STRENGTHENING CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS: EVALUATION OF UNICEF STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

FINAL REPORT

© United Nations Children’s Fund, New York, 2018

United Nations Children’s Fund
Three United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017

December 2018

The purpose of publishing evaluations produced by the UNICEF Evaluation Office (EO) is to fulfill a corporate commitment to transparency through the dissemination of all major evaluation products. The reports are designed to stimulate the free exchange of ideas among those interested in the topic and to assure those supporting the work of UNICEF that it rigorously examines its strategies, results and overall effectiveness.

This report titled “Strengthening Child Protection Systems: Evaluation of UNICEF Strategies and Programme Performance” was prepared by the UNICEF Evaluation Office based on inputs from two independent consulting firms: Le Groupe-conseil Baastel Itée and Tana Copenhagen. Tina Tordjman-Nebe, Evaluation Specialist, led and managed the overall evaluation process. Beth Ann Plowman, Senior Evaluation Specialist at the EO, supported the management of the evaluation, including inputs to quality assurance.

The contents of the report do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF. The designations in this publication do not imply an opinion on the legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers. The text has not been edited to official publication standards and UNICEF accepts no responsibility for error.

The copyright for this report is held by the United Nations Children’s Fund. Permission is required to reprint/reproduce/photocopy or in any other way to cite or quote from this report in written form. UNICEF has a formal permission policy that requires a written request to be submitted. For non-commercial uses, the permission will normally be granted free of charge. Please write to the Evaluation Office at the address below to initiate a permission request.

For further information, please contact:
Evaluation Office
United Nations Children’s Fund
Three United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017
evalhelp@unicef.org
PREFACE

In 2008, UNICEF adopted a systems approach to child protection. Broader in scope and ambition than traditional ‘issues-based’ approaches (such as, for example, efforts targeting child soldiers or children living in institutions) a systems approach seeks to ensure that children are being protected in a manner consistent with their rights. Systems-strengthening, in turn, involves enhancing the capacities of institutions and systems to achieve this aim. Key to this paradigm shift within UNICEF was an emphasis on engaging the full range of actors involved in protecting children, as well as a recognition that child protection mechanisms exist in different degrees of formality.

A decade later, the organization is taking stock of what has been achieved under the rubric of child protection systems strengthening, with a view towards improving future efforts. The present evaluation is much more than a report: It has been an impartial yet collaborative process involving many stakeholders at different levels of the organization and beyond, and represents a collective reflection about what UNICEF has learned and where it is headed as an organization with regard to strengthening child protection systems.

The evaluation confirms that systems strengthening is rarely a linear process. It tends to occur in waves and surges when political will is present and windows of opportunity arise, followed by periods of very slow progress or even setbacks. Some aspects of the system may advance while others stagnate. Overall, the evidence shows that some of UNICEF’s investments have yielded greater results than others, and that some contexts are more receptive than others to the kinds of systems strengthening UNICEF typically offers.

This year, as we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is an opportune moment to review our achievements, identify what has worked well and where the challenges remain, and to use this learning to inform global discussions, including this year’s High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goal 16, which includes ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.

This evaluation should encourage UNICEF to continue the journey and further sharpen its tools for strengthening national child protection systems, so as to help protect children in a manner consistent with their rights and ensure that no child is left behind.

George Laryea-Adjei
Director of Evaluation
Evaluation Office
UNICEF New York
Acknowledgements

This evaluation is the result of the commitment, efforts and contribution of a large number of individuals and institutions. We would like to express our sincere appreciation for all those who participated in the interviews and surveys by sharing their knowledge, experience and expertise.

The evaluation report was prepared by Tina Tordjman-Nebe, Evaluation Specialist in UNICEF’s Evaluation Office, on the basis of inputs from two independent consulting firms. Le Groupe-conseil Baastel Itée conducted the main evaluation work, including six country case studies which yielded separate reports, and a synthesis. Tana Copenhagen, in collaboration with independent evaluation methodologist Barbara Befani, carried out a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) of data from all 24 case/desk study countries. The Baastel team was led by David Todd and included Virginia Thomas and Rafael Muñoz Sevilla, Senior Evaluation Experts/Child Protection Specialists, Alexandre Daoust, Deputy Team Leader/Data Analyst, Anna Maria Van Gaalen, Research Expert, and Melissa MacLean, Research Assistant. Six national consultants supported the international team: Soumahoro Gbato (Côte d’Ivoire), Gulnar Wakim (Lebanon), Monica Rodriguez Nario (Peru), Chariya Phongvivat (Thailand), Indunil Bandara (Sri Lanka) and Sibangani Shumba (Zimbabwe). The QCA report was authored by Joachim Theis (Tana Copenhagen), in collaboration with Barbara Befani and Tina Tordjman-Nebe. Erin Tettensor supported writing and editing of the final evaluation report and Joachim Theis acted as an external quality advisor.

