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UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025

Summary

Gender equality is essential to realizing the mandate of UNICEF to uphold the rights of all children. The UNICEF Gender Action Plan (GAP), 2022–2025, operationalizes the UNICEF Gender Policy, 2021–2030, by specifying how UNICEF will promote gender equality across its programmes and workplaces. It affirms that promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is the responsibility of everyone, regardless of organizational role. The GAP elaborates the steps required to accelerate progress on gender equality across the five Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, as well as within institutional systems and processes, with clear indicators and monitoring mechanisms to track change.

The GAP builds on an increasing knowledge base on gender equality, including current evidence regarding the gendered effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. It responds to lessons learned from the implementation of previous GAPs and an extensive global consultative process with staff, partners and young people. It is grounded in the human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality and articulates the role of UNICEF, as a collaborator with Governments and other partners, in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Recognizing that gender discrimination has lifelong and intergenerational impacts, the GAP advances gender equality throughout the life course. At the same time, it promotes targeted actions to advance the leadership and well-being of adolescent girls, as girls are both disproportionately affected by gender inequality and have tremendous potential to be leaders for change. This dual-track approach goes beyond responding to the manifestations of gender inequality to tackle its underlying drivers, including by engaging boys and men as allies; advancing upstream financing and policy solutions; and supporting girls' agency and voice.

* [E/ICEF/2021/23](#).

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



The priority results for gender equality across the UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Areas include improvement in the quality of maternal health care and nutrition, and HIV testing, counselling and care; more gender-responsive education systems and equitable access to education for all; progress towards the elimination of violence and harmful practices; more equitable water, sanitation and hygiene systems; and gender-responsive social protection systems. Targeted actions for adolescent girls include promoting health, nutrition and pregnancy care, and the prevention of HIV and human papilloma virus; advancing girls' education, learning and skills; ending child marriage and early unions; and promoting accessible and dignified menstrual health and hygiene services. To address gender-based violence, UNICEF will adopt a multisectoral strategy across all Goal Areas, using sector-wide and survivor-centred approaches. Integrating gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls into all humanitarian action is also a priority in the GAP.

Across the humanitarian-development nexus, UNICEF will continue to invest in rigorous gender analysis, data collection and reporting, as well as evidence-based solutions that hold UNICEF accountable to the children and women it serves. UNICEF will expand its partnerships with feminist organizations and networks led by women and girls, raising their voices as agents of change and partners. The GAP also commits UNICEF to deliberate on adjustments in internal policies and systems to transform the organization into a more diverse, inclusive and equitable institution.

I. Overview

1. The universal mandate of UNICEF is to safeguard the rights of all children everywhere. The advancement of gender equality is essential to realizing those rights. In its Gender Policy, 2021–2030, UNICEF has committed to a bold and ambitious vision for gender equality and the empowerment of women and of all children and adolescents, charting a path towards a more just, equitable, empathetic and inclusive world. The Policy impels UNICEF to work actively to remove the underlying structural barriers, such as harmful social norms and gendered power systems, that perpetuate inequalities. It also compels UNICEF to address gender inequalities across all areas of its work, with particular emphasis on the leadership and well-being of adolescent girls.

2. The UNICEF Gender Action Plan (GAP), 2022–2025, operationalizes the Gender Policy by specifying how UNICEF will promote gender equality. It elaborates the steps required to accelerate progress on gender equality across the five Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, as well as within institutional systems and processes. It also articulates the organization’s role, as a leader and collaborator with Governments and other partners, in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Indicators for tracking progress are contained in the accompanying indicator matrix for the GAP.

3. The work of UNICEF on gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women is grounded in the human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality, upheld in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is further anchored in the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and their follow-on commitments, as well as other international frameworks. It aligns with the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and other United Nations system-wide processes to advance gender equality.

4. UNICEF recognizes that gender discrimination begins before birth and impedes the realization of rights through childhood, adolescence and beyond. Investments in gender equality beginning in early childhood and continuing throughout adolescence are therefore integral to lifelong positive outcomes for children and their communities. As the organization mandated to protect and promote the rights and opportunities of children and adolescents during the time of life when gender norms are learned and solidified, UNICEF has a unique responsibility to ensure that gender equality is at the core of everything it does.

5. UNICEF is committed to leaving no one behind and recognizes that gender intersects with multiple risks faced by the poorest and the most marginalized and excluded groups, including heightened risk of discrimination and neglect related to disability, racism, xenophobia, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity, urbanization, migration and displacement, natural disasters and armed conflicts, or any other reason.

6. UNICEF places a particular emphasis on supporting girls during adolescence, as they are both disproportionately affected by gender inequality and have tremendous potential to become leaders for change during this critical time of life. In addition to promoting the rights, leadership and well-being of girls, the GAP advances support for and promotion of the rights of women and explicitly recognizes that children’s rights and women’s rights are inextricably linked.

7. UNICEF recognizes that children and adolescents experience conflict, displacement, climate change and complex emergencies in different ways based on their gender, age and other status. They must be included in disaster preparedness, humanitarian response and peacebuilding, and supported in providing their unique contributions in those areas. UNICEF will implement the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, including ending gender-based violence, strengthening community engagement with and accountability to girls and women, and promoting gender equality in all humanitarian action, including data collection, analysis and reporting.

8. Across all five Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, the GAP both advances gender equality priorities throughout the life course and promotes targeted actions to advance the leadership and well-being of adolescent girls. This dual-track approach emphasizes structural and norms change – going beyond responding to the manifestations of gender inequality to tackling the underlying drivers. The GAP also commits UNICEF to deliberate on adjustments in internal policies and systems to transform the organization into a more diverse, inclusive and equitable institution.

