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**Annual report for 2024 of the Executive Director
of UNICEF***Summary*

The present report is the third annual report of the UNICEF Executive Director on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

It is accompanied by reports on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, and on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system; an annex on independent oversight functions/bodies in UNICEF; and a data companion and scorecard.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are presented in section V.

* E/ICEF/2025/11.



I. Overview

1. In this penultimate year of its Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, UNICEF partnered with national Governments and stakeholders to protect children’s rights, meet their basic needs and expand their opportunities. The organization worked to keep children’s well-being at the centre of global and national agendas, supporting countries across regions and development contexts to make notable strides towards the child-related Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Children faced a myriad of crises and numerous challenges in the year 2024. More than 460 million children lived in or had fled from violent conflicts that increasingly devastate civilian areas¹ and drive grave violations of children’s rights on an increasing scale.² Nearly 1 billion children lived in multidimensional poverty,³ while growing debt burdens made it difficult for many countries to fund the social services that children need to escape poverty and realize their potential.⁴ The resource environment for development and humanitarian action became further constrained, with cuts in traditional donors’ aid budgets, and a continuing decline in flexible funding for UNICEF and its United Nations partners.

3. As it implemented its Strategic Plan, UNICEF adapted its programmatic and policy approaches to tackle these complex challenges and reach millions of children while contributing to lasting change to strengthen national systems and resilient communities. The organization streamlined its operations and expanded digital transformation efforts to become more agile, efficient and responsive to diverse and evolving local contexts, while deepening local partnerships and strengthening resilient national systems.

4. In 2024, an estimated 183.5 million children required humanitarian assistance. Together with partners, UNICEF responded to 448 emergencies in 104 countries, delivering humanitarian assistance in accordance with its Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action and humanitarian principles. The organization delivered over 1.5 billion polio vaccine doses to 87 countries, contributing to the reduction of global polio cases by nearly 25 per cent between 2023 and 2024. Early detection services for wasting reached 251 million children under 5, and 9.3 million were treated for severe wasting and other forms of severe acute malnutrition.

5. As a result of UNICEF efforts, 26 million out-of-school children and adolescents gained access to education, including 9 million in humanitarian settings and 3.7 million children on the move. Over 18 million children accessed digital education, including nearly 10 million through the Learning Passport, up 44 per cent from 2022. Through evidence-based advocacy and engagement with partners to increase social spending and improve budget allocations, UNICEF supported 91 countries, up from 78 in 2022, to make greater and more effective investments in children.

6. UNICEF-supported parenting programmes reached 18.5 million parents and caregivers, up from 11.8 million in 2022. Across 110 countries, 6.2 million children who experienced violence received health, social work, justice or law enforcement services, a 36 per cent increase from 2023. UNICEF scaled up or introduced multisectoral programmes designed with and for adolescent girls in 63 countries in

¹ UNICEF, Humanitarian Action for Children appeal, New York, 2024.

² United Nations, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, [A/78/842-S/2024/384](#), New York, 3 June 2024.

³ UNICEF Innocenti–Global Office of Research and Foresight, *Innocenti Report Card 18: child poverty in the midst of wealth*, Florence, Italy, 2023.

⁴ INFF Facility, *Making Finance Work for People and Planet*, New York, 2024.

2024, working with partners to reach over 25.8 million people – girls as well as boys, parents, front-line workers and community members.

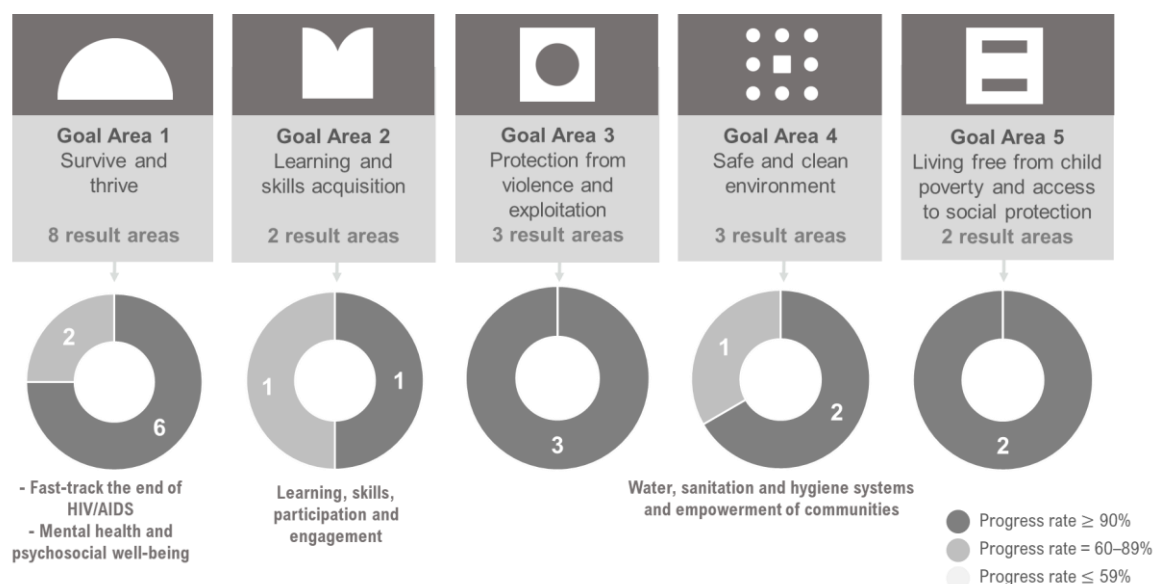
7. In 2024, over 18 million people gained access to at least basic sanitation services, over 33 million to safe water available when needed, and over 21 million to basic hygiene. The organization's direct support resulted in 6.7 million people using climate-resilient water systems, up from 5.4 million in 2022. UNICEF expanded its climate programming to 102 countries, up from 68 in 2022, focusing on climate-resilient social services and disaster preparedness, while accreditation by the Green Climate Fund opened up new opportunities to place children at the centre of action to address the climate crisis.