The evaluation was steered by an advisory group, which had significant involvement throughout the evaluation process, including review of the draft inception report and draft final report. At the final stages, the group included Cornelius Williams, Stephen Blight, Sumaira Chowdhury, Kirsten Di Martino, Aniruddha Kulkarni and Eri Dwivedi from UNICEF’s child protection section in headquarters; Vidhya Ganesh, Alexandra Yuster and Rafael Obregon from UNICEF’s Programme Division; Aaron Greenberg from UNICEF’s Europe and Central Asia Regional Office; Ramya Subrahmanian from UNICEF’s Office of Research – Innocenti; as well as George Laryea-Adjei, Beth Plowman and Tina Tordjman-Nebe from UNICEF’s Evaluation Office. In earlier phases of the evaluation, the following colleagues made significant contributions: Krishna Belbase, Evaluation Office; Peter Gross, Joanne Dunn, Roger Pearson and Susana Sottoli, Programme Division; and Jasmina Byrne, Office of Research – Innocenti. Regional child protection advisers contributed to the QCA: Aaron Greenberg, Kendra Gregson, Rachel Harvey, Jean-Francois Basse, Jose Bergua, Isabella Castrogiovannii/Anthony MacDonald and Andrew Brooks. The evaluation benefited greatly from the advice and suggestions of all these stakeholders.

We are obliged to the UNICEF country offices and members of the National Evaluation Reference Groups in the six case study countries (Côte d’Ivoire, Lebanon, Peru, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe) for giving their time and expertise to help improve the quality and utility of the evaluation. Key UNICEF counterparts at country level included Noriko Izumi and Jane Muita (Zimbabwe), Gary Risser (Thailand), Ramiz Behbudov and Tetyana Nikitina (Sri Lanka), Amanda Rivas Martin and Olga Isabel Isaza (Peru), Miranda Armstrong (Côte d’Ivoire) and Johanna Eriksson Takyo (Lebanon). National Reference Groups included members from the following institutions: World Education Inc., Save the Children, Childline, Africaid and JF Kapnek Trust
(Zimbabwe); Centre for the Protection of Children’s Rights, National Child Protection Committee (Thailand); Open University of Sri Lanka, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Probation Commission, Child Fund (Sri Lanka); Ombudsman’s Office, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations, Ministry of Health, Public Ministry, National Identity and Civil Status Registry, Ministry of Justice; IFEJANT, Acción por los Niños, World Vision, Save the Children, Kallpa (Peru). The EO would like to thank national government partners who provided valuable insights and information, as well as representatives of bilateral donor agencies and civil society, along with staff from other United Nations agencies.

Most importantly, we would like to thank all the girls and boys, parents, members of various community groups and local leaders who shared their experiences and contributed important insights to this evaluation.
# CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS ........................................................................................................ vi
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..................................................................................................................... viii
RESUMEN EJECUTIVO ....................................................................................................................... xv
RÉSUMÉ ANALYTIQUE ......................................................................................................................... xxiii
1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
   1.1. UNICEF’s approach to child protection systems strengthening ................................................. 1
   1.2. Organizational context ............................................................................................................... 5
2. Evaluation Scope and Methodology ................................................................................................. 9
   2.1. Purpose, objectives, scope and utility ...................................................................................... 9
   2.2. Evaluation framework and questions ...................................................................................... 10
   2.3. Evaluation methodology ......................................................................................................... 11
   2.4. Challenges and limitations ..................................................................................................... 17
3. Country-Level Findings .................................................................................................................. 20
   3.1. Relevance and appropriateness of UNICEF interventions in CP systems strengthening ........ 20
   3.2. Effectiveness of UNICEF programmes, including from a gender/human rights perspective .... 24
      3.2.1. Overview of CP systems success in the 24 case studies ...................................................... 25
      3.2.2. Qualitative assessment of UNICEF contribution by key element (intermediate outcome) . 29
      3.2.3. Assessment of specific UNICEF investments as contributors to success ....................... 45
      3.2.4. Overall assessment and factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of child protection systems-strengthening objectives ......................................................... 50
   3.3. Sustainability of UNICEF interventions in CPSS ..................................................................... 53
   3.4. Efficiency of UNICEF’s use of human and financial resources for CP systems work ............ 59
4. Institutional, Global and Regional Findings .................................................................................... 65
   4.1. Institutional effectiveness: policies, strategies, monitoring and evaluation ............................ 65
   4.2. Global leadership, advocacy and partnerships ......................................................................... 71
   4.3. Regional leadership, leveraging and support ........................................................................... 74
5. Conclusions, Lessons and Recommendations ............................................................................... 78
   5.1. Conclusions ............................................................................................................................. 78
   5.2. Lessons learned ....................................................................................................................... 83
   5.3. Recommendations .................................................................................................................... 85
## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAC</td>
<td>Children and Armed Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Case Management System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Country Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAR</td>
<td>Country Office Annual Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Child Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Country Programme Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE</td>
<td>Country Programme Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPIMS</td>
<td>Child Protection Information Management Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPSS</td>
<td>Child Protection Systems Strengthening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAPR(O)</td>
<td>East Asia and the Pacific Region(al Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECAR(O)</td>
<td>East and Central Asia Region(al Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EO</td>
<td>Evaluation Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESAR(O)</td>
<td>Eastern and Southern Africa Region(al Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGM/C</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-Based Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEROS</td>
<td>Global Evaluation Report Oversight System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSSWA</td>
<td>Global Social Service Workforce Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HQ</td>
<td>UNICEF Headquarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KII</td>
<td>Key Informant Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LACR(O)</td>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean Region(al Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;A</td>
<td>Mapping and Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENA(RO)</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa (Regional Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICS</td>
<td>Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIS</td>
<td>Management Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTSP</td>
<td>Medium-Term Strategic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD-DAC</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Assistance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVC</td>
<td>Orphans and Vulnerable Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Programme Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEF</td>
<td>Protective Environment Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEPFAR</td>
<td>President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QCA</td>
<td>Qualitative Comparative Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM</td>
<td>Results Assessment Module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBM</td>
<td>Results-Based Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RME</td>
<td>Research Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSA</td>
<td>Region of South Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIC</td>
<td>Specific Intervention Code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMQ</td>
<td>Strategic Monitoring Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOP</td>
<td>Standard Operating Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Strategic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ToC</td>
<td>Theory of Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDAF</td>
<td>United Nations Development Assistance Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAC</td>
<td>Violence against Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCAR(O)</td>
<td>West and Central Africa Region(al Office)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of an evaluation of UNICEF’s strategies and programme performance in applying a child protection systems-strengthening (CPSS) approach in its work across country, regional and headquarters (HQ) levels. Child protection (CP) – defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as “preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children” – is central to UNICEF’s mandate. Historically, UNICEF and others working in this field targeted their child protection efforts mainly at specific issues, or specific populations considered especially vulnerable to child protection threats. Over the past decade, however, the need for more sustainable outcomes produced a gradual shift towards a more holistic, comprehensive approach. As such, a CPSS approach has been a strategic objective of the overall CP work of the organization since the adoption of the Child Protection Strategy in 2008.