9. The GAP builds on an increasing knowledge base on gender equality, lessons learned from the implementation of previous GAPs and an extensive global consultative process with staff, partners and young people. It also responds to evidence regarding the gendered effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis. The implementation of the GAP will continue to be evidence-driven. Together with Governments and other partners, UNICEF will deepen and expand efforts to generate, analyse and use gender-related evidence and data to monitor outcomes for girls and women and to inform global and national accountability processes.

II. Global context

10. While advancements have been made in recent years across a range of gender equality outcomes, a backlash has also been seen in the form of a rise in fundamentalist ideologies, authoritarianism and extremism; limited or shrinking civil society space; and persistent regressive gender norms and power structures. The COVID-19 pandemic, increasingly complex and extended humanitarian crises around the world and the ongoing catastrophe of climate change all threaten to reverse gains made towards gender equality, laying bare just how fragile these truly are.

11. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing gender inequalities across many spheres of life. It has amplified the need to address the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women, the ongoing crisis of violence faced by girls and women and the underrepresentation of girls and women in leadership roles. Women have left the labour force at much higher rates than men and are less likely to return. Disruptions in education have affected children and adolescents everywhere. Adolescent girls are especially at risk of not returning to school and losing access to programmes they need to transition to a rapidly changing workforce. Millions of girls lack access to critical health services and face increased risk of child marriage and early pregnancy. Deepening economic and social stressors, combined with the effects of quarantine, isolation and heightened family and domestic demands, have led to acute stress, particularly for girls and women. Increases in gender-based violence and the strain on prevention and response services have further aggravated the safety and security of girls and women in diverse settings, including in their own homes.

12. The pandemic has also exposed the web of restrictive gender norms and power dynamics that rationalize and perpetuate the subordinate status of girls and women, while endorsing harmful behaviours related to masculinity. Because power structures

in societies throughout the world mostly privilege boys and men, the disadvantages faced by girls and women must be addressed in order to advance gender equality. However, gender inequality pervades individual and family relationships, as well as institutions, with negative consequences for everyone. For progress to be made towards gender equality, advocates of all genders must work to dismantle the structures of power that have prevented girls and women from accessing their full rights and there must be strong engagement at all levels of society.

13. Combined with a steady onslaught of conflict, humanitarian crises and climate change, the pandemic has sparked a global reckoning about how institutions, societies, structures and laws contribute to and reinforce existing inequalities, increasing the hope for systemic change towards more equitable power structures. There are new opportunities to learn, work and deliver services in ways that embrace innovation, sustainability, inclusion and equity. There is a growing recognition that the intersecting inequalities faced by children and adolescents require bolder and more interconnected and transformative policies and programmes that can be equitably accessed by all.

14. Women's, youth and social justice movements have used the opportunities and challenges of the recent past to spotlight both ongoing systemic injustices and the need for institutions, including UNICEF, to embrace the opportunity to build back better. Globally, there has been a rise in the demand by grass-roots feminist organizations and young people for action against sexual harassment and abuse, racial injustice and climate change. UNICEF commits to supporting, amplifying and centring their voices.

15. In this context, UNICEF is critically positioned to be a champion within the United Nations system and a model for the global community in advancing transformational change toward gender equality. Over the past 75 years, UNICEF has generated credibility and public trust, demonstrating a proven ability to work with Governments across sectors; advocate for systems-level change; scale up effective and evidence-based programming; and effectively support the generation, analysis and use of gender data. With its presence and operational capacity in 190 countries across the humanitarian-development nexus and its long-standing strategic partnerships with Governments, United Nations agencies, civil society, donors, academia, the private sector and media, UNICEF will leverage resources, expertise and advocacy to spur progress on gender equality.

III. Overarching principles and priorities

16. UNICEF commits to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women as a key responsibility of everyone in the organization. Noting that previous GAPs have experienced challenges in matching intention with implementation, a greater focus will be placed on institutional accountability and ownership in all contexts in which UNICEF works.

17. A values-based approach will be adopted with respect to programming, wherein UNICEF and its partners will explicitly seek to redress the underlying structural barriers to equality by addressing power dynamics and gender roles, norms and relations at all levels of society and across the life cycle; reinforcing positive norms that support equality and non-discrimination; and working with boys and men to embrace and take actions towards gender equality.

18. Sustainable changes in gender norms, systems and structures are only possible when the next generation is supported and empowered to participate in and lead progress towards equality in their families, communities, nations and the world. Across all areas of its work, and particularly where it is most present, such as on

school-based, digital and other platforms, UNICEF will support opportunities for girls to be leaders of the change they want to see by promoting the voice and agency of adolescent girls.

19. UNICEF also commits to the deepened integration of innovation within its gender equality efforts and will work to ensure that girls and women have equal opportunities to safely and meaningfully access, use, lead and design technology and innovation.

20. Furthermore, UNICEF will expand its partnerships with feminist organizations and networks led by women, girls and young people, raising their voices as change agents and partners in programming and advocacy at the local, national, regional and global levels, within and across its work and that of its partners.

21. Results related to gender must be clear and specified from the start of all programmes across all Goal Areas. This will require strengthened gender analysis and gender data reporting, monitoring and research to inform evidence-based programming priorities and practices; clear standards for accountability; and participatory feedback and other consultative mechanisms. Specific targets for each Goal Area are included in the accompanying indicator matrix.

22. Gender socialization, the process of learning and internalizing norms, expectations and stereotypes that support or restrict gender expression, will be a priority area for UNICEF in addressing the structural causes of inequality and discrimination, both institutionally and programmatically. Community engagement; social and behaviour change communications; and parent and caregiver outreach strategies will be employed across sectors and at all levels to address the formation and impact of gender norms for children and adolescents. These strategies must also extend to formal systems, such as legislative and policy reform and financing for gender equality. Institutionally, UNICEF will engage in continual learning and improvements to address gender bias in its staffing, partnerships and processes.

