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Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan (January 2020 – February 2022)

EVALUATION REPORT March 2022

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List of Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CP	Country Programme
CPD	Country Programme Document
CPE	Country Programme Evaluation
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CWD	Children with disability
DPG	Development Partner Group
DPOs	Disabled Peoples Organisations
ECOSOC	(United Nations) Economic and Social Council
EM	Evaluation Manager
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESC	Evaluation Steering Committee
ET	Evaluation Team
FAO	(United Nations) Food and Agriculture Organization
GD	Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEROS	Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System
ICF	International Classification of Functioning
IFI	International Financial Institution
ILO	(United Nations) International Labour Organization
IR	Inception Report
IRB	Institutional Review Board
JP	UN Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan
KII	Key Informant Interview
LMP	Labour Market Program
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MELR	Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MOPE	Ministry of Public Education
MOPSE	Ministry of Preschool Education
NEET	Young people not in education employment or training
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSSP	National Strategy for Social Protection
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
PUNOs	Participating United Nations Organizations
PSA	Public Services Agency
PwD	Persons with disabilities
QA	Quality Assurance
RBM	Result-based management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOP	Standard Operations Procedure
SR	The Single Registry
TBD	To be determined
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Thematic Working Group

UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations County Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
VNR	Voluntary National Review
VKK	Medical Advisory Commission
VTEK	Medical and Labour Experts Commission
WHO	(United Nations) World Health Organization

Executive Summary

1. This report presents the end of cycle evaluation of the **UN Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan** – hereafter referred to as the JP, which is a programme jointly implemented by three United Nations (UN) agencies: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), International Labour Organization (ILO), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from January 2020 until February 2022. This report stems from a summative evaluation which assessed the JP’s contribution to the social protection sector reforms and social care services in Uzbekistan. The evaluation is based on the Terms of Reference provided by UNICEF (Annex 1).
2. Uzbekistan is the largest country in Central Asia with a resident population of Uzbekistan is 35.19 million, with approximately equal numbers of men (50.3 percent) and women (49.7 percent). Over the past 30 years, the population of Uzbekistan has increased substantially - by 13.9 million people, including 2 percent growth in 2021, compared to the same period in 2020. The proportion of people of working age has increased from 53.6 percent to 58.7 percent between 2000 and 2019.
3. The National Development Strategy of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021 covers five priority areas, the fourth of which is the further development of the social sphere and the strengthening of social protection of vulnerable segments of the population. A set of legislation regulates social protection schemes, but no Social Protection policy or strategy has been adopted yet. Over the past 5 years, real qualitative changes have been achieved in the social protection of the poor and vulnerable segments of the population. The legal and institutional mechanisms that been created, have made it possible to prevent a large-scale increase in the share of low-income population, especially among families with children, the elderly and PwD. Uzbekistan has committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2018 the country adopted 16 national SDGs, 125 related targets and 206 indicators, and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF 2021-2025) between the UN and the Government of Uzbekistan, which is closely aligned to the SDGs., and the new Uzbekistan’s Development Strategy.
4. Social Protection in Uzbekistan is fragmented across various institutions, with none of them having the core mandate for the coordination or integration of social protection sector. Besides, substantial resources invested in social protection appear not optimized due to fragmentation and lack of an integrated approach to benefits and services. The role of the professional social worker is also still not recognized in Uzbekistan. The social assistance eligibility process is guided by traditional local community structure, the *makhalla*, which had its advantages, but is marred by a fact that the support provided is rarely under professional guidance. Uzbekistan has limited social care services for elderly people, children without parental care, and PwD. Although households with members with disability have higher expenditures due to disability related expenses, they are less likely to access social protection schemes and services. The recent decisions in favour of children with disabilities and their caregivers may serve to overcome some of these issues.
5. The JP was launched in January 2020 and covered a two-year period from January 2020 to 31 December 2021, An extension was later approved which moved the end date to end of February 2022. The aim of the programme was to support the acceleration of Uzbekistan's progress towards SDG 1, 5, 10, and 16. Ultimately, the programme aimed to support system changes for the benefit of the most vulnerable groups, including children, low-income families, people with disabilities, older people without access to pensions, and young people not in education employment or training (NEET). The total cost of the programme was USD 2 million. Overall, the programme focused on the following three areas to lay the basis for a major reform of the national social protection system between 2022 and 2030: (1) Establishing a dedicated institutional framework to provide leadership and coordination to the social protection sector, and be responsible for overseeing the delivery of social protection schemes, (2) Designing an evidence-based and costed national social protection strategy based on wide multi-stakeholder consultations and citizens’ engagement, and (3) Improving the accessibility of social protection for persons with disabilities and promoting their full inclusion into different aspects of social life, via modelling implementation of the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) in disability assessment implying abolishment of the current medical approach. The programme was implemented jointly by UNICEF, ILO, and UNDP. Each of the three programme implementing partners had excellent prior understanding and experience of addressing social sector challenges in Uzbekistan and strong relations with key actors in the government. Each agency brought strong local expertise and potential to bring international expertise and experience into the programme in their respective fields: institutional support (UNICEF), national strategy development (ILO) and interventions for people with disabilities (UNDP).

6. The purpose of the evaluation was to critically assess the joint programme contribution to social protection sector reforms and provision of more equitable and quality social care services in the country. The evaluation looked at the UN joint programme holistically in the framework of the broader social protection sector reforms as well as the national and global priorities. In addition, the UNICEF contribution was analysed to provide additional insights on the Single Registry model implementation. The geographical scope of the evaluation was nationwide.
7. The evaluation has a formative - forward-looking - perspective to support strategic learning and decision-making; and a summative - backward-looking - perspective, to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience. The primary intended users of the evaluation are the UN agencies, Government of Uzbekistan, and other social protection actors. It is expected that the findings and recommendations of the evaluation will be used as a basis for discussions, planning for future programming.
8. The evaluation was conducted in a participatory manner and participation of key stakeholders was ensured in all phases of the evaluation, including the planning, inception, fact-finding, reporting as well as the management response phases. Most of the primary data were collected from prioritized key informants during the field phase. During the primary data collection phase, semi-structured key informant interviews (KII) were carried out with i) Joint Programme implementing partners, ii) key national stakeholders (key government interlocutors, implementing partners, civil society) and iii) development partners. A total of 90 key informants were interviewed (Annex 5). The final beneficiaries of the programme – children and adolescents – were not interviewed as agreed during the inception meeting with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG). The ET organized group discussions (GD) with civil society stakeholders. The purpose of group discussions was to elicit reflection on wider contextual issues and feedback on the JP contribution to wider changes in the country. In total, two group discussions were conducted during the primary data collection phase.
9. The Evaluation Team (ET) members did not have any conflict of interest and operated with independence and impartiality throughout the evaluation. The team ensured compliance with ethical and moral principles, including the application of the UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation and Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. The ET adhered to the Standard Operations Procedures for Quality Assurance and Ethical Standards in UNICEF-supported Research, Studies, and Evaluations and the Core Commitment for Children in Humanitarian Action. Given that there were no children or vulnerable groups involved in the evaluation data collection, the evaluation did not go through a formal Institutional Review Board ethics review as part of the design process. However, the evaluation still adhered to the ethical considerations related to safety, confidentiality, and data protection regarding its treatment of participants in the evaluation process.
10. The evaluation of the Joint Programme applied the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, impact, coherence, and disability focus.
11. **Relevance:** The comparative analysis of the JP Results Framework, the national plans, and priorities of the Government of Uzbekistan, UNCT as well as the SDG priorities, indicates that the programme was relevant to the national priorities and aligned well with the national development strategies of Uzbekistan. From the start, the programme design and planning were based on analyses conducted at national level, thorough situational analyses conducted by UN agencies as well as other development partners.
12. The JP focused on systemic change and supported reforms to accelerate the expected progress. It was also very responsive to critical bottlenecks to social protection such as the inefficient system of social benefits allocation and the registration of PwD, the lack of a single government entity for social protection, the fiscal aspects of the social protection system, the degree of digitalization of databases, etc. This included providing more effective coverage and support to those in need. The JP also supported the roll-out of the Single Registry (SR), which was also very relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
13. **Effectiveness:** The JP has drawn on the expertise and strategic positioning of the three PUNOs in its support the Government in building and delivering a high-quality social protection system that offers all citizens of Uzbekistan security and social support throughout their lives. Support was delivered through a mix of capacity building, policy dialogue and technical assistance, aimed at building an integrated social protection system at institutional, policy and programme/operational levels. The support interventions delivered their intended key outputs, laying the basis for a major reform of the national social protection system between 2022 and 2030.
14. The JP partners succeeded in delivering results towards: i) supporting and informing policy alternative for establishment of a dedicated institutional framework to provide leadership and coordination to the social protection sector, as well as to be responsible for overseeing the delivery of social protection schemes, ii) designing an evidence-based and costed national social protection strategy based on wide multi-stakeholder consultations and citizens' engagement, and iii) improving the accessibility of social protection for persons with

disabilities and promoting their full inclusion into different aspects of social life. This was done via modelling implementation of the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) in disability assessment which is contributing to the shift from the current medical to social approach. One of the most effective results of the JP is the nation-wide roll-out of the SR. The registry was initiated by UNICEF prior to the JP, which was designed and applied to simplify the social benefits provision process to the most vulnerable. The SR uses a scientific method to support evidence-based decision making and positive change in the lives of vulnerable people.

15. **Efficiency:** The JP resources were adequate (USD 2 million), both in terms of funding and technical expertise provided. However, the duration of the programme was short, limiting the extent to which the programme could support longer term reform priorities. The technical assistance was professional and in line with the requirements of the government agencies. There was due diligence in financial and portfolio management. The evaluation found that the programme secured strong and competent technical staff, with lean core teams in each PUNO and outsourced services where specific, additional expertise was needed. Outsourced international expertise was adequate and appropriate, and delivered most results despite the COVID-19 travel restrictions. This was made possible by shifting to remote/online mode of support. The JP budget utilization rate is good, with the full funding expected to be used as planned. PUNOs' efficiency driver has been the technical competence and personal dedication of each PUNO team, contributing to the efficient implementation of the interventions.
16. Another contribution to sustainability is the combination of working at system and at local level with piloting models, and conducting social mobilization, through the work with NGOs on advocacy or promotion of rights of PwD, etc. This combination contributed to building durable partnerships between the implementing partners and the national stakeholders, and among the national stakeholders themselves.
17. **Impact:** This evaluation is not in position to provide full assessment of impacts due to time and resource constraints but also because there has not been enough time between implementation and evaluation. Positive impact prospects of the programme will materialize should all delivered outputs fully transform into positive government practices. At the time of the evaluation, there is evidence of better social protection coverage of right holders. However, the achievement of impact-level results is not entirely dependent on PUNOs' work, with many external factors directly affecting achievements
18. **Coherence:** The internal coherence of the thematic portfolios within the JP is sound and the three outputs, implemented by three different UN agencies, bring together a holistic approach to the social protection. Having three UN agencies working together has built a convening power and strategic positioning as advocate and supporter of reforms, and this is considered a good driving force for partnerships with stakeholders. PUNOs have also invested efforts to avoid overlaps and create synergies with other partners such as the World Bank. Stronger operationalization of the planned holistic approach would be further improved coherence.
19. **Disability focus:** Across all thematic components, PUNOs encouraged inclusion and targeting of PwD as beneficiaries or rights and inclusion advocates. For instance, UNDP spearheaded reforms of the disability assessment and classification models in Uzbekistan in line with ICF and CRPD norms, to help its modernization and shift towards a social model, which, once adopted should bring important changes in registering PwDs and their inclusion in society. UNDP also supported 11 NGOs through grants to advocate for PwD rights and engaged them in policy processes lead by the government. The JP partners also engaged with the Government to advocate for and adapt policy framework towards more inclusion of PwD in the labour market and employability measures. A gender lens was integrated in the programme as well.

20. The main evaluation conclusions are as follows:

Relevance	C1: The programme has underpinned and stirred important reforms and mindset changes in the social protection sector.
Specific contributions to desired outcomes of the JP	C2: Output level results ensuing from advisory and capacity strengthening interventions have been positive and confirm the strength and value added of a joint programme rather than individual agency interventions. However, a challenge remains to ensure that investments across the targeted thematic areas transform into more sustainable outcome level results. This is understandable as programmes and projects implemented by PUNOs can only control output level results under their direct control. The transformational change in achievement of outcomes require system and/or behavioural change. Such changes require time and are usually beyond PUNO's control. Successful achievement of intended outputs is clear and specific contribution to desired outcomes have been noted.

	C3: The JP interventions provided effective support to the most vulnerable, with integration of protection, gender and disability principles.
Efficiency	C4: Programme efficiency was very good, uplifted by positive and constructive partnership between PUNOs, sound results framework and good division of tasks in line with strong comparative advantage and strategic positioning of each PUNO.
Impact and sustainability	C5: Impact and sustainability of achievements of the JP are still emerging and fragile. The JP contributed to the design and adoption of several legislative solutions, while some key supported policies are still in the process of adoption. One of the most sustainable achievements is the Single Registry which is likely to continue to be used by the Government. However, many other areas of interventions require further work as they contribute to wider social protection reform which takes more time to show results.
Coherence	C6: The collaborative and flexible programme approach helped to maximize the JP's potential, despite some challenges because of the internal siloed approach.

21. The evaluation identified three important lessons learned, as follows:

22. **Lesson 1:** The design of a joint programme implemented in partnership between UN Agencies requires evidence-based selection of strategic areas of intervention. The experience of this JP in Uzbekistan showcases the importance of ensuring a good balance between the scope of a joint programme and its support to the government's comprehensive reforms from the perspective of what can be realistically achieved, and where joint work of PUNOs has a comparative advantage. The experience demonstrates that a clear intervention logic of how support effort can deliver outputs with transformative potential along with a realistic resourcing strategy. Such an approach is critical in societies which encounter more limited fiscal and institutional capacity, and where national institutions embark in fast pace of reforms.

23. **Lesson 2:** Achieving longer term strategic (outcome level) objectives is based on cooperation with government and a commitment for adoption of an appropriate set of policies and legislative and institutional reforms sequenced in a way the incrementally build the national capacity over a longer-term horizon. The experience in Uzbekistan suggests for policy areas where there is government commitment but lower absorption capacity, close partnership with the government is helpful to bring about change, It also requires a longer-term intervention with a set of realistic strategic choices and targeted outcomes, to ensure sufficient time is available to support the government in complex reforms requiring incremental change.

24. **Lesson 3:** Scaling up models requires clear frameworks agreed with the Government since the onset of modelling intervention. Experience from modelling of approaches and mechanisms in Uzbekistan shows the relevance and need for a time-bound transition framework or a handover plan designed together with the Government. Such plans should contain clear milestones and benchmarks of what is desired to be achieved and how it would be scaled up. As such it should represent the foundation of modelling interventions. Such plans should be reviewed and discussed on a regular basis with national stakeholders is a good way forward to ensure scaling up of models.

25. The evaluation makes the following **recommendations**:

#	Recommendations
Strategic recommendation	
1	UN agencies should continue providing comprehensive support to the Government of Uzbekistan to reform its social protection and inclusion system in line with SDGs and government priorities
Thematic recommendations	
1.1	Continue to support government fiscal planning and optimization processes for social protection to underpin the implementation of the Social Protection Roadmap
1.2	Continue investing in the optimization of national structures and inclusive policy processes in the social protection and inclusion sphere
1.3	Support further upgrade of the Single Registry outlining the type of technical support/capacity strengthening to be provided. 1.3.1 Continue supporting government efforts to engage more entities into the Single Registry. This support should come with a hand-over plan that includes well-defined priority actions to enhance cross-institution data sharing, security, oversight, and management functions.

#	Recommendations
	<p>1.3.2 Efforts should also be invested to support wider and more effective inter-ministerial coordination beyond Ministry of Finance to include as many ministries and other entities as possible with a stake in social protection and inclusion.</p> <p>1.3.3 Continue investing in capacity strengthening of central, regional and local level institutions to use and utilise the Single Registry to the benefit of citizens. These efforts should be based on institutional capacity assessment and strong monitoring and evaluation framework.</p>
1.4	Continue supporting regulatory and institutional strengthening to enable a full and sustainable shift of disability assessment and classification towards the social model in line with ICF and CRPD norms and principles
1.5	Continue supporting and promoting the focus on child rights and access to social protection and inclusion for children and their families.
1.6	Continue promoting and supporting the mainstreaming of gender across all government's social policies
Operational recommendations	
1.7	Devise programme intervention logic which strongly integrates these thematic components into a holistic approach to reform the social protection and inclusion system.
1.8	If the programme is decided as a joint UN Activity, all participating UN Agencies should jointly agree on how individual components will be monitored and in what manner will the cumulative (outcome level) effects be captured and reported.
1.9	Continue strengthening strategic and operational partnerships with key government institutions.

1 Introduction

1. This report presents the end of cycle evaluation of the **UN Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan** – hereafter referred to as the JP, which is a programme funded by the SDG Fund and jointly implemented by three United Nations (UN) agencies: the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from January 2020 until February 2022. This report stems from a summative evaluation which assessed the JP’s contribution to the social protection sector reforms and social care services in Uzbekistan. The evaluation is based on the Terms of Reference provided by UNICEF (Annex 1).
2. The purpose of the evaluation is to critically assess the joint programme contribution to social protection sector reforms and provision of more equitable and quality social care services in the country. The evaluation looked at the UN joint programme holistically in the framework of the broader social protection sector reforms as well as the national and global priorities. In addition, the UNICEF contribution was analysed to provide additional insights on the Single Registry model implementation. The geographical scope of the evaluation nationwide. The primary intended users of the evaluation are the UN agencies, Government of Uzbekistan, and other social protection actors. It is expected that the findings and recommendations of the evaluation will be used as a basis for discussions, planning for future programming.

2 Background

2.1 COUNTRY CONTEXT

3. As of November 15, 2021, the resident population of Uzbekistan is 35.19 million¹, with approximately equal numbers of men (50.3 percent) and women (49.7 percent)². Over the past 30 years, the population of Uzbekistan has increased substantially - by 13.9 million people, including 2 percent growth in 2021, compared to the same period in 2020³. The proportion of people of working age has increased from 53.6 percent to 58.7 percent⁴ between 2000 and 2019.
4. Uzbekistan has a youthful population, with only 8 percent of the population being 60 years of age or above. More than half the population (57 percent) are aged 30 years or less, with a third of the population under 18 years. Most of the children live in low-income households. Families tend to be relatively large and often contain multiple generations: nearly one third of children live in a household with seven or more members⁵. Between 2015 and 2030, an additional 4.3 million people are expected to enter the labour market, increasing Uzbekistan’s working age population to 23.3 million.⁶ This is expected to reduce the country’s dependency ratio, with other potential benefits from the demographic dividend⁷. Benefits will depend on current and future investments in the nutrition, health, education, and skills of the population, as well as on the capacity of economic reform programmes to yield decent and productive employment opportunities for the growing working age population.⁸
5. The Government of Uzbekistan has announced its intention to halve the share of low-income population by 2026 and achieve upper-middle-income status by 2030. Uzbekistan has made significant progress in transforming its economy and society since political changes in 2017, when the then new government-initiated reforms to remove structural constraints such as the state’s economic dominance in the economy⁹. However, the country’s ambitious reform plans depend on efforts to accelerate Uzbekistan’s economic transition to a sustainable and inclusive market economy¹⁰.