This evaluation is the first comprehensive attempt to gather and analyse evidence about the application of CPSS across UNICEF. It has two overall purposes: 1) to contribute to learning and decision-making with a view to improving UNICEF’s ongoing programming, and 2) to support accountability on CPSS. It assesses UNICEF’s global strategies and country-level programme performance to strengthen CP systems in order to bring about better protection for girls and boys. It examines CPSS from prevention through response and follow-up, involving formal and less formal actors, covering national and sub-national levels in middle income, low-income and fragile countries. While the evaluation traces UNICEF’s CPSS work over the past decade, the main time period under review is 2012 to 2018.

UNICEF has monitored its contributions to CPSS since 2012, when the results framework for the updated Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MTSP, 2006-2013) was devised. CPSS has been embedded in subsequent Strategic Plans, albeit in differing ways. The Strategic Plan, 2014-2017 narrowly pitched systems strengthening as a capacity development and advocacy initiative. In the current Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, meanwhile, CPSS is focused on service delivery and clearly linked to violence against children: “Countries have strengthened child protection systems for prevention and response services to address violence against children (VAC).”

In the absence of a theory of change to reach this outcome, the Evaluation Advisory Group developed a conceptual framework identifying six key elements of a functioning child protection system, namely:

- A robust legal and regulatory framework, as well as specific policies related to child protection;
- Effective governance structures, including coordination across government departments, between levels of decentralization and between formal and informal actors;
- A continuum of services (spanning prevention and response);
• Minimum standards and oversight (information, monitoring and accountability mechanisms);
• Human, financial and infrastructure resources; and
• Social participation, including respect for children’s own views, and an aware and supportive public.

The evaluation focuses on analysing UNICEF’s contribution to these six key elements, framed as “intermediate outcomes” in the report.

The evaluation was guided by ten key evaluation questions (see Annex 1) in combination with four of the standard evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC), namely: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. While some evaluation questions specifically targeted one level—global (HQ), regional (RO), or country (CO)—others related to more than one tier but generated differentiated evidence and findings for each. Effectiveness at the country level was, in addition, assessed in relation to progress towards the six key elements of a functioning child protection system noted above.

Case studies of a purposive sample of 24 countries enabled the evaluation to bring detailed evidence from the country level to bear on the question of UNICEF’s performance in implementing CPSS, and to generate evidence to inform regional and global efforts in the future. The cases were divided among three levels of depth: Twelve were examined through documentary desk study, six drew additionally on remote interviews with key informants (UNICEF and partners), and six in-depth case studies also drew on data collected during field missions through face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions with adolescents and field observation. Two RO visits were combined with the country missions to collect additional regional-level data. Key informant interviews at global level, a document review and two online surveys completed the data sources— one with UNICEF country office teams, one with government and civil society partners. Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) was used to examine which combinations of UNICEF investments most successfully contributed to CP systems-strengthening within the set of 24 countries.

The evaluation generated a total of 42 findings, a selection of which is presented here:

• The approaches taken by the 24 country offices examined were found to be strongly aligned with UNICEF’s mandate, relevant human rights instruments and global priorities.

• Overall, UNICEF’s approach to CPSS has been moderately effective at the intermediate outcome level. UNICEF has been more effective in countries where the context is favourable (e.g. better governance, national ownership and resourcing) and a child protection system is already functioning. That is, UNICEF support to ‘system reform’ has been more successful than contributions to ‘system building’ or ‘system consolidation’.
• Attention is given not only to achieving results for children, but also to achieving them in a human rights-, gender- and equity-responsive fashion. Gender analysis and focus on children living with disabilities could be improved.

