measures and **ultimately achieving results within the adjusted timeframe (see Finding 7)**. In so doing, it was **ultimately efficient from a timeliness perspective in converting inputs into outputs**.
125. But the movement towards outcomes was complicated by the design issues and the fact that the outcomes would ultimately require more time to be fully achieved (this is discussed in the Relevance findings). So even though there was movement towards outcomes (as discussed further in the Effectiveness findings), from an efficiency perspective, inputs have not been converted into outcome-level results in a timely way.

Finding 6 (relates to EQ5): To what extent was cost a consideration when making technical choices in the project?

126. **The project's overall cost efficiency was good given the challenges faced, with significantly higher than anticipated spending on some project components linked to the late push to achieve project results and covered by lower-than-budgeted-for spending on other budget lines as well as additional funding sources, thus reflecting appropriate overall financial management.**
127. The various timeliness challenges faced by the project, as outlined in the previous finding, are in many ways reflected in its efficiency from a cost perspective.
128. The bar chart below shows that the majority of disbursements of the EU grant component (total amount: USD 4,200,928) took place in the last two years. This underlines the observation made in Finding 5, about the **higher than anticipated intensity of activities in the latter part of the project's implementation period, and a linked burn rate**. Table 15 in Annex 4 – 'Overview of Project Financial Information' also indicates that the **majority of the funding** (79 per cent, or USD 3,324,089 of USD 4,200,928) **contributed to the EMIS roll-out** (Activity 123 and 124) which took place during 2022 and 2023. The explanation given for this was that, in the case of EMIS, the software had to be developed, with computers procured for MoE, DoE and Schools, and training of master trainers all needing to occur prior to roll-out. Thus the **funds were spent on project activities that were carried out in the last two years**: this means the burn rate was reasonable, given the contextual slowdowns described earlier.

Figure 9: EU Grant Disbursement by year by GL Category USD for EU expenditure only (source: EU Funding SC190328_Expenditure Listing_15Aug2023.xls)⁵⁸



129. As indicated by the table below, **more than 80 per cent of the total budget was provided by the EU** (highlighted in white in the table). Almost **20 per cent of the total budget was co-financed by Germany and Global Education Thematic** (highlighted in grey in the table). This indicated a broad commitment amongst project partners and enabled an increase in the project's reach, e.g. being able to equip and train more schools in the EMIS. The co-financing arrangement also helped to support the no-cost extension, which allowed the project to complete the roll-out of EMIS and development of the GESP (as discussed in the previous finding).

Table 5: Total programme budget by funding source in USD

Source of Funding	Code	Direct costs	Indirect costs	Total Cost	Per cent cost recovery
EU	NA	\$ 4,200,927.84	\$ 294,064.95	\$ 4,494,992.79	7 per cent
Global – Education Thematic	(SC189904)	\$ 161,158.58	\$ 10,821.12	\$ 171,979.70	7 per cent
Germany	(SC181122)	\$ 73,253.73	\$ 5,426.20	\$ 78,679.93	8 per cent
Germany	(SC181122)	\$ 708,743.50	\$ 56,699.48	\$ 765,442.98	8 per cent
Germany	(SC160635)	\$ 29,880.17	\$ 2,390.41	\$ 32,270.58	8 per cent
Co-financing Total		\$ 973,035.98	\$ 75,337.22	\$ 1,048,373.19	
Total		\$ 5,173,963.82	\$ 369,402.17	\$ 5,543,365.98	
Co-financing as per cent of total project budget		19 per cent	20 per cent		

130. Table 15 in Annex 4 – Overview of Project Financial Information' also shows the planned budget against actual expenditure for all main expenditure items.⁵⁹ The table highlights many areas where actual expenditure exceeded planned expenditure. **For most activities, the amount exceeded was manageable, with several exceptions.** The most notable areas where planned budget was exceeded included: **Training of school-level EMIS users, in which the original budget amount was EUR 1,053,204 and actual expenditure was EUR 1,933,493.93 (184 per cent); Conduct teacher training on pilot course in which the original budget was EUR 440,000 and actual expenditure was EUR 529,983 (120 per cent); and, Technical Assistance (consultancy to develop governorate education plans) where the original budget was EUR 400,000 and actual expenditure was EUR 541,702 (135 per cent).** Some areas where budget was underspent and realigned included: production/printing and dissemination of governorate sector plans in which EUR 600,000 was budgeted and

⁵⁸ Spreadsheet on overall expenditures of the EU grant, exclusive of the cost recovery and pending activities.

⁵⁹ Source: UNICEF (2023) Breakdown of Project Expenditure – Final Financial Report (from 1 August 2019 to 31 May 2023). (Source: EC Template_SC190328 - 15Aug23.xlsx)

only EUR 451,954 disbursed (75 per cent); and, Education Sector Analysis (Cost of Assessment and capacity building workshop during the sector analysis phase) in which EUR 240,000.00 was budgeted and only EUR 9,898 spent.

131. However, the Evaluation Team's analysis finds that **spending for the different project components is reasonable despite some activities exceeding budget**. This is because, as noted above and in the previous finding, **many of the changes were because of Covid**, which incurred greater costs on procurement of laptops and computers. It is also a result of the need to reassess some activities, e.g. expanding the number of schools receiving laptops and teachers receiving training in EMIS. Finally, this spending was compensated for by savings in other budget lines, as well as by agreed-upon new money linked to the extra activities and COVID-related challenges.
132. One of the things remarked on by multiple UNICEF interviewees was the formal process of changing budget lines. More specifically, they noted that **limitations on moving funds from one budget line to another affected the efficiency of the project, by causing delays and administrative burdens**. The issue was compounded because the role of **EU grant supervisor in Iraq was not filled for a critical period during the last phase of project implementation**, so there was no one in-country during that period with whom staff could specifically liaise to request changes. For example, staff noted that it would have been useful to procure additional laptops with some of the savings made on other parts of the project: but that would have required time-consuming discussions with donors, so was avoided.
133. **Cost efficiency was also demonstrated by staff during Covid**. For example, **adjustments were made to workshop modalities for the GESP to accommodate Covid restrictions**. Moreover, the online sessions organised between Cambridge and staff members helped to save money. **The decision to focus SO3 on e-learning also showed flexibility in adjusting to the Covid situation**. But as noted in other findings, this decision also raises questions as to how effective the component might be in a post-Covid environment and whether teachers have had their capacity strengthened to deliver classroom lessons. Staff also demonstrated cost efficiency in sharing costs with project partners. For example, the EU grant couldn't cover all the computers for Rusafa 3, so UNICEF agreed to support UNESCO to procure an additional 1,063 laptops to support the EMIS trainings.

5.4. Effectiveness

This section analyses the **effectiveness of the project, taking into account the relative importance of the objectives or results**. This section provides an aggregate measure of the extent to which an intervention has or will be expected to achieve relevant and sustainable impacts, efficiently and coherently, with specific consideration for the target groups of the intervention. The **extent to which the changes achieved are valued by the targeted groups is analysed, as well as whether there are any unintended results**, either positive or negative. The section also examines **which factors were most necessary** for the intervention to achieve its intended output and outcome-level results and how well the project has monitored its progress toward the results.

This section addresses the evaluation questions **EQ7, EQ8, EQ9, EQ10, EQ11, and EQ 12** (see Annex 5):

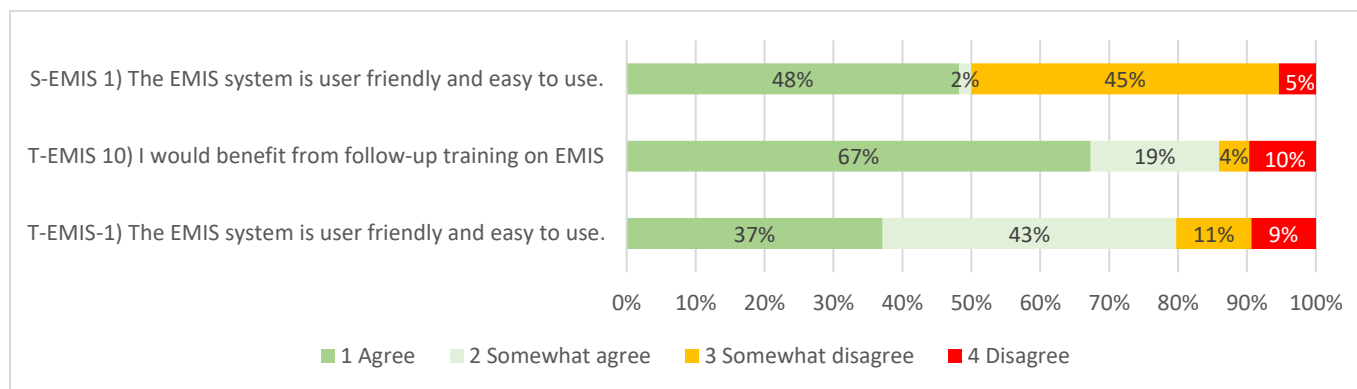
Finding 7 (relates to EQ7): How well has the intervention achieved its intended outcome-level results for the different targeted groups and under which circumstances?

134. **The project achieved its output-level results for all three specific objectives – with the quality of outputs good – and facilitated movement towards, though not achievement of, outcomes. There is weak evidence of capacities and planning tools being comprehensively put into practice.**

In assessing the project's achievement of outcome-level results, it is useful to begin by looking at **outputs as the precursors to achieving outcomes**. Thus the evaluation has found that **all three SO's outputs were achieved**. These are fully detailed, including with numbers achieved by year of the project and total numbers reached, in Annex 3 – Implementation Status Tables for Specific Objectives. The Annex draws on final monitoring data provided by UNICEF and triangulated where possible with data from the evaluation. They are also summarised in this finding.

135. SO1's output of establishing and rolling out the Education Management Information System (EMIS), included multiple indicators: development of the EMIS system; call centre for the EMIS established and operational; staff capacity in the targeted governorates enhanced (54,824 training days for 5,328 staff) achieving a total of 7,019 trained staff (3,538 female, 3,481 male – see Figure 9 below) thereby reaching 132 per cent of the target value. A total of 3,529 schools and literacy centres were entered onto EMIS, which was also 32 per cent more than the targeted number of 2,664; and 376 statistical reports were generated, which is more than seven times the targeted number of 50. This output and all of its indicators were achieved based on monitoring data and also KIIs with UNICEF staff, DoE staff, and others, as well as a review of the EMIS system by the Evaluation Team. However, notably for the literacy centres, KIIs with UNICEF staff made clear that the number of centres entered onto EMIS ended up being lower than initially anticipated in the project proposal (84 achieved out of 368 targeted). This was primarily due to significant slowdowns in the upstream work and some inefficiencies in coordination with the literacy commission's executive board.
136. Furthermore, KIIs and FGDs with participants indicated that they found the **training sessions to be strong**, even if many felt that **follow-up training would have been useful, not least because of the frequent updates to the EMIS system**. Survey data (see Figure 10 later in this finding) also showed that 80 per cent of 918 teaching staff tended to agree with the statement that the EMIS system is user-friendly and easy to use (T-EMIS 1). However, in Qadissiyah, only 66 per cent of the respondents agreed with that statement.
137. 86 per cent of respondents said that they need further training, suggesting that the trainings they have participated in are not experienced as being sufficient (T-EMIS 10). Of respondents to the staff survey, levels of agreement are similarly high (93 per cent) with the statement that the EMIS system is user friendly and easy to use (S-EMIS 1), with 91 per cent saying that they could use further training on the system. While the sample is relatively small for the staff survey with only 56 respondents, the high levels of approval to both questions hints that the potential of the EMIS system is recognised, but that the training sessions that have been offered are not yet sufficient. Challenges highlighted by both surveyed groups are continuous updates to the software as well as their own weak basic computer literacy skills. Many of them thus struggle to remember the procedures for various functions of EMIS, such as entering, managing and updating data. Some have as a result suggested creating tutorial videos for these various steps to refresh their memory on these procedures (T-EMIS 10) Open); S-EMIS 10) Open).

