



# Evaluation of UNICEF's Protective Environment programme in Tajikistan (2016 - 2022)

July 2022



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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

C4D	Communication for development
CAE	Centres for Additional Education
CBR	Community-based rehabilitation
CFCI	Child-Friendly Cities Initiative
CO	Country office
Covid	Coronavirus disease
CP	Child protection
CRC	Committee on the Rights of the Child
CRIA	Child-Rights Impact Assessment
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CRU	Child Rights Units
CSO	Civil society organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EQ	Evaluation questions
ERG	Evaluation's Reference Group
FCSC	Family and Child Support Centres
GBV	Gender-based violence
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GEROS	UNICEF's Global Evaluation and Research Oversight System
GIS	Georeferenced information systems
GmbH	Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung (Limited Liability Company, in German)
hCTP	Humanitarian Cash Transfer Programme
IM	Inception mission
IR	Inception report
J4C	Justice for Children
JS	Juvenile support
LNOB	Leave no one behind
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MOES	Ministry of Education and Science
MOHSPP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
O4CR	Ombudsman for Child Rights

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPD	Organisation of People with Disabilities
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PE	Protective environment
PPSW	Paraprofessional social worker
QA	Quality assurance
RBA	Rights-based approach
RCI	Residential care institutions
ROM	Results-oriented monitoring
SAHU	Social Assistance at Home Units
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SMR	Strategic moment of reflection
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
ToC	Theory of change
ToR	Terms of reference
UNCRC	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group

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## Executive summary

This report presents the results of the formative and summative evaluation of UNICEF's Protective Environment (PE) programme in Tajikistan over six years from 2016 to 2022. The PE programme had a total planned budget of USD 7.7 million (USD 6.4 million allocated, USD 5.6 million [88%] of which were utilised by April 2022). The programme was designed around three main outputs: O1) Social protection and social work [48% of the utilised budget]; O2) Alternative care [25% of the utilised budget]; and O3) Justice for children and preventing VAC (violence against children) [27% of the utilised budget]. The programme aimed to create necessary mechanisms to enable policy, legal, and operational environments to ensure that the rights of all children, with a focus on the most marginalised, are upheld. For that, it supported systems to ensure that child victims of violence, children in contact with the law, children affected by migration, children with disabilities, and children living in institutions are protected, have access to social and rehabilitation services, are not discriminated against, and live in a safe and supportive family setting<sup>1</sup>.

The **purposes** of this evaluation were to 1) generate sound and credible evidence with a focus on whether the PE programme is contributing effectively and efficiently to ensuring sustainable protective environments for the most vulnerable and marginalised children and on reasons for success or failure (accountability), 2) best practices, gaps, and barriers in the applied approaches and programmatic and strategic choices made in its design and implementation, and 3) lessons to be considered for shaping the future engagement of UNICEF in Tajikistan. In this sense, the evaluation analysed not only the PE programme's success achievements (expected and unexpected) and good practices but also its gaps and challenges faced, identifying lessons learnt and providing recommendations for future programming. The evaluation's **specific objectives** were to: 1) provide an independent assessment of approaches, strategies, and interventions within UNICEF's Protective Environment programme, 2) assess UNICEF's strategic positioning and programmatic choices made, given the government's priorities, the changing socio-economic and political context, and the Covid-19 challenge, 3) identify good practices which contributed to the achievement of intended results and draw lessons on challenges, gaps, and barriers that hindered the progress, 4) provide forward-looking recommendations on how to accelerate actions towards reaching the child-protection related targets. The evaluation **audience** includes primary stakeholders (e.g., state bodies, civil society organisations, and UNICEF) and secondary ones (e.g., multilateral and bilateral donors as well as other UN agencies).

The evaluation was conducted from October 2021 to May 2022 and used a mixed-**methods** approach, including quantitative and qualitative data, both for its collection and analysis, allowing methodological triangulation from the use of different data-collection methods. To provide a quick overview of the results, the evaluation used a simple scoring system<sup>2</sup> for each of the key questions which ranged from very good (score 5, grade A) to very poor (score 1, grade E). The evaluation used a theory-based approach to assessing the PE programme and its three core strategic outputs and activities based on its theory of change (ToC) as well as complementary documentary evidence such as yearly output and outcome statements and country reports. In addition, the evaluation included a primary data collection, aimed at understanding and assessing the contribution of the programme to the expected short-term outputs and medium-term outcomes as well as towards longer-term impacts and sustainability. The evaluation followed the UNEG **ethical standards**<sup>3</sup>, and the inception report and questionnaires as well as informed consent/assent forms and protection protocols went through an external ethical review commissioned by UNICEF from an independent contractor.

Data collection took place in January and April 2022 and included the following **sources**: a) document review, including programme documents (e.g., PE work plans, programmatic reviews, ToC, annual reports, and other reference documents); b) phone survey with 203 participants from school staff, beneficiaries (children, youths, and young adults), parents, community representatives, local authority representatives, and NGO representatives; c) 24 key-informant interviews and 8 focus-group discussions (a total of 63 people) that took place remotely and in two selected regions (Panjakent, Sughd province and Kulob, Khatlon region) and included the following stakeholders: ministry representatives (11)<sup>4</sup>, local authority representatives (4), NGO representatives (4), UNICEF staff (5), youths aged 14-17 years (12), parents/guardians of minors aged 17 and younger (23), school staff (2), and children aged 13 years and younger (2); d) an online survey involving 15

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Country Office Annual Report 2018.

<sup>2</sup> This scoring system and key evaluation questions are based on EuropeAid's methodology of Results Oriented Monitoring. EuropeAid (2012) ROM Handbook. Available at: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/rom/>.

<sup>3</sup> UNEG (2020) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. Available at <http://www.unevaluation.org>.

<sup>4</sup> As from UNICEF feedback, According to UNICEF's feedback on the draft report, in the list of interviewees none of the interviewed persons can be categorised as a "representative" of a ministry. They are either representatives of ministry sub-structures or local authorities. Additional information is available in the section 2.2 (limitations).



participants, among them UNICEF staff (6), NGO representatives (5), local authority representatives (2), ministry representatives (1), and other public international/regional organisations (1).

The **summary of the main findings** is presented below by evaluation criterion. The scores were calculated from the evaluative scale-based questions in the phone interviews and online surveys. The evaluation scores by the evaluation team were based on the assessment of the overall quantitative and qualitative findings, considering all primary and secondary sources:

**Relevance and design (4.3 – ‘good’):** The programme was highly relevant due to its sound intervention logic and theory of change, which have been informed by an analysis of the needs of vulnerable children and youths, including the geographical distribution of vulnerabilities. The programme addressed explicitly the most vulnerable, including children in contact and conflict with the law, children at risk of institutionalisation, children from war-affected zones, and children and women with disabilities. The programme’s implementation strategy was relevant due to its focus on an evidence-based approach supporting changes at system level by strengthening policy and legal frameworks for child protection and providing technical assistance for the revision and development of policies. The 2018 revision of the ToC helped the programme to stay relevant, according to the progress made at that time and changes in the context. The reviewed key programme documents and annual reports suggest that the programme design followed a [Right-Based Approach](#) (RBA) and [Leave-No-One-Behind](#) (LNOB) principles. Gender aspects seem to have been mainstreamed, and there are activities focused on girl/women empowerment. In line with the recommendation 2, A specific gender action plan for the PE programme, coordinated by the Gender Focal Point, can help to guide the programme in developing specific activities to track and address specific gender-related protection issues, in line with the recommendations of the Country Programme Evaluation (2020) and the Gender Programmatic Review (2019). The results of the multivariate regression analysis<sup>5</sup> model indicate that additional focus on the specific needs of girls and young women<sup>6</sup> could help to improve the future performance of the programme. Improvements could also take place to address the issues of child labour related to housekeeping among female children and adolescents as well as hooliganism (e.g., prevention of violence at community level). Additional cross-sectoral work can help to address some of the most-frequently mentioned needs, which suggest synergy opportunities with health and education sectors. Addressing emerging topics which have been identified among the key protection needs such as guidance on digital protection, including the appropriate and safe use of mobile phones and internet, could contribute to increased outcomes and impact. Healthy use of technology is becoming a key source of intergenerational conflict, which is highly relevant for child protection and prevention of violence against children<sup>7</sup>, and helps children to be safe online and make the most of new media and technology<sup>8</sup>.

**Coherence (4.4 – ‘good’):** The programme successfully generated significant policy and system level changes that helped to improve policies at national and local levels and support a better protective environment for children. UNICEF’s evidence-driven advocacy of policy revision resulted in concrete contributions to national and institutional policies based on a strong partnership with the Government of Tajikistan (e.g., revision of two important provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code and amendment to the Code of Administrative Offences to introduce administrative punishment for parents and/or caregivers for using or threatening to use violence against children). There is evidence of synergy with other child protection-related interventions (e.g., work with migrants with the Ministry of Labour as well as issuance of legal documents with the Ministry of Justice) that support the PE programme, and vice versa. Internal coherence is high with evidence of synergies and interlinkages between the PE programme and other interventions carried out. There is a high consistency of the PE programme with the relevant national and international policies, norms and standards (e.g., National Development Strategy 2030, Mid-term Development Programme, draft National Programme for Children 2030<sup>9</sup>). The evaluation results suggest a very high external coherence. The programme’s cross-sectoral and integrated approach offers concrete examples of the benefits, which were critically important to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups had better access to services that respond to their needs. While the programme took

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<sup>5</sup> Multivariate regressions explore the relationship between multiple variables in datasets (see: <https://movimenter.co/3FYt4Se>).

<sup>6</sup> This can include additional efforts around monitoring differences based on violence against girls and boys; their domestic and paid work roles; access to services; activities promoting equal and peaceful relations between boys and girls; negotiation of gender promotion with family and community; steps to reduce the risk of sexual violence and exploitation in public and private settings; strengthening of protection complaints mechanisms (see more at <https://movimenter.co/genderinchildprotection>).

<sup>7</sup> See: PEW Research Centre (2020) Parenting approaches and concerns related to digital devices. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/07/28/parenting-approaches-and-concerns-related-to-digital-devices/>

<sup>8</sup> See: Harvard University (2020) Experts offer advice on how to become a ‘connected parent’. Available at: <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/12/how-parents-can-manage-children-and-their-technology-use/>

<sup>9</sup> The programme contributed to SDGs 1 (end poverty in all its forms everywhere), 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), and 16 (promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels).

sufficiently into account vulnerability assessments in its design and implementation, the use of objective consistent vulnerability criteria is not fully in place due to data-access issues. A methodology note exists describing an office-wide child-vulnerability index, which attempts to answer the recommendations from the CPE 2020 and uses a composite approach without weights with indicators including on PE at district level, while violence against children and nutrition indicators exist at a provincial level. The PE programme had a good alignment with the SDGs 1, 5, and 16, with important synergies with other programmatic areas of the CO (e.g., education sector as well as with the programme on data and evidence for children). The results suggest that the PE programme had sufficient complementarity, harmonisation and coordination with development partners and other UN agencies, adding value while avoiding duplication. For example, under the UNICEF-UNHCR Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality, in 2021 over 1,250 children at risk of statelessness and affected by migration from 26 districts and cities received birth certificates. In coordination with the World Bank, the PE programme and the UNICEF CO supported inclusion of low-income families with children under 7 years of age into the emergency COVID-19 hCTP cash-transfer programme, which is another example of coordination of support and synergies between development partners.

**Effectiveness (4.4 – 'good'):** Considering the challenge related to COVID-19, the programme demonstrated a good achievement of its objectives and results. From its 14 indicators, nine have been met or exceeded, while the rest were considered as partially achieved. For two of the achieved indicators, the programme delivered two to three times higher figures than the initial targets (indicator 1.1 with 271% of the target and indicator 3.1 with 251%). From the five indicators which had not met targets, two demonstrated progress of at least 70% of their targets. The results suggest that the programme integrated well the three main programmatic areas (alternative care of children, justice for children, and preventing violence against children) with other components of children's rights, for example, education and nutrition. There is strong evidence that the PE programme successfully adapted to major factors influencing the implementation during the evaluation period. UNICEF's liaison with the government offered examples of best practices, which led to a strong partnership from 2019 onwards. UNICEF recognised and reacted to the new context posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, showing very good capacity of the PE programme to adapt the context while leveraging resources for the achievement of its objectives and results. A narrative analysis of the data related to internal and external factors that influenced the implementation of the programme suggests a very good cooperation between all parties involved, including with the governmental institutions. There are examples of concrete new partnerships (e.g., work with migrants with the Ministry of Labour; facilitation of issuance of legal documents by the Ministry of Justice; and dialogue with key development partners for raising USD 5.4 million, which benefited the PE programme and other country office programmes), which are consistent with the answers from both UNICEF and government respondents. Since 2019, the RAM reports have started to include a specific section on 'Evaluations', which was a very good decision and places emphasis on UNICEF's evidence-driven approach. Documentary evidence indicates that UNICEF has implemented recommendations from earlier evaluations. In the 2021 RAM report, the implementation of 8 of the 16 actions from the 2020 CPE recommendations had been reported to be completed. From the response matrix, it is difficult to assess its current implementation as it is relatively recent and focuses on the whole country programme. However, in the online survey (institutional stakeholders), the implementation of the recommendations of earlier evaluations was among the aspects that received the lowest scores (3.4 – regular). The overall results suggest that this is an area for improvement. There is strong evidence that the PE programme has been making progress towards its objectives, considering the results and progress as from the narrative annual reports and evidence from the primary data collection. For instance, in the online survey and phone interviews, most of the participants (67%, 15 participants) rated positively the extent to which the programme objectives had been achieved (see Annex 10 for details). It is clear from the responses to the KIIs/FGDs with beneficiaries that the support received was helpful to their lives.

**Efficiency (4.4 – 'good'):** The evaluation did not include a cost analysis (how costs compare to similar interventions or standards). However, it asked questions around efficiency, which help to assess the programme performance in this regard. The PE programme had a very good management quality and efficiency, considering the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. By April 2022, the PE programme had utilised 88% of the USD 6.4 million planned since 2016. Output 1 (Social protection and social work) was the largest one throughout the period, with the exception of 2018, when Output 2 (Alternative childcare) saw a higher allocation in support of the conversion of baby homes to family and child-support centres. The largest budget allocation and utilisation was in 2019, when also Output 3 (J4C and VAC) reached its peak, at higher values than Output 2. This budget allocation remained similar between 2019 and 2022, following a reduction in the budget allocation for alternative childcare considering the successful transformation from baby homes to family and child-support centres as from 2019. Despite the low budget compared to other country programme components, PE programme successfully achieved its planned outcomes. The programme had sufficiently detailed two-year work plans. However, it is unclear since when this started. The joint work planning with government partners added value and is a good

practice, especially considering that the PE programme had diverse and broad range of partners. The work plan for 2021-2022 included activities, sub-activities, geographical coverage by sub-activity, implementing partners, timeline by quarter, and budget information such as amount funded and funds to be mobilised. However, the work plan did not contain information on outputs for all sub-activities, which can be improved to ease results-oriented management. The evaluation team did not have access to the internal corporate systems (e.g., Etools). The results indicate that The programme has a highly functional, sufficient, and goal-oriented management system, grounded on UNICEF's procedures. Improvements may include the use of a more granular, specific commercial digital/cloud project-management information system to coordinate the PE programme intervention tasks internally and with external implementation partners and for improved tracking and visibility of results in terms of short-term outputs beyond intermediate and long-term changes highlighted in the ToC and RAM reports. More systematic use of the [RBA \(rights-based approach\)](#), namely building stakeholder interest groups to define representatives to participate in yearly planning and review workshops, particularly involving beneficiary and government representatives, can help to improve the opinions about transparency and accountability, while supporting increased local ownership.

**Impact (4.3 – 'good'):** There is strong evidence that the PE programme had a good performance against its pre-defined indicator targets, considering the COVID-19 challenges. Primary data show positive opinions among beneficiaries and other key stakeholders about impact performance. By April 2022, four out of nine outcome-level indicators (44%) had been fully achieved. Among the five outcome indicators that had been partially achieved, three had achieved at least 70%. At the output level, the best performance in indicator achievement was seen in the alternative care component, followed by social protection and social work. Component 3 (J4C and VAC) showed the most areas for improvement in achieving output targets. The PE programme's advocacy of policy revision and cooperation with the government resulted in important policy and institutional changes that advanced children's rights in Tajikistan. Such changes include various policy revisions in the J4C system, the transformation of baby homes to child and family support centres, improved focus on children with disabilities, and capacity-development actions that concretely improve institutional responses to violence against children and emergencies. Opinions from key stakeholders about the programme's contribution to children's rights are very positive and contained requests for the continuation of the support. Key impact areas from the multiple evaluation sources include: 1) development of capacities of social service staff to improve assistance to beneficiaries including home visits, psychological and legal support; 2) increased awareness (also among children) and support related to children's rights, gender issues, and special needs of children with disabilities in the centres; 3) production of documented knowledge about the situation of the most vulnerable families; 4) equipment and training support to FCSCs. A government representative mentioned a "real change" in terms of "regular involvement and support of children with special needs in the centres that were not [present] in the past". Some responses from multiple stakeholder categories to this and other questions above suggest that the programme can contribute to reducing criminality and violence (e.g., reduced bullying), which could be assessed in future impact assessments. Answers from parents suggest an integrated and comprehensive approach, including improved knowledge of legal processes (e.g., steps to obtain documents) and cross-sectoral support in terms of job skills and professional orientation (e.g., car repair and electricians) delivered by other interventions. The results show awareness of UNICEF staff that impact assessment requires further analysis after some time (e.g., 2-4 years) after the support has been delivered to beneficiaries. Responses from local authorities mentioned that the programme helped the government to do its job better and faster and made certain local institutions focus on the rights of CWDs. NGO representatives pointed out that the local culture and parents' attitudes limit the advancement of gender issues and children rights. According to UNICEF staff, gender mainstreaming needs improvement. The analysis of the answers suggests some areas for improvement such as 1) increased duration of programme support and 2) increased focus on gender issues.

**Sustainability (4.3 – 'good'):** The programme has successfully influenced local, regional, and national policies and public services. Considering evidence from primary data, public representatives and families clearly identify child protection policies as a public responsibility. The opinions of beneficiaries are very positive, with 97% of the 203 beneficiaries in phone interviews highly satisfied with the programme and over 87% considering that the programme delivered long-lasting results. Views from institutional stakeholders contrast with the positive views from the beneficiaries in the phone survey. There are concerns about the sustainability of the support, also in terms of dependency on the support for the continuation of some benefits. Considering the primary evidence, the results suggest that implementing partners (institutional stakeholders) assessed the ownership of the programme as 'regular', and this is one of the main areas for improvement. Although there is evidence of a very good relationship with the state institutions, the evaluation did not identify documentary evidence of kick-off, planning or review meetings during the implementation with the participation of key stakeholders such as representatives of beneficiaries. As mentioned in the key finding 4.i (see section 3.2.4 on efficiency), building stakeholder interest groups to define representatives to participate in yearly planning and review workshops,

particularly involving beneficiaries (e.g., children, youths, parents, community leaders, PWDs, and implementing partners) and government representatives, can help to improve the opinions about local ownership, transparency, and accountability. It is clear from the phone survey and FGDs that beneficiaries and their families identify a sustainable effect on their lives (see also answers to EQ20). There is enough documentary evidence that government structures (local, regional, national) will continue to benefit based on outputs such as system and policy changes (see EQ5 and Annex 12), studies/assessments, capacity building, and material support (see EQ20) provided by the PE programme, particularly in the justice system, SAHUs (Social Assistance at Home Units), FCSCs (Family and Child Support Centres), and schools. The opinions from key stakeholders indicate a high likelihood of continuation of the generated benefits but raise concerns about the resources and technical capacity to maintain such benefits in the long term. The programme strengthened the structures and capacities of its partners from a long-term perspective. Opinions from institutional stakeholders about the programme contribution to building local capacities show a high level of satisfaction but also areas for improvements. The programme has no formal [exit strategy](#) prepared with the involvement of representatives of beneficiaries and other key stakeholders. The participatory development of an exit strategy is a good practice for sustainability and can contribute to improving the programme performance in this sense.

For concision, the **key recommendations of high priority** are presented below. A full list is available in chapter 5. **lessons learnt and best practices** are presented following the conclusions in chapter 6.

- **Recommendation 1** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – Develop narrative descriptions to complement current programme documents where objectives, intervention logic, planned activities, cross-cutting approaches, related SDGs and monitoring mechanisms (targets and indicators) are mentioned and explained.
- **Recommendation 2** (Responsible: UNICEF and National Government / Priority: High) – Develop a specific gender-action plan for the programme including specific activities and targets/indicators to track progress. We recommend explicit reference to the specific cross-cutting issues in the theory of changes of future programmes, to clarify which aspects they intend to address, including specific activities (inputs).
- **Recommendation 3** (Responsible: UNICEF and Government at all levels / Priority: High) – There is an emerging need for introducing a proper case-management system at the ground level, which the programme can contribute to. We recommend seizing this opportunity to introduce more detailed beneficiary registration forms, in line with the recommendations of the CRC concluding observations of 2017 around data collection.
- **Recommendation 4** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – Consider using administrative data or commissioning primary data collection at household and district level to independently build composite vulnerability indexes (specific related to protection indicator and ideally including also standard development indicators such as the [poverty probability index](#), [life-satisfaction index](#) or [coping strategy index](#)). Data collection can be eased with tools such as [RapidPro](#), which UNICEF has been successfully using worldwide to build nationally scalable mobile applications. This can help to build capacities of government partners while validating/triangulating official data, helping to improve vulnerability targeting and disaggregation of data by multiple demographic and geospatial variables (e.g., village, jamoat, district and province levels).
- **Recommendation 5** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – We recommend to improve / scale up the programme outreach to remote villages compared to urban areas. Adaptations to the needs of those participants in rural areas (e.g., additional focus on households whose livelihoods depend on cattle raising, which may be more vulnerable to child labour), can help to improve the programme performance.
- **Recommendation 6** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – We recommend additional focus on the needs of primary-grade participants (e.g., age specific materials and contents) as it could help to improve the programme performance, particularly considering that this group represents most of the respondents, and lower educational levels are usually correlated with higher vulnerability.
- **Recommendation 7** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – We recommend scaling up activities related to building capacities and raising awareness for prevention of violence against children. The output 3 (Justice for children and preventing VAC) was the programme component with the lowest budget share [27% of utilised budget]. In addition, the outcome indicator 5 (“Percentage of parents who consider physical punishment of their children acceptable under given circumstances”) saw an increase from 16% in 2017 to 16.4% in 2021 as from the RAM reports.
- **Recommendation 8** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – Develop an explicit [exit strategy](#) in a participatory way that describes how the programme intends to end its support, ensuring that the achievement of programme goals (assistance or development) is not compromised and that progress towards these goals continues. The participatory development of an exit strategy is a good practice for sustainability, and can contribute to improve the programme performance in this sense.

# 1 Introduction

The evaluation of UNICEF's Protective Environment (PE) programme in Tajikistan will be presented here, covering six of the seven years of the country programme from 2016 to 2022. The evidence and forward-looking recommendations generated by the evaluation will be used by the government and UNICEF during implementation of the remaining part of the current country programme as well as to inform the 2023-2026 country programme planning process. The PE programme covered the whole country and had a total planned budget of USD 7.7 million (USD 6.4 million allocated, of which 88% were utilised). The programme aimed to build a protective environment for children that prevents and responds to deprivation, violence, abuse, and neglect, especially for the most vulnerable. Three key outputs guided the programme implementation, namely: O1) social protection and social work, O2) alternative care, and O3) justice for children and preventing violence against children (VAC). The programme strived to strengthen the existing systems to ensure that rights holders such as child victims of violence, children in contact with the law, children affected by migration, children with disabilities, and children living in institutions are protected, have access to social and rehabilitation services, are not discriminated against, and live in a safe and supportive family setting.

The programme involved a range of interventions implemented by various civil society partners<sup>10</sup> in partnership with state actors at national and sub-national levels (duty bearers). The PE programme and this evaluation involved the Commission on Child Rights (CCR)<sup>11</sup> under the government of the Republic of Tajikistan chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of Tajikistan (and the Department of Child Rights Protection of the Presidential Executive Office serving as Secretary to the Commission on Child Rights).

## 1.1 Context and intervention

The Republic of Tajikistan has one of the youngest populations in Central Asia<sup>12</sup>: Of its 9.7 million inhabitants, around 37% are below 15 years of age. According to the World Bank, although Tajikistan showed progress in terms of poverty reduction between 2013 and 2019 (poverty rates of the total population decreased from 34% to 26%), national poverty rates have stalled since then and are currently projected for 2022 at 25.9%<sup>13</sup>. There is a substantial geographic variation in the overall and children's poverty rates in Tajikistan, and rural areas are substantially poorer than urban areas<sup>14</sup>. This suggests that Tajikistan's socio-economic context puts vulnerable families under economic stress, making them struggle to meet their basic needs, while the state only provides an insufficient child-protection and justice system.

The social and economic wellbeing of the population severely deteriorated following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the second half of 2020. According to the World Bank, loss of livelihoods, a deterioration of food security, and a decrease in remittance income that made families struggle to meet their basic needs have been reported as impacts to the pandemic<sup>15</sup>. Increased consumer prices together with falling household income has resulted in the rise of food insecurity, particularly for households depending on formal wages and those without remittance income, which are currently affected by the Russian war in the Ukraine<sup>16</sup> with its substantial challenges to the sustainability of past and ongoing support actions.

Due to a combination of a high unemployment rate and low incomes, Tajikistan is one of the most remittance-dependent countries in the world, and Russia is a top destination for Tajik migrant workers. According to the World Bank, remittances accounted for 27% of the total GDP of Tajikistan in 2020<sup>17</sup>. In 2021, Tajik labour migration to Russia hit a historic high with more than 2 million Tajik migrants registered by the Interior Ministry of Russia, 1.6 million of whom indicated work as their primary and official purpose for migration. In 2019, the remittances which Tajik workers sent from Russia exceeded US\$2.6 billion, which was about three times more

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<sup>10</sup> These include (not exclusively) the Legal Initiative; NGO Hayot dar Oila; HealthProm; Aga Khan Development Network; Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities; Caritas Germany in Tajikistan; the Red Crescent Society; Terre des Hommes; CESVI; and EHYO.

<sup>11</sup> The Commission is a permanent, interdepartmental, consultative body established to coordinate the activities of state, non-governmental bodies, and international organisations and bodies involved in working with children in need of special measures of protection. The members of the Commission include government ministries, agencies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, and religious figures. Source: Terms of reference, please see annexes.

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF (2021) Country office Annual Report 2020 Tajikistan. <https://movimenter.co/38PpE7O>

<sup>13</sup> World Bank (2021) Poverty in Tajikistan 2021. <https://movimenter.co/3Ob7vkQ>

<sup>14</sup> Tajik Agency on Statistics (2022) Child Poverty in Tajikistan. <https://stat.tj/en/welfare-of-the-population>

<sup>15</sup> World Bank (n.d.) Economic and social impacts of COVID-19: Update from listening to Tajikistan.

<sup>16</sup> Geopolitica (2022) The impact of the Russian-Ukraine war on the Central Asian economy. Available at: <https://movimenter.co/38PTKrN>

<sup>17</sup> World Bank (2022) Personal Remittances, received (% of GDP) – Tajikistan. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=TJ>



than the value of all other Tajik exports that year combined<sup>18</sup>. In this context, sudden shocks and economic downturns in Russia directly impact on the Tajik economy as well as the ability of households to provide for their members. It can be expected that this will even worsen in view of the recent sanctions against Russia as result of the Russian invasion in the Ukraine. Also, the emerging phenomenon of migrant workers who have been deported and face a re-entry ban into Russia returning to Tajikistan is likely to have serious consequences on families and children.

Amid the fallout of the economic and social situation of households, the well-being of children is under pressure, undermining progress diminishing extreme poverty. Although school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>19</sup> have been limited in Tajikistan, children's education is hindered by an increased exposure to violence and exploitation, such as early marriages, child recruitment to militias, sexual exploitation of girls and young women, teenage pregnancies, and child labour<sup>20</sup>.

The concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Tajikistan on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, dated back from 2017. This document emphasised as main areas of concern and recommendations: corporal punishment, family environment, children with disabilities, health and health services, in particular, nutrition, and administration of juvenile justice. The concluding observations on the combined sixth to seventh periodic reports (2022) highlighted some important policy changes and progress towards past concerns and recommendations. This included legal amendments providing additional guarantees for orphans and children left without parental care (Resolution No. 419 of the Government of Tajikistan of 6 October 2016), for example. The amendments and additions to the State Registration of Civil Status Acts of 19 July 2019, No. 1637, were adopted and helped to implement the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the free issue of a child's birth certificate submitted no later than three months after birth.

The CO also introduced, together with the government of Tajikistan, the new National Program for Children for 2020–2030 as a response to the recommendations given to by UNICEF to the government after submitting the latest report on the state of child rights in the country. The Program outlines the main priorities of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan in the framework of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to children.

In this context, the PE programme forms part of UNICEF's 2016-2022 country programme in Tajikistan and is based on the following outputs, which were covered in this evaluation:

- **O1) Social protection and social work:** By 2022, the most vulnerable girls and boys will have increased inclusive access to social benefits and quality social work services.
- **O2) Alternative care:** By 2020, girls and boys, including children with disabilities, in institutions, and children at risk of family separation have increased access to family- and community-based alternative care.
- **O3) Justice for children and preventing VAC (violence against children):** By 2022, boys and girls, including those in contact with the law, benefit from programmes that prevent and respond to VAC and a strengthened child-friendly justice system.

The causes for child institutionalisation are directly related to the SDGs 1 (end poverty in all its forms everywhere). This context requires the promotion of appropriate social protection systems (target 1.3), the creation of pro-poor and gender-sensitive policy frameworks (target 1.b). An adequate protective environment requires consideration for the SDG 4 (target 4.5: Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations) and 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls). More specifically, gender disparities must be eliminated and children with disabilities and in vulnerable situations included (targets 4.2, 4.5, and 4.a), discrimination and violence against girls and women need to be fought against. The PE programme is also directly related to SDG 16, the strengthening of legal institutions (promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels), since it involves ending abuse and violence against children (target 16.2) and contributed to providing legal identity for all (target 16.9).

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EurasiaNet (2021) Tajik Labour migration to Russia hits historic, officially. Nov. 2021 Eurasianet. <https://eurasianet.org/tajik-labor-migration-to-russia-hits-historic-high-officially>

<sup>19</sup> See: <https://www.unicef.org/tajikistan/stories/children-tajikistan-return-safer-schools-amid-covid-19> and

<sup>20</sup>

UNESCO (2021) Adverse consequences of school closures. Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>. Access on 20 May 2022.

### 1.1.1 Intervention logic

- According to its 2018 theory of change<sup>21</sup>, the overall developmental **outcome** (impact) of the PE programme was: “Children who are most at risk benefit from a better-functioning protective environment that prevents and responds to deprivation, violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect”. The programme aimed to achieve this outcome through the following **outputs**: 1) By 2020 the most vulnerable children have increased access to social benefits and quality social work services; 2) By 2020 children in institutions and children at risk of family separation have increased access to family and community based alternative care; and 3) By 2020 children in contact with the law benefit from strengthened justice system. The programme followed the activities described below, as from the programme’s 2021-2022 two-year action plan, with the intention of leading to the following intermediate changes: 1) National stakeholders recognise and support the revision of laws and policy documents to better support the realisation of child rights; 2) National stakeholders are convinced about the efficiency of allocations; 3) M&E systems for the protection of children are capacitated and operational; 4) Systems at the local level are in place; 5) Para-social workers are capacitated to deliver their expanded mandate; 6) Government cash-assistance programmes are child-sensitive, and eligibility criteria and selection procedures are streamlined; 7) Budgetary allocations are child-focused and child-sensitive; 8) Curricula for pre- and in-service training on practical social work are developed and accredited; 9) Childcare professionals and foster carers are capacitated; 10) Task shifting of Family and Child Support Centre (FCSC) is effective; 11) Legal framework is revised for greater alignment with the UNCRC (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and other international standards; 12) Disaggregated data on protection of children is generated and updated regularly; 13) An increased number of vulnerable children benefit from quality integrated social-work interventions; 14) TSA (Targeted Social Assistance) benefit amount is increased based on the number of children in the household; 15) Enrolment in the disability pension is simplified; 16) Number of accredited PPSW has increased; 17) Number of children sent to RCIs is reduced; 18) Children in contact with the law are handled in a child-friendly manner. Rehabilitation and reintegration of children in conflict with the law and reduced rate of offending and re-offending.

#### Core output components (2021-2022 action plan)

**O1) Social protection and social work:** By 2022, the most vulnerable girls and boys will have increased inclusive access to social benefits and quality social work services.

- **Activity 1:** Promote social inclusion of children and women with disabilities through awareness-raising interventions and advocacy.
  - *Activity 1.1:* Conduct communication for social-change interventions to promote the rights of children and women with disabilities.
  - *Activity 1.2:* Strengthen the role of the OPD and other CSOs to advocate for the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, with a focus on children and women with disabilities.
  - *Activity 1.3:* Sustain the community-based rehabilitation interventions in Rasht district within the CFCL initiative.
- **Activity 2:** Support the reintegration of children separated from their families and address the needs of child protection in emergency situations.
  - *Activity 2.1:* Reintegrate repatriated children from war-affected zones.
  - *Activity 2.2:* Strengthen existing systems to plan for and render psychosocial support before and after emergencies and disability inclusion during emergencies.
- **Activity 3:** A well-formed and supported system of social-work workforce development.
  - *Activity 3.1:* Develop and operationalise a comprehensive system of social-work workforce (composed of mapping, planning, licensing, training and supervision, and supporting).
  - *Activity 3.2:* Capacitate para-social workers from 5 targeted SAHUs on different thematic sessions (children with disabilities, in foster care, at risk of institutionalisation, in contact with the law, in migration context, etc.).
- **Activity 4:** Integrated and person-centred system of social protection.
  - *Activity 4.1:* Strengthen data-collection systems on better coverage of vulnerable children.
  - *Activity 4.2:* Make the social-protection system child-sensitive, hCTP-inclusive, and well-functioning.
  - *Activity 4.3:* Ensure access of children affected by migration to essential services, including birth registration.
  - *Activity 4.4:* Pilot an hCTP module during emergencies.

**O2) Alternative care:** By 2020, girls and boys, including children with disabilities, in institutions, and children at risk of family separation have increased access to family- and community-based alternative care.

<sup>21</sup> See Annex 7



- **Activity 1:** Advocate for amendments of the national legislation related to alternative family care in the country to promote community and family-based support to children without family care.
  - *Activity 1.1:* Support the working group on development of the law on guardianship based on the current practices in the country.
  - *Activity 1.2:* Advocate for approval and implementation of the methodological guidance for the Commission on Child Rights related to children without family care.
  - *Activity 1.3:* Hold a series of consultations at national and local level to align the work of gatekeeping mechanisms to address the needs of children without family care.
- **Activity 2:** Generate evidence related to children without family care aimed at reintegration of children with their biological/extended families.
  - *Activity 2.1:* Carry out assessment of families whose children are in residential childcare institutions.
  - *Activity 2.2:* Monitor selected residential childcare institutions.
  - *Activity 2.3:* Conduct a roundtable for presenting the results of the monitoring of selected residential childcare institutions.
- **Activity 3:** Promote community and family-based alternative family care for children without family care or at risk of being placed in residential childcare institutions.
  - *Activity 3.1:* Operationalise family and child-support centres through reallocation of funds, technical support, capacity-building interventions, and implementation of the newly introduced family and child-support services.
  - *Activity 3.2:* Promote foster care and existing guardianship mechanisms in the country as part of alternative family care through advocacy, evidence generation, legislation amendments, development of bylaws, curriculum revision, capacity building, and service provision.
  - *Activity 3.3:* Place children affected by violence in a safe and protective family environment.
- **Activity 4:** Strengthen the child-protection system at national level and in targeted districts in Tajikistan as per CFCI in the country (support for better functioning and capacity building of the CRU and CCR members in CFCI districts).
  - *Activity 4.1:* Develop/revise the training module at the Academy of Public Administration to provide pre- and in-service training on child-rights issues in general and on child protection in particular.
  - *Activity 4.2:* Provide short-term training orientation sessions for the Secretaries of the Commission on Child Rights.

**O3) Justice for children and preventing violence against children:** By 2022, boys and girls, including those in contact with the law, benefit from programmes that prevent and respond to VAC and a strengthened child-friendly justice system.

- **Activity 1:** Promote justice systems that guarantee equal access, benefits, protection, and support to children (enabling environment).
  - *Activity 1.1:* Advocate for the revision of the national legislation to introduce amendments to protect the rights of children, be it offenders, victims, or witnesses of crime, including the implementation of the National Plan of Action of Justice for children system reform and on prevention of offences among children and youths.
  - *Activity 1.2:* Monitor and document legal processes for children, in particular girl victims and witnesses of crime/violence, to identify and address shortfalls regarding the protection of, and support to, victims and witnesses.
  - *Activity 1.3:* Strengthen the capacities of law enforcement, judiciary, defence lawyers, and O4CR on child protection and diversion and on working with victims and witnesses of crime/violence.
  - *Activity 1.4:* Open four child-friendly interview rooms in the Prosecutor's office, Ministry of the Interior to connect with child-friendly courtrooms.
- **Activity 2:** Prevent unnecessary contact with the justice system and the criminalisation of children and respond to needs of children in contact with the law (prevention and response).
  - *Activity 2.1:* Provide juvenile support services to children in conflict with the law allowing diversion from the formal justice system (7 CAEs in Sughd region).
  - *Activity 2.2:* Expand the number of juvenile-support services in Dushanbe, DRS, and Khatlon.
  - *Activity 2.3:* Build the capacity of professionals providing juvenile-support services including child-rights units.
  - *Activity 2.4:* Bring in education, rehabilitation, and reintegration to the boys' colony.
- **Activity 3:** Prevent all forms of violence against children (VAC).
  - *Activity 3.1:* Promote positive parenting in families, communities, and schools to prevent SGBV (sexual and gender-based violence) against girls and violence against children.
  - *Activity 3.2:* Establish a network of NGOs to deliver community-based services to child victims of violence. Psychosocial support, legal support, court representation, and social-worker support.
  - *Activity 3.3:* Build the capacity on VAC for teachers, home-visiting professionals, social workers, and CRU officers in six targeted districts.
- **Activity 4:** Establish and sustain the foundations for change through empowerment and participation of children in all decisions that affect their lives (O4CR).
  - *Activity 4.1:* Improve child-friendly complaint mechanisms within the O4CR including development of the referral system for individual complaints.
  - *Activity 4.2:* Increase the awareness of children about the O4CR through community meetings and dissemination of advocacy materials.
- **Activity 5:** Carry out advocacy meetings and workshops.

### 1.1.2 Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the performance and effectiveness of UNICEF's Protective Environment Programme, including child protection agenda and social protection interventions in Tajikistan 2016-2022<sup>22</sup>. It focused on the extent to which the PE programme is contributing effectively and efficiently to ensuring sustainable protective environments for the most vulnerable and marginalised children. The evaluation aimed at providing information on successes and areas for improvement, identifying best practices, gaps, and barriers in the applied approaches, and programmatic and strategic choices made in its design and implementation. Also, it aimed at providing insights and recommendations for the implementation of the country programme and UNICEF's work in Tajikistan.

The evidence and forward-looking recommendations generated by the evaluation will be used by the government and UNICEF during implementation of the remaining part of the current country programme as well as to inform the 2023-2027 CP planning process, which will commence in late 2021. It will also contribute to a more evidence-based advocacy and development of the child protection system in the country. More specifically the evaluation will help UNICEF and partners in the following:

1. The evaluation findings on the effectiveness of different PE interventions at national and sub-national level will allow dropping or scaling them up depending on the needs of those most vulnerable.
2. Generated evidence on good practices and lessons learned on the gaps, bottlenecks, barriers and challenges will enable UNICEF, government and other partners to develop a vision towards ensuring protective environment for children and to shape the child protection policy agenda grounded in national realities and context, informed by needs and preferences of those most marginalized.
3. The evaluation findings will help to define a clear vision on how to accelerate actions/progress towards reaching the child-protection related targets and commitments.

The PE programme included interventions in partnership with several stakeholders such as government institutions (e.g., Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population (MoHSPP), Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Justice (MoJ), and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), the commissioner for Children's rights and other independent child rights institutions), development partners, and civil society (e.g., Caritas Germany, Red Cross, HealthProm, and CESVI). The PE programme worked closely with international and national development partners to implement the programme's activities: for example, the collaboration with the European Union and the government to finalise the draft National Social Protection Strategy in 2016<sup>23</sup> as well as strategic partnerships with the World Bank, the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Other examples are UNICEF's partnership with the World Bank, which allowed baseline data on the economic situation of Tajik families to be generated through the Listening to Tajikistan survey in 2016. The 2018 collaboration with the World Bank and the statistics agency, which allowed the introduction of a child poverty measurement methodology in the poverty measurement system<sup>24</sup>. Other partners include the Ombudsman for Child Rights (focusing on assistance on institutional strengthening) and national and international NGOs (examples: CESVI and Istituto degli Innocenti for formative research implementation and Refugee Children and Vulnerable Children (RCVC) for assistance of refugees in the field). One of the flagship results in 2020, the transformation of baby homes into family- and child-support centres, was a product of the partnership between UNICEF, the MoHSPP, and other stakeholders such as the UK-based NGO HealthProm with local NGOs Hayot dar Oila and Sarchashma. Another example was the partnership with UNDP, UN Women, and UNFPA under the Spotlight Initiative for the development of the national referral mechanism for women and girls survivors of SGBV.

## 1.2 Evaluation scope

The evaluation follows the scope detailed in the ToR, evaluating the Protective Environment programme between 2016 and 2022<sup>25</sup> following both a summative and a formative approach. The scope of this evaluation included both national (policy and advocacy work) as well as subnational (selected districts) levels. Field visits were paid in only two selected districts. The evaluation of each individual intervention needed to take place separately to allow for sufficient information to decide about dropping the interventions or scaling them up. The evaluation focused on the key components of the programme including alternative family care, justice for

<sup>22</sup> Initially, the Country Programme Document had been developed for the period of 2016-2020, but it was subsequently prolonged due to COVID-19 and to align with the government timeframe. This evaluation focuses mostly on the period until the end of 2021.

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF Annual Report (2016), p. 2 (internal document).

<sup>24</sup> According to feedback from UNICEF during the review of the draft report for this evaluation, these interventions were covered within PE before Strategic Moment of Reflection (SMR), in 2018. After the SMR (second half of 2018), this moved from the PE programme to the Knowledge Programme.

<sup>25</sup> Due to the time of the evaluation, the main focus was on the period from 2016 to the end of 2021.

children, and violence against children, migration effects, children with disabilities, child protection in emergencies, and the role of social services. This evaluation was undertaken at the end of the sixth year of an extended seven-year country programme (CP) of cooperation (2016-2022) between UNICEF and the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan.

### 1.2.1 Evaluation use and audience

The evidence and forward-looking recommendations generated by the evaluation were intended to be used by the government and UNICEF during the implementation of the remainder of the current country programme and to inform the 2023-2026 CP planning process, which started at the end of 2021. The evaluation aimed at contributing to a more evidence-based advocacy and development of the child-protection system in the country. More specifically, UNICEF and partners plan to use the evaluation in the following ways:

1. Use information for dropping or scaling up programme interventions depending on the needs of those most vulnerable.
2. Gather evidence on the needs, gaps, and challenges as well as good practices and lessons learnt to inform the child-protection policy agenda.
3. Build on insights on how to accelerate actions/progress towards reaching the child-protection related targets and commitments.

The **evaluation audience** includes primary stakeholders (e.g., state bodies, civil society organisations, and UNICEF) and secondary stakeholders (e.g., multilateral and bilateral donors as well as other UN agencies). A detailed list of stakeholders is available in the terms of reference, which can be found in the annexes to this report. Among the primary stakeholders and duty bearers, the evaluation also involved the Directorate on Child Rights Protection under the Ministry of Education and Science, which is the official custodian of the implementation of the Child Rights Protection Law of 2015 and child-protection issues. The evaluation aimed at involving line ministries and agencies responsible for child-protection related policy and services including representatives of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population; Agency on Social Insurance and Pensions; Department on Prevention of Delinquencies among Adolescents and Youth, Ministry of Internal Affairs; Department on Supervision of the Law on Youth and Minors, General Prosecutor's Office; Department on Juvenile Justice, Ministry of Justice; Judges Training Institute, Supreme Court; Republican Centre of Additional Education; Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment; and the Commissioner for Children's Rights (Ombudsman for Child Rights) through the interagency Evaluation Reference Group established by the government of Tajikistan for this evaluation.

The evaluation aimed to be useful to both primary and secondary stakeholders, providing: (i) evidence to improve future UNICEF interventions in the country; (ii) knowledge, including best practices and lessons learnt, that could be used by the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and other key-partners in better designing and enhancing public policies to reach and address the beneficiaries' needs and expectations; (iii) accountability and control of the PE implementation. The entire process from evaluation design to development of data-collection tools and reporting counted on the engagement of representatives of young people in the evaluation process and the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG). This aimed to support local adaptation and learning while ensuring participation, equity, and accountability.

### 1.2.2 Evaluation Objectives

The overall objectives of the evaluation were to:

1. **Provide an independent assessment of approaches, strategies, and interventions** designed and implemented with UNICEF's Protective Environment programme in Tajikistan.
2. **Assess UNICEF's strategic positioning and programmatic choices made**, given government priorities, the changing socio-economic and political context, and COVID-19 challenges in Tajikistan.
3. **Identify good practices which have contributed to the achievement of intended results and draw lessons on challenges, gaps, and barriers** that have hindered the progress towards ensuring a protective environment for the most vulnerable and marginalised children, looking beyond the traditional vulnerable groups.
4. **Provide forward-looking recommendations** on how to accelerate actions towards reaching the child-protection related targets set in the National Programme for Children 2030 and implementing the recommendations of the 2017 CRC Concluding Observations.

### 1.2.3 Key questions

This evaluation followed the principle of having few yet well-focused questions. The inception report annexed to this report includes an equivalence table and evaluation matrix showing how the key questions correspond to the questions from the terms of reference. The key questions were defined based on the terms of reference and updated during the inception phase. The key evaluation questions are presented below, divided into the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria<sup>26</sup>.

#### Relevance

- What is the relevance of the programme considering the needs and priorities of its key beneficiaries?
- To what extent is the programme design appropriate to achieve the intended outcomes and impact (including intervention logic, approach, structure, components, and assumptions)?
- To what extent did the programme design take sufficient account of cross-cutting issues (e.g., gender, minorities, persons with disabilities, and the environment)?
- How well have the different needs of vulnerable girls and boys been considered?

#### Coherence

- What has been the contribution of the programme to improved local and national policies?
- To what extent did other child-protection activities by UNICEF and partners, especially social policy and social protection, reinforce the Protection Environment programme?
- How well did the programme use a cross-sectoral and integrated approach while using vulnerability criteria developed by UNICEF Tajikistan?
- To what extent has the programme coordinated with development partners and other UN agencies to avoid overlaps, leverage contributions, and catalyse joint work?
- How closely is the programme aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (external coherence)?

#### Effectiveness

- To what extent have the objectives and results of the programme been achieved?
- How well was the programme implementation adapted to the major factors (internal and external) influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives and results?
- To what extent have the recommendations of earlier evaluations been implemented in the programme?

#### Efficiency

- How adequate was the management quality and efficiency (including work planning, procurement, financial resource management, budget allocation, and timely outputs)?
- To what extent is the programme output data efficiently used for national/regional advocacy?
- How functional, sufficient, and goal-oriented is the programme-management system (including technical expertise as well as monitoring, planning, and reporting systems)?

#### Impact

- How well has the programme had direct impacts at its overall-objective level?
- To what extent does/will the programme have any indirect positive and/or negative impacts (i.e., environmental, social, cultural, gender, and economic)?
- How well have the implemented interventions/activities contributed to ensuring a protective environment for children?
- To what extent has the programme advanced children's rights?

#### Sustainability

- To what extent have the interventions had a sustainable effect at the local, regional, and national level?
- To what extent has the local ownership of partners been considered in the implementation of the programme?

<sup>26</sup> OECD (2021), Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/543e84ed-en>.

- To what extent will the target groups and beneficiaries continue to use the benefits after the support has ended (long-term orientation)?
- What is the contribution of the programme to the institutional capacity of local partners?

In order to provide a quick overview of the conclusions, the evaluation used a simple scoring system<sup>27</sup> for each of the key questions. The scores ranged from very good (score 5, grade A) to very poor (score 1, grade E). Grades and scores are explained in the following table and are supported by detailed information on the actual findings, the rationale behind the conclusions, and key lessons learnt and recommendations.

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<sup>27</sup> This scoring system and key evaluation questions are based on EuropeAid's methodology of Results Oriented Monitoring. EuropeAid (2012) ROM Handbook [online]. Available at: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/rom/>.

## 2 Methodology

This section summarises the methodological approach used in the evaluation. A more detailed account of the methodology can be found in the inception report and sample documentation, which are available in the annexes to this report. Unless explicitly mentioned, the terminology used here follows the OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation<sup>28</sup>.

Table 1: Assessment criteria and scoring for the evaluation.

Grade	Score	Qualitative	Explanation
A	4.6 to 5	<i>Very good</i>	The situation is a reference for good practice. Recommendations focus on measures to facilitate replication of good practices in future operations.
B	3.6 to 4.5	<i>Good</i>	The situation is highly satisfactory, largely above average, and potentially a reference for good practice. Recommendations are useful but not vital for the operation.
C	2.6 to 3.5	<i>Regular</i>	The situation is satisfactory, but there are important operational risks, and there is room for improvements. Recommendations are important for increasing the likelihood of successful operation.
D	1.6 to 2.5	<i>Poor</i>	There are issues which need to be addressed or else the overall performance may be negatively affected. Necessary improvements, however, do not require major revisions of the intervention logic.
E	1 to 1.5	<i>Very poor</i>	There are deficiencies which are so serious that, if not addressed, they can lead to failure of the operation. Major adjustments of the intervention logic and revision of the strategy are necessary.

The data-collection process followed the principles of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and informed participants of the purpose of the exercise as well as other GDPR requirements. All calculations were documented in computer syntax (RMarkdown). The syntax/source code for this document is hosted on a private repository on Github and is available to authorised users. The source code allows the automatic download of data from the cloud and document aggregator in a fully reproducible way at all stages, from the cleaning process to the visualisation of the results.

### 2.1 Data sources, methods, and sampling strategies

The evaluation used a mixed-methods participatory approach<sup>29</sup>, including quantitative and qualitative data, both for its collection and analysis. Different programme stakeholders were involved through online surveys (Institutional stakeholders), Key informant interviews (Institutional stakeholders and beneficiaries) and phone interviews (beneficiaries), and data was triangulated to draw conclusions. The evaluation was based on a theory-based approach to assessing the PE programme and its three core strategic outputs and activities, based on its theory of change (see Annex 2 for the evaluation matrix, and Annex 6 for the ToC in graphic form) as well as complementary documentary evidence including yearly output and outcome statements and country reports. A primary-data collection formed part of the evaluation, as detailed below. This aimed at understanding and assessing the contribution of the programme to the expected short-term outputs and medium-term outcomes as well as towards longer-term impacts and sustainability. A random sample of 500 beneficiaries was taken in a simple random manner using the R programming language. The sample includes a total of 675 beneficiaries in 15 of 15 locations. The sample is larger than the goal of phone interviews in order to account for non-response, inoperative numbers or any unforeseen event during data collection.

The locations and samples were randomly drawn from a list provided by UNICEF based on defined criteria. Firstly, the programme team provided a list of individual and institutional beneficiaries with a total of 962 beneficiaries in 14 locations. From the total records, 954 beneficiaries had known and unique phone numbers and names. This represents the population from which the sample for the phone interviews has been drawn. During data collection, the local team identified the need to complement the initially drawn sample. This was necessary due to non-response rates caused by non-operational phone numbers and 146 duplicated phone numbers out of a total of 500 (29%). We complemented the initially drawn sample by the same number of duplicated phone

<sup>28</sup> OECD (2010) Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management. <http://bit.ly/oecdbrm>

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF (2014) Participatory Approaches. [https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/brief\\_5\\_participatoryapproaches\\_eng.pdf](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/brief_5_participatoryapproaches_eng.pdf)



numbers added by 20% to allow for a security margin, while excluding phone numbers that had been selected in the first sample. The sample included a total of 675 beneficiaries in 15 locations. The sample was larger than the goal of phone interviews in order to account for non-response, inoperative numbers or any unforeseen event during data collection.

The data-analysis methods followed a mixed-methods approach and included techniques focusing on both quantitative data (e.g., analysis of scores for each criterion using triangulation) and qualitative data (e.g., natural language processing using word-stemming algorithms<sup>30</sup> and network co-occurrence plots<sup>31</sup> for visualisation of key words after removal of stop words<sup>32</sup> in addition to a traditional, manual analysis of open questions). Data-collection sources have been selected with due independence and methodological rigour including the use of reproducible random samples as much as possible. To avoid bias and improve the validity and reliability of results, this evaluation combined the following multiple data sources and data-collection methods:

**Document review:** The reference group uploaded inputs to a virtual folder to which the evaluation team had access throughout the assignment. The provided inputs included a desk review of documents such as photos of programme activities, strategies, statistics, reports, past related evaluations, publications, monitoring data, and similar interview forms. Key sources of secondary data included sectoral administrative statistics as well as studies and literature on topics related to the object of the evaluation.

**Online survey:** The evaluation team prepared an anonymous survey form in English, Tajik, and Russian that was available online for about five weeks to gather opinions from UNICEF staff and other relevant internal and external stakeholders from a list of participants prepared by UNICEF staff. The online survey allowed key stakeholders to provide inputs anonymously and identify best practices, key challenges, and lessons learnt. The survey reached 15 participants (69% female) out of the 71 people invited by e-mail (21% response rate). Most participants were UNICEF staff, followed by NGO and government representatives. For confidentiality, there was no personally identifiable information recorded with online surveys so as to allow respondents to present their critical feedback and suggestions.

**Phone interviews:** To minimise risks related to the Covid-19 pandemic, phone interviews were used to collect data from local partner staff and beneficiaries. A list of phone numbers of beneficiaries and other stakeholders was made available by the programme staff<sup>33</sup>, similarly to the one for the online survey described above. The phone survey aimed at focusing on children, youths, and their families to complement other primary-data sources, as not for all beneficiaries and stakeholders a phone number was available<sup>34</sup>. The evaluation team developed a digital form in Tajik, Russian, and English to collect evaluative data from beneficiaries through phone interviews. Using beneficiary registration data/attendance lists, the team drew a simple reproducible random sample of beneficiaries of 675 people, so at least 200 respondents could be reached<sup>35</sup>. The evaluation team trained phone interviewers, involving also female interviewers to ensure comfort for female participants during interviews. The data-collection team successfully conducted a total of 203 interviews (78% female) with mainly school staff, adolescents, children, and youths as well as representatives of community/mahalla parent's committees. The questionnaire was deployed using KoBoToolbox, which allowed for collecting data with any device with a browser. Digital data collection allowed for efficiency and quality gains, particularly concerning the prevention of data-quality issues.

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<sup>30</sup> Stemming is the process of producing morphological variants of a root/base word. A stemming algorithm reduces the words "chocolates", "chocolatey", "choco" to the root word "chocolate", and "retrieval", "retrieved", "retrieves" to the stem "retrieve". Stemming is an important part in natural language processing. Source: <https://movimentar.co/3uowF7N>

<sup>31</sup> These plots are the result of an algorithm that presents the network of co-occurrences of the most frequent words used by participants to answer the questions after the so-called stop words have been automatically removed (e.g., articles, prepositions, and other words that do not convey significant meaning). The blue lines indicate how often the words occur together. The thicker the line, the more often they occur together in the dataset. The graph presents the most frequent words in the centre of the plot and groups them according to their co-occurrence. Text networks are common tools for natural language processing, namely for visualising qualitative data.

<sup>32</sup> Stop words are a set of commonly used words in a language. Examples of stop words in English are "a", "the", "is", "are". The method is being used in Text Mining and Natural Language Processing (NLP) to eliminate words that are so commonly used that they carry little useful information. Source: <https://movimentar.co/stopwords>

<sup>33</sup> The list contained 962 beneficiaries in 14 locations. 954 beneficiaries were identified with unique phone numbers and names, which represented the population from which the sample was drawn.

