EMR Tracker

Evaluation Management Response Document

Region: MENAR

Office: Saudi Arabia

Evaluation Year: 2023

Evaluation Title: Formative evaluation of Anti-Bullying Programme in Schools in the United Arab Emirates

Person In Charge For Follow Up to Management Response: Saji Thomas

Overall response to evaluation
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Planned Use of the Evaluation
The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the programme's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, and sustainability in mitigating bullying in the target schools, and thereby advise how UNICEF can best support the UAE and balance the government's objectives and priorities with the UNICEF mandate. The evaluation also aims to assess the pilot phase of the programme, gauge the programme's accessibility with a focus on equity and gender equality, support the overall work on child protection in the country, and identify key lessons and best practices to enrich evidence-based decision-making. The evaluation will contribute to inform how UNICEF can best support the UAE, and balance both government objectives and priorities and UNICEF mandate. The knowledge generated, and the specific lessons learned that it identifies, will inform evidence-based decision-making, evidence-based advocacy, contributing to learning within UNICEF to strengthen to child well-being in the region and beyond. Evaluation report recommendations will inform the new APD of the UNICEF GAO as well as will assist the government of the UAE to scale up and replicate the programme in the schools.

Recommendations and Actions

No.	Recommendations/Actions	Responsible Section (Action)	Responsible Person Name (Action)	Expected Completion (Action)	Mgt Response / Implementation Stage	Reason/Action Taken
1	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 1: Strengthen the service response.				Agree	
1.0	Development of a coordinated integrated case management system both within entities and across different entities (including PRIMERO roll out)	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF has positioned its management response to the evaluation of the anti-bullying programme within the broader national agenda to End Violence Against Children (EVAC) in the United Arab Emirates. As a Pathfinder Country under the global EVAC movement, the UAE has demonstrated sustained commitment to advancing child protection through nationally led reforms and initiatives. Global momentum on EVAC, reaffirmed through the Bogotá Conference, has emphasized three strategic pillars of action: (i) positive parenting, (ii) safe schools, and (iii) strengthened child protection services. Building on these priorities, the UAE is currently developing a national EVAC roadmap that is expected to further articulate a comprehensive, systems-level approach to preventing and responding to violence against children. Within this broader strategic context, UNICEF's support to the integrated case management programme was designed as a key contribution to strengthening national child protection systems. In collaboration with the Supreme Council for

						Motherhood and Childhood (SCMC) and the Ministry of Education (through the Emirates Schools Establishment at the time of implementation), UNICEF supported efforts to enhance case management processes through the adoption of PRIMERO and its accompanying tools and resources. The introduction of PRIMERO was envisioned as a strategic investment in building a more coherent, coordinated, and integrated case management system. To this end, UNICEF made substantial contributions, including adapting the PRIMERO platform to the UAE context, contextualizing technical tools and guidance materials, and strengthening the capacities of child protection professionals within the Ministry of Education. These interventions were aimed at establishing the foundations for a more effective and integrated approach to case management across sectors. UNICEF has delivered the planned technical assistance and capacity-strengthening support under the programme. Achievement of the broader systems-level objective, however, is dependent on sustained institutional alignment, ownership, and coordinated action across the relevant government entities. Institutional restructuring within the education sector, including the integration of the Emirates Schools Establishment into the Ministry of Education, has affected institutional continuity and ownership, resulting in delays to the full rollout and operationalization of the system. Going forward, realizing the intended impact of these investments will require renewed inter-ministerial coordination and commitment to advancing an integrated national case management framework as part of the wider EVAC agenda.

1.0	Updating resources of MOE and ESE on Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs) for case management	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Resources were updated as part of the PRIMERO adaptation process. This adaptation included the revision and customization of reporting tools to align with the UAE context, ensuring that data collection and case management processes reflected national child protection systems and requirements. The updated tools were designed to strengthen reporting, improve data quality, and support more effective monitoring of child protection cases. In addition, efforts were undertaken to support the Ministry of Education (MOE) in operationalizing and disseminating a child protection guidance framework that had been developed prior to the evaluation. This support aspired to facilitate the activation and practical application of the guidance, with the aim of strengthening child protection mechanisms within the education sector and enhancing the capacity of schools and education personnel to identify, report, and respond to child protection concerns.