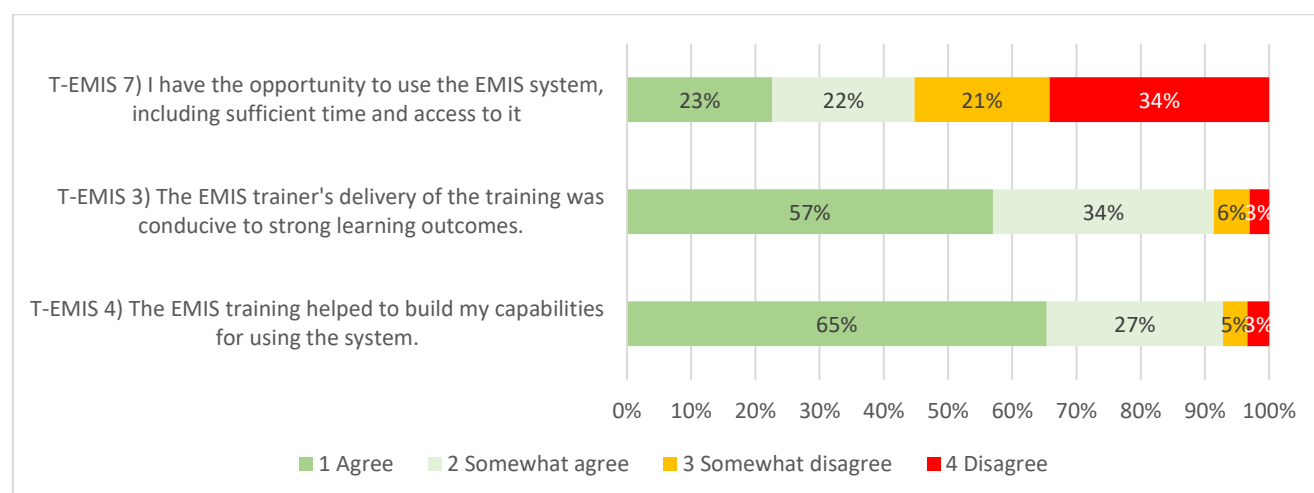
Figure 10: The online survey showed differences in the perception of user friendliness of the EMIS system between government staff (n=56) (S-EMIS 1) and teaching staff (n=918) (T-EMIS 1) with the latter thinking that the EMIS system is far easier to use for teachers than it appears to be for government staff. Yet, 86 % of teaching staff agree that they could use some follow up training (T-EMIS 10)



138. Evaluation KIIs and FGDs also found that the ability of teachers to use the system was facilitated by the WhatsApp and Signal groups that many trainers set up: these were actively used for exchanging challenges and the solutions to them. As touched on earlier, one issue was the **poor Internet access, due to the project's component of providing Internet access never being realised**. A further challenge was that the **teachers made responsible for entering EMIS data were not assigned specific work time to do it and they were not given a reduction in their overall teaching workload**. Teachers compensated for this by often entering data in their own time from home, which also allowed them to take advantage of their private Internet connections. Yet this was problematic, since teachers are not allowed to bring student records home, even though some school heads do give informal permission to do so. Overall however, this solution reflects the strength of commitment of teachers to achieving the outputs.
139. Regarding SO1 outcome-level results, the evidence from interviews and FGDs with key stakeholders (UNICEF, MoE and DoE) **indicates some movement toward them but not achievement**. This is partially a design issue,

rooted in how such outcomes would be achieved (this is also discussed in the Relevance findings). It is also an implementation issue, reflecting how a reworked design would be put into practice. It is also an issue related to the project's outcomes being optimistically expressed, by comparison with the project's scope and timelines. Yet there is weak evidence of SO1's outcome being achieved ("improved capacity to identify gaps in access and quality of education using reliable and frequently collected EMIS data and to allocate appropriate resources, including qualified teachers, to address them"). This is because achieving this objective would require having improved capacity to actually use the EMIS system, as part of a wider organisational change process for the MoE and DoEs; such capacity building has not been implemented yet. Furthermore, EMIS data are not usable yet given that planning is done at DoE or governorate levels and that in all of the implementation locations other than Rusafa 3, coverage is not complete. This is not to deny that there are isolated examples of the EMIS data informing decision-making – yet these are not part of a comprehensive process. The effectiveness of the EMIS trainings, however, was deemed to be quite valuable. This is highlighted by the fact that overwhelming majorities of survey respondents felt that the EMIS training led to strong capacity building (T-EMIS 4) and was conducive to strong learning outcomes (T-EMIS 3). However, when teaching staff practically apply their learned skills and knowledge, their motivation to use EMIS is frustrated by a lack of opportunities or sufficient time to effectively use EMIS (T-EMIS 7): only 45 per cent of the respondents tend to agree that they have sufficient opportunities or time to access the EMIS system (see Figure 11 below). This situation can be attributed to a lack of access to the internet or equipment, as was mentioned earlier.

Figure 11: The online survey showed that while the training content (T-EMIS 4) and delivery (T-EMIS 3) appears to be highly appreciated by teaching staff, the majority of them have trouble using the EMIS system in practice (T-EMIS 7).

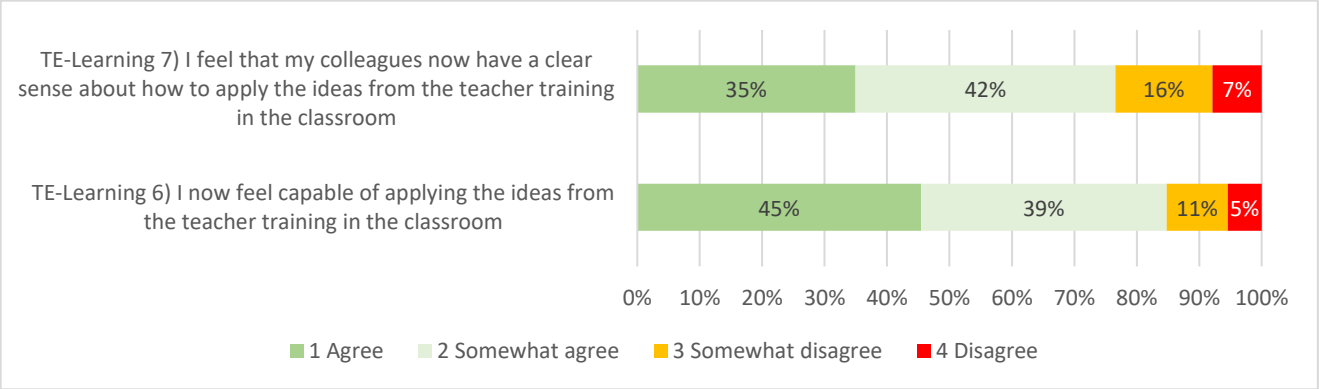


140. SO2's output of Developing Education Capacity Development plans at national and governorate levels included multiple indicators: the 5-year National Education Capacity Development plan developed at central level; number of Governorate Education sector plans and capacity development plans developed at selected governorates; 3-year capacity development implementation plan developed at central level; and, 3-year capacity development implementation plan developed in four governorates. **This output and all of its indicators were achieved based on project monitoring data and based on evaluation data** (review of the plans and KIIs with UNICEF and DoE staff).
141. More specifically, interviews with UNICEF, the DoEs, and others indicated that **the Education Section Plans (GESPs and capacity building plans) are available at governorate levels in the targeted governorates**, and they lay out a clear process to develop capacities and even somewhat for implementation (without clear funding strategies, which are not however specifically mentioned as part of the output). Based on analysis of the plans as well as feedback from key informants in the sampled areas for the evaluation, **the plans are strong because they can guide work at the governorate level**. They also included good consultations with key stakeholders, as well as strong tailoring to the particularities of context and inclusion of GEDSI-related issues, e.g. including gender-disaggregated/JbWMGB analysis. Here too, strong commitment by stakeholders is what allowed these plans to achieve their output-level results.
142. Regarding SO2's outcome-level results ("Capacity of education planners, statisticians, and educators to make timely and accurate decisions at central and governorate levels is increased, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of education and improved capacity to develop and implement policies at central and governorate

levels”), the **evidence from interviews and FGDs with key stakeholders (UNICEF, MoE and DoE) indicates some movement towards them but not achievement**. As with SO1, this is partially a **design issue rooted** in how such outcomes would be achieved, as well as an implementation issue in terms of how a reworked design would be put into practice. It is also an issue related to the project’s outcomes being optimistically expressed, by comparison with the project’s scope and timelines (see above, SO1 outcome-level results). But more specifically, the reason is that the **capacity building plans linked to the GESPs are not being implemented and are not funded for future implementation**. Without those capacity building plans, implementation of the GESPs themselves – and therefore more timely and accurate decisions to improve education and to develop and implement policies – is reduced. Thus while there are isolated examples of the GESPs informing some decisions, these are not part of a comprehensive process.

143. Finally, SO3’s output of enhancing teachers’ capacities in service delivery at central and governorate levels also included multiple indicators: pilot training materials developed; number of Master trainers trained on developed materials; and, number of teachers who participated in developing the capacity building plans and teachers training. This output and all of its indicators were achieved on the basis of project monitoring data and were based on evaluation data (review of the pilot training materials). **Feedback from trainers and teachers who received the training also showed that the trainings were overall good**. The training included an appropriate mix of software, in line with the goals aimed at by the SO, and good training methods employed during the sessions, even though Internet access remained a challenge for many.