<sup>34</sup> The sample documentation in RMarkdown, which includes all the steps from the data loading to cleaning and reproducible sampling, is available at: <https://movimentar.co/unicef-taj-pe-sampled.doc>.

<sup>35</sup> In 2016, the Tajik Telephone Agency announced the creation of the unified database of identification numbers of mobile phones (see <https://movimentar.co/3cmKJFo>). Re-registration of a subscriber number was free of charge but had to be done by the end of April 2017. To re-register their mobile-phone numbers, subscribers of any cellular company had to take their passports and SIM cards to the nearest service centre of their mobile operators.



**Key-informant interviews and focus-group discussions:** A total of 32 qualitative interviews<sup>36</sup> and eight focus-group discussions with beneficiaries were conducted using qualitative, semi-structured interview guides (face-to-face and remote); a list of participants for the KIIs can be found at Annex 3. Data collection for such interviews also involved visits to two regions (the districts of Panjakent and Khujand in Sughd province and the district of Kulob in Khatlon province) for interviews at both district and regional levels. The participants of the individual key-informant interviews were selected from a list of 123 contacts (both service providers/duty-bearers and rights holders) with which the programme staff had provided the evaluation team. Participants of the seven focus-group discussions with beneficiaries were selected locally by the data-collection team in coordination with local stakeholders. The selection followed a purposeful sampling design in coordination with the evaluation management group and sought to maximise stakeholder diversity of opinions. Key-informant interviews involved mainly local authorities, UNICEF staff and consultants, and representatives of civil society organisations, while focus-group discussions involved parents, children, and adolescents (divided into different groups). A digital form supported the implementation of the key-informant interviews. The interviews aimed at collecting detailed views from the participants. Data were collected mainly by our local senior evaluator, who is based in Dushanbe and travelled to the project areas. He was supported by a female colleague on-site to ease interviews with female beneficiaries and involved trained representatives of youths (aged above 18 years) from the evaluation reference group.

**Triangulation:** The findings used data from the document review, online surveys, phone interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions to increase the credibility and validity of the findings while also avoiding biases. Conclusions were drawn from the findings when the results of different methods and data sources converged.

**Statistical regression:** The multivariate regression is a statistical technique to explore the relationship between multiple variables in datasets. This statistical computation technique was used to inform the analysis of the main determinants of the OECD criteria score. The model seeks to explain OECD score variations based on other variables. The selection of the variables follows an automated process that seeks to maximise Akaike's information criterion. This aims to avoid a bias in the selection of the parameters. To determine the significance of independent factors, we considered that a p-value <0.05 (less than 5 in a hundred chance of being wrong) is a reasonable threshold.

## 2.2 Limitations

The main limitations were:

1. As explained above in detail, phone interviews were conducted based on reproducible random samples. The list of beneficiaries and contacts had been provided by the programme staff based on a pre-selection process that did not include full datasets<sup>37</sup> with beneficiary registration data<sup>38</sup>. To this the evaluation team did not have access due to confidentiality of personal data. The online survey and key-informant interview participants also came from a list of stakeholders provided by the programme staff. Although the random-sampling procedure could help to mitigate selection bias in the phone interviews, the evaluation team could only assume that the reference lists of beneficiaries and stakeholders provided by the programme staff was representative of the total beneficiaries and stakeholders.
2. According to UNICEF's feedback about the draft report, in the list of interviewees in the key-informant interviews, none of the interviewed persons can be categorised as a "representative" of a ministry. They are either representatives of ministry sub-structures or local authorities. The local team prioritised interviews with stakeholders at local level in order to make the most of the field visits and collect feedback at ground level, while categorising the stakeholders according to the information provided by the interviewees and the implementing partners. The online survey also invited institutional stakeholders at national and international level to participate, in order to maximise participation and representativeness.
3. Although there may be potential limitations of the outreach to highly vulnerable groups, in terms of assessing the access of children with disabilities to basic services, for example, the evaluation team did not

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<sup>36</sup> Initial goal: 25 interviews.

<sup>37</sup> According to the evaluation management group, "The shared excel file included the complete datasets of ultimate beneficiaries (right holders) downloaded from the Activity Info Platform. Direct access was not granted due to confidentiality of personal data. On the beneficiaries/duty bearers, as far as I remember, there were no unified databases (information kept by relevant programme officers)". The information, however, does not include all beneficiaries of the programme activities as from the RAM reports. This is probably so since not all beneficiaries' contacts are available to UNICEF.

<sup>38</sup> According to UNICEF feedback, "this related only to Justice for Children. For others the datasets were not pre-selected".

have access to data from the programme beneficiaries as a whole<sup>39</sup>. Also, the evaluation team did not identify objectively verifiable vulnerability criteria or thresholds to ease the identification and prioritisation of beneficiaries based on registration data. This context limits the capacity of the evaluation to assess the extent to which the sampled beneficiaries are indeed the most vulnerable. It also limits the assessment and follow-up of vulnerabilities based on a more quantitative approach. To mitigate these gaps, the evaluation team included questions to assess the vulnerability of the beneficiaries following aspects based on their Food Consumption Scores, among other standard vulnerability indicators.

4. The team successfully interviewed 203 participants, while 23% of the sampled participants did not have an operational number or the number did not work, 16% did not want to participate, and 9% did not answer the phone. Participation of the invited beneficiaries and stakeholders may be determined by aspects such as access to an operational phone and electricity, particularly in phone interviews. This may bias the results as people without access to operational mobile phones or people who are too busy to participate (e.g., mothers or those affected by child labour), for example, may not have answered the calls from the interviewers. The evaluation team tried to mitigate these risks by calling non-respondents up to three times at different times of the day and by attempting to re-schedule phone interviews.
5. The anonymous online survey had a lower-than-expected response rate (21%), with 15 out of 71 invited stakeholders participating. Potential factors behind this performance can include the period of time/time of the year that the survey was available (from 4 to 31 January 2022), low engagement of key stakeholders in the programme, limited internet connectivity, and/or limited habit to participate in online surveys, particularly among stakeholders at subnational level. The evaluation team tried to promote participation by extending the data-collection period for the online survey as well as using phone interviews to mitigate this risk. The team also used a professional campaign-management tool (MailChimp), which allowed it to monitor participation and send eight reminders to non-clickers throughout the data-collection period.

## 2.3 Ethical considerations and confidentiality

The evaluation followed the UNEG ethical standards<sup>40</sup> in terms of integrity, accountability, respect, and beneficence. Following UNICEF procedures for Ethical Research Involving Children, the inception report and questionnaires as well as informed consent/assent forms and protection protocols went through an external ethical review commissioned by UNICEF from an independent contractor. The official ethical approval is available upon request to UNICEF. Forms related to informed consent/assent and emergency protocols are included among the annexes to this report. Data from minors were collected only after obtaining parental consent. The interviews adhered to the GDPR ([General Data Protection Regulations](#)) and avoided situations that might have led to upsetting children or inducing a conflict with their legal representatives. Confidentiality was ensured by separating samples which included contact information (e.g., phone survey sample) from the datasets, thus preserving respondents' anonymity. Data-collection tools contained the required information to obtain informed consent for participation, which was voluntary. Participants in face-to-face key-informant interviews received a letter with all required information for informed consent and data-protection rights. The evaluation assessed children in conflict with the law, who were not identified as such in the sample for confidentiality. No risk was identified for participants during the data collection. Our team completed the BSAFE training as well as ethics and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) courses, and all personnel collecting data received refresher training about ethical issues and data-protection guidelines; guidance for risk mitigation was provided. Carbon emissions were minimised by involving local consultants in the data-collection design and implementation, thus avoiding air travels, and by reducing material use through digital data collection.

## 3 Evaluation findings

This section presents the key findings holistically but grounded in the primary and secondary data collected during this evaluation. The participatory evaluation approach strongly values the inputs from the evaluation participants, which have been triangulated with evidence from the document review. The box below summarises key characteristics of the participants in the primary data collection. The annexes contain detailed information about participants' demographics as well as key vulnerability indicators of the beneficiaries who took part in the phone survey, including protection-related issues and needs.

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<sup>39</sup> As from feedback from UNICEF during the draft report review, "the PE [programme] does not have a complete set of databases for all beneficiaries. What we shared were the complete databases (except J4C) for those interventions/projects that established beneficiary databases. Also apart from various lists of training attendants (re improving service delivery) or WG members (re legislation) there is no database for policy and system related interventions and I think it is not possible to document the beneficiaries (maybe could be analysed through admin data, e.g. for alternative care)."

<sup>40</sup> UNEG (2020) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. Available at <http://www.unevaluation.org>.

### Summary of key characteristics of the evaluation participants

- Among the 15 **online survey respondents** were 6 UNICEF staff, 5 NGO representatives, 2 local authority representatives, 1 ministry representative, and 1 other public international/regional organisation. Most of the participants were female (11 or 73%) and were based mainly in Tajikistan, and two in Geneva, Switzerland (UNICEF RO).
- There were 203 phone interview submissions, from which 160 were female. The most common age group of the **phone interview respondents** was under 20 years (57), with only few being above 61 years (8). The participants were based mostly in Kulob, Isfara, Sarband, B. Gafurov, Hissar, Rudaki, Shakhriyev, Yavon, and Bokhtar. Most lived in towns (119), the rest in villages (84). 67 participants had a university degree, 43 primary, 38 lower secondary, 27 higher secondary, 19 secondary specialised education (technical school, college). Only 9 participants had no education.
- The **KIIs and FGDs** involved key informants that had been selected in coordination with UNICEF staff. A total of 63 people were interviewed in 24 individual interviews and 8 focus-group discussions, which involved 39 participants (average of 5 participants per focus group, mostly beneficiaries and parents). The qualitative data collection included the following stakeholders: government representatives (11), local authority representatives (4), NGO representatives (4), UNICEF staff (5), youths aged 14-17 years (12), parents/guardians of minors aged 17 and younger (23), school staff (2), and children aged 13 years and younger (2).

Additional information including charts is available in the annexes.

We present below the summary of key findings, taking into account primary and secondary data sources, which include the programme theory of change, as described in the methodology section. To aid the triangulation of results, the table below presents the mean scores<sup>41</sup> of all questions in the online and phone interviews, as well as a numerical representation of the evaluative decision considering all primary and secondary data sources as per triangulation results. These scores are used through the report as a way of summarizing beneficiaries and stakeholder opinions, and subsections in the findings.

Table 2: Overall scores by evaluation criteria and source.

Scoring by evaluation criteria and type of source (1 = very poor; 5 = very good)			
Criterion	Evaluative decision	Institutional stakeholders (Online survey)	Beneficiaries (Phone interviews)
Relevance	4.3	3.7	4.4
Coherence	4.4	3.7	-
Effectiveness	4.4	3.6	4.6
Efficiency	4.4	3.7	4.5
Impact	4.3	3.5	4.5
Sustainability	4.3	3.3	4.7
<b>Overall score</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>4.5</b>
<b>Overall rating</b>	<b>B ('good')</b>	<b>B ('good')</b>	<b>B ('good')</b>

The programme obtained higher scores in the phone interviews than in the online survey. The difference in scores between both methods can be attributed to the different types of participants and questions. In the view of the evaluation team (first column of the table), the PE programme performed best in the criterion efficiency,

<sup>41</sup> The scores from the online survey and phone interviews have been computed after conversion of answers based on scale-based questions (see methodology section) and calculation of averages.

followed by its relevance and impact. The criteria with the most areas for improvement were sustainability and effectiveness, which received the lowest scores by the evaluation team.

The subsections below explain the rationale behind the views from the evaluation team, with reference to both primary and documentary evidence. Each section starts with the scores by the evaluation team for each of the Evaluation Questions (EQs). These scores reflect the final evaluation decision by the evaluation team considering both primary and secondary evidence, followed by a detailed response to each of the EQs. Section 2 (methodology) presents the approach to analysis, while Annex 2 presents the evaluation matrix with the indicators/judgement criteria for each of the evaluation questions. Section 2.5 presents the limitations to this evaluation and its results, including mitigation actions to compensate them.

## 3.1 Relevance

### Key findings

**1.i:** The programme was highly relevant due to its sound intervention logic and theory of change, which have been informed by an analysis of the needs of vulnerable children and youths, including the geographical distribution of vulnerabilities.

**1.ii:** The programme's implementation strategy was relevant due to its focus on an evidence-based approach supporting changes at system level by strengthening policy and legal frameworks for child protection and providing technical assistance for the revision and development of policies.

**1.iii:** While the PE programme included gender-related activities, its ToC did not mention gender issues and outcomes. A specific gender action plan for the PE programme, coordinated by the Gender Focal Point, can help to guide the programme in developing specific activities to track and address specific gender-related protection issues, in line with the recommendations of the Country Programme Evaluation (2020) and the Gender Programmatic Review 2019.

In line with the OECD/DAC definitions<sup>42</sup>, the relevance criterion assessed the extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities, and national policies. The overall relevance score given by the evaluation team (evaluative decision) was 4.3 (grade B), which indicates a 'good' performance. The table below presents a summary of the scores and weights given by the evaluation team for each evaluation question for this criterion, considering both the primary and secondary evidence.

Table 3: Score for the criterion 'relevance' by the evaluation team.

KEY QUESTIONS – RELEVANCE	PERFORMANCE					WEIGHT
	A = 5	B = 4	C = 3	D = 2	E = 1	
EQ1: What is the relevance of the programme considering the needs and priorities of its key beneficiaries?	5.0					25%
EQ2: To what extent is the programme design appropriate to achieve the intended outcomes and impact (including intervention logic, approach, structure, components and assumptions)?		4.0				25%
EQ3: To what extent did the programme design take sufficient account of cross-cutting issues (e.g., gender, minorities, persons with disabilities, and the environment)?		4.0				25%
EQ4: How well have the different needs of vulnerable girls and boys been considered?		4.0				25%
Note: A = very good; B = good; C = fair; D = poor; E = very poor.	Result:					4.3 B

<sup>42</sup> See more at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm> (last visited: 4 June 2022).

### EQ1: What is the relevance of the programme considering the needs and priorities of its key beneficiaries?

The PE programme's intervention logic and theory of change have been well targeted. In line with the Country Programme Evaluation (2020), there is strong evidence that design and implementation of the PE programme have been informed by an analysis of the needs of vulnerable children and youths, including the geographical distribution of vulnerabilities<sup>43</sup>.

The 2015 Country Programme Document recognised that there was a need “to build a protective environment that prevents and responds to deprivation, violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect, especially for the most vulnerable”. This document pointed out that the PE programme's implementation strategy followed an evidence-based approach to support changes at system level by strengthening policy and legal frameworks for child protection and providing technical assistance for the revision and development of policies. In this sense, there is strong evidence, in line with the Country Programme Evaluation (2020), that the PE programme reflected the key national policies and strategies, particularly the Mid-term Development Programme, the programme and action plan of the Justice Reform for Children for 2017-2021, the Programme for Training of Personnel of the Social Protection System for 2030, the Programme on Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration of Children After Released from Closed Institutions 2020-2024, the National Programme on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency for 2020-2024, the State Programme on Youth Social Development and the National Education Strategy, and the Child Rights Ombudsman Strategy.

The programme addressed explicitly the most vulnerable, including children in contact and conflict with the law, children at risk of institutionalisation, children from war-affected zones as well as children and women with disabilities. These findings from documentary evidence (e.g., theory of change, results matrix, and action plan 2021-2022) could be confirmed when triangulating evidence from primary data collection.

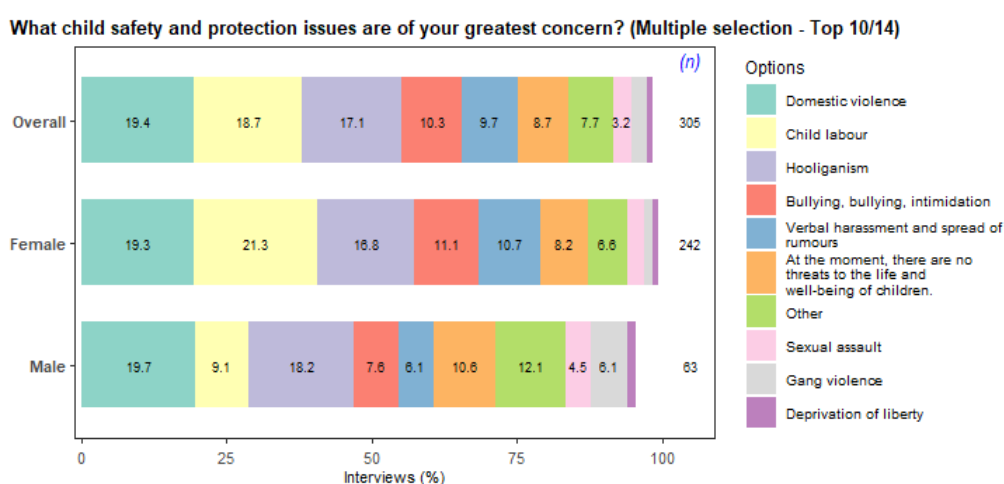


Figure 1: Children's safety and protection issues (phone interviews).

The phone survey with the sample of beneficiary children, adolescents, and youths until 30 years included a range of questions exploring key vulnerability indicators, which included opinions and needs, as well as protection issues. When asked about the key problems in their lives nowadays, the most frequently mentioned ones were related to job insecurity, bad economic situations, health problems, and housing problems. Some of the main problems specifically associated with children were the lack of schools and kindergartens, parent-related problems (e.g., neglect/mis care and violence), poor living and health conditions, and insufficient access to clothing. Although not all these problems are directly related to the scope of the PE programme, parenting and violence problems are among the most frequent issues mentioned by the beneficiaries, which is in line with the programme problem analysis and intervention logic.

The programme is highly relevant considering the results in terms of beneficiaries' opinions on child safety. When asked about protection issues on child safety, only 9% of the participants answered that at the moment there

<sup>43</sup> This include studies such as: Rapid assessment of the system's response to adolescents' mental health, including prevention of suicidal behaviour in the Republic of Tajikistan (2016); Formative research on infant and young child feeding and maternal nutrition in Tajikistan (2016); Mapping the vulnerable and excluded groups of adolescents and youth in Tajikistan (2017); Adolescence baseline study (2018), Situational analysis, Baseline study on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices related to children and women with disabilities in Tajikistan (2018); Assessment of the impact of social allowances on the quality of life of children living with HIV (2018); Baseline study on children, teachers and parents' ability to recognise and respond to situations of discrimination or exclusion in five target districts of Sughd region of Tajikistan (2019); Endline study on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices related to children and women with disabilities in Tajikistan (2021); among others.

were no threats to the lives and well-being of their children. The most common protection issues in order of frequency were domestic violence (19%), child labour (19%), hooliganism (17%), bullying and intimidation (10%), verbal harassment and spread of rumours (10%), sexual assault (3%), and gang violence (3%). 24 respondents (8%) answered 'other', which includes a range of issues with parents, school, mobile-phone use, neglect, and other children.

Domestic violence was the main protection issue reported by both female and male respondents, in very similar proportions. However, child labour was the most frequent protection issue reported among female participants. This can be related to traditional gender roles associated with housekeeping work, for example, and suggests the need of additional sex-specific initiatives for girls and boys, in line with the Country Programme Evaluation assessment<sup>44</sup>. Hooliganism was the third main protection issue, particularly reported by male respondents but also by female ones. Bullying and intimidation was the fourth most mentioned protection issue, with higher reporting frequency among female participants.

Qualitative data included evidence of girls not being allowed to go to school after reaching 9<sup>th</sup> grade. From the collected evidence, the extent is unclear to which this is related to protection issues/traditional norms and/or poor hygiene and sanitation in schools, the latter also contributing to female student dropout following the start of menstruation. Although this can at first look unrelated to the PE programme, there may links worth investigation with the Family Code and exceptions to the minimum age of marriage / child marriages. Another issue is the improper usage of mobile phones, computer games, and watching age-inappropriate movies. These can be opportunities for future programming, particularly as parents may welcome guidance from teachers and social workers on how to best support the development of their children amid the pitfalls of abuse of digital devices.

Feelings of personal safety and that of the community (mahalla, kishlak), especially for children, were predominantly positive and regular. When asked about the needs for children's safety and protection, most respondents emphasised the importance of meetings and recreational/sports grounds, including promoting cooperation between families and schools as well as makhalla meetings for improved awareness and monitoring to prevent children's abuse.

The latest ToC of the programme (Annex 6) as well as implementation reports make clear that the programme supported the government in generating knowledge for evidence-based policy making and piloting new social service provision models for vulnerable families. Since the onset of the programme, the UNICEF country office (CO) commissioned a range of studies and partnered with different organisations to generate the evidence required on the needs of its ultimate beneficiaries. For example, in 2016, UNICEF partnered with the World Bank to undertake the regular Listening to Tajikistan Survey (2015–2020) and generated a baseline as well as endline study on knowledge, attitudes, practices, and behaviours related to children and women with disabilities. In 2018, the functional assessment of the Commission on Child Rights and the Child Rights Units was finalised, which allowed it to identify gaps in the child protection and justice system.

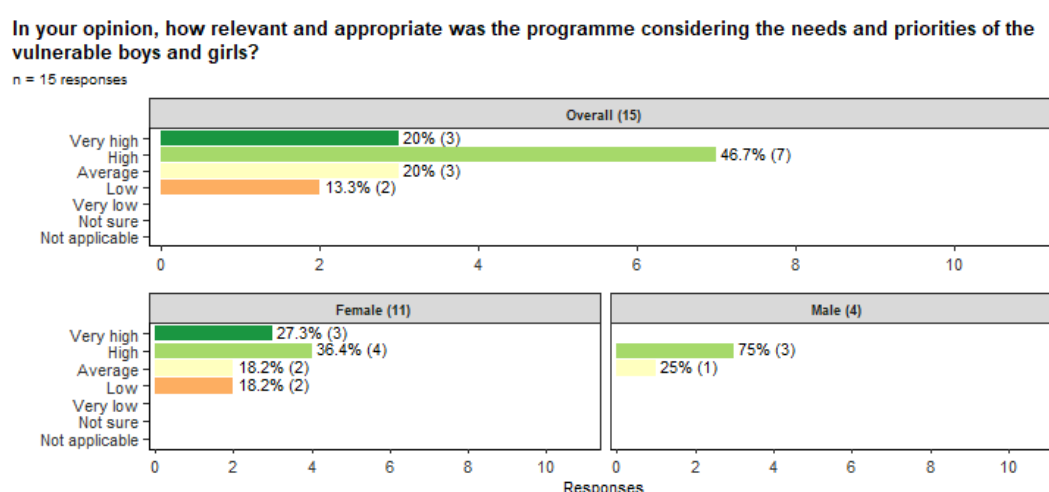


Figure 2: Relevance and appropriateness of the programme according to the needs of the target group (online survey).

The implementing staff and institutional stakeholders (online survey/key-informant interviews) and the ultimate beneficiaries (phone interviews) had positive opinions about the programme's relevance, as shown in the graph above. The online survey asked its participants about the relevance and appropriateness of the programme in

<sup>44</sup> See the Country Programme Evaluation of 2020, page 27, Relevance to gender equality, paragraph 75.



regard to the needs and priorities of vulnerable boys and girls, with an average rate of 3.7 ('good'). This result suggests that the programme considered the needs and priorities of the vulnerable children in an appropriate way, in line with the documentary evidence described above as well as the other data sources. Similarly, the beneficiaries' opinion on the relevance of the programme was positive. The participants believe that the programme met their expectations, was relevant to their lives, reached and accommodated for the needs of children. The results can be seen in more detail in Annex 10 (Detailed findings).

**Summary – EQ1:** The PE programme was highly relevant, taking into consideration the needs and priorities of its key beneficiaries (Evaluation score of 5.0). The reasons for this are that: 1) the programme used an evidence-based approach that considered the needs of its key beneficiaries, which included the analysis of the needs of vulnerable children and youths, including the geographical distribution of vulnerabilities. This has been confirmed by strong evidence from both documentary and primary data sources; 2) UNICEF closely collaborated with the government of Tajikistan and other international organisations to implement the activities in the ToC; 3) both implementing staff and beneficiaries have positive opinions about the relevance of the programme, especially the beneficiaries.

**EQ2: To what extent is the programme design appropriate to achieve the intended outcomes and impact (including intervention logic, approach, structure, components, and assumptions)?**

The 2016 ToC started as the basis for the programme's implementation and included the key elements that the PE programme would be based on, namely inputs, operational changes, intermediate changes, outputs, and outcome, all of which were coherent and followed a logic intervention rationale. This was further revised in 2018 as part of the Country Programme revision of outputs, which helped to update each element to better fit the national context regarding the needs of vulnerable girls and boys and the programme's progress. The table below presents the latest outcome statement as well as changes to outputs of the PE programme.

*Table 4: Protective Environment outcome and changes to outputs.*

<b>Outcome statement<sup>45</sup>:</b> By 2020, boys and girls, including those in contact with the law, benefit from programmes that prevent and respond to VAC and a strengthened child-friendly justice system.	
<b>2016 PE programme outputs</b>	<b>2018 Revised PE outputs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children benefit from an improved protection system based on a policy and legal framework in line with international standards, adequately resourced by evidence-based, equitable resource allocation and executed through strong intersectoral coordination at central and local levels;</li> <li>National and local authorities increasingly ensure availability and accessibility of quality child protection services and social benefits, including during emergencies, for children most at risk and their families; and</li> <li>Social norms shift in favour of better protection and inclusion of the most marginalised children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Social Protection and Social Work</u> – By 2020, the most vulnerable girls and boys have increased inclusive access to social benefits and quality social work services;</li> <li><u>Alternative Care</u> – By 2020, girls and boys, including children with disabilities, in institutions, and children at risk of family separation have increased access to family and community-based alternative care; and</li> <li><u>Justice for Children and Violence against Children</u> – By 2020, boys and girls, including those in contact with the law, benefit from programmes that prevent and respond to VAC and a strengthened child-friendly justice system.</li> </ul>

In addition to the changes above, other notable changes between both versions were: 1) improved output statements, which in the 2016 version were less succinct and time-bound, with the definition of more clear programme components, and 2) the addition of four activities based on the good progress of the programme during the last two years. These changes made the intervention logic clearer and helped to maintain the programme relevant.

The programme design was based on a sound intervention logic and theory of change, with a detailed results matrix (see Annex 8), which was introduced in 2018. Those included appropriately designed programme components and activities, which were well integrated in UNICEF's country programme. Areas for improvement can include the preparation and maintenance of a full logical framework for the programme, in complement to the ToC. While the ToC played a key role in programming, a logical framework matrix collaboratively designed with representatives of beneficiaries and other key stakeholders could help to better clarify the programme intervention logic and indicators at all levels as well as assumptions and risks. Such a logical framework document

<sup>45</sup> Source: UNICEF Tajikistan End of Year RAM Outcome and Output Statements (2021), Outcome 4150/A0/05/884, page 71.



could also help to specify better the links between interventions/activities with results and indicators presented in the results matrix of the PE programme (Annex 8). A narrative programme document describing approaches and each activity in more detail is also necessary, considering the inputs and the document review results. As from the two-year work plan for 2021/2022, activities were clear and detailed by sub-activities. Additional information about tasks under the sub-activities could help to further clarify the intervention logic. For example, activities A1.3<sup>46</sup> and A2.3<sup>47</sup> could be more concrete (either in the activity statement or with tasks under it) and mention which concrete measures (e.g., training, mentoring, equipment, material provision) are planned to strengthen the capacities of the target groups, including the expected number of participants or outputs directly in the activity statements. This can help to speed up and clarify the implementation to partners, although it needs to be done with flexibility to allow for adaptations to the changing context and needs.

**Summary – EQ2:** The programme was well designed and highly appropriate to achieve the intended outcomes (score 4.0). The inputs, outcomes, intermediate changes, and assumptions were coherent with each other and logical. The 2018 revision of the ToC helped the programme to stay relevant, according to the progress made at that time and changes in the context. There is both primary and secondary evidence of appropriate integration in UNICEF's country programme.

