



ARMENIA //  
**Full Spectrum Strengthening of the  
National Social Protection System**





## Issue

Armenia has a population of 3 million, 23% of whom are children. It had a GDP per capita of \$4,212 in 2018.<sup>24</sup> The last decade has seen Armenia's economy and society go through two economic shocks, leading to a big contraction in GDP of 14.1% in 2009. Inequality has also increased: the Gini coefficient rose from 0.339 in 2008 to 0.36 in 2018.<sup>25</sup> Poverty is a major challenge too. 2018 figures indicate that 23.5% of the population lives under the national poverty line.<sup>26</sup> While poverty rates are declining, they remain one of the highest in the region. Moreover, for every three Armenians who moved out of poverty between 2010-2015, one fell back into poverty.<sup>27</sup>

**Other challenges include high urban-rural disparities, falling fertility rates, population ageing, and large-scale outward migration. These all place pressures on growth and expenditure on health, pensions, and social services.** In particular, low female labour force participation and a wide gender wage gap further hinder growth prospects. Spending on social protection is relatively high (6.59% of GDP) compared to education (2%) or health (1.3%), but low compared to OECD averages. Most expenditure is on pensions and other types of cash benefits, while social services are underfunded.

**Approximately a third of all children experience poverty. The extreme child-poverty rate is 1.5%.<sup>28</sup> There has been no substantive reduction in child poverty in the last decade.** The risk of being poor increases significantly for families with three or more children. Multidimensional poverty experienced by children in Armenia shows that 61.6% of children experience deprivation in two or more dimensions, especially in utilities, housing, and leisure.<sup>29</sup>

**Monetary and multidimensional child poverty reduction have not been explicitly included in any policy documents, and no national social protection strategy existed prior to the Velvet Revolution of 2018 and UNICEF's recent advocacy efforts.** Moreover, the family benefit (FB) system is viewed as ineffective and there are different levels of understanding of social protection among cooperation partners. Proxy means-tested benefits aimed at enhancing family living standards in poor and vulnerable households (comprising a family benefit, social benefit, and quarterly emergency assistance) are the primary anti-poverty social assistance benefits. The FB is the only poverty benefit for families with children, while vulnerable households without children are entitled to a Social Benefit.

**Social transfers have a significant poverty reducing effect. However, not all recipients are lifted out of poverty through monetary assistance, as significant challenges**

**with targeting efficacy exist.** The FB programme is most relevant to families with children who experience poverty. In 2018, the FB's coverage was 12.1% of the eligible population (lower than in 2015, where it was 13.6%). The FBs experience 'leakage' where benefits are distributed to recipients in the top two consumption quintiles. For example, 12.2% of the beneficiaries receive transfers despite not being vulnerable, receiving a total of 11.2% of the total FB transfers. Clearly, the targeting methodology has resulted in inclusion/exclusion errors, and therefore requires reform. FBs make a difference in reducing child poverty, especially extreme child poverty. Some 23.9% of all children live in households receiving the FB.<sup>30</sup> If FBs were deducted from the total household expenditure, the extreme child poverty rate would increase from 1.5% to 7%, whereas the total child poverty rate would go up by 4.5 percentage points, from 29.2% to 33.7%.<sup>31</sup> Thus, FB income is very significant for poor households. However, the FB's design does not account for multidimensional poverty, and it is inadequate in enabling the full use of important services and goods. Moreover, its adequacy diminishes over time, as it is not adjusted to inflation and, in this sense, can be regressive. Other benefits (e.g. disability and childcare allowance) are not poverty-targeted and hardly make any difference to the poverty status of children and families.<sup>32</sup> More targeted and needs-based services are needed, intertwined with cash interventions, for more effective alleviation of child poverty.