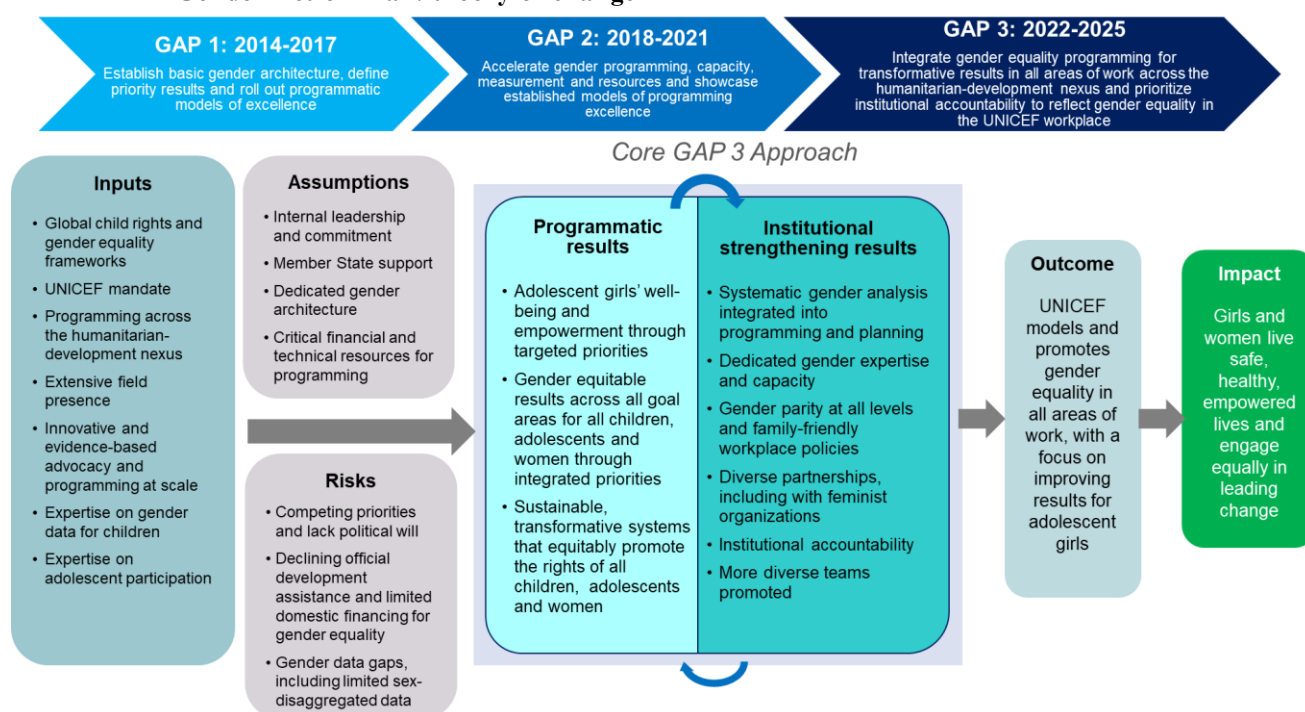
23. UNICEF will continue to work with partners to dismantle harmful masculinities. Gender norms related to dominant masculinities may increase the pressures boys face to drop out of school to help to provide for their families, to engage less with health systems and preventive care and to participate in risky or violent behaviours. Harmful masculinities restrict how boys and men express emotions and may encourage them to participate in gendered forms of violence. In all Goal Areas, UNICEF will engage boys and men in reflecting on their relationship with power, learning and modelling positive expressions of masculinity and practising more gender-equal dynamics within relationships, families, communities and systems.

24. UNICEF will increase investment to address the global crisis of violence against children, including adolescents, and women. Violence remains a fact of life for far too many children, including adolescents, and women, affecting their physical and mental health and well-being, access to services, and educational and livelihood outcomes, and increasing their vulnerability to poverty, discrimination and crisis. Violence against women within the home often occurs with and shares the same risk factors and consequences as violence against children. UNICEF will work not only to prevent and respond to gender-based violence but to break the cycle of and promote healing from the intergenerational legacies of all forms of violence. While violence prevention and response are core tenets of work in the child protection sector, violence is a barrier to change across all of the organization's work. Accordingly, UNICEF will adopt a multisectoral strategy to address gender-based violence, using sector-wide and survivor-centred approaches in all Goal Areas. It will expand its leadership in addressing gender-based violence in emergencies and violence against children and in supporting safe school environments. Building on its experience and collaboration

with sister agencies in eliminating harmful practices, UNICEF will scale up support to national and local governments, civil society, women's and girls' networks and other partners to strengthen child protection systems, promote quality survivor-centred services, mitigate the risk of violence, invest in prevention and shift gender norms that are perpetuated and reinforced by violence.

25. The GAP theory of change (see figure I) demonstrates how UNICEF will realize its commitment to achieve gender equality and empowerment of girls and women by: (a) integrating gender equality programming for transformative results throughout the life course; (b) deepening and strengthening its work to advance the leadership and well-being of adolescent girls; and (c) incorporating and investing in gender equality as a principle and practice across all institutional structures and systems to ensure that it is fully embraced across the organization.

Figure I
Gender Action Plan: theory of change



IV. Gender in programme strategies and results

26. To advance progress towards all of its goals, including a more gender-equal world, UNICEF aims to ensure that its programming meets or exceeds minimum standards for evidence-informed programme design and implementation. As reflected in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, key actions for the integration of gender equality throughout the life course are incorporated in all five Goal Areas. These include: (a) quality maternal health care and nutrition, and HIV testing, counselling and care; (b) gender-responsive education systems and equitable access to education for all; (c) addressing violence against girls, boys and women, as well as harmful practices; (d) equitable WASH systems; and (e) gender-responsive social protection systems and care work.