• The QCA identified the most impactful stand-alone UNICEF interventions as capacity building (in particular of the social workforce), investing in evidence and research and leveraging public resources. For highly functioning systems, a package of interventions including evidence and research, leveraging public resources, and policy advocacy was found to have the greatest impact.

• The interventions with the greatest potential for sustainability, if institutionalized, were support to child protection information management systems, case management and coordination.

• UNICEF global strategies and planned results do not adequately capture CPSS objectives. Notably, there is a lack of operational clarity around CPSS, and no globally-agreed theory of change. In addition, UNICEF systems for monitoring results and expenditures – while improved over the period examined – cannot adequately capture systems-strengthening efforts.

• There are good examples of strong CPSS partnerships developed through UNICEF initiatives at the national level. However, the available evidence suggests that UNICEF has not been effective in sustaining its global leadership role and in leveraging key partnerships to ensure continuous strengthening of child protection systems.

• UNICEF has been largely unsuccessful in building resource partnerships for CPSS. Donor practices of earmarking grants to CP “issues” have further disincentivized a greater focus on systems strengthening.

• UNICEF regional offices have made important contributions to child protection systems-strengthening work. Stakeholders identified a number of areas where additional RO support would be valued.

Findings are presented in full in Chapters 3 and 4 of the report. An abridged version of the conclusions and recommendations appears below; the full version can be found in Chapter 5.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: After a decade of work in this area, conceptual clarity on child protection systems strengthening in UNICEF is still incomplete. As a result, there is a lack of shared understanding around CPSS among UNICEF staff at various levels, and with partners.

At the most basic level, there is no official UNICEF definition of child protection systems strengthening that is positioned as such, published and widely shared across all levels of the organization. Second, a clear conceptual framework or programme-impact pathway with associated measurements is missing.
Conclusion 2: Staff lack technical support on operationalizing the CP systems-strengthening approach in different programming contexts and against the backdrop of large issue-based initiatives and VAC as the unifying umbrella concept.

The desired balance and connection between UNICEF’s issue-based and systems approaches to child protection has not been spelled out. A related operational challenge is the relationship between the systems-strengthening approach and work to address violence against children, which has been positioned as the unifying umbrella concept in SDG 16.2 and SP Goal Area 3. More generally, there is little clarity or systematic evidence on how to choose the best entry point for CPSS. Finally, UNICEF’s programmatic approach to CPSS has so far not distinguished between different levels of functioning or maturity of national CP systems.

Conclusion 3: UNICEF has had considerable success in advancing the child protection systems agenda at the national level and in raising awareness among national partners. However, by and large, this has not translated into adequate domestic investments in CPSS.

In most countries reviewed as part of this evaluation, UNICEF’s role in evidence generation, systems mapping and assessments, and costing of child protection systems has helped to change the understanding of government partners. UNICEF technical support has also helped to improve key components of CP systems. However, in most cases, this shared understanding has not resulted in resource commitments from governments.

Conclusion 4: Donors have played a largely negative role in advancing national CP systems by distributing funding on a narrow issue-by-issue basis and using parallel monitoring and reporting systems. The organization has so far failed to present key donors with a compelling ‘business case’ for child protection systems strengthening.

Many donors primarily require readily- and quickly-measurable results expressed in terms of numbers of children benefitted. This has led to favouring parallel service-delivery systems that undermine systems-strengthening. UNICEF staff are therefore challenged to design projects that meet donor expectations for high numbers of early beneficiaries, while also contributing to broad and lasting development results in terms of a robust CP system.

Conclusion 5: UNICEF’s programme performance on CPSS has been moderate overall. Progress was uneven, with stark gaps in low-income, fragile and humanitarian contexts.

In many of the countries examined, UNICEF contributed to a moderate, verifiable level of progress toward strengthening the six dimensions that together make up functioning CP systems. However, there is still a long way to go in most of the countries reviewed. UNICEF’s contribution to CPSS has been particularly strong with regard to strengthening the legal and regulatory framework. In general, UNICEF support was less successful where child protection systems were embryonic and more successful in countries where UNICEF supported the government-led reform of existing child protection systems.
Conclusion 6: The evaluation has identified a number of interventions that are particularly effective for strengthening CP systems, including capacity-building/social workforce strengthening, leveraging public resources, evidence and research and policy advocacy. This provides some clarity on priority investments for UNICEF.

Stronger child protection systems benefit most from UNICEF investments in evidence and research, leveraging public resources, and policy advocacy. Investments in capacity-building (including workforce strengthening) made the biggest difference across the entire set of 24 countries, suggesting that this intervention is worthwhile in a wide range of contexts. In countries with weaker CP systems, UNICEF often invests significantly in community-based child protection mechanisms and provides direct financial and technical support for child protection services and infrastructure.

Conclusion 7: UNICEF’s ambitions for what a child protection system can be expected to accomplish in specific contexts, and in what timeframe, have not been realistic.