**Armenia has embarked on the reform of its integrated social services (ISS) since 2010, with the support of UNICEF and the World Bank.** The ISS reform entails the provision of comprehensive social services through a 'one window' approach, meaning that all main social service offices are under one roof, thereby improving access to and administration of social services. Under this concept, the territorial Integrated Social Service Centres are being gradually established, hosting territorial offices of social services, territorial divisions of the Social Security Administration, State Employment Agency, and regional commissions of the Medical-Social Examination Agency. 48 such centres are planned in the country by the end of the reform. By September 2019, 28 ISSC were operating nationwide. However, challenges remain in the systemic capacity development and quality of social/case management work, availability and quality of community-based services, financing of social protection, and professional cooperation among social service providers in addressing the multiple vulnerabilities of families and children. Cash and care services are neither meaningfully linked nor interlinked with active labour market programmes (ALMPs).



## Actions

**In 2018, UNICEF Armenia, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), the World Bank, and the Armenian Association of Social Workers, initiated a dialogue through a three-day conference.**

The conference hosted over 350 participants from the government, civil society, the private sector, international associations of social workers, international development actors, academia, and youths on the *Role of Social Protection in the Sustainable Development Agenda within the notion of leaving no one behind (LNOB)*. The goal was to make a clear case for the important role that pursuing a life cycle approach to social protection has played in including the most vulnerable population. UNICEF Armenia, in cooperation with its partners, convened the conference to revalorise social protection as an important tool for poverty reduction, human capital formation, sustainable development, and other progressive social outcomes. An integrated approach was also posited, emphasising complementarity (i.e. social work should cohere logically with labour market activation policies).

**A call to action was developed through the conference. The call stressed the importance of addressing (child) poverty through adequate social protection, including cash and services, as well as human capital development.**

The Minister read out the call as a commitment for advancement in the social protection sector. The Conference recommendations included: 1) integrating economic and social development strategies and policies to achieve the SDGs and the LNOB agenda; 2) cash transfers for families and children must contribute to reducing poverty and deprivations and serve wellbeing; 3) cash transfers should be integrated and coordinated through interagency collaboration and linked with social care and support services and ALM policies; 4) human-centred social protection systems offer the optimal opportunity for obtaining human development outcomes across the lifecycle; 5) accountability and professionalisation of social services and its workforce are essential for SDG implementation and social policies; 6) adequate financial resources should be allocated to social protection as an investment in human capital; 7) the Government and its partners should encourage a culture of social protection that articulates it as an investment rather than a cost to address detractive stigma and promote social solidarity.

**Furthermore, in 2018, UNICEF Armenia launched a comprehensive and comparative assessment on the implementation process of the ISS reform with MoLSA and the World Bank.** The intention was to review, analyse, and assess the legal framework that covers the ISS system implementation and operation, quality of service delivery, effectiveness, obstacles, and directions of financial spending. The following features were analysed: joint reception,

integrated MIS, social case management, inter-agency cooperation and social support network, and development of territorial/local social plans. Integrated and non-integrated social centres were compared. A series of recommendations were provided for the advancement of the reform with a focus on the legal framework, workforce capacities, service provision, M&E and information systems, financing, and public awareness. The results were presented and discussed with key stakeholders in the reform process.

**UNICEF, MoLSA, and the World Bank conducted a landmark diagnostic of the social protection system and programmes using the ISPA Core Diagnostic Instrument (CODI) tool.** This primarily focussed on those programmes that had poverty reduction objectives; those which were directed at particularly vulnerable groups of the population (e.g. children) and labour market programmes. Over 115 social protection programmes were identified across various line Ministries, a matrix of lifecycle coverage of various population groups per social protection schemes was prepared, and an in-depth assessment of 15 selected social protection programmes was conducted.

**UNICEF supported an assessment of functional effectiveness of 19 departments and separated divisions within MoLSA using innovative functional assessment tools.** Moreover, a strategic planning workshop was supported by UNICEF for 35 key ministerial managerial staff to discuss priorities and a course of action for social protection. The assessment provided recommendations for the functional and structural reorganisation of MoLSA and its adjacent bodies, including for the more effective and efficient realisation of child rights, the avoidance of duplication, encouraging cooperation and organisational effectiveness of the Ministry to deliver its mandate.