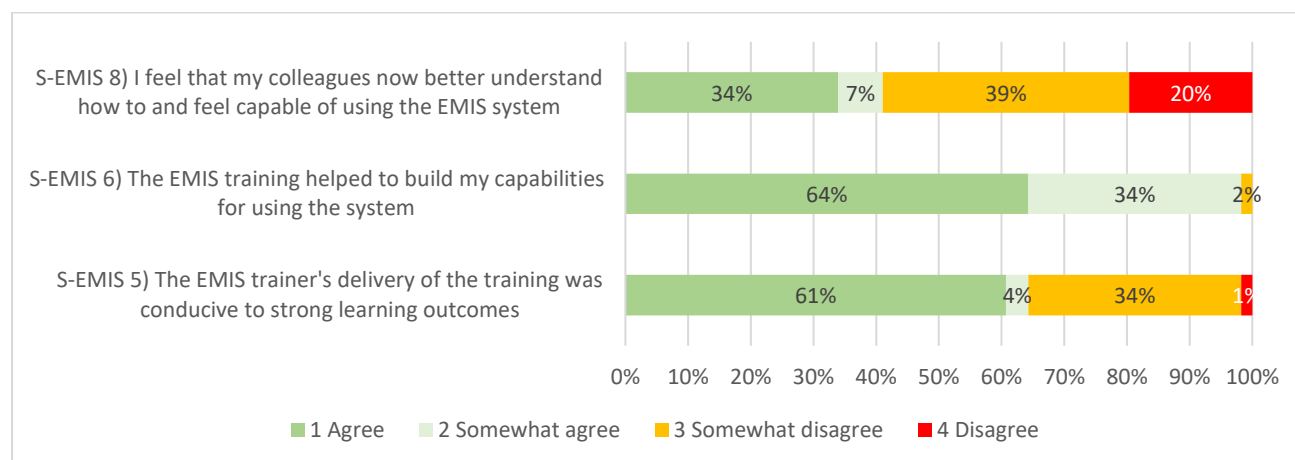
Figure 12: The online survey showed that teaching staff that participated in E-Learning training sessions (n=572) largely agree that the ideas from the teacher training can benefit their colleagues (TE-Learning 7) and even more so themselves (TE-Learning 6) to improve their teaching.



144. As regards survey data (see Figure 12), the 572 teachers who participated in the e-Learning survey overwhelmingly agreed (85 per cent) that they feel capable of applying the ideas of the teacher training in the classroom (T-E-Learning 6) and 77 per cent also had the sense that their colleagues were capable of doing so (T-E-Learning 7). Of the 56 staff respondents to the e-learning survey (see Figure 13), 94 per cent agreed that the EMIS trainer’s delivery of the trainings was conducive to strong learning outcomes (S-EMIS 5) and 98 per cent agreed that the EMIS training helped to build their capacities to use the system (S-EMIS 6). However, they felt

that their colleagues' understanding had been enhanced only slightly less than their own (S-EMIS 8) which confirms the impression of a wide adoption rate of the teachings.

Figure 13 The online survey showed a contrast of perceptions among government staff (n=56) regarding their colleagues' capacity to use EMIS after the training (S-EMIS 8), the EMIS-training's impact on their own capabilities (S-EMIS 6) as well as the trainer's performance in conveying the skills and knowledge (S-EMIS 5).



145. In the open comments to some of the questions (T-EMIS 2 – Open; T-EMIS 3 – Open; T-EMIS 10 - Open), teaching staff often suggested that the training periods were insufficient and should be prolonged or that the quality of the training sessions should be improved. This view was also prevalent in the open responses of teaching staff that participated in the e-learning training sessions: they said that trainings should be more numerous and more in-depth (T-E-Learning 3 – Open). This opinion was shared by DoE staff respondents, who also suggested increasing the quantity and duration of trainings (S-EMIS 4 – Open; S-EMIS 5 Open). Many of the open answers to these questions suggested that **there are a lot of teachers struggling with basic computer literacy skills, and that this is an additional area where more training would be useful** so as to support using the EMIS system. This impression is formulated by open text responses like “[t]here are some trainees who are not proficient in working on computers and do not have any knowledge of the subject” (T-EMIS 2 – Open), while typical open text responses to the question, “[w]hat areas would you need more training on?” were answered along the lines of “[t]rain[ing] employees to use computers” (S-EMIS-10 Open).
146. Regarding factors affecting the achievement of SO3's output-level results, several teacher and trainer interviewees mentioned that **trainings were given during the summer months**, possibly because project slowdowns meant that there was little flexibility for when to hold them. This meant that for some people **it was difficult to concentrate, given the intense heat and lack of air conditioning due to frequent power outages**. Some interviewees felt this negatively impacted the ability of participants to learn as much as they might have from the sessions. Some respondents also noted that more days would have been useful to strengthen the training, with several of those – including trainers – also mentioning that an initial computer literacy orientation course of a few days would have strengthened the capacity building sessions. As with SO1, WhatsApp and Signal groups were a key way that trainers stayed in touch with trainees, in order to answer questions and try to overcome ongoing challenges. Yet many WhatsApp and Signal groups did not seem to be active, when the Evaluation Team tried to reach out to potential survey respondents through them. This could indicate that fewer groups were in fact set up or had remained active than interviewees had indicated. But overall, the evaluation found that capacities have been built and that many trainees are capable of demonstrating the e-learning tools.
147. While the output monitoring data for **SO3** clearly highlight that all three targets have been achieved (Training Materials have been developed (T1), 24 of 24 Master Trainers have been trained (T2), and 4,000 out of 4,000 teachers participated in developing capacity building plans and teacher trainings (T3)), when it comes to **outcome-level results** (“Enhanced quality of teaching and learning improved”), **the evidence from interviews and FGDs with key stakeholders (UNICEF, MoE and DoE) indicates some movement towards them but not achievement**. As with SO1 and SO2, this is partially a design issue rooted in how such outcomes would be achieved; it is also an issue related to the project's outcomes being optimistically expressed, by comparison with the project's scope and timelines (see the above explanation in SO1 outcome-level results). When it comes to the self-reported data in the online perception survey, **the teaching staff appears to view the teacher training very positively and is already making effective use of the data**. Yet, interview data suggest that the picture is different: **there were only episodic instances showing the enhanced capacities being put to use to**

enhance the quality of teaching, meaning there is no data showing a consistent strong deployment of the capacities based on reporting by teachers.⁶⁰ This included some teachers reporting stronger communication with students as well as stronger outreach and connection to students as a result of the virtual (mobile phone-based) technologies. Others said that students learned new technology, that they had stronger engagement with parents, and several said it was easier to reach students with special needs as well as students displaced by drought. Such tools certainly enhanced contact with students, though the extent to which they strengthened the quality of teaching itself is not clear. As will be discussed later in the sustainability finding, there was weak planning for the institutionalisation of the training beyond the specific teachers trained.

Finding 8 (relates to EQ8): Which changes achieved by the intervention were most valued by the targeted groups, with consideration given to the needs of different targeted groups?

- 148. Project capacity building and planning components are valued and often strongly valued by all target groups in all implementation locations, with raised expectations about their continuation providing an opportunity in terms of ultimately reaching outcomes as well as representing a challenge going forward (for SO1⁶¹ and SO2⁶²).**
149. Interview and FGD data made clear that the components of the project that are **most valued are the capacity building and capacity building plans, as well as the planning components across the three SOs** of the project. These can be broken down by SO, so as to highlight the particularities for each.
150. SO1's capacity building was somewhat appreciated by the teachers, based on KIIs and FGDs with them. More specifically, they were overall not enthusiastic about the training as an end in itself, but rather as a means to setting up a planning (and reporting) tool that they strongly supported. This support for the improved planning possibilities arising from a complete EMIS system was shared and even felt more strongly by DoE and MoE respondents. Regarding survey results, **more than 280 teachers left remarks on what aspects of EMIS they feel most confident in using, and widely praised the power of the platform to provide comprehensive access to relevant information and data.** What matters most for the teachers is the system's accessibility and ease of use. Some teachers also expressed the need for additional training both in EMIS and basic computer literacy, as well as addressing technical obstacles and challenges in accessing the EMIS system (T-EMIS 4) Open 1; T-EMIS 4) Open 2).
151. Yet this overall support also comes with a caveat, that expectations are now high particularly at the DoE level and among teachers. The following paraphrases what many of them said: we have made a big effort to input this data, often on our time and with our own resources (Internet); will it now actually be used as part of a new, data-driven planning process? The caveat in turn underlines an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is that their support for the system could help to drive forward its implementation and thus support change; but the challenge is that if it is not used, cynicism risks could set in. This could lead them to disengage from the change processes that the SO aims at, thus weakening the movement towards outcome-level results.
152. For SO2, the improved planning possibilities arising from the GESPs were supported and valued by the DoE respondents. Many noted that these possibilities would improve governorate-level decision-making, with several noting that they could possibly help to reduce the number of girls dropping out of education young; others noted that they could help to reduce fraud within the system. The same was true of the capacity building plans. The key question raised by many respondents was whether the GESPs would actually be used and whether the capacity building plans would go ahead. Similar to with SO1 then, expectations for SO2 were raised by these plans; yet the concrete longer-term commitments to implement them are still weakly expressed. This observation is thus linked to the previous effectiveness finding about weak movement towards outcomes, as well as earlier relevance findings about design challenges in the project in terms of the achievement of outcomes.
153. Lastly, SO3's capacity building was strongly valued by teachers. Interviews and FGDs found that they appreciated the possibility to strengthen their outreach to parents and students, to draw in technologies to their own teaching in a way that they couldn't previously, and to theoretically enhance the quality of their

⁶⁰ Given the timing of the evaluation's data gathering, during the summer holidays, it was not possible to do classroom observations.

⁶¹ To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of education through roll-out of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and increase capacity of education planners, statisticians and educators at governorate level.

⁶² To strengthen the capacity of MoE at the central and governorate level to improve education services delivery.

teaching to students (how far capacity building actually did enhance their teaching skills is analysed in the previous finding). The survey data were in line with this, with many teachers expressing their satisfaction with the ideas from the e-learning training, noting how it helped them to use modern software as tools with their students. Examples included using Google Forms to do multiple choice tests, Zoom for virtual classes, and PowerPoint for effective presentations. The e-learning training was also felt to have provided the teachers with valuable inputs on how to differentiate learning tasks and materials, according to the needs of individual students (T-E-Learning 6) Open). Yet, some teachers pointed out that the level of usage the e-learning's ideas varies among their colleagues: while some embrace and apply the ideas, others do not – either due to insufficient computer literacy levels, or because these ideas do not suit their teaching style or student needs (T-E-Learning 7) Open).

Finding 9 (relates to EQ9): Were there any unintended results, either positive or negative, which resulted from the project?

154. Unintended results of the project relate to lessons learned. This includes learning around how to design effective partnerships, ensuring efficiency between upstream and downstream work, and assigning roles that capitalise on partner strengths and ensure longer-term aims are more likely to be achieved. Other unintended results include learning about facilitating the movement towards outcomes, how a project can create expectations that unfulfilled risk may negatively impacts on project results, and about reaching vulnerable populations and planning for climate change.

155. The project had a variety of unintended results, primarily in terms of learning about designing future projects as well as about **reaching** vulnerable populations.

156. Regarding the design-related learning, the project's implementation under – often challenging conditions – showed the importance of strong coordination mechanisms between all project partners. It underlined how communication is key to adapting to shifting circumstances. The project also highlighted the importance of ensuring that meetings include all partners for an integrated project, so that they all have an overall understanding of challenges as they arise and can contribute to the development of appropriate responses.