Some of UNICEF’s objectives in terms of child protection systems strengthening are oriented to the short- and medium-term, whereas achieving functional child protection systems is a highly ambitious long-term goal. This may have led to ‘over-selling’ and ‘under-delivering’ on systems-strengthening efforts in some contexts, which may in turn have undermined partners’ confidence in CPSS. Relatedly, in better functioning systems, child protection results often rely on a network of allied health, education and social protection systems that shoulder the main burden of prevention and early intervention.

Conclusion 8: UNICEF has a clear niche focusing on state accountabilities for children’s rights and partnering with government departments at national, provincial and district levels. However, the organization has yet to define its role with regard to children’s participation, community-based child protection mechanisms and coordination between formal and less formal actors.

In terms of the ideal programme-impact pathway for CPSS, the dichotomy between formal and less formal child protection structures may have been overstated. As the QCA findings showed, in some of the countries with functioning child protection systems, UNICEF also successfully invests in community-based child protection mechanisms. Investing in children’s civil rights (to information, communication, association and civic engagement in child protection systems) may be an area of opportunity with regard to the participation of girls and boys in CPSS.

Conclusion 9: Investments in staff capacities and learning for CPSS have been insufficient.

In some countries and regions, experienced UNICEF staff have been able to provide strong strategic leadership to mobilize donors, governments and other implementing agencies to advance the systems agenda in creative ways. However, many countries lack this capacity. The skill set needed for CPSS goes beyond what is typically found in CP staff, and includes public finance, institutional development, results-based management, research/analytical skills and strategic leadership (convening, persuading and influencing). These competencies do not seem
to have been sufficiently considered in hiring, promotion and retention of staff as well as in learning initiatives.

Conclusion 10: UNICEF’s corporate reporting systems on expenditures and results are inadequate to demonstrate the exact level of UNICEF’s contribution.

Coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS are yet to be established, both at the level of the intermediate outcomes (elements of the CP system) and at the level of UNICEF expenditures and investments contributing to these outcomes. For the 2014-2017 period in particular, it has been difficult to assess investments, as it is unclear which ones were considered “systems strengthening” at CO level when expenditures were recorded. Evidence from UNICEF’s corporate results reporting systems, while markedly improved as part of the SP, 2018-2021, remain patchy. All in all, UNICEF lacks the ability to systematically track its contribution to CPSS progress and performance globally, which hinders the organization from demonstrating results and mobilizing resources for CPSS.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Clarify UNICEF’s definition of, and role in, child protection systems strengthening, and ensure that this approach is reflected in organizational strategies, policies and plans.

This should include:

- Refining the draft programme-impact pathway created for this evaluation;
- Defining the phases of the CPSS process (system-building, system consolidation and system reform, or a similar typology to be determined);
- Reflecting this clarified narrative on CPSS in any future update of UNICEF’s 2008 CP Strategy, setting out accountabilities for CPSS work among the various actors within the organization.

Recommendation 2: Define UNICEF’s niche in CPSS and invest in the most impactful areas to strengthen child protection systems.

UNICEF should unapologetically embrace a focus on state leadership and accountability, for which it is well positioned. UNICEF needs to clearly position itself in terms of topics and fora through which to push the CPSS agenda.

UNICEF should:

- Articulate key priority areas of work and possible entry points for CPSS by context in order to guide programming;
- Develop a menu of interventions in each priority area, with a different package of options tailored to each phase of the CPSS process and targeting different levels (formal/less formal).
Recommendation 3: Strengthen staff and partner capacities and learning on CPSS

CPSS requires a skill set beyond what is typically found in CP staff. These competencies need to be fostered within UNICEF and among partners. In addition, UNICEF needs to do more to support learning between countries (and regions) with similar profiles and challenges.

UNICEF should:
- At HQ level, invest in learning and skills development for staff and partners;
- At RO level, step up technical assistance for CPSS;
- At CO level, embrace CPSS as a learning function and a cross-cutting and management responsibility.

Recommendation 4: Leverage partnerships and resources for CPSS

UNICEF should urgently step up its efforts to revitalise partnerships and advocacy in favour of CPSS. This should include:
- Investments in communication and advocacy, including putting forward business cases across the range of contexts;
- Developing a partnerships and resourcing strategy for CPSS, assisting donors to open up to supporting systems strengthening;
- Improving the adequacy, equity, efficiency and effectiveness of public finance for child protection services and systems.

Recommendation 5: Address the CPSS data and measurement challenges

Part of what is perceived as lack of conceptual clarity on CPSS is linked to the absence of coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS and the scarcity of global-level data and evidence across the steps of the CPSS results chain.

UNICEF should:
- Invest in coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS;
- Close evidence gaps along the CPSS programme-impact pathway.
RESUMEN EJECUTIVO

Este informe presenta los resultados de una evaluación de las estrategias y el desempeño de los programas de UNICEF en la aplicación de un enfoque para fortalecer los sistemas de protección de la infancia (a partir de ahora, enfoque CPSS, por sus siglas en inglés) en todas las tareas de la organización a nivel nacional, regional y de la sede. La protección de la infancia –definida en la Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño como la prevención y la respuesta a la violencia, la explotación y el abuso contra los niños– es fundamental para el mandato de UNICEF. Históricamente, UNICEF y otros organismos que trabajan en este sector han centrado sus esfuerzos de protección de la infancia principalmente en cuestiones concretas, o en poblaciones específicas consideradas especialmente vulnerables a las amenazas contra la protección de la infancia. Sin embargo, la necesidad de obtener resultados más sostenibles durante el último decenio ha generado un cambio gradual hacia un enfoque más holístico e integral. Como tal, el enfoque CPSS ha sido un objetivo estratégico en la labor más general de protección de la infancia de la organización desde la aprobación de la Estrategia de Protección de la Infancia en 2008.