**UNICEF continued to work on the strengthening of the social protection system at the sub-national level too.** UNICEF, World Vision, and Yerevan municipality initiated a review of the child and social protection system in the community that hosts more than one-third of Armenia's population. The review included an assessment of the legal framework for social service delivery, functions of various units and entities within the municipality responsible for social protection, human resource management, social work, and local social planning. Long-term planning and budgeting for child and social protection in the community were assessed too. Key recommendations emerging from this included setting national and local social protection priorities, having a network of dedicated social workers in administrative units, mechanisms and guidelines for the allocation of funds to local social projects and giving social assistance to families and children, and better clarification of divisional roles.



## Impact

UNICEF's conference, its evidence generation and analytical work, and technical support, resulted in a number of changes being introduced by the Government. These included a new draft social protection strategy, reform of the ISS, and changes to existing social assistance programmes.

The draft CODI analysis and the 2018 call to action fed into the development of the draft 2019-2023 Labour and Social Protection Sector Development Strategy, which was the first such standalone strategy in the social protection sector. This outlined five priority areas: 1) social guarantees and security, 2) protection of labour rights, 3) improving the demographic situation, 4) gender equality, prevention of human trafficking and exploitation, and violence, 5) social service delivery: key issues of children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. Crucially, for the first time, the draft contained a comprehensive analysis of child monetary and multidimensional poverty, as well as introducing a life cycle costing approach following initial CODI findings.

UNICEF's support to the comprehensive assessment of the ISS reform was extensively discussed with MoLSA leadership and the working group on ISS implementation, leading to concrete steps in the revision of the ISS system. This was based on the conclusions and recommendations of the report and focussed on operation of the joint reception, integrated databases,

accessibility of services, and case management. It also formed the basis for the revision of the World Bank's Social Protection Administration Project II, as well as informed linkages (of the reform) with the International Classification of Functions (i.e. disability assessment reform) reform and corresponding functional assessment of persons and children with disabilities.

UNICEF's direct support to the analysis in the Yerevan municipality served as the basis for the holistic review of the social protection chapter of the 2019-2023 Yerevan Development Strategy and 2020 Action Plan. Both documents were approved by the Municipal Council in December 2019, paving the way for a comprehensive reform of the social protection sector which should improve outcomes for children.

While the national social protection strategy has not yet been approved (expected in 2020), many policy reforms have already been undertaken in the field of social protection, with a focus on children. Going forward, UNICEF is supporting MoLSA in the review of the vulnerability assessment methodology, development of a cash transfer package (e.g. the concept of a Family Sustainable Income Generation Fund), advancement of the ISS reform (i.e. case management database, capacity building of social workers) and increasing the shock-responsiveness of the social protection system.



A young girl with dark hair, wearing a brown hooded jacket, is smiling and leaning on a thick rope. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. A large white number '2' is overlaid on a blue square on the left side of the image.

# 2

## ACTION AREA 2 // **Public Finance for Children**



ARMENIA //  
**Leveraging Funds through Public  
Finance Advocacy and Evidence  
Generation to Combat Child Poverty  
and Deprivation**





## Issue

Despite a recent decline in child poverty, a third of all children experience poverty and multiple deprivations. This situation required action to reduce the deprivations and pernicious lifelong impacts of poverty on children. Currently, 29.2% of children experience poverty and 1.5% extreme poverty, as compared to 23.5% and 1% respectively for the general population.<sup>119</sup> Children experience significant multidimensional poverty<sup>18</sup> too: 61.6% are deprived in two or more dimensions. The rural-urban contrast is stark, with multidimensional poverty figures of 74.9% and 52% respectively.<sup>120</sup>

Reducing child poverty and deprivation presupposed marshalling adequate financial resources to support transformative social policy. The 2013 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Concluding Observations for Armenia emphasised several challenges and recommendations regarding public finance for children. It identified a significant decrease in budget allocations for social sectors, and a lack of a child rights-based perspective in the budgeting process. The 2018 Ombudsman's report on the CRC implementation noted that none of those recommendations were implemented by the Government.

In recent years, there has been insufficient and declining government spending on social protection, health, and education, which directly concerns child wellbeing.