8. In a time of interconnected crises and geopolitical fragmentation, UNICEF remains steadfast in its commitment to advocate for the protection of children's rights, supporting duty bearers to fulfil their responsibilities and expand opportunities for children in all contexts. As highlighted by the Pact for the Future in 2024, addressing the challenges faced by children, adolescents and youth is a critical precondition for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and securing a liveable future.

II. Performance under the Goal Areas

9. In the third year of its Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, UNICEF sustained the performance of the previous two years. The organization reached or came close to reaching milestones for 14 out of the 18 result areas. About 70 per cent of Strategic Plan output milestones were met or nearly met, with 13 per cent somewhat off track and 17 per cent significantly off track.

UNICEF performance in Goal Areas 2024, by result area



Note: For details on the methodology utilized for calculations, refer to the data companion and scorecard included with this annual report.

A. Goal Area 1: Every child, including adolescents, survives and thrives, with access to nutritious diets, quality primary health care, nurturing practices and essential supplies

10. Global under-5 deaths reached an historic low of 4.9 million in 2023, down from 9.9 million in 2000 and 6 million in 2015,⁵ while child stunting fell by over a quarter since 2000.⁶ Still, 4.8 million children under 5, 500,000 children aged 5–9 years, and 900,000 adolescents died from mostly preventable causes in 2023. Stunting still affects 148 million children under 5, with over 1 in 4 children in this age group affected by severe food poverty, a key driver of malnutrition. Among children aged 5–9 years, 147 million are overweight or obese.⁷

11. While the global maternal mortality ratio has fallen by 40 per cent since 2000, progress in reducing maternal deaths has slowed significantly in recent years, and in 2023 an estimated 260,000 women died from pregnancy- or childbirth-related causes – one woman every two minutes.⁸ The percentage of surviving infants receiving the first dose of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine has increased slightly, from 85 per cent in 2022 to 88 in 2024. But as conflict, migration and displacement increasingly disrupted immunization efforts – notably in parts of Africa and the Middle East – and as population growth outpaced increases in coverage in some countries⁹ – the number of zero-dose children rose by 600,000, totalling 14.5 million, 1.7 million more than in 2019, pre-pandemic.¹⁰

12. In 2024, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 1 in 158 countries, with a total expense of \$2.39 billion, including \$0.67 billion for humanitarian action. On average, the organization reached or came close to reaching its output-level milestones for six of eight result areas.

13. Work to improve maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health focused on strengthening primary healthcare, in partnership with Governments to increase coverage and workforce capacity. UNICEF supported 35.6 million births in 89 countries in 2024; reached 63.4 million children through efforts on integrated management of neonatal and childhood illnesses; and trained 1.2 million health workers.

14. To expand national community health worker programmes, the Community Health Delivery Partnership raised an additional \$160 million in 2024. The initiative grew to 24 partners, including Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; the Global Financing Facility; the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; the United States Agency for International Development; the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO).

15. UNICEF contributed to global and national efforts to build resilient, equity-focused health systems, driving tangible shifts in policy and strategy. Advocacy led to the inclusion of primary healthcare in the new Gavi 6.0 strategy, reinforcing a shift from vertical programmes towards integrated health systems. The organization's leadership in primary healthcare metrics development under the Lusaka Agenda – a multi-stakeholder process to accelerate progress towards universal healthcare –

⁵ United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, *Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: report 2024*, New York, 2025.

⁶ UNICEF, WHO and World Bank, *Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates*, 2024.

⁷ UNICEF, *Child and youth mortality data ages 5–24*, New York, 2024.

⁸ WHO, *Trends in Maternal Mortality Estimates 2000 to 2023*, Geneva, 2025.

⁹ WHO and UNICEF, WHO/UNICEF estimates of national immunization coverage, 2024.

¹⁰ Alegana, Victor A. et al., 'Modelling the spatial variability and uncertainty for under-vaccination and zero-dose children in fragile settings', *Scientific Reports*, vol. 14, no. 24405, 2024.

positioned children and maternal health at the core of efforts to strengthen primary healthcare.

16. In addition to co-chairing the primary healthcare accelerator under the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All with WHO and 13 other development partners, UNICEF expanded its leadership and partnerships in areas such as antimicrobial resistance and climate-resilient health care facilities, underscoring its commitment to address emerging health threats through a health systems lens.

17. Eighty-seven countries integrated early childhood development services into primary healthcare, up from 65 in 2022. These services included support for early stimulation and responsive caregiving, developmental monitoring, early identification and interventions for developmental delays and disabilities, and parenting support programmes.

18. Adolescent health initiatives expanded from 37 countries in 2022 to 44 in 2024, serving over 9.7 million adolescents. Mental health and psychosocial support was expanded to 45 countries (up from 39 in 2023), with service integration into primary healthcare, schools and digital platforms.

19. Antiretroviral therapy and prevention services for pregnant women, children and adolescents living with HIV have reduced new infections and kept children alive. In 2024, UNICEF supported policies to eliminate HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B in 36 countries, integrated paediatric HIV services into primary healthcare in 33 countries, and promoted HIV prevention for adolescents, especially girls. Through U-Test, over 5 million young people in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, including 1 million at-risk adolescent girls, received self-testing kits and HIV prevention education.

20. UNICEF and partners reached 26.4 million women and children in emergencies with critical health services and supplies. The organization provided technical support to 92 countries experiencing public health emergencies (mpox, Marburg, dengue, diphtheria and cholera) and supported early and reliable access to quality-assured mpox diagnostics for 77 low- and lower-middle-income countries.

21. As the world's largest purchaser of vaccines, UNICEF facilitated routine immunizations, preventive campaigns and outbreak responses, delivering 2.8 billion vaccine doses to 99 countries in 2024, including 652.7 million for outbreak responses in 39 countries. Partnering with Gavi, UNICEF supported 35 countries in the Big Catch-up initiative to vaccinate children who missed essential vaccines due to COVID-19 disruptions.