157. Relatedly and as discussed previously, one unintended result was learning around ensuring ownership in the broader sense (as noted in finding 6, where ownership involves becoming progressively more committed to a project and its success, by virtue of experiencing it as one's own) and what this means for assigning partner roles. Further unintended results relate to learning around ensuring movement towards outcomes. In the this project, that meant more than simply providing capacity building and stronger plans/data, but also mechanisms to foster movement towards using outcomes (including organisational-level change). This latter observation underscores the need to balance pressure, including from donors, to propose ambitious project outcomes with what is realistic within the project's timeframe and budget.

158. Further unintended results for learning concern how raising expectations among key stakeholders – e.g. teachers and staff in DoEs who worked hard on the EMIS system and the GESPs – comes with associated risks. The learning is about the need to ensure a strong plan from the start, in order to capitalise on their built-up expectations: by also using demonstration effects when possible, e.g. by showing how the EMIS system can work in practice; and by minimising the chances of those risks materialising.

159. The project also had unintended results in terms of showing how vulnerable populations can be reached with e-learning, even though this was originally not a deliberate aim. E-learning also proved useful for young people in rural locations as well as girls and children with a disability, all of whom are more prone to dropping out of school early.

160. Further unintended results related to how the EMIS system could support strong education planning in the future on climate change. Although not designed to do that at present, the system could help to anticipate how populations are forced to migrate internally within the country away from areas with environmental challenges, e.g. as a result of desertification and lack of water, and related impacts for the allocation of teachers or location of schools, etc.

Finding 10 (relates to EQ10): What was the quality of the processes mechanisms by which the intervention's activities and outputs contributed to outcome-level results?

161. The process by which the intervention's activities and outputs contributed to outcome-level results is linked to the causal assumptions of the project – some of which were realised and others not – as well as its ability to overcome key barriers, challenges and constraints.

162. In line with the evaluation's theory-based methodological approach, the project's reconstructed Theory of Change has guided efforts to construct a strong contribution narrative, by examining the linkages between activities, outputs and outcomes and by paying particular attention to the context. Earlier analysis of the ToC underlined the importance of making causal assumptions in this process.
163. As was noted above, for outputs to be achieved, assumptions must be realised: if not, there will be an impact on the project's results. The key assumptions that proved central to realising the move towards outputs were:
- National government and governorates take on increased responsibilities and leadership.
 - MoE and governorate partners engage in a systematic capacity building and planning process.
 - Teacher training is delivered in a high-quality, engaging manner with high participation, and teachers use the EMIS training to enter the required data on that system.
 - Implementing partners continue to operate with a sound financial management. They periodically conduct capacity assessments, together with financial spot checks and audits adapting to the fiduciary risk level identified.
164. The evaluation has found that these key assumptions were overall realised – as analysis of the evidence in the findings on effectiveness and on efficiency has shown; hence the project's success in reaching its output-level results. Also relevant as a barrier/challenge/constraint on the achievement of outputs were disruptions due to COVID. This was shown in the earlier findings on effectiveness and on efficiency in particular, because COVID initially interrupted and ultimately slowed down project activities and thus the achievement of results at the output level.
165. In the move from outputs to outcomes, the key assumptions were:
- Improved capacities are deployed, including to improve learning.
 - Improved plans and data management systems inform decision-making, planning and policies.
166. These assumptions are captured to some extent in the reconstructed Theory of Change's causal assumptions developed at the inception phase. Consequently, the observation is that while the assumptions in the reconstructed ToC were correct, they can now be honed and deepened thanks to the Evaluation Team's analysis.
167. A key assumption in moving from output-to-outcome results is a change in organizational behaviour by the key actors change, when using the outputs.⁶³
168. As has been shown in earlier findings, there is good evidence in this project of improved teacher capacities as well of the plans and data management systems being developed. But there is little comprehensive evidence of the capacities being deployed systematically, in a manner informed by the plans and data, i.e. of the output-to-outcome assumptions holding true. This situation can partly be linked to some of the key actors not having the capability, opportunity and motivation to do so. In turn, this observation can first be linked to analysis of ownership and how such ownership is assumed in finding 4 and in the conclusions; and secondly, it can be linked to analysis of how organisational change processes occur in finding 2 and in the conclusions. Another key consideration is time, given the observation in earlier findings that ongoing work is required to support the move towards outcomes. This underlines the importance of several of the external assumptions outlined in the ToC:
- The need for continued partner commitment to funding projects within Iraq and relatedly, stable and timely funding for project activities in general.
 - Continuing MoE support to improving children and adolescents' rights to education and protection as well as to improving educational planning including via strong data.
169. Finally, it is relevant to consider the barriers/challenges/constraints outlined in the ToC. Here, we can underline the relevance of low technical capacities (as found in all three SOs), poor connectivity (Internet access), some weak support for change processes and procedures, challenges related to wider public service

⁶³ Here it is useful to draw on the COM-B model of behaviour change, which says that for key actors to change their behaviour, they must have the capability, opportunity and motivation to do so.⁶³ In this model, 'capability' is understood as the key actors having the ability to participate in an activity and so the behaviour can be accomplished in principle. 'Opportunity' refers to external factors that make a behaviour possible, and so there is sufficient opportunity for the behaviour to occur. And 'motivation' refers to the cognitive processes that direct and inspire behaviour, in this case key actors having sufficient motivation to undertake the behaviour.

reform requirements that constrain reform in the MoE, the push-pull between centralisation and decentralisation, and COVID-related disruptions. These barriers/challenges/constraints impacted negatively on achieving the assumptions and thus the movement towards outcomes.

170. Overall, the assumptions outlined in the reconstructed ToC for movement to outputs and to outcomes, alongside certain external assumptions and the project's ability to overcome key barriers, challenges and constraints, formed a key lens. This lens helped with understanding how and to what extent activities and outputs contributed to outcome-level results. The same assumptions also explain why the project has not fully achieved its outcomes.

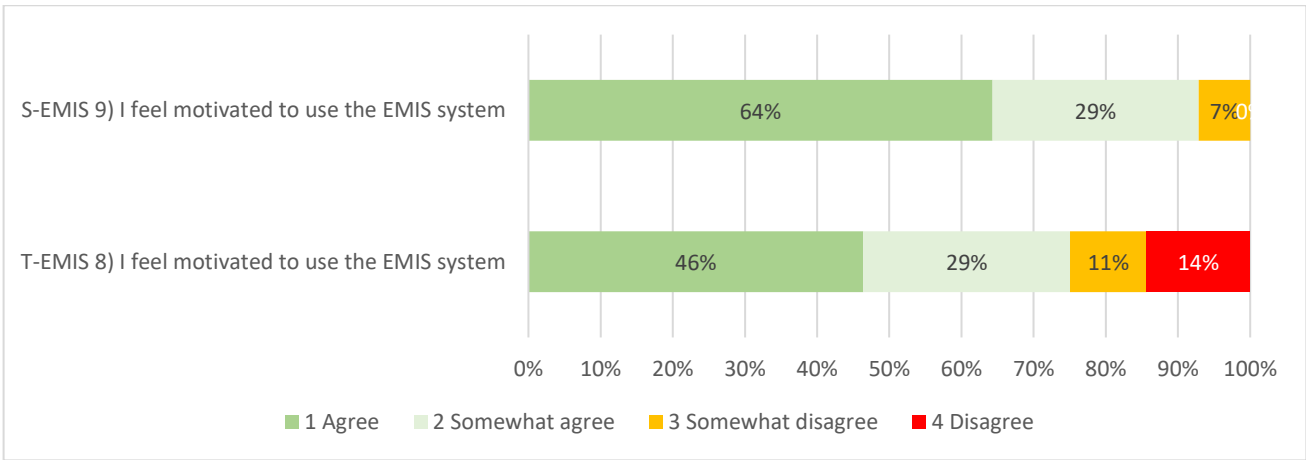
Finding 11 (relates to EQ11): Which factors were necessary for the intervention to achieve its intended output and outcome-level results?

- 171. The key factors for the project to achieve its output and outcome-level results include the provision of strong and timely upstream components, including systems (the EMIS system) and capacity building inputs (training materials and trainers) as well as computers and Internet access. These factors also depend on strong, adaptive and ongoing engagement by, as well as commitment and institutional support from, project stakeholders.**
172. This finding complements the previous finding, as it focuses on the key factors underlying and driving the assumptions and thus the movement towards results, including at a design level.
173. Focusing first on design, earlier findings underlined that for the downstream (UNICEF) components to be realised at the output and outcome level, the upstream project components were needed. For SO1, this was an operational and maintained EMIS system plus training materials and trained master trainers as well as identified school-level end-users for training. For SO2, it was national-level education strategy and capacity building plans. For SO3, it was a pilot training course and related materials, plus trained master trainers. Furthermore, these upstream components had to be strong and delivered in a timely manner in order for UNICEF's project to have the capacity to move ahead. As part of this, key upstream contributions were necessary, e.g. laptop computers and Internet access.
174. For the actual implementation of UNICEF's project, the key underlying factor to explain how activities and outputs contributed to outcome-level results is related to the strong, adaptive and ongoing interactions with, engagement by, and commitment from, all project stakeholders at multiple levels. This observation requires some unpacking.
175. Evaluation interviews and FGDs found that UNICEF staff made a significant effort to push forward the project, including in the face of significant challenges that were especially related to COVID. This push included committing significant staff time to working on the project in the latter stages (once upstream components were fully available). Also important were the strong linkages and communication with governorate-level actors by UNICEF on an ongoing basis over the implementation period. These were built on relationships that UNICEF has fostered over multiple years, and which are stronger for it. This facilitated adaptation to challenges. A good example is the master trainers for SO3: they lacked the required technical skills, which meant that new trainers had to be identified and trained. UNICEF therefore rearranged capacity building workshops. Another example was in SO1, where UNICEF secured funding for UNESCO to purchase laptops, as a reaction to COVID-related inflation increasing their price beyond what was originally budgeted. A third example was the inability to gather large numbers of teachers together in one place for SO3 capacity building, due to COVID-related distancing rules: the resulting solution was in an agreement to organise more sessions in more rooms on more days. Part of UNICEF's ability to play this role is because of its reputation as a strong actor in the education sector among stakeholders. This supported and fostered a sense of partnership and commitment, which kept the project moving forward. It should be noted that UNICEF's ability to do this was facilitated by strong efforts made by the MoE and UNESCO to drive it forward.
176. That commitment was mirrored by the commitment of stakeholders in the DoEs and at the governorate levels as well as by teachers. Indeed, interviews and FGDs made clear that they support the project's objectives, as well as its activities and outputs as a way to move towards those objectives. This support was seen in their active participation in the project, and the DoE staff's encouraging of it. Several interviewees also highlighted that a key factor driving their commitment was support shown by the Director General in the DoEs and, linked to that, from the Directors. Also highlighted was generally good political support at the governorate level in the governorates targeted. However, evidence gathered from several UNICEF staff and other interviewees indicated

weaker support in at least one governorate. This weaker support impacted on the quality of project implementation there, which underlined the importance of political support as an underlying factor. Finally, interviewees highlighted the good political support – albeit rather weak concrete commitments and weak real ownership – at the national level (from the Ministry and the Minister’s office).