¹ <http://uzdaily.uz/ru/post/64210>

² <https://stat.uz/ru/60-poleznaya-informatsiya/5902-naselenie-uzbekistana>

³ <https://stat.uz/ru/60-poleznaya-informatsiya/5902-naselenie-uzbekistana>

⁴ State Committee on Statistics

⁵ UNICEF 2019. <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/reports/building-national-social-protection-system-fit-uzbekistans-children-and-youth>

⁶ <https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/assessment-social-protection-system-uzbekistan-based-core-diagnostic>

⁷ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_760153.pdf

⁸ Ibid

⁹ World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uzbekistan/overview#context>

¹⁰ World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uzbekistan/overview#context>

6. Thanks in part to reforms to liberalize prices and remove barriers to domestic and foreign trade, the economy is one of the few in the Europe and Central Asia region to avoid negative growth in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic (GDP growth of 1.6 percent in 2020)¹¹. After a slowdown in GDP growth to 1.7 percent in 2020, it increased to 6.2 percent in the first half of 2021¹². Uzbekistan's economy is expected to grow by 5.0 percent in 2021 and by 5.5 percent in 2022 assuming a smooth coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine rollout and that the rapid recovery for industry, services, investment, and private consumption continues¹³.
7. The working age population accounts for more than half the population, and 44 percent of the population is economically active, i.e., employed or seeking employment. Only 37 percent of economically active people are employed in the formal sector¹⁴.
8. Recent data shows growing unemployment trends, particularly among young people. There is also low female participation in the formal workforce, (33.1 percent of women, compared to 73.9 percent of men) and limited employment opportunities in rural areas and less developed regions. Informal employment is high, with 58.5 percent of people active in the informal sector, the majority of which (80 percent) work in the agriculture sector¹⁵.
9. Labour migration is high; about 2.5 million Uzbek citizens are labour migrants, with most working in Russia¹⁶. This migration has made it possible to keep the official unemployment rate at an acceptable level (10 percent) and helps to partially solve the problems of youth and female unemployment¹⁷.
10. Social protection of youth and the reduction of youth unemployment have become urgent issues for the government, resulting in new policies to address the issue. The Agency for Youth Affairs was established by the Decree of the President in 2020¹⁸ and the Concept for the Development of State Youth Policy in Uzbekistan until 2025 was adopted in 2020¹⁹. Several programmes and measures are in place to train young people to increase employability and to increase chances for decent work, though needs persist in this regard.
11. The share of low-income population is concentrated in rural areas, distant from centres of economic activity and with inferior public services and infrastructure. Incomes are below the national average in the remote regions, and in the three regions of the Fergana Valley. Urban–rural disparity is also attributed to low productivity in labour-intensive agriculture, deficiencies in the coverage and quality of infrastructure, existence of informality in the labour market, and regional disparities in endowments²⁰.
12. The impact of per-capita growth on poverty reduction was modest in 2012–2016²¹, mainly because growth was concentrated in the capital and in intensive sectors, while productivity in agriculture remained low, and economic rigidities constrained the development of small businesses²².

2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

13. The National Development Strategy of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021²³ contains five priority areas, the fourth of which is the further development of the social sphere and the strengthening of social protection of vulnerable segments of the population. A set of legislation regulates social protection schemes, but no Social Protection policy or strategy has been adopted yet.

¹¹ <https://www.cer.uz/ru/news/news/ponatie-vvp-na-dusu-naselenia-ne-sleduet-putat-s-dohodom-naselenia>

¹² <https://www.vsemirnyjbank.org/ru/country/uzbekistan/overview#3>

¹³ Asian Development Bank Outlook 2021. <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-raises-uzbekistan-growth-projections-2021-and-2022>

¹⁴ Republican Scientific Centre for Employment and Labour Protection under the MELR, 2018 (<http://centr-truda.uz/en/home/> or <https://mehnat.uz/ru/subordinate-organizations/structure/242>).

¹⁵ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_760153.pdf

¹⁶ <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/uzbekistan-looks-diversify-labour-migration>

¹⁷ https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/04_UZB%20CPS_LD_ISGA.pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2020/07/07/youth-agency/>

¹⁹ <https://www.lex.uz/ru/docs/5234746>

²⁰ https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/04_UZB%20CPS_LD_ISGA.pdf

²¹ According to computations by ADB's Uzbekistan Resident Mission, with GDP per capita growth of 35percent in 2012–2016, the share of the population below the national poverty line dropped by 23 percent.

²² According to computations by ADB's Uzbekistan Resident Mission, with GDP per capita growth of 35percent in 2012–2016, the share of the population below the national poverty line dropped by 23 percent.

²³ <http://strategy.gov.uz/en>

14. Since the beginning of the Joint Programme, the social protection system was based on cash transfers and benefits and was rather fragmented. Several institutions had some responsibility, but none of them had the overall lead to link or integrate interventions to optimize individual programmes.
15. Uzbekistan has built a national lifecycle social protection system, with schemes addressing the challenges faced by people across the lifecycle, from childhood to old age. The social protection system targets children, working age population and the elderly. The system also provides several forms of support for people with disabilities (PwD), including professional rehabilitation, labour support, and programmes to help people obtain and maintain suitable work and promotion.
16. Available data shows that 23 percent of the population are direct recipients of some type of social protection benefit, while 54 percent of the population live in a household accessing a social protection benefit. Social benefits target various age and population groups such as children, mothers with new-borns, persons with disability, workers in case of injury, unemployed, old persons, and other vulnerable groups. For instance, among children aged 0-17 years, 54 percent live in a household receiving a social protection benefit while, among young people aged 18-30 years, the proportion is 44 percent²⁴.
17. Other social protection schemes are targeted at the poorest families: among households living below a poverty line set at 50 percent of median income, coverage is only 48 percent, meaning that 52 percent of the poorest households are excluded from any support by the national social protection system²⁵.

Policy and legal framework

18. Over the past 5 years, real qualitative changes have been achieved in the social protection of the poor and vulnerable segments of the population. The legal and institutional mechanisms that been created, have made it possible to prevent a large-scale increase in the level of poverty, especially among families with children, the elderly and PwD.
19. National legislation aims to address the risks associated with old age, disability, unemployment and employment injury and family and survivor benefits. The system includes (i) social insurance schemes (contributory and non-contributory old age, unemployment, disability, and breadwinner-loss); (ii) employer liability schemes (employment injury, maternity, and sickness); (iii) social assistance schemes (unemployment, low-income family, and child support; non-contributory old age, disability, and breadwinner-loss); (iv) active labour market policies; (v) social services.
20. Particular attention has also been paid to the legal framework to support PwD. For example, in 2020, the President signed the law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities"²⁶ through which rights and guarantees are granted to people with disabilities to housing, including subsidized housing, education, and employment, as well as to accessible infrastructure, information, and public services Furthermore, the government adopted a number of bylaws that provide tax incentives and financial rewards for disability employment, special benefits to caregivers of children with disabilities and PwD, support the higher education of PwD, and simplified access to disability assessment/determination procedure.
21. Uzbekistan is signatory to several relevant international human rights mechanisms that enshrine the right to Social Protection and relevant services. Uzbekistan is a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) since 1994, so the country is committed to realizing the rights of all children, including the rights to survival, education, dignity, and protection from all forms of violence and discrimination. On June 7, 2021, the President signed the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (New York, December 13, 2006)" which was adopted by the Legislative Chamber on May 18, 2021, and approved by the Senate on May 29, 2021.

Challenges of implementing social assistance

22. Since the beginning of the Joint Programme, Social Protection was fragmented across various institutions with no one institution responsible for the coordination or integration of overall interventions. The ministries involved include the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Public Education, the Ministry of Mahalla and Family Support, and the Ministry of the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction. There is little involvement of civil society, workers', and employers' groups.

²⁴https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/media/2761/file/Uzbekistan%20SP%20overview%20paper%20-%20ENG%20FINAL_July2019%20.pdf

²⁵ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_760153.pdf

²⁶ <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/5049549>

23. While each institution may have a well-developed vertical organizational structure, horizontal links across programmes and schemes appear to have been limited. More importantly, the effectiveness of substantial resources invested in social protection appears not optimized due to fragmentation and lack of an integrated approach to benefits and services. The role of the professional social worker is also still not recognized in Uzbekistan. The social assistance eligibility process is guided by traditional local community structure, the *makhalla*, which had its advantages, though marred by a fact that the support provided is rarely under professional guidance. However, the introduction and national roll out of the Single Registry affects the phasing out of such role for *makhallas*. Moreover, Uzbekistan has limited social care services for elderly people, children without parental care, and PwD. Although households with members with disability have higher expenditures due to disability related expenses, they are less likely to access social protection schemes and services.²⁷
24. In addition, labour market programmes (LMP) are limited in scope and most take the form of public works, entrepreneurship support, and training programmes. The shares of expenditure on active and passive LMPs have been increasing, although they remain low, especially considering the significant employment challenges that face the country.
25. According to the joint report by ILO, UNICEF, and the World Bank report “An assessment of the social protection system in Uzbekistan Based on the Core Diagnostic instrument (CODI)”, coverage of unemployment benefits is around one percent of the registered unemployed²⁸, and there is no, or minimal, insurance element for workers in the event of unemployment, a core component of international social security standards.
26. There is also little sign of integration and coordination between benefits and training programmes and training and public work programmes, nor any between these and entrepreneurship programmes and self-employment support.

Key government actions to improve the social protection system during 2021

27. During 2021, there have been some key actions taken by the government to improve the existing social protection system. For instance, on February 17, 2021, the President signed a decree "On measures to improve the system of social protection of the population of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2021-2030"²⁹, which approved the concept of the National Strategy for Social Protection of the Population (NSSP). This decree was developed with support of the UN JP. Along with the concept, this decree approved a composition of republican group on drafting NSSP and road map on developing the strategy. The National Strategy for Social Protection of the Population is expected to initiate the transformation of the social protection system.
28. The concept provides a vision for the full NSSP that will contribute to the improvement and enhancement of the effectiveness of the social protection system through:
 - institutional building
 - increase social protection coverage
 - ensuring equity and access at all levels
 - simplify and speed up the process of getting help
 - increasing the efficiency and ensuring the flexibility of the system³⁰
29. The main sections of the strategy will be the institutional system of state social protection management and its financing; social assistance benefits, state programs for the development of the labour market; coverage of the working-age population with social security; social services for children and families, citizens with disabilities and the elderly.
30. The Concept also includes a system for providing government subsidies through a social contract to improve the effectiveness of the fight against unemployment. Measures for the provision of social services to vulnerable groups of the population through the preparation of an individual program of social adaptation will also be considered³¹.

²⁷ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_760153.pdf

²⁸ ILO (2020); An assessment of the social protection system in Uzbekistan Based on the Core Diagnostic instrument (CODI) A joint report by ILO, UNICEF, and the World Bank” page 10, para 4; https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_760153.pdf

²⁹ <https://www.uzdaily.uz/ru/post/59079>

³⁰ https://www.ilo.org/moscow/news/WCMS_771463/lang--ru/index.htm

³¹ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2021/02/17/social-protection/>

31. Work is already underway to improve the system of social protection of the population through the widespread introduction of modern information and communication technologies³². New rules come into force in 2021 for identifying low-income families through the information system "Single Registry of Social Protection"³³, as well as for the appointment and payment of social benefits and material assistance.
32. In August 2021, as a criterion for assessing the level of poverty, the minimum consumer spending of the population was determined. The approval of the base value of consumer spending of the population and the introduction of the Single Registry of Social Protection of the Population allowed the government to keep an objective record of poverty and ensure the provision of targeted assistance and provide social services (more than 30 types) to needy families and citizens.
33. On 11 August 2021, the President signed a decree "On measures to provide material assistance to low-income families and further expand the scale of the fight against poverty". From September 1, a child allowance for low-income families was introduced instead of an allowance for families with children under 14 years old and a childcare allowance for a child under 2 years old. When assigning benefits, the age of children is considered, the payment period will increase, and the amount will be determined based on the number of children in the family. Additional important steps include mainstreaming a gender perspective and applying gender analysis in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of all policies and decision-making.
34. The pillars of social assistance and social care services within Social Protection are mostly implemented through *makhallas*, or communities that draw from their local knowledge to target the allocation of social assistance benefits for low-income individuals and households. The introduction and national roll out of the Single Registry (SR) affects the phasing out of such role for *makhallas*. This approach helps to avoid human error and brings more transparency during registration. It also helps overcoming challenges for *makhalla* workers to identify those in need in case they are assigned to such a role, as they need training and knowledge of the Draft Law on Social Work which is the basis for such procedures.³⁴ There is a wealth of information within the *makhallas* about the vulnerabilities, coverage, adequacy and targeting efficiency of social assistance programmes. Information, however, neither appears to be systematized, nor has it been presented to higher authorities for improvement measures, nor it is used as evidence to document actual financing needs.
35. Despite the positive developments, there are still problems in the implementation of equality agenda in Uzbekistan. For example, the proportion of women still constitutes only a small proportion of the staff of civil servants-politicians; large gender pay-gaps persist; violence against women remains a serious issue. The introduction of a gender quota system for parliamentary elections helped to increase the number of women in political parties but has not yet reached 30 percent of representatives in office - this is the share recommended by the UN as a critical mass necessary to influence decision-making³⁵.
36. Although the National Strategy for Action considers the situation of women only in the context of social protection and health issues, its targets include indicators of employment and entrepreneurship, disaggregated by sex, as well as indicators of women's political and social participation. The ratio of the female to male labour force is 69.1 percent versus 75.3 percent for the group of 7 countries with a similar level of development³⁶.

2.3 GENDER

37. Labour markets are characterized by gender predisposition and adherence to gender stereotypes in the division of labour. Also, women often work in social sectors where the salary offered is 50-60 percent of what men earn in the formal sector and women in rural localities are limited employment outside the rural sector farms³⁷. Women make up a significant proportion of the labour force in rural households (44.3 percent) but are also usually low-skilled workers of physical labour³⁸.
38. A recent set of measures to promote the position of women were set out in the Presidential Decree on Measures for the Fundamental Advance to Support Women and Strengthen the Institution of the Family. These measures offer social support to women and mothers in their role as family carers, while also addressing employment issues. The fund was allocated UZS 100 billion (approximately US\$12 million) for preferential

³² <https://lex.uz/docs/5319768>

³³ <https://lex.uz/docs/4930656>

³⁴ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_760153.pdf

³⁵ <https://parliament.gov.uz/ru/events/opinion/33984/>

³⁶ <https://ifmr.uz/publications/articles-and-abstracts/tourismuz>

³⁷ <https://gender.stat.uz/ru>

³⁸ https://uzbekistan.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/United%20Nations%20Common%20Country%20Analysis%20Uzbekistan_en.pdf

loans for women entrepreneurs, half of which were disbursed in 2018. Besides, UZS 55 billion (approximately US\$6.5 million) was also allocated for down payments on housing for women with disabilities.³⁹

39. Despite general gender parity in literacy and primary education, the development prospects of women in Uzbekistan are constrained by structural barriers that lead to lower middle school years, reduced access to secondary vocational and higher education (especially for rural women), female dominance in informal and low-wage jobs; and lack of access to and control over resources, be it productive assets, information and knowledge, or local and national decision-making⁴⁰. More than 90 percent of persons dedicated to unpaid childcare and household work were women, whereas 67 percent of employed persons were men⁴¹.
40. On 28 May 2021, the Senate approved the Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in Uzbekistan until 2030. The strategy provides for "an integrated approach to the implementation of the principle of equality between women and men in all spheres and levels of decision-making and implementation." The document will also contribute to the advancement of gender equality in economic, political, and social life to create conditions for the realization of equal rights and opportunities for women and men, as well as the observance of fundamental human rights⁴². The strategy covers issues such as ensuring equal and quality education for all, creating opportunities for girls from rural areas to obtain higher education, achieving gender equality for women, preventing violence and human trafficking.
41. There have been positive changes in increasing the economic independence of women, creating conditions for realizing their potential in the socio-economic sphere. In 2019, the Parliament adopted two important laws: The Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women"⁴³ and the Law "On the Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence"⁴⁴. In 2020, the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan under the Cabinet of Ministers was abolished, and part of the functions was transferred to the newly formed Ministry for Support of Mahalla and Family, part – to structures under the Senate of Uzbekistan – the Committee on Women and Gender Equality, and the Commission on Ensuring Gender Equality of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The election of a woman as Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2020 also testifies to the large-scale work to ensure gender equality⁴⁵.
42. Today, women's employment is defined as one of the priority areas of socio-economic development. On the initiative of the women's committees, more than 2,300 small workshops were created, based on the reconstructed and commissioned free premises, in which about 16,000 women were employed⁴⁶. For the last 2018-2021 the volume of loans allocated by banks for the development of women's and family entrepreneurship has doubled⁴⁷.

2.4 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

43. Uzbekistan has committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2018 the country adopted 16 national SDGs, 125 related targets and 206 indicators. In 2020, the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF 2021-2025) between the UN and the Government of Uzbekistan was adopted, which is closely aligned to the SDGs.
44. On July 15, 2020, the presentation of the first Voluntary National Review (VNR) of Uzbekistan on progress in the implementation of SDGs was held at the High-Level Political Forum under the aegis of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)⁴⁸. Some of the key reported achievements include -
 - A share of low-income population decreased from 12.8 percent in 2015 to 11.5 percent in 2018⁴⁹
 - Gender-oriented laws of the Republic such as "On guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for men and women" and "On the protection of women from oppression and violence" were adopted
 - The share of women has reached 33 percent in leadership positions and 45 percent of the total working-age population

³⁹ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_760153.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://parliament.gov.uz/ru/events/opinion/33984/>

⁴¹ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_776476.pdf

⁴² <https://tashkenttimes.uz/national/6988-strategy-for-achieving-gender-equality-in-uzbekistan-until-2030-approved>

⁴³ <https://lex.uz/docs/4494873>

⁴⁴ <https://www.lex.uz/docs/4494712>

⁴⁵ <https://parliament.gov.uz/ru/events/opinion/33984/>

⁴⁶ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2638IVNR_2020_Uzbekistan_Report_Russian.pdf

⁴⁷ https://cbu.uz/ru/press_center/reviews/498845/

⁴⁸ <https://mineconomy.uz/en/news/view/3188>

⁴⁹ <https://stat.uz/ru/ofitsialnaya-statistika/living-standards>

- Access to electricity in rural areas has increased from 74 percent to 78 percent, to natural gas - from 62 to 67 percent, to drinking water from 62.6 percent to 64.1 percent
- The country has risen from 100 place in 2014 to 81 in 2018 (out of 193 countries) in the UN E-Government Development Index
- Increase in the average annual rate of gross investment for 2017-2018 reached 12.0 percent.

2.5 COVID-19

45. In 2020, the Uzbekistan labour market showed clear signs of strengthening from the previous year, with a share of low-income population declining from 12.8 percent in 2015 to 11.5 percent in 2020 (this is based on national definition of poverty that is based on the cost of minimum food consumption, equivalent to 2,100 kilocalories per day per person); incomes were notably higher, and most respondents to the World Bank's Listening to the Citizens of Uzbekistan (L2CU) survey were positive about the country's economic future. According to the L2CU, after an initially swift recovery during the summer of 2020, employment stalled below its previous trend. The share of households with at least one working member fell by more than 40 percentage points (pp) in April – equivalent to almost 2.8 million households – before rebounding by 33 pp by June 2020. However, employment did not fully recover at any point in 2020, and in December remained stalled more than 6 percentage points below 2019 levels.
46. The COVID-19 pandemic and measures to contain it have hit Uzbekistan hard, cutting exports and remittances, straining government coffers, and forcing most small businesses across the country to close. In 2020, exports dropped 18 percent in the first quarter, compared with the same period a year earlier, the Government reports, while 475,000 or 85 percent of the country's small businesses were forced to close in March 2020. The share of households with at least one member actively working fell more than 40 percentage points, from 85 to 43 percent, between March and April 2020. Among self-employed people, income fell 67 percent⁵⁰.
47. Local mahalla leaders reported increased concern about unemployment toward the end of 2020. Work disruptions and job losses were concentrated in services and manufacturing, and especially in informal activities. Disruptions in public works reported early in the pandemic fell to low levels by the end of the year, and relatively few disruptions or losses in agriculture were reported by mahalla leaders⁵¹.
48. According to L2CU, when asked about vulnerable groups during COVID-19, mahalla leaders most often pointed to increased need among the poor. About 56 percent reported elevated needs among poor people, 42 percent reported elevated needs among the elderly, and 24 percent reported elevated needs among people living with disabilities. About 9 percent cited increased needs among women, 4 percent cited increased needs among migrants and internally displaced people, and nearly none mentioned increased needs among ethnic minorities.
49. Overall, during the pandemic, 12 decrees and resolutions by the President were adopted to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the standard of living of the population and the economy in the amount of almost 30 trillion Soums (~ 3 billion USD), or 5.9 percent of the GDP (2019)⁵². Main measures relate to economic policy and employment policy. In general, they can be grouped into 4 main areas: deferral of payments for certain taxes, bank loans and rent for small businesses and the population; lower tax deductions, lower tax rates and preferential loans; exemption of small businesses from paying certain taxes, rent, some fines and interest payments for servicing loans; elimination of certain bureaucratic barriers for small businesses and the population.
50. In July 2020, the President adopted a decree "On additional measures to provide material support to segments of the population in need of social protection and support during the coronavirus pandemic."⁵³ According to the document, more than 400 thousand additional families were included in the lists of those in need of material assistance and support in a pandemic ("iron notebook"), which increases the total number of people

50 <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/uzbekistans-health-care-system-economy-hit-hard-covid-19>

51 World Bank. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/c705e28720492e4af5d637a701a28f8e-0080062021/original/L2CU-COVID-19-Rev2020-Cleared-ENG.pdf>

52 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_759844.pdf

53 https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=630274_ukaz_prezidenta_respubliki_uzbekistan_ot_30_07_2020_g_n_up-6038_o_dopolnitelnyh_merakh_po_materialnoy_podderjke_sloev_naseleniya_nujdayushchihsya_v_pomoshchi_i_socialnoy_zashchite_v_period_koronavirusnoy_pandemii&products=1_vse_zakonodatelstvo_uzbekistana

who will receive support from the state to more than 1.7 million. In addition, the adopted decree provides for a sharp increase in the number of recipients of social benefits during a pandemic - including:

- the number of mothers with new-borns receiving childcare benefits until the children reach two years of age will be increased by 14-15 thousand per month, and in December 2020 reach 400 thousand, an increase of almost 1.5 times compared to the beginning of the year
- the number of families receiving benefits for those in need with children under the age of 14 will increase by more than 2.5 times compared to the beginning of the year and will reach 700 thousand
- The number of recipients of material assistance to low-income families will increase by 1.5 times compared to the beginning of the year and will reach 100 thousand.⁵⁴

51. As a result of the measures taken, there is a tendency to increase the coverage of the population with social benefits from 0.8 percent to 1.5 percent for the period 2015-2020.⁵⁵ Accordingly, spending on social protection has increased.