Furthermore, budgetary data is not disaggregated, which limits the possibility of equity analysis. This stems from both low staff capacities in the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and sectoral departments. Moreover, the demand for disaggregated data by line Ministries has been low since evidence-based policymaking is limited. This means reforms which directly affect children are often neither costed, coupled with proper financial analysis, nor are spending efficiencies assessed. Combined, this results in wasted resources.

**Limited information on national spending on children and adolescents hampered the possibility to logically link budget and policy design.** Consequently, the government pursued programme-based budgeting (PPB) reform to establish a better linkage between budget and policy objectives and outputs. The reform aimed to improve the accountability, transparency, and efficiency of public spending. Armenia transitioned to PPB in 2019, however, there was little guidance and capacity development provided, particularly for non-finance staff. This was problematic for many Government departments, as they had to devise budgetary submissions with little prior financial knowledge.

**UNICEF Armenia recognised these problems and how to respond.** Addressing the various challenges was necessary if progress was to be made on improving the use and availability of domestic resources for services of importance to children.

## Actions



To influence government spending, UNICEF Armenia conducted and launched a Child-focussed Public Expenditure Measurement study report (C-PEM),<sup>121</sup> which measured the state budget's direct and indirect expenditure on children. This was the first such study to be conducted in Armenia and the region. Its aim was five-fold: engender a sustainable increase in spending on children, make children a budget priority, render spending on children more effective and efficient, ensure spending is equitable and improve the transparency and accountability of the public budget. The study revealed that the increase in overall public spending since 2012 had not benefited children proportionately. Expenditure on children rose more slowly

than overall expenditures, even though the proportion of children in the overall population had not changed.

**The bulk of child-focussed expenditure, more than half, (direct and indirect) has rested within the traditional sectors – education, health, social protection.** Further disaggregation by child rights showed that most spending on children went to fulfilling the rights for survival (nearly a third), development (more than a third), and protection (about 18%), with the right for participation receiving only about 1%. Distribution of child-focussed expenditure among different age groups revealed underinvestment in early childhood, especially children aged 1-5.

<sup>18</sup> Child poverty is multidimensional, and deprivations are often mutually reinforcing: poor health, malnutrition, low access to or quality of education, and poor housing conditions, including a lack of water and sanitation, define children's experience of poverty more accurately than measures of income.

UNICEF made recommendations, based on the study, to the Government and specifically to the MoF on how to integrate child-focussed public expenditure measurement into the budget process. In addition to the C-PEM, several costing, capacity development, and evidence generation initiatives on child budgeting for children were produced. This is expected to contribute to improving the effectiveness, efficiency, equity, sustainability, transparency, and accountability of child-related policies and budget allocations.

To support policy change, UNICEF Armenia organised knowledge-exchanges to institutionalise the C-PEM findings into the government's PPB reforms. Various PF4C awareness-raising activities were pursued to achieve this. A South-South learning exchange was organised between UNICEF Armenia and Argentina. This involved organising a five-day study visit to Armenia for officials from the Argentine MoF, the National Council for Coordination of Social Policies, and UNICEF Argentina. The exchange capitalised on Argentina's strong experience in measuring public expenditure on children, and, in turn, learn from Armenia's experience of institutionalising a child poverty measurement. Meetings were held with the MoF, Standing Committee on Health and Social Affairs of the National Assembly of Armenia, European Union, GIZ, and experts working on public finance issues in Armenia. This meeting discussed C-PEM institutionalisation in the context of the PPB reform, including the practical sharing of budget templates and guidelines.

Moreover, a high-level official presentation of Armenia's C-PEM results was conducted with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UNICEF, Argentine Delegation, Embassy

of Argentina in Armenia, and several governmental, NGO, and donor representatives. The workshop<sup>122</sup> consisted of a presentation of Argentina's experience of measuring social investment in children, and the validation of Armenia's C-PEM findings, followed by a discussion on measuring investments in children.

At the 2018 World Children's Day celebrations, organised by UNICEF, the issue of investing in children was voiced by an adolescent at a meeting with the President and several Ministers.<sup>123</sup> This was part of UNICEF's advocacy efforts to sensitise both government counterparts and adolescents on the need to measure and track investments in children. Furthermore, UNICEF Armenia converted its C-PEM study, with the input of children, into a child-friendly booklet.<sup>124</sup> This outlined Armenia's child-friendly budgeting for adolescents and was shared widely at this country's CRC 30 celebrations, which was attended by over 170 adolescents.