Esta evaluación es el primer intento exhaustivo de reunir y analizar pruebas sobre la aplicación del enfoque CPSS en todo UNICEF. Tiene dos objetivos generales: 1) contribuir al aprendizaje y a la toma de decisiones con miras a mejorar la programación en curso de UNICEF, y 2) apoyar la rendición de cuentas con relación al enfoque CPSS. En el documento se evalúan las estrategias mundiales de UNICEF y el desempeño de los programas a nivel de país para fortalecer los sistemas de protección de la infancia con el fin de lograr una mejor protección para las niñas y los niños. El enfoque CPSS se examina desde la prevención hasta la respuesta y el seguimiento, incorporando a actores formales e informales, y abarcando los niveles nacional y subnacional en países de ingresos medios, bajos y frágiles. Si bien la evaluación se centra en la labor de UNICEF en materia de servicios de atención primaria de la salud durante el último decenio, el principal período que se examina es de 2012 a 2018.

UNICEF ha supervisado sus contribuciones al enfoque CPSS desde 2012, cuando se elaboró el marco de resultados para el Plan Estratégico de Mediano Plazo actualizado (2006-2013). El enfoque CPSS se ha incorporado en los planes estratégicos subsiguientes, aunque de maneras diferentes. El Plan Estratégico para 2014-2017 preveía el fortalecimiento de los sistemas mediante una iniciativa para el desarrollo de la capacidad y la promoción. En el Plan Estratégico actual para 2018-2021, por su parte, el enfoque CPSS se centra en la prestación de servicios y está claramente vinculado a la violencia contra los niños: “Los países han fortalecido los sistemas de protección de la infancia de los servicios de prevención y respuesta a la violencia contra los niños y niñas”.

A falta de una teoría de cambio para alcanzar este resultado, el Grupo Consultivo de Evaluación elaboró un marco conceptual en el que se identificaban los seis elementos clave de un sistema de protección de la infancia que funcione, a saber:
• Un marco jurídico y reglamentario sólido, así como políticas específicas relacionadas con la protección de la infancia;
• Estructuras de gobernanza eficaces, incluida la coordinación entre departamentos gubernamentales, entre diferentes niveles de descentralización y entre actores formales e informales;
• Un conjunto ininterrumpido de servicios (que abarque la prevención y la respuesta);
• Normas mínimas y supervisión (mecanismos de información, supervisión y rendición de cuentas);
• Recursos humanos, financieros y de infraestructura; y
• La participación social, entre otras cosas mediante el respeto de las opiniones de los propios niños y la existencia de un público consciente y solidario.

La evaluación se centra en el análisis de la contribución de UNICEF a estos seis elementos clave, que en el informe se formulan como “resultados intermedios”.

La evaluación se orientó según 10 preguntas clave (véase el Anexo 1) en combinación con cuatro de los criterios de evaluación estándar del Comité de Asistencia para el Desarrollo de la Organización de Cooperación y Desarrollo Económicos (OCDE-CAD), a saber: pertinencia, eficacia, eficiencia y sostenibilidad. Mientras que algunas preguntas de la evaluación se centraban específicamente en un nivel concreto –mundo central, regional (OR) o nacional (OP)–, otras se referían a más de un nivel, pero sirvieron para generar pruebas y conclusiones diferenciadas para cada uno de estos niveles. Además, se evaluó la eficacia a nivel de los países en relación con los progresos alcanzados en el logro de los seis elementos clave de un sistema de protección de la infancia que funcione, como se ha señalado anteriormente.

Los estudios de casos de una muestra intencional de 24 países permitieron que la evaluación contara con pruebas detalladas a nivel nacional sobre la cuestión del desempeño de UNICEF en la implementación del enfoque CPSS, y que generara pruebas para fundamentar los esfuerzos regionales y mundiales en el futuro. Los casos se dividieron en tres niveles de profundidad: Doce de ellos fueron examinados mediante un estudio documental, seis se basaron además en entrevistas a distancia con informantes clave (UNICEF y sus asociados), y otros seis estudios de casos analizados en profundidad se basaron también en datos reunidos durante las misiones sobre el terreno, mediante entrevistas personales, debates de grupos focales con adolescentes y observaciones sobre el terreno. Con la intención de recopilar datos adicionales a nivel regional se combinaron dos visitas a las OR con las misiones a los países. Las fuentes de datos se completaron realizando entrevistas con informantes clave a nivel mundial, un examen de documentos y dos encuestas en línea, una con los equipos de las oficinas de UNICEF en los países y otra con asociados gubernamentales y de la sociedad civil. Se utilizó un análisis comparativo cualitativo (ACC) para examinar qué combinaciones de inversiones de UNICEF contribuyeron con más éxito al fortalecimiento de los sistemas de protección de la infancia en el conjunto de los 24 países.
La evaluación generó un total de 42 resultados, de los cuales se presenta a continuación una selección:

- Se comprobó que los enfoques adoptados por las 24 oficinas en los países examinadas estaban muy en consonancia con el mandato de UNICEF, los instrumentos pertinentes de derechos humanos y las prioridades mundiales.