54 <https://mineconomy.uz/ru/news/view/3205>

55 <https://mineconomy.uz/ru/news/view/3205>

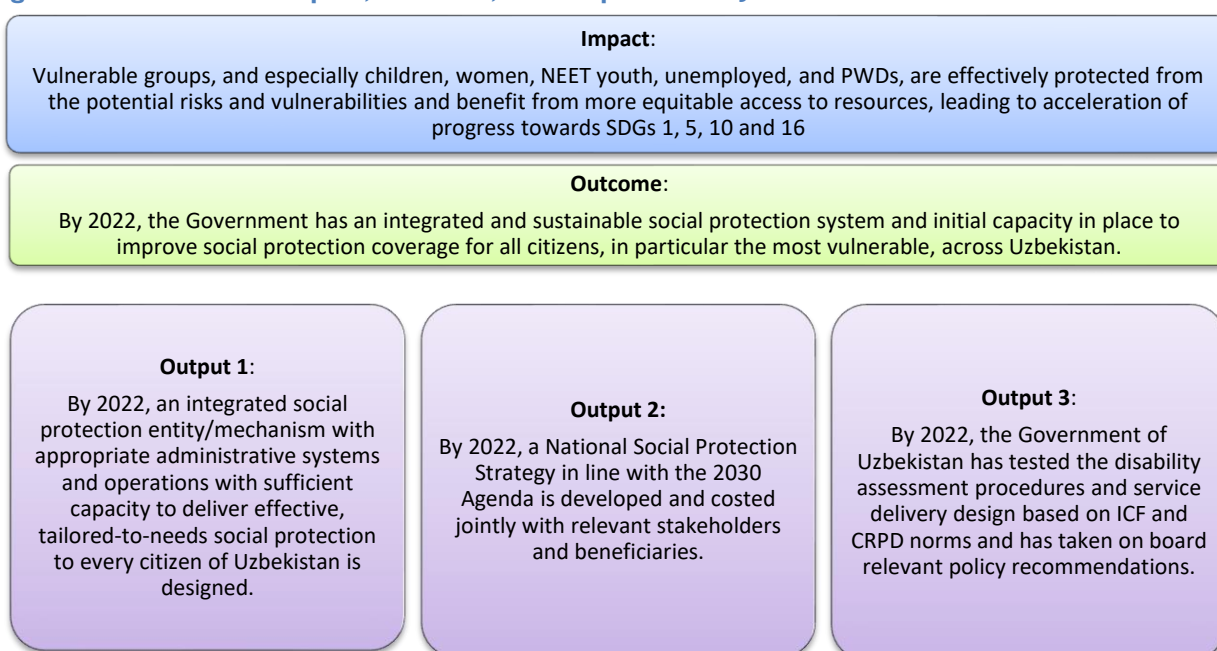
3 Subject of evaluation

52. The subject of the evaluation is the Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan. The JP was launched in January 2020 with the aim of building a social protection system that is integrated at the operational, policy and institutional levels, to ultimately help children, low-income families, people with disabilities, older people without access to pensions, and young people not in education employment or training (NEET).
53. All three programme implementing partners had excellent prior understanding of the social sector challenges in Uzbekistan, strong relations with key actors in the government, and potential to bring international expertise and experience into the programme in their respective fields: institutional support (UNICEF), national strategy development (ILO) and interventions for people with disabilities (UNDP). UNICEF acted as the administrator for the project and had a budget more than double than ILO and UNDP to implement the programme. Based on the JP Theory of Change (ToC) and the 2020-21 Workplan, the programme covered a two-year period from January 2020 to 31 December 2021 and aimed at supporting the acceleration of Uzbekistan's progress towards SDG 1, 5, 10, and 16. The total cost of the programme was USD 2 million. Implementation of the JP was extended to the end in February 2022.
54. The JP focuses on providing support to the Government in building and delivering a high-quality social protection system that offers income security and social support to all citizens of Uzbekistan throughout their lives – in particular, those at risk of being left behind. The programme objectives were to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the social protection system as envisioned in the Strategy of Actions of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2017-2020 (Priority area 4 - Development of the social sphere).
55. Overall, the programme focused on the following three areas to lay the basis for a major reform of the national social protection system between 2022 and 2030:
 - Establishing a dedicated institutional framework to provide leadership and coordination to the social protection sector, and be responsible for overseeing the delivery of social protection schemes,
 - Designing an evidence-based and costed national social protection strategy based on wide multi-stakeholder consultations and citizens' engagement, and
 - Improving the accessibility of social protection for persons with disabilities and promoting their full inclusion into different aspects of social life, via modelling implementation of the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) in disability assessment implying abolishment of the current medical approach.
56. The two main target groups were: i) national stakeholders - government officials and policymakers and social partners at national level, and ii) children, low-income families, people with disabilities, older people without access to pensions, and young people not in education, employment, or training.
57. The JP was intended to establish strategic partnerships with key national stakeholders. In consultation with relevant ministries and agencies, the JP aimed to build a wide partnership network with key stakeholders across Government, including the Cabinet of Ministers and the Ministries of Finance, Employment and Health; the Parliament, social partners; non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, international organizations and established a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Finance as the national lead for implementation of the JP.
58. Civil society, disabled people's organizations, private sector, trade unions, and mass media were considered important stakeholders throughout the implementation of all three pillars. The NGOs, academia and other partners were involved in the institutional design and social protection strategy development.
59. The JP also drew on the expertise of other United Nations Country Team (UNCT) members, in particular UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO), UN Women, the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to address cross-cutting issues of gender equality and women's empowerment, access to health, vital registration, and labour market complementarities.
60. The JP followed a results framework described below which was built upon strategic interventions that led to specific outputs and outcomes directed towards the expected impact of the project. More details about the JP including the goals and general activities of the project can be found in Annex 2. The expected impact of the JP is that - "Vulnerable groups, and especially children, women, NEET youth, unemployed, and PwDs, are effectively protected from potential risks and vulnerabilities and benefit from more equitable access to resources, leading to acceleration of progress towards SDGs 1, 5, 10 and 16".

3.1 PROGRAMME OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

61. The JP supports the Government of Uzbekistan to design a national leadership and coordination entity that is capable of undertaking key policy decisions, while strengthening the operational delivery of systems; design a comprehensive and costed national social protection strategy in line with international human rights mechanisms and social security standards, and design, pilot the ICF and CRPD-compliant disability assessment and social service delivery schemes, and analyse the lessons learnt from high impact integrated interventions for people with disabilities.
62. Fragmentation of social protection at institutional, policy and programme levels has resulted in challenges with governance of a significant component of government expenditures and a reduction in its effectiveness. In the context of ongoing ambitious socio-economic reforms in Uzbekistan, transformative measures were needed to deliver enhanced social protection for all citizens, in particular disadvantaged groups, while accelerating progress across SDGs, therefore ensuring leadership and a clear direction for the national social protection system was required.
63. The JP therefore focused on *systemic and accelerated change*. Prior knowledge and analysis indicated that Uzbekistan’s social protection system had been moving backwards, with the level of investment falling and coverage shrinking, hence increasing the chances of vulnerable women and men being left behind, with no income security or access to social services. The JP, therefore, focused on *systemic change* by supporting governance reforms towards the development of a national social protection system, with the intention that if a major systemic change is in place by the end of the JP, the UN will continue to support the further establishment of the social protection entity through its own (or additional) resources. By designing a National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) – with a clear and progressive vision to 2030 – the programme strived to bring about *accelerated change* in the way that social protection supports families and individuals across Uzbekistan.
64. The JP focused on outcome I of the SDG fund outcomes: Integrated multi-sectoral policies to accelerate SDG achievement, implemented with greater scope and scale. Based on this, the JP outcome was that “By 2022, the government of Uzbekistan has an integrated and sustainable social protection system”. The outcome was planned to be achieved through three outputs focused on the development of an integrated social protection mechanism with sufficient capacity to deliver social protection to citizens, the development of a National Social Protection Strategy and the development of disability assessment procedure and service delivery design.
65. The ToC for the JP links together the three main outputs and includes the structural root causes of the fragmentation and inefficiencies in the social protection system in Uzbekistan, in particular the integration of people experiencing vulnerabilities, including girls, women, and PwD. The intervention logic including the intended impact, outcome and outputs are shown in Figure I.

Figure I: The intended impact, outcome, and outputs of the JP



66. The first output of the JP entailed efforts towards the design and capacity building support for implementation of the integrated social protection, that would provide leadership and coordination to the social protection sector. The Project also invested in developing and scaling up of the Single Registry (SR), as well as being responsible for overseeing the delivery of social protection schemes. The focus was on working alongside government to develop a costed proposal for the new entity with a mandate for social protection, which is now still fragmented across several government entities.
67. The second output entailed efforts towards developing a long-term vision for the sector under a NSSP that would underpin the creation of a rights-based, inclusive, lifecycle social protection system. The intention was that this would ensure that new policy direction is agreed upon and implemented, and that national strategies are taken forward.
68. To provide models for the implementation of key principles with the NSSP, the ToC also proposed that implementing partners should work alongside Government in developing and implementing practical solutions that can be expanded from 2022 onwards. This included piloting a high impact and integrated interventions for PwD – with a particular focus on women – and building a more effective disability assessment mechanism.
69. Through these interventions, the programme supported the Government to establish an integrated and sustainable social protection system with capacity in place to improve social protection coverage and quality for all citizens who experience vulnerability, while enhancing gender equality and women’s empowerment.

3.2 DELIVERY MODALITIES AND MODES OF ENGAGEMENT OF IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

70. Interventions from all three pillars (outputs) of the JP directly contributed to the programme outcome on designing an integrated and sustainable social protection system with initial capacity in place to improve social protection coverage for all vulnerable groups in Uzbekistan. All three agencies had a comparative advantage on at least one of the three areas of the engagement and took the lead on the different pillars, leveraging their comparative advantages. All three agencies also worked together on all three pillars of the programme ensuring cohesion to achieve establishment of an integrated national social protection system.
71. **UNICEF: Institutional support was led by UNICEF.** UNICEF took the lead while at the same time advising the Government on social protection reforms, including developing policy proposals encompassing both reforms to schemes – in particular, child benefits – and governance reforms while financing and providing technical support for the expansion of the national SR (i.e., the social protection management information system).
72. Some of the achievements of Output 1 (led by UNICEF) include: the concept note on costing of institutional reform options was finalized; the Social Protection Single Registry (SR) was scaled up in line with the new legislation, training and capacity building provided to supporting Ministry of Finance in establishing governance and management systems for Single Registry (SR); Concept note for delivering integrated social services through case management was finalized, governmental partners identified, and work plans signed with them, and pilot launched; Concept for institutional design of the integrated social protection with appropriate functions was developed, including standard operating procedures and operationalization action plan; Internal capacity of the national partner to maintain and manage the Single Registry for Social Protection was established and SR was fully handed over to the Ministry of Finance; Testing delivery of integrated social services through case management and developing e-module for social services based on case-management was integrated to the Single Registry.
73. **ILO:** The ILO led on social security within the UN and, as a result, was well-placed to bring its international experience in the development of social protection policy to Uzbekistan. Building on its strong normative mandate, **ILO led the development of the national social protection strategy.** This included the concept note on the national strategy for social protection (NSSP), the costed strategy in line with 2030 agenda, fiscal space analysis, support of 4 thematic working groups on drafting NSSP through conducting consultative meetings, trainings, development of the ToRs for the groups and methodological and operational guidelines on drafting the NSSP.
74. Some of the achievements of output 2 (led by ILO) include: The NSSP Concept Note outlining the shared vision of national social protection and its contribution to Agenda 2030 was developed; Capacity building training for national counterparts on Social Protection Floor, fiscal space analysis, gender and social security standards was organized; Costed national social protection strategy (through a participatory consultative process) was designed; Costing exercise for the NSSP and Fiscal space analysis for social protection in Uzbekistan was conducted; National social protection strategy (through a participatory

consultative process) was developed; Costing exercise for the NSSP was conducted; Fiscal space analysis for social protection in Uzbekistan was conducted

75. **UNDP:** UNDP brought many years of experience in engaging on disability in Uzbekistan. **UNDP led a catalytic pilot of high impact integrated interventions for people with disabilities**, leveraging its successful experience in pilots to inform their potential scaling up. The designed interventions contributed to support the Government of Uzbekistan to test the disability assessment procedures and service delivery design based on ICF and CRPD norms and has taken on board relevant policy recommendations.
76. Some of the achievements of output 3 (led by UNDP) include: support to the ratification of the UNCRPD; Piloting of disability assessment based on ICF, and UN CRPD was conducted; Micro-grants initiative jointly with DPOs and local authorities were implemented; Re-engineering of business process in social services in line with CRPD and ICF requirements was conducted, policy documents were developed; The Government was introduced to ICF-based disability assessment procedure to develop national assessment procedures to ensure meaningful participation of PwDs in all areas of life; The Government received reports analysing obstacles for introduction of ICF-based assessment procedures, and was provided recommendations on business processes and normative frameworks allowing application of ICF and CRPD requirements in disability assessment of PwDs; Government received analytical reports on “Accessibility of Public Services for PwDs”, “**Analytical Report on ICF and Disability Assessment in Uzbekistan**” and “Disability statistics introduction and integration in the national statistics system” as means to inform improvement of accessibility of public services for PwDs and to develop a national disability statistic ensuring complete coverage of PwDs to address their needs and situations.
77. The Joint programme used its Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework reflecting the results framework set forth for the programme. The PUNOs reported for their components and the data was collected and compiled in the reports.

4 Purpose, Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

4.1 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

78. As stipulated in the ToR, the object of the evaluation was the UN Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan, implemented by UNICEF, UNDP, and ILO. The evaluation will serve to critically assess the programme’s contribution to the social protection sector reforms and provision of more equitable and quality social care services in the country.
79. The evaluation also included a focus on assessing the UNICEF specific contribution towards establishment of the Single Registry considering its growing importance for social protection sector reform and plans of government for its further national roll-out.
80. The evaluation has a formative - forward-looking - perspective to support strategic learning and decision-making; and a summative - backward-looking - perspective, to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.
81. The evaluation also adopted an equity-based and gender-sensitive approach to understand whether the undertaken interventions managed to address the needs and uphold the rights of the most vulnerable groups in Uzbekistan as well as the root causes of inequities.
82. The ToR outlines the seven main objectives of the evaluation. These objectives have been discussed with PUNOs and agreement was reached that no changes would be made.
 - i. Assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, coherence and, to the extent possible, impact of a) the UN joint programme in general and b) UNICEF contribution towards establishment of the Single Registry.
 - ii. Provide recommendations to guide policy level decision-making by PUNOs and the key relevant stakeholders on social protection system reform.
 - iii. Provide recommendations to guide UNICEF’s further work on Single Registry.
 - iv. Provide recommendations on how to better incorporate gender equality and equity issues, including disability into the social protection reform agenda.
 - v. Identify and document successes, challenges and lessons learnt both for the joint programme and the UNICEF contribution.
 - vi. Identify contribution of the UN joint programme to SDGs acceleration and UN coherence.
 - vii. Assess the role of the Joint Programme to increasing awareness about social protection among key

stakeholders and beneficiaries

83. The main objectives of the evaluation were confirmed during the inception phase and remained unchanged.

4.2 INTENDED USES OF EVALUATION AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS- USERS OF THE EVALUATION

84. As stipulated in the TOR and confirmed in the inception phase, this formative and summative evaluation came at the end of the joint programme implementation. The findings of the evaluation are expected to be used as a basis for discussions, planning and programming between UN, Government of Uzbekistan, and other key national and international stakeholders.
85. The evaluation engaged with primary stakeholders in charge of implementation of the JP and involved in JP's interventions, with detailed overview presented in stakeholder analysis section below.
86. The results of the evaluation will be used by the Cabinet of Ministers, key sectoral ministries and PUNOs to further improve the social protection system based on evaluation recommendations. Other relevant stakeholders including other UN agencies, International Financial Institutions (IFI), CSOs, and line ministries not directly engaged in the JP implementation, are secondary users of the evaluation.
87. The knowledge generated by the evaluation will be used by:
- The Cabinet of Ministries, key sectoral line ministries and other relevant stakeholders to identify and further address existing barriers to support social protection reform agenda and strengthening the national social protection system to ensure more effective coverage and support to those "left behind"
 - PUNOs (UNICEF, ILO, and UNDP) for taking stock of lessons learnt and best practices and informing revision of their respective programmes towards strengthening the system of social protection
 - PUNOs to contribute to the relevant Social Protection knowledge generation and dissemination platforms, such as the ILO social protection platform intended for global knowledge sharing and extension of social security and the Social Protection Floor Initiative. •
 - UNICEF to assess the status of the Single Registry model implementation with lessons learnt and identification of possible adjustments, if needed.
 - Other UN agencies and relevant development partners to identify potential synergies and avoid overlaps in planning and implementation of interventions in area of social protection
 - UNCT to assess contribution to SDG acceleration and to promote the UN coherence.

4.3 EVALUATION SCOPE

88. As stipulated in the ToR and confirmed in the inception phase, the evaluation looked at the entire JP within the broader social protection sector reforms as well as the national and global priorities. The scope also included additional insights on the Single Registry model implementation led by UNICEF as an integral part of the evaluation. However, other similar PUNOs' activities implemented through interventions within wider thematic areas are outside the scope of this evaluation.
89. The evaluation covered the entire programme implementation period (January 2020 – 31 December 2021). The geographical scope was nationwide, while two sub-national locations were also included in the evaluation process.
90. The evaluation also reviewed the gender and equity focus of the programme by analysing the data collected through assessing gender lens of Project's focus, mainstreaming and subsequent results when it comes to access to services, involvement, and participation in working groups and decision-making. Besides, assessment of Project's focus on integrating gender and equity in advisory support for development of legal framework and policy papers was conducted. This was deemed particularly important as the JP was designed with a view of strengthening the social protection system to address the needs of the most marginalized groups of population. Special consideration of the effects of COVID-19 on the original scope of the JP were also assessed.

5 Methodology

5.1 EVALUATION DESIGN AND APPROACH

91. The evaluation was designed as utilization-focused and consultative, maximizing the value of the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations for the intended users and supporting lessons learning for future interventions.
92. The evaluation employed a theory-based approach, whereby the primary focus of the assessment was on understanding cause-effect interactions between individual components and the programme's desired outcomes. The theory-based approach aims to generate both an understanding of what has worked, but also an understanding of why it has worked. The JP intervention logic and a ToC formed the foundation for the qualitative and quantitative research, providing a framework against which collected data were analysed to enable testing the findings against the theories to see whether the hypothesized mechanisms did indeed work, and if so, under what conditions.
93. As required by the ToR, this evaluation applied a mixed methods approach. The ET combined the use of qualitative and quantitative data and relied on both primary and secondary data sources throughout the evaluation process. During both the inception and field phases, and considering the evolving COVID-19 situation, the ET continuously adapted the techniques and instruments as required to maximize data collection efforts. The evaluation uses the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and coherence as its basis. All the evaluation questions are grouped under the OECD criteria within an overarching evaluation matrix (Annex 3).
94. The main data collection methods included policy review (PUNOs corporate policy and strategic documents, JPs strategic framework, government policies and strategies), documentary analysis (general documentation review, review of secondary sources, reports, analyses, studies) and primary data (interviews and group discussions). The ET considers the data collection methods to be adequate given data needs, budget, and time constraints.
95. **Participation:** The evaluation was conducted in a participatory manner and participation of key stakeholders was ensured in all phases of the evaluation, including the planning, inception, fact-finding, and reporting. These elements are intertwined throughout the evaluation design and summarized in the evaluation workplan. Prior to the evaluation, UNICEF had established an evaluation reference group (ERG) that acted as sounding board for the evaluation and be consulted at critical times during the evaluation process. Besides, government, civil society and development partners were consulted, and their views were solicited on the Programme, as input for analysis and triangulation of findings.