22. UNICEF supported the immunization of 110.4 million children against measles, including 24.6 million in emergencies, an increase of 29.4 per cent compared to 2022. A new malaria vaccine was introduced in 17 countries, and over 25 million adolescent girls received the human papillomavirus vaccine. UNICEF reached 21 million people to boost vaccine uptake and expanded cold chain equipment and vaccine management systems in 70 countries.

23. To accelerate procurement of vaccines, the Vaccine Independence Initiative facilitated \$313 million in-country pre-financing and special contracts in 47 self-financing countries, a twofold increase from 2020. The Child Nutrition Fund's innovative matching mechanism enabled 18 countries to double their domestic investments, unlocking nearly \$60 million in essential nutrition supplies to address child undernutrition.

24. Child nutrition and development programmes in 130 countries focused on prevention of child food poverty and malnutrition, early detection and treatment of child wasting, and prevention of anaemia, overweight and other forms of malnutrition

among children, adolescents and women. UNICEF leveraged food, health and social protection systems to reach children and adolescents, including in fragile contexts and crises.

25. In 2024, 441 million children under 5 benefited from programmes to prevent stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies and obesity; 139 million children and adolescents benefited from malnutrition prevention programmes; 251 million children under 5 received early detection services for wasting; and 9.3 million received treatment for severe wasting and other forms of severe acute malnutrition.

26. Nutrition interventions to prevent, detect and treat child wasting were scaled up. Through Joint Action to Stop Wasting, UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) improved child wasting programmes, with UNICEF focusing on prevention and treatment, and WFP on food assistance. UNICEF mobilized significant resources with partners through the Child Nutrition Fund in support of the No Time to Waste initiative, reaching over 21 million children and women (82 per cent of the target) with nutrition services, including nearly 6 million children reached with life-saving treatment.

27. First Foods Africa was launched to strengthen local food systems' capacity to produce nutritious and sustainable foods for children, leveraging strategic partnerships to build on successful experience with local production of ready-to-use therapeutic food. To address income poverty as a root cause of child food poverty, UNICEF supported the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, led by the Government of Brazil and the Group of 20 (G20). UNICEF introduced an acceleration plan to combat malnutrition and anaemia, collaborating with partners and Governments to reach over 300 million pregnant women across 16 countries.

28. Going forward, UNICEF will scale up efforts to address children's physical and financial access to nutritious and affordable foods, leveraging food, health and social protection systems. Efforts on maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health will be focused strategically, with special attention to high-burden countries and those facing acute challenges such as conflict or climate shocks. Given growing populations in regions with high numbers of zero-dose children – where even maintaining immunization coverage requires countries to reach more children every year – the organization will support intensified efforts to boost coverage, as a key high-level action to accelerate health impacts for every child.

29. UNICEF will work to reestablish child health priorities in humanitarian crises, bringing sharper focus to escalating conflicts and fragile settings. To improve alignment and adaptation to local contexts in its global partnership programmes on health and nutrition, UNICEF will strengthen collaboration mechanisms and accountability frameworks, including through joint United Nations workplans on global partnerships at country, regional and headquarters levels.

B. Goal Area 2: Every child, including adolescents, learns and acquires skills for the future

30. Recent decades have seen significant progress in securing children's right to education. Policy changes, cash transfer programmes, social and behavioural changes and infrastructure investments have led to increases in primary school enrolment, particularly among girls. Since 2000, the number of out-of-school children of primary school age fell by 35 per cent.¹¹ But in more recent years, the decline has slowed, from 17.2 per cent in 2015 to 16.1 per cent in 2023. Globally, 251 million children

¹¹ UNICEF, Primary education data: Global database on out-of-school children rate, July 2024. See <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/primary-education/>.

and youth are out of school, half in sub-Saharan Africa and 33 per cent in low-income countries.¹²

31. While more children are staying in school, progress in completion rates has been slow: from 85 per cent in 2015 to 87 per cent in 2023 at the primary level, from 74 to 77 per cent at the lower secondary level, and from 54 to 59 per cent at the upper secondary level.¹³ Meanwhile, the learning crisis is worsening. In low- and middle-income countries, 70 per cent of 10-year-olds cannot read and understand a simple story, up from 57 per cent in 2019, pre-COVID-19.¹⁴ Growing numbers of children in crisis contexts worldwide require support to access quality education,¹⁵ while long-term climate shifts and extreme weather events continue to disrupt education, affecting at least 242 million students through school closures in 2024.¹⁶

32. In 2024, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 2 in 142 countries, with a total expense of \$1.6 billion, including \$922 million for humanitarian action. The organization reached or came close to reaching its 2024 output-level milestones for one of the two result areas. Work in this Goal Area focused on enhancing children's access to quality learning opportunities, transforming education systems and bolstering resilience to support learning continuity in the face of shocks.

33. As a result of UNICEF efforts, 26 million out-of-school children and adolescents, including 9 million in humanitarian settings and 3.7 million children on the move, gained access to education. In Lebanon, the disability-inclusive Cash for Education programme supported 43,557 children with disabilities, promoting school enrolment and retention during the 2022–2024 school years.

34. Technical support to strengthen national education sector plans led to 73 per cent of UNICEF programme countries implementing evidence-based plans addressing inequities and aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals, up from 48 per cent in 2021. Policy advocacy, targeted programmes and digital inclusion strategies were used to expand equitable access to education for marginalized children and youth, especially girls and learners with disabilities.

35. To address the learning crisis, UNICEF scaled up remedial support for foundational learning in 17 countries, focusing on evidence-based approaches to accelerate literacy and numeracy acquisition. Learning materials reached 17.5 million children, 27 per cent in crisis-affected areas. The Accessible Digital Textbooks for All initiative, developed with OpenAI, provided 2 million children in 11 countries with inclusive digital learning materials in 63 languages.