- En general, el enfoque de UNICEF con respecto al enfoque CPSS ha sido moderadamente eficaz en el nivel de resultados intermedios. UNICEF ha sido más eficaz en los países donde el contexto es favorable (por ejemplo, mejor gobernanza, apropiación nacional y asignación de recursos) y ya está funcionando un sistema de protección de la infancia. Es decir, el apoyo de UNICEF a la “reforma del sistema” ha tenido más éxito que las contribuciones a la “construcción del sistema” o a la “consolidación del sistema”.

- Se prestó atención no sólo a la obtención de resultados para los niños, sino también a la manera en que se lograron teniendo en cuenta los derechos humanos, el género y la equidad. Se podría mejorar el análisis de género y la atención a los niños que viven con discapacidades.

- En el ACC se determinó que las tres intervenciones independientes más eficaces de UNICEF eran el fomento de la capacidad (en particular de la fuerza de trabajo social), la inversión en pruebas e investigaciones y el aprovechamiento de los recursos públicos. En el caso de los sistemas de alto rendimiento, se encontró que un conjunto de intervenciones que incluye pruebas e investigación, el aprovechamiento de los recursos públicos y la promoción de políticas, es el que da los mejores resultados.

- Las estrategias mundiales y los resultados previstos de UNICEF no reflejan adecuadamente los objetivos del enfoque CPSS. En particular, hay una falta de claridad operativa en torno al enfoque CPSS, y no existe una teoría de cambio que haya sido acordada a nivel mundial. Además, los sistemas de seguimiento de los resultados y los gastos de UNICEF, aunque han mejorado durante el período examinado, no pueden captar adecuadamente las actividades de fortalecimiento de los sistemas.

- Hay buenos ejemplos de alianzas sólidas en torno al enfoque CPSS establecidas mediante iniciativas de UNICEF a nivel nacional. Sin embargo, los datos disponibles indican que UNICEF no ha sido eficaz a la hora de mantener su papel de liderazgo mundial ni de aprovechar las asociaciones clave para garantizar el fortalecimiento continuo de los sistemas de protección de la infancia.

- UNICEF ha tenido poco éxito en la creación de asociaciones para la movilización de recursos en favor del enfoque CPSS. Las prácticas de los donantes de destinar subvenciones a “cuestiones” de protección de la infancia han agravado aún más la falta de interés en el fortalecimiento de los sistemas.
Las oficinas regionales de UNICEF han realizado importantes contribuciones a la labor de fortalecimiento de los sistemas de protección de la infancia. Las partes interesadas identificaron una serie de esferas en las que un apoyo adicional de las OR sería valorado.

Las conclusiones se presentan íntegramente en los capítulos 3 y 4 del informe. A continuación figura una versión abreviada de las conclusiones y recomendaciones; la versión completa puede consultarse en el capítulo 5.

**Conclusiones**

**Conclusión 1:** Después de un decenio de trabajo en esta esfera, la claridad conceptual sobre el fortalecimiento de los sistemas de protección de la infancia en UNICEF sigue siendo deficiente. Como resultado de ello, ni los asociados ni el personal de UNICEF a diversos niveles comparten los mismos conocimientos sobre el enfoque CPSS.

En el nivel más básico, no existe una definición oficial de UNICEF sobre el fortalecimiento de los sistemas de protección de la infancia que se posicione como tal, se publique y se compartira ampliamente en todos los niveles de la organización. En segundo lugar, falta un marco conceptual claro o una vía a seguir del programa con sus respectivas mediciones.

**Conclusión 2:** El personal carece de apoyo técnico para poner en práctica el fortalecimiento de los sistemas de protección de la infancia en diferentes contextos programáticos y en el contexto de grandes iniciativas temáticas basadas en la violencia contra los niños como concepto unificador.

El equilibrio y la conexión deseados entre los enfoques temáticos y sistémicos de UNICEF en materia de protección de la infancia no se han explicado detalladamente. Un problema operacional conexo es la relación entre el enfoque del fortalecimiento de los sistemas y la labor para hacer frente a la violencia contra los niños, que se ha posicionado como el concepto general unificador en el ODS 16.2 y en la esfera 3 del plan estratégico. En términos más generales, hay poca claridad o faltan pruebas sistemáticas sobre cómo elegir el mejor punto de entrada para el enfoque CPSS. Por último, el enfoque programático de UNICEF para fortalecer los sistemas de protección de la infancia no ha distinguido hasta ahora entre los diferentes niveles de funcionamiento o madurez de los sistemas nacionales de protección de la infancia.

**Conclusión 3:** UNICEF ha tenido un éxito considerable en la promoción del fortalecimiento de los sistemas de protección de la infancia a nivel nacional y en la concienciación de los asociados nacionales. Sin embargo, en general, esto no ha llevado a que se realicen inversiones nacionales adecuadas en el enfoque CPSS.