5.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND TOOLS

96. The evaluation used an evidence-based approach, combining a variety of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, which helped to ensure that the limitations of one type of data were balanced by the strengths of another. The main quantitative data sources were secondary data and existing documentation, including UNICEF's annual reports and data sources. The ET generated qualitative data through key informant interviews and group discussions. Triangulation was used to strengthen the reliability and robustness of all findings.

Documentary analysis – inception and desk review phase

97. Within the inception and document review phase, the ET applied stakeholder mapping and context analysis, as well as in-depth and structured documentary review. The ET reviewed the following types of reports:
 - UNICEF's, UNDP's, ILO's organisational policy documents, guidelines; JP framework, monitoring data, reports, and studies as well as other types of documentation that can provide an insight into the Joint Programme focus and results across areas of intervention to extract relevant findings related to the JP performance in Uzbekistan.
 - Analysis of external sources pertaining to the JP focus areas and country context. This group includes all other studies, analyses, evaluations, and policy documents produced by non-UN entities (e.g., civil society, academic, think tanks, donor, international organizations' reports etc.). This group is especially important to see how others have researched and assessed UN agencies' support to the social protection sector but also overall country development when it comes to social protection and inclusion.

98. The document review established documentary evidence for most indicators and established preliminary hypotheses to be tested during primary data collection. The review also identified data gaps and helped clarify the primary data collection process and related instruments. A list of all the reviewed documents can be found in Annex 4.

Primary data collection

99. The primary data collection process served the purpose of testing preliminary assumptions, hypotheses and findings resulting from the document review and filling in the data gaps encountered during the document review. For this evaluation, a comprehensive list of potential key informants resulted from stakeholder mapping conducted by the ET. The list was presented and discussed with the ERG, to agree on the full scope of potential key informants. The ET combined different data collection approaches to ensure that a variety of views are captured. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all scheduled meeting had to be held remotely and applying a hybrid approach, using zoom as a main communication tool. The national team member was present in a few meetings with the selected communities, while international team members lead all the meetings remotely. UNICEF provided the necessary technical support to arrange meetings and help reach out to wider group of informants. During the primary data collection phase, ET performed:

100. **Key informant interviews-** Most of the primary data were collected from prioritized key informants during the field phase. During the primary data collection phase, semi-structured key informant interviews (KII) were carried out with i) Joint Programme implementing partners, ii) key national stakeholders (key government interlocutors, implementing partners, civil society) and iii) development partners. A total of 90 key informants (53 women, 37 men) were interviewed (Annex 5). The final beneficiaries of the programme – children and adolescents – were not interviewed as agreed during the inception meeting with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG). Table below presents the stakeholder groups interviewed for the purpose of the evaluation.

Table 1: Evaluation key informants

Stakeholder group	Number of representatives interviewed
PUNO staff members	17
Regional Office representatives	1
National and International Stakeholders (government, civil society, workers organizations, academia and international experts)	70
SDG Fund (donor)	1
Development partners	1
TOTAL	90

101. **Group discussions-** The ET organized group discussions (GD) with civil society stakeholders. The purpose of group discussions was to elicit reflection on wider contextual issues and feedback on the JP contribution to wider changes in the country. In total, three group discussions were conducted during the primary data collection phase.

102. The interview guides for the KII and GDs can be found in Annex 6. During data collection, the team strictly adhered to confidentiality rules and data protection, which contributed to greater openness of the interviewees and safeguarded them against possible risks.

5.3 DATA ANALYSIS

103. Once the primary data collection was finalized, the ET embarked on data analysis and synthesis of evidence and findings. The ET applied specific methods for analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected through the document review and stakeholder interviews

104. **Thematic narrative analysis** through structured desk review to enable identification of key themes covered by the Joint Programme that are of relevance to the indicators outlined in the evaluation matrix

- a. **Descriptive quantitative analysis** of quantitative data collected through document review of available monitoring data, reports and external sources with cross tabulation for evaluation indicators, but also criteria of interest (such as gender, equity or disability, or geographic location) where relevant.
- b. **Qualitative iterative data analysis** allowed to connect, and structure key thought units related to each evaluation question (EQ) deriving from stakeholder interviews into clusters and identifying the key themes within each cluster. These formed emergent themes from each category for further analysis. Triangulation of data was conducted determine if inputs were coming from multiple sources and stakeholder levels and multiple stakeholder categories. Observations or comments that only came from

a single source or a single category of stakeholder were given less weight during the building of the analysis. Finding highlighted in the report are those emerging from multiple actors and across multiple stakeholder categories.

- c. The Programme Theory of change formed the basis for the **Contribution Analysis** which assisted in assessing the degree to which the Joint Programme has contributed to the perceived outcomes. Initial document review showed that the programme developed a theory of change for the intervention with key assumptions. The activities in the programme were implemented to a large extent in line with the theory of change. Assessment of performance and achieved results was conducted based on these, accompanied with analysis of external factors influencing results. This type of analysis assisted in interlinking the findings of the above outlined different types of analysis and helped lead to definition of conclusions regarding effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability, as well as connectedness and coverage.

I05. The evaluation utilized two types of **triangulation** that served to highlight any inconsistencies between document analysis and the feedback from key informants, i.e. how external parties perceive the results of the measures undertaken within the Joint Programme. These were: i) **Methods triangulation**, both qualitative and quantitative data was used to elucidate complementary aspects of the same subject; and ii) **Data sources triangulation**, which involves examining the consistency of different data sources within the same methods.

5.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I06. The ET members did not have any conflict of interest with the JP and operated with independence and impartiality throughout the evaluation. The team ensured compliance with ethical and moral principles, including the application of the UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation and Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. The ET adhered to the Standard Operations Procedures for Quality Assurance and Ethical Standards in UNICEF-supported Research, Studies, and Evaluations and the Core Commitment for Children in Humanitarian Action.

I07. Given that there were no children or vulnerable groups involved in the evaluation data collection, the evaluation did not go through a formal Institutional Review Board ethics review as part of the design process. However, the evaluation still adhered to the ethical considerations related to safety, confidentiality, and data protection regarding its treatment of participants in the evaluation process.

I08. The ET conducted Stakeholder mapping and analysis to identify and prioritize institutions/organizations to be engaged in the evaluation process. The stakeholder analysis integrated prioritization of those institutions/organizations to be interviewed. This list was further discussed with UNICEF to reach agreement on those institutions to be interviewed. Based on the final list of critical and desirable interlocutors, PUNOs oversaw identifying representatives of these institutions/organizations and arranging meetings.

I09. The team applied ethical standards to the data collection process including the protection of rights and dignity of evaluation informants. This included applying the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, assurances of anonymity and confidentiality and do no harm principles in all parts of a data collection exercise.

Protocols for Safety, Confidentiality, and Data Protection.

I10. In line with informed consent principles and confidentiality, interviewees were informed at the start of the interview regarding the purpose of the evaluation, assurances of voluntary participation, and confidentiality of all responses (Annex 7). The ET applied the principle of “do no harm” – both for the ET and evaluation participants together with the standard ethical requirements of any evaluation data collection process.

I11. **Confidentiality:** In agreement with PUNOs, all interviews and group discussions were arranged by PUNOs teams. This assisted in the protection of confidentiality of participants as most of their contact information was not shared with the ET. The ET did not use audio or video recordings of KIs and GDs. All notes taken by ET have been stored in personal computers with password protection.

I12. No compensation for participation in the evaluation process was provided. The ET ensured that informed consent protocols were verbal, to avoid signing of any type of printed forms that might put participants at risk. For all interviews and group discussions, personal data, including contact details were stripped from the data before it was shared to ensure further confidentiality. All interview notes from the ET are kept electronically on password encrypted computers. Any potential personal identifiers have been removed from the data prior to analysis. Data analysis was carried out only by the ET members to ensure confidentiality. Data compiled in reporting was aggregated so that individual responses cannot be traced to specific locations or individuals. Both quantitative and qualitative information will be maintained on ET computers only until the finalization of the report, at which time it will be deleted to further protect individuals from possible identification.

I 13. **Gender Norms:** The ET ensured that gender roles were respected and provided space for women to share their views in safe and enabling environment.

5.5 LIMITATIONS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

I 14. The evaluation was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a lack of opportunity for the ET to travel to Uzbekistan and conduct a standard field mission, which was originally planned for December 2021. In lieu of field mission, the ET conducted the entire primary data collection in hybrid form and remotely through virtual meetings, using communication channels such as Zoom. After extensive consultations with the UNICEF team, it was agreed that the remote primary data collection phase would happen in December 2021. A longer timeframe for primary data collection was set forth to allow wider participation taking into account remote data collection approach. Eventually, the ET was able to keep to the intended plan and methodology, which ensured confidence in the robustness and quality of data collected to inform the assessment. One remaining limitation that the evaluation encountered related to the remote approach is a lack of opportunity to observe and gain insights from observation and site visits, as it would have been done in other evaluation. The ET avoided potential for bias by ensuring that each interview is carried out by at least two, if not all three members of the ET to ensure objectivity in interpretation of observations and data.

6 Key Findings

115. This chapter presents the review of the overall performance of UN Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan from different perspectives: programme relevance, programme effectiveness, impact and sustainability of programme results, coherence, and programme efficiency. The evidence collected and presented as key findings in this report derive from thorough review of documents that were obtained from PUNOs, secondary data sources gathered by the ET throughout the process, and interviews and GDs with key informants. Quantitative and qualitative data was analysed, and findings were triangulated to ensure balanced and evidence-based review of the programme performance and its catalytic potential.

6.1 RELEVANCE

116. The following section provides a review of the relevance of the JP to the national priorities/policies and the needs of the vulnerable groups, the relevance of the jointness of the programme to addressing Uzbekistan's development priorities and challenges, as well as the relevance of UNICEF's contribution towards the establishment and nation-wide roll-out of the Single Registry to deliver social assistance to the most vulnerable.

117. The JP focused on systemic change and supported reforms to accelerate the expected progress. It was also very responsive to critical bottlenecks to social protection such as the inefficient system of social benefits allocation and the registration of PwD, the lack of agency/separate single entity for social protection, the fiscal aspects of the social protection system, the degree of digitalization of databases, etc., which were identified through studies and analyses conducted by UN and other actors. This included providing more effective coverage and support to those in need. The JP also supported the development and roll-out of the Single Registry, which was also very relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Continued relevance of JP to national priorities/policies and the needs of the main vulnerable groups (EQ1 and EQ3)

Finding 1: The design and development of the Joint Programme was informed by thorough analyses conducted at the national level by different agencies, and it was aligned to the national development strategies of Uzbekistan, the national SDG Strategy plans, the UNDAF 2015-2020 and the PUNOs country programmes. The main areas of the JP intervention are also in line with the new UNSDCF 2021-2025 and with national priorities, and it contributed to National Strategies and Legislative documents.

118. From the start, the programme design and planning were based on analyses conducted at national level, thorough situational analyses conducted by UN agencies as well as other developmental partners, including the joint report by ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank "An assessment of the social protection system in Uzbekistan; ILO's assessments informing the Decent Work Country programme; UNDP studies; UNICEF Country Programme situational analysis of children in Uzbekistan 2019/2020, Country Gender assessment and other relevant documents.

119. The comparative analysis of the JP Results Framework, the national plans, and priorities of the government of Uzbekistan, as well as the SDG priorities, indicates that the programme was relevant to the national priorities and aligning well with the national development strategies of Uzbekistan. The agenda, plans and priorities set forth by the government of Uzbekistan also informed the planning and development of the JP, especially the National Development Strategy 2017-2021 and state statistical reports on the achievement of the SDGs. The JP also aligned with or contributed to the Law on Social Services for elderly, disabled, and other socially vulnerable categories of the population; the Presidents decree of February 17, 2021 "On measures to improve the system of social protection of the population of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2021-2030"; the Law on guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for men and women; and Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on measures to implement national goals and objectives in the field of Sustainable Development for the period up to 2030.

120. Stakeholders noted that JP interventions were built upon existing community initiatives which were primarily initiated by the government but were not at the desired quality level and were not being scaled up due to human and technical constraints in respective government institutions. The JP's efforts to pilot

the case management was specifically mentioned during interviews as being a process that built upon an existing system and introduced more advanced, evidence-based technology, with broader perspective on how to assess the needs of the vulnerable families. Also, the SR information system was in the planning since 2015-2016, but there were huge challenges in launching such the system, including lack of expertise. The JP built upon and supported this government led priority and initiative, which speaks to the relevance of the intervention. A thorough analyses of the system of provision of social assistance at *makhalla* level was conducted prior to the development of the SR. This analysis identified several challenges which informed the development of the Single Registry.

- I 21. The JP also aligned with the UNDAF 2016-2020 and the UNSDCF 2021-2025, and PUNOs' country strategies for the periods of 2015-2020 and 2021-2025, as well as the Gender Action Plans 2018-2021. The JP also had close interlinks with other initiatives related to child protection, health, and education, including UNICEF initiatives on strengthening the social work and social service workforce, child benefits reform, childcare system reforms, home-visiting programme. The JP also had close interlinks with other projects implemented by UNDP and ILO in Uzbekistan and regionally. Interactions were also happening with the World Bank initiatives.
- I 22. The JP was also timely to assist Uzbekistan's significant structural reforms, that entailed changes to the economic and social policies. The implementation of the programme clearly boosted these reforms and accelerated the expected progress. The system was previously largely fragmented, with different processes happening at different levels, and different policy frameworks being developed by different ministries. Stakeholders considered that the programme brought all these processes together as a basis for social protection reforms to move forward.
- I 23. The JP also supported the strengthening of the national social protection system and ensured more effective coverage and support to those in need. Stakeholders confirmed the previous lack of legal framework and expertise in the field hence development of policy and legal framework and capacity building components were considered highly relevant. Stakeholders noted that the programme has also contributed to building the blocks of legislative, regulatory, and social policies. Besides this, the JP also worked on the fiscal space analysis, to inform the development of the roadmaps for social protection. This analysis helped rethink approaches to budgeting but also contributed to building skills for national stakeholders on how to conduct this type of analytical work for other relevant policies as well. As the JP was highly relevant to the needs and priorities of the country, it was widely accepted by state partners.

Finding 2: The Joint Programme followed a system level engagement and addressed critical bottlenecks and unmet needs of the main vulnerable groups.

- I 24. Before the JP, poverty reduction was overshadowing social protection, with the latter being considered more as charity. There was therefore a need to elevate the importance of social protection in government systems, and this has been addressed by the JP. The JP also helped address unmet needs of the main vulnerable groups, i.e., families with small children, persons with disabilities and other most vulnerable groups that need social protection and social assistance. The ET found that the JP was working together on system level changes to strengthen the response to the unmet needs of the main vulnerable groups when it comes to social protection.
- I 25. **The JP focused on systemic change by supporting governance reforms** that supported the establishment of a clear leadership of the national social protection system and strong institutions, including support for the development of a national social work system. This ensured that vulnerable children, women, and men are not left behind, with no income security or access to social services. The programme interventions responded to the need to support and integrate the most vulnerable groups into the society and looking into the multi-dimensional needs and support interventions that can be integrated into the government's response.
- I 26. **The JP was also responsive to critical bottlenecks to social protection.** The main bottlenecks include the inefficient system of social benefits allocation and registration of PwD which was addressed namely through the development of the Single Registry (SR) and development of the electronic platform for PwD. Stakeholders noted that the single registry helped social benefits to reach those in need. Assessment of eligibility for support was previously done in non-objective and non-standardized way across the country, there were challenges with maintaining records (*makhallas* using different models for registration in excel or word documents) and existence of data for decision making was scarce.

127. The SR was instrumental in enabling vulnerable people to be registered for government support, showing relevance from many different perspectives. First, responding to the unmet needs of groups in need of social assistance but who previously did not have access. Stakeholders noted that the single registry provided more accessible and transparent ways to process applications and to provide social benefits to those in need. This greatly improved the targeting and coverage for right-holders. Besides the direct work on social assistance and social services, the SR has been helpful to reach out to the most vulnerable and provide services for them. The JP also provided direct technical assistance to support the roll-out and smooth implementation of the SR. The support was provided through trainings for government bodies and partners to increase their skills, knowledge, and capacities for implementation of SR. The support contributed to mobilization of civil society to support the implementation of SR. Additionally, there has been quite a lot of work on advocacy and promotion on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities through mobilization of civil society. This is considered important to raise awareness, increase capacity and include civil society in the policy making processes supporting them become recognized as partners.



“There was no data really for decision making - SR provides a unified, computerized information system for capturing applicant and tracking them from the point the application is made”.

- Key informant

The JP also provided direct technical assistance to support the roll-out and smooth implementation of the SR. The support was provided through trainings for government bodies and partners to increase their skills, knowledge, and capacities for implementation of SR. The support contributed to mobilization of civil society to support the implementation of SR. Additionally, there has been quite a lot of work on advocacy and promotion on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities through mobilization of civil society. This is considered important to raise awareness, increase capacity and include civil society in the policy making processes supporting them become recognized as partners.

128. Another bottleneck was the degree of digitalization of ministry databases, which was very low. With the development of the SR, 17 databases were integrated into the SR, with more to follow. The fiscal aspects of the social protection system were addressed through the fiscal space analysis which assisted seeing the areas where social benefits can be sourced. The JP offered detailed analysis of past performances of financial expenditures and provided detailed report on possible options for having larger fiscal space. The Ministry of Finance followed up with further in-depth fiscal space analyses and developed a draft three-year costed Action Plan for strategy implementation, which – once the Nssp is adopted, can assist timely implementation of its priorities and measures (See finding 9).

129. The lack of agency/separate single entity for social protection was another bottleneck. The JP supported the Government of Uzbekistan in finding ways how to address this bottleneck through the establishment of a single entity responsible for social protection in the country. The focus on PwD has been important for thinking about priorities for persons with disability. Stakeholders felt that the shift from the medical to social model of registering PwD was crucial to move beyond registration and recognize multidimensional needs. Also, the drafting of the first ever national law on social work, developed through interdepartmental working group meetings from all relevant ministries, CSOs, and other agencies enables the implementation of norms and regulations which should lead the change in the future.

130. **The JP was very relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.** The SR was useful for providing social benefits during COVID-19 as it had efficient and timely outreach to the increasingly vulnerable populations. The pandemic highlighted the timeliness of the JP. As the COVID-19 pandemic increased the vulnerability of population, the investment in social protection policies became increasingly relevant.

131. Further, assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on labour market and social protection responses enabled the programme to propose options to preserve jobs and incomes of workers. Assessment results were used by MELR to shape the design of unemployment benefit scheme and consider setting up unemployment insurance scheme.

Relevance of the jointness in programme design, implementation, and management for addressing the country’s development priorities and challenges (EQ2)

Finding 3: The programme brings together three UN Agencies with their specific mandate, expertise and reputation, and this combination offers relevant and timely support to addressing the country’s development priorities and challenges

132. Bringing three well respected UN agencies together with their specific and unique mandates and expertise, has helped to have a holistic approach to tackling the issues of social protection and social inclusion. Joint programming enabled relevant and timely support to addressing the country’s development priorities and challenges. Each agency brought is evidence-based perception, leverage, knowledge, and expertise, which are considered crucial ingredients of the success of the programme. Specifically, UNICEF brought into the programme its strong social positioning and work with national partners to develop child sensitive,

disability and equity-focused social protection. ILO's specific mandate and cooperation with the government and social partners in pursuing economic and social reforms, has been important to move the inclusive social protection policy making process forward. UNDP's engagement on disability issues and cooperation with civil society has also been critical to enable advocacy and promotion of rights and international standards in this area.

I 33. All UN Agencies engaged with the highest levels of government and delivered the same message which increased the advocacy potential of the programme. Availability of international adequate expertise and work ethics of PUNOs supported development and changing philosophy of work of local and development partners.

I 34. Each of the three UN Agencies has a very good reputation in Uzbekistan. Stakeholders noted that getting funds or partnering with the UN agencies helped raise their profile and increased acknowledgement of other partners. Involvement in the project helped most partners increase their skills and competence.