**EQ3: To what extent did the programme design take sufficient account of cross-cutting issues (e.g., gender, minorities, persons with disabilities, and the environment)?**

The programme explicitly states the work with children with disabilities in its theory of change. The reviewed key programme documents and annual reports suggest that the programme design followed a [Right-Based Approach](#) and [Leave-No-One-Behind](#) principles. The evaluation team received study reports from the programme staff with sufficient evidence, data collection, and disaggregation that go beyond gender, geography, and age. However, while the latest ToC mentions activities with vulnerable families and children among its inputs, there is no explicit mention of gender or other cross-cutting issues in either of the programme's ToCs. The 2015 Country Programme document, nevertheless, identified girls and children with disabilities (CWD) as key beneficiaries by stating that:

*Children are often exposed to risk and vulnerability and left unprotected because of social norms and harmful practices and beliefs. These include the perception of CWD as bringing shame and burdens to their families and society; and the tolerance of physical punishment of children and violence against women and girls. This programme's focus on innovative communication for social change will help to overcome these barriers.*

The most recent Social Institutions & Gender Index (SIGI) for Tajikistan dates back to 2019 and places Tajikistan among those countries with 'medium' SIGI at 39% of its level of gender discrimination index. Although Tajikistan performs better than most of its neighbouring countries, legal frameworks related to child marriage, household responsibilities, and divorce were the main areas for improvement<sup>48</sup> with consequences to the protection of the rights of girls and female adolescents and youths.

There were activities focused on girls' and women empowerment as evidenced by the latest programmatic two-year action plan for 2021-2022. Gender aspects have been explicitly mentioned by some of the PE programme's activities under its social protection/social work output component (e.g., Activities 1.1, 1.2), as well as J4C/VAC component (e.g., Activities 1.2, 3.1).

Hence, despite the gap in the PE programme theory of change in terms of gender issues and the results of the Gender Programmatic Review 2019, there is strong primary and secondary evidence (e.g., RAM and COAR reports) that the programme mainstreamed gender in its activities. The KIIs and FGDs suggest a very good contribution of the PE programme to improving the lives of children with disabilities, legal support to parents of children in contact with the law, promotion of gender issues, capacity building of social workers and beneficiaries on children's rights, guidance for obtaining birth certificates, and support to home visits (see detailed findings in Annex 10). Further evidence of UNICEF's work on cross-cutting issues are the baseline and endline studies on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and practices related to children and women with disabilities in Tajikistan and other assessments supported by the UNICEF CO. In fact, according to some KII/FGD participants, the support offered to CWD can be considered one of the most relevant results of the programme, in coherence with the LNOB principle. At the same time, gender issues were mentioned as a component that needed to be strengthened.

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<sup>46</sup> Activity 1.3: Strengthen the capacities of law enforcement, judiciary, defence lawyers, and O4CR on child protection and diversion, and on working with victims and witnesses of crime/violence.

<sup>47</sup> Activity 2.3: Build the capacity of professionals providing juvenile-support services including child-rights units.

<sup>48</sup> OECD (2022) Social Institutions & Gender Index. Available at: <https://www.genderindex.org/country-profiles/>

The primary and secondary evidence for the PE programme evaluation is in line with the conclusions of the Country Programme Evaluation (CPE), which stated that:

*The CO has taken a first essential step in terms of requiring sex-disaggregated data. There is more work to be done on consistently collecting, monitoring, and utilising sex-disaggregated data. The UNICEF-commissioned situation analyses identify a range of important gender issues, such as: different rates of suicides among adolescent boys and girls; reasons for dropping out of school being different for boys and for girls; boys tending to commit more offences; and boys being more frequently in conflict with the law. Whilst these issues are identified in analyses, the CO has not incorporated them into specific programme approaches in the same way as those of marginalised groups.*

Gender sensitivity and mainstreaming can be improved by fully and explicitly embedding gender issues into the PE programme ToC and approaches. In line with the CPE, a more systematic approach is required to ensure that gender inequalities are addressed. A specific gender action plan for the PE programme, coordinated by the Gender Focal Point, can help to guide the programme in developing specific activities to track and address gender-related protection issues. This may include, for instance: an increased scale and activities around monitoring differences based on violence against girls and boys; their domestic and paid work roles; access to services; activities promoting equal and peaceful relations between boys and girls; negotiation of gender promotion with family and community; additional activities to reduce the risk of sexual violence and exploitation in public and private settings; and strengthening of protection complaints mechanisms at community level<sup>49</sup>.

**Summary – EQ3:** The ToC of the programme explicitly mentions the work with children with disabilities but does not include gender issues and outcomes. Despite that, the PE programme included gender-related activities in its action plan. Further documentary evidence (e.g., RAM and COAR reports) as well as primary data indicate that the programme mainstreamed gender in its implementation and contributed to gender equality. A specific gender action plan for the PE programme, coordinated by the Gender Focal Point, can help to guide the programme in developing specific activities to track and address gender-related protection issues, in line with the recommendations of the Gender Programmatic Review 2019 and the 2020 CPE.

#### **EQ4: How well have the different needs of vulnerable girls and boys been considered?**

It is important to know the beneficiaries' problems to understand their needs before assessing the performance of the PE programme in this regard. Beyond analysing the assessment reports and studies provided by UNICEF, and to ensure triangulation, phone interviews and KIIs/FDGs were used as source of information.

The phone interview questionnaire asked beneficiaries about child protection issues threatening the lives and well-being of children in their communities. As presented in the answer to the EQ1, domestic violence, child labour, and hooliganism were the most frequent problems, followed by bullying and intimidation, verbal harassment and spread of rumours. When asked about their safety feeling and the safety of the community (mahalla, kishlak), especially the children, the participants answered mostly 'very good'/'good' and 'regular'. Questions about safety concerns suggest that although community-based hooliganism was an issue, the core site of interest for protection issues remains the household, rather than community/street issues. While community-based work can be important to achieve broader social changes, the programme can increase its impact by focusing on household-based and school-based protection issues. We recommend that particularly for remote areas and the potentially sensitive issues (e.g., physical punishment of children, gender empowerment and child labour) depending on the context and openness of each specific village/town.

The results of the multivariate regression analysis model<sup>50</sup> (see Annex 10, section 10.4) of phone interviews with beneficiaries, indicate that male participants gave higher scores to the programme compared to their female counterparts, with statistically significant differences. The multivariate regression is a statistical technique to explore the relationship between multiple variables in datasets. The results suggest that additional focus on the specific needs of female participants could help to improve the future programme performance, as explained above in the answer to the EQ3 regarding gender mainstreaming.

As shown in the answer to the EQ1, UNICEF considered the generation of knowledge as one of the key programme actions following an evidence-driven, and pilot-based approach. Through this dense body of evidence, UNICEF has contributed to the understanding of the context of its ultimate beneficiaries, and their

<sup>49</sup> See more at <https://movimentar.co/genderinchildprotection>.

<sup>50</sup> The multivariate regression analysis model of the average scores for scale-based questions suggested significant differences between scores of male and female participants in phone interviews. Male participants (36%) tend to give higher scores (0.28) compared to their female counterparts (64%). Although the difference is low and the overall average score was high, this indicates that additional focus on the specific needs of female participants could help to improve the future performance of the programme. See more in the Annex 10 and at <https://movimentar.co/3FYt4Se>.

vulnerabilities, including of the most vulnerable such as children of migrants, girls and children with disabilities. Some examples are described in the box below.

- **Children from migrant workers** are frequently living in households led by women, who are mostly dependent on remittances that are often insufficient to meet the family's necessities. These children tend to be more vulnerable and more likely to suffer from abuse and neglect<sup>51</sup>. The main cause of children institutionalisation was the inability of families to cover for the children's necessities (around two thirds of the children were institutionalised because of this reason).
- **Children in child-protection institutions** (e.g., baby homes, institutions for children with disabilities, and boarding schools) have also been identified as vulnerable, as these institutions have been regarded more as medical facilities (in the case of baby homes and institutions of children with disabilities), lacked possibilities of alternative family-based care, and needed specialised social workers (training of social workers and hiring psychologists) <sup>52</sup>.
- **Tajik girls and women** are in a more vulnerable position because social norms put them in disadvantage as they have fewer opportunities for further education and economic independence. About one quarter of women aged 15-49 were victims of physical violence and that 31% of married women have been victims of physical, sexual, or psychological violence<sup>53 54</sup>.
- **Children living with disabilities** are particularly vulnerable. The available data on disability prevalence rates among adults and children of 2% and 0.8% are perceived to be gross underestimates. It is estimated that most boys and girls with disabilities do not have access to mainstream social services despite the government's efforts to promote community-based rehabilitation through day-care centres. Furthermore, misconceptions and lack of awareness about people with disabilities among children and adults are still prevalent and boys and girls with disabilities in residential care institutions are especially vulnerable, as 9% of them were double orphans, girls were more institutionalised than boys, and family reintegration plans were not in place.<sup>55</sup>

All data sources support the assessment of how effectively the programme's interventions reflected the needs identified in the planning stage and those of the beneficiaries. The PE programme's intervention logic and theory of change have been well targeted. Although the programmatic ToC did not include gender issues and outcomes, the PE programme explicitly included gender-related activities focusing on the specific needs of girls and women. This happened particularly under its social protection/social work (output 1), as well as J4C/VAC (output 3) components, as presented in the answer to the EQ3.

The programme activities in the ToC directly address the problems identified in the assessments supported by UNICEF, and there is evidence that the programme has been implemented taking these issues into account. For example, regarding the justice for children component, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Tajikistan government identified gaps (through the functional assessment of the Commission on Child Rights and the Child Rights Units) in the justice system in terms of child protection. After these gaps were identified, a number of amendments in the following years were performed that prevented children from being exposed to violence in the system. Similar steps were taken to reform the child protection system, UNICEF cooperated with the government to identify problems in the system. Together they sought organisational changes, they achieved the transformation of baby homes to family support centres and continued the support through capacity building in these newly created institutions. During the programme's duration, UNICEF also conducted interventions to prevent and respond to violence against children in the family (collaborating with NGO CESVI and Istituto degli Innocenti research institute) while also focusing on CWD, among others.

Further evidence of the consideration of the specific needs of vulnerable boys and girls come from the KIIs/FGDs. The graph below summarises the answers from participants in KIIs and FGDs about the relevance of the programme considering the needs of vulnerable children. From the graph, it is possible to see that disabilities features among the most mentioned key words. This pattern can be seen in other results of open questions with qualitative data. KIIs and FGDs also include evidence of good performance in reaching out for children at risk and their parents, including street children, orphans and those children affected by migration (detailed results are available in Annex 10).

<sup>51</sup> UNICEF (n.d.) Protecting Children affected by migration in Southeast, South, and Central Asia (Tajikistan) (internal document).

<sup>52</sup> UNICEF (2014) Study Report Children in residential care in Tajikistan.

<sup>53</sup> Republic of Tajikistan (2018) Demographic and Health Survey 2017.

<sup>54</sup> UNICEF (2019) Situation analysis of children's and young women's rights in Tajikistan.

<sup>55</sup> UNICEF (2020) Study on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices related to children and women with disabilities in Tajikistan.

In your opinion, how relevant and appropriate was the programme considering the needs and priorities of the vulnerable boys and girls?

n = 32 responses

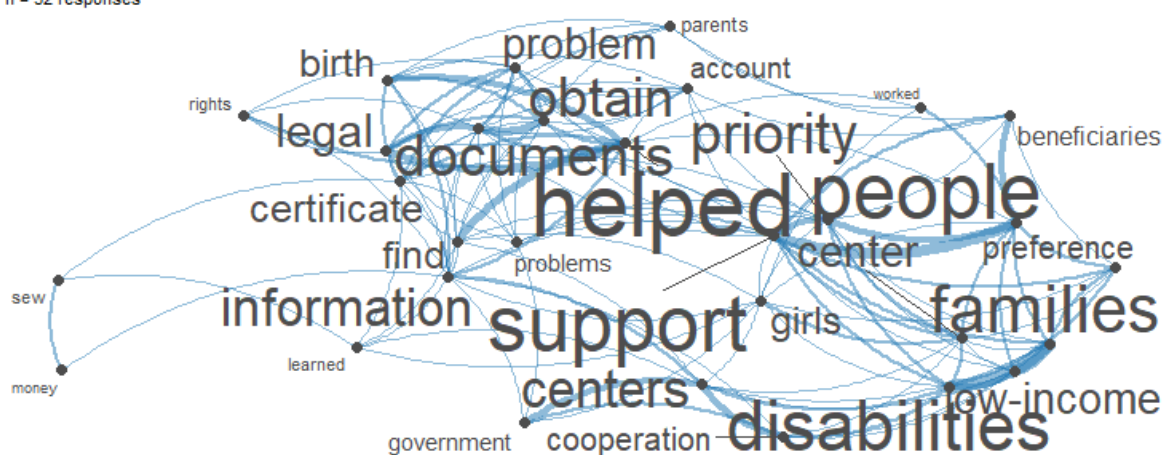


Figure 3: Text network plot of relevance of the programme to the needs of vulnerable children (KIs and FGDs).

**Summary – EQ4:** The evaluation team considers that the different needs of girls and boys have been well considered (evaluation score 4.0) due to the evidence-oriented approach used, and progress from documentary evidence (e.g., RAM and COAR reports). Although the programmatic ToC did not include gender issues and outcomes, the PE programme explicitly included gender-related activities focusing on the specific needs of girls. However, male beneficiaries in phone interviews gave higher scores to the programme compared to their female counterparts, with statistically significant differences. The results of the statistical analysis triangulated with the results from other data sources and documentary evidence suggest that additional focus on the specific needs of female participants, informed by a more systematic gender action plan, could help to improve the future programme performance. This is in line with the conclusions from the Country Programme Evaluation. In future interventions, child labour issues, especially cases related to housekeeping among girls (see also answer to the EQ1), and hooliganism could be addressed more explicitly considering the most frequent protection issues mentioned by the beneficiaries who took part in the phone interviews and key-informant interviews, in line with priority 38 of the State Comprehensive Programme for Children “Rushdu Numu” 2030, which is pending approval by the government.

## 3.2 Coherence

### Key findings

**2.i:** The programme successfully generated significant policy and system level changes that helped to improve local and national policies and support a better protective environment for children. UNICEF’s evidence-driven advocacy of policy revision resulted in concrete contributions to national and institutional policies based on a strong partnership with the Government of Tajikistan.

**2.ii:** The programme’s cross-sectoral and integrated approach offers concrete examples of the benefits, which were critically important to help to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups had better access to services that respond to their needs. While the PE programme took sufficiently into account vulnerability assessments in its design and implementation, the use of objective vulnerability criteria is not fully in place due to data-access issues.

**2.iii:** The PE programme had a good alignment with the SDGs 1, 5, and 16, with important synergies with other programmatic areas of the CO (e.g., education sector as well as with the programme on data and evidence for children). Specification of target SDGs in the programme documents (e.g., ToC, work plans and reports) can help to clarify the planned contribution of the PE programme to the SDGs, and ease assessments about its performance.

This subsection summarises the findings for the evaluation criterion of coherence, which assesses the compatibility of the PE programme with other interventions. The evaluation assessed the compatibility of the PE programme with other interventions. The score for this criterion by the evaluation team (evaluative decision) was ‘good’ or 4.4 (grade B).

Table 5: Score for the criterion 'coherence' by the evaluation team.

KEY QUESTIONS – COHERENCE	PERFORMANCE					WEIGHT
	A = 5	B = 4	C = 3	D = 2	E = 1	
EQ5: What has been the contribution of the programme to improved local and national policies?	5.0					20%
EQ6: To what extent other child protection activities by UNICEF and partners, especially social policy and social protection, reinforced the Protection Environment programme?		4.0				20%
EQ7: How well did the programme use a cross-sectoral and integrated approach while using vulnerability criteria developed within UNICEF Tajikistan?		4.0				20%
EQ8: To what extent has the programme coordinated with development partners and other UN agencies to avoid overlaps, leverage contributions and catalyse joint work?	5.0					20%
EQ9: How closely is the programme aligned with sustainable development goals (external coherence)?		4.0				20%
<i>Note: A = very good; B = good; C = fair; D = poor; E = very poor.</i>	<b>Result:</b>					<b>4.4</b>
						<b>B</b>

#### EQ5: What has been the contribution of the programme to improved local and national policies?

Based on the documentary evidence, the programme provided direct contributions to priorities listed in the draft State Comprehensive Programme for Children “Rushdu Numu” 2030, such as priority 6 (e.g., support to birth certificates and advocacy relate to children affected by migration), priority 8 (e.g., work related to GBV and VAC), priority 11 (e.g., supporting transformation of baby-homes into family and child support centres, as well as their operationalisation), priority 38 (e.g., interpersonal and public dialogue with parents’ community and the society in general regarding prevention of violence against children), priority 39 (e.g., strengthening supervision system at district level (Commission of Child Rights) for preventing placement of children to institutions; and improve alternative family care mechanisms, such as guardianship and trusteeship, foster care and other types of family care), and priority 40 (e.g., Introduction of community-based rehabilitation approach for children with disabilities to include children with disabilities into society).

The document review indicates high consistency of the intervention with the national and international norms and standards (e.g., Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, National Development Strategy 2030, Mid-term Development Programmes, draft National Programme for Children 2030, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, National Plan of Action for implementation of the Concluding Observation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for 2018-2022, National Plan of Action on Justice for Children System Reform 2017-2021, and the discussions around the coming National Social Protection Strategy). As presented in the answer to the EQ1, the PE programme reflected the key national policies and strategies. An important axis of the PE programme was related to its support to the reform of the justice system for all children in contact with the law. For example, the programme supported the development, implementation and monitoring of the National Plan of Action on Justice for Children System Reform 2017-2021. For this purpose, the PE programme included advocacy for legal revision and institutionalisation of J4C (Justice for Children) in pre-service and on-the-job training for law enforcement and justice professionals. The UNICEF CO has supported the Government in the elaboration, adoption and implementation of the state programme “On prevention of Offences by juveniles for 2020-2024”. The programme included both advocacy and capacity development of MoIA and other key stakeholders. Moreover, UNICEF CO has advocated for and contributed to the elaboration and adoption of the State Programme “On Social reintegration and social rehabilitation of children released from closed and semi-closed institutions for 2020-2024”.

Through its advocacy efforts UNICEF successfully generated policy and system level changes that improved local and national policies and supported a better protective environment for children. These changes include the signing of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) by the Government of Tajikistan in

2018 (pending ratification), and the different amendments done to the law in the context of the J4C component. For example, in 2018, UNICEF advocacy with the Ministry of Justice has led to the Government's decision to revise two important provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC), that is, the obligation to start interrogating children within 12 hours following their arrest (instead of 24 hours previously); and the reduction of the duration of police custody upon arrest from 72 hours to 48 hours. In 2020, to improve connection between evidence and policy-making, a first-ever independent monitoring of the boys' detention centre (colony), 'special schools' and special vocational schools was led by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), which was a step towards a comprehensive need assessment of the institutions<sup>56</sup>. In 2021, the Government amended the Code of Administrative Offences to introduce administrative punishment for parents and/or caregivers for using or threatening to use violence against children in the process of upbringing and has toughen up the punishment<sup>57</sup>.

Another important system-level change was the transformation of the first baby homes into Family and Child Support Centres (FCSC) in 2019. As from UNICEF's Country Office Annual Report 2019, the transformation of Baby Homes into FCSCs increased the chances of new-borns and young children to stay with their families and, thereby, reduced the number of children in institutions. Annex 12 presents a comprehensive selection of system and policy-level changes for which the PE programme contributed through the evaluation period.

**Summary – EQ5:** This evaluation question received the maximum score by the evaluation team (5.0 – 'very good'). Through its advocacy efforts, the PE programme successfully generated significant policy and system level changes that helped to improve local and national policies and support a better protective environment for children. UNICEF's evidence-driven advocacy of policy revision resulted in concrete contributions to national and institutional policies based on a strong partnership with the Government of Tajikistan.

**EQ6: To what extent did other child-protection activities by UNICEF and partners, especially social policy and social protection, reinforce the Protection Environment programme?**

Internal coherence is high with evidence of synergies and interlinkages between the PE programme and other interventions carried out by UNICEF and partners, as further described below. There are a range of examples from the documentary evidence about how other child-protection activities have reinforced the PE programme, especially social policy and social protection. Through the PE programme, UNICEF jointly with MOHSP conducted a vulnerability assessment in the country with the aim to: a) analyse current processes of identification and registration of vulnerable groups; b) list those who are registered as recipients of protective measures and those who are outside of the social protection (SP) system; c) examine current processes of data collection, usage, storage and data flow in SP sector, with specific focus on children<sup>58</sup>.

The programme demonstrated a high degree of collaboration with other actors and their interventions, including adding value by using its convening and coordination role to leverage resources and synergies. During 2021, for example, the CO engaged in dialogue with key players such as the European Union, Government of Japan, USAID, GAVI and UNAIDS, which resulted in raising USD 5.4 million for the PE programme as well as Early Years and Emergency programmes. The PE programme supported the GoT to develop comprehensive social protection mechanisms, and a system<sup>59</sup> for Social Work Workforce Development to better meet the needs of the vulnerable children, including children affected by migration, in contact and/or in conflict with the law, children affected by emergencies, repatriated and children with disabilities. The programme also supported the Ministry of Education and Science to have an initial draft of the Law on Guardianship, with inclusion of Foster Care<sup>60</sup>.

In line with the conclusions of the Country Programme Evaluation, the PE programme has been able to work in an integrated and cross-sectoral way. This helped to increase the overall contribution to progress particularly within the social protection and social work, as well as VAC components, which operated across the inclusive education, mental health/psychosocial support, communication and child protection sectors. For example, the PE programme had supported in 2021 over 1,270 children left behind by migrant parents to access social welfare services in 26 districts, and over 1,250 vulnerable children obtained birth certificates. This contributed to improve these children's access to essential services including healthcare, legal aid, reintegration, education and social care services. In 2021, complaint mechanisms were established in 51 schools and communities that covered 17,634 (including 8,851 girls) young people. UNICEF also carried out a Communications for Development (C4D) campaign to promote the rights of children and women with disabilities, reaching 2.5 million people<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> UNICEF's End of Year Results Summary Narrative 2020

<sup>57</sup> UNICEF's End of Year Results Summary Narrative 2021.

<sup>58</sup> UNICEF Tajikistan's End of Year RAM Outcome and Output Statements, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> According to UNICEF's feedback, the system has been developed and the initial steps were taken, but there is still work to be done to consolidate the result.

<sup>60</sup> Idem. According to UNICEF feedback during the draft report, "This is a purely CP [country programme], not relevant to this EQ which focuses on other CP-related activities especial on social policy and Social protection (it is more relevant to EQ5)".

<sup>61</sup> Idem.



Jointly with the Commissioner on Children's Rights, Ministry of Labour and Migration and the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children, UNICEF conducted a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) of COVID-19 related measures and children's right to protection, with a specific focus on children affected by migration and left behind. Based on the experiences of the PE programme, UNICEF played an important role in several joint UN programmes on SDG financing, migration, peacebuilding and ending violence against women and children.

**Summary – EQ6:** From the beginning, the programme activities presented in the ToC prioritised collaboration with the government to identify gaps in the social protection and justice systems that could expose children to violence or discrimination, considering CWD (e.g., Children Rights Units and CRC observations). Other child-protection activities by UNICEF and partners, especially social policy and social protection (e.g., support to schools and childcare centres, support to families to be enrolled in vocational training as a means of income generation, access to birth certificates and legal documentation), reinforced the Protection Environment programme. This can be seen in the answers to both KIIs and FGDs, but also in the phone survey and documentary evidence. There are important linkages within the PE programme between social policy/protection with child protection interventions as evidenced above. While social policy and social protection is marked by a broader portfolio, there is evidence of a shared understanding in the CO that they are not part of the child-protection framework. Despite that, the programme's cross-sectoral and integrated approach offers concrete examples of the benefits of cross-sectoral work in this sense.

**EQ7: How well did the programme use a cross-sectoral and integrated approach while using vulnerability criteria developed by UNICEF Tajikistan?**

As presented in the EQ6, the programme's cross-sectoral and integrated approach offers concrete examples of the benefits of cross-sectoral work. Such work helped to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups had better access to services that respond to their needs. These include, for example, the pilot hCTP module during the COVID-19 emergency, inclusive education for CWDs, work with schools to prevent SGBV (sexual and gender-based violence) against girls and violence against children, capacity building on VAC for teachers, and psychosocial support for adolescents through the school system.

In line with the Country Programme Evaluation (2020), there is strong evidence that design and implementation of the PE programme has been informed by analysis of the needs of vulnerable boys, girls and youth, including the geographical distribution of vulnerabilities. The programme ToC considered the generation of knowledge as one of the key programme strategies to support system and policy-level changes for an improved child protection environment following an evidence-driven, and pilot-based approach. Through this dense body of evidence, UNICEF has contributed to the understanding of the context of its ultimate beneficiaries, and their vulnerabilities, including the most vulnerable such as children in contact and conflict with law, children at risk of institutionalisation, children from war-affected zones as well as children and women with disabilities.

As discussed in the EQ3, the PE programme applied a cross-sectoral and integrated approach in practice. However, these issues were not explicitly stated in its intervention logic and ToC. The programme supported the generation of information about vulnerabilities (e.g., vulnerability assessment jointly conducted with the MOHSP). According to staff from the programme, an office-wide vulnerability index including PE related indicators was recently developed using existing administrative data, and is planned to be used from 2022 ("Methodology Note: CHILD Vulnerability Index"). The note describes a child-vulnerability index, which attempts to answer the recommendations from the CPE 2020, and uses a composite approach without weights with indicators at district level, while violence against children and nutrition indicators are at a provincial level. Although a good start, lack of reliable disaggregated PE-related administrative data is one of the main limitations. The use of such an objective vulnerability criteria at household level for beneficiary selection, such as specific vulnerability thresholds following some indexes such as the [poverty probability index](#), [coping strategy index](#) or [life-satisfaction index](#), can be useful for objectively targeting the most vulnerable households. However, it can be also highly data intensive, and its feasibility needs to consider and build local capacities and tools, particularly around data protection, real-time management and visualisation.

Despite that, there is strong evidence that sufficient vulnerability assessments were in place before and during the programme implementation. Some examples are the Rapid assessment of the system's response to adolescents' mental health, including prevention of suicidal behaviour (2016); Mapping the vulnerable and excluded groups of adolescents and youth in Tajikistan (2017); Adolescence baseline study (2018), Situational analysis, Baseline study on Children, Teachers and Parents' Ability to Recognise and Respond to Situations of Discrimination or Exclusion in Five Target Districts of Sughd Region of Tajikistan (2019). In addition, the baseline (2018) and endline (2021) studies on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices related to children and women with disabilities in Tajikistan provided valuable information for programming.

**Summary – EQ7:** The programme's cross-sectoral and integrated approach offers concrete examples of the benefits of cross-sectoral work, which were critically important to help to ensure that vulnerable and



marginalised groups had better access to services that respond to their needs. While the PE programme took sufficiently into account vulnerability assessments in its design and implementation, the use of objective vulnerability criteria is not fully in place due to data-access issues. Vulnerability criteria in the form of indexes can be useful for objectively targeting the most vulnerable, and for ensuring an evidence-driven implementation. However, the approach is also highly data intensive, and its feasibility needs to consider and build local capacities and tools, particularly around data protection, real-time management and visualisation.

**EQ8: To what extent has the programme coordinated with development partners and other UN agencies to avoid overlaps, leverage contributions, and catalyse joint work?**

The results suggest that the PE programme had sufficient complementarity, harmonisation and coordination with development partners and other UN agencies, adding value while avoiding duplication. A list of examples is shown in the box below.