27. The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 also describes an ambitious set of priority actions to advance adolescent girls' leadership and well-being, including: (a) promoting adolescent girls' nutrition and pregnancy care and preventing HIV/AIDS and human papillomavirus; (b) advancing girls' education, learning and skills,

including science, technology, engineering, mathematics and digital skills; (c) eliminating child marriage and early unions; and (d) promoting accessible and dignified menstrual health and hygiene services, including tackling taboos with respect to menstruation.

28. These gender results are mapped in figure II against the Goal Areas and described in greater detail below. All results will be supported by the work of UNICEF in advocacy, innovation, partnerships, data, research and analysis.

Figure II
Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025: programmatic priorities



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

1. Maternal health and nutrition, including HIV testing, counselling and care

29. Inequalities based on gender and other factors disproportionately compromise access to and the quality of health care for girls, women and marginalized children and adolescents. Gender and age biases can reinforce discrimination in health policy and health facilities, influence restrictive age-of-consent policies that discourage adolescents from seeking sexual and reproductive health services, contribute to consistent underprioritization and underfunding of services for girls and women and place health decision-making authority and financial control in the hands of others. In the COVID-19 context, interrupted services and the strain on parents and caregivers have had adverse effects on the nutrition and care of children, including heightening inequalities between children of different genders within the same family. Combined with school closures, isolation and other factors, such as gender inequality, racism, conflict and violence, the pandemic has worsened an already growing crisis of mental health among children and adolescents.

30. UNICEF will take a systems-strengthening approach, including in the recruitment, training and remuneration of front-line workers, to prioritize the expanded coverage of quality, dignified maternal and newborn health services,

including for pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers, as well as access to quality nutrition and immunization services for girls and women in all settings.

31. UNICEF will work to ensure that children and adolescents, as well as pregnant and breastfeeding mothers of all ages, have access to interventions that fast track the elimination of HIV/AIDS. This includes support to national partners for early identification and for linkages to stigma-free treatment and care for children and adolescents living with HIV. It also includes support for accelerating the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B.

32. UNICEF will support countries in scaling up parenting and caregiving support strategies, including through social and behavioural change programming, to tackle unequal power relations and promote more gender-equitable household decision-making and nurturing care. This will result in more positive health, nutrition and other outcomes for children and women, as well as positive gender roles and behaviours among boys and girls. Girls and women will benefit from increased access to healthy diets, body positivity and confidence, as well as services and practices to prevent anaemia, poor nutrition and poor health.

33. UNICEF has increasingly recognized the tremendous burden of poor mental health during adolescence, as well as the gendered nature of stressors on adolescent mental health and well-being. Such stressors include, for example, unequal household responsibilities, early maternity, pressure to conform to stereotypical gender roles and exposure to gender-based violence. To foster mental health and well-being, UNICEF will expand access to gender-responsive mental health care for all children and adolescents as part of primary health care. UNICEF will further advocate for and invest in early intervention and expanded access to mental health care for pregnant and post-partum adolescents and young parents, children and adolescents living with HIV, and children and adolescents in crisis and humanitarian contexts, among other things. UNICEF will engage parents and caregivers in mental health support and will continue to lead the development of novel data collection methods to capture sex-disaggregated data on the burden and determinants of adolescent mental health in low- and middle-income countries.

34. UNICEF will advocate for comprehensive, age-appropriate health and nutrition sector responses to gender-based violence. Together with Governments and other partners in these sectors, UNICEF will strive to ensure that all girls and women, including those from marginalized and excluded communities, have access to quality survivor-centred services and that the threat of violence is mitigated. This will include working with frontline health workers to support survivors in accessing quality services, as well as mitigation measures that prevent violence in the health system.

2. Adolescent girls' health and nutrition, including HIV prevention

35. UNICEF will work to ensure that pregnant and parenting adolescent girls benefit from gender-responsive maternal, antenatal and post-natal services, including for the prevention of anaemia and poor nutrition. It will support countries in designing and scaling up gender-responsive programmes, advocacy and communications to prevent anaemia, malnutrition, overweight and obesity in school-age children and adolescents through school- and community-based approaches, as well as in the large-scale fortification of staple foods with essential nutrients for adolescents and women. UNICEF will also expand public-private partnerships and programmes to address harmful stereotypes and promote body positivity among children and adolescents.

36. Recognizing that the majority of new infections occur among adolescent girls, UNICEF will ensure that girls, young women and other key young populations are adequately prioritized, galvanized, engaged and empowered in transition-to-scale efforts for evidence-based HIV prevention methods and tools. Noting the considerable

challenges adolescent girls face in accessing HIV prevention and care services, UNICEF will prioritize investments in prevention programmes designed with and for adolescents that tackle the underlying gender and cultural barriers they face in that regard, with a particular focus on empowering girls to have greater control and agency over their bodily autonomy. UNICEF will also engage businesses and private sector partners to promote positive gender roles and address stereotypes in the media and advertisements targeting children and adolescents.

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

1. Gender-responsive education systems and equitable education access for all

37. UNICEF aims to close gender gaps in accessing and completing quality education, learning and skills training for all children and adolescents, from the pre-primary through the secondary levels. This requires a focus on addressing the global learning crisis, including expanding emphasis on early learning, skills acquisition and alternative learning pathways, as well as ensuring safer and more supportive school environments to better reach the most marginalized children and adolescents. UNICEF will continue to support the development of gender-responsive education systems, including through digital platforms and literacy education, to bridge the gender digital divide. Programming will also prioritize a comprehensive response to school-related gender-based violence and foster safe physical and online learning spaces for all children and adolescents.

38. UNICEF will leverage its convening power and partnerships with Governments, non-governmental organizations and other non-State providers to strengthen inclusive, gender-responsive education systems through sector-wide analysis, planning, implementation and accountability. This will include a focus on increasing equity in access and learning by specifically targeting the structural barriers to education faced by adolescent girls, children with disabilities, migrant and displaced children, and other marginalized children and adolescents, and on the development of gender-responsive curricula. UNICEF will invest in evidence-based, gender- and disability-responsive sector planning and monitoring; the strengthening of national capacities in data, delivery and accountability for results; and the improvement of linkages with social protection systems to reach the most vulnerable.