1.0	Training and Capacity building of Case Managers/social workers, supervisors, and various functionaries in case management.	GAO/UAE	Moataz Azzam,Saji Thomas	12/31/2025	Completed	Annual capacity-building trainings were conducted for Child Protection (CP) specialists within the Ministry of Education (MOE) under the framework of the UNICEF–MOE Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). In addition, UNICEF provided targeted technical training for some child protection specialists and social workers on the PRIMERO case management system, with the objective of strengthening child protection case management, referral pathways, and data management mechanisms across the education sector. A dedicated training was completed for all 40 odd child protection specialists on PRIMERO, along with all the tools developed as part of the adapation. While the initial phases of training were successfully implemented, the nationwide rollout and institutionalization of PRIMERO have not yet been fully completed due to administrative and structural changes within the Ministry. Moving forward, renewed engagement with MOE leadership and alignment on implementation priorities will be critical to reactivating the rollout process, ensuring system sustainability, and strengthening the integration of child protection case management within the education sector response.
2	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 2: Support pilot schools in continuing to adopt programme interventions				Agree	

2.0	Develop with MOE and ESE action plan with programme, activities, and timeline to roll out the program trainings to reach and activate the program in all schools of UAE , including continued support to existing schools.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moat Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	A scale-up plan was developed to guide the implementation of the scale-up trainings. See next point on scale of implementation. Although the merger of ESE with the MOE caused some delays, the scale-up process was successfully brought back on track. By 2025, 100% of the public and private schools in Abu dhabi were covered. TOTs were also conducted for reaching the rest of the country, but a progress report from MOE was is not available to assess the level of expansion. A strategic plan is now being developed to ensure the long-term institutionalization and sustainability of the programme.
2.0	Expand program trainings to include MHPSS school-based services, parenting guide and child protection referrals.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moat Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	The training package was updated to include a strong focus on MHPSS and referral pathways for case management. A parenting guide was developed as part of the programme and circulated among schools. As part of the program scale-up with the MOE, all public schools in Abu Dhabi were covered in 2024 through direct training sessions delivered to school committees. In early 2025, the program expanded to all public schools across the Northern Emirates through a series of Training of Trainers (TOT) sessions for master trainers, who subsequently established program support hubs within each Emirate. In line with the ongoing commitment to promoting student wellbeing with Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge, mandatory one-day Anti-Bullying trainings were conducted for private and charter schools. These trainings equipped school social workers with the knowledge and tools required to raise awareness, deliver trainings, and implement anti-bullying activities for students, parents, and staff across the wider school community. Efforts also included adapation of I Support My Friends (ISMF), an evidence based programme by WHO and UNICEF to the UAE context.
3	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 3: Improve the programme manuals				Agree	

3.0	Improve and update program manuals to address wider scope of topics (case management, MHPSS, cyber bullying, parenting) and integrate the beneficiaries' priorities	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	The resources were reviewed and updated. In response to the evaluation findings, SCMC and UNICEF convened a national committee composed of education stakeholders, child protection experts, and policymakers to design an scale up plan.
3.0	Update the anti-bullying materials as per the manuals and consider more child friendly versions.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	The update was completed and subsequently integrated into training activities. The adoption of the I Support My Friends (ISMF) approach contributed to the development of child-friendly resources that support the broader wellbeing agenda, including the prevention of bullying and the strengthening of psychosocial support systems in schools. The I Support My Friends (ISMF) was designed as a capacity-building intervention aimed at strengthening school-based psychosocial support systems through structured peer-support approaches grounded in Psychological First Aid principles. The overall objective of the training resource was to equip school-based professionals with the knowledge, skills, and ethical frameworks required to safely implement peer-support initiatives within school settings, in alignment with national child protection and wellbeing priorities. Current discussions are focused on transitioning from issue-specific training programmes towards a more holistic approach to social work capacity building, enabling professionals to address a wider range of child protection and wellbeing needs in an integrated and sustainable manner.
4	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 4: Update the anti-bullying programme materials				Agree	
4.0	Update the anti-bullying materials as per the manuals and consider more child friendly versions.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Updating of the resources was done as detailed in the section above.
4.0	Collaborate UNICEF and MOE modules of MHPSS School-based in the UAE.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	MHPSS was integrated into the anti-bullying training programme, which ensures potential coverage nationally. Aditionally, in partnership with SCMC and the MOE, UNICEF supported the piloting of the I Support My Friends (ISMF) programme across multiple Emirates. The

						ISMF initiative was designed not as a standalone training intervention, but as a strategic step toward institutionalizing peer support and psychosocial wellbeing within the UAE public school system. Through standardized capacity building, integration of safeguarding protocols, referral pathways, and supervised implementation mechanisms, the programme aims to embed peer support practices within existing school wellbeing structures and strengthen the MOE's long-term ownership and sustainability of MHPSS programming. The training reached a broad cohort of school-based professionals and strengthened national capacity in peer support, Psychological First Aid (PFA), safeguarding, and safe referral practices within school settings. The cascade approach further supports institutionalization by building a network of trained personnel capable of sustaining implementation and mentoring within schools and across Emirates. The programme has however not been rolled out and scaled up nationally. The programme combined quantitative post-test assessment data with qualitative narrative reporting. While the training reached a larger number of participants overall, quantitative findings were based exclusively on participants who completed the full training programme and met certification requirements, in line with quality assurance and fairness standards. Findings demonstrated strong learning outcomes among fully trained participants, including increased confidence, clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities, and improved application of PFA principles in school contexts.
5	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 5: Develop a results framework for the programme				Partially Agree	