36. The percentage of countries institutionalizing holistic skills development to support learning, personal empowerment, environmental sustainability, active citizenship, social cohesion, employability and entrepreneurship nearly doubled since the beginning of the Strategic Plan, from 23 per cent in 2022 to 42 per cent in 2024, thanks to the partnership between UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education. The UPSHIFT skills development initiative expanded to over 55,000 schools in 56 countries, engaging 2.1 million young people in 2024, with 1.1 million completing the full learning journey and earning certification.

¹² UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/5*, Paris, 2024.

¹³ World Bank et al., *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 update*, 2022.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Salmeron-Gomez, Daylan et al., 'Global Trends in Child Monetary Poverty According to International Poverty Lines', UNICEF and World Bank Group, 2023.

¹⁶ UNICEF, 'Learning Interrupted: global snapshot of climate-related school disruptions in 2024', UNICEF, New York, January 2025.

37. Twenty-six per cent of countries had effective digital learning solutions in place, up from 9 per cent in 2021. More than 18 million children accessed education through digital platforms, including nearly 10 million through the Learning Passport, adding close to 4 million new users compared to 2023. UNICEF launched the EdTech for Good Framework and a Learning Cabinet to set new standards for safe, scalable digital learning tools. To further address the digital divide, UNICEF partnered with the International Telecommunication Union through Giga to connect every school to the Internet by 2030. Giga expanded to 20 new countries in 2024, for a total of 34, connecting 12 million children to digital learning.

38. Through integration of risk analysis into education systems, 40 per cent of countries (totalling 41 countries) had resilient education systems in 2024, up from 23 per cent in 2022. This ensured that children and communities could better cope with disruptions while maintaining access to education. UNICEF integrated climate education into learning opportunities in 91 countries, up from 63 in 2022, while facilitating youth participation in climate initiatives across 137 countries, up from 104 in 2022.

39. To mitigate learning disruptions and enable equitable access to education, UNICEF will focus on safe and supportive school environments, particularly for girls and learners with disabilities; alternative pathways to learning and skills; support for teachers to improve learning outcomes; and appropriate infrastructure, including connectivity.

40. The organization will leverage digital innovation to drive quality and equity in learning access and outcomes at scale, and will advocate for greater investment in education and targeting of resources towards poor and marginalized children. Education will be prioritized in humanitarian responses to support children to return to learning, with schools offering safe places to meet children's holistic needs.

C. Goal Area 3: Every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices

41. Most of the child protection-related Sustainable Development Goals are off track. While rates of both child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) have fallen, progress has not been sufficient to eliminate these harmful practices. Violence against children is widespread, with 2 in 3 frequently subjected to violent punishment at home.¹⁷ In 2024, 1 in 6 adolescent girls aged 15–19 years experienced physical or sexual violence committed by their husbands or partners,¹⁸ and nearly 1 in 4 children lived with mothers who are victims of intimate partner violence.¹⁹ Children with disabilities are more than twice as likely to experience violence than their peers without disabilities.²⁰ Protection risks are also heightened for children living in countries affected by fragility and conflict, children on the move, children living without family care and children in conflict with the law.

42. In 2024, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 3 in 157 countries, with a total expense of \$0.93 billion, including \$0.45 billion for humanitarian action. The organization achieved or came close to achieving its 2024 output-level milestones for all three result areas. An approach focused on strengthening child protection systems steered expanded efforts to prevent and respond to violence against girls, boys and women in development and humanitarian contexts.

¹⁷ UNICEF, 'Ten Facts about Violence against Children', 2024.

¹⁸ UNICEF, 'When Numbers Demand Action', 2024.

¹⁹ UNICEF, 'Ten Facts about Violence against Children'.

²⁰ Fang, Zuyi et al., "Global Estimates of Violence against Children with Disabilities", *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, vol. 6, no. 5, May 2022.

43. Across 110 countries, 6.2 million children who experienced violence were supported to receive health, social work, justice or law enforcement services, a 36 per cent increase from 2023. Sixty-one per cent of children in conflict with the law were diverted or subjected to non-custodial measures, up from 46 per cent in 2021, totalling nearly 238,000 children.

44. Parenting programmes – a force multiplier to deliver a range of child protection outcomes – reached 18.5 million parents and caregivers, surpassing the 2024 target of 4.5 million and up from 3 million in 2021. Mental health and psychosocial support services reached 60.9 million children, adolescents, parents and caregivers through a multisectoral approach across child protection and education.

45. In partnership with Colombia, Sweden, WHO and the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, UNICEF convened the first Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children in November 2024. The event resulted in new commitments from 113 Governments to renew policies and funding to prevent violence against children, end corporal punishment, and enhance online safety measures. It also led to increased data availability in 50 countries.

46. UNICEF supported programmes to improve legal and policy frameworks addressing child sexual abuse and exploitation, including online violence, in 119 countries. The number of countries with mature child protection systems increased from two to five since 2023, the number with specialized justice systems grew from 34 to 38, and 46 countries established quality assurance systems for the social service workforce – surpassing the 2024 milestones in all instances. As of 2024, 65 countries had interoperable civil registration and health systems to achieve universal birth registration.

47. UNICEF reached vulnerable and at-risk girls through gender equality and social and behaviour change programming, bringing together child protection, education, health and social protection services in a multisectoral approach to eliminating harmful practices. In 2024, nearly 759,000 girls and women across 19 countries received prevention and protection services addressing FGM, up from 159,000 in 2021. Nearly 10.7 million adolescent girls in 50 countries benefited from prevention and care interventions addressing child marriage, up from 7.6 million in 2021.

48. In addition to providing targeted funding and technical assistance through the Joint Programmes on Ending Child Marriage and the Elimination of FGM, with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF played a key role in global and regional leadership, advocacy and coordination. Intense advocacy by UNICEF, UNFPA and others contributed to the withdrawal of the proposed FGM law in the Gambia and the adoption of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Bill in Sierra Leone.

49. In humanitarian settings, UNICEF provided child protection services to over 40.4 million people. More than 124,000 children separated from their families due to conflict, displacement or natural disasters received alternative care or reunification support. The organization reached 16,482 children formerly associated with an armed force or group, 70 per cent of those targeted, with protection or reintegration support, up from 59 per cent in 2021. UNICEF provided prevention or victim assistance interventions to over 7.5 million children affected by landmines and other explosive weapons, up from 5.2 million in 2021.