Following the South-South learning exchange, UNICEF built the capacity of 35 staff from four line Ministries involved in the country's overall transition process to a finalised PPB in 2019. After this, UNICEF provided technical assistance in the development of child-related budget programme submissions to the State budget. Education, social protection, and child-protection budget briefs were also prepared to help present and analyse complex budget information, easily intelligible to different stakeholders. The briefs conveyed key recommendations to influence the public financial decision-making processes, with the goal of leveraging domestic resources for children.







## Impact

The evidence generated by the C-PEM, and the costing and analytical exercises, has been increasingly used by the Government, for the advancement of various reforms, and reporting on CRC implementation by the Human Rights Defender's Office. For instance, the C-PEM and an education budget brief revealed issues with early childhood education. Ultimately, the C-PEM raised the importance of PF4C considerations in the government's PPB activities. However, work on the C-PEM halted because of the 2018 revolution, but there is now renewed momentum to put it back on the social policy agenda again.

Critical to progressively modifying PF4C considerations in Armenia, was UNICEF's effort to draw on the skills and knowledge of other countries and development partners with strong PFM experience. The knowledge exchange with Argentina enabled a change of perception in measuring child public expenditure. The C-PEM exercise mobilised other partners with more experience than UNICEF in PFM activities (i.e. EU, GIZ, and the World Bank). This resulted in aligned advocacy on the budgeting process. Having the Argentine MoF share their expertise with their Armenian MoF

counterparts was transformative. It cultivated a paradigm shift in understanding and attitudes on the importance of measuring expenditure on children. This helped broach wider discussions with the Armenian MoF on changing methodological and reporting guidelines for integrating the C-PEM into the budgeting process.

UNICEF's PF4C advocacy efforts made a direct contribution to the development of 2019 PPBs for education, health, social protection, and justice sectors, thereby generating policy impacts that will help combat child poverty and deprivations. For example, public allocations (USD138,000 for the 2019 budget) were provided for the expansion of alternative preschool education services in 60 communities, and a school safety enhancement budget programme was introduced for the first time (approx. USD20,000) with a possible further expansion in 2020-2021. Support from the EU was leveraged for the scale-up of the alternative preschool model in 35 settlements in 2020-2022. Moreover, as part of the PPB reform, child-focussed non-financial indicators were added to the programme budget format.

## STORIES FROM THE FIELD // Armenia — Leveraging Funds for Children

On November 20, 2018, the world celebrated World Children's Day. This is also the day when the UN Convention on Child Rights was adopted! In 2018, to mark World Children's Day in Armenia, a special discussion was held in the Tumo Creative Center, where children voiced the issues they are concerned about. Children were joined by the President of Armenia, Sarkissian, UNICEF Representative, Tanja Radocaj, VivaCell-MTS General Manager, Yirikian, Director of Synopsys Armenia, Musayelyan, Acting Minister of Education and Science, Harutyunyan, and many other guests to discuss possible solutions to their problems. The call for investing in children was voiced by an adolescent called Hayk, at a meeting with the President and several Ministers. This was part of

UNICEF's advocacy efforts to sensitise both government counterparts and adolescents on the need to measure and track investments in children. Hayk talked about the lack of investment in children's development in Armenia and what needs to be done. His speech's key message centred on being savvy with public finance, saying that "I do understand that our economy does not always allow us to allocate needed funding. But it is always possible to find a way by spending the available resources more effectively, or involving other partners, like the private sector." He stressed that "If the government provides adequate financing for the children's education, this can be a turning point for the country's economy in several areas."

*Original source and video:* Link to video on its hosted site. UNICEF Armenia. 2018. Without Strong Social Protection Services, it will be Difficult to Overcome this Situation: Hayk's talk on World Children's Day. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/stories/without-strong-social-protection-services-it-will-be-difficult-overcome-situation>

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