I 35. Social and economic hardships that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the need for more systematic social protection measures, and JP was in a good position to provide the relevant support to this dimension. The three agencies together managed to adjust appropriately to the changing needs of its target population but also to the changing realities of implementation of assistance



“All experts who joined the programme had excellent theoretical knowledge, wide international expertise, and excellent work ethic.”
- Key informant

Relevance of UNICEF's contribution towards establishment and nationwide rollout of the Single Registry to deliver social assistance to the most vulnerable (EQ4)

Finding 4: UNICEF's contribution to the Single Registry has been relevant to the needs of the Government to provide better, more accessible, and transparent services to right holders. UNICEF supported the Government to enhance the Single Registry and develop internal capacity to administer and maintain the system.

I 36. In 2015, the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations requested UNICEF's support in developing an integrated system that would enable more effective administration of the social protection programmes from applications, verification, and registration to payments and monitoring. The system was envisaged as a tool which could provide a comprehensive picture of the national profile of beneficiaries as well as the performance of the national social protection system overall. UNICEF support to the Single Registry responded to the need for provision of accessible, transparent social benefits, along with improved targeting and coverage for right holders. Upon shifting responsibility for social protection to the Ministry of Finance (MoF), it was decided to digitize the system to overcome the paper-based approach, which created difficulties to access information and provide for more efficient and transparent services. UNICEF supported the MoF in enhancing the Single Registry and developing internal capacity to administer and maintain the system and achieved the following objectives: 1) completion of the data migration process and user trainings were conducted; 2) SR was enhanced in line with the users' suggestions and comments collected; 3) SR modules were modified to reflect the planned changes in the legislation on social allowances in Uzbekistan; 4) the MoF was supported in establishing internal capacity, including establishing appropriate governance system, to maintain and manage SR without involvement of external organizations or people; 5) an electronic module on case management in social services was designed and trainings for users and administrators of the module were conducted, as preparation for introduction of the electronic module once it is ready.

I 37. This support enabled the government to improve targeting and coverage of social protection assistance in a transparent and efficient manner and push forward the national rollout of the SR thereby ensuring access to social service assistance to the most vulnerable.

I 38. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Finance of Uzbekistan (MoF) in enhancing the Registry and developing internal capacity to administer and maintain the system and achieved the following objectives: 1) completion of the data migration process and user trainings were conducted; 2) SR was enhanced in line with the users' suggestions and comments collected; 3) SR modules were modified to reflect the planned changes in the legislation on social allowances in Uzbekistan; 4) the MoF was supported in establishing internal capacity, including establishing appropriate governance system, to maintain and manage SR without involvement of external organizations or people; 5) an electronic module on case management in social services was designed and introduced to be operated at local community (*makhalla*) level,

including and trainings for users and administrators of the module was conducted. The internal capacity of the national partner to maintain and manage the SR was established and the SR was fully handed over to the MoF; To date the SR is reaching up to 1.2 million households and further increase in number of covered families is expected. The availability of the SR and work on this helped to expand the coverage of support to those who fell to the need for social assistance, which was in line with government priorities and unmet needs of the most vulnerable populations.

139. The SR was the breakthrough on how the system of applying for the social benefits has been transformed. UNICEF comparative advantage with vast knowledge and experience in social protections supported qualitatively the design of SR and policy reform. Stakeholders have noted that UNICEF provided the design, methodological help, hired programme developers, provided capacity building and technical expertise, hence covering gaps that could not be addressed by the stakeholders in a timely and efficient manner. By swiftly addressing technical difficulties in the system, the implementation of the SR was accelerated. Positive perceptions were noted from senior officials who considered UNICEF to have provided great support to finding institutional solutions for needed interventions in the SR design and methodology and supported covering any capacity gaps identified.

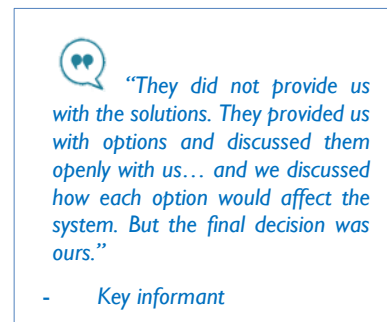


“It was a joint effort. UNICEF supported us as per our requirements, and we steered the registry development jointly.”
– Government representative

140. UNICEF also provided support to the Government to adjust the programmes and accelerate the nationwide rollout of the Single Registry for Social Protection to support social protection response to COVID-19.

6.2 EFFECTIVENESS

141. The following section provides a review of JP performance and its catalytic potential of delivered outputs to contribute to outcomes and impacts as envisaged in the intervention logic. The JP has drawn on the expertise and strategic positioning of the three PUNOs in its support the Government in building and delivering a high-quality social protection system that offers all citizens of Uzbekistan security and social support throughout their lives. Support was delivered through a mix of capacity building, policy dialogue and technical assistance, aimed at building an integrated social protection system at institutional, policy and programme/operational levels, to reach the following key outputs⁵⁶ as described in Section 3.



“They did not provide us with the solutions. They provided us with options and discussed them openly with us... and we discussed how each option would affect the system. But the final decision was ours.”
- Key informant

Assessment of achievement of results (EQ5)

142. The JP is expected to lay the basis for a major reform of the national social protection system between 2022 and 2030. The PUNOs have been strategically positioned as a key partner of the government in reforms of the social protection, each bringing its own expertise and network of partners. The JP has built and maintained strong partnerships with social protection professionals and service providers, the Government, civil society, and with development partners active across the sector. The main positive framework condition has been strong willingness of the Government to invest in reform of the social protection, to ensure more comprehensive and just delivery of social services and assistance to those most in need. On the other hand, negative conditions have been the fast pace of reforms combined with the level of absorption capacity across public institutions, financial constraints limiting implementation of existing and newly developed legislation and normative acts, and the COVID-19 pandemic which created additional resource limitations and restrictions.

143. Within these framework conditions, the JP partners invested in: i) establishing a dedicated institutional framework to provide leadership and coordination to the social protection sector, as well as to be responsible for overseeing the delivery of social protection schemes, ii) designing an evidence-based and costed national social protection strategy based on wide multi-stakeholder consultations and citizens’ engagement, and iii) improving the accessibility of social protection for persons with disabilities and

⁵⁶ 1) Costed plans in place for stronger and more effective institutional leadership of the social protection sector; 2) Strengthened capacity of national partners to design and deliver integrated social protection programmes based on reformed child benefits and improved social services; 3) A viable and innovative National Social Protection Strategy developed with Government and ready to be implemented; and, 4) A range of pilot initiatives to enhance the wellbeing of people with disabilities tested to be scaled up by the new institution, with commitments set out in the National Social Protection Strategy.

promoting their full inclusion into different aspects of social life, via modelling implementation of the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) in disability assessment implying abolishment of the current medical approach.

Output I By 2022, an integrated social protection entity/mechanism with appropriate administrative systems and operations with sufficient capacity to deliver effective, tailored-to-needs social protection to every citizen of Uzbekistan is designed.

Finding 5: The JP contributed to greater government understanding of the benefits of an integrated national social protection system. The JP has resulted in the development of a costed institutional design for an integrated social protection system, with appropriate administrative systems and operations, with sufficient capacity to deliver effective, tailored-to-needs social protection to citizens of Uzbekistan.

144. The Government currently has several ministries and agencies separately responsible for different parts of the social protection services, which results in fragmentation, lack of coordination and loss of efficiency by the system. JP evaluated this with a functional analysis and provided the government with a concept on institutional reform which outlines the needed administrative systems and operations, and several different costed options for providing integrated social protection. The options included a) expanding the mandate of one of the state agencies providing social protection to cover all components, b) creating of an overarching coordination body to facilitate provision of social protection by individual agencies or c) creating a new agency to provide integrated social protection. The concept note corresponds to the institutional reform workstream, with the aim of outlining the menu of institutional reform options for the better integration and coordination of the social protection sector in Uzbekistan. The concept note has supported increased knowledge and capacity of government officials to reflect on possible options and reach an informed decision.
145. As of January 2022, several ministries hold competencies in social protection dimensions, under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance: Ministry of Mahalla and Family Support, Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction, Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, Ministry of Health, and the Agency for the Development of Medical and Social Services. To address a critical challenge of a lack of a single institution which would be in charge of steering the social protection system, the JP helped the national government consider and develop policy alternatives for establishment of a single body in charge of the sector. One of the policy alternatives is the establishment of a single governmental entity with a mandate for social protection. By the time of finalization of this evaluation report, such entity was not established. Document review and stakeholder interviews pointed to weaknesses of such solution including the fact that such governmental entity might not have the power or strategic positioning that a Ministry would have had. Interviewed stakeholders also noted other challenges (such as transfer of competencies from and relations with other ministries, institutional capacity, etc.).
146. The government was supported with drafting a costed institutional design concept for the integrated social protection system with developed functions and standard operating procedures. The JP also provided the government with an action plan and a change management strategy to operationalize the integrated social protection institutional design. The JP also supported the drafting the Government Resolution of establishing a government entity on social protection developed together with the Ministry of Finance. As noted above, this entity is still not established.

Finding 6: The JP contributed to institutionalization of the Single Registry. The registry has been scaled up by the government and represents an integrated and efficient social protection administrative mechanism with capacity to deliver effective, tailored-to-needs social protection to citizens of Uzbekistan.

147. One of the most effective results of the JP is the development and nation-wide roll-out of the Single Registry. The registry was designed and applied to simplify the social benefits provision process to the most vulnerable. The SR uses a scientific method to support evidence-based decision making and positive change in the lives of vulnerable people, and it takes away targeting decisions from the *makhallas*; eliminates duplicates (people benefiting from different *makhallas*; reduces corruption; increases timeliness of benefits; reduces administrative/bureaucracy work which allows *makhallas* to focus on supporting social

work and other activities. As a highly automated system, it allows for easier, more efficient, and accessible application process and it produces reliable data for action and decision-making.

148. The design and modelling of the SR were pioneered by UNICEF prior to the JP, enabling scalability during the JP implementation. The SR was successfully piloted initially in the Syrdarya Region to test the mechanisms and IT solutions ahead of national roll-out. The pilot was useful to test and upgrade the system, and its implementation was successful despite delays caused by COVID-19 restrictions. The SR developers used local field teams during the pilot to address all technical difficulties and glitches in the system swiftly and efficiently and did the same during the national roll-out. The system was upgraded after the piloting and was then handed over to the MoF. To further facilitate the full scale up, UNICEF provided capacity strengthening support to the MoF in establishing governance and management systems for the SR, as well as capacity strengthening support to maintaining and management of the registry. UNICEF also supported the development of the e-module for social services based on case-management to the SR, which is still not finalised.
149. The evaluation found that, currently, the SR connects 17 agency and ministry databases system (seven more to be added) into one interoperable data sharing system that enables efficient, transparent mechanism and provides over 50 types of information. The system helped improve targeting and coverage of the most vulnerable with an increase from 566 thousand in January 2020 to over 1.12 million beneficiaries of social assistance by September 2021 (the increase in Tashkent region was from 13,000 to 57,700, and in Khorezm region from 39,000 to 73,000). The system helps increase efficiencies, transparency in budget allocation and application process, coverage, and better targeting. The single registry was flexible and very useful at time of COVID-19 also, enabling efficient support to the most vulnerable without delays. The procedures for getting registered as people with disabilities also improved. All stakeholders noted that the SR services were particularly important during COVID-19 pandemic as it allowed for remote access to application and supported the general government response to COVID-19 measures.

Finding 7: The programme successfully tested the delivery of integrated social services through the case management model.

150. Another relevant contribution to the JP was provided by boosting integrated provision of social services at community level through the introduction of the case management approach and model. Preparatory work was conducted to test case management delivered through competent *makhalla* specialists trained in social work and in case management. The aim of the service is to identify and refer vulnerable families (especially families with children) to qualified assistance to help them overcome life situations caused by poverty, unemployment, disability, the consequences of labour migration, domestic violence, etc. The *makhalla* specialists act as a bridge in providing integrated social protection tailored to the needs of each individual or family, including children and adults with disabilities.
151. This activity was evolving during the programme implementation, and additionally boosted through re-purposing funds and allocation of additional funds by UNICEF. The programme thus far succeeded in finalizing the model's concept note, in identification of and signing joint workplans with governmental partners as basis for launch of the pilot. At the onset of piloting, a functional review was conducted to assess the capacity at mahalla level for provision of social assistance and social services through a case management model. Besides, a mapping of social services and social assistance programmes was conducted resulting in engaging local level professionals in a variety of trainings and events discussing social service delivery through case management.
152. As of January 2022, the testing is still underway. Interviewed PUNO and government stakeholders note that the insights from testing of the model will be incorporated into the design of the institutional coordination mechanism of social protection and will pave a way towards provision of social protection through professional social service workforce. This work is still in process and is expected to serve as a basis for the Institutional Reform for the social protection provision, as highlighted by government stakeholders. Furthermore, an e-module for social services based on case-management is to be integrated to the SR.

Output 2 By 2022, a National Social Protection Strategy in line with the 2030 Agenda is developed and costed jointly with relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Finding 8: The JP informed the selection of policy alternatives for social protection, notably the development of NSSP, the costing exercises for NSSP, and fiscal space analysis.

153. The JP laid strong foundations for social protection system by investing in social protection regulatory and policy framework to address issues of accessibility and availability of social protection system and services in Uzbekistan. The JP promoted inclusive and evidence-based policy making and engaged partners across the spectrum of social protection, which is a driver of continued reform. However, the work on the NSSP and its implementation is unfinished business, with outstanding needs and priorities relating to adoption and further implementation of the social protection roadmap and its action plan. More information on this can be found in Section 6.4 - Sustainability.
154. Under the leadership of ILO, the JP performed several evidence generation and advocacy activities to support the development and costing of the NSSP. The national strategy protection roadmap and action plan are not adopted yet, however stakeholder noted that the process was a very professional and inclusive process that has reached its intended purposes.
155. ILO and other PUNOs worked in partnership with the MoF to 1) ensure understanding of social protection system (financial) needs and priorities, and 2) engage relevant stakeholders in an inclusive process of selection of policy alternatives and solutions that could assist the social protection reforms to address the recognized bottlenecks and unmet needs of right holders.
156. The process was initiated by soliciting assessments to provide evidence to inform the selection of policy alternatives for social protection, notably the costing exercises for NSSP, and fiscal space analysis. The JP provided detailed analysis of past performances of financial expenditures and a report on possible options for expanding fiscal space. The fiscal space analysis offered budget allocation alternatives and potential for areas where social benefits can be sourced, along with potential for savings across different expenditure areas.
157. Document review and stakeholder interviews revealed that the fiscal space analysis was a new concept for Uzbekistan, and it was useful to help rethink approaches to budgeting and understanding of expenditures and ways to maximize resources. Interviewed stakeholders emphasized that the process also increased the skills of relevant MoF staff to initiate and conduct such studies on their own. The interviews also revealed that the MoF followed up with more in-depth fiscal space analysis studies, building on the data and skills generated through the work performed by JP. The JP was therefore viewed as an important foundation for changing institutional practices. The fiscal space analysis helped the government to develop a draft three-year costed action plan for strategy implementation, which – once the NSSP is adopted, can assist timely implementation of its priorities and measures.
158. These efforts were underpinned by wider capacity strengthening efforts by ILO to increase capacities and familiarity of national counterparts on other important elements of social protection reform such as the Social Protection Floor, gender and social security standards. These capacities strengthened efforts engaged a wider pool of social policy actors, including the government and public institutions, civil society, and development partners. The JP offered space to discuss and exchange on the issues relating to international standards and local practices, needs and ways that needs can be addressed through government measures. The evaluation found that these measures contributed to a better understanding of policy alternatives when it comes to national social protection and its contribution to Agenda 2030.
159. The JP contributed to greater buy-in and willingness of actors to design a costed national Social Protection Roadmap and draft Social Insurance Law, and to develop options for unemployment protection. Importantly, the programme also supported the drafting of Presidential Decree "On measures to improve the system of social protection of the population of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2021-2030" (adopted on 17 February 2021). The JP also contributed to the introduction of gender budgeting into the Gender Strategy until 2030 and introduction of gender audit into the Law "On guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for women and men".
160. This comprehensive support to the national social protection policy framework has been highly praised by all interviewed government, social protection and stakeholders and development partners. Once adopted, the policy and legislative solutions will create **strong regulatory foundations for improved performance** in addressing issues of accessibility and availability of social protection to ensure more effective coverage and support to those "left behind". The support to development of practical guidance on how fiscal analysis, gender budgeting and auditing can be done was highlighted by stakeholders as highly effective for reconsidering practices and ways of thinking across the social protection system. Besides, **support to platforms and networks of partners engaged in social policies processes are seen**

as adding value to the JP, with partners praising the JP for its efforts to bring stakeholders together and assist cross-sector interaction and joint work.

Output 3 By 2022, the Government of Uzbekistan has tested the disability assessment procedures and service delivery design based on ICF and CRPD norms and has taken on board relevant policy recommendations.

Finding 9: The Joint Programme has assisted the Government of Uzbekistan to test the disability assessment procedures and service delivery design based on ICF and CRPD norms. Through this support, the JP has contributed to the enhanced accessibility of social protection for persons with disabilities and promotion of full inclusion of persons with disability in social life. Besides, the programme boosted the shift from medical to social approach to and disability assessment and classification, and wider outreach and inclusion of persons with disability in social services and advocacy efforts. These efforts are still ongoing and in an early stage, so are vulnerable to external influences and resource limitations, demanding further support.

161. Under the leadership of the UNDP, the JP applied a comprehensive set of measures focusing on building foundations and prerequisites for empowerment and social inclusion of persons with disability that included: a) capacity building for government to apply ICF and CRPD standards in disability assessment and classification; b) establishment of the disability and services databases for persons for disability; c) advocacy and direct outreach and engagement with persons with disability (through microgrants for NGOs); and d) enhancing the employment possibilities through advocacy on inclusion of persons with disability on the labour market. This component of the JP encountered rather conducive framework conditions, characterized by openness of the government counterparts to work on reforms in this area, presence of credible NGO partners and demand for reforms by right holders and their representatives.
162. There is strong evidence of the JP's **direct contribution to increasing equity and rights-based disability assessment and classification** based on the application of International Classification of Functioning (ICF) and CRPD norms. The JP invested its efforts in building capacity of the Agency on Medical and Social Services (AMMS), the Medical Experts Council of Uzbekistan, and the medical expert commissions on disability (VKK- Medical Advisory Commission and VTEK- Medical and Labour Experts Commission) to familiarize them and increase knowledge and skills to apply international standards and best practices in disability assessment and classification. These capacity-strengthening efforts aimed to tackle and change old approaches and practices in disability assessment and classification based on a 'medical model'⁵⁷. This model was practical to ensure that PwD gain access to social assistance benefits and rights but did not envisage measures of models for empowerment of persons with disability to engage in the society and fulfil their potential.
163. Considering recognized needs of duty bearers and right holders to ensure better inclusion of PwD in society, UNDP worked with the AMMS to develop and pilot a model for disability assessment and classification based on ICF and CRPD norms and standards. The model was piloted in Tashkent and brought results in terms of building skills of commissions to conduct the assessment and classification process and to derive a set of recommendations which were considered in the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated November 27, 2021, No. pp-22, "On measures to further improve the activities of the medical and social examination service and the system for establishing disability for children"⁵⁸.
164. However, the evaluation found that, despite positive experiences gained through the piloting of the new disability assessment and classification approaches, as of January 2022, the model has not been scaled up. Interviewed stakeholders noted that there is a general commitment and interest of national stakeholders to further invest and reform the assessment and classification model. Stakeholders also emphasized that scale-up and uptake of the disability assessment and classification services relies heavily on professionals from the social welfare and health system who need further training to be able to apply the new model if/when it is adopted. Changes will therefore be incremental and will require change in mindsets and practices of social protection and medical experts engaged in VKK and VTEK but also wider society

⁵⁷ According to stakeholder feedback and document review, a medical model defines disability as having impairments or differences that should be 'fixed' or changed by medical and other treatments, even when the impairment or difference does not cause pain or illness. It does not go beyond medical focus to analyse any social or inclusion implications.

⁵⁸ <https://lex.uz/en/docs/5745292>

actors. The Decree is now adopted, and the experience with application of new standards serve as a good foundation for further efforts in this regard.