50. Gender-based violence response, prevention and risk mitigation programming in emergencies reached over 17.6 million people across 79 countries, up from 13.9 million in 2021. UNICEF made significant progress in implementing the minimum set of gender-based violence risk mitigation actions, with 43 per cent of countries achieving full compliance. More than half a million women and girls had access to

Laaha, a virtual safe space platform providing information and support related to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence.

51. UNICEF developed a whole-of-route approach to cross-border coordination and programming to ensure protection and care for children on the move, aiming to strengthen inclusive child protection systems and reception processes and facilitate cross-border case management. In 2024, the organization reached over 11.3 million children on the move across 64 countries with child protection, education, social protection and water, sanitation and health (WASH) services, up from 5 million in 2023.

52. Informed by lessons learned from evaluations, UNICEF strengthened child protection efforts by scaling up evidence-based interventions such as parenting support, investments in the social service workforce and inclusive community engagement. The organization will build on successful approaches while enhancing coordination across sectors and within joint United Nations programmes.

D. Goal Area 4: Every child, including adolescents, has access to safe and equitable WASH services and supplies, and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment

53. Between 2015 and 2024, the proportion of the population using safely managed drinking water increased from 69 to 77 per cent, the proportion using safely managed sanitation rose from 49 to 63 per cent, and the proportion with basic handwashing facilities with soap and water available rose from 67 to 75 per cent. Still, 2.2 billion people lack safely managed drinking water, 3.4 billion lack safely managed sanitation, and 2 billion lack basic hygiene services, leading to an unacceptably high disease burden on children and a disproportionate burden of water carriage on women and girls.²¹

54. Multiple overlapping challenges hamper progress towards the WASH-related Sustainable Development Goals,²² including conflict, public health emergencies, financial crises²³ and climate change. Despite the accelerating climate crisis, only 2.4 per cent of funds from multilateral climate mechanisms focus on children's needs.²⁴

55. In 2024, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 4 in 154 countries, with a total expense of over \$1 billion, including \$500 million on humanitarian WASH response. The organization reached or came close to reaching its 2024 output-level milestones for two of three result areas.

56. UNICEF worked to ensure service delivery and strengthen WASH systems to reach the most vulnerable populations, making strong progress in direct support for safe WASH services. Over 18 million people gained access to at least basic sanitation services, over 33 million to safe water available when needed, and over 21 million to basic hygiene, and disability-inclusive WASH programming reached 80 per cent of countries, all surpassing their 2024 cumulative milestones.

57. Direct support in humanitarian emergencies provided WASH services to 41 million people, across more than 30 countries. Five additional countries integrated humanitarian-development collaborative approaches into WASH programming. Across both humanitarian and development settings, UNICEF supported nearly 9,000

²¹ UNICEF and WHO, *Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene: Annual report 2023*.

²² World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2025*, Cologny/Geneva, 2025.

²³ See <https://watercommission.org/>.

²⁴ Children's Environmental Rights Initiative, "Falling Short: addressing the climate finance gap for children", June 2023.

schools and almost 4,000 healthcare facilities to achieve a basic level of WASH service provision. Programmes addressing menstrual health and hygiene reached nearly 12 million women and adolescent girls.

58. With support from UNICEF and WHO, G20 leaders adopted a call to action on strengthening drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services, emphasizing the urgency of achieving universal access and the vital role of WASH in children's health and nutrition. UNICEF contributed to the global agenda of the United Nations Development Programme-Stockholm International Water Institute Water Governance Facility to create inclusive global water and sanitation solutions.

59. Guided by its Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan, 2023–2030, UNICEF expanded its support for enhancing children's resilience to climate change and disasters, from 68 countries in 2022 to 119 in 2024, integrating sustainability and climate action into programming, research, data and analytics, policy development, advocacy and government budgeting support across sectors.

60. At the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference, more commonly known as COP29, UNICEF advocacy achieved key policy commitments, integrated child-specific indicators into global goals for adaptation and climate finance, and established a "Group of Friends" to promote children's rights in climate negotiations. Sixty-six countries supported the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action.

61. To accelerate action to address climate change, UNICEF supported 59 countries to integrate child-relevant elements into their NDCs, with a pilot cohort of 15 receiving dedicated seed funding to make upcoming NDC rounds more child-sensitive. The organization collaborated with 69 countries to update their environmental and disaster management policies, ensuring better integration of child-focused disaster risk reduction activities across social sectors.

62. UNICEF direct support in 2024 resulted in 6.7 million people using climate-resilient water systems and 3 million using climate-resilient sanitation facilities. As of 2024, 40 countries, up from 11 in 2021, had integrated climate-resilient WASH into national climate policies, including National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). UNICEF led the Climate-Resilient Sanitation Coalition, uniting over 30 partners, including the World Bank and WASH organizations, to address the impacts of climate change on sanitation.

63. Targeted infrastructure investments in 59 countries bolstered the resilience of schools, healthcare facilities, and water and sanitation systems to climate shocks, helping to avoid interruptions in essential services. As part of strategic efforts to reshape energy access for children, renewable energy solutions were deployed in healthcare facilities across 66 countries, while 69 countries benefited from solar-powered water systems.

64. Youth engagement remained central to UNICEF efforts to advance climate action and resilience. UNICEF supported over 10.5 million young volunteers to take concrete and measurable green actions, building community resilience. Through the Green Rising initiative, 11 million young people in 30 countries participated in climate-focused interventions, planted 19 million trees, conserved 600 million litres of water, and recycled over 75,000 kg of waste.²⁵

65. Going forward, UNICEF will build on its growing experience in climate change adaptation and resilience programming, and will leverage strategic investments and partnerships to strengthen the resilience of children to the impacts of climate change. The organization will seize opportunities – including through the

²⁵ UNICEF, *The Green Rising: mobilising millions of young people to protect their communities from the climate crisis*, April 2023.