177. As noted previously, not all stakeholders were enthusiastic about their roles. For example, many teachers were unhappy about having to enter the EMIS data on their own time and with their own Internet connections. This showed that stakeholders really need dedicated time and the materials to undertake tasks, if the intervention is to achieve its results. Yet the observation still stands, because they did that here. This also underlines that stakeholders were willing to adapt on an ongoing basis to challenges as they arose. Once again, this was clearly shown in the active usage of WhatsApp and Signal group chats among SO1 trainers and trainees, and among SO2 trainers and trainees to a slightly lesser extent. These group chats made it possible for them to develop and share new and user-level solutions to problems encountered along the way and thus to keep the project components moving forward.
178. Overall, project qualitative data have revealed a broader trend, in terms of Government of Iraq prioritising a commitment to improve the education system and related support for this priority by the funder and the UN system. The data in general showed that these FGD and KII respondents are supportive of the project’s larger aims. They also revealed that the project’s various components are in line with their sense of what needs to be done to achieve these aims. This includes the need for greater capacities among the key actors involved in the system, and for the system to be informed and driven by stronger data and planning. For SO1 in particular, survey results (see Figure 14) found that 75 per cent of the 918 teachers who participated in the survey were either motivated (46 per cent) or somewhat motivated (29 per cent) to use the EMIS system (T-EMIS 8). And among government staff, the motivation to use the EMIS system was even higher at 93 per cent (S-EMIS 9). Overall, this commitment is an important driving factor behind staff’s strong engagement with and commitment to the project.

Figure 14: The online survey showed differences in the motivation of government staff (S-EMIS 9) vs motivation of teachers to use the EMIS system (T-EMIS 8)



179. It is also important to underline the observations made by multiple key informants. These observations showed that the external consultants who worked on the project, and on SO1 and SO2 in particular, were central to its success. Indeed, the strong and high-quality work of these consultants coupled with flexible and proactive responses to challenges as they arose – including in one case after remuneration for the project had ended – was positively remarked on by many observers in all respondent groups who had interacted with them.

Finding 12 (relates to EQ12): How well have the progress towards and achievement of output and outcome-level results been monitored? How well have the risks and changes in contextual factors been monitored? And how useful was the monitoring information, and analysis of that information for timely and effectively guiding implementation changes and adjustments?

180. Project monitoring was overall good at the activity and output levels. This included monitoring of implementation, risks and changes in contexts as well as the capacities of trainees and how to best implement capacity building. These in turn informed adaptations in the work undertaken through feedback loops. The

monitoring of outcome-level results was weak, an observation that can also be linked to weak definition of the outcomes and the extent to which the project might realistically aim to achieve them.

181. A review of reporting documents to the EU, as well as monitoring documents that include meeting minutes and field visit reports, showed good project monitoring at the activity and output level for all three SOs. Indeed, a review of documents has shown that project progress, including challenges faced and the numbers of people trained, is well documented; the same can be said of progress on the GESPs (SO2). This includes gender-disaggregated data, but not much more about GEDSI-specific monitoring that is documented or that emerged in interviews.
182. There is good evidence that the quality of project outputs was overall well monitored, e.g. a post-evaluation that was done after EMIS training workshops clearly showed survey results on such questions as the relevance of sessions, the effectiveness of discussions and the quality of training materials. The EMIS teacher survey respondents and KIIs, as well as FGDs with teachers and other key informants, also made it clear that teachers provided constructive feedback on project outputs. This feedback was used to adjust the system and the implementation of training. These feedback loops influenced the design of the EMIS, and the need for stronger trainer selection, pre-training computer proficiency tests for teachers, and an extended training period beyond the initial five days (this latter loop was not however adopted). These feedback loops also emphasised the importance of giving individual computers to users, ensuring reliable Internet access, and dedicated computer specialists for each school. Finally, teachers recommended simplifying the data entry process and building in more flexibility: the goal was to make amending information easier, as well as to provide ongoing training support and follow-up. These various insights helped to improve the system overall, by making it more user-friendly, accessible, and efficiently managed, thus ensuring the system was better able to play its planning role for the educational system (T-EMIS 2) Open) & (T-EMIS 5) Open) & (S-EMIS 5) Open).
183. There is thus good evidence that the monitoring data that were generated did support adaptations to challenges and changes as they arose. The effective communication between the project partners supported such adaptations, particularly as upstream components were slowed down and downstream components thus had to be adjusted. Third-party monitors were another aspect of this adaptive management, as was mentioned by several UNICEF interviewees. They noted the quality of their monitoring and of their feedback, e.g. when provided on issues that they observed in the field locations. This in turn facilitated timely responses from UNICEF to such issues. In the words of one interviewee, "...they become almost our eyes and ears in addition to the programme officers themselves."
184. However, not all areas of output quality were consistently well monitored: multiple **DoE interviewees and some teachers** trained said that, for SO3, the quality of training delivered was not consistently monitored; and for SO1, many noted that the quality of the data entered on the EMIS system was not consistently monitored.
185. The evaluation found that the monitoring of outcome-level results was weak, based on a review of all data available and KIIs with UNICEF staff. This was reflected in insufficient outcome data, as well as insufficient data to monitor the progress from output- to outcome-level results and to generate feedback loops on the organisational change-related outcomes. Several UNICEF interviewees argued that it was **too soon to see outcome-level results**. This observation can be ascribed to the design issues, as well as the linking of the outcomes that the project aimed at, as highlighted in earlier findings. **Overall, the the outcome-level monitoring was not sufficiently developed for monitoring outcome-level results of this nature.**

5.5. Sustainability

This section examines the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention will continue, or are likely to continue. In analysing sustainability, there is consideration given to the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities of the systems needed to sustain net benefits over time. Given the duration of the intervention in Iraq, this involves analysing the actual flow of net benefits to date, as well as estimating the likelihood of net benefits continuing over the medium and long-term and the capacity of stakeholders to extend those outputs of the project beyond the project's target groups.

This section addresses the evaluation questions **EQ 13, and EQ14** (see Annex 5):

Finding 13 (relates to EQ13): To what extent were EMIS and the GESPs being used as intended? And to what extent has teacher training been institutionalised and influenced plans for scaling-up by the MoE?

- 186. The sustainability of the project is at present weak. This observation is based on the evidence of EMIS and the GESPs being comprehensively used, of how the capacity building plans will be implemented, of weak institutionalisation of teacher training, and of MoE scale-up plans remaining aspirational. So it is now essential to build on project results.**
187. KIIs and FGDs have shown weak sustainability of project results overall and for all three specific objectives, despite the many achievements of the project. This observation is broken down **further** below.
188. Regarding SO1, the EMIS system has been populated with data in the targeted areas. But as noted previously, the system is not currently usable for governorate-level planning, as it has not been rolled out in all schools in any one governorate. Furthermore, while there is good commitment to the system from all stakeholder groups, the commitment at MoE level remains aspirational: because there is not yet a strong and definitive financial commitment to maintaining and further rolling out the system. This highlights the issue of ownership, as was discussed in earlier findings. To maintain the system, MoE and UNESCO as well as other interviewees, clear stated that significant technical capacity building for the Ministry has been implemented so that the system can continue to run. Yet capacity levels are still too low to be able to do this. Moreover, according to several key informants, it is doubtful that the MoE is ready to run the system, especially given the heavy ongoing workload involved in doing so. One other key informant also noted that individuals who are trained to a level where they could run the system could also command much higher wages outside the Ministry – employee retention in the government could thus be a problem. Multiple other teachers in KIIs and FGDs noted that a significant number of teachers who trained to enter data on the EMIS system have now moved to other schools. Yet there are no concrete plans to train new EMIS-dedicated teachers to replace them.
189. Earlier findings have observed that SO2's GESPs and capacity building plans are complete. From a sustainability perspective, the challenge underlined by multiple interviewees (particularly at the DoE level) is that the GESPs are not being consistently used. Additionally, while such plans are complete, they also become outdated and so there is a limited time period in which they are most useful. Likewise, while the sector coordination committees designed to drive forward implementation have begun to be established, they are not fully operational. Just as importantly, there is no clearly committed funding from the MoE for implementing the capacity building plans required to fully implement the GESPs. Indeed, many DoE and MoE interviewees expressed hopes that outside funders, working through the UN, would cover this cost. Some DoE and MoE interviewees – as well as several from UNICEF – also made clear that part of the challenge is the fact that much of the MoE's budget is committed to staff salaries, thus there are relatively few uncommitted funds to dedicate to intensive capacity building.
190. SO3's training has also been undertaken, as earlier effectiveness findings made clear. But regarding sustainability, as mentioned in finding 2 (relevance) and finding 7 (effectiveness), the training is weak. That is because the project design did not envision institutionalising the training beyond the specific teachers trained. Furthermore, several teacher interviewees noted that there was interest in hearing more about their e-learning training from other teachers in their schools. But many more said that there was little interest, little direct support from school heads to amplify the training's impact by passing it on to other teachers, and that many other teachers' technical capacities are quite low and thus they would have difficulty in taking on the training even if they were interested. This underlines the narrow foundations of SO3's capacity building, with no clear mechanism in place to ensure sustainability beyond the teachers initially trained and their own interest in carrying on using it, and there is no clear and funded scale-up plan from the MoE.
191. Overall, what this finding makes clear is the weak sustainability of the project, other than through work that builds on the work already done and that explicitly addresses the weaknesses identified in this evaluation. This observation underlines that project results are at a critical juncture, particularly given that the three SOs' results will gradually weaken (capacity building) or become more out of date (plans and data systems).

5.6. Gender Equity/JbWMGB, Human Rights and Climate Change

Gender equality/JbWMGB is the concept that women and men, girls and boys are meant to have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realising their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefiting from) economic, social, cultural and political development. For UNICEF, equity means that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop and reach their full potential without discrimination, bias or favouritism. Human rights are, for UNICEF, standards that recognise and

protect the dignity of all human beings. Human rights govern how individual human beings live in society and with each other, as well as their relationship with the State and the obligations that the State has towards them. A final principle central to this evaluation is climate change, in particular climate change-related adaptation and mitigation measures.

This section addresses the evaluation questions **EQ15 and EQ 16** (see Annex 5):

Finding 14 (relates to EQ15): To what degree were gender, human rights and equity principles integrated into the design, implementation and monitoring of the intervention?