165. There is evidence of the JP's contribution to the development of the national disability and State Services to PwD databases in Uzbekistan. These efforts were aimed at establishing a full map of available services and their locations, to assist outreach and better social assistance coverage of PwD. The programme also supported re-engineering of business process in social services in line with CRPD and ICF requirements. The evaluation found that these efforts have been very useful to understand better the distribution and accessibility of services for PwD, and to enable more timely assistance by physicians or medical staff should such services be needed. Interviewed stakeholders shared expectations that the government will now have the capacity to revise legislation and align it with CRPD, and to evaluate efficiency and effectiveness of the current state policies and programmes on social protection of PwDs in line with international standards and SDGs priorities. Besides, the Programme encouraged the national partners to enhance the collection and use of the disability statistics. As part of such efforts, the AMSS launched a dedicated nationwide survey to map registered or unregistered PwD (by MLEC), to assess their social, medical and other needs and access to education, employment, healthcare, and assistive / rehabilitation devices. The survey also partially covers children with disability (CwD) aged 16 and older.
166. The programme contributed to improved understanding of the hidden disability costs borne by the families, which resulted in ensuring that parents who are caretakers of CwD would receive a special benefit. Besides, the programme contributed to building foundations of more equitable access to labour market, albeit with limited results to date. The Decree of the President "On additional measures to comprehensively support persons with disabilities, promote their employment and further increase social activity"⁵⁹ adopted on December 21, 2021, brought several positive measures for employment of persons with disability. For example, by March 2022, the State Services will employ a consultant who will themselves be a PwD. Also, according to stakeholders, over 500 job vacancies were posted in the electronic platform and long-term employment for 30 PwD was secured. Stakeholders also noted that numerous MoUs with district employers, NGOs and government agencies were signed for employment of PwD. Interviewed stakeholders noted that the promotional and advocacy activities of programme's NGO partners helped increase awareness of employers about the 3% employment quota for PwD and for providing inclusive working environments and diverse job opportunities. NGOs received information for vacancies' potential employers, and they guided job seekers to relevant jobs. Consequently, trainings were provided on soft skills, accounting and computers, artisan professions, entrepreneurship to respond to employers' placement demands. Although the initial target was to train 400 PwD, the JP reached 700 persons through low value grants (LVG) to NGOs, 175% achievement.
167. The programme distributed LVG to NGOs, to expand the access of PwD to social protection and ensure their inclusion in various aspects of public life. NGOs implemented innovative approaches to the provision of comprehensive social protection for persons with disabilities, especially for women and young people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The application process resulted in approval of 11 social projects for funding to NGOs, amounting to 53,683 USD. A detailed overview of project can be found in Annex 8.
168. The evaluation found that engagement with NGOs representing PwD helped raise awareness and rethink approaches to inclusive policy making. Interventions were successful in introducing best practices for people with disabilities, providing direct services to PwD such as capacity building, skills training, and employment (Box 1). The LVG scheme also helped to create a network of NGOs with synergies, info sharing and joint advocacy.



"The microgrants contributed to changing the environment in which we function, and this was positively reflected in the mindset of the people- and the perception was not only about our needs, but our potentials as well"
- Key informant

⁵⁹ <https://lex.uz/docs/5789986>

BOX I. EXAMPLES OF LVG PROJECT RESULTS

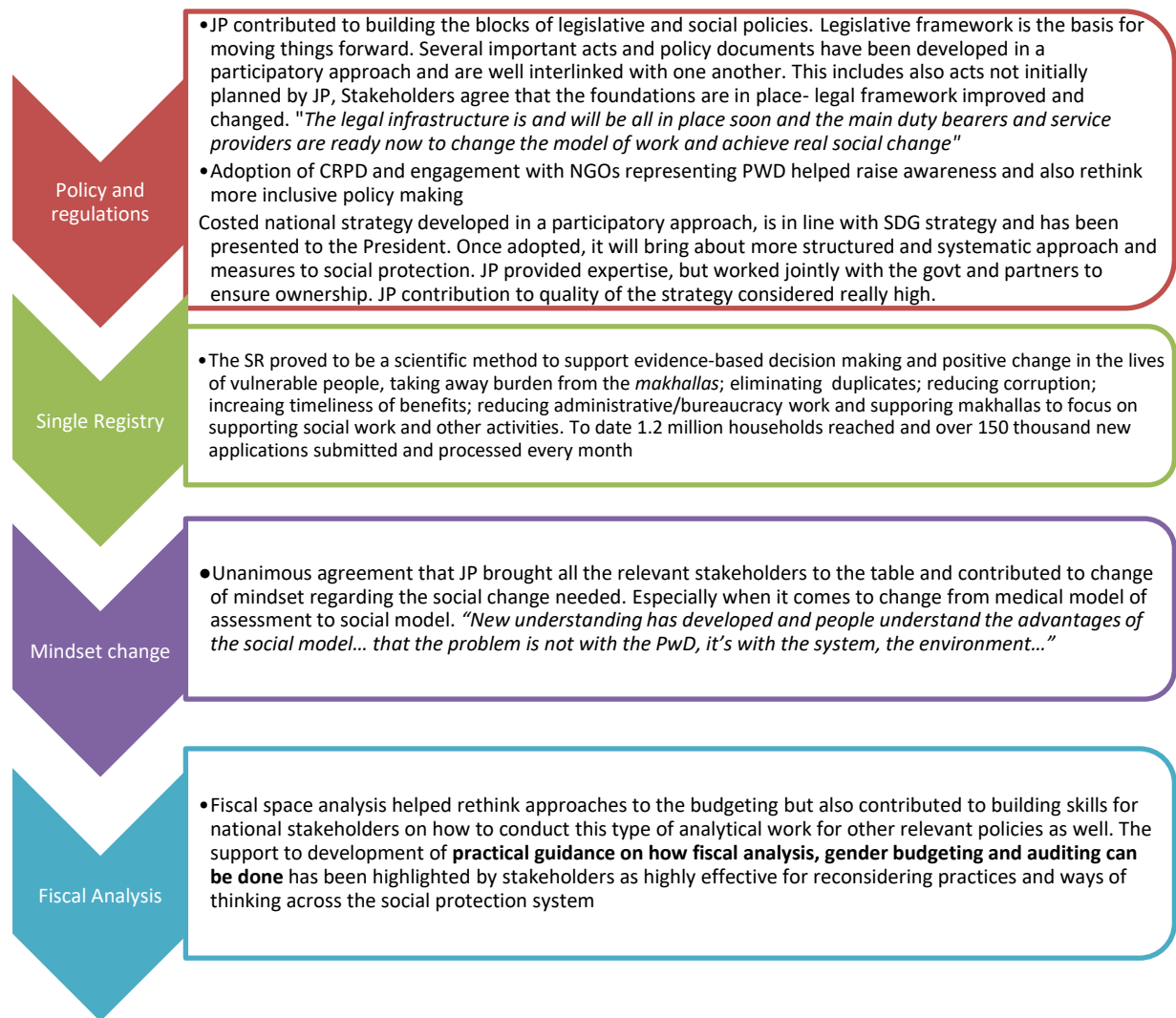
- A monitoring system has been put in place of public service buildings for accessibility, accessibility of services, implementation of compulsory 3% employment of PwD in govt institutions and NGOs.
- Improvement of public statistics data on disability issues (6 indicators were used previously- with the support of JP, 12 more were included)
- Over 500 job vacancies were posted in the electronic platform and long-term employment for 30 PwD was secured. Numerous MoUs with district employers, NGOs and government agencies were signed for employment of PwD. Trainings were provided on soft skills, accounting and computers, artisan professions, entrepreneurship (aimed 400, reached 700)
- Development of a network of NGOs to help synergies, info sharing, joint actions and joint advocacy for PwD. Increased visibility and capacity of these NGOs for service delivery, as well as for monitoring govt work and interventions (watchdog capacity)
- Development of special web portal for employment in Tashkent region, user-friendly for PwD, with open, transparent, and easily accessible information- possibility for integration of this service in the employment promotion centres in every district.
- Microgrants supported local partner organizations to increase their capacities for project planning and implementations. They also supported their visibility and public image as UN agency grantees. As a result, a few organizations received additional funds from other donors to increase reach and impact (i.e., Sharoit Plus received grant from OSCE to expand and continue work).
- 7 social video clips are produced on people with hearing impairment. Wide distribution of the produced videos on television and through social networks is happening, which it is expected to increase awareness of the general population about the problems of people with hearing impairment, as well as relevant solutions to these issues.

169. The JP contributed to sensitization and better understanding of policy alternatives for improving the accessibility of public services for PwDs. Such contributions were made through production and promotion of studies and policy papers analysing obstacles for introduction of ICF-based assessment procedures, and recommendations on business processes and normative frameworks allowing application of ICF and CRPD requirements in disability assessment of PwDs. For example, the programme produced analytical reports on “Accessibility of Public Services for PwDs” and “Disability statistics introduction and integration in the national statistics system” to improve accessibility of public services for PwDs and to develop a national disability statistical baseline ensuring complete coverage of PwDs to address their needs and situations.

170. This support has contributed to the ratification of the CRPD and the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" ZRU-641 15.10.2020. The evaluation found that adoption of these documents, along with the President's decrees, presents a strong foundation for further efforts to enhance the social protection system for PwD and for stronger social inclusion. However, as emphasized by interviewed stakeholders, such results mark only the beginning of long-term efforts to reform the system to be fully equitable and inclusive of all right holders.

171. Overall, there are many stories (EQ 22) generated through the evaluation process which show that the outputs of the JP have been successful. These are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Presentation of main success stories identified during evaluation process



Outcome: By 2022, the Government has an integrated and sustainable social protection system and initial capacity in place to improve social protection coverage for all citizens, particularly the most vulnerable, across Uzbekistan.

Finding 10: The JP has contributed to building the capacity of the key government institutions to improve social protection coverage for all citizens and build an integrated and sustainable social protection system. However, further efforts are required in terms of capacity building, modelling, advisory support and advocacy by UN, civil society, and other development partners. The foundations supported by the programme are still vulnerable to ambitious government reform agenda and resource limitations, demanding further external support.

172. The evaluation found considerable evidence of delivery of programme's outputs across the social protection system. The main significant contributory factors in building an integrated system were the support to the Single Register and modelling of the various approaches to disability assessment, case management, social services, etc. The government is now on a good track to adopt a strategic and legal basis for an integrated and sustainable social protection system, which was developed with support of the programme as well.

173. Output level results have strong transformative potential, though are dependent on further external support and on government commitments. There is evidence of significant improvement in the legislative and policy framework and an increase in government capacity to design social protection mechanisms, resulting, inter alia, from Programme's intensive work with the government and related social protection

institutions and professionals. The legislative and policy framework, once fully adopted, will provide strong foundations for an integrated and sustainable social protection system.

174. Particularly visible is the contribution towards the participatory design of the costed National Social Protection Strategy in line with the 2030 Agenda. The investment in capacity strengthening and advisory on institutional mechanisms (e.g., Single registry, case management, disability assessments, institutional solution for addressing social protection mandate (i.e., Agency for Social Protection) also contribute to increased capacity to improve and better target social protection coverage for all citizens, particularly the most vulnerable. The application of such improved institutional mechanisms and services (e.g., the SR) is already showing significant outcome level results in terms of better, more efficient and just social protection coverage (supply by duty bearers), which is based on needs and rights of the end beneficiaries (demand by right holders). However, these advances are vulnerable to several factors, notably the government's continued commitment, the pace of the reform and resource limitations.
175. For the moment, the Government shows strong commitment and urge to push the reform further. The reform pace is, however, quite fast, which is reconfirmation of government's commitment but may be risky from the point of duplication of efforts, overambitious agenda, and suboptimal results, or too much pressure on institutions to deliver in short time institutional changes that require significant organisational change. Closely link to that are the resource limitations (financial, human, organisational) which may negatively affect the operationalisation of the ambitious policy agenda. Another issue is linked to the too-short duration of this JP which limits somehow the extent to which the government's aspirations can be supported to ensure that ambitious agenda translate into changes that are sufficiently incremental to take more institutional root.

Unintended negative and positive outcomes of the Project (EQ12)

176. The evaluation did not find any evidence of negative outcomes of the programme on the targeted partner institutions or final beneficiaries. On the contrary, the JP has catalysed some unintended positive outcomes. For example, the establishment of the SR for use by 17 ministries and agencies has already proven its utility when it comes to efficiency and effectiveness of social assistance benefits' processing by interlinking these institutions and their databases. There is further potential for expanding services which can be made more efficient and accessible by tapping on these databases, including cadastre, civil registry, and other types of public services once other seven ministries join as planned in 2022.
177. Several stakeholders also highlighted the fact that the financial and partnership support to NGOs representing PwD rights has contributed to development of a network of NGOs working on disability rights. This network has a potential to grow and build synergies, share information, and organize joint actions and joint advocacy for PwD.

Gender and equity aspects mainstreaming (EQ6)

Finding 11: There is evidence of integration of a gender and equity dimension in the JP's support to social protection reforms.

178. The programme has applied an equity-based and gender-sensitive approach to addressing key bottlenecks and national priorities for the reform of the social protection system and included a set of gender disaggregated indicators in its results framework. The programme has also mainstreamed gender and equity in its advocacy and policy advice efforts to make sure that legislative solutions and services across the system are equity-based and gender-sensitive.
179. Gender equality and women's empowerment were mainstreamed in the developed concepts of the NSSP and institutional design options for integrated coordination mechanism and in the operational and methodological guidelines of Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) on development of NSSP.
180. ILO has invested strongly in integration of gender budgeting and mainstreaming in its policy advisory efforts. As a result, gender budgeting was introduced into the Gender Strategy until 2030 while the gender audit was introduced into the Law "On guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for women and men". Also, the ILO convention on protection of maternity was ratified, and promoted through establishing of maternity and child benefits made available through the SR. Such efforts also assisted the integration of a gender lens in key modelling interventions (e.g., single registry, case management, disability assessment and databases), resulting in an increased sensitization of multiple deprivation and needs of women and girls, particularly those facing discrimination based on ethnicity, disability, etc.

181. The LVG initiatives covered at least 710 women with disability and particular reference was made to gender equality in the context of UNCRPD at the capacity building training courses on ICF norms for national partners. Furthermore, a situational review on women with disabilities and their access to employment opportunities, including the impact of COVID-19 pandemic was conducted. Results were shared with the national partners and used to adjust unemployment benefit scheme for women with disabilities.

182. To date, **the work on gender lens is work in progress**. Stakeholders see an outstanding need for further engagement and advocacy to mainstream gender into national policies.

JP's contribution to accelerating the SDGs at the national level (EQ7)

Finding 12: The JP has made contributions to integration of SDGs and Agenda 2030 priorities into government's social protection policies.

183. The JP is strongly founded on the principles and objectives of Agenda 2030 and SDGs, notably SDGs 1 (End Poverty), 5 (Gender Equality and Women Empowerment), 10 (Reduced Inequality) and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The programme's focus on social protection provides impetus for acceleration of related SDGs.

184. Within the social protection focus, the JP has been actively promoting and contributing to building an integrated and sustainable social protection system with capacity in place to improve social protection coverage and quality for all citizens. As a result, a set of regulatory documents and systems have been developed and some of them have been adopted to enhance access to rights and benefits and to effectively protect the most vulnerable from the potential risks and shocks, contributing to acceleration of progress towards SDGs 1, 5, 10 and 16. However, the social protection reform is still in its initial stage, with prospect for adoption of the Social Protection Roadmap, which will, once adopted, bring stronger foundations for far reaching reforms.

185. The draft NSSP is strongly founded and aligned with national SDG agenda, and many of its indicators are the same as the national SDG indicators. While the prospects for its adoption are strong, the evaluation found that the capacity of the government to implement it fully remains limited, requiring further support by external actors, notably the UN. A more detailed assessment of the support required can be found in the Sustainability and Impact sections.

186. The JP has also contributed to building the blocks of legislative, regulatory, and social policies, and through this process contributed to integrating the SDGs and Agenda 2030 into the governmental policies supported by the programme. The programme also contributed to bridging the gaps, expanding the coverage, and building a system to enable wider coverage and access to social protection system. It also supported the government in developing a more inclusive social protection policy that, when adopted and implemented, has the potential to enable the government to further tackle inequality and create a fairer and more just society.

The extent to which COVID-19 affected the achievement of intended results contributing to/reversing the expected impact of the JP (EQ11)

Finding 13: The JP showed flexibility and agility in continuously adapting to changing working environments and restrictions, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

187. The JP started its implementation in January 2020, shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since March 2020, most programme implementation was heavily affected by the pandemic and related imposed restrictions, requiring most activities to be put on hold/move online/slow down. This led to delays and challenges to access services or assistance for the most affected populations. Most programme interventions are based on live interaction between stakeholders, so the travel restrictions and reduced possibility for the programme to organize in-person activities (e.g., trainings, policy dialogue and advisory, gatherings or other activities) affected the programmes ability to maximize their potential.

188. To compensate, the JP swiftly undertook a set of measures to support smooth implementation despite COVID-19 restrictions. These included modifications of the 2020 workplan and inclusion of additional activities related to the COVID-19 response that became integral part of the UNCT's COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Framework (SERF). The JP relied on its already established partnerships between PUNOs and the government and other national actors, to ensure that the programme could continue

engaging with partners remotely or in a hybrid manner. For instance, the programme applied a hybrid approach (with some stakeholders meeting in-person when/where possible while others would join remotely) to its capacity strengthening, partner meetings and advisory services, ensuring all safety precautions were in place. Thanks to the agility, the programme managed to deliver planned outputs and provide strong transformative potential across all areas. Materialization of outcomes, in particular, the adoption and scale up of tested models (case management, disability assessment) and the adoption of the Social Protection Roadmap strategy remain outstanding at the time of finalization of this report.

189. Interviewed stakeholders noted that the JP showed agility to continuously adapt to changing working environments and restrictions, showing flexibility and readiness to change the approaches to maximize the potential of the programme in difficult circumstances.

6.3 EFFICIENCY

190. The following section provides a review of the efficiency of JP management in terms of its human/financial resources as well as organizational/governance structure, and the contribution of the JP programme to enhancing UN efficiency. The JP resources were adequate (USD 2 million), both in terms of funding and technical expertise provided. The technical assistance was very professional and in line with the requirements of the government agencies. There was due diligence in financial and portfolio management and each participating UN agency had a dedicated team to support the implementation of the programme, along with outsourced international expertise, which was adequate and appropriate. The JP budget utilization rate is good, with the full funding expected to be used as planned.

JP management of its human / financial resources and organizational / governance structure (EQ13)

Finding 14: The JP managed to ensure efficiency and adaptive management of its portfolio.

191. The review of JP implementation data, corroborated by stakeholder interviews, shows the programme's diligence to use available project funds efficiently, despite its broad scope and multitude of partners and target areas. PUNOs' **efficiency driver has been the technical competence and personal dedication** of each PUNO team, contributing to the efficient implementation of the interventions. The evaluation found that the programme secured strong and competent technical staff, with lean core teams in each PUNO and outsourced services where specific, additional expertise was needed. This structure appropriately addressed the personnel needs related to policy and system strengthening, and the technical support to modelling and testing services or systems.

192. Considering the fact that much of the reform interventions are rather new to Uzbekistan, and some of the required tasks are highly specialized, the JP outsourced work to international consultants or companies to work on, including setting up the Single Registry IT system, and provision of advisory services for disability assessment and classification processes, questions related to ADL (Activities of Daily Life), social determinants of disability experience, and environmental, including living and non-living factors). Such efforts were costly but have assisted in efficiently building a critical mass of examples or services to assist the reform process. The evaluation found that outsourcing proved challenging throughout the implementation primarily due to COVID-19 restrictions to travel, but the programme partners worked proactively to overcome obstacles by combining in-person (when possible) and remote work to maximize results.

193. UNICEF acted as the administrator for the project and had a budget more than double than ILO and UNDP to implement the programme. Each PUNO had their own budget (UNICEF - \$1.1 million, ILO - \$500,000 and UNDP - \$400,000) and all have efficiently spent their allocated resources. Table 2 shows that the JP has managed to commit all its available funds by January 2022. Review of financial data shows positive, albeit varying degree of utilization of funds. The UNDP rate of is 95,83%; UNICEF's and ILO's utilization around 75% of funds by mid-January 2022. The utilization rate is good, with the full funding expected to be used as planned. Stakeholder interviews reveal that remaining committed funds for all PUNOs will be used to cover planned administrative and staff costs as well as the closing event for the programme.