Green Climate Fund – to make climate finance work for children in the most exposed and vulnerable countries.

E. Goal Area 5: Every child, including adolescents, has access to inclusive social protection and lives free from poverty

66. Progress on child poverty reduction has decelerated in recent years, leaving nearly 1 billion children worldwide living in multidimensional poverty.²⁶ While over half the world's people are now covered by at least one social protection benefit,²⁷ children account for nearly half of the population uncovered, with only one in four receiving a child benefit.²⁸ In many countries, growing debt payments squeeze spending on social sectors.

67. In 2024, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 5 in 155 countries, with a total expense of \$0.82 billion, including \$0.58 billion for humanitarian action. In the aggregate, 2024 output-level milestones were achieved for both result areas. The organization's efforts led to significant investments to reinforce sustainable, inclusive and shock-responsive social protection systems in all contexts.

68. Sixty-eight countries routinely measured the numbers of children in monetarily poor households in 2024, and 72 measured multidimensional child poverty. In 43 countries, up from 32 in 2021, measurement, analysis or policy advice contributed to national policies and/or programmes to reduce child poverty. UNICEF supported 91 countries to strengthen social sector budgets for greater and better investments in children, up from 84 in 2023 and exceeding the targeted 69. Evidence-based advocacy to improve budget allocations and engagement with partners to increase social spending contributed to this progress.

69. Efforts to leverage diverse sources of financing for children were expanded, reflecting growing recognition that they are essential to support delivery of social services, tackle child poverty and inequality, and advance child rights and human development. In 2024, UNICEF leveraged financing from international and private sector resources for children in 85 countries, up from 55 in 2021.

70. UNICEF worked to strengthen integrated, child-sensitive social protection systems, including through support for legislation and financing, information management systems, social service workforce strengthening, and integrated delivery of social services. In 2024, 88 countries reported moderately strong to strong systems, up from 56 in 2021. The organization's commitment to building inclusive, resilient care and support systems resulted in 42 countries taking action to support family-friendly policies, up from 13 in 2021.

71. The responsiveness of social protection programmes to the particular needs of girls and boys was strengthened in 60 countries, up from 46 in 2023. UNICEF supported 77 countries to implement inclusive social protection, up from 67 in 2023, deepening its country-level capacity, improving consultations with persons with

²⁶ While monetary poverty is defined as having a household income below a certain amount, such as the \$2.15 per day by which the World Bank defines extreme poverty, children's experiences of poverty are about more than money, encompassing lack of essentials such as shelter, nutrition, water, health or protection services. As a complement to monetary poverty measurement, multidimensional poverty measures children's access to goods and services that are fundamental for their full development and essential for the fulfilment of their rights. See <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2024-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi#/indicies/MPI>.

²⁷ Salmeron-Gomez, Daylan et al., 'Global Trends in Child Monetary Poverty'.

²⁸ See <https://www.statista.com/chart/33286/prevalence-of-extreme-child-poverty-around-the-world/>.

disabilities, and providing technical assistance for designing policies that encompass disability benefits and information management systems for inclusion.

72. UNICEF made strides in supporting shock-responsive social protection systems that effectively support children and their families before, during and after crises, integrating preparedness, anticipatory action, support for recovery and resilience-building. Over 102 million households were reached with UNICEF-supported cash transfers in 2024, down from 106 million in 2023, partly owing to budget cuts affecting national child benefit programmes. At the same time, UNICEF-funded cash based assistance to families in fragile and humanitarian settings grew, reaching 3.6 million families, up from 2.9 million in 2023, with \$574 million disbursed through the UNICEF delivery system – reflecting increasing need in these settings, including in Level 3 emergencies.

73. National and local governance capacities for poverty reduction at the local level were enhanced in 74 countries, up from 64 in 2023. To address structural barriers to child well-being in urban settings, slums and informal settlements, UNICEF strengthened child-responsive urban policies and spatial planning standards in 18 countries, up from 15 in 2023.

74. Going forward, UNICEF will formalize government partnerships for poverty measurement, advocate for increased social protection financing, and expand “cash-plus” models linking cash assistance with other services. Evaluations and research have highlighted that strengthening disability programme integration, prioritizing assistive technologies, and developing a global disability data strategy are crucial for strengthening social policy and social protection systems.

Strengthening organizational performance through strategies supporting programme results and organizational capacity

75. In 2024, UNICEF maximized its efforts to operationalize its change strategies and invest in its organizational performance enablers, including by implementing recommendations from 17 global evaluations conducted during the period 2022–2024.

Upholding children’s rights

76. Amid growing challenges to children’s rights, UNICEF worked with United Nations human rights mechanisms to elevate attention to children’s independent status as full rights holders, and worked closely with other United Nations entities to amplify child rights advocacy and child rights mainstreaming in the United Nations system and beyond.

77. In 2024, 95 per cent of UNICEF country offices supported follow-up to the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, up from 84 per cent in 2021, including by incorporating follow-up actions in country programmes and advocating with relevant duty bearers. The organization strengthened its engagement with broad-based national human rights institutions and dedicated independent institutions with a child rights mandate, with 60 per cent of countries engaging with the latter, up from 45 per cent in 2021.

Engaging children, adolescents, young people and communities

78. UNICEF supported national systems for adolescent and youth participation in 67 countries, up from 22 in 2021, equipping stakeholders with the skills to engage with adolescents and fostering platforms through which adolescent voices can contribute to shaping policies. Ninety-nine UNICEF offices consulted adolescents to

inform key country programme cycle milestones, far exceeding the target of 60 and making programmes more responsive to adolescents' needs.

79. The Global Girl Leaders Advisory Group, made up of adolescent girls and young women connected to UNICEF work in their respective countries, was engaged in setting priorities for the organization's work with and for adolescent girls. Its members guided the development and launch of a global poll in 2024, through which over half a million girls, boys and young people voiced their policy priorities for girls' rights.