- 192. There is some evidence of gender principles/JbWMGB being integrated into the project for SO1⁶⁴ and SO2,⁶⁵ and of their possibly forming the basis for further gender-targeted/JbWMGB programming when the EMIS system and GESPs are ultimately used. There is also some good evidence of human rights and equity principles being incorporated into SO1 and into SO2, though with some variability in SO2. SO3⁶⁶ could partly contribute to this, though this would not be by design.**
193. A document review found that the design in the proposal does not explain in detail how gender/JbWMGB is or was prioritised as a cross-cutting issue. Nor does the design clearly explain how gender/JbWMGB was to be implemented concretely across the project. Likewise, other project strategic and planning documents available do not explain, prioritise or analyse gender/JbWMGB in detail, other than the admittedly important component of disaggregating data by gender to track progress and impact. Relatedly, there is evidence of such disaggregation in the monitoring data, e.g. with the numbers of teachers **reached** for capacity building broken down by gender. Interviews with UNICEF staff, and with the UNICEF social inclusion specialist, have confirmed that gender analysis/JbWMGB was done as part of the needs assessments. Analysis of documentary data and KIIs with UNICEF did not find that there was a differentiated approach to boys, girls, and men or women Rights Holders.
194. Interview data with the EMIS system designer and EMIS users – including teachers, DoE staff and at the MoE – made clear that the EMIS system includes gender disaggregated data. Furthermore, 96 per cent of all 56 respondents among government staff agreed or somewhat agreed that the EMIS system sufficiently differentiates between boys and girls in order to inform stronger education planning (S-EMIS-3). This data in turn could feed into governorate-level planning, which could take the differential needs and vulnerabilities of boys and girls into consideration when designing or adapting **programming**, whenever the system is eventually used. Moreover, the system would be able to analyse intersectional vulnerabilities as a result of co-relating them and thus form the basis for targeting these; this too could happen when the system is eventually used. For the EMIS training, there was no evidence of gender considerations/JbWMGB playing a role in shaping how the capacity development was designed or implemented. There was also no evidence in the qualitative KII and FGD data of women teachers having different results than men, in terms of the capacity building activities.
195. SO2 had a stronger and more deliberate gender/JbWMGB component, with the GESPs incorporating fairly strong gender/JbWMGB disaggregated analysis and insights about how to address particular vulnerabilities (primarily related to female school drop-out rates). Intersectional vulnerabilities of women and girls were also analysed in the GESPs, e.g. how the socio-economic situation of women differs from that of men. The GESPs also analysed internal and external risks and their impact on gender/JbWMGB, as well as considering mitigation strategies. However, this analysis could **have** been deeper and more complete in order to be actionable. The capacity development plans under this SO were not specifically tailored to target women differently than men.
196. SO3 had no specific gender-related/JbWMGB component, such as how teachers might target girls differently than boys in order to enhance learning or prioritise learning around gender/JbWMGB as a thematic priority in the e-learning materials. Nor was there evidence of gender disaggregation/JbWMGB playing a role in shaping how the capacity development was designed or implemented. SO2 could potentially be used to target gender/JbWMGB related vulnerabilities, by using e-learning to reach girls who do not attend school regularly.

⁶⁴ To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of education through roll-out of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and increase capacity of education planners, statisticians and educators at governorate level.

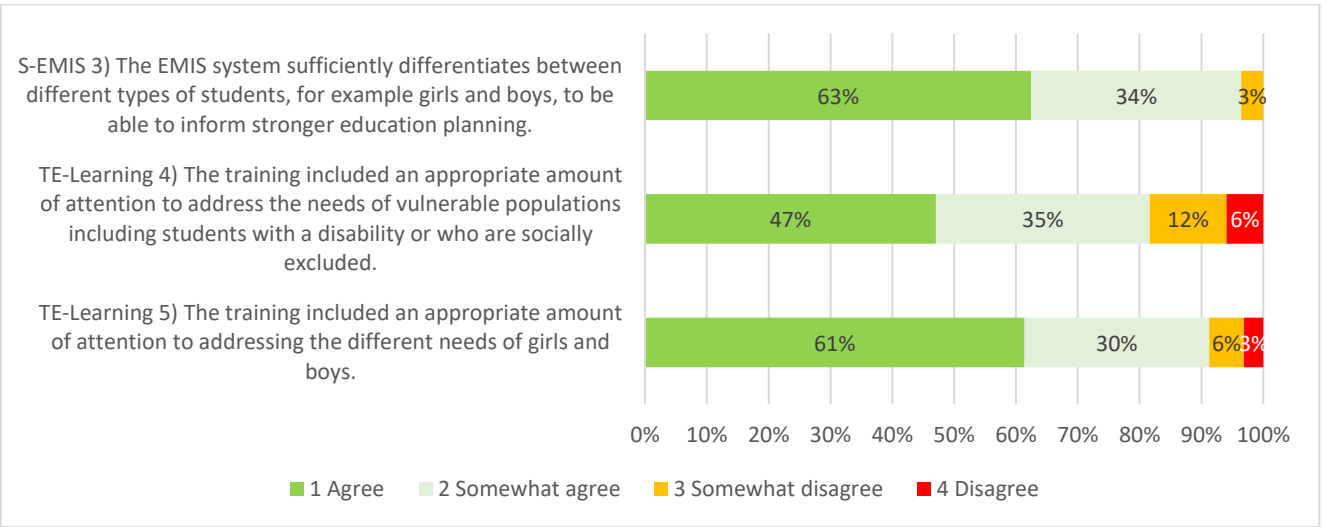
⁶⁵ To strengthen the capacity of MoE at the central and governorate level to improve education services delivery.

⁶⁶ To enhance the quality of teaching and learning by operationalising the capacity development plan and developing teachers' capacities at central and governorate levels.

Yet multiple teacher and DoE interviewees argued that the girls who do not attend school regularly are likely not allowed to have access to a mobile phone (to access the e-learning). The interviewees also said that these vulnerable girls often come from poorer and more rural backgrounds, where access to a mobile phone and to the Internet is more problematic. This unintended effect related to intersectional vulnerabilities – ‘unintended’ because it was not deliberately designed into the project – would thus be unlikely to help address the issue. This overall qualitative analysis is in contrast with the survey data, where 91 per cent of teaching staff concurred with the statement that the e-learning training included an appropriate amount of attention to the different needs of boys and girls (T-E-Learning 5 – see Figure below). The reason for this variation is not clear. Finally, there was no evidence in the qualitative KII and FGD data of women teachers having different results than men in the capacity building activities.

197. Regarding human rights and equity principles more generally, the interviewees cited above were clear that SO1’s EMIS system includes a strong profile of students. This includes profiling potential disabilities, socio-economic vulnerabilities, learning difficulties, as well as special needs: all of which were deliberately designed into the system. These dimensions could help to ensure equity and rights principles, because children who are more likely to drop out of school – or whose learning needs are not appropriately met – can be identified and potentially targeted with programming when the system is operational. SO2 was more variable on this dimension. In other words, some GESPs and education sector analyses included very strong analysis on rights and equity, in terms of vulnerabilities and access. These analyses also included analysis of disabilities and how to address them, so as to ensure access to school, as well as differential analysis by disability. This analysis was paired with strong contextual analysis of the particular conditions in the governorate. Other GESPs were weaker on this dimension, with no clear pattern as to why (e.g. the Muthanna and the Rusafa 2 plans included strong components than the others reviewed). Here too, equity and rights-related principles could flow from those GESPs that strongly included this analysis as implementation moves forward. SO3 did not specifically target rights and equity principles in its design, implementation or monitoring. Yet it did do so implicitly, since those fundamental rights related to access and inclusion especially for vulnerable groups, e.g. children with a disability, could be addressed through implementation of the e-learning. Yet multiple teacher FGDs said that they did not think this would happen in practice. These qualitative data contrast with the survey data, since of the 918 teaching staff respondents, 82 per cent agreed that the e-learning paid enough attention to the needs of vulnerable populations, such as disabled or socially excluded Rights Holders (T-E-Learning 4 – see Figure below). It is unclear why there is a difference between the qualitative and quantitative data. One government staff respondent said that the current system does not allow for systematically recording orphaned children, with a view to better monitoring their needs and providing them with additional resources as needed (S-EMIS 3) Open).

Figure 15: Online Perception Survey results regarding the perception of government staff (n=56) on whether the EMIS system sufficiently differentiates between boys and girls to inform stronger education planning (S-EMIS 3). Further, it shows the overwhelming perception of teachers (n=572) whether the online training sufficiently addresses the needs of vulnerable populations (T-E-Learning 4) as well addressing the different needs of boys and girls (T-E-Learning 5).



198. One area that was highlighted in one FGD was that e-learning could help to provide a solution to the many overcrowded classrooms in Iraq, by supplementing in-class learning with remote learning. If implemented, this

could then help to ensure that more young people could continue to benefit from education, despite overcrowded classrooms.

Finding 15 (relates to EQ16): To what degree have climate change mitigation and adaptation measures been addressed in the design and implementation of the intervention?

199. Climate change mitigation and adaptation measures were not specifically addressed in the project design and implementation, although there are areas of potential overlap between the project and SDG 13.

200. The project did not specifically integrate climate change mitigation or adaptation measures in any of the SOs. This point emerged from **interviews**, including those with UNICEF and DoE staff, as well as from document review. This lack of such measures does not match with SDG 13⁶⁷ clearly having areas of *potential* overlap with the project – e.g. SO3 could have been linked to the target about improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

201. It could be argued that the EMIS system, when fully deployed, could inform stronger planning on climate issues. For example, the system would make it easier to continue to track children if their families move for climate-related reasons and in cases where more or less teachers and schools might be needed if people were to move for climate-related reasons. Other possibilities are tracking infrastructure that could be vulnerable to climate change, including schools or other MoE facilities. Yet the GESPs do not specifically anticipate climate-related movement and the possible implications for where schools and teachers might be needed; nor does the EMIS deliberately include climate vulnerability data fields. Thus, these positive scenarios are still hypothetical, which underlines the finding that the project did not specifically integrate climate change mitigation or adaptation measures.

⁶⁷ See SDG targets 13.1 and 13.3 ([here](#)).

6. Conclusions

202. The following conclusions flow from the evaluation report's findings, presenting larger insights arising from them. The conclusions underline the project's success overall at achieving results in a largely efficient manner. This was done through a partnership approach that worked quite well, with some areas for strengthening particularly related to engendering ownership and leveraging stakeholder engagement. This success was achieved in the face of some significant challenges, especially related to COVID. However, this success can be balanced against weaker results related to achieving outcomes, due to the longer-than-the-project timeline for achieving them, as well as due to underestimating the fostering of organisational change, a key element that would ensure their achievement. However, the project's objectives and pathways for reaching those objectives are supported by stakeholders, which is an essential enabler of achieving the outcome-level changes. The key challenge is how to capitalise on that stakeholder support and commitment, in order to build upon and consolidate movement towards project outcomes. These key themes are elaborated in what follows.

Conclusion 1: Achievement of results

203. The project was overall successful in achieving its targeted output-level results in a largely efficient manner, despite significant challenges, especially related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The strong achievement of output-level results is not echoed at the outcome level.