- Under the UNICEF-UNHCR Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality, in 2021 over 1,250 children at risk of statelessness and affected by migration from 26 districts and cities received birth certificates.
- In coordination with the World Bank, the PE programme and the UNICEF CO supported inclusion of low-income families with children under 7 years of age into the emergency COVID-19 hCTP cash transfer programme.
- During 2019, the programme negotiated the joint implementation with FAO, IOM and UN Women of the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund to empower families left behind, particularly women and children.
- The programme also helped to develop the National referral mechanism for women and girls' survivors of SGBV in partnership and coordination with UNDP, UN Women and UNFPA. The trainings planned for the operationalisation of the referral pathways had to be delayed due to COVID-19 constraints and limited access to online services among service providers. However, the programme helped to provide mental health support to girls' survivors of SGBV via an established hub of mental health counsellors who were connected to a national hotline supported by UNDP.
- Another example of a well-succeeded effort to leverage contributions and catalyse joint work was the partnership with UNDP's Rule of Law project, which facilitated free legal aid provision of duly capacitated defence lawyers to children.
- In addition, UNICEF with UNHCR, EU, OSCE and other partners initiated a capacity building programme with State Border Troops on child protection as part of emergency preparedness and response to the Afghan situation. This programme aims to sensitise border troops on issues with unaccompanied and separated children so that the best interests of the child are taken into consideration during the process of receiving refugees<sup>62</sup>.
- In coordination with the Commissioner on Children's Rights, Ministry of Labour and Migration and the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children, the programme supported the conduction of a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) of COVID-19 related measures and children's right to protection, with a specific focus on children affected by migration and left behind. The report highlighted areas for improvement such as regarding the amounts of cash transfers, and limitations of support to children that were formally registered in the social protection system, with around 59% of families affected by migration not receiving any assistance<sup>63</sup>.
- The programme had a range of partnerships with other development partners such as civil society organisations throughout its implementation. One example was the partnership with the UK-based NGO HeathProm, local NGOs Hayot dar Oila and NGO Sarchashma to transform Baby Homes into the Family and Child Support Centres and to promote the right of each child to grow in a safe and protective family environment.
- The programme worked with the network of Coalition of Associations of Parents of Children with Disabilities to roll its community mobilisation campaign for social inclusion of children and women with disabilities.
- The programme also worked with the International Committee for the Red Cross and the local NGO Refugees, Children and Vulnerable Citizens (RCVC) to reintegrate 57 repatriated children from conflict zones.
- In partnership with the NGOs Chashma, Rights and Prosperity, Terre des Hommes, which were contracted within the "Protecting Children Affected by Migration" project, the programme ensured that 1,250 beneficiary children were protected and had access to essential services.
- Another example was the partnership with a national NGO to initiate "strategic litigation" of cases related to VAC and SGBV against girls. This involved monitoring cases both at the stage of preliminary investigation and in the court, with the aim of identifying gaps in legislation and practice that fall short of the international standards.

The evidence obtained through key-informant interviews and the online survey highlighted that the work has been well coordinated with organisations, UN agencies and other stakeholders particularly at regional and national level. Most participants emphasised that the programme was successful in avoiding duplication based on different mandates and coordination framework applicable to UN agencies (e.g., UNDAF). The results suggest a very good relationship with the government at both national and local levels. However, most answers did not highlight synergies between development partners nor coordination fora at sub-national level (e.g., protection cluster meetings, thematic working groups, NGO coordination meetings). In contrast, at national level, UNICEF is the Chair of the Donor Coordination Council for Social Protection and calls quarterly meetings with the donor

<sup>62</sup> UNICEF's End of Year Results Summary Narrative, 2021.

<sup>63</sup> UNICEF (n.d.) Impact assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic-related measures to children's right to protection.

community, development and government partners and CSOs. According to the programme staff, UNICEF has also taken part in the meetings of the development coordination council, foras about emergencies and child protection, and other events that have helped UNICEF to coordinate with relevant partners and stakeholders, also at sub-national level.

According to most of the online survey participants, the coordination was good and there was no mention of duplication of activities. The participants also believed that the coordination between the government, NGOs and other UN agencies was high. Local authority and NGO representatives mentioned that the cooperation between the programme and the government was good and supported public policies. Staff from UNICEF mentioned that they worked closely with the government so that the programme's components could serve as a model and be upscaled to all the country, and that changes in the legislation were sought (for additional information, please see the answer to the EQ5 and Annex 12, System and policy level changes through the programme's evaluation period).

The Country Programme Evaluation (2020) mentioned "the need for strengthened coordination and harmonisation of service provision horizontally and vertically and particularly at provincial levels". Although there are systemic challenges (e.g., structural fragmentation and lack of consistency when it comes to the implementation of social policies, current division of labour and the lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities among ministries, departments and agencies), the evidence suggest that UNICEF with its leadership and provision of technical expertise accumulated over years can add value by increasing its support to complementarity and harmonisation of the interventions of other actors at local level.

**Summary – EQ8:** The coordination with development partners and other UN agencies was very good (evaluation score: 5), and that the necessary mechanisms to avoid overlap, leverage contributions, and catalyse joint work are in place. There is strong evidence that the programme was successful in coordinating the work among the various stakeholders and the UNICEF CO leveraged capacities and resources to create synergies at all levels. UNICEF with its leadership and provision of technical expertise accumulated over years can add value by increasing its support to complementarity and harmonisation of the interventions of other actors at local level.

#### **EQ9: How closely is the programme aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (external coherence)?**

The evaluation team could not find explicit reference to the SDGs in the PE programme design and reporting documents. However, the country office annual report 2018 states that the 2016-2020 Country Programme for UNICEF Tajikistan aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan and Gender Action Plan planned to contribute to eight out of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (Goals 1 to 6, 9, 10, 13, 16, 17). Despite that, in 2021, UNICEF Tajikistan was the lead agency of the joint programme "Financing SDGs in Tajikistan", implemented together with UNDP and UN Women, to support GoT in advancing SDGs and national development priorities through addressing technical constraints in securing SDG financing. Focused on improving capacities of its staff on SDG financing, key staff from the UNICEF CO completed a public finance for children training in 2021, for example. Documentary evidence shows that other learning sessions on the budgetary and financial system of Tajikistan took place by lead national and international experts, followed by discussions on how to enhance/utilise the knowledge within the ongoing and future UNICEF programmes.

The Mid-term Development Programme (MTDP) 2021-2025 developed with support of UNDP, UNICEF and other partners was approved in 2021. MTDP result matrix includes 22 child-related SDG indicators and lays the foundation for the national SDG monitoring system. Although not part of the PE programme, UNICEF provided continuous support to Tajstat to improve data on vulnerable children at local level as part of the CO programme on data and evidence for children. Tajstat organised study visits to districts and reviewed data collection processes and reporting forms on children without parental care, orphans and children with disabilities. Based on this, Tajstat made recommendations on how to improve official statistical reporting on the most vulnerable children. UNICEF expects that the implementation of these recommendations (postponed to 2022 due to Tajstat's staff turnover) will address the data challenges revealed during the inter-ministerial technical consultations and collection of child protection data.

The document review indicates that the PE programme directly contributed to the SDGs 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere), 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), and 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels). Out of 22 child-related SDG indicators that were integrated into the Mid-term Development Programme (MTDP) 2021-2025 developed with support of UNDP, UNICEF and other partners, five related to PE programme (child marriage, poverty and social protection, violence). Activities related to child and social protection systems contributed to targets 1.3<sup>64</sup> by generating change in the social

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<sup>64</sup> 1.3: Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable. Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators>.

protection systems and policy. The programme's work with girls (including the work with CWD and J4C) contributed to targets 5.1<sup>65</sup> and 5.2, and the programme's work with children affected by migration contributed to targets 16.1<sup>66</sup>, 16.2<sup>67</sup>, 16.3<sup>68</sup> and 16.9<sup>69</sup>.

Specification of target SDGs in the programme documents (e.g., ToC, work plans and reports) can help to clarify the planned contribution of the PE programme to the SDGs, and ease assessments about its performance in this sense. In addition, reports could highlight indirect contributions to other SDGs and other Country Programme components, which can also help to promote cross-sectoral work towards the SDGs.

**Summary – EQ9:** The PE programme had a good alignment (evaluation score: 4.0) with the SDGs 1, 5, and 16, with important synergies with other programmatic areas of the CO (e.g., education sector as well as with the programme on data and evidence for children). Programme activities and interventions related to child and social protection systems contributed to targets 1.3 by generating change in the social protection systems and policy. The programme's work with girls (including the work with CWD and J4C) contributed to targets 5.1 and 5.2, and the programme's work with children affected by migration contributed to targets 16.1, 16.2, 16.3 and 16.9. Specification of target SDGs in the programme documents (e.g., ToC, work plans and reports) can help to clarify the planned contribution of the PE programme to the SDGs, and ease assessments about its performance in this sense.

### 3.3 Effectiveness

#### Key findings

**3.i:** Despite the challenge of the COVID-19, the programme demonstrated a good achievement of its objectives and results. From its 14 indicators, nine have been met or exceeded, while the rest were considered as partially achieved. For two of the achieved indicators, the programme delivered two to three times higher figures than the initial targets (indicator 1.1 with 271% of the target and indicator 3.1 with 251%). From the five indicators which had not met targets, two demonstrated progress of at least 70% of their targets.

**3.ii:** There is strong evidence that the PE programme successfully adapted to major factors influencing the implementation during the evaluation period. UNICEF recognised and reacted to the new context posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, showing very good capacity of the PE programme to adapt the context while leveraging resources for the achievement of its objectives and results. UNICEF's liaison with the government offered examples of best practices, which led to a strong partnership from 2019 onwards.

**3.iii:** Since 2019, the RAM reports have started to include a specific section on 'Evaluations', which was a very good decision and gives emphasis to UNICEF's evidence-driven approach. Documentary evidence indicates that UNICEF has implemented recommendations from earlier evaluations. By the end of 2021, the implementation of 8 from the 16 actions from the 2020 CPE recommendations had been completed. However, in the online survey with institutional stakeholders, the implementation of the recommendations of earlier evaluations was among the aspects that received the lowest scores (3.4 - regular). The overall results suggest that this is an area for improvement.

The overall findings indicate that the PE programme had 'good' (4.0, grade B) effectiveness as summarised by the table below.

Table 6: Score for the criterion 'effectiveness' by the evaluation team.

KEY QUESTIONS – EFFECTIVENESS	PERFORMANCE					WEIGHT
	A = 5	B = 4	C = 3	D = 2	E = 1	
EQ10: To what extent have the objectives and results of the programme been achieved?		4.0				30%

<sup>65</sup> 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators>.

<sup>66</sup> Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators>.

<sup>67</sup> 16.1: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators>.

<sup>68</sup> 16.2: Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all. Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators>.

<sup>69</sup> 16.3: By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration. Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators>.

EQ11: How well was the programme implementation adapted to the major factors (internal and external) influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives and results?	5.0					40%
EQ12: To what extent have the recommendations of earlier evaluations been implemented into the programme?		4.0				30%
<i>Note: A = very good; B = good; C = fair; D = poor; E = very poor.</i>	<b>Result:</b>				<b>4.4</b>	<b>B</b>

#### EQ10: To what extent have the objectives and results of the programme been achieved?

Triangulated with evidence from primary data collection, we used mainly the available documentary evidence (e.g., ToC, RAM and COAR reports) to assess the extent that the programme achieved its objectives and results. Annex 8 presents a result matrix of progress against indicators for each one of the 14 indicators of the PE programme. The table presents data from UNICEF Tajikistan's End-of-Year RAM Outcome and Output Statements up to the end of 2021, which was generated on 30 March 2022.

Despite the challenge of the COVID-19, the programme demonstrated a good achievement of its objectives and results. The programme had progress indicators for both its outcome and output components which were related to the operational and intermediate changes listed in the ToC. From its 14 output indicators, nine have been met or exceeded, while the rest were considered as partially achieved<sup>70</sup>. For two of the achieved indicators, the programme delivered two to three times higher figures than the initial targets (indicator 1.1<sup>71</sup> with 271% of the target and indicator 3.1<sup>72</sup> with 251%). From the five indicators which had not met targets, three demonstrated progress of at least 70% of their targets. The other three indicators that achieved less than half of their target value were: 1.5) number of children benefiting from government cash transfer programmes [49% of the target]; 2.1) number of unaccompanied and separated children who have benefitted from a formal UNICEF-supported process [36% of the target]; and 3.3) number of justice professionals and law enforcement officials trained on J4C [30% of the target]. From the 9 outcome indicators, four were considered as achieved and 5 as partially achieved.

We identified partially achieved targets in all three programme output components. The programme component which had the highest number of indicators with achieved targets was social protection and social work (four from six targets achieved), while the alternative care and J4C components achieved three from five and one of three targets respectively.

The programme's targets and indicators stuck close with the proposed ToC, whose activities aimed to generate intermediate changes related to revision of legislation, budgetary allocation, improving M&E capacity, piloting the hCTP model and capacity building (For ToC see Annex 6). The achievement and partial achievement of the targets shows that progress has been made towards the three outputs and ultimate outcome, even if not in the targeted magnitude.

Outside of the indicators identified in the RAM reports, the programme had sufficiently detailed two-year work plans, which can be highlighted as a good practice. These were important for presenting output targets that are objectively verifiable. The work plan for 2021-2022 included activities, sub-activities, geographical coverage by sub-activity, implementing partner, timeline by quarter as well as budget information such as amount funded and funds to be mobilised. However, the work plan did not include information on outputs for all sub-activities (e.g., number of repatriated children from war-affected zones for; or number of children affected by migration supported to access essential services, including birth registration), which is an area for future improvement. In addition, the available documentary evidence indicates the need to continue efforts around improvement of the evidence base around protection issues (including on social norms and behaviour change), in support of the CO's actions on data and evidence for children together with Taj stat.

There is enough evidence that the PE programme has been making progress towards its objectives, considering the results and progress as from the narrative annual reports, as well as evidence from primary data collection. For example, in the online survey and phone interviews, most of the participants (67%, 15 participants) rated positively the extent to which the programme objectives had been achieved (see Annex 10 for details). It is clear

<sup>70</sup> We identified five indicators which the RAM report for 2021 indicated as fully achieved (indicators 1.5, 2.1, 2.4, 2.5, and 3.2), whereas their latest data indicated below-target performance. It is unclear if this is a mistake in the system from UNICEF. Additional information is available in Annex 8 in the footnotes for these indicators.

<sup>71</sup> Number of households benefiting from new or additional social assistance measures provided by governments to respond to COVID-19 with UNICEF support [COVIDSitRep].

<sup>72</sup> Number of women, girls and boys accessing GBV risk mitigation, prevention or response interventions.

from the responses to the KIIs/FGDs with beneficiaries that the support received was helpful to their lives. When asked about how helpful the support was and how it met their expectations, participants mentioned that the programme helped children and families to know more about their rights (e.g., what to do in case of domestic violence), supported children facing law problems, home visits by social workers including assistance to children with disabilities, schools materials/books, school transportation, food, clothes, and livelihood skills such as sewing. Since livelihood support was not among the activities of the PE programme, this result also suggests that there has been integration of other interventions supported by UNICEF with the PE programme.

**Summary – EQ10:** Considering the challenge of the COVID-19, the programme demonstrated a good achievement of its objectives and results. The indicators with the most need for improvement were: 3.3) number of justice professionals and law enforcement officials trained on J4C [30% of the target]; 2.1) number of unaccompanied and separated children who have benefitted from a formal UNICEF-supported process [36% of the target]; and 1.5) number of children benefiting from government cash transfer programmes [49% of the target].

**EQ11: How well was the programme implementation adapted to the major factors (internal and external), influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives and results?**

There is strong evidence that the PE programme successfully adapted to major factors influencing the implementation during the evaluation period.

A major factor influencing the PE programme was the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to limitations regarding travel, face-to-face meetings, and the general implementation of the programme. This factor was addressed by the 2020 Narrative Annual Report, where the CO recognises that the pandemic increased significantly the number of children at risk of exclusion and the struggle of the social protection system to address the negative impacts to vulnerable families. During this time, UNICEF adapted its plans to support children and its families to cope with the impact of the pandemic.

For example, the programme overachieved its indicator 1.1 by 277% of the initial “number of households benefiting from new or additional social assistance measures provided by governments to respond to COVID-19 with UNICEF support” (124,164 against a target of 44,772 households). This was possible through a partnership with World Bank for the inclusion of low-income families with children under 7 years into the emergency COVID-19 hCTP, which demonstrates the very good capacity of the programme to adapt the context while leveraging resources for the achievement of its objectives and results.

The Tajikistan CO included in its annual reports descriptions about major external factors affecting the PE programme implementation. Most of such factors were reported between 2016 and 2018. In 2016, the CO reported that institutional changes and significant staff turnover in the government caused delays and uncertainty regarding alternative family care. In response, UNICEF recognised the need for advocating for the training of new officials. During 2018, three significant delays concerning the government were reported. These include delays in the: 1) operationalisation of the new regulation on Family and Child Support Centres (planned to replace baby homes), 2) submission of the new Social Protection strategy, and 3) revision of the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code. As discussed in other sections, UNICEF was successful in achieving major reforms to these working areas, despite the mentioned delays. The CO’s reacted by increasing liaison efforts, which allowed the programme to pave the way for substantial improvements in the partnership with ministries, departments and agencies. To overcome political unwillingness, UNICEF sponsored study visits to Scotland to make government official acquaintance with international examples of best practices and models of foster care, supported inter-ministerial consultations and advocated with the Ministry of Justice to revise two provisions in the penal code.

Further evidence of the programme’s adaptation to internal or external factors comes from the online surveys and KIIs/FGDs, where most participants had a good opinion towards this aspect. In the online survey, most of the surveyed participants had a positive opinion about this EQ (see graph below).



How well was the programme implementation adapted to the major factors (internal and external) influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives and results?

n = 15 responses

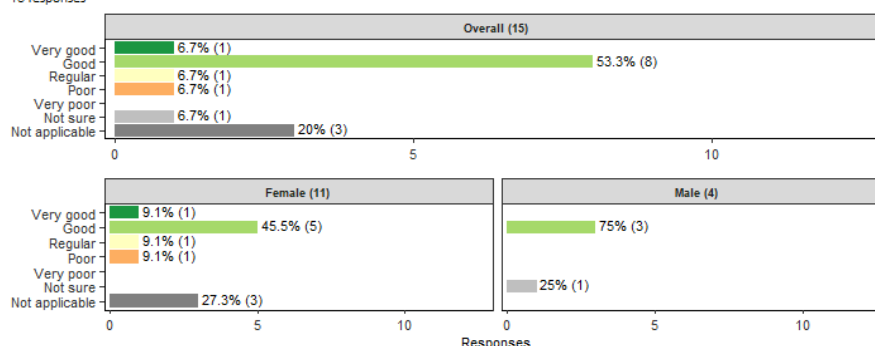


Figure 4: Opinions about the capacity of the programme to adapt to major factors (online survey).

What were the major factors (internal and external) influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives and results? How well was the implementation adapted to these major factors?

n = 32 responses



Figure 5: Text network plot of major factors influencing the achievement of objectives and results (KIs and FGDs).

This was complemented by results from the KIs, where words such as ‘support’, ‘government’, ‘results’, ‘good’ and ‘achieve’ were the most mentioned by the participants, as shown in the text-network plot above. The connections between the words support the findings from the documentary evidence. Government support was a major positive factor mentioned in the KIs, related to factors influencing the achievement and non-achievement of objectives.

After 2018, there are examples of concrete new partnerships with government institutions (e.g., work with migrants in synergy with the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment, as well as support from local individuals and private sector to support Family and Child Support centres in Khujand), which is consistent with the answers from both UNICEF and government respondents. These results indicate that the scenario improved considerably compared with programme reports before 2019, with very positive references to the involvement and collaboration with government institutions. Lessons learnt identified in the responses refer to the importance of perseverance in the face of initial resistance by some government representatives who at first saw external support as unnecessary. The participants highlighted regular communication and networking with government agencies as lessons learnt.

**Summary – EQ11:** There is strong evidence that the PE programme successfully adapted to major factors influencing the implementation during the evaluation period. There were delays caused by difficulties in cooperating with government institutions at the beginning of the programme implementation (2016-2018). However, UNICEF’s reactions were timely, very effective and an example of best practice; with an improvement of the relationship with the government from 2019 onwards. UNICEF recognised and reacted to the new context posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, showing very good capacity of the PE programme to adapt the context while leveraging resources for the achievement of its objectives and results.

#### EQ12: To what extent have the recommendations of earlier evaluations been implemented in the programme?

In the online survey, the implementation of the recommendations of earlier evaluations was among the aspects that received the lowest scores (3.4 – regular), as shown in the graph below (see Annex 10 for details).



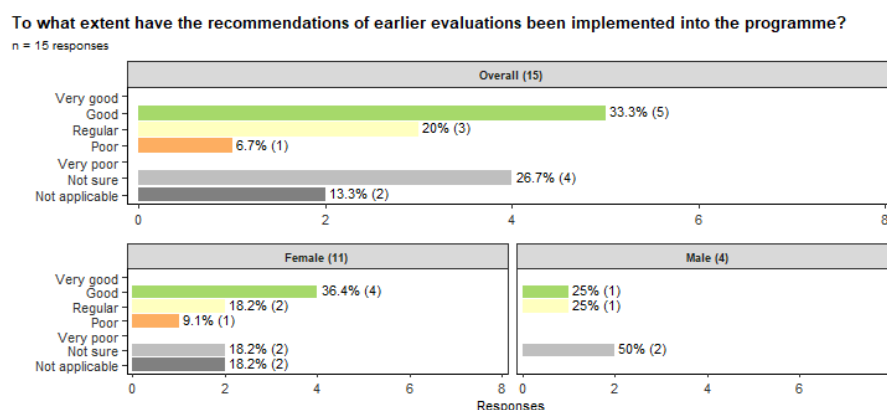


Figure 6: The level of implementing earlier evaluations into the programme.

Two examples of evaluations at country-programme (CP) level during the period to which we had access to were the “Evaluation of UNICEF Capacity Development Interventions in Tajikistan (2016-2018)” and the “Country Programme Evaluation 2020”. Both evaluations provided UNICEF with forward looking recommendations that supported future programming improvements. Since both previous evaluations were performed at CP level, they included recommendations holistically to the CO. Although the evaluations did not include specific recommendations for the PE programme, changes in CP strategies and approaches included the PE programme.

The 2018 Evaluation of UNICEF’s Capacity Development Interventions in Tajikistan included recommendations. Some aspects from these recommendations were general, and could affect the PE programme. Examples of recommendations from this report were to: 1) consider national priorities and scale up/exit strategies in the capacity-development interventions, 2) develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms / develop robust M&E systems, 3) design interventions based on vulnerability analysis, 4) continue to advocate and engage in policy dialogue, and 5) to engage representatives of the legislative.

The 2021 Country Programme evaluation’s recommendations mainly included to: 1) take into consideration the achievements and experience gained to develop further programme strategies, 2) use suggested vulnerability criteria to prioritise national needs, 3) use the most recent data to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, 4) ensure effectiveness of coordination mechanisms, 5) include in the monitoring systems the complexity of different types of indicators, 6) revise CO monitoring and research strategies, and 7) use the ToC to track progress on a regular basis. Recommendations specifically related inequalities and gender included: 8) to develop a systematic approach that ensures that inequalities (including gender inequalities) are systematically addressed, 9) to follow up on gender issues identified in situation analyses, and 10) to assess the effectiveness of interventions that address inequalities.

During the document review, we found evidence in the COAR and RAM reports that the CO recognised and analysed both evaluation reports through the “Evaluation Management Response Documents”. This type of document includes overall and specific responses to the evaluation recommendations, as well as their planned use in future programme activities. The specific responses are detailed and include the evaluation recommendations, mention if the people responsible agree or disagree with it, provide the rationale for agreement or disagreement according to the country’s context, specify activities performed to address the recommendation and their progress, designates specific responsible CO sections/people and describes reasons for delays in the responses if any.

Since 2019, the RAM reports have started to include a specific section on ‘Evaluations’, which was a very good decision and gives emphasis to UNICEF’s evidence-driven approach. The 2021 RAM reported that the management responses for the 2021 CPE were ongoing, with 8 from 16 actions completed, which is impressive, considering that the CPE was finished in mid-December 2020. Despite these references in the annual reports and the evaluation management response documents, it is not fully clear how the CPE recommendations have impacted the PE programme as they address the whole CP.

The document review results indicate that the CO analyses the applicability of each recommendation and responds to each one with concrete actions. However, the previous evaluations were implemented at a CP level and none of the recommendations were directly addressed to the PE programme, which is a CP component. This means that the effect of previous CPE recommendations will be indirectly reflected in the PE programme and is difficult to assess. Another factor that complicates the assessment of previously implemented recommendations is the timeframe between the past and present evaluations (CPE completed in 2021 and this one, ongoing in 2022), which would probably not be enough to implement all recommendations. These factors might be the

reason why respondents gave regular and poor ratings in the online survey. For future CP 2023-2026 evaluations, it is recommended to evaluate the extent in which the recommendations of this report are applied in the new CP's components.

**Summary – EQ12:** Since 2019, the RAM reports have started to include a specific section on 'Evaluations', which was a very good decision and gives emphasis to UNICEF's evidence-driven approach. Documentary evidence indicates that UNICEF has analysed and implemented recommendations from earlier evaluations. By the end of 2021, the implementation of 8 from the 16 actions from the 2020 CPE recommendations had been completed. However, it is not fully clear which of the CPE recommendations have had an effect in the PE programme.

### 3.4 Efficiency

#### Key findings

**4.i:** The PE programme had a very good management quality and efficiency, considering the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. By April 2022, the PE programme had utilised 88% of the USD 6.4 million planned since 2016. The programme budget utilisation was concentrated in its output 1 (Social protection and social work [48%]); followed by its output 2 (Alternative care [25%]); and output 3 (Justice for children and preventing VAC [27%]). Building stakeholder interest groups to define representatives to participate in yearly planning and review workshops, particularly involving beneficiary and government representatives, can help to improve the opinions about transparency and accountability, while supporting increased local ownership.

**4.ii:** UNICEF's evidence-driven advocacy of policy revision resulted in concrete contributions to national and institutional policies. The use of [Activity Info](#) (data aggregator) as well as [PowerBI](#) (data visualization) by the programme since 2019 is an example of best practice. To allow for a more efficient and effective use of data, the system could be enhanced with the use of cloud computing (reproducible processing of raw data in an automated way) and modern data science tools, particularly for the integration of qualitative data, and up-to-date functionalities (e.g., predictive analytics, natural language processing and machine learning/artificial intelligence applications).

**4.iii:** The programme has a highly functional, sufficient, and goal-oriented management system, grounded on UNICEF's procedures. Improvements can include the use of a more granular, specific commercial digital/cloud project-management information system to coordinate the PE programme intervention tasks internally and with external implementation partners, and improved tracking and visibility of results in terms of short-term outputs beyond intermediate changes and long-term changes highlighted in the ToC and RAM reports.

Following the OECD/DAC criteria for the evaluation of development assistance, the criterion efficiency assesses the extent to which an intervention delivered, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way<sup>73</sup>. The evaluation did not include a cost analysis (how costs compare to similar interventions or standards). This was not feasible considering the focus of the terms of reference, provided inputs/data, available time and resources. In addition to the documentary evidence (e.g., two-year work plan, financial statements and results of past evaluations), the questionnaires included questions around efficiency which helped to assess this criterion, also considering the perspective of the participants. Considering both primary and secondary evidence, the PE programme had a 'good' (4.4 – grade B) performance in terms of efficiency in our view, as detailed in the table and answers to the evaluation questions below.

Table 7: Score for the criterion 'efficiency' by the evaluation team.

KEY QUESTIONS – EFFICIENCY	PERFORMANCE					WEIGHT
	A = 5	B = 4	C = 3	D = 2	E = 1	
EQ13: How adequate was the management quality and efficiency (including work planning, procurement, financial resource management, budget allocation, and timely outputs)?	5.0					40%

<sup>73</sup> "Economic" is the conversion of inputs (funds, expertise, natural resources, time, etc.) into outputs, outcomes and impacts, in the most cost-effective way possible, as compared to feasible alternatives in the context. "Timely" delivery is within the intended timeframe, or a timeframe reasonably adjusted to the demands of the evolving context. This may include assessing operational efficiency (how well the intervention was managed) Source: <https://movimentar.co/oecd-eval-criteria>.

EQ14: To what extent is the programme output data efficiently used for national/regional advocacy?		4.0			30%
EQ15: How functional, sufficient, and goal-oriented is the programme-management system (including technical expertise as well as monitoring, planning, and reporting systems)?		4.0			30%
<i>Note: A = very good; B = good; C = fair; D = poor; E = very poor.</i>	<b>Result:</b>			<b>4.4</b>	<b>B</b>

### EQ13: How adequate was the management quality and efficiency (including work planning, procurement, financial resource management, budget allocation, and timely outputs)?