80. To enhance locally led humanitarian responses and ensure more effective and sustainable collaboration with local actors, UNICEF improved and simplified its internal guidance to countries. The organization strengthened localization efforts through targeted financial and technical support to regions, aiming to develop and operationalize a common, cross-sectoral approach to localization and foster equitable partnerships with local actors.

81. Comprehensive strategies and action plans for accountability to affected populations were developed across all regions and embedded into country-level programmatic frameworks to promote meaningful engagement, enhance transparency, provide accurate information on aid and service delivery, and establish effective feedback mechanisms. In 2024, 62 per cent of 129 country offices met the organizational benchmarks for accountability to affected populations, up from 23 per cent in 2021, while 74 per cent had a well-defined strategy or plan, up from 24 per cent.

82. UNICEF strengthened country-level systems to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, while working with communities to enhance complaints mechanisms and build awareness and trust in these systems. As a result, 79.5 million children and adults had access to safe reporting channels. Community engagement was key to building trust in these reporting systems.

Understanding and addressing norms and practices

83. Data generation initiatives across 99 countries contributed to a better understanding of the behavioural, cognitive and social drivers influencing people's practices and service uptake. Social and behaviour change interventions addressed barriers faced by children with disabilities and their families in 115 countries. They included community engagement efforts reaching over 85,000 people in Eritrea and Rwanda; the Learning Together initiative in the Republic of Moldova; and interventions to strengthen disability-inclusive humanitarian action in 28 of the 40 countries with a Humanitarian Action for Children appeal in 2024, including Somalia and Yemen.

84. In 2024, 90 per cent of 129 country offices financed child rights policies and programmes promoting gender equality, up from 66 per cent in 2021. In 86 countries, UNICEF supported at-scale programmes addressing gender discrimination among children and fostering roles, norms and practices that promote gender equality. At-scale capacity-development programmes on gender equality reached front-line workers across sectors in 74 countries, up from 50 in 2021. An evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans was conducted to assess the organization's effectiveness in advancing gender equality and inform the next Gender Action Plan.

Leveraging evidence and promoting learning

85. UNICEF scaled and sharpened its work on global child-focused data systems, reflecting a strategic shift from data collection to actionable insights, ensuring that

every child is counted and prioritized in policies worldwide. The Africa Data Strategy provided a model for scaling impact. The creation of the Africa Expert Group on Child and Adolescent-related Statistics was a key step in strengthening regional governance, harmonizing methodologies, and enhancing capacity to use child-focused data for decision-making. It was convened with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union, the World Bank and African Development Bank Group, and endorsed at the ninth meeting of the Statistical Commission for Africa in 2024.

86. Twenty-six countries that submitted their resilient and innovative solutions for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals to the 2024 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development received support on progress analysis.²⁹ Seventy-four per cent of country offices implemented action plans to support Governments to improve the availability and quality of child-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators, compared to 64 per cent at the beginning of the Strategic Plan in 2022.

87. To generate data on critical indicators of children's well-being, UNICEF supported more than 30 Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys across three key stages – design, data collection and reporting – in 2024. The organization continued collaborations to ensure the availability of reliable global data, with key partners including the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates, and WHO/UNICEF Estimates of National Immunization Coverage.

88. UNICEF leveraged data and analytics to inform global and regional policymaking through major publications such as *The State of the World's Children 2024*, “Global Outlook 2025: prospects for children – building resilient systems for children's futures”, and the 2024 “Child Nutrition Report” on food poverty. As the organization worked to integrate knowledge and learning systematically into the country programming process, 59 per cent of country offices shared knowledge products publicly on the web, partnered with local institutions for knowledge generation and use, documented lessons learned from their programmes and shared them externally.

89. To analyse the impacts of emerging trends on children, UNICEF strengthened its foresight capacities and integrated them into situation analysis and planning processes. The organization will invest further in foresight, in line with the UN 2.0 vision, to reinforce agile programming and support countries to prepare for and respond to changing scenarios, promoting the best possible futures for children.

Harnessing innovation and digital transformation

90. In 2024, UNICEF worked to unlock the multiplier effect of digital transformation to accelerate programme delivery in areas including education, child protection, social policy and fundraising, including through digital skills enhancement, work on digital safety and adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) as part of digital-by-design approaches. Indicators of digital skills and safety, digital systems strengthening and child rights in the digital environment all exceeded 2024 targets.

91. Technology and innovation were leveraged to improve the speed and quality of UNICEF programmes and operations, notably in humanitarian contexts. By the end of 2024, UNICEF had supported 238 programme innovations in 138 countries, reaching 38 million people directly and benefiting 181 million people indirectly, through social multiplier effects or system strengthening. In 2024 alone, 122 countries were supported with 91 initiatives. The 5-Dimensional Innovation Framework,

²⁹ DESA, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*, New York, 2024.

developed in 2022 and endorsed in 2024, ensured that only validated, scalable solutions were prioritized, while the COMPASS programme helped country offices to integrate innovation into programmes. The Venture Fund expanded its reach, supporting 153 solutions to date across 87 countries, reaching 128.6 million people directly and indirectly.

Partnering with business

92. UNICEF engaged globally and locally to influence business policies and practices, and collaborated with businesses to mobilize their core assets, innovation and voice to promote children's rights. As a result of work in 60 countries – up from 53 in 2023 – to address business practices that negatively impact children's rights, over 13,000 businesses made changes, including adopting family-friendly workplace practices, improving online safety policies, addressing stereotyping of girls and boys in marketing, and conducting child rights impact assessments.

93. In 36 countries, up from 33 in 2023, advocacy efforts contributed to improved laws, policies and industry standards addressing business practices affecting children's rights. UNICEF advocacy led the European Union Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive to strengthen protection of children's rights and include an explicit reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Facilitating access to essential supplies

94. In 2024, through an end-to-end supply chain approach, UNICEF procured \$5.610 billion in goods and services, a 7 per cent increase from 2023. The global value of goods procured was \$3.778 billion, while the total global value of services procured was \$1.832 billion.