39. As part of a multisectoral approach to advance positive health and education outcomes, UNICEF will continue to work in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to promote age-appropriate and culturally relevant comprehensive sexuality education aligned with the international technical guidance on sexuality education and centred on empowerment, critical thinking and the promotion of gender-equitable norms and power relations.

2. Adolescent girls' leadership, learning and skills, including digital skills

40. While gender disparities in education access and enrolment have narrowed, adolescent girls, including those living in low-income and conflict-affected countries, the poorest households and rural areas, remain disadvantaged. In the poorest families, girls are 50 per cent more likely never to attend school than boys. Even before the pandemic, girls were significantly less likely than boys to be enrolled in skills and training opportunities. Globally, nearly 1 in 4 girls aged 15 to 19 years is not employed or enrolled in education or training, as compared with 1 in 10 boys of the same age. COVID-19 has compounded educational exclusion and caused the largest disruption of education in history, leaving millions of girls without the opportunity to learn and build essential skills or to obtain the protection that education and school settings

provide against child marriage, early pregnancy and gender-based violence. All of this will require UNICEF and its partners to continue reimagining education, including through new digital delivery platforms and skills development that respond to current realities, to ensure an inclusive, gender-equitable and empowered future for all children and adolescents.

41. For adolescent girls, UNICEF will promote access to education and skills development, including for safe transitions to satisfying work. It will make dedicated efforts to target and include girls in skills and learning opportunities that prepare them for twenty-first century socioeconomic pathways by ensuring that they participate in and benefit from opportunities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. UNICEF will continue to invest in overcoming the gender digital divide through the development of digital learning solutions, enhanced connectivity and accompanying safety measures, including by increasing the accessibility and affordability of devices and Internet services, as well as through broader efforts to shift gender norms with regard to digital access and use. Programming will also embrace alternative pathways to learning for girls who are out of school and/or living in humanitarian contexts.

42. UNICEF will promote girls' leadership, voice and agency in the education sector as a catalyst for their inclusion and participation across all sectors and contexts. This will include supporting innovative and safe platforms and spaces, both offline and online, to build girls' skills and capacities to lead, influence change, voice their opinions and be empowered. It will also promote accountability among adult stakeholders and institutions for developing and ensuring opportunities for girls' systematic inclusion and participation in designing, advocating for, owning and implementing solutions to the issues affecting their communities and their lives.

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

1. Addressing violence against girls, boys and women and ending female genital mutilation

43. Notwithstanding some progress in recent decades, notably declines in the rates of child marriage and female genital mutilation, significant acceleration is required to achieve the child protection-related Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure that these gains are experienced equitably and sustainably. One in four children under the age of 5 years lives with a mother who has experienced intimate partner violence. Fifteen million girls aged 15 to 19 years have experienced rape, while nearly one in three have been victims of emotional, physical or sexual violence committed by an intimate partner. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the risk of violence for women and girls, with reported increases in domestic violence during lockdowns and setbacks in eliminating child marriage, early unions and female genital mutilation. School and childcare closures, disruptions in health, social and justice services, and the strain on violence response and prevention services are hampering the ability of child protection systems to reach already-vulnerable children.

44. UNICEF is shifting towards an expanded focus on preventing violence and harmful practices by adopting a transformative approach that tackles the gender dimensions of violence. This will require supporting positive social and behavioural change efforts, from the individual through the national level, as a core strategy. Working with girls, boys, young people, parents, role models, communities, the private sector and others, UNICEF aims to challenge restrictive or harmful gender norms conducive to violence and to encourage more gender-equitable practices, such as anti-violence interventions and the increased understanding and practice of consent in relationships, including in adolescent peer relationships. Evidence-based gender-

sensitive parenting support strategies will emphasize positive expressions of gender and care within families, including by promoting co-parenting and male involvement in child development and care; encouraging non-violent discipline; and supporting positive behaviours among parents and caregivers of adolescents. UNICEF will also support community engagement on norms change to address and proactively prevent and mitigate violence wherever it occurs.

45. UNICEF will expand its role as a leader and collaborator in the field of prevention of gender-based violence in emergencies, including by strengthening and deepening its inter-agency partnerships, in accordance with United Nations reform processes and the Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. This work will also contribute to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, a United Nations system-wide responsibility, by scaling up safe and accessible reporting channels, survivor-centred assistance and strengthened accountability for child survivors in all settings.

46. UNICEF will invest in delivering comprehensive quality and age-appropriate services for survivors of gender-based violence. In addition, improved and non-discriminatory access to justice – especially for girls and marginalized children and adolescents – will be prioritized, including through specialized child justice strategies that are gender-responsive and survivor-centred.

2. Eliminating child marriage

47. Building on the successes and lessons from the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, UNICEF, together with UNFPA, will continue to accelerate gender equality programming strategies to end this harmful practice. This work will include evidence generation and gender analyses to inform programmatic priorities, partnering with women's and girls' rights networks and organizations, and engaging men and boys, as well as broader communities, in promoting positive masculinities and shifts in discriminatory social norms. UNICEF will also prioritize the scaling up of cross-sectoral interventions to support at-risk adolescent girls, emphasizing education, sexual and reproductive health, safe spaces and life skills to empower girls, keep them in school, avoid adolescent pregnancy and delay marriage.

D. Goal Area 4: Every child, including adolescents, uses safe, resilient water, sanitation and hygiene services and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment

1. Equitable water, sanitation and hygiene systems

48. Girls and women have different water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) needs than their male peers and experience disproportionate negative impacts from poor WASH policies, systems and services. Poor access to WASH services in schools, health-care facilities, homes and public places can expose women and girls to violence, harassment and exploitation; discourage girls from attending school; and prevent women from engaging in income-generating activities. In many contexts where women and girls bear the primary responsibility for WASH-related tasks, such as water collection, cleaning and cooking, the associated physical and time burdens prevent them from performing other activities and participating in community life, learning and/or earning income. Girls, women and their children also bear a great health burden from indoor air pollution caused by the use of solid fuels for cooking or heating.