5.0	Activate the national committee of stakeholders to address the bullying issue through national framework and accountability mechanism that cuts across all ministries and entities.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	The dissemination workshop for the study findings organized by SCMC successfully convened a broad range of stakeholders and helped strengthen cross-sectoral engagement on the issue. While an existing committee on anti-bullying remains relatively inactive, a separate committee led by SCMC and consisting members from MOE, Ministry of Interior and UNICEF, continue to oversee the annual anti-bullying awards initiative. Building on these efforts, UNICEF is currently collaborating with SCMC to establish a high-level multi-sectoral committee with a broader mandate that will also encompass anti-bullying.
5.0	Strengthen the role of SCMC as a third-party monitor, conducting cross-cutting research and playing a monitoring role in multiple child-related areas, including bullying and child protection.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Efforts were undertaken to support the role of SCMC. A team of consultants were brought on board to help support SCMC to fully own the programme. The implementation of the roll out of the anti-bullying programme involved close coordination with SCMC and MOE, with SCMC leading the liason role. Resources were shared regularly by SCMC for inputs periodically. UNICEF has also worked with SCMC on a range of broader child protection issues, thereby building capacity internally for oversight and coordination on issue specific approaches. Currently efforts are underway to reinforce SCMC's role on child protection generally with the development of the National Road Map on EVAC.

5.0	Undertake periodic studies/surveys to track progress of the programme.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Periodic reviews were not institutionalized during the reporting period due to the restructuring of the education sector governance framework, which involved the merger of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Emirates Schools Establishment (ESE) into a single entity. This transition resulted in changes to institutional mandates, reporting arrangements, and coordination mechanisms, which affected the regular implementation of programme monitoring and review processes. As for monitoring, the consultants hired by UNICEF who were invovlved in the training provided insights on the implentation and follow up. Developing of action plan by each schools trained was also an important step towards monitoring. As of now, efforts will be made to promote greater integration at a national level. A key step in this process will be the establishment of a national task force under the auspices of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood (SCMC). The proposed task force will provide strategic oversight, coordinate multi-sectoral implementation, and ensure regular monitoring of progress against agreed targets and outcomes. It will also facilitate periodic reviews, strengthen data collection and analysis, promote stakeholder engagement, and support the generation of lessons learned to inform future planning and policy development. The institutionalization of these M&E mechanisms is expected to enhance programme effectiveness, strengthen accountability, and ensure the timely identification of implementation challenges and opportunities for improvement at both national and sub-national levels.
6	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 6: Accelerate the programme’s implementation				Agree	

6.0	Develop with MOE and ESE action plan with programme, activities, and timeline to roll out the program trainings to reach and activate the program in all schools of UAE	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moat Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	A dissemination workshop organized and a draft of the scale up plan developed. As a result of the scale up plan and its implemenation, 100% of the public and private schools in Abu Dhabi were covered by the programme and capacity was built for reaching 100% of the public schools nationally. Any scale up plan would now be integrated into the multi-sectoral task force to be created nationally.
6.0	Maintain constant review and feedback from all stakeholders and participants in the capacity building process to upgrade and improve training methodology and content.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moat Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Organized coordination meetings using the study and the situational analysis of children in the UAE. UNICEF mobilized a team of consultants to support SCMC to implement the project in coordination with educational entities.
7	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 7: Expand the scope of the programme to deal with the topics mentioned in the school code of conduct, and integrate the beneficiaries' priorities				Agree	
7.0	Roll out the child protection guidance in the MOE	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moat Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Efforts were undertaken to support the Ministry of Education (MOE) in operationalizing and disseminating a child protection guidance framework that had been developed prior to the evaluation. This support aspired to facilitate the activation and practical application of the guidance, with the aim of strengthening child protection mechanisms within the education sector and enhancing the capacity of schools and education personnel to identify, report, and respond to child protection concerns. There has been institutional changes within the Ministry of Education which has hampered this activity. UNICEF has completed the action expected of it.
7.0	Resources to be developed for drugs and addiction	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moat Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Resources were developed and shared with the MOE. The roll out of the same has suffered due to the organizational restructuring.