The results suggest that the PE programme was adequate in terms of management quality and efficiency (including work planning, procurement, financial resource management, budget allocation, and timely outputs), considering the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The PE programme had a total planned budget of USD 7.7 million for the period between 2016 and 2022 (USD 6.4 million planned, 88% of which had been utilised), according to data provided by the CO in April 2022. Considering the period from 2016 to 2022, the programme budget utilisation was concentrated mainly in its output 1 (Social protection and social work [48%]); followed by its output 2 (Alternative care [25%]); and output 3 (Justice for children and preventing VAC [27%]). The following graph presents the utilised budget allocation for each one of the programme components. The component 1 (Social Protection & Social Work) was the largest one throughout the period, with the exception of 2018, when the component 2 (Alternative Child Care) saw a higher allocation in support of the conversion of baby homes to family and child-support centres. The largest budget allocation and utilisation was in 2019, when also the component 3 (J4C and VAC) reached its peak, at higher values than the component 2. This budget allocation remained similar between 2019 and 2022, following a reduction in budget allocation for alternative childcare due to the successful transformation from baby homes to family and child-support centres as from 2019.

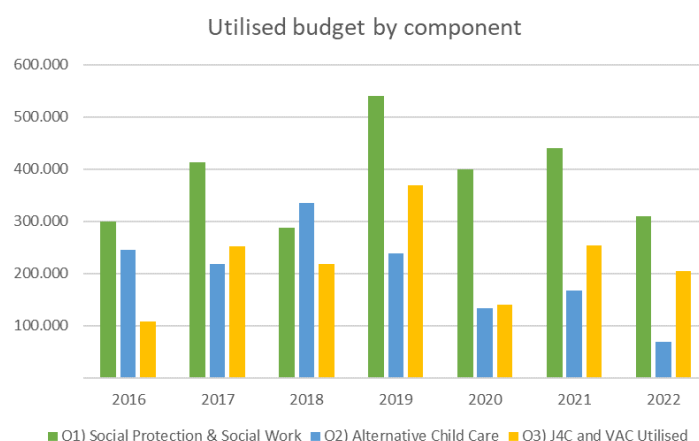


Figure 7: Utilised budget by PE programme component.

As presented in the answer to the EQ10, the programme had sufficiently detailed two-year work plans, but apparently only since 2021. The work plan for 2021-2022 included activities, sub-activities, geographical coverage by sub-activity, implementing partner, timeline by quarter as well as budget information such as amount funded and funds to be mobilised. However, the work plan did not include information on outputs for all sub-activities, which can be improved to ease results-oriented management.

In line with the documentary evidence, the results from the online survey and phone interviews show that both programme staff and beneficiaries generally had positive opinions about the programme's management and efficiency. In the phone interviews, the beneficiaries were asked the following questions: "To what extent was support provided in a timely manner?" and "How would you assess the level of transparency of UNICEF's work?". The feedback from the beneficiaries as from the phone interviews was very positive in this sense (average scores 4.4 and 4.6 respectively).

Most of the online-survey participants also evaluated positively (average scores between 3.4 and 3.9) the programme management quality and efficiency, output delivery timing, output quality as well as management transparency and accountability. The main areas for improvement according to the participants of the online survey were related to: a) the extent to which the outputs have been delivered on time, and b) the transparency

and accountability under which the programme resources have been managed. While the evaluation did not look into procurement aspects, one of the participants in the key-informant interviews suggested additional scrutiny among private contractors (e.g., travel agencies).

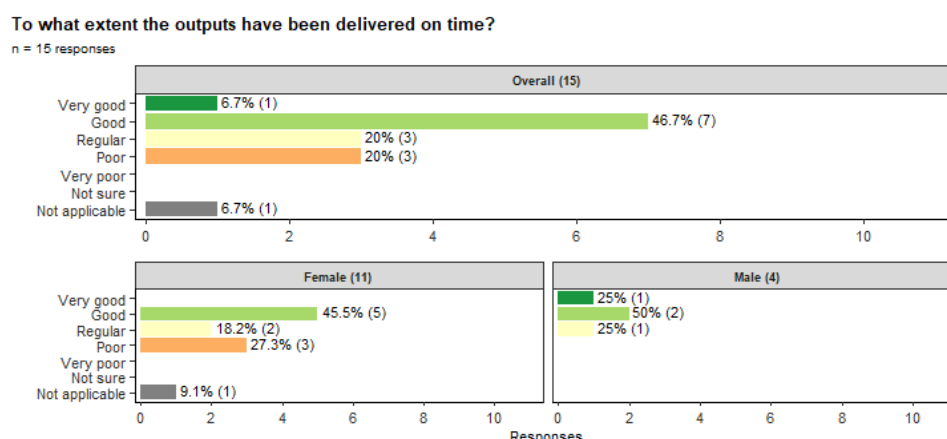


Figure 8: Assessment of the extent outputs were delivered on time (phone interviews).

Regarding the result about output timing, it is important to consider that, as described in the EQ11, between 2016 and 2018, the CO reported important delays were due to institutional changes with staff turnover in the government, insufficient political will and commitment, as well as budgetary constraints from the government's side. These factors have had an impact on the timing of outputs, and can explain the low scores for that aspect. More systematic use of the [RBA \(rights-based approach\)](#), namely building stakeholder interest groups to define representatives to participate in yearly planning and review workshops, particularly involving beneficiary and government representatives, can help to improve the programme performance in terms of opinions about the transparency and accountability towards affected populations.

The results of KIIs indicate a well-planned resource allocation although there were different views about the overall availability of financial resources. Some participants highlighted that the child-protection is under-resourced, and that the status of Tajikistan as a lower-middle income country<sup>74</sup> makes it difficult to raise funds compared to other countries in a more critical situation. The interviews suggest that one of the reasons why it is difficult to acquire funding for child protection is due to the visibility of results only in the long term. However, another participant mentioned that the country has good access to financial resources, especially for the work related to violence against women and girls.

**Summary – EQ13:** The results suggest that the PE programme was adequate in terms of management quality and efficiency (including work planning, procurement, financial resource management, budget allocation, and timely outputs), considering the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to UNICEF, the PE section was temporarily dissolved and reconvened at some point during the reference period, which the consequences are unclear from the documentary evidence and data. The PE programme had utilised 88% of the USD 6.4 million allocated from 2016 until 2022. More systematic use of the [RBA \(rights-based approach\)](#), namely building stakeholder interest groups to define representatives to participate in yearly planning and review workshops, particularly involving beneficiary and government representatives, can help to improve the opinions about transparency and accountability, while supporting increased local ownership. Despite the low budget compared to other country programme components, PE programme successfully achieved its planned outcomes.

#### EQ14: To what extent is the programme output data efficiently used for national/regional advocacy?

Since 2019 the programme has been using a system called [Activity Info](#) (data aggregator) as well as [PowerBI](#) to collect and visualise the available implementation quantitative data, as informed by the programme staff. This shows good data-management capacities. However, the evaluation team did not have direct access to the system. PowerBI has some intrinsic limitations in terms of reproducible processing of raw data in an automated way (e.g., scheduled cleaning of raw data from Activity Info, which requires cloud-based scripts and running triggers in servers such as Azure, AWS EC2 or Google Cloud), particularly regarding the integration of qualitative monitoring data and more up-to-date functionalities (e.g., predictive analytics, natural language processing and machine learning/artificial intelligence applications). This tends to limit a more agile use of data by the various users, as the datasets become larger and more complex. There are potential policy contributions in the use of

<sup>74</sup> World Bank (2021) New World Bank country classifications by income level: 2021-2022. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-world-bank-country-classifications-income-level-2021-2022> (last access: 11 June 2022).

more advanced algorithms including machine learning/artificial intelligence for regression (e.g., exploring hidden underlying factors behind key vulnerabilities, behaviours and attitudes, and forecasting aspects such as service or supply demand), or classification tasks (e.g., faster and more precise classification of areas or beneficiaries based on vulnerabilities for improved targeting). These are new areas which are becoming increasingly important for supporting more evidence-driven decisions.

Considering the documentary evidence (e.g., CO annual reports, RAM and study reports during the evaluation period) as well as results from primary data collection, outputs were systematically and timely registered and analysed, data was shared with national and regional partners and used to influence government actions and public policy decisions (see also the answer to the EQ5 section 3.2.2 Coherence and Annex 12 for additional examples). There are clear examples of the PE programme's evidence-driven contributions to inform actions by the government, other development partners and other UNICEF sectors. For example, the assessment of the 2018 CCR and CRU revealed important gaps in the child protection system. The J4C and child protection actions considered the generated evidence in their implementation, as described in the annual and RAM reports from 2019 onwards.

An important system-level change following advocacy work by the programme was the transformation of the first baby homes into Family and Child Support Centres in 2019, which increased the chances of new-borns and young children to stay with their families instead of being sent to residential institutions. The gathered data coupled with focused lobby and advocacy actions (e.g., study visits to Scotland to make government official acquaintance with international examples of best practices and models of foster care) has also been important to support the transition from baby homes to family support centres in terms of identifying immediate necessities like developing qualified personnel.

The PE programme advocated and provided technical support for the reform of the justice system focusing on children in contact with the law (e.g., National Plan of Action on Justice for Children System Reform 2017-2021 which included advocacy for legal revision and institutionalisation of J4C in pre-service and on-the-job training for law enforcement and justice professionals). The programme "On prevention of Offences by juveniles for 2020-2024" is another example that included both advocacy and capacity development of MoIA and other key stakeholders. The programme also successfully advocated for and contributed to the elaboration and adoption of the State Programme "On Social reintegration and social rehabilitation of children released from closed and semi-closed institutions for 2020-2024", as presented in the answer to the EQ5.

As mentioned in the answer to the EQ11, UNICEF advocacy with the Ministry of Justice has also supported the revision of two important provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code, namely the obligation to start interrogating children within 12 hours following their arrest (instead of 24 hours previously); and the reduction of the duration of police custody upon arrest from 72 hours to 48 hours.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the official Humanitarian Cash Transfer Programme was informed by data that allowed the inclusion of low-income families with children under 7 years of age into the programme. identify vulnerable children/families that would receive help. Those are some examples of how effective advocacy efforts of the programme have been.

**Summary – EQ14:** Outputs were systematically and timely registered and analysed, data was shared with national and regional partners and used to influence government actions and public policy decisions. UNICEF's evidence-driven advocacy of policy revision resulted in concrete contributions to national and institutional policies. Since 2019 the programme has been using a system called [Activity Info](#) (data aggregator) as well as [PowerBI](#) to collect and visualise the available implementation quantitative data. This shows good data-management capacities, and is an example of best practice. To allow for a more agile use of data by the various users, the system could be improved in terms of reproducible processing of raw data in an automated way, particularly regarding the integration of qualitative monitoring data and more up-to-date functionalities (e.g., predictive analytics, natural language processing and machine learning/artificial intelligence applications).

#### **EQ15: How functional, sufficient, and goal-oriented is the programme-management system (including technical expertise as well as monitoring, planning, and reporting systems)?**

The results from the evaluation indicate that the programme counts with a highly functional, sufficient, and goal-oriented management system, grounded on UNICEF's procedures. UNICEF Tajikistan's End of Year RAM Outcome and Output Statements are a key source of information about the CP's performance, including about the PE programme, and are good examples of the quality of the management systems in place at the moment.

As presented in the answer to the EQ14, the use of [Activity Info](#) (data aggregator) as well as [PowerBI](#) by the programme since 2019 is an example of best practice. The KII results confirm that there are systems in place which allow for the implementation follow up. PowerBI, however, is limited in terms of predictive functionalities

(e.g., live forecasts of output and outcome achievement using dashboards based on data from Activity Info), integration of qualitative data, and more advanced algorithms including machine learning/artificial intelligence.

The evaluation team did not have access to the internal corporate systems (e.g., Etools). Although UNICEF has its Enterprise-Resource-Planning (ERP) systems and well-consolidated processes, during the document review and KIIs, we did not find evidence that the PE programme used a specific and more granular digital/cloud project-management information system/platform to coordinate work internally and with external implementation partners. The adoption of project/task-management information systems in the cloud, such as [Teamwork Projects](#), [Asana](#), [Trello](#), or [Basecamp](#) can improve the current management systems, including in terms of ongoing evidence for result-oriented management. With training, this can enable greater efficiency and systematisation including tasks, responsibilities, among others. These commercial systems help to move away from traditional e-mail-centric processes, reducing the flow of messages while improving communication and exchange between programme staff and other partners. This can also support processes to modernise the management, communication and monitoring of individual programme interventions through more automated reminder and reporting generation.

Since the programme uses a ToC for communicating its intervention logic, and no logical framework (logframe) was provided, the programme's vertical and horizontal logic cannot be directly assessed but inferred from the ToC. Regarding the vertical logic, outcome and outputs of the ToC are logical and logical consequences of the activities and the described intermediate changes. However, horizontal logic is not clear in the ToC. While the programme has clear activities, outcomes, assumptions, targets and indicators, the linkages between them are not as clear as they would be in a logframe. For example, it is clear that the programme design considered the intermediate changes and outputs when choosing targets and indicators, but it is not clear which intermediate change corresponds to which indicator. Furthermore, this connection cannot be done with assumptions, which have been left out of the ToC diagram. It is recommended to use a Logframe in future programmes to illustrate this connection and ensure indicator adequateness.

An area for improvement is related to improved tracking and visibility of results in terms of short-term outputs beyond intermediate changes and long-term changes as highlighted in the programme's ToC and RAM reports. In addition to the forms being used in the Activity Info aggregator, structured six-monthly or annual reporting forms, as well as output delivery and evaluation forms, can be deployed in Activity Info to support implementing partners to report their activities by providing an harmonised template to report outputs and the factors affecting implementation of individual interventions by external partners, namely NGOs. This could at the same time help partners to plan, follow up and manage the implementation of their interventions as part of the PE programme. Such a system could deliver UNICEF a continuous stream of implementation data which could support more evidence-oriented programming and visibility of results, with potential benefits in terms of resource mobilisation, as well as evaluation of results both by internal monitoring staff and external evaluators.

**Summary – EQ15:** The programme has a highly functional, sufficient, and goal-oriented management system, grounded on UNICEF's procedures. Improvements can include the use of a more granular, specific commercial digital/cloud project-management information system to coordinate tasks internally and with external implementation partners, and improved tracking and visibility of results in terms of short-term outputs beyond intermediate changes and long-term changes highlighted in the ToC and RAM reports.

## 3.5 Impact

### Key findings

**5.i:** There is strong evidence that the PE programme had a good performance against its pre-defined indicator targets, considering the COVID-19 challenges. Primary data show positive opinions among beneficiaries and other key stakeholders in terms of impact performance. By April 2022, four out of nine outcome-level indicators (44%) have been fully achieved. Among the five outcome indicators that have been partially achieved, three have achieved at least 70%. At the output level, the best performance in indicator achievement was seen in the alternative care component, followed by the social protection and social work component. The component 3 (J4C and VAC) showed the most areas for improvement in achieving output targets.

**5.ii:** The PE programme's advocacy of policy revision and cooperation with the government resulted in important policy and institutional changes that advanced children's rights in Tajikistan. Such changes include various policy revisions in the J4C system, the transformation of baby homes to child and family support centres, improved focus on children with disabilities, and capacity-development actions that concretely improve institutional responses to violence against children and emergencies. There is a high level of satisfaction among beneficiaries and key stakeholders with the programme contribution.



As from the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, the criterion ‘impact’ helps to assess the extent to which an intervention has generated or are expected to generate positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects<sup>75</sup>. The PE programme had a ‘good’ impact (4.3 or grade B) considering the triangulation of primary and secondary data sources, as explained in more detail below. The table below presents the scores and weights per evaluation question around ‘impact’, followed by a detailed account of the reasons for the scores by the evaluation team.

Table 8: Score for the criterion ‘impact’ by the evaluation team.

KEY QUESTIONS – IMPACT	PERFORMANCE					WEIGHT
	A = 5	B = 4	C = 3	D = 2	E = 1	
EQ16: How well has the programme had direct impacts at its overall-objective level?		4.0				30%
EQ17: To what extent does/will the programme have any indirect positive and/or negative impacts (i.e., environmental, social, cultural, gender, and economic)?	5.0					25%
EQ18: How well have the implemented interventions/activities contributed to ensuring a protective environment for children?		4.0				25%
EQ19: To what extent has the programme advanced children’s rights?		4.0				20%
Note: A = very good; B = good; C = fair; D = poor; E = very poor.	Result:					4.3
						B

#### EQ16: How well has the programme had direct impacts at its overall-objective level?

Although this was a formative evaluation, this question is important for exploring the likelihood that impact (usually seen as long-term effects) is achieved as expected. Considering the challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is evidence that the PE programme had a good performance against its pre-defined indicator targets. The PE programme had as its impact goal to contribute to a better functioning protective environment, which prevents and responds to deprivation, violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect for children who are most at risk. The 2021 End of the Year RAM Outcome and Output report include as outcome statement (Outcome 4150/A0/05/884) the following: “By 2020, boys and girls, including those in contact with the law, benefit from programmes that prevent and respond to VAC and strengthened child-friendly justice system”<sup>76</sup>. Considering the extension of the programme duration to 2022, the report presents the outcome as “on track”. It indicates that solid progress was made in child protection policy, legislative framework, and practice with a decrease in the number of children placed in institutional care, an increase in the number of children in conflict with the law accessing rehabilitation services at the community level, together with a strong political will to move forward social protection reforms in Tajikistan.

The 2021 RAM report shows that four out of nine outcome-level indicators (44%) have been fully achieved or exceeded as from the report (see also Annex 8 for more information). The programme showed above-target performance for the indicators 1 (Children 0-17 years living in residential care [117% of its target]) and indicator 4 (Number of CWD receiving community-based care service during the year [200% of its target]). Apart from these, all other outcome indicators have underperformed their 2021 targets. This suggests that the decision on declaring indicators as achieved seems to have been made taking into account other context aspects apart from the target values. For example, two indicators show status as fully achieved although they did not reach their targets, namely: indicator 7 (Percent distribution of children in formal care by type of care (residential care vs. family-type care) [91% of its target to increase the number of children in family-type care versus residential care

<sup>75</sup> Impact addresses the ultimate significance and potentially transformative effects of an intervention. It seeks to identify social, environmental and economic effects of interventions that are longer term or broader in scope than those already captured under the effectiveness criterion. Beyond the immediate results, this criterion seeks to capture the indirect, secondary and potential consequences of an intervention. It does so by examining the holistic and enduring changes in systems or norms, and potential effects on people’s well-being, human rights, gender equality, and the environment. Source: <https://movimenter.co/oecd-eval-criteria>

<sup>76</sup> 2021 End of the Year RAM Outcome and Output dated from 21 January 2022 and approved on 03 February 2022.

Since the evaluation is a theory based one, we need to discuss the result chain in the intervention logic to get to the likelihood of impact. At the output level, the programme had a better performance. As explained in more detail in the answer to the EQ10, nine from the programme's 14 output indicators (64%) have been met or exceeded. Evidence of impact on the overall objective could be found in the COARs and RAM reports, where considerable advancements at system and policy levels were described (see EQ5 and Annex 12 for additional information). The online survey shows that participants (implementing staff) have positive opinions about the extent to which objectives and results were achieved (10 of 15 participants rated it positively).



In your opinion, what were the main impacts achieved by the programme including any indirect positive or negative impacts?

n = 32 responses

impact

social

people

center

increased

work

equipment

knowledge

support

families

activities

documents

project

development

started

beneficiaries

assistance

received

services

rights

future

life

care

child

vulnerable

providing

seminars

children's

training

38

**Summary – EQ16:** Considering the challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is strong evidence that the PE programme had a good performance against its pre-defined indicator targets. Primary data show positive opinions among beneficiaries and other key stakeholders in terms of impact performance. By April 2022, four out of nine outcome-level indicators (44%) have been fully achieved. Among the five outcome indicators that have been partially achieved three have achieved at least 70% of their planned end-2021 targets. The best performance in terms of indicator achievement at output level was seen in the alternative care component, followed by the social protection and social work component. The most areas for improvement in this regard are in the component for J4C and VAC.

**EQ17: To what extent does/will the programme have any indirect positive and/or negative impacts (i.e., environmental, social, cultural, gender, and economic)?**

The documentary evidence did not highlight unexpected/indirect positive or negative impacts, but includes strong evidence that the programme generated measurable improvements for beneficiaries (see Annex 8 for additional information on the achievements against targets). Opinions from key stakeholders did not indicate any major indirect impacts.

Considering primary data sources, in the online survey, only one participant (from 15) reported knowing about an unplanned negative impact, while five reported knowing of unexpected positive impacts the programme had. When asked about elaborating on their answers in open-ended questions, the positive indirect impacts were actually aspects that had been planned within the programme ToC or indicators. For example, there were references to increased outreach to remote areas and villages through mobile groups, empowerment of girls victims of gender violence through development of their soft skills and entrepreneurship, issuance of birth certificates, and reduction of children in institutional care because of the new family and child support centres.

The KIIs and FGDs presented a specific question about the main impacts achieved by the PE programme, including unexpected ones. The answers also include a **few examples of negative indirect impacts** that need to be monitored and mitigated. A representative of local authorities highlighted the risk of aid dependency and passiveness from target populations. The same respondent also mentioned the perception that some rights holders may have misunderstood the awareness raising about their rights. The respondent was concerned that some people would think that they do not need to take action to obtain documents such as birth certificates and passports since these were presented as a right (duty bearers are obliged by law to provide documents to rights holders), no matter if right holders apply for documents or not. These potential negative impacts can be monitored through activity feedback forms deployed in Activity Info for implementing partners to use for activity quality control, with increased involvement of beneficiary representatives in moments of reflection about the performance and yearly planning through participatory workshops (see also Key finding 4.i, under the efficiency criterion). Increased promotion of awareness about the principle of self-initiative by rights holders can help to mitigate the risk of misunderstanding about their duties and responsibilities.

**Summary – EQ17:** The documentary evidence includes strong evidence that the programme generated measurable improvements for beneficiaries (see Annex 8). Opinions from key stakeholders did not indicate any major indirect, unexpected impacts. The participant's responses mentioned two main negative impacts, which could be further investigated: 1) possible dependency on aid among beneficiaries (sustainability challenges), and 2) misunderstanding among beneficiaries about the need to apply for personal documentation themselves, considering the rights-based approach awareness that these are rights.

**EQ18: How well have the implemented interventions/activities contributed to ensuring a protective environment for children?**

The PE programme's ToC (Annex 6) described the programme's expected operational, intermediate, belief/behavioural and development changes towards contributing to a protective environment for children, as defined in the programme documents and its ToC. The programme's contributions can be divided into two interrelated dimensions: 1) at the strategic level, and 2) at the levels of direct changes on the ground.

At the strategic level, the programme focused on creating changes in policy and systems, as described in the answer to the EQ5. The PE programme successfully generated substantial policy and system level changes that helped to improve local and national policies (e.g., signature and ratification of the CRPD by the Government of Tajikistan in 2017, UNICEF/MOHSP joint vulnerability assessment of children outside of the social protection system, Child Rights Impact Assessment of COVID-19 related measures, and support for the National Plan of Action on Justice for Children System Reform 2017-2021), and contributed to a better protective environment for children. The programme also included activities building institutional capacities (e.g., advocacy for legal revision and institutionalisation of J4C in pre-service and on-the-job training for law enforcement and justice professionals; 279 social workers were trained with skills to promote social inclusion of CWD; and 281 social workers were trained on child protection). As presented in the EQ19, the PE programme successfully collaborated with different partners to produce situation assessments that would later be used to inform policy and decision making. By collaborating with the government, UNICEF achieved changes in legislation that made progress towards the programme's overall objective. Annex 12 includes a comprehensive selection of other system and policy-level changes that the PE programme contributed to.

At the ground level, the programme directly contributed to supporting vulnerable children (e.g., transformation of the first baby homes into Family and Child Support Centres in 2019; support to over 1,270 children left behind by migrant parents to access social welfare services in 26 districts; support for 1,250 vulnerable children to obtain birth certificates; and establishment of complaint mechanisms in 51 schools and communities). The PE programme also involved activities that directly benefited beneficiaries in its indicators. By 2021, 124,164 households had benefited from new or additional social assistance as response to COVID-19, 194,130 children benefited from government cash transfer programmes, the number of children in residential care institution was reduced by 1,962 and 123 children in contact with the law were diverted to alternative based support. The Communications for Development (C4D) campaign promoted the rights of children and women with disabilities to an estimated audience of 2.5 million people. These are some of the examples of the programme's contributions based on documentary evidence (e.g., COAR and RAM reports).

The primary data sources support the documentary evidence that the PE programme's interventions had a positive impact on its stakeholders and beneficiaries. For example, over 89% of the 203 beneficiaries who took part in the phone survey, considered that the programme had a 'very good' (45%) or a 'good' (44%) contribution to ensure a protective environment for girls and boys (see Annex 10.2.8).

Examples of these benefits can be found in the KIIs/FDGs, where participants were asked to elaborate on the programme's contribution to advance child rights and to ensure protective environments to the most vulnerable. The network plot below suggests a very good contribution with emphasis to children with disabilities, legal support to parents, promotion of gender issues, capacity building to social workers and beneficiaries on children's rights as well as guidance for obtaining birth certificates as well as support to home visits. As presented in the answer to the EQ16, some respondents highlighted contributions to reduction in the cases of lawbreaking, improved access to the justice system and legal protection, and increased local awareness on how to protect children's rights using the law. A government representative mentioned a "real change" in terms of "regular involvement and support of children with special needs in the centres that were not present in the past". Some responses from multiple stakeholder categories suggested that the programme contributed to reducing criminality and violence (e.g., reduced bullying), which could be assessed in future impact assessments.

**What is your view about the programme's contribution to advance child rights and to ensure protective environments for girls and boys, especially the most vulnerable?**

n = 32 responses

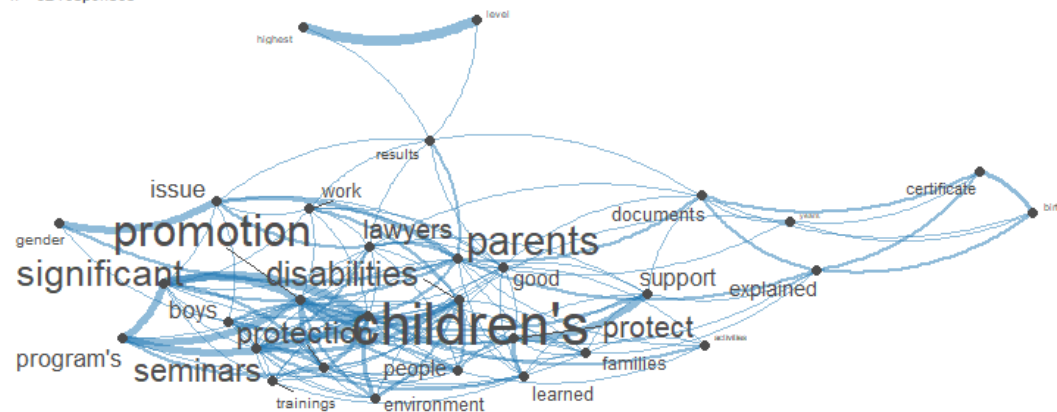


Figure 11: Text network plot of contribution to advance child rights and ensure a protective environment (KIs and FGDs).

**Summary – EQ18:** The PE programme's activities successfully contributed to ensuring a protective environment for children. The programme had a good performance in achieving its outcome indicators, particularly considering the challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Primary data show positive opinions among beneficiaries and other key stakeholders about impact performance. There is evidence that the programme has made progress towards changes detailed as from its ToC, and the primary data confirms documentary evidence.

#### EQ19: To what extent has the programme advanced children's rights?

The PE programme achieved important system and policy changes that advanced children's rights and ensured a better protective environment, as explained and exemplified in the EQ5, EQ16 and EQ18, as well as Annex 12 (selection of system and policy-level changes). The programme supported the revision of normative national normative and legal frameworks as planned in its ToC. These changes are reflected in the output indicators (see Annex 8, indicators 1.2, 2.2, and 2.3), and include strengthened shock-response mechanisms for times of crises, alternative care policy in line with the 2009 UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, as well as local policies aligned with these guidelines (e.g., local budget inclusion and operationalisation of FCSCs, training for secretaries of the Commission on Child Rights in 22 selected districts and orientation packages developed for maternity wards in the same 22 districts). Furthermore, the programme facilitated a partnership between UNICEF and the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan to train public servants, including high level officials that will strengthen institutionalised approach towards child-rights promotion and protection.