49. With an underlying emphasis on equity and inclusion, UNICEF will strengthen and resource gender-responsive WASH systems and empower communities to advance affordable and sustainable services to meet the needs of all children and

adolescents, particularly the most disadvantaged, in both the development and the humanitarian contexts. The organization will provide support for universal and sustainable access that is gender- and disability-responsive and integrated in households, schools and health-care facilities. UNICEF will strengthen the civic engagement and empowerment of marginalized groups, including women and adolescents, to advocate for equitable service delivery and to participate in WASH decision-making processes.

50. An important new priority in the present GAP is support for adolescent and youth leadership in climate and environmental action, including girls' leadership. Specifically, UNICEF will seek to build the resilience and adaptive capacity of girls and women to the effects of climate change by promoting their access to and control over natural resources and centring their participation as change agents for more environmentally sustainable socioeconomic models and approaches. UNICEF will also seek to scale up successful models of community decision-making that promote the equitable participation of women and young people and that recognize their potential as leaders and entrepreneurs in market-based approaches to WASH systems.

2. Accessible, dignified menstrual health and hygiene

51. The right to dignified menstrual health and hygiene supplies and management systems, as well as accurate knowledge and information about puberty, is among the most essential of girls' and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Building on prior efforts, UNICEF will work with partners to increase menstrual health and hygiene coverage by resourcing the design of WASH systems to respond to the needs of adolescent girls, including separate toilets and private facilities, to manage hygiene during menstruation. In addition, UNICEF will focus on expanding access to menstrual hygiene products for adolescent girls and women experiencing disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, displacement, crisis or conflict, including by leveraging innovative and sustainable financing opportunities with public and private partners. Such initiatives will require a strengthening of the enabling environment for dignified menstrual health and hygiene through support for national gender-responsive policies, budgets and accountability processes, as well as market-driven strategies that include innovations led by girls that embrace partnerships with girls' and women's networks. Complementing these efforts, UNICEF will work with partners to address harmful stereotypes with respect to menstruation, including through positive gender socialization interventions with adolescents and families and community engagement initiatives that dispel myths, provide accurate information and promote the right of girls to health and well-being.

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

Gender-responsive social protection systems and gender-responsive care work

52. Gender inequality continues to be a key driver of child poverty. Women and girls are overrepresented globally among the poorest and are disproportionately impacted by multiple intersecting deprivations, or multidimensional poverty. Yet global action to address poverty – both monetary and multidimensional – often fails to account for, or does not adequately respond to, gendered risks, needs and opportunities. Growing evidence indicates that social protection systems and programmes are a critical, cost-effective and scalable means to alleviate poverty and can improve a range of health, education and social inclusion outcomes for families and children. Such programmes can also achieve important gender-related outcomes for women and girls, including increasing their empowerment and agency, improving their access to education and health services and reducing gender-based violence. These outcomes can be achieved

through multiple pathways, such as reducing financial stress and barriers to accessing income-generating opportunities and services; providing direct access to information, social networks and skills development; or linking social protection to empowerment and norms-changing interventions.

53. Owing to the failure of some social policy frameworks to adequately recognize and prioritize the socioeconomic value of care work, as well as persistent gender stereotypes that treat care and domestic work as the domain of females, women and girls continue to shoulder the bulk of unpaid care work at home. This burden significantly limits girls' schooling and women's income-earning ability. Before the pandemic, women were spending three times as many hours on unpaid domestic and care work as men globally. Girls aged 5 to 14 years were spending 160 million more hours per day on domestic and unpaid care work than boys their age, compromising their right to learning and play. The pandemic has aggravated this burden, forcing women out of the workforce and threatening progress made in the economic empowerment of women and the development of adolescent girls. It has exponentially increased the vulnerabilities of poor women, including women who are the heads of households, single mothers and the vast numbers of women engaged in informal employment.

54. UNICEF has significantly expanded its support to gender-responsive social protection programming in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This support recognizes the immense potential of social protection systems – including policies, programmes and institutions – to protect children, adolescents, women and families from socioeconomic shocks and to shift resources to those who need them most. In this context, UNICEF considers the equal distribution of care work and the need for social norms that promote gender equality as pre-conditions for long-term and sustainable poverty reduction, while also recognizing that poverty reduction itself can drive progress towards gender equality. In alignment with the UNICEF Social Protection Programme Framework,¹ the conceptual framework on gender-responsive age-sensitive social protection,² and the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, UNICEF, along with its national partners, will invest in strengthening inclusive, gender-responsive and shock-responsive social protection systems. Interventions will emphasize empowerment of girls and women and increased access to education, health, social and gender-based violence response services, as well as family-friendly policies with respect to parental support, accessible childcare and child benefits, all of which shift the paradigm towards paid, equitably distributed and sufficiently valued care work.

55. Recognizing the importance of transformative budgeting and financing across all sectors, UNICEF will prioritize inclusive financing work that will advance decentralized gender-responsive planning and budgeting, enabling government spending for solutions that address gender-related spending gaps. Finally, to advance the leadership and well-being of adolescent girls, UNICEF will build on emerging evidence on the impact of social protection on reducing sexual violence, child marriage and HIV infection, as well as improving psychosocial and mental health outcomes.

¹ UNICEF, *UNICEF's Social Protection Programme Framework* (New York, October 2019). Available at www.unicef.org/media/64601/file/Global-social-protection-programme-framework-2019.pdf.