7.0	Strengthen mechanisms for reporting in schools, with a strong focus on confidentiality – as part of the school guidelines	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Draft resources were developed and shared with the Ministry. A draft of the child protection guidance, prepared prior to the evaluation, was also shared with the Ministry, with key elements further integrated into the PRIMERO adaptation process. While the most recent reporting is not yet available, previous experience indicates that the Ministry of Education has relatively strong mechanisms in place for reporting and follow-up. UNICEF has completed the expected technical inputs and support within the scope of this engagement.
8	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 8: Offer non-school support to regularly bullied students and aggressive bullies				Agree	
8.0	Strengthen and upgrade program manuals to address wider scope of topics (case management, MHPSS, cyber bullying, parenting) and integrate the beneficiaries' priorities	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Support in this area of work included the adaptation and contextualization of PRIMERO for the UAE context, in close coordination with the UAE Ministry of Education and the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood. This included strengthening child protection case management and referral pathways within education and child protection systems, while ensuring alignment with national child safeguarding priorities and digital governance frameworks. Additional support included the adaptation and rollout of the "I Support My Friends" initiative to promote peer-to-peer psychosocial support and student wellbeing in schools, alongside the development of practical guidance for parents, caregivers, and educators on child wellbeing, positive parenting, and online safety. Technical assistance also covered the development of child-friendly digital safety guidance and awareness materials to support safe online engagement, cyber wellness, and protection from digital risks for children and adolescents across the UAE.

8.0	Development of a coordinated integrated case management system (including through PRIMERO roll out)	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Work has been undertaken with ESE (MOE) to support the rollout of PRIMERO in the UAE, aimed at strengthening child protection case management and coordination systems. An MOU was developed between UNICEF and the MOE to formalize collaboration on child protection initiatives and systems strengthening. The file on PRIMERO is currently with the Ministry of Family for review and follow-up on next steps toward endorsement and implementation.
9	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 9: Develop a capacity-building programme for implementation partners				Agree	
9.0	Assess and maximize social workforce support and capacity building plans and initiatives withing MOE and ESE.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Regular capacity-building trainings have been undertaken for child protection specialists to strengthen technical competencies, case management practices, and inter-sectoral coordination. In parallel, a new strategic plan is under development to consolidate and strengthen work related to the social service workforce, with a focus on improving coordination, professional development, and service delivery standards.
9.0	Undertake a national profiling and assessment of the social work workforce	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Cancelled	Negotiations are being held with key partners such as the SCMC and the Ministry of Family.
9.0	Supporting Professional development courses and competency-based trainings on a regular basis.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Regular trainings undertaken for child protection specialists. A new approach nationally is being proposed to key partners.
10	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 10: Position the SCMC as a third-party monitor				Agree	

10.0	Set SCMC in the position of third-party monitor. conducting cross-cutting research and playing a monitoring role in multiple child-related areas, including bullying and child protection.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	Efforts were undertaken to support the role of SCMC. A team of consultants were brought on board to help support SCMC to fully own the programme. The implementation of the roll out of the anti-bullying programme involved close coordination with SCMC and MOE, with SCMC leading the liason role. Resources were shared regularly by SCMC for inputs periodically. UNICEF has also worked with SCMC on a range of broader child protection issues, thereby building capacity internally for oversight and coordination on issue specific approaches. Currently efforts are underway to reinforce SCMC's role on child protection generally with the development of the National Road Map on EVAC.
11	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 11: Build the capabilities of social workers and school staff through a dedicated programme to plug the human-resources gaps among social protection specialists and social workers				Partially Agree	
11.0	Overall engagement with MOE on child well-being with a focus on mental health	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	An MOU has been signed with MOE. The ISMF package has been introduced within the Ministry and work is underway for institutionalizing the same. With a new integrated approach to social work capacities, a new modality is being explored.
12	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 12: Strengthen the UNICEF’s role in the programme to maximise the impacts				Partially Agree	
12.0	Activate the national committee of stakeholders to address the bullying issue through national framework and accountability mechanism that cuts across all ministries and entities, including implementation of a monitoring and evaluation framework.	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	UNICEF is a member of the national committee and would continue to try and encourage SCMC to hold regular coordination meetings. UNICEF is currently working on a Terms of Reference for creating a national multi-sectoral working group that would address a range of issues including anti-bullying.
13	Evaluation Recommendation or Issue 13: Support the scale-up				Agree	
13.0	Develop with MOE and ESE action plan with programme, activities, and timeline to roll out the program trainings to reach and activate the program in all schools of UAE	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	A plan was developed and support was provided.

13.0	SCMC in cooperation with MOE and ESE, support existing schools in the program to lead in scaling up	GAO/UAE	Saji Thomas,Moa Azzam	12/31/2025	Completed	A plan was developed and support was provided. As a result nearly 100% of the schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi was reached and a cadre of trainers were createed within the MOE to take the programme to scale nationally. The next phase of the programme in the country will have wider systems focus with an integrated social work capacity building and overall Ending Violence against Children framing. UAE is currently finalizing national Road Map on EVAC, which will cover elements on safe schools.