95. UNICEF delivered \$1.234 billion worth of supplies to support humanitarian action in 68 countries, with 50 per cent going to Level 2 and Level 3 emergencies. Kits that Fit, which tailors emergency response kits to local needs, scaled to countries including Kenya and the State of Palestine, winning the Gold Anthem Award, which recognizes purpose-driven initiatives that inspire social impact and drive meaningful change.

96. Responding to the unmet needs of children, UNICEF worked to improve access to assistive technology for persons with disabilities in development and humanitarian contexts, including through community advocacy, capacity-building, screening and identification, and systems strengthening in 35 countries, up from 19 in 2021. The organization engaged with businesses to introduce new assistive products such as paediatric hearing aids, wheelchairs and vision products, and scaled up access to assistive products and inclusive supplies, reaching over 260,000 children with disabilities in 2024.

Mobilizing resources

97. UNICEF income reached \$8.26 billion in 2024, down 5 per cent compared to the revised financial estimates presented to the Executive Board at the second regular session of 2024. Total income decreased by 7 per cent compared to 2023, mainly driven by the 9 per cent decrease in other resources due to a decline in private sector funding for emergency appeals and a decrease from some Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee partners.

98. Core regular resources reached \$1.58 billion. While the ratio of regular resources to total income was similar to 2023, increasing by 1 per cent, it remained far below the 30 per cent commitment made by Member States as part of the funding

compact. Income from flexible thematic funding decreased, from \$482 million in 2023 to \$357 million in 2024, marking a return to pre-2019 levels and contrasting starkly to funding compact commitments to double thematic funding contributions. Approximately 10 million individual supporters globally constituted the largest group of donors for flexible resources to UNICEF.

99. The organization worked to enhance pooled funding approaches to support results across Goal Areas, fostering coherence and enhanced coordination among other United Nations agencies. In 2024, 86 per cent of country offices participated in United Nations inter-agency pooled funding initiatives, encompassing joint programmes, trust funds and/or multi-partnership trust funds for both development and humanitarian programmes.

Enhancing efficiency and managing risks

100. In 2024, UNICEF drove organizational efficiencies through digital transformation, streamlining the delivery of transactions and operations and allowing more time and resources to be channelled to country-level programme delivery. Digitization, automation and use of frontier technologies, including AI, saved over 200,000 hours of staff time and optimized administrative processes for travel, recruitment and finance.

101. Fifty-four per cent of UNICEF offices were in common premises, up from 50 per cent in 2021, allowing for further operational efficiencies and joint savings. Centralization of payments enabled greater control to reduce financial and reputational risks. UNICEF strengthened its risk management and oversight mechanisms through high-impact, data-driven actions, and adopted a corporate strategy on AI for children.

Improving organizational culture and diversity

102. Remaining among the top performers in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UNICEF met or exceeded 94 per cent of targets in 2024. The proportion of women among all staff rose to 49.9 per cent, with 53.0 per cent among International Professionals, 48.9 per cent among National Professional Officers and 48.0 per cent among General Service staff.

103. UNICEF contributed to inter-agency efforts to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, chairing the United Nations Executive Group and engaging on work to further empower United Nations personnel at all levels with the necessary knowledge and skills to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and to support victims

104. The Managing People with Purpose programme provided coaching and peer support to equip people managers with the knowledge, skills, emotional intelligence and self-awareness to excel in their supervisory roles. As at March 2025, 44 per cent of all UNICEF managers had started the training programme, and 11 per cent had concluded it.

105. Within the authority given to the Executive Director to establish senior-level positions on an as-needed basis and funded from within the approved institutional budget envelope, six net additional senior-level positions were approved in 2024, comprising seven new Director (D)-1-level positions added in country offices and one subtracted at headquarters. This brings the total to 140 (1 Under-Secretary-General, 4 Assistant Secretaries-General, 41 D-2s and 94 D-1s).

Looking ahead

106. Geopolitical and economic fragmentation is increasingly threatening children's rights, with violent conflicts and climate change driving growing humanitarian needs and jeopardizing development outcomes. Conflicts are causing grave violations of children's rights on an increasing scale, while challenges to children's status as rights holders intensify across various contexts.

107. UNICEF is evolving to meet these complex challenges. The organization's Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 will build on the current Plan's focus on systemic change, but sharpen the organization's strategies and strengthen partnerships to better reach the most disadvantaged children, accelerate progress towards the child-related Sustainable Development Goals and lay the groundwork for a post-2030 agenda.

108. In a constrained resource environment, UNICEF will intensify efforts to mobilize public and private sector resources, diversify funding sources, and advocate for flexible, multi-year commitments, while shifting towards a focus on leveraging collective resources and financing for children. The organization will strengthen domestic financing mechanisms and leverage innovative financing, including climate finance, to drive impactful investments in children.

109. Enhanced data and evidence capacity will underpin all UNICEF work, with a unified, coherent approach to evidence generation and use, and an expanded use of real-time analytics and predictive modelling to inform strategic decision-making. Collaborating with other United Nations agencies, UNICEF will embed frameworks such as the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the Pact for the Future and UN 2.0 across its programmes. Innovation, data, digital tools, foresight and behavioural science will be harnessed to find new ways to deliver for every child.

110. Guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights instruments, UNICEF will drive collective action to uphold children's rights, especially for marginalized and discriminated-against children. The organization will mobilize partners to counter the erosion of children's and women's rights, protect children affected by conflicts, address root causes of deprivation and discrimination – and build a world where the rights enshrined in the Convention become lived realities for every child.

III. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the annual report for 2024 of the Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as the report on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025; the report on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system; the description of independent oversight functions/bodies in UNICEF; and the data companion and scorecard;

2. *Decides* to transmit the above-mentioned reports to the Economic and Social Council, along with a summary of the comments and guidance of the Executive Board;

3. *Takes note* of the UNICEF report on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit, including the management responses to the 15 recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit intended for consideration by the Executive Board.