The COARs include additional evidence of the CO's measures to advance children's rights. UNICEF advocated for policy revisions and closely collaborated with the government for the signature and ratification of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the government of Tajikistan. Additional examples are the revision of policies in the area of J4C, the transformation of baby homes to child and family support centres, the amendment to the family code that allowed to operationalise the foster-care procedure, and the establishment of monitoring systems in boy detention centres. The programme also galvanised strong partnerships with the Ministry of Labour (migration issues), and Ministry of Justice (issues of childhood statelessness). This was complemented by the CRIA, which took place as a result of the joint work with the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children, supporting the O4CR to address challenges and concerns faced by children affected by migration.

Together with the World Bank and the Government of Tajikistan, the programme supported the inclusion of low-income families with children under 7 years old into the emergency COVID-19 humanitarian cash transfer programme, who were previously out of the social protection system. In addition, civil-society partners commissioned within the PE programme ensured that 1,250 children affected by migration were protected and had access to essential rights including basic services and personal documentation. Together with the network of Coalition of Associations of Parents of Children with Disabilities, the programme supported the roll out of a community-mobilisation campaign for social inclusion of children and women with disabilities.

The phone survey with beneficiaries suggests a high level of satisfaction with the support, suggesting 'good' programme contributions for beneficiaries to find out their rights (average score 4.5), exercise their rights (average score 4.6) and protect their rights (average score 4.5), as presented in more detail in Annex 10.2.8.

The KIs and FGDs also asked the participants to elaborate on the programme's contribution to advance child rights and to ensure protective environments to the most vulnerable. The results confirm the positive view of

beneficiaries and stakeholders about the programme contribution with emphasis to the rights of children with disabilities, legal support to parents, promotion of gender issues, capacity building to social workers, civil servants and beneficiaries on children's rights as well as guidance for obtaining birth certificates as well as support to home visits. Some respondents also highlighted contributions to reduction in the cases of lawbreaking, improved access to the justice system and legal protection, and increased local awareness on how to protect children's rights. Responses from local authority representatives mentioned that the programme helped the government to do its job better and faster, which includes improved focus on the rights of children with disabilities. Despite that, UNICEF staff and NGO representatives mentioned that the local culture and parents' attitudes are still important factors limiting the advancement of gender issues and children rights.

**Summary – EQ19:** There is strong evidence that the PE programme's advocacy of policy revision and cooperation with the government resulted in important policy and institutional changes that advanced children's rights in Tajikistan. Such changes include various policy revisions in the J4C system, the transformation of baby homes to child and family support centres, improved focus on children with disabilities, and capacity-development actions that concretely improve institutional responses to violence against children and emergencies. There is a high level of satisfaction among beneficiaries and key stakeholders with the programme contribution.

### 3.6 Sustainability

#### Key findings

**6.i:** The programme has successfully influenced local, regional, and national policies and public services. Public representatives and families clearly identify child protection policies as a public responsibility. Opinions from the beneficiaries are very positive, and over 87% of the beneficiaries considered that the programme delivered long-lasting results. Views from institutional stakeholders contrast with the positive views from the beneficiaries in the phone survey, and suggest: a) concerns about dependency on the programme, and b) requests for continuation of the support.

**6.ii:** Local ownership of the programme is one of the main areas for improvement. There is a very good relationship with the state institutions. However, the evaluation did not identify evidence of kick-off, regular planning or review meetings with the participation of key stakeholders such as representatives of beneficiaries. This is a measure for improvement, in line with the key finding 4.i (see section 3.2.4 on efficiency).

**6.iii:** Opinions from key stakeholders indicate a high likelihood of continuation of the generated benefits, but also raise concerns about the resource and technical capacity to maintain benefits in the long-term. The Implementation of suggestions for improvement raised by the participants will require an integrated and cross-sectoral approach, particularly involving the education sector. This can help to open new possibilities of cooperation with the MoES around emerging needs (e.g., digital child protection and connected-parenting support), and can support actions to reduce VAC.

As from the OECD/DAC criteria for development evaluation, the criterion 'sustainability' assesses the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue<sup>77</sup>. The overall score for sustainability by the evaluation team was 'good' or 4.0 (grade B), as detailed in the table below.

Table 9: Score for the criterion 'sustainability' by the evaluation team.

KEY QUESTIONS – SUSTAINABILITY	PERFORMANCE					WEIGHT
	A = 5	B = 4	C = 3	D = 2	E = 1	
EQ20: To what extent have the interventions had a sustainable effect on local, regional, and national level?	5.0					25%
EQ21: To what extent has the local ownership of partners been considered in the implementation of the programme?		4.0				25%

<sup>77</sup> Includes an examination of the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities of the systems needed to sustain net benefits over time. Involves analyses of resilience, risks and potential trade-offs. Depending on the timing of the evaluation, this may involve analysing the actual flow of net benefits or estimating the likelihood of net benefits continuing over the medium and long-term.

Source: <https://movimantar.co/oecd-eval-criteria>



EQ22: To what extent will the target groups and beneficiaries continue to use the benefits after the support has ended (long-term orientation)?		4.0			25%
EQ23: What is the contribution of the programme to the institutional capacity of local partners?		4.0			25%
<i>Note: A = very good; B = good; C = fair; D = poor; E = very poor.</i>	<b>Result:</b>			<b>4.3</b>	<b>B</b>

#### EQ20: To what extent have the interventions had a sustainable effect on local, regional, and national level?

The PE programme has had a sustainable effect at local, regional and national level. UNICEF has worked closely with the national government and influenced national policies which in turn have affected institution structure and responsibilities related to child issues. For example, because of the 2015 child protection law, the MoES (directorate on child rights) received the attribution for child protection. Through technical support and capacity building, the programme also helped to create mechanisms that benefit vulnerable children, such as the complaint mechanism created within the Ombudsman for Child Rights office. As mentioned in the impact section, through advocacy and cooperation with the national government, the programme also achieved important and long-lasting policy and system changes, especially in the areas of J4C, child protection and alternative care. These system level changes are sustainable and, therefore, they demonstrate the programme's long-term impact sustainability.

Through situation assessments, the programme identified human-resource needs within institutions, while supporting evidence orientation and focus on the most vulnerable in the design and management of public programmes (e.g., hCTP, inclusion of CWD, support to children affected by migration and in contact with the law. For example, the CO identified in 2014 that baby homes were regarded more as medical institutions where children would receive treatment,<sup>78</sup> that there was a shortage of social workers and psychologists in such institutions<sup>79</sup>, and that there was insufficient of human-resource capacity in government institutions to monitor plans to improve social inclusion of CWD<sup>80</sup>. The PE programme took this information into account and trained professionals to satisfy these needs. The programme also had a sustainable effect in public services through the transformation of protection and alternative care services. This happened, for example, through staff capacity building activities to paraprofessional social workers responsible for child protection, justice professionals and law enforcement officials.

Other examples of sustainable contributions are the awareness raising campaigns on prevention of children institutionalisation, as well as the referral and response mechanisms to promote access of vulnerable families to state services. This includes examples such as the hCTP as explained before as well as women, girls and boys accessing GBV risk mitigation, prevention or response services.

As from the phone interviews (see graph below), the beneficiaries showed to be generally very satisfied with the programme's work (97% answered 'very good' or 'good'), and over 87% of the 203 beneficiaries considered that the programme delivered long-lasting results.

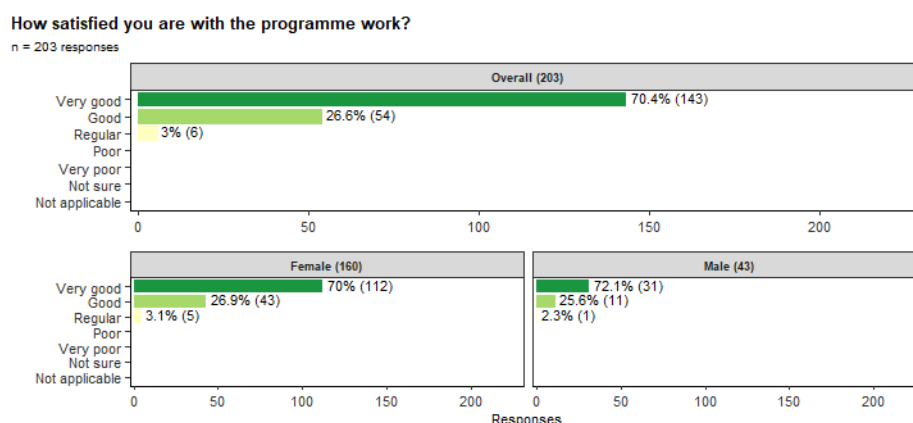


Figure 12: Satisfaction of beneficiaries (phone survey).

<sup>78</sup> UNICEF (2014) Study Report Children in residential care in Tajikistan.

<sup>79</sup> UNICEF (2015) Social Protection in Tajikistan A situational analysis.

<sup>80</sup> UNICEF (2020) Study on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices related to children and women with disabilities in Tajikistan.

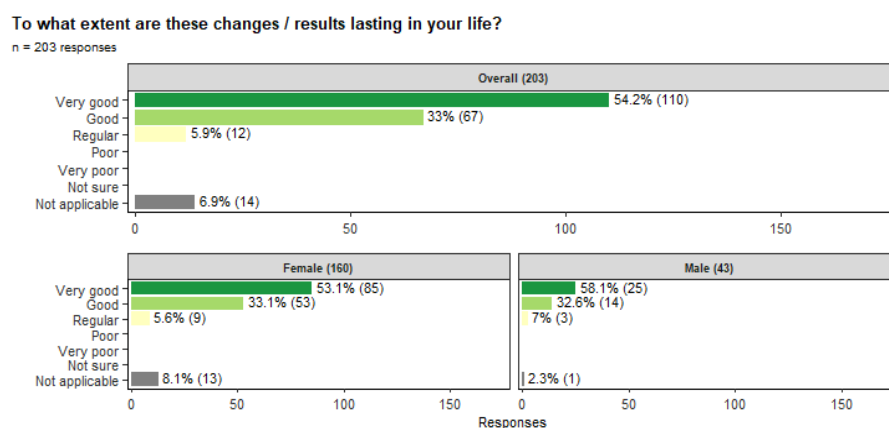


Figure 13: Extent in which the changes are lasting in the beneficiaries' lives (phone survey).

Despite these very positive results, some participants during the online survey and KIIs expressed concerns about the sustainability of the support, including in terms of dependency on the support for the continuation of benefits. From the responses, it is not possible to see which specific components of the programme are the most affected by such concerns. From the ToC and activities, it seems likely that sustainability challenges are concentrated around the continuation of cash transfers as well as daily operation of institutions such as family and child-support centres, and providers of services such as juvenile-support services, community-based rehabilitation, legal support, and services to child victims of violence.

In the online survey, regarding the sustainability of the effects generated by the PE programme at the local, regional, and national level, only 40% of the 15 participants answered 'good' (33%) of 'very good' (7%), while 47% of the participants answered 'regular', 7% poor, and 7% very poor. This contrasts with the positive views from the beneficiaries in the phone survey, but is in line with the results from the KIIs/FGDs, which suggest: a) concerns about dependency on the programme, and b) requests for continuation of the support.

Regarding the programme's direct interventions with beneficiaries, the main suggestions for improvement in future support from the phone survey concentrate mainly around increasing training/seminars to parents (particularly housewives), teachers (particularly in remote areas) and students. Increased support to and involvement of poor families with improved targeting of children with special needs is another group of suggestions. The participants recommended that children, adolescents and youth are more involved in the programme planning and management, including in terms of health training and collecting more evidence about their problems and suggestions of solutions. The participants also suggested the establishment of new centres (particularly in the vicinity of mahallas). Although not all these suggestions are focused on the PE programme mandate, they indicate potential areas for further support improvement following an integrated and cross-sectoral approach.

**Summary – EQ20:** The programme has successfully influenced local, regional, and national policies and public services. Considering evidence from primary data, public representatives and families clearly identify child protection policies as a public responsibility. Opinions from beneficiaries are very positive, with 97% of the 203 beneficiaries in phone interviews highly satisfied with the programme, and over 87% considered that the programme delivered long-lasting results. The views from institutional stakeholders in the online survey contrast with the positive views from the beneficiaries in the phone survey, and suggest: a) concerns about dependency on the programme, and b) requests for continuation of the support.

#### EQ21: To what extent has the local ownership of partners been considered in the implementation?

Considering the primary evidence, the results suggest that implementing partners (institutional stakeholders) assessed the ownership of the programme as 'regular', and this is one of the main areas for improvement. Although there is evidence of a very good relationship with the state institutions, the evaluation did not identify documentary evidence of kick-off, planning or review meetings during the implementation with the participation of key stakeholders such as representatives of beneficiaries. As mentioned in the key finding 4.i (see section 3.2.4 on efficiency), building stakeholder interest groups to define representatives to participate in yearly planning and review workshops, particularly involving beneficiaries (e.g., children, youths, parents, community leaders, PWDs and implementing partners), and government representatives, can help to improve the opinions about local ownership, transparency and accountability.

The online survey with institutional stakeholders had five questions related to sustainability, the overall average score (3.3) indicated a 'regular' sustainability, which means that the implementing staff of the programme assess the situation as satisfactory. The lowest average score was for the question: "To what extent has the local

ownership of partners been considered in the implementation of the programme?” Only 5 out of the 15 participants answered ‘good’ to this question while all other respondents answered ‘average’ (40%), 13% low, and 7% very low. Considering also the findings from the documentary evidence, and other data sources, this suggests that this is the most important area for improvement.

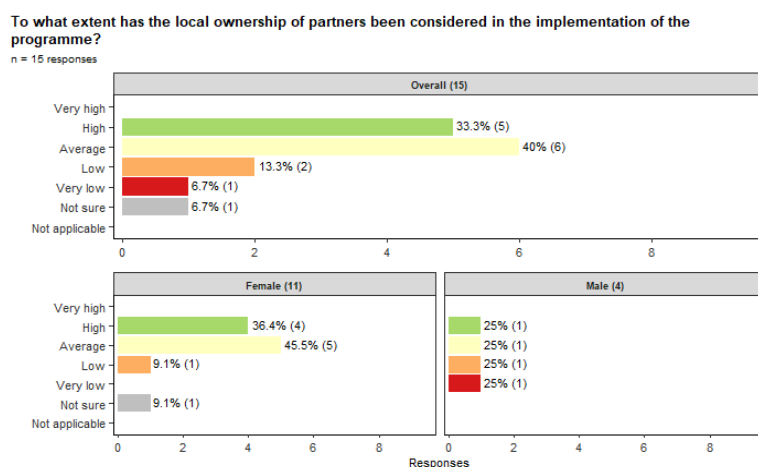


Figure 14: Opinions about the ownership of partners (online survey).

**Summary – EQ21:** Based on the evidence from key-informant interviews and the online survey, institutional stakeholders assessed the ownership of the programme as ‘regular’, and this is one of the main areas for improvement. Although there is documentary evidence of a very good relationship with the state institutions since 2019, the evaluation did not identify evidence of kick-off, regular planning or review meetings with the participation of key stakeholders such as representatives of beneficiaries. This is an area for improvement, in line with the key finding 4.i (see section 3.2.4 on efficiency).

#### EQ22: To what extent will the target groups and beneficiaries continue to use the benefits after the support has ended (long-term orientation)?

It is clear from the phone survey, and FGDs that beneficiaries and their families identify a sustainable effect on their lives (see also answer to the EQ20). There is enough documentary evidence that government structures (local, regional, national) will continue to benefit based on outputs such as system and policy changes (see EQ5 and Annex 12) studies/assessments, capacity building and material support (see EQ20) provided by the PE programme, particularly in the justice system, SAHUs, FCSCs, and schools.

The opinions from key stakeholders indicate a high likelihood of continuation of the generated benefits, but also raise concerns about the resource and technical capacity to maintain such benefits in the long-term. As presented in the EQ20, the views of institutional stakeholders in the online survey about the sustainability of the effects generated by the PE programme contrast with the very positive opinions from the beneficiaries as from the phone survey. The results from the KIIs/FGDs suggest: a) concerns about dependency on the programme, and b) several requests for continuation of the support. However, when asked about the continuation of the benefits by target groups and beneficiaries after the end of the support 80% of the participants in the online survey with institutional stakeholders believed that continuation of benefits would take place should the programme discontinue its support (53% answered regular, 20% good, 7% very good).

The KIIs and FGDs included a question around the sustainability of the benefits, beyond the programme implementation. In the network co-occurrence graph below, the words ‘centre’ and ‘schools’ are the most frequent one, indicating that they are key spaces when it comes to sustainability. Activities with parents are also frequently mentioned in addition to cooperation with state organisations. Some local authorities indicated that discontinuation of the programme still presents a risk for the sustainability of the results, which is in line with some of the feedback above that highlighted the potential dependency on programme support. Training activities, equipment/material support to FCSCs, and support for access to legal documents (e.g., birth registrations, passports, and identification documents) were seen as types of support with high sustainability potential by participants. The answers indicate a high likelihood of benefit sustainability beyond the implementation period.

To what extent will the target groups and beneficiaries continue to make use of the programme's benefits after the end of the implementation, including their ownership of results?

n = 32 responses

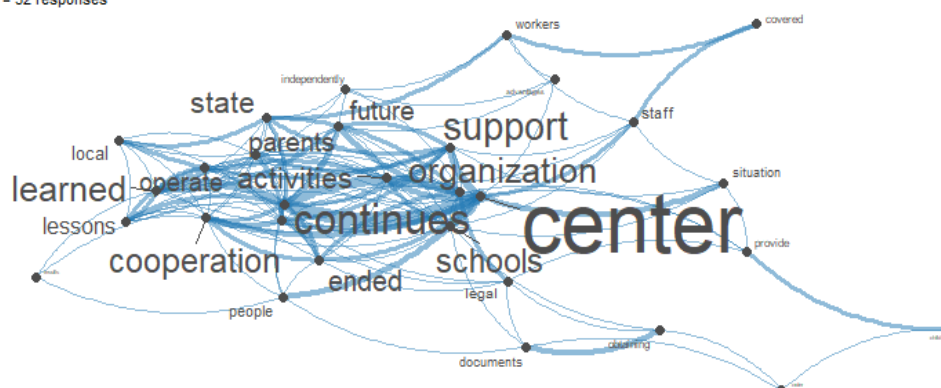


Figure 15: Text network plot of continuation of benefits after the implementation (KIIs and FGDs).

Participants in KIIs and FGDs have been asked what their two main suggestions for improvement would be. The network graph clearly shows that support continuation is the main suggestion, namely training/seminars (including remote education) and modern equipment support to FCSCs, as well as further development of intersectoral cooperation mechanisms with government departments, and increased beneficiary outreach in terms of districts (e.g., not only six pilot districts in the Sughd region) and also in terms of coverage of remote areas. Additional screening of child needs and more customised support approaches seem necessary, as well as continuation of training, mentoring visits to centres and exchanges among child-support department staff, and creation of centres of psychological assistance. Local authority representatives also suggested increased awareness raising campaigns on child rights which should include video clips broadcasted in the media, as well as use of theatrical performances about children's rights and the reasons why people should have legal documents such as birth certificates (including in mosques).

What would be your two main suggestions for improvement?

n = 32 responses

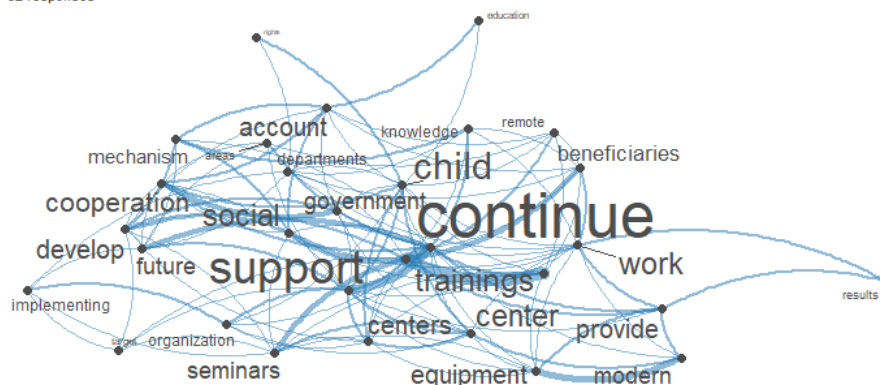


Figure 16: Text network plot of main suggestions for improvement (KIIs and FGDs).

Although not all their suggestions are restricted to the mandate of the PE programme, children and adolescent FGDs also mentioned interest in more teachers of foreign languages, modern equipment in schools and seminars in technology-based topics such as programming and robotics, which could take place with child-friendly tools such as Lego robotics sets complemented with the required IT equipment (tablets or computers). A potential recommendation could be to contact the Lego Foundation and others to explore the potential of the implementation of pilot projects following a cross-sectoral and integrated approach, which could also approach the challenges related to abuse of technology and mobile phones by children, adolescents and youths, data protection and guidance to parents and teachers on how to guide and support safer and healthier use of technology. Healthy use of technology is becoming a key source of intergenerational conflict, which is highly relevant for child protection and prevention of violence against children. For example, a recent study by the PEW research centre on parenting approaches and concerns related to digital devices that parents who have at least one child under the age of 18 (but who may also have adult children) are more likely to think smartphones, for example, have the potential to do more harm than good on young children. More than nine-in-ten parents say

they have a lot of responsibility in protecting children from inappropriate online content<sup>81</sup>. Particularly among conservative families and communities, this represents a challenge as parents, relatives and teachers are not yet equipped with knowledge and skills to embrace the philosophy of “connected parenting” and help children be safe online and make the most of new media and technology<sup>82</sup>.

The suggestions for improvement from the phone survey concentrate mainly around increasing training/seminars to parents (particularly housewives), teachers (particularly in remote areas) and students. Increased support to and involvement of poor families with improved targeting of children with special needs is another group of suggestions. The participants recommended that children, adolescents and youth are more involved in the programme planning and management, including in terms of health training and collecting more evidence about their problems and suggestions of solutions. The participants also suggested the establishment of new centres (particularly in the vicinity of mahallas).

**Summary – EQ22:** The programme beneficiaries and their families clearly identified a sustainable effect on their lives, and showed a high level of satisfaction. Government structures (local, regional, national) will continue to benefit based on outputs such as system and policy changes (see also EQ5 and Annex 12) studies/assessments, capacity building and material support (see EQ20) provided by the PE programme, particularly in the justice system, SAHUs, FCSCs and schools. The opinions from key stakeholders indicate a high likelihood of continuation of the generated benefits, but also raise concerns about the resource and technical capacity to maintain benefits in the long-term. Suggestions for improvement will require an integrated and cross-sectoral approach, particularly involving the education sector. This can help to open new possibilities of cooperation with the MoES around emerging needs (e.g., digital child protection and connected-parenting support), and can support actions to reduce violence against children.

#### **EQ23: What is the contribution of the programme to the institutional capacity of local partners?**

The PE programme provided an important contribution to strengthen the structures (e.g., CRU, SAHU and FCSC) and capacities of implementing partners beyond the programme implementation. As presented in the EQ18, the programme included multiple activities building institutional capacities. Some key examples are the programme contribution to the institutionalisation of J4C in pre-service and on-the-job training for law enforcement and justice professionals; training of 279 social workers to promote social inclusion of CWD; and training of 281 social workers on child protection. Another example is the joint programme of UNICEF with UNHCR, EU, OSCE and other partners for building capacities of State Border Troops on child protection as part of emergency preparedness and response to the Afghan situation.

The PE programme produced multiple studies and situation assessments that informed policy and decision making (see details in the EQ5 and EQ19). The programme supported a range of system and policy-level changes, and contributed to qualify the operationalisation of the FCSCs following the transition from baby homes, for example. Jointly with the Commissioner on Children’s Rights, Ministry of Labour and Migration and the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children, UNICEF conducted a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) of COVID-19 related measures and children’s right to protection, with a specific focus on children affected by migration and left behind. These evidence-oriented initiatives helped to improve the institutional capacity of local authorities to improve focus of programmes such as the hCTP on the most vulnerable, who were out of the social protection system. The programme also facilitated a partnership between UNICEF and the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan to train public servants, including high-level officials that allows for a more institutionalised approach towards child-rights promotion and protection.

In the online survey, when asked about the contribution of the programme to capacity development of local partners, 81% of the responses were ‘very good’ (7%), ‘good’ (47%) or ‘regular’ (27%), while 14% answered ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’. This suggests that institutional stakeholders are satisfied with the capacity building efforts by the programme, but that there are potential areas for improvement.

The participatory development of an [exit strategy](#) is a standard procedure for sustainability, and is usually seen as good practice. It should take place ideally at the time of the formulation of a new phase or early in implementation. An exit strategy is a plan that describes how the programme intends to end its support, ensuring that the achievement of programme goals (assistance or development) is not compromised and that progress

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<sup>81</sup> See: PEW Research Centre (2020) Parenting approaches and concerns related to digital devices. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/07/28/parenting-approaches-and-concerns-related-to-digital-devices/>

<sup>82</sup> See: Harvard University (2020) Experts offer advice on how to become a ‘connected parent’. Available at: <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/12/how-parents-can-manage-children-and-their-technology-use/>

towards these goals continues<sup>83</sup>. From the documentary evidence and key-informant interviews, we did not find evidence of a formal exit strategy for the programme. The results of the online survey and the key-informant interviews also indicate the need to improve the PE programme's exit strategy with key stakeholders' engagement (question: 'What is your assessment concerning the programme's exit strategy or approach, including involvement and agreement of key stakeholders?'). When asked about the exit strategy in this sense, 34% of the institutional stakeholders in the online survey answered 'very good' (7%) or 'good' (27%), while 33% answered 'regular', and 20% 'poor' (13%), or 'very poor' (7%).

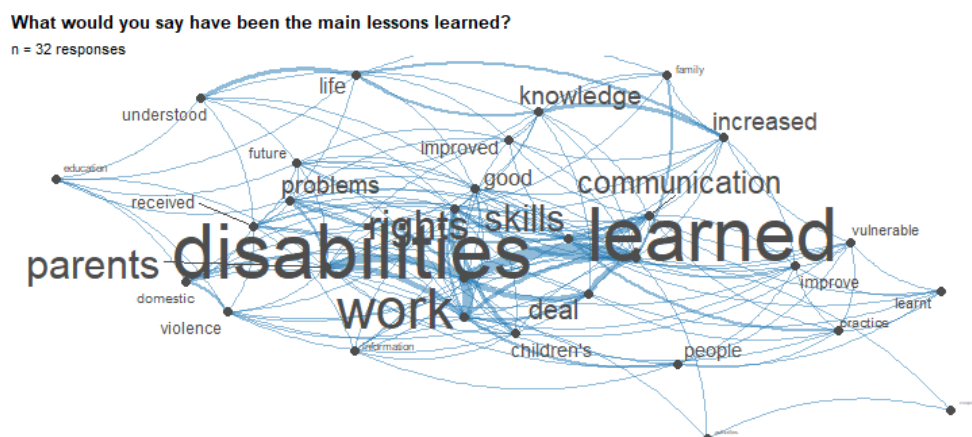


Figure 17: Text network plot of main lessons learnt (KIs and FGDs).

The KIs and FGDs included a question about the main lessons learnt as a result of the PE programme implementation. The network graph above shows that work around disabilities has a prominent role in this regard. Other aspects that have been frequently mentioned are those related to skills development, learning above the practice of support to the most vulnerable and problematic children, increased listening skills/communication with vulnerable families, as well as work with parents regarding problems related to domestic violence and how to deal with children with disabilities. Another aspect highlighted refers to the use of group games particularly in schools and also in terms of role playing of the steps to obtain legal documents. Parents also emphasised the importance of support regarding how best to communicate with their children, while local authorities highlighted improved capacities to conduct family conferences on protection issues, while others raised the importance of early screening of children's development/living standards as well as psychosocial support. FGDs with children under 13 years in Panjakent indicate activities to help children to decrease and control aggression. Multiple participants mentioned that a lesson learnt was that the duration should be extended.

Considering the results of the online survey, improvements seem necessary in terms of setting deadlines that are realistic/well planned, and take into account limited resources including time and the sustainability of the implementation (delivery quality). Another area of lessons learnt as from the graph refers to improving targeting and systems focused on vulnerable adolescents and youth. The third component for lessons learnt involved the work and stakeholder engagement with NGOs and the state (e.g., Ministry of Justice and Registry Offices) which was considered successful by the participants, and helped to institutionalise the interventions and improve the negative attitudes of state institutions towards NGOs. Despite this, the results suggest the need of improving monitoring of programmes by some state organisations, and communication of a "unified vision for the goals and objectives of the programme".