Table 2: Overview of financial status of the programme per PUNO

Agency	Funds	Rate (%)
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UNICEF		
Total budget	\$1.100.000,00	
Utilized as of 12.01.2022	\$820.526,03	74,59%
Commitment as of 12.01.2022	\$276.196,83	25,11%
Planned activities by the end of programme: Administrative costs and concluding event of the UN JP	\$3.277,14	0,30%
Balance	\$0,00	0,00%
ILO		
Total budget	\$500.000,00	
Utilized as of 12.01.2022	\$373.703,67	74,74%
Commitment as of 12.01.2022	\$48.164,71	9,63%
Planned activities by the end of programme: Administrative costs, concluding event of the UN JP, international and national consultancy and webinars	\$78.131,62	15,63%
Balance	\$0,00	0,00%
UNDP		
Total budget	\$400.000,00	
Utilized as of 12.01.2022	\$383.337,14	95,83%
Commitment as of 12.01.2022	\$8.495,80	2,12%
Planned activities by the end of programme: Administrative costs and concluding event of the UN JP, translations, and publications	\$8.167,06	2,04%
Balance	\$0,00	0,00%

Source: UN Joint Programme data

Contribution of the JP model to enhancing UN efficiency (EQ14)

Finding 15: The JP composition and structure were conducive to achievement of results. Stronger collaboration across components could have been beneficial to maximize full potential of the JP model.

194. The JP is structured by themes, with division of components done in such a way that each PUNO is responsible for their own component. The division of portfolios was done based on a natural continuation of already implemented interventions by each PUNO, but now joined under one umbrella. This design enhanced UN efficiency despite never intending to fully integrate all three outputs. The division enabled important elements to be maintained for each PUNO such as already established network of partners and strategic positioning. However, the division was also an obstacle to ensuring the appropriate integration of sectors and preventing silos.
195. The evaluation found several examples of excellent integration including on strategy development and advocacy with the government. All the UN agencies also developed a joint position paper with the World Bank and have a well-integrated approach with their work with the Ministry of Finance. However, the workplans of each thematic component rarely includes cross-sectoral interventions, or when it does, the interventions that *are* formally included, are not extensively utilized in practice, as corroborated through interviews. Although the thematic approach helps to focus engagement within a given sector, the programme struggled to ensure a more holistic approach to the reforms of social protection and social inclusion of the most vulnerable (e.g., PwD, children, but also other groups). This is considered a weakness given the multidimensional nature of the sector but also the need for cross-sectoral programming and functions, not only because of the complex needs of the most vulnerable, but also due to the limited donor resources for the sector. Silos affect the extent to which efficiency and effectiveness and the prospects of contributing to longer-term impact are possible. There is a visible demand for consolidation, through a stronger focus on deeper and cross-sectoral engagement with less of a thematic approach per se.
196. Nevertheless, the evaluation found that the partnership between the three UN agencies has brought efficiencies and effective results. As noted by all interviewed stakeholders, the main value of a joint approach is the combination of the three-UN Agencies' expertise, profile, and credibility along with their pools of stakeholders and partners. The combination has been crucial for delivery of stronger results, particularly from the fact that the Result/Component 2 lead by ILO sublimates interventions of all three agencies into a central focus of the programme, i.e., the adoption of the Social Protection Strategy which will serve as foundation for all other reform efforts within the sector.
197. While more efforts to overcome silos could have been invested, the programme structure and central focus enabled interaction to happen for the benefit of the reform and UN's strategic positioning within the reform. This is a positive foundation for potential future PUNOs' joint efforts.
198. When it comes to M&E, the results framework presented the framework for monitoring results. Each PUNO provided monitoring data on their own component and the information was compiled by UNICEF. The meetings between PUNOs were also platforms to discuss the progress. However, review of project reports and interviews show that project's monitoring process is still compartmentalized per PUNO. There are only limited efforts to cross-fertilize monitoring data for reflection on cumulative achievements. This prevents understanding the wider programme results and mutual leverage potential.


Efficiency of management of UNICEF resources to support the Single Registry rollout and delivery of benefits to the most vulnerable (EQ15)

Finding 16: UNICEF contribution of covering all technical support has increased efficiency of the programme, enabling technical difficulties to be solved quickly, often on the spot, and this accelerated the implementation and nation-wide roll-out of Single Registry

199. The implementation of the support to the Single Registry was initiated by UNICEF in 2015, before the JP started. The evaluation found that UNICEF's investment and resources in supporting the SR were critical in ensuring a timely, efficient and appropriate roll-out and delivery to the most vulnerable despite the challenges. The main driver was UNICEF's and partners' flexibility but also UNICEF's vast knowledge and experience in social protection and design of similar models.

200. Document review and stakeholder interviews show that UNICEF’s resources were adequately planned and operationalized through engagement of qualified personnel in designing the system, appropriate selection of partners to implement technical expertise and capacity building. These elements assisted UNICEF to fill in gaps that could not be addressed by the stakeholders in a timely and efficient manner. Stakeholders noted that UNICEF support was flexible enabling technical difficulties to be addressed quickly; the glitches in the system were fixed promptly and professionally, and this accelerated the implementation of SR and enabled the use of the system during the COVID-19 pandemic.

201. UNICEF’s flexibility was praised also in some adjustments that had to be made to some activities to align with social distancing requirements, with training and meetings moved online. It is worth mentioning in this sense that, all activities were achieved despite COVID-19 and moving online also caused some savings which helped them to increase the output.

 *Without UNICEF, it would take longer, cost more and would not be of the same quality”*
- Government representative

“Their support enabled us in principle to develop and implement the system nation-wide in a short time”
- Government Representative

6.4 SUSTAINABILITY

Contribution to sustainability and the long-term buy-in, leadership and ownership by the Government and other relevant stakeholders (EQ 16 and EQ 17)

202. The JP has succeeded in ensuring the partnership and ownership by the government and stakeholders will be a strong foundation for sustainability. The evaluation found that there is a joint understanding about where the reform should be going and the commitment to contribute to these reforms. The SR, the work on the roadmap for social protection and other investments of the programme are seen by stakeholders as a significant contribution to building sustainability of the social protection system in Uzbekistan.

203. Another significant contribution to sustainability is the combination of working at multiple levels: at system level, at a local level with piloting models, and conducting social mobilization, through the work with NGOs on advocacy or promotion of rights of PwD. This combination contributed to building durable partnerships between the implementing partners and the national stakeholders, and among the national stakeholders themselves. The following section presents an overview of the sustainability of the results achieved by the JP and the contribution to the ownership by the Government and other stakeholders.

Finding 17: The JP supported important changes to legislation and formation of vital institutional mechanisms to address issues of accessibility and availability of social services. Through its efforts, the JP promoted and contributed to integration of international social security standards, the “leave no one behind” principles and SDGs into national legislation, policy, and practice. However, the sustainability of these efforts will depend on the capacity of the government and national actors to implement the drafted and/or adopted reform package.

204. The JP worked in partnership with the key national institutions engaged in social protection reforms lead by the MoF to address the recognized bottlenecks and reform priorities within the sector. The support interventions benefited from strong ownership and commitment of the government but also of other key stakeholders including employers, workers representatives, organizations of PwD, CSOs representing other vulnerable groups. This translated into joint efforts and readiness to maximize the programme potential, as elaborated in Section 6.2 – Effectiveness. This strategy contributed to 1) building stronger and durable partnership both between PUNOs and national stakeholders but also among national stakeholders, and 2) better familiarity and understanding why codifying international social security standards into national legislation, policy and practice is important, and 3) the importance of rolling out of the SR.

205. Within these efforts, and in fulfilling its key role of policy advocacy, advisory and dialogue, the JP succeeded in bringing legislative and policy contributions, resulting in adoption of several regulatory acts, listed in Box 2. As of January 2022, the draft National Social Protection Roadmap and Action Plan have been drafted and are undergoing a consultation process. The adopted legislation and roadmap, once fully adopted, will create strong legislative and policy foundations and a reform package for improved performance in addressing issues of accessibility and availability of social protection measures and services for citizens of Uzbekistan. Also, through its support to the MoF in drafting a costed Roadmap, the JP has made a significant contribution towards building MoF's analytical capacity to follow and analyse data and inform future decision-making.

206. However, interviewees from all stakeholder groups emphasized the fact that the full operationalization of this reform package is the too fast paced for reforms in Uzbekistan. Besides, the fact that there is still no single institution in charge of social protection is a limitation in terms of fragmentation and duplication of efforts. As a result, it will be a challenge to overcome competing priorities and duplication of efforts, which may threaten government's ability to maintain reform focus.

207. The reform also requires significant financial allocations, which are more difficult to ensure given the economic downturn caused by COVID-19, despite the exacerbated social challenges and poverty for the most vulnerable, demanding expansion of social assistance coverage. External donor assistance to social protection is currently very limited, which is another challenge for maintaining the reform momentum.

Box 2: Regulatory acts supported by the JP

- The CRPD
- The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" ZRU-641 15.10.2020.
- Presidential Decree "On measures to improve the system of social protection of the population of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2021-2030" of 17 February 2021.
- Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated November 27, 2021, No. pp-22, "On measures to further improve the activities of the medical and social examination service and the system for establishing disability for children".
- Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated December 21, 2021, No. pp-57 "On additional measures to comprehensively support persons with disabilities, promote their employment and further increase social activity".
- The Law "On guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for women and men"
- The Gender Strategy until 2030

Finding 18: The absorption capacity of the social protection system threatens replication of modelled interventions, particularly given the capacity and resource availability differences between regions and communities in the country.

208. UNICEF and UNDP developed and successfully tested models that have the potential to transform practice within the social protection system and tangibly impact the most vulnerable groups (PwD, users of social assistance, deprived children, and their families). However, the pace of their introduction varies and is closely linked to government's buy-in and absorption capacity to integrate models in a timely manner. At present, there is commitment by the government and other partners to continue the path, but there is concern about their capacity to move things forward at the same pace without JP support.

209. The evaluation found that the modelled SR has been scaled up across the country and already brings significant results in terms of coverage, efficiency, and access to social assistance but also transparency and accountability when it comes to utilization of national budget. The SR is expected to incorporate additional systems and databases soon and grow even further. The electronic platform for PwD is also expected to be joined with a single registry to help ensure adequate targeting and outreach.

210. Some stakeholders raised concerns about the capacity of the government to technically maintain the SR system. There is still limited capacity and human resources to sustain the SR and it is expected that the government will have to compete with the private sector in attracting a competent workforce to ensure the proper functioning of the SR.

211. At the same time, the move from the medical model of disability assessment to the social model is not only a change in the mode of work or a change in the type of forms used. It is a mindset change, a social change that requires not only time to happen but constant advocacy and capacity building work.

212. Regarding, the disability assessment procedures and the service delivery design based on ICF and CRPD norms, the programme has contributed to better understanding of what the alternatives would be in improving the accessibility of public service for PwD and supporting the development of the database for

disability assessment procedures. The modelled case management, disability assessment and classification approach have produced good results, but they have not yet been scaled up, and as of January 2022, there is no such plan to do so. Lack of resources and concrete plans in this direction pose a challenge to sustainability as their adoption and scale-up will have a ripple effect and require significant changes in mindset, as well as in procedures, processes and overall practices that are not always horizontally or vertically integrated. The case management pilot also needs further efforts to scale up, and the government institutions in charge of scaling up and implementation of these new models need to be further supported to better use the systems and the models that have been showcased by the JP. While there have been many positive results achieved, there is still a need for further investment to support these new mechanisms and pilots to take root and to be adequately used and applied for the benefit of the citizens of Uzbekistan.

213. A key challenge is the fact that the government has been active in tackling many new initiatives (service development, deinstitutionalization, etc.) in the social protection sector simultaneously which create competing priorities for the government and the fragmentation of efforts. Key stakeholders mentioned the absorption capacity of the social and medical-care institutions to acquire and implement the tested models due to small exposure to some of these pilots (e.g., small number of localities or engaged institutions) and their short timeline, resulting in too many activities in a short period of time. The evaluation found that, considering these challenges, the catalytic and sustainability potential of models beyond the SR is limited and fragile.

214. The JP support to NGO initiatives has brought short term output level results with some positive catalytic potential on the final beneficiaries. The LVGs have enabled the NGOs to make real change and in a few cases, sustainable change in the services offered to PwD. The JP also helped create a network of these NGOs for information sharing and joint advocacy work in the future. However, due to short term period of support and limited funding, most of these initiatives will remain as one-off support interventions, without sustainability potential if no further funding is provided.

Contribution of the JP to the awareness raising on social protection, development of knowledge and its dissemination (guides, tools, country briefs, trainings) among key stakeholders and beneficiaries? (EQ 18)

Finding 19: The JP has contributed to awareness raising and knowledge building on social protection. Such contributions assist increasing commitment to reform, resulting in placing the reforms strongly on the government agenda. However, capacity strengthening is an ongoing need which demands continued attention to underpin implementation of the reform package.

215. The JP has moved forward the policy framework and institutional thinking of the government and national stakeholders on the issues of modernization and optimization of the social protection system in Uzbekistan. The JP advocated for and supported cooperation and partnerships among national stakeholders, investing in the generation of evidence and knowledge building, modelling, and provision of advice to the design of policy solutions. New partnerships and intersectoral cooperation initiatives have been forged including between government, social partners, NGOs, and development partners which stakeholders considered helpful to raise awareness and knowledge. The knowledge generated through trainings and modelling of approaches and services such as the SR, case management, disability assessments, and fiscal space analysis, have helped national stakeholders better understand international practices and use new methodologies and approaches to modernize the institutional practices and service provision to the most vulnerable. However, interviewed stakeholders highlight outstanding needs for sharing and familiarization with international best practices, standards, and approaches. The reform of social protection is still in the initial stages and demands for understanding latest human rights and social protection standards are still considerable, calling for continued support of UN and other partners to support such knowledge building interventions.

Likelihood of the uptake and application of the Single Registry by the Government in the medium to long run (EQ 19)

Finding 20: The Single Registry has already been scaled up and proved its utility during the first year of implementation by the government. It brought evidenced improvements in terms of coverage, efficiency,

and accountability. The evaluation found that the Single Registry is likely to continue to be utilized and applied by the Government in the medium to long term.

216. The Single Registry model was scaled up by the government in 2020 and 2021, improving social assistance coverage. The system helped improve targeting and coverage of the most vulnerable, resulting in an increase from 566,000 beneficiaries of social assistance in January 2020 to over 1.2 million beneficiaries of social assistance by September 2021. For instance, the increase in Tashkent region was from 13,000 to 57,700, and in Khorezm region from 39,000 to 73,000 beneficiaries.
217. Evaluation interviews with government counterparts at all levels indicate that the SR was crucial from the perspective of a rights-based response to the needs of the population and considering the state's social protection responsibility. The evaluation also found that government institutions made good use of the interoperability of databases that were connected within the framework of the SR beyond social assistance. As of January 2022, the SR connects databases of 17 ministries and agencies (seven more to be added) and provides over 50 types of information. This is viewed as an opportunity to bring together different institutions and allow for more services to be optimized and made more efficient. Interviewed government stakeholders revealed new ideas for services that they would develop based on the availability of internal flow of data, spanning cadastre services, administrative, civil registry, social, health and other services.
218. These findings point to strong ownership of the Government ongoing use of the SR, including maintenance and upgrading it in the medium to long term. Interviewed government stakeholders also confirmed their commitment to continuing to develop it. There is already a commitment to allocation of funds by the Government to maintaining and its further upgrade.

6.5 IMPACT

219. This evaluation is not in position to provide full assessment of impacts due to time and resource constraints but also since there has not been enough time between implementation and evaluation. This section summarizes the impact prospects of the JP on the social protection reform in Uzbekistan.

The extent to which JP produced a catalytic effect in terms of generating systems change across sectors to leave no one behind (EQ8, EQ 9, EQ10, EQ20, and EQ 21)

Impact	Vulnerable groups, especially children, women, NEET youth, unemployed, and PwDs, are effectively protected from potential risks and vulnerabilities and benefit from more equitable access to resources, leading to acceleration of progress towards SDGs 1, 5, 10 and 16.
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Finding 21: The prospect for the JP influencing the progressive realization of desired programme impact is overall mixed, but it will depend on ongoing capacity strengthening and resources being provided to social protection actions over the coming years.

220. Positive impact prospects of the programme will materialise should all delivered outputs fully transform into positive government practices. At the time of the evaluation, there is evidence of better social protection coverage of right holders (vulnerable groups, especially children, women, NEET youth, unemployed, and PwDs) enabled by the Single Registry. The social assistance coverage enabled through the SR directly helps several groups of vulnerable people including women, children and PwD. The interoperability of databases within the SR also brings the potential to develop other types of e-services for citizens, which then impacts positively the efficiency, transparency, and accountability.
221. However, the shift to registering PwDs or the case management system are still not scaled up, though there is commitment and ownership of the government to do so in the next period. If adopted and scaled up, these will enable right holders to access social assistance and social services to bring multidimensional benefits. The limited duration of the joint programme does not allow for full follow up, though individual UN agencies are committed to continue investing in these models.
222. The programme's advocacy and policy advisory and dialogue, partnerships, modelling of systems and services and social mobilization have brought important output and outcome level results. There is also evidence of impact on the national system and duty bearers' prioritization and commitment to social protection reforms, but no data on its impact on rightsholders are available yet. Most of the adopted legislation is still new and has only recently begun to be operationalized, while the Roadmap is not adopted

yet. The evaluation finds that there is potential for the full implementation of the reform package (including, but not limited to, the establishment of single government entity on social protection and adoption of Social Protection Roadmap as a start) to bring tectonic changes in the way the needs of the most vulnerable are addressed, resulting in social inclusion that will have transformative potential on their empowerment and livelihoods. Such system level investments also contribute to the acceleration of progress towards SDG 1, 5, 10 and 16. The project has tackled the recognized challenges in terms of the effectiveness of the social protection system, with concrete contributions through the Single Registry, the social protection roadmap and policies concerning PwD. According to document review and stakeholder interviews, there is still outstanding work to be done for the SDGs to be achieved in Uzbekistan, depending on the full roll out of the social protection and inclusion reform.

223. The achievement of impact-level results is not entirely dependent on PUNOs' work, with many external factors directly affecting achievements. The full transformative potential of the programme is dependent on government's commitment, political and reform stability, and availability of external (programme) support, advisory and sharing of international best practices.

6.6 COHERENCE

224. This section presents an overview of the internal coherence within the programme, as well as the PUNOs' convening power and strategic positioning in the country. The internal coherence of the thematic portfolios within the JP is sound and the three outputs, implemented by three different UN agencies, brings together a holistic approach to the social protection. Having three UN agencies working together has built a convening power and strategic positioning as advocate and supporter of reforms, and this is considered a good driving force for partnerships with stakeholders. PUNOs have also invested efforts to avoid overlaps and create synergies with other partners such as the World Bank. Stronger operationalization of the planned holistic approach would be further improved coherence.

Finding 22: PUNOs' convening power and strategic positioning was a driving force for partnerships with stakeholders including government, CSOs, and other national development partners in support of its strategic approaches.

225. PUNOs hold strong convening power and strategic position both with the government and with civil society and development partners. Through exercising their individual and joint convener role, PUNOs were able to enhance and deepen cooperation with other stakeholders, leading to positive progress in advancement of the social protection reforms.
226. Furthermore, to align the processes of drafting the PRSP and NSSP, collaboration with the World Bank on poverty reduction, social protection, labour market and employment was strengthened. PUNOs' cooperation with the World Bank was regarded positively by government stakeholders who saw the joint action by PUNOs, and World Bank as well coordinated and aligned in their advocacy towards the government on the direction the reform should take and on the key messages that were passed through. The World Bank's position was also sought when drafting the NSSP as they were part of the working group and this partnership between the PUNOs, and World Bank was a driving force in accelerating the processes further.
227. The JP has also invested in avoiding overlaps and creating synergies between the UN agencies, and government counterparts regarded this as a positive factor. Both the World Bank and PUNOs have been working on the same issues from different angles, with the messages towards government being the same. This was important for the Government to see that all agencies agreed with the direction the development is taking.

FINDING 23. The JP did bring positive examples to UNCT when it comes to supporting social protection reforms integrating rights-based perspective.

228. The PUNOs have been leading and participating in working groups and other mechanisms established within the UNDAF/ UNSDCF framework, relating to social protection and human rights. PUNOs chair and coordinate work of all UN agencies within their specific mandates, and this offers a double benefit as they act as conveners for those relevant topics and ensures that all individual agencies complement other UN agencies and the overall UNDAF 2015-2020 and the follow up UNSDCF 2021-2025. Interviewed stakeholders describe PUNOs as open for cooperation and proactive in seeking opportunities for joint

action, promoting effective partnerships and strategic alliances around its targeted programme outcome areas, national development goals and SDGs.