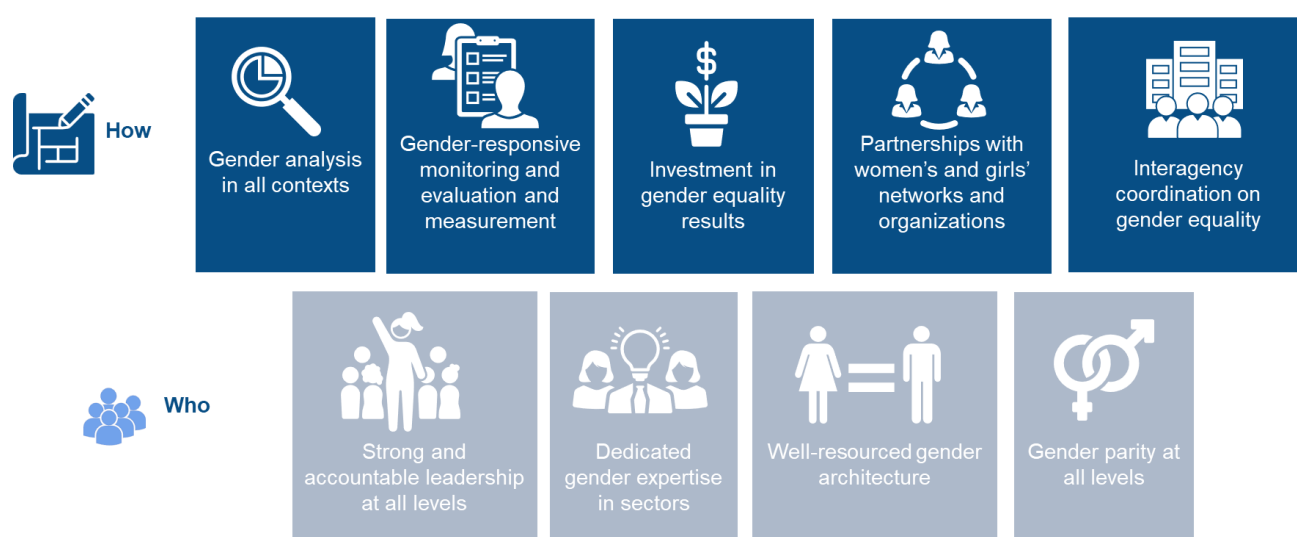
² UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti, *Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection: A conceptual framework*, *Innocenti Working Papers*, No. 2020-10 (Florence, Italy, August 2020). Available at www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1116-gender-responsive-age-sensitive-social-protection-a-conceptual-framework.html.

V. A whole-institution approach

56. In working towards its vision of a more gender-equal world, UNICEF commits to gender equality programming strategies that deliver transformative results, as well as to an organizational change strategy for gender equality across internal policies, practices, and accountability mechanisms at all levels. Promoting gender equality and ending all forms of discrimination – including within its own work culture – must be the responsibility of everyone at UNICEF, regardless of role, title or position. Accordingly, UNICEF will match its investments in building gender capacity with commitments to resourcing and accountability, and will move beyond process measures that track results to support an enabling environment and an inclusive culture that allows the organization to lead by example.

Figure III

Institutional enablers for the UNICEF Gender Action Plan



A. Gender analyses and programmatic monitoring

57. Integrating gender equality programming approaches for transformative results will require deliberate and targeted gender integration throughout the programming cycle, including attention to gender in country programme documents and strategy notes; emergency preparedness, response and recovery plans; and strategic and budget planning processes. From the start, each planning process will require analyses of gendered differences and needs in the community and sector contexts. The gender analyses will entail a critical examination of available data, evidence and previous programme results, but they must go beyond the identification of differences in outcomes and access to intentionally assess the social norms, structures and power dynamics at play in each context, so that programme design and implementation can focus resources and support in ways that will most effectively and equitably counter gendered barriers. The participation of girls, women, and marginalized children and adolescents, as well as boys and men, as appropriate – from analysis, through programme design, delivery and evaluation – must be a priority. Such engagement will help to sharpen understanding of their different needs, allow for tailored interventions and foster community participation in and ownership of solutions.

58. UNICEF will expand on gender-responsive institutional monitoring systems and capacity-building efforts that have gained momentum in previous GAP cycles, including enhancement of the capacity of staff at the country level to utilize monitoring systems and application of a more deliberate accountability process that

incorporates clear regional- and country-level responsibility for results, improved feedback loops and opportunities for shared learning. Wherever possible, guidance on gender-related monitoring and reporting will be integrated into broader system-wide guidance to improve accountability at all levels.

B. Data, research and evidence to support gender equality results

59. To encourage continuous learning, UNICEF will regularly commission independent evaluations of programmes from a gender perspective and support a dynamic research agenda that informs and promotes innovative and evidence-informed programming and policy modalities, highlights best practices and contributes to the global marketplace of ideas.

60. UNICEF will ensure adequate resources and capacity for the integration of a gender perspective into all stages of the evidence generation, evaluation and dissemination cycle, including the assessment of data needs to strengthen evidence-based programming and advocacy, and the collection, analysis and dissemination of data related to gender equality. UNICEF will invest in and advocate for the mandatory reporting of sex- and age-disaggregated data in all contexts and will work with partners in Governments, multilateral organizations, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations to increase the availability and strengthen the analysis of these data, particularly in humanitarian contexts. It will also work with organizations led by girls, young people and women to increase the utilization and sharing of sex- and age-disaggregated data, as well as data that reflect the specific needs, opportunities and contributions of women and girls in society.

61. UNICEF recognizes that there are critical evidence gaps in core programming areas, including the measurement of gender norms and adolescent girls' empowerment, and commits to setting standards in those areas, as well as to working with partners to explore non-traditional and emerging techniques and tracking systems to record progress against gender equality goals. UNICEF also has a key role to play in protecting the data privacy and security concerns of girls and marginalized children.