204. The project management's responsiveness to the evolving context, aided by a 10-month no-cost-extension, and a high degree of financial management prowess in response to the pandemic, enabled the project to achieve its output-level results across all three specific objectives (SOs), including the successful establishment and roll-out of EMIS (SO1), development of education capacity plans (SO2), and enhancement of teachers' capacities for e-learning (SO3). The achievement of outcome-level results was hindered by some deeper project design issues. Most activities took place toward the end of the project, at which point the attempt to measure most outcome-level changes would have been premature, since outcome-level changes can take time to manifest themselves. Measuring outcome-level changes at an organisational or institutional level is complex and therefore challenging, because outcome results largely depend on the organisation's capacity to create the enabling conditions for moving from outputs towards achieving outcome-level results. Furthermore, the project needs strong outcome-level monitoring mechanisms, including adapted indicators, and feedback loops that can inform effective decision-making and coordination of all relevant actors at a strategic level. Additionally, due to the longer-than-the-project timeline for achieving outcome results, the project's management did not have sufficient information on time to make decisions that could lead to the achievement of the outcome results.

205. Regarding the larger organisational change processes required, the findings show that capacity building and putting the development of planning tools do not lead automatically to the usage of these newly developed capacities and planning tools. Using new capacities and tools in order to facilitate the move towards data-driven decision-making and planning, and thus the achievement of the outcome-level results, also requires organisational-level change, including appropriate incentivization and ownership building measures. This is also relevant for SO3's e-learning not including measures to amplify the capacity building beyond the core group of teachers trained, via institutionalisation. The evaluation findings thus call into question the project's implicit assumption that individual-level capacity building and the creation of sophisticated planning tools will on their own produce organisational-level change and ultimately system-level change (in Iraq's education system). A further observation is that the project's outcomes were relatively siloed from one another. This reduced their ability to create synergistic change, which is particularly relevant given how an effective EMIS system should support governorate-level planning guided by a GESP and stronger staff capacities.

206. Perhaps most crucially, the project's capacity to reach those objectives depends on the effective engagement of relevant stakeholders across all levels. Hence, the key challenge is how to capitalise on their support and commitment to build upon and consolidate movement towards project outcomes in a sustainable way. Fortunately, the project benefited from a very effective partnership and coordination mechanism with relevant stakeholders providing a strong foundation to fulfill this requirement.

Conclusion 2: Adaptive management and stakeholder commitment

207. The achievement of results at the output level is linked to the strong adaptive management in the face of significant slowdowns during implementation, as well as strong stakeholder commitment and coherence,

especially between UNICEF and UNESCO. The adaptive management strategies at activity-output level involved adjusting timelines, sharing new financial resources with the other partners to ensure their upstream elements were not holding up downstream work, and dedicating significant staff time to the project once work was possible in its latter stages. Such strategies are at the root of the project's success in a challenging and changeable implementation context, as is the project's fostering of the strong stakeholder commitment that supports it both at a management level but especially amongst the local-level actors that feed directly into the system, such as teachers and DoE staff. Yet the strong commitment of these stakeholders comes with increased expectations that if there is no further progress and concrete uptake of outputs, especially by the MoE, there is a risk of frustration and even disengagement developing. This underlines that the project results are at a key juncture, where further engagement and follow-up are necessary in the near term, in order to build on the successes already achieved. This observation also underlines the need to manage the expectations, given the large changes aimed at, including with the donors and with implementing partners.

Conclusion 3: Theory of Change

208. **The project's Theory of Change did not fully grasp and address the complexity of the change process it was aiming to achieve.** This is reflected in some linkages and assumptions not being sufficiently clear or strong. A more detailed ToC could have supported the movement from output towards outcome-level results. This is also reflected in the strong monitoring of results at the output level but weaker monitoring at the outcome level; a stronger ToC could have informed a selection of process indicators related to linkages between outputs and outcomes and stronger outcome-level monitoring; this in turn would have allowed feedback loops and consequently would have informed an analysis of what was working and what was not working in the move towards outcomes. A stronger ToC would thus have informed a stronger response to improving those results through adaptive management approaches.

Conclusion 4: Partnership between UNICEF, UNESCO and MoE

209. **The project's partnership approach between UNICEF, UNESCO and the MoE and the linkages between the upstream and downstream components in general worked well, even if slowdowns upstream inevitably affected downstream work.** In particular **UNICEF boasts a strong network and pre-existing relationships with many key actors in Iraq at the sub-national level;** its **good reputation** amongst these actors and the resultant trust that has been built up over time; and, its **extensive experience** in providing training related to education. The project partnership assigned roles to UNICEF based on these strengths and that capitalised on these strengths. **This was also a key factor in facilitating the project's ability to achieve results, especially as project implementation ended up being done under tight timelines.**

210. The findings have underlined the importance of putting in place **strong and inclusive communications and coordination mechanisms both horizontally** (between partners, including the donors) **and vertically** (between upper management and field level staff), as these helped to **facilitate adaptive management strategies based on identifying and responding to implementation opportunities and challenges** as these arose. Also, there was good horizontal communication and coordination amongst the three core partners, though there was sometimes a tendency to hold bilateral meetings, when the inclusion of all partners would have helped to ensure a shared, project-level view of progress and challenges. Notwithstanding, such horizontal connections at the level of UNICEF, UNESCO and the MoE were not complemented by strong vertical connections between central-level duty bearers like the MoE. Similarly, there were no strong vertical connections between implementing agencies like UNICEF and UNESCO and local-level secondary duty bearers further down the implementation chain, such as teachers and DoE staff. The weaker vertical feedback loops may have compounded the slow achievement of outcome results, since challenges were not being quickly communicated up the line and addressed.

Conclusion 5: Ownership

211. **Regarding ownership more generally, the evaluation highlighted that insufficiently concrete tasks were assigned to the MoE, which weakened its ownership of the project.** The conclusion is that strong ownership does not arise without substantive engagement through adopting a range of active roles in the project, including the organisation that is to take ownership supporting it with clear financial commitments. A higher degree of ownership within the MoE, coupled with stronger adoption and institutionalisation of capacity building measures on EMIS by the MoE, could have increased the project's sustainability.

Conclusion 6: Climate change mitigation and adaptation measures

212. The context in Iraq is particularly prone to climate-related fragilities, with potential impacts on education, e.g. through population movements but also by virtue of the need to increase young peoples' awareness and to encourage their informed efforts to help combat climate change. **Climate change mitigation and adaptation measures were not foreseen in the design of the project:** that is a significant weakness of the project, given the context of Iraq and given the conceptual room to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation measures in the project's design.

Conclusion 7: Gender/JbWMGB principles

213. **The integration of gender principles across the project varied**, with explicit attention given to SO2 and more implicit considerations in SO1. Despite gender-disaggregated data inclusion and analysis, there was a **lack of a differentiated approach in terms of programming for boys, girls, men, or women**. The **monitoring system did not thoroughly address gender/JbWMBG issues, with gaps in articulating how gender would be prioritised and implemented across project components**. While potential exists for gender considerations in the EMIS system's future use, explicit strategies were absent.

7. Lessons Learned

Lesson Learned 1: Partnerships

214. Relates to findings 4, 6, 9, and 11.

215. Strong partnerships are a key way to achieve strong project results. Such partnerships have roles assigned to partners that are aligned with their organisational strengths in the particular implementing context; incorporate clear communication and feedback loops that inform an adaptive management strategy; and, incorporate the elements needed to foster assumption of the longer-term roles the project expects partners to assume (ownership in particular).

216. The project's implementing partnership was a key factor impacting upon results – and breaking down the components of what worked well and what worked less well provides some important lessons learned. This is especially the case as there is an increasing move towards cooperative partnerships amongst UN entities and with national partners, both in Iraq and more broadly.

217. The first lesson emerging under the umbrella of partnerships is related to UNICEF's strong network and pre-existing relationships with many key actors in Iraq at the sub-national level; its good reputation amongst these actors and the resultant trust that has been built up over time; and, its extensive experience in providing training related to education. The project partnership assigned roles to UNICEF based on these strengths and that capitalised on these strengths. This was also a key factor in facilitating its ability to achieve results, especially as project implementation ended up being done under tight timelines. The lesson then is to appropriately assess the relative strengths of partners in the national/sub-national context where a project would be implemented, including their reputation and thus ability to bring stakeholders onboard to the project (especially where it is advancing a new approach to working), and thereby to facilitate achievement of project results.

218. A second lesson under the partnerships umbrella is related to their smooth functioning. More specifically, the project has underlined the broader point that it is important to put in place strong and inclusive communications and coordination mechanisms, both horizontally (between partners, including the donors) and vertically (between upper management and field level staff). Doing so helps to facilitate adaptive management strategies based on identifying and responding to implementation opportunities and challenges as these arise. These strategies are also facilitated by inter-organisational and inter-personal relationships amongst organisational staff, relationships that have been built over time and thus bring trust and an understanding of the others' work processes that can smooth planning and implementation. This is particularly important in fragile and conflict-affected or post-conflict contexts, given the greater likelihood of shifts in the context that could impact on the project.

219. A final dimension under the partnerships umbrella is related to building in appropriate measures, in order to allow partners to fulfil their roles. This is a narrower lesson related to ownership and how it is fostered. Insights from organisational assessments show that ownership emerges from actively participating in designing, implementing and ideally co-funding project components and thereby becoming progressively more committed to them and their success by virtue of experiencing them as (at least partially) one's own. If then, as in many UNICEF projects, the aim is for ownership to ultimately be assumed by a government entity, it is important to ensure that these pre-requisites to the assumption of ownership are put in place as part of the partnership's assigning of roles.

Lesson Learned 2: Project Design and Implementation

220. Relates to findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 13.

221. A strong project design, rooted in a realistic appraisal of what is to be achieved is critical for achievement of project results, especially at the outcome level, and it should be based on a jointly constructed and subsequently utilised Theory of Change.

222. The project has shown that individual-level capacity building and putting together sophisticated planning tools do not on their own produce organisational-level change – e.g. within a government ministry – or ultimately system-level change (e.g. in an education system). This is partly related to the timelines to achieve those results at the outcome level, an observation that can also be linked to pressure, including from funders to articulate ambitious outcome-level results. But more fundamentally, it is because usage of built capacities and planning

tools within the organisation and thus achievement of outcome-level results also requires organisational-level change, in terms of changing approaches to planning, decision-making and work processes.

223. The lesson then is about the importance of collaboratively working with all stakeholders at the concept note and proposal stage, in order to ensure that there is a strong and realistic Theory of Change. Such a ToC would have assumptions that are clearly articulated. For example, this project's assumption that teachers would input data to EMIS during their free time rather than during the work day, which is clearly problematic for sustainability, would have become clear in such a process and so could have been mitigated in the project design. An early inclusion of key stakeholders would also have appropriate mechanisms for achieving results realistically appraised and incorporated into the project design, e.g. including mechanisms to foster concrete commitment from higher management. This is particularly the case for activities such as individual capacity building, which intuitively make sense as being the key to moving towards a larger result – but are in fact important though often not sufficient on their own to do this. Furthermore, subsequently using that Theory of Change to inform implementation, including as the project (and its ToC) is adapted during implementation, will strengthen the achievement of results. Lastly, ensuring that outcome-level results are realistic and achievable will help to ensure that the project is not ultimately judged against unrealisable standards.