**Summary – EQ23:** The programme strengthened the structures and capacities of implementing partners beyond the programme implementation. Opinions from institutional stakeholders about the programme contribution to building local capacities show a high level of satisfaction, but that suggest the need for improvements. The programme does not count with a formal [exit strategy](#) for the programme, prepared with the involvement of representatives of beneficiaries and other key stakeholders. The participatory development of an exit strategy is a good practice for sustainability, and can contribute to improve the programme performance in this sense.

<sup>83</sup> Exit strategies, when planned with partners prior to closure, ensure better outcomes and encourage commitment to programme sustainability. In addition, good exit strategies can help resolve the tension that can arise between withdrawal of assistance and commitment to achieving programme outcomes. Exit strategies may include knowledge sharing and transfer initiatives, systematisation of implementation (indicating lessons learnt and hotspots), capacity building and processes for transfer of responsibilities, attracting future support (financial and technical), defining independent impact evaluations (at least two years after the end of the intervention) and establishing 'protocols' for support and sustainability of results.



## 4 Conclusions

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the extent to which the Protective Environment programme has been contributing to ensuring sustainable protective environments for the most vulnerable and marginalised children. This section presents the main conclusions of this evaluation reflecting its purpose and objectives. It is followed by forward-looking recommendations as well as identification of lessons learnt and good practices considering challenges, gaps, and barriers during the period.

### 1. Approaches, strategies, and interventions have been well designed and implemented.

**Findings: 1.i, 1.ii, 2.ii, 2.iii, 4.ii, 5.ii, and 6.iii**

The programme was based on a sound intervention logic and theory of change. An analysis of the needs of vulnerable children and youths informed its implementation strategy, which followed and promoted an evidence-based approach. The generated body of knowledge supported successful advocacy for changes at system and policy levels. There are multiple examples of improvements in policy and legal frameworks for child protection to which the programme provided technical assistance in their revision and development. Such changes include various policy revisions in the justice for children system, the transformation of baby homes to child and family support centres, improved focus on children with disabilities, and capacity-development actions that concretely improve institutional responses to violence against children and emergencies. There is a high level of satisfaction among beneficiaries and key stakeholders with the programme contribution (see section 3.2.2 'Coherence' and Annex 12).

The results from both primary and secondary data support the programme's cross-sectoral and integrated approach. This is in line with the 2020 CPE, which also identified examples of integrated working, such as inclusive education for CWDs, and psychosocial support through the school system. The results include concrete examples of the benefits of such an approach, which helped to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups had better access to services that respond to their needs. The PE programme was aligned with the SDGs 1, 5, and 16, with important synergies with other programmatic areas of the CO (e.g., education sector as well as with the programme on data and evidence for children).

Opinions from key stakeholders indicate a high likelihood of continuation of the generated benefits but also raise concerns about the resource and technical capacity to maintain benefits in the long term. The implementation of suggestions for improvement raised by the participants will require continued effort towards an even more integrated and cross-sectoral approach, particularly involving the education sector. This can help to open new possibilities of cooperation with the MoES around emerging needs (e.g., digital child protection and connected-parenting support) and can support actions to reduce VAC.

### 2. Strategic positioning and programmatic choices informed and supported government priorities considering the context and the COVID-19 challenge.

**Findings: 1.ii, 2.i, 2.iii, 3.ii, 3.iii, 4.i, 5.i, 5.ii, and 6.i**

The PE programme had a very good management quality and efficiency, considering the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. By April 2022, the PE programme had utilised 88% of the USD 6.4 million allocated since 2016. Output 1 (Social protection and social work) was the largest one in terms of budget throughout the period, except for 2018, when Output 2 (Alternative childcare) saw a higher allocation in support of the conversion of baby homes to family and child-support centres.

Primary data show positive opinions among beneficiaries and other key stakeholders in terms of impact performance. By April 2022, four out of nine outcome-level indicators (44%) had been fully achieved. Among the five outcome indicators that had been partially achieved, three had achieved at least 70%. At the output level, the best performance in indicator achievement was seen in the alternative care Output, followed by the social protection and social work Output. Output 3 (J4C and VAC) showed the most areas for improvement in achieving output targets.

The PE programme supported important policy and system level changes and reflected the key national policies and strategies. These include particularly the Mid-term Development Programmes, draft National Programme for Children 2030, the programme and action plan of the Justice Reform for Children for 2017-2021, the Programme for Training of Personnel of the Social Protection System for 2030, the Programme on Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration of Children After Released from Closed Institutions 2020-2024, the National Programme on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency for 2020-2024, the State Programme on Youth Social Development, National Programme for Rehabilitation of Disabled People of 2017- 2020, and the National Education Strategy, and the Child Rights Ombudsman Strategy.

The programme successfully adapted to major factors influencing the implementation during the evaluation period. The 2018 ToC revision helped the programme to stay relevant, according to the progress made at that time and context. UNICEF's liaison with the government led to a strong partnership from 2019 onwards. UNICEF recognised and reacted to the new context posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating very good capacity of the PE programme to adapt the context while leveraging resources for the achievement of its objectives and results (e.g., vulnerability assessment and facilitation of the inclusion of children affected by migration in the COVID-19 humanitarian cash-transfer programme in partnership with the World Bank). Since 2019, the RAM reports have started to include a specific section on 'Evaluations', which was a very good decision and gives emphasis to UNICEF's evidence-driven approach. Documentary evidence indicates that UNICEF has implemented recommendations from earlier evaluations. However, primary data suggest that this still is an area for improvement and can help to enhance the programme's strategic positioning and choices.

The PE programme's advocacy of policy revision and cooperation with the government resulted in important policy and institutional changes that advanced children's rights in Tajikistan. Over 87% of the 203 beneficiaries that took part in the phone survey considered that the programme delivered long-lasting results. However, views from institutional stakeholders (UNICEF staff, NGO representatives, local authority representatives, ministry representatives, and other public international/regional organisations) contrast with the positive views from the beneficiaries and suggest: a) concerns about dependency on the programme, and b) requests for continuation of the support. The section on recommendations includes suggestions for action.

### **3. Good practices contributed to progress towards a protective environment for the most vulnerable and marginalised children, looking beyond the traditional vulnerable groups.**

#### **Findings: 2.ii, 3.i, 4.ii, and 5.i**

A range of good practices have been identified through this evaluation and are presented in more detail in section 6 (lessons learnt and best practices). Good practices were found at all levels, from the strategic (e.g., liaison with government and advocacy) to operational practices that supported progress towards the programmatic goals.

The programme explicitly addressed the most vulnerable, beyond the traditional vulnerable groups. These included children in contact and conflict with the law, children at risk of institutionalisation, children from war-affected zones, and children and women with disabilities.

The programme's cross-sectoral and integrated approach is an example of good practice and was crucial to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups had better access to support and services that respond to their needs. However, while the programme took sufficiently into account vulnerability assessments in its design and implementation, the use of objective vulnerability criteria is not fully in place due to data-access issues. A methodology note exists describing a child-vulnerability index, which attempts to answer the recommendations from the CPE 2020 and uses a composite approach without weights with indicators at district level, while violence against children and nutrition indicators are at a provincial level.

Institutional changes and significant staff turnover in the government caused delays and uncertainty regarding alternative family care, for example, as reported between 2016 and 2018. Reported delays related to the relationship with the government at that time included the: 1) operationalisation of the new regulation on Family and Child Support Centres (planned to replace baby homes), 2) submission of the new Social Protection strategy, and 3) revision of the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code. The programme reports indicated that such delays were due to insufficient political will and commitment as well as budgetary constraints from the government's side. However, primary data suggest that the programme faced initial resistance from government partners, who saw the support as unnecessary. The programme reacted by increasing liaison efforts, which allowed it to pave the way for substantial improvements in the partnership with ministries, departments, and agencies. To overcome political unwillingness, UNICEF sponsored study visits to Scotland to acquaint government officials with international examples of best practices and models of foster care, supported inter-ministerial consultations, and advocated with the Ministry of Justice to revise two provisions in the child penal code. This set of actions is also an example of good practice that allowed UNICEF to build a strong relationship with the government partners as from 2019. As a result, the programme was successful in overcoming the initial resistance and delays while achieving major reforms in policies and legislation.

Another good practice at a more operational level were the sufficiently detailed two-year work plans. The work plan for 2021-2022, for example, included activities, sub-activities, geographical coverage by sub-activity, implementing partner, timeline by quarter, and budget information such as amount funded and funds to be mobilised. However, the work plan did not include information on outputs for all sub-activities (e.g., number of repatriated children from war-affected zones or number of children affected by migration supported to access essential services, including birth registration). This offers a potential opportunity for improvement together with

the increased involvement of beneficiary representatives and key stakeholders in the review and design of such two-year work plans.

The use of [Activity Info](#) (data aggregator) and [PowerBI](#) by the programme since 2019 is another example of good practice. To allow for a more efficient and effective use of data, the system could be enhanced with the use of cloud computing (reproducible processing of raw data in an automated way) and modern data-science tools, particularly for the integration of qualitative data, and up-to-date functionalities (e.g., predictive analytics, natural language processing, and machine learning/artificial intelligence applications). This can contribute to UNICEF's evidence-driven advocacy of policy revision and improved public targeting/spending. There are potential policy contributions in the use of more advanced algorithms including machine learning/artificial intelligence for regression (e.g., exploring hidden underlying factors behind key vulnerabilities, behaviours, and attitudes, and forecasting aspects such as service or supply demand) or classification tasks (e.g., faster and more precise classification of areas or beneficiaries based on vulnerabilities for improved targeting). These are new areas which are becoming increasingly important for supporting more evidence-driven decisions. This is in line with the 2020 CPE conclusions, which highlighted the need to further develop a monitoring and evaluation system for the programme and particularly use of the data and evidence produced for planning and implementation.

The participatory development of an [exit strategy](#) is a standard procedure for sustainability and is usually seen as good practice. An exit strategy is a plan that describes how the programme intends to end its support, ensuring that the achievement of programme goals (assistance or development) is not compromised and that progress towards these goals continues<sup>84</sup>. From the documentary evidence and key-informant interviews, we did not find evidence of a formal exit strategy for the programme. This is a potential area for improvement, and it should take place ideally in a participatory way with key-stakeholder representatives at the time of the formulation of a new phase or early in implementation.

#### **4. Experiences from the programme can accelerate progress towards the child-protection targets.**

##### **Findings: 1.iii, 3.iii, 4.iii, and 6.ii**

Based on the documentary evidence, the programme provided direct contributions to priorities listed in the draft State Comprehensive Programme for Children “Rushdu Numu” 2030 (also known as National Programme for Children 2030 and pending approval by the government), such as priority 6 (e.g., support to birth certificates and advocacy related to children affected by migration), priority 8 (e.g., work related to GBV and VAC), priority 11 (e.g., supporting transformation baby-homes into family and child support centres as well as their operationalisation), priority 38 (e.g., interpersonal and public dialogue with parents' community and the society in general regarding prevention of violence against children), priority 39 (e.g., strengthening supervision system at district level (Commission of Child Rights) for preventing placement of children in institutions; improve alternative family care mechanisms, such as guardianship and trusteeship, foster care and other types of family care), and priority 40 (e.g., introduction of community-based rehabilitation approach for children with disabilities to include them in society).

The programme contributed to the implementation of the recommendations of the 2017 concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. As presented in the answer to the EQ5, advocacy and technical support activities promoted two important provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC). The programme also supported the 2021 amendment of the Code of Administrative Offences to introduce administrative punishment for parents and/or caregivers for using or threatening to use violence against children in the process of upbringing and has toughened up the punishment. This helped to ensure alignment with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child towards protection for all children. The programme also worked to strengthen the Commission on Children's Rights and its representations at the provincial and district level in order to enable them to better coordinate activities for improving the effective provision of child-protection services. The 2019 Budgeting, Costing, and Financing Gap Analysis for Children report, which was commissioned by the programme jointly with the Government of Tajikistan, is an example of a comprehensive assessment of the budgetary needs for children.

While the PE programme included gender-related activities, its ToC did not mention gender issues and outcomes, for example. A specific gender action plan for the PE programme, coordinated by the Gender Focal Point, can

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<sup>84</sup> Exit strategies, when planned with partners prior to closure, ensure better outcomes and encourage commitment to programme sustainability. In addition, good exit strategies can help resolve the tension that can arise between withdrawal of assistance and commitment to achieving programme outcomes. Exit strategies may include knowledge sharing and transfer initiatives, systematisation of implementation (indicating lessons learnt and hotspots), capacity building and processes for transfer of responsibilities, attracting future support (financial and technical), defining independent impact evaluations (at least two years after the end of the intervention), and establishing 'protocols' for support and sustainability of results.

help to guide the programme in developing specific activities to track and address gender-related protection issues, in line with the recommendations of the Country Programme Evaluation (2020). This is likely to accelerate progress towards child-protection targets focused on the most vulnerable.

Documentary evidence indicates that UNICEF has implemented recommendations from earlier evaluations. Since 2019, the RAM End of Year Outcome and Output reports have included a specific section on evaluation, as mentioned above. By the end of 2021, the implementation of 8 of the 16 actions from the 2020 CPE recommendations had been completed. It is also difficult to assess the current extent of the implementation of the recommendations from the CPE considering its relatively recent finalisation and the more holistic focus on the country programme. However, in the online survey, the implementation of the recommendations of earlier evaluations was among the aspects that received the lowest scores (3.4 – regular). The results suggest that this is an area for improvement for increased learning from past experiences and faster progress towards targets.

The programme has a highly functional, sufficient, and goal-oriented management system, grounded on UNICEF's procedures. Improvements can include the use of a more granular, specific commercial digital/cloud project-management information system to coordinate the PE programme intervention tasks internally and with external implementation partners. Improved tracking and visibility of results in terms of short-term outputs beyond intermediate and long-term changes highlighted in the ToC and RAM reports can help to accelerate progress by capitalising on technology and more agile management tools.

Currently, there is a very good relationship with the state institutions at national level. However, the evaluation did not identify evidence of kick-off, regular planning, or review meetings with the participation of key stakeholders such as representatives of beneficiaries. Local ownership of the programme is one of the main areas for improvement, and a more participatory management approach can support increased relevance and ownership in line with the [RBA \(rights-based approach\)](#), as highlighted by key finding 4.i (section 3.2.4).

Chapter 5 presents a selection of recommendations considering the evaluation results.

## 5 Lessons learnt and best practices

We attempted to identify positive and negative lessons that reflect the processes, practices, decisions and experiences acquired, recording, whenever possible, the problems and solutions found.

**Lessons learnt 1:** Persistence with increased and well-thought liaison efforts with government stakeholders was crucial to overcome initial resistance and delays in system and policy changes.

**Best practice 1:** The sponsored study visits to Scotland to acquaint government officials with international examples of best practices and models of foster care, together with supported inter-ministerial consultations, and advocacy towards the revision of two provisions in the child penal code are examples of best practices in the face of resistance and delays. They allowed UNICEF to build a strong relationship with the government partners as from 2019, and advance changes in policies and legislation.

**Lesson learnt 2:** The comments obtained through KIIs/FDGs as well as through phone interviews with children, adolescents and youths suggest a strong support to activities focused on preventing violence against children. FDGs with children under 13 years indicate that programme activities have helped children to decrease and control aggression. The results also emphasise the importance of increasing the outreach of VAC, particularly around capacity building. Children who benefited from the activities were more conscious about their actions and staff from schools reported being able to see attitude changes in the children after involving them in sport and other extracurricular activities.

**Best practice 2:** The combination of capacity building on VAC for teachers, home-visiting professionals, social workers, and CRU officers in six targeted districts, together with child-friendly complaint mechanisms, and awareness of children about the O4CR through community meetings and dissemination of advocacy materials is an example of best practice, which could be extended to other districts.

**Lesson learnt 3:** The work with schools and local authorities on children rights and how to deal with children with disabilities, and vulnerable/problematic children, was particularly successful in developing local capacities, including listening and communication skills to teachers and parents.

**Best practice 3:** Cross-sectoral and integrated work was important to reach out to beneficiaries and build local capacities. The use of group games and other participatory activities such as role playing / theatrical performances are good practices. Social inclusion of children and women with disabilities through awareness-raising interventions were particularly well assessed by the evaluation participants.

**Lesson learnt 4:** Interagency partnerships such as UNICEF-UNHCR Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality, and the COVID-19 hCTP support with the World Bank, made a difference in increased outreach and synergies.

**Best practice 4:** The joint work supporting the provision of birth certificates to children at risk of statelessness and affected by migration, as well as the work to improve access to services, social and legal aid is a best practice towards increased outreach focused on the most vulnerable.

**Lesson learnt 5:** Adjustments to the Theory of Change during 2018 improved the programme design and adaptation to the context. The two-year work plans helped to translate the ToC to operational terms, which contributed to a clearer understanding and implementation. The use of digital tools was important to manage data complexity and monitor results

**Best practice 5:** The use of [Activity Info](#) (data aggregator) and [PowerBI](#) by the programme since 2019 is an example of good practice, which can be further developed (see recommendations). Sufficiently detailed two-year work plans were important, as they presented activities, sub-activities, geographical coverage by sub-activity, implementing partner, timeline by quarter, and budget information such as amount funded and funds to be mobilised. Additional information on outputs for all sub-activities can help to improve result-orientation. The design of work plans also offer a potential opportunity for involving beneficiary representatives and key stakeholders in the review and design processes (e.g., yearly workshops for work-plan review and design).

**Lesson learnt 6:** There are new emerging needs that require attention, such as challenges related to abuse of technology and mobile phones by children, adolescents and youths, data protection and guidance to parents and

teachers on how to guide and support safer and healthier use of technology. Misuse of the internet / mobile phones is an important source of conflict within households, as indicated by the suggestions for improvement by the beneficiaries. Intersectoral integration in the support to beneficiaries and schools is important in order to ensure access to contents using digital technologies. These can improve access to information and education as long as the equipment and capacities are in place.

**Best practice 6:** The cross-sectoral and integrated approach, together with the use of digital/phone support as part of the adaptation to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic helped the continuation of the programme activities, and ensured relevance to beneficiaries' needs and constraints.

**Lesson learnt 7:** There is still a long way to go in terms of strengthening data-collection systems on better coverage of vulnerable children. The use of objective vulnerability criteria is not fully in place due to data-access issues, and cannot depend only on official data at district and province levels. Its operationalisation will require independent data collection also at household level for disaggregation as required by the recommendations of the CRC 2017 concluding observations.

**Best practice 7:** The programme gave a first step by drafting a methodology note describing a child-vulnerability index, which attempts to answer the recommendations from the CPE 2020 and uses a composite approach with indicators at district level, while nutrition indicators are at a provincial level.



## 6 Recommendations

The main recommendations are presented below, indicating possible responsible parties and the suggested degree of priority. The recommendations have been developed based on consultations and involvement of duty-bearers, as well as rights holders through the online survey, phone survey, key informant interviews and focus-group discussions, which included questions about their main suggestions for improvement. The recommendations were presented and discussed with the CO through the ERG meeting. Our key recommendations are as follows:

**Recommendation 1** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – Develop narrative descriptions to complement current programme documents where objectives, intervention logic, planned activities, cross-cutting approaches, related SDGs and monitoring mechanisms (targets and indicators) are mentioned and explained. Such a narrative programme document can help to facilitate monitoring and evaluation beyond the indicators mentioned in the RAM reports, as well as the communication about the programme with external stakeholders.

**Recommendation 2** (Responsible: UNICEF and National Government / Priority: High) – Develop a specific gender-action plan for the programme including specific activities and targets/indicators to track progress. We recommend explicit reference to the specific cross-cutting issues in the theory of changes of future programmes, to clarify which aspects they intend to address, including specific activities (inputs).

**Recommendation 3** (Responsible: UNICEF and Government at all levels / Priority: High) – There is an emerging need for introducing a proper case-management system at the ground level, which the programme can contribute to. We recommend seizing this opportunity to introduce more detailed beneficiary registration forms, in line with the recommendations of the CRC concluding observations of 2017 around data collection, which also recommended UNICEF as a source of technical assistance. Integration of data collection in the daily case management and processes can be a critical step towards improved evidence base for targeted policies and support. This recommendation can involve an impact evaluation with a larger sample size and preferably at the household level during and after 2-3 years after receiving the support by the programme.

**Recommendation 4** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – Taking into account the limitations of official district and provincial level data, as well as data-access by UNICEF, consider using administrative data or commissioning primary data collection at household and district level to independently build composite vulnerability indexes (specific related to protection indicator and ideally including also standard development indicators such as the [poverty probability index](#), [life-satisfaction index](#) or [coping strategy index](#)). Data collection can be eased with tools such as [RapidPro](#), which UNICEF has been successfully using worldwide to build nationally scalable mobile applications. This can help to build capacities of government partners while validating/triangulating official data, helping to improve vulnerability targeting and disaggregation of data by multiple demographic variables (e.g., sex, age, education) and geospatial variables (e.g., village, jamoat, district and province levels).

**Recommendation 5** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – We recommend to improve / scale up the programme outreach to remote villages compared to urban areas. Adaptations to the needs of those participants in rural areas (e.g., additional focus on households whose livelihoods depend on cattle raising, which may be more vulnerable to child labour), can help to improve the programme performance. As from the regression model (see Annex 10.4.2), the participants who live in villages (41%) tended to attribute higher scores (0.15) to the programme compared to the participants who live in towns (59%). This indicates that the programme has been successful in answering the needs of participants living in both rural and urban areas, performing best in rural areas. However, most of the 203 interviewed beneficiaries in the phone survey lived in urban areas. While the likelihood of a beneficiary to answer phone calls can have an influence on the larger representation of beneficiaries in urban areas, results from other sources (KIIs/FGDs) also suggest the need to improve the outreach to rural areas, where the most vulnerable to multidimensional poverty are.

**Recommendation 6** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – We recommend additional focus on the needs of primary-grade participants (e.g., age specific materials and contents) as it could help to improve the programme performance, particularly considering that this group represents most of the respondents, and lower educational levels are usually correlated with higher vulnerability. The regression model identified a statistically significant association between education and the scores. Participants with lower secondary (grade 5 to 9) (27%) tend to have a higher score (0.26) compared to the participants with primary (grade 1 to 4) (71%).

**Recommendation 7** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – We recommend scaling up activities related to building capacities and raising awareness for prevention of violence against children. The output 3 (Justice for children and preventing VAC) was the programme component with the lowest budget share [27% of utilised budget]]. In addition, the outcome indicator 5 (“Percentage of parents who consider physical punishment of their children acceptable under given circumstances”) saw an increase from 16% in 2017 to 16.4% in 2021 as from the

RAM report. As from the regression model (see Annex 10.4.2), respondents who selected “violence against children” (71%) for the question “Which of the UNICEF programmes have you participated in?” tend to give higher scores (0.41) compared to participants who did not select that option. This suggests that the topic has succeeded particularly well from the point of view of the respondents.

**Recommendation 8** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: High) – Develop an explicit [exit strategy](#) in a participatory way that describes how the programme intends to end its support, ensuring that the achievement of programme goals (assistance or development) is not compromised and that progress towards these goals continues. The participatory development of an exit strategy is a good practice for sustainability, and can contribute to improve the programme performance in this sense.

**Recommendation 9** (Responsible: UNICEF and national government / Priority: Medium) – The participants in KIIs/FGDs suggested that children, adolescents and youth are more involved in the programme planning and management, including in terms of collecting more evidence about their problems and suggestions of solutions. Following a [RBA \(rights-based approach\)](#), we recommend building stakeholder interest groups to name representatives and hold yearly planning and review workshops to involve them, particularly involving beneficiary and government representatives. Such a participatory management approach can be used to jointly review and improve two-year work plans, and can improve the opinions about transparency and accountability, while supporting increased local ownership.

**Recommendation 10** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: Low) – Children and adolescent FGDs also mentioned interest in more teachers of foreign languages, modern equipment in schools and seminars in technology-based topics such as programming and robotics. Although these suggestions go beyond the mandate of the PE programme, they offer an opportunity to work on emerging digital child-protection issues (e.g., online safety, connected parenting), which could tap on cross-sectoral work with the Education sector. We recommend to contact actors such as the Lego Foundation, Google Foundation as well as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to explore the potential of the implementation of pilot projects in complement to the PE Programme, which could prepare the Tajik children, adolescents and youth to the digital era, while also approaching the challenges related to abuse of technology and mobile phones by children, adolescents and youths, data protection and guidance to parents and teachers on how to guide and support safer and healthier use of technology<sup>85</sup>.

**Recommendation 11** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: Low) – The use of [Activity Info](#) (data aggregator) as well as [PowerBI](#) by the programme since 2019 is an example of best practice, although they were used only for specific projects/components. We recommend extending this to all programme interventions for consistent use and real-time monitoring. To allow for a more efficient and effective use of data, the system could be enhanced with the use of cloud computing (reproducible processing of raw data in an automated way) and modern data science tools, particularly for the integration of qualitative data, and up-to-date functionalities (e.g., predictive analytics, natural language processing and machine learning/artificial intelligence applications).

**Recommendation 12** (Responsible: UNICEF and implementing partners / Priority: Low) – Consider the use of commercial cloud-based project/task management information systems (such as [Teamwork Projects](#), [Asana](#), [Trello](#), or [Basecamp](#)). With training, this would enable greater efficiency and monitoring including tasks, responsibilities, among others. These commercial systems help to move away from traditional e-mail-centric processes, reducing the flow of messages while improving communication and exchange between programme staff and other partners.

**Recommendation 13** (Responsible: UNICEF and NGOs / Priority: Low) – Consider the inclusion of new activities cross-sectoral synergy with other UNICEF sectors, and/or an specific component on labour and job orientation (e.g., labour rights, financial education for credit consumer protection and micro business legislation). This can complement the current programme structure, particularly the protection issues which included child labour, and regarding the support to families to ensure children remain in the safe and protective family environment in addition to cash transfers. Although UNICEF uses internal corporate systems (e.g., e-tools) such management systems mentioned here are also involving external stakeholders, and go beyond monitoring tools mentioned in the recommendation 12.

**Recommendation 14** (Responsible: UNICEF / Priority: Low) – We recommend to present the results of this report to other sectors in support of cross-sectoral work with the Education, Health and Nutrition sectors to support the PE programme’s children, adolescent and youth beneficiaries with activities focusing on improved diet (reduced consumption of condiments and sugar and increased consumption of food with high protein content

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<sup>85</sup> Healthy use of technology is becoming a key source of intergenerational conflict, which is highly relevant for child protection and prevention of violence against children, and help children to be safe online and make the most of new media and technology. Particularly among conservative families and communities, this represents a challenge as parents, relatives and teachers are not yet equipped with knowledge and skills to embrace the philosophy of “connected parenting” and help children be safe online and make the most of new media and technology. Please see more information in the answer to the EQ22.

such as meat/fish and pulses). Nutritional guidance and support can also contribute in part to addressing health issues. The participants (children, adolescents, and youths until 30 years) in the phone survey most frequently mentioned 'health' as their most critical problem nowadays. We also recommend investigating in more detail which health needs are required and support synergies and activities to address them following an integrated and cross-sectoral approach. Although the overall FCS can be considered 'acceptable' according to the standard limit (>35 = 'acceptable') of the World Food Programme, 4% of the participants have a 'borderline' food consumption. The data on diet diversity also suggest a high prevalence of inadequate nutrition. The results from the phone survey suggest that food of low nutritional value such as condiments and sugar tend to be among the most consumed items in the participant's diet. There was low consumption of food with high protein content such as meat/fish and pulses.

**Lesson learnt 8:** The participatory development of an [exit strategy](#) for the PE programme is critically important. This should take place ideally at the time of the formulation of a new phase or early in implementation. An exit strategy describes how the programme intends to end its support, ensuring that the achievement of programme goals is not compromised and that progress towards these goals continues.

## 7 Annexes

Following the requirements of UNICEF, the annexes are presented separately and available at: <https://movimentar.co/annexes-PE-report>. For confidentiality and for preserving the anonymity of the participants, anonymous datasets can be shared upon request and approval from UNICEF.