62. UNICEF will make targeted investments in expanded and innovative research and data collection aimed at a better understanding of the intersections of gender- and age-related discrimination with other forms of discrimination, exclusion and vulnerability. Through research partnerships and evidence synthesis, UNICEF will benefit from and contribute to research conducted by partners, while supporting sectors and country offices in conducting high-quality, ethical research and gender analysis. Leveraging research and evaluation to promote gender equality through feminist evaluation approaches will remain a priority for the organization.

C. Financing

63. UNICEF will ensure that minimum standards for gender financing are met and exceeded, with the aim of going beyond the existing United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women resource allocation benchmark of 15 per cent. Ongoing monitoring will be essential to ensure that technical capacity and expertise to deliver on gender results across Goal Areas and institutionally are sufficiently resourced.

64. In addition, UNICEF recognizes both the value and limitations of financial benchmarks and commits to continued improvements in its funding mechanisms. This will be accomplished through gender-responsive procurement and partnership systems that increasingly disburse to women- and girl-led organizations.

D. Partnerships

65. Strategic partnerships are integral to the efforts of UNICEF to advance gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. UNICEF will strive to apply the principles of gender equality in all its partnerships and collaborative initiatives with other multilateral agencies, Governments, public and private donors, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector, among others, to leverage comparative advantages, mobilize resources and expand reach to accelerate gender results. UNICEF will also strengthen existing, and develop new, partnerships with public and private entities, including multilateral banks, to leverage public financing and innovative funding mechanisms to advance gender equality priorities.

66. UNICEF will continue to collaborate closely with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), UNFPA, the United Nations Development Programme and all relevant United Nations entities for greater efficiency, coherence and impact, including on adolescent girls' health, nutrition and education; ending child marriage and female genital mutilation; eliminating gender-based violence; and changing discriminatory gender norms. UNICEF will also continue to work closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme and other international partners in humanitarian action.

67. UNICEF will prioritize the resourcing of in-country and global partnerships with girl-, youth- and women-led organizations and networks, as well as investments in girls' leadership in all Goal Areas. This will help to ensure that partnerships are based on inclusion. UNICEF will further invest in innovation driven by girl- and women-led organizations to address the digital divide, respond to the climate crisis, expand access to skills and learning, address inequalities and redress gender-based violence.

E. Leadership and accountability

68. Leadership is critical to the fostering of institutional ownership of gender equality. UNICEF will continue to emphasize that everyone at UNICEF – at all levels and in all offices of the organization – is involved in promoting gender equality, while simultaneously stressing that accountability for gender equality priorities and results rests at the highest levels, across both programmatic and institutional structures. Accordingly, in addition to dedicated annual reporting to the Executive Board and through United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women processes, UNICEF will establish explicit accountabilities of senior managers for gender results and will institute mechanisms to ensure that gender action plans are integrated into country office management plans and regional accountability frameworks. Senior leadership must lead by example, demonstrating commitment to gender equality goals through visible, public actions.

69. Accountability for gender equality also requires zero tolerance for discrimination, sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment within the organization, among its partners and in its programming. Everyone at UNICEF is responsible for promoting child safeguarding, for creating and maintaining an environment that prevents exploitation and abuse and for providing timely, confidential and effective investigation, assistance and support to survivors. UNICEF will develop, implement and continually improve training and policies to ensure that this commitment is understood and adopted by all.

F. Staffing, gender parity and culture

70. To make gender equality the responsibility of everyone at UNICEF, regardless of sector or role, gender competencies will be integrated into staff development and review processes and opportunities will be created for cross-sectoral collaboration across Goal Areas. Going beyond standards of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UNICEF will promote equity in staffing and the inclusion of gender-diverse staff in all sectors, with a focus on ensuring the representation of women in senior management and on investing in the development and mentoring of young, female and gender-diverse staff. UNICEF will both model within the organization and advocate among its partners for the implementation of inclusive, diverse and family-friendly workplace policies, including by expanding parental support, recognizing the needs of caregivers and reviewing institutional staffing mobility and gendered impacts on families.

71. UNICEF will update staffing benchmarks to ensure gender parity and the inclusion of diverse staff in all sectors and will prioritize regular review and redress of pay and hiring inequities based on gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, country of origin, disability or other personal characteristics. In addition, UNICEF will ensure the study and implementation of workplace policies that promote equity and work-life harmony, and support initiatives that mitigate biases, particularly based on gender, at each stage of the recruitment, hiring and promotion processes. Zero tolerance for sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse will be strictly applied organization-wide, with more prevention mechanisms created at the country level.

72. UNICEF will invest in expanding access to values-based gender training and capacity-strengthening for staff across all areas of the organization, including programmes in development, humanitarian and high-income contexts, as well as research, communications, management and human resources, using, among other strategies, GenderPro credentialing, secondments, e-learning and the expansion of mandatory gender training and learning opportunities. UNICEF will integrate gender competencies into the design of strategies for hiring, recruitment and accountability to resource a large and capable cadre of gender specialists at the headquarters, regional and country levels, as well as sectoral specialists with gender expertise. The achievement of these changes will require strategic investments in building the gender capacity of human resources and management staff to ensure that hiring cultures do not perpetuate gender inequalities.

VI. Conclusion

73. Through the present Gender Action Plan, UNICEF reaffirms its commitment to promoting gender equality and to the actions it will take in the period from 2022 to 2025 to achieve better and more gender-equal outcomes for all children and adolescents, with a particular focus on adolescent girls. This third iteration of the GAP focuses on the expansion of transformative approaches throughout all UNICEF programming, as well as in institutional policies, partnerships and capacities. Building on lessons and successes of the previous two Plans, UNICEF will continue to scale up evidence-based programmes and intentionally design programming to advance the leadership and well-being of adolescent girls. UNICEF will continue to advocate with and leverage existing and new partnerships to promote girls and women as agents of change, support their civic participation and foster their equal leadership in enhancing their well-being and that of their communities.