Lesson Learned 3: Gender, Equity, Human Rights and Climate Change

224. Relates to findings 14 and 15.

225. Gender equity, human rights and climate change are project elements that can be weak, often due to a weak understanding of how to incorporate them or of their importance. Addressing this requires proactively anticipating the weakness and prioritising addressing it at both the design and implementation stages of projects.

226. The project has shown how gender equity, human rights and climate change can be somewhat lost in the approach adopted and during implementation. This is especially because while 'mainstreaming' actually means including these elements across all project components, the reality is that it sometimes ends up with them not being strongly integrated into any of them. Yet not including these elements, or only including simplified dimensions of them such as gender disaggregation, is problematic given UNICEF's institutional commitments. As the Evaluation Team found however, a key challenge is that staff capacities to do this can sometimes be lower than necessary, compounded by staff positions dedicated to supporting on them not always being filled in-country. Furthermore, issues related to climate change can risk seeming less urgent in a fragile and conflict-affected or post-conflict context, and thus not appropriately emphasised.

227. The lesson then is that strongly integrating gender equity, human rights and climate change into projects requires specifically reviewing for these elements at the project design stage and then throughout implementation, as well as drawing on expertise from UNICEF's own experts, including from abroad if necessary.

Lesson Learned 4: Project Monitoring

228. Relates to finding 12.

229. Monitoring at the output and outcome level, as well as feedback mechanisms, are important tools for achieving results and should not be omitted from projects.

230. The fourth lesson relates specifically to monitoring. The evaluation found that the project had weak outcome-level monitoring data, as well as weak monitoring of the linkages between outputs and outcomes. Earlier lessons learned underlined the need to clearly articulate how outcomes are to be achieved, including incorporating the appropriate mechanisms into the project's design to facilitate this process. Here, the lesson is that strong outcome-level monitoring and feedback loops on what that monitoring finds can be important tools for adjusting the project's approach and thus to facilitate movement towards outcomes. This includes monitoring of organisational change-related outcomes, based on appropriate indicators, when these are central to the project. Without such mechanisms, the chances of achieving outcomes are reduced, especially in fragile and conflict-affected or post-conflict contexts where adjustments to the project are more likely to be required.

8. Recommendations

232. The recommendations are linked to the findings, conclusions and lessons learned in the report. They have been reviewed by UNICEF staff in a series of rounds of comments, as well as in a recommendations workshop with the key stakeholders for the project, including representatives from the Ministry of Education and others. These different reviews in turn informed revisions made to them in different drafts of the evaluation report.

Recommendation 1: Maintain and Expand Work on Focus Areas of the Project

233. For UNICEF, the MoE, UNESCO and the EU (relates to findings 1, 8, and 9).

UNICEF and its partners should plan for and implement further work on the focus areas of the project, to build upon its promising yet incomplete results. This should be done in the near-term, especially as the project's achievements will weaken/become progressively more outdated over time.

234. The evaluation has made clear that the project achieved some notable results in all three Specific Objective areas, related to capacity building and planning as well as database systems to support such planning. Furthermore, it showed that the work is relevant to the context in the country based on assessed needs. The evaluation has found good evidence of support for and commitment to those various Specific Objectives and the results they aim at amongst stakeholders, notably teachers as well as DoE and MoE staff.

235. This represents a positive initial results that constitutes a foundation for continuing to improve the strength of Iraq's education system, and are the basis for the core recommendation: UNICEF and its partners should build upon the project's strong foundation with further work in the areas that the three SOs focused on. Most importantly, this should be done in the near term. This is because the project's achievements to-date will weaken over time, whether due to capacity building fading from memory, due to plans becoming outdated and no longer as coherent with the context, or because of enthusiasm and support for the project's components amongst stakeholders fading over time.

Recommendation 2: Revise and Fine-tune Theory of Change and Project Design at Large

236. For UNICEF, the MoE, UNESCO and the EU (relates to findings 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, and 14).

UNICEF and its partners should also address challenges in the project's design and implementation in any further work, by: ensuring that new capacities, tools and plans are effectively used as part of a process of organisational capacity building that leads to system strengthening (and that this is captured in a strong Theory of Change); building the MoE's ownership by strongly engaging it in planning and implementation and with all partners making significant financial contributions; creating a demonstration effect by covering all the schools in governorates so that the EMIS and GESP can be used; connecting together different project components to create synergies; ensuring strong monitoring at output and outcome levels, with feedback loops to inform adaptive management; and, ensuring that teachers have Internet access and dedicated time for undertaking their EMIS work.

237. While the first recommendation highlighted the strengths of the project to build upon, the evaluation has also outlined challenges as regards facilitating movement towards outcomes and achieving sustainability. These challenges should be addressed in any future work, and include:

- **Revise and refine the project's Theory of Change by incorporating components aimed at building the ability and the will to robustly use the new capacities, tools and plans** in the ways intended. The revised ToC should **explicitly articulate risks, assumptions, and how the project will move from activities to outputs and outcomes**. The observation here is that authoring strong plans, building strong data systems and building capacities for key stakeholders at the individual level are important, but not enough on their own given the broader, systemic-level changes aimed at by the project. Future work phases should, at the concept note phase, conduct a review of good practices on organisational capacity building. More specifically, these phases should focus on how complex organisations like the Ministry of Education adopt more data-driven ways of work related to planning and decision-making and more effectively draw upon and institutionalise newly built staff capacities, and then ultimately translate these into system strengthening. These insights should then inform the development of activities, as well as related outputs and outcomes, which would be incorporated into the project design for any possible future phases.

- Fostering the Ministry of Education's ownership of the project and thus the sustainability of its results, by engaging it more strongly in project design, and ensuring that it plays a strong role in the implementation of project components similar to other project partners. Furthermore, all project partners should make substantial financial contributions, again aimed at increasing shared ownership and thus supporting sustainability.
- Focusing upon ensuring all schools in selected governorates are covered by the EMIS system, to facilitate actually using the EMIS and the GESPs as governorate-level planning tools. Future work should also ensure a robust learning mechanism is built in, to capture and publicise learning about the effects of this process, so as to inform a demonstration effect for other governorates and thus greater support for the shift in approach.
- Ensuring that the different project components are connected together, with linkages such that for example the EMIS system and its users are also drawing in the GESPs, so as to create greater synergies in the work.
- Related to the previous point about learning mechanisms, any further work should build upon the project's strong monitoring at the output level, by incorporating strong monitoring at the outcome level, as well as monitoring of the linkages between outputs and outcomes. This includes capturing data about how plans, data systems and capacity building measures were actually put into practice, including at the organisational level, as well as the effects (if any) of this. Given the timeline for such changes, it would also be important to have short-term as well as longer-term indicators, with the latter possibly planned to be reached in future iterations of the project's work. Finally, it would be important to build in strong feedback loops to the monitoring, so as to facilitate ongoing adaptive management practices.
- Lastly, any further work should address the very real concerns of user-level stakeholders and particularly teachers, related to Internet access and dedicated time for undertaking their EMIS-related tasks. Other concerns expressed included the perception of many that further training related to EMIS was needed, that this should also be supported with basic computer literacy training, and that short YouTube clips should be produced showing EMIS users standard work procedures.

Recommendation 3: Strengthening the Project's Partnership Approach

238. For UNICEF, the MoE, UNESCO and the EU (relates to findings 4, 5, 7, 10, and 12).

UNICEF and its partners should replicate the strong partnership approach in the future, while also ensuring that learnings from this partnership inform how the partnership approach could be further improved. These include building in strong linkages between upstream and downstream components (and possibly sharing these components amongst partners); capitalising on partner strengths in assigning roles; building in conditional timeline commitments; building in mechanisms for each partner to be able to strongly support the other; incorporating robust communication mechanisms to support adaptive management; and, ensuring that linked partnership projects are evaluated together.

239. The partnership between UNICEF, UNESCO and the MoE has been a key strength of this project, incorporating strong linkages between upstream and downstream components and capitalising on many of the institutional strengths of each partner. Furthermore, this partnership approach is in line with institutional commitments made in the UN Cooperation Framework for Iraq. The approach should thus be continued for future work projects. But learnings from this project should also inform how partnerships are designed and implemented in the future. Key insights include:

- Consider partnership arrangements where upstream and downstream components are shared amongst partners, to ensure that none of the partners is kept waiting on the other's work.
- Build in timeline commitments that are conditional, i.e. assuming that a particular upstream component is completed by x date, or the linked downstream component will be completed by y date.
- Build in mechanisms for strongly supporting other project partners, including the possibility for shifting project resources amongst partners to support moving components forward in a timely manner (with appropriate communication with and oversight from the funder).

- Build in robust mechanisms communication mechanisms for inclusive, joint planning and discussions amongst all partners, so that all partners are fully aware of and party to challenges and decisions. These should be both horizontal (between partners) and vertical (between upper management and field-level staff), so as to facilitate adaptive management strategies based on responding to opportunities and challenges as these arise. They should also draw in donors, to ensure strong coordination with them and thus smooth functioning of, including adjustments to, the project.
- Ensure that linked partnership projects are evaluated together as a coherent whole, given that this is how they are designed rather than as separate projects, to avoid learning ending up siloed.

Recommendation 4: Maintain Sensitivity to Shifting Needs of Target Populations in a Volatile Environment

240. For UNICEF, the MoE, UNESCO and the EU (relates to findings 1, 3, and 8).

UNICEF should ensure that all components in its future projects are the most appropriate in line with the project's needs analysis and the project proposal, based on both the immediate context and longer-term aims.

241. This project's thematic focus for the SO3 learning module, e-learning, was decided upon within a crisis context related to the COVID-19 pandemic and related shutdowns of schools as well as limitations on movement. The evaluation found that the Specific Objective did produce some good results, though also questioned whether it was the most appropriate focus given the broader capacity needs identified amongst teachers and listed in Finding 1. While the decision in this case was outside UNICEF's control, it is still an important opportunity for learning that can inform UNICEF's future work.

- Put in place a requirement to ensure that decisions about what to focus on within future projects is justified by a thorough needs analysis, (in line with the project proposal's longer-term aims as well as including contingency planning appropriate for a crisis context.

Recommendation 5: Include Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Measures

242. For UNICEF, the MoE, UNESCO and the EU (relates to finding 15).

UNICEF and its partners should ensure that future project iterations incorporate strong climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, particularly into education-related projects where there is a possibility to embed such measures into policy and learning. This would include incorporating them into all future GESPs, the EMIS system, and capacity building measures.

243. UNICEF has made strong institutional commitments related to incorporating climate change components into its projects, including developing a methodology for monitoring climate change through schools and using EMIS (with relevant indicators). These commitments are even more important in Iraq, given the vulnerability of the country to climate-related challenges. Yet the evaluation has found that such components were not incorporated into the project's design or its implementation, despite there being many ways in which this could have been productively done given the project's educational focus.

- Include climate components, even when key stakeholders might argue – as several did in this evaluation's KIIs – that their inclusion is not a priority, and moreover to do so in a manner that maximises its impact. This would include a requirement to incorporate climate components into future GESPs, the EMIS system, as well as capacity building measures for key stakeholders.

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