229. JP contributed to increased understanding within UNCT about ways and approaches to formulate and implement social protection interventions in close cooperation with the Government and in volatile context marked by ambitious reforms. The PUNOs have been vocal to inform and advocate for reforms both within UNCT and with the national stakeholders, which was contributing to awareness raising. The Role of Resident Coordinator in this process was less prominent but included follow up and support to PUNOs efforts when required.

230. Thus far, there are no new pooled resources dedicated or allocated for continuation of PUNOs efforts for social protection. One opening for continued engagement and support to the Government presented itself by negotiations between Switzerland and Uzbekistan regarding a restitution agreement for the return of assets definitively forfeited in criminal proceedings in connection with Ms. Gulnara Karimova. These assets are set to be channelled through a new United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund (the Fund) or the benefit of the population of Uzbekistan and in support to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The JP mission and results at scale in comprehensive reform of social protection are in alignment with the spirit of this Fund.

231. Besides, the evaluation found that, thanks to the JP and partners commitment to social protection reform thus far, Uzbekistan has been invited to Flagship Programme Building Social Protection Floors for All (Second Phase), which has a potential to keep focus next steps and support through technical assistance and resource mobilization.

Coordination with development partners and other UN agencies to avoid overlaps, leverage contributions and catalyse joint work (EQ 23)

Finding 24: Internal coherence and coordination of agencies within the JP is a good example of UN agencies working together as one UN. However, the JP would have benefitted from stronger operationalization of planned holistic approach across all three programme components.

232. The JP's intervention logic is sound and provides for a holistic approach to the reform of the social protection system towards benefit of the citizens in Uzbekistan. A comparative review of this JP with programmes in other countries shows that the JP has operationalized the commitment of UN agencies to work together as "One UN". This is evidenced through open communication, and mutual efforts to coordinate and cooperate.

233. The evaluation identified multiple instances of cooperation and exchange between PUNOs in implementation of their respective components and some cross-fertilization and cross-component utilization of PUNOs' leverage. Examples include efforts to bring partners of each PUNO together in advocacy and coordination efforts and relying on each PUNOs' leverage and expertise when needed. However, the programme would have benefitted from more inter-sectoral integration across all three programme sectors. While the evaluation found that Components 1 and 2 are well linked, Component 3 was implemented rather separately, without much interaction with the other two components.

Coordination between UNICEF and the participating agencies as well as other international organizations and government stakeholders within the framework of the Single Registry interventions (EQ 24)

234. The internal coherence is perceived as conceptually good, although there is somewhat of a silo approach between individual components. This is somewhat understandable because each PUNO had their own component at the operational level. Nevertheless, stakeholders noted that the interventions complemented each other, were well aligned, and coordinated with one another, hence supporting the achievement of the intended purpose. The convening power and strategic positioning was supported by PUNOs operations under strong leadership of UNICEF.

235. Several stakeholders observed that although UNICEF was the leading agency, the leadership component was moving from one PUNO to another depending on the need of the JP, and this made the integration of the programme components even more successful.

236. Stakeholders noted that PUNOs worked well with other donors, specifically, regarding the national strategy development and single registry. Because of their combined experience, knowledge, and support

of three agencies working together, and good coordination with other partners no drawbacks were observed, and stakeholders acknowledge that this was due to the good coordination practice.

6.7 DISABILITY FOCUS

Inclusiveness of the joint programme design, implementation, and monitoring of persons with disabilities (EQ 25 and EQ 26).

Finding 25: Inclusion. Leave No One Behind principles and a focus on disability have been reflected in the project framework, with evidence of their mainstreaming throughout implementation and monitoring of inclusive practices for persons with disability.

237. The JP interventions across the programme portfolio, and particularly under Component 3 lead by UNDP, have contributed to positive changes towards enabling access to and benefit for women, men, girls, and boys with disability. The JP design was informed by an analyses and previous engagement of PUNOs, leading to integration of disability focus as an integral part of implementation of programme activities. Throughout the period of implementation, the PUNOs continued advocating for and ensuring that the voice of PwD were heard. This was done through provision of funding to NGOs representing PwD to advocate for rights and inclusion; investment in institutional capacity strengthening of intuitions and commissions dealing with PwD rights; system enhancements (social protection strategy; Single Registry; case management and direct services and outreach to PwD.
238. Across all thematic components, PUNOs encouraged inclusion and targeting of PwD as beneficiaries or rights and inclusion advocates. For instance, UNDP spearheaded reforms of the disability assessment and classification models in Uzbekistan in line with ICF and CRPD norms, to help its modernization and shift towards a social model, which, once adopted should bring important changes in registering PwDs and their inclusion in society. UNDP also supported 11 NGOs through grants to advocate for PwD rights and engaged them in policy processes lead by the government. The JP partners also engaged with the government to advocate for and adapt policy framework towards more inclusion of PwD in the labour market and employability measures.
239. The trainings and awareness raising sessions within the JP were delivered not just to the government stakeholders but also NGOs and wider community members. Stakeholder interviews revealed a strong appreciation of support interventions, noting that the JP is one of the few focusing on these issues. All interviewed NGOs emphasized the fact that the grants they received were rare opportunities. The grants helped NGOs gain prominence and increase their profile and the profile of their target groups. NGOs noted that they are also now more able to obtain grants from other donors thanks to this support, which is an important input for their work and recognition as advocates of rights of their specific groups.
240. The JP advocacy and awareness raising efforts, both centrally and locally, also included attention to engaging PwD in implementation and monitoring processes to ensure that PwD and their representative organisations can provide their input in the process. Through these and other programme interventions, the programme supported the Government to establish an integrated and sustainable social protection system with capacity in place to improve social protection coverage and quality for PwD.

Finding 26: The JP's contributions to the socio-economic inclusion of persons with disabilities are still emerging.

241. The evaluation found that, despite the JP's efforts to advocate for systemic reforms of social protection sector, the outcome level results in terms of progress towards improved income security, coverage of health care, and disability-related costs across the life cycle are only emerging. The JP has been investing in reforms and engaged with the government, NGOs and other actors on social protection and social services, employment, inclusion, but the societal change is incremental and slow, and the programme duration has been short and narrow in comparison to the needs and current context of PwD rights in Uzbekistan.

7 Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations

7.1 CONCLUSIONS

242. This section provides a set of conclusions derived from the evaluation process, relating to the relevance of the Joint Programme interventions to national priorities in Uzbekistan; specific outcome level contributions; efficiency, sustainability, impact, and coherence of the programme.

Relevance

243. C1: The programme has underpinned and stirred important reforms and mindset changes in the social protection sector. The JP's strategic direction of investing in direct support to development of the strategic and regulatory framework for social protection and inclusion, and the implementation of the Single registry, case management and promotion and enhancement of the rights and inclusion of PwD were highly appropriate to the context and the needs of PwD in Uzbekistan. The programme was driven by Agenda 2030 and SDGs, which helped responding to the sector priorities.

244. The JP PUNOs are positioned as key actors in delivering social protection and inclusion, and institutional capacity strengthening interventions that are well aligned with government priorities, and responsive to priority needs. The JP has helped fill a gap in government services and respond to unmet needs of right holders by investment in the Single Registry, case management and social services as well as small-scale grants to NGOs. The programme also advised the government and supported the design of evidence-based policies and regulatory documents which, once adopted and implemented, will bring more systematic response to the needs and rights of Uzbekistan's citizens.

245. At the time of the finalisation of this report, Switzerland and Uzbekistan held a round of negotiations regarding the return of assets that have been definitively confiscated in criminal proceedings, which resulted in an agreement to set up a new United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund (the Fund) which will contribute to SDG achievement in Uzbekistan. It will allocate resources to projects/programmes in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Uzbekistan (UNSDCF). The evaluation found that the JP has been directly aligned with and contributing to achievement of SDGs. The Programme works to address the government social protection and inclusion reform priorities which are in close alignment with the vision of the Trust Fund goals.

Specific contributions to desired outcomes of the Joint Programme

246. C2: Output level results ensuing from advisory and capacity strengthening interventions have been positive and confirm the strength and value added of a Joint programme vs. individual interventions. Yet, the challenge is to ensure that investments across the targeted thematic areas transform into more sustainable outcome level results.

247. The JP has engaged with all relevant national actors and development partners in the process of reform of the current social protection and inclusion system in Uzbekistan, investing in capacity strengthening, modelling and advocacy interventions. This engagement brought important output level results, through which the JP contributed to social protection and empowerment of most vulnerable groups.

248. The programme support to social protection system level change, which adopted a multi-dimensional approach operating at different levels (national, regional and *makhalla*) and through different pathways (advocacy, policy, technical and material support) has yielded positive output level results, though transformative potential is still pending the adoption of the Social Protection Roadmap. The programme assisted the government to quicken the pace of strengthening and scaling up innovative mechanisms for delivery of social assistance, through modelling and support to the launch of the Single Registry. The Registry is already bringing important results in terms of increased and just social assistance coverage, and more accountability, efficiency, and transparency of the process.

249. As a result of UNICEF's sustained efforts, the transition and scale up process of the Single Registry has been successful both at policy and implementation levels. The case management process, although still a work in progress, assists the social services and contributes to wider access. The piloting of the integrated social services through case management has been very important in widening the outreach and engagement with vulnerable groups of people who are otherwise unable to access some of the services that could be beneficial for them. Programme efforts to raise awareness and change the disability assessment and classification procedures have led to better understanding and knowledge of how to make the shift. However, the modelled approach still needs to be scaled up.

250. Such engagement with the government, NGOs, and development partners has brought positive prospects for the reform of the social protection system and resulted in improved capacity of national actors to expand social protection coverage for all citizens across Uzbekistan, particularly the most vulnerable.
251. C3: The Programme interventions provided effective support to the most vulnerable, with integration of protection, gender and disability principles.
252. The PUNOs invested efforts to invest in and adhere to gender and inclusion principles and disability focus. Gender and disability issues received strong attention and GEWE was mainstreamed throughout implementation, which added value to the intervention.

Efficiency

253. C4: Programme efficiency was very good, uplifted by positive and constructive partnership between PUNOs, sound results framework and good division of tasks in line with strong comparative advantage and strategic positioning of each PUNO.
254. The somewhat siloed approach to implementation of components and monitoring of the JP, which has been also noted as a design issue, lessened the programme's potential and diminished the understanding of wider programme results. The JP's approach of three UN agencies with strong mandate and strategic positioning joining forces with the government and other national actors, worked well to secure partnerships with the government and responsiveness to priorities. The JP's sound approach to resource management and consistent engagement in thematic areas boosted further the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme. The programme did not encounter significant delays in implementation, aside from interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which determined the postponement or shift of several actions or changing the approach. Still, the COVID-19 disruptions did not negatively affect the project to a major extent.
255. The JP could have done more to collect evidence, and capture and report on individual PUNO contributions to respective thematic priorities but also at programme level with regards to the JP's cumulative transformational potential. Programme reports and data provide abundance of output level data per component with outcome data is generally collected and reported for individual components (albeit to limited level of analysis).

Impact and sustainability

256. **C5: Impact and sustainability of achievements of the JP are still emerging and fragile.** The JP contributed to the design and adoption of several legislative solutions, while some key supported policies are still in the process of adoption.
257. Investment in capacity strengthening and modelling of innovative approaches and systems has resulted in scaled or scalable solutions and models which, once scaled up and implemented, will bring significant changes in terms of addressing the needs, enabling access and empowering the most vulnerable groups. However, there are array of bottlenecks and barriers that limit the implementation of regulations and models, including the fast pace of reforms compared with government's absorption capacity and the socio-economic challenges exacerbated also by COVID-19. Due to the short JP implementation timeline, the programme is not in position to offer more sustained systematic, concerted efforts targeting multiple institutional bottlenecks and incremental system changes simultaneously. While the JP delivered planned outputs there was insufficient time to allow the outputs to be fully institutionalization, which is a prerequisite for sustainability.

Coherence

258. C6: The collaborative and flexible programme approach helped to maximize the JP's potential, despite some challenges because of the internal siloed approach.
259. The JP is a positive example of collaborative and proactive partnership between PUNOs. Each PUNO brought and combined where possible/relevant its expertise and positioning to the JP which was a driver for sharing and engaging in common reflection and joint action towards the government. Nevertheless, programme partners could have done more to seek deeper synergies and cross-component leverage and cross-fertilization opportunities, beyond general coordination and partnership. Each PUNO oversaw its own component (thematic area) and invested in achievement of results within that respective area.
260. The PUNOs have been proactive, flexible and positive partners of the government, civil society and development partners. The open and proactive partnership approaches have been a driver of reform and enhanced the profile and prominence of UN as a partner in Uzbekistan's reform process.

7.2 LESSONS LEARNED

261. **Lesson 1:** The design of a joint programme implemented in partnership between UN Agencies requires evidence-based selection of strategic areas of intervention. The experience of this JP in Uzbekistan showcases the importance of ensuring a good balance between the scope of a joint programme and its support to the government's comprehensive reforms from the perspective of what can be realistically achieved, and where joint work of PUNOs has a comparative advantage. The experience demonstrates that a clear intervention logic of how support effort can deliver outputs with transformative potential along with a realistic resourcing strategy. Such an approach is critical in societies which encounter more limited fiscal and institutional capacity, and where national institutions embark in fast pace of reforms.
262. **Lesson 2:** Achieving longer term strategic (outcome level) objectives is based on cooperation with government and a commitment for adoption of an appropriate set of policies and legislative and institutional reforms sequenced in a way the incrementally build the national capacity over a longer-term horizon. The experience in Uzbekistan suggests for policy areas where there is government commitment but lower absorption capacity, close partnership with the government is helpful to bring about change. It also requires a longer-term intervention with a set of realistic strategic choices and targeted outcomes, to ensure sufficient time is available to support the government in complex reforms requiring incremental change.
263. **Lesson 3:** Scaling up models requires clear frameworks agreed with the government since the onset of modelling intervention. Experience from modelling of approaches and mechanisms in Uzbekistan shows the relevance and need for a time-bound transition framework or a handover plan designed together with the Government. Such plans should contain clear milestones and benchmarks of what is desired to be achieved and how it would be scaled up. As such it should represent the foundation of modelling interventions. Such plans should be reviewed and discussed on a regular basis with national stakeholders is a good way forward to ensure scaling up of models.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

264. The JP has been at the forefront of tectonic changes in the way the social protection and inclusions system in Uzbekistan is structured to enable access to and protection of right holders. The JP stirred the beginning of comprehensive reforms which require continuous and stable engagement of UN in support to Government of Uzbekistan to achieve the results set forth jointly.
265. The recommendations for the project derive from extensive consultations with key stakeholders across the evaluation process, analysis of documentation, and the findings and conclusions of this evaluation. The ET used interviews and group discussions to generate ideas for future joint and individual PUNO's strategic directions in support to the social protection and inclusion reforms. Evaluation recommendations were further presented and validated through interactive discussions with ERG members during interviews and during the evaluation briefing meeting held in January 2022. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this evaluation will further be disseminated by PUNOs.
266. In light of voiced recognition of the role and added value of UN engagement in the reform of social protection and inclusion, the evaluation recommendations (Table 3) are directed to PUNOs to assist them to further strengthen the support to the reform.

Table 3: Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timeframe
Strategic recommendation			
I	UN agencies should continue providing comprehensive support to the Government of Uzbekistan to reform its social protection and inclusion system in line with SDGs and government priorities	UNICEF in close consultation with the government counterparts	2022

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timeframe
	The follow up programme should build on the results and lessons learned from implementation of this Joint programme. This evaluation presents several thematic recommendations addressing the needed thematic components that should represent building blocks of future UN support to the Government of Uzbekistan. A set of operational recommendations for the development of the follow programme are also included below.		
Thematic recommendations			
1.1	<p>Continue to support government fiscal planning and optimization processes for social protection to underpin the implementation of the Social Protection Roadmap</p> <p>Follow up on the positive results of the JP's support to capacity strengthening and production of fiscal space analysis to continue supporting the government on fiscal planning in targeted sectors. This component should build upon the conducted analysis of the fiscal space for social protection and lessons learned from scale up of the Single Registry, and in line with ILO's and UNICEF's strategic priorities for Uzbekistan.</p>	ILO and UNICEF in close consultation with the government counterparts	2022
1.2	<p>Continue investing in the optimization of national structures and inclusive policy processes in the social protection and inclusion sphere</p> <p>Considering that social protection and inclusion demands collaboration of different sectors (education, social protection, finance, etc.) and entities (national and regional, local level planning and service provision entities), continue to assist the government to reinforce/optimize national institutional structures. This support should build on achieved changes in policy and institutional mechanisms and models.</p> <p>Such support could be operationalized through the provision of expertise and international best practices for fiscal planning, organization and implementation of social protection and inclusion strategies and interventions through optimized solutions.</p> <p>PUNOs should continue supporting and enhancing cross-sectoral partnerships and inclusive policy making and dialogue processes to maximize the potential of the NSSP implementation.</p>	ILO in cooperation with UNICEF and UNDP and in close consultation with the government counterparts	2022
1.3	<p>Support further upgrade of the Single Registry outlining the type of technical support/capacity strengthening to be provided.</p> <p>1.3.1 Continue supporting government efforts to engage more entities into the Single Registry. This support should come with a hand-over plan that includes well-defined priority actions to enhance cross-institution data sharing, security, oversight, and management functions.</p> <p>1.3.2 Efforts should also be invested to support wider and more effective inter-ministerial coordination beyond Ministry of Finance to include as many ministries and other entities as possible with a stake in social protection and inclusion.</p> <p>1.3.3 Continue investing in capacity strengthening of central, regional and local level institutions to use and utilise the Single Registry to the benefit of citizens. These efforts should be based on</p>	UNICEF in close consultation with the government counterparts	2022

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timeframe
	institutional capacity assessment and strong monitoring and evaluation framework.		
1.4	<p>Continue supporting regulatory and institutional strengthening to enable a full and sustainable shift of disability assessment and classification towards the social model in line with ICF and CRPD norms and principles</p> <p>A combination of support for legislative reforms with provision of concrete models should be provided along with approaches to underpin a shift of disability assessment and classification towards the social model in line with CF and CRPD norms and principles.</p> <p>Such efforts will enhance the potential for further institutionalization of new approaches, skills, sensitization of Commissions and other government entities dealing with CwD and PwD and contributing to better assessment and more inclusive practices.</p>	UNDP in close consultation with the Joint Programme on CRPD	2022
1.5	<p>Continue supporting and promoting the focus on child rights and access to social protection and inclusion for children and their families.</p> <p>The Project already achieved a lot in terms of promoting child rights and access to social protection and inclusion services and rights. Such efforts should be continued to strengthen such mechanisms and services but also through ensuring that child rights are mainstreamed across the reform policies.</p>	UNICEF in close consultation with the government counterparts	2022
1.6	<p>Continue promoting and supporting the mainstreaming of gender across all government's social policies</p> <p>There have been advances in Uzbekistan when it comes to gender mainstreaming in policies, but investment on gender lens is still needed. UN Agencies should continue promoting, advocating for and supporting the mainstreaming of gender in all respective social policies.</p>	UNICEF, ILO, UNDP in close coordination with other engaged UN Agencies	2022
Operational recommendations			
1.7	Devise programme intervention logic which strongly integrates these thematic components into a holistic approach to reform the social protection and inclusion system.	UNICEF in close coordination with other engaged UN Agencies	2022
1.8	<p>If the programme is decided as a joint UN Activity, all participating UN Agencies should jointly agree on how individual components will be monitored and in what manner will the cumulative (outcome level) effects be captured and reported.</p> <p>Procedures for joint monitoring and reflection of cumulative results will need to be developed and applied consistently. This will help overcome potential obstacles or limitations in terms of understanding of Joint UN results and curtail too high ambitions potential obstacles or limitations in terms of understanding of Joint UN results and curtail too high ambitions.</p>	UNICEF in close coordination with other engaged UN Agencies	2022

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timeframe
I.9	<p>Continue strengthening strategic and operational partnerships with key government institutions.</p> <p>To maintain strategic positioning and delivery of results, PUNOs should continue to invest in and nurturing key partnerships with Government (e.g., the Ministry of Finance), other UN agencies, development partners and donors.</p> <p>New partnerships should be also sought with the private sector. Investment in partnerships should include efforts to include private sector into the reform process and win their buy in and contribution to the reforms and their principles, as well as SDG fulfilment.</p>	UNICEF in close coordination with other engaged UN Agencies	2022 and beyond