En la mayoría de los países examinados como parte de esta evaluación, el papel de UNICEF en la generación de pruebas, el mapeo y la evaluación de sistemas y el cálculo de los costos de los sistemas de protección de la infancia ha contribuido a cambiar la comprensión de los aliados gubernamentales en torno a este asunto. El apoyo técnico de UNICEF también ha contribuido a mejorar los componentes clave de los sistemas de protección de la infancia. Sin
embargo, en la mayoría de los casos, este entendimiento compartido no ha llevado a los gobiernos a comprometer recursos.

Conclusión 4: Los donantes han desempeñado un papel muy negativo en el avance de los sistemas nacionales de protección de la infancia al distribuir los fondos de manera limitada, tema por tema, y al utilizar sistemas paralelos de supervisión y presentación de informes. Hasta la fecha, la organización no ha presentado a los principales donantes un “argumento institucional” convincente para el fortalecimiento de los sistemas de protección de la infancia.

Muchos donantes exigen principalmente resultados que se puedan medir de manera fácil y rápida, y que se expresen en términos del número de niños beneficiados. Esto ha llevado a favorecer los sistemas paralelos de prestación de servicios que socavan el fortalecimiento de los sistemas. Por lo tanto, el personal de UNICEF se enfrenta al reto de diseñar proyectos que satisfagan las expectativas de los donantes en relación con un número elevado de beneficiarios iniciales, al tiempo que contribuyen a obtener resultados amplios y duraderos en materia de desarrollo en la creación de un sistema sólido de protección de la infancia.

Conclusión 5: El desempeño de los programas de UNICEF con respecto al enfoque CPSS ha sido en general moderado. Los progresos fueron desiguales, con marcadas diferencias en contextos de bajos ingresos, frágiles y de crisis humanitaria.

En muchos de los países examinados, UNICEF contribuyó a un nivel de progreso moderado y verificable hacia el fortalecimiento de las seis dimensiones que, en su conjunto, definen los sistemas de protección de la infancia que funcionan. Sin embargo, aún queda un largo camino por recorrer en la mayoría de los países examinados. La contribución de UNICEF al enfoque CPSS ha sido especialmente importante en lo que respecta al fortalecimiento del marco jurídico y reglamentario. En general, el apoyo de UNICEF fue menos satisfactorio cuando los sistemas de protección de la infancia eran embrionarios, y más satisfactorio en los países en los que UNICEF apoyó la reforma, dirigida por el Gobierno, de los sistemas de protección de la infancia existentes.

Conclusión 6: La evaluación ha permitido identificar una serie de intervenciones que son particularmente eficaces para fortalecer los sistemas de protección de la infancia, entre ellas el fomento de la capacidad y el fortalecimiento de la fuerza de trabajo social, la movilización de recursos públicos, la obtención de pruebas y la investigación y la promoción de políticas. Esto ha servido para ofrecer cierta claridad acerca de las inversiones prioritarias de UNICEF.

Los sistemas de protección de la infancia más sólidos son los que más se benefician de las inversiones de UNICEF en pruebas e investigaciones, la movilización de recursos públicos y la promoción de políticas. Las inversiones en el fomento de la capacidad (incluido el fortalecimiento de la fuerza de trabajo) marcaron la mayor diferencia en el conjunto de los 24 países, lo que sugiere que esta intervención merece la pena en una amplia gama de contextos. En los países con sistemas de protección de la infancia más débiles, UNICEF invierte a menudo de manera significativa en mecanismos de protección de la infancia basados en la
comunidad y proporciona apoyo financiero y técnico directo a los servicios y la infraestructura de protección de la infancia.

Conclusión 7: Las ambiciones de UNICEF sobre lo que un sistema de protección de la infancia puede lograr en contextos específicos, y en un determinado plazo, no han sido realistas.

Algunos de los objetivos de UNICEF en cuanto al fortalecimiento de los sistemas de protección de la infancia están orientados al corto y mediano plazo, mientras que el logro de sistemas funcionales de protección de la infancia es una meta muy ambiciosa a largo plazo. Esto puede haber conducido a una “sobrestimación” y a una “infrautilización” de los esfuerzos para fortalecer los sistemas en algunos contextos, lo que a su vez puede haber socavado la confianza de los asociados en el enfoque CPSS. Por otra parte, en los sistemas que funcionan mejor, los resultados de la protección de la infancia suelen depender de una red de sistemas asociados de salud, educación y protección social que asumen la mayor parte de la carga de la prevención y la intervención temprana.

Conclusión 8: UNICEF ocupa un claro nicho que se centra en la responsabilidad de los Estados en relación con los derechos de la infancia y en la colaboración con los departamentos gubernamentales a nivel nacional, provincial y de distrito. Sin embargo, la organización aún no ha definido su papel con respecto a la participación de los niños, los mecanismos de protección de la infancia basados en la comunidad y la coordinación entre los actores formales y e informales.

Con respecto a la vía ideal para garantizar el impacto programático del enfoque CPSS, la dicotomía entre las estructuras formales e informales de protección de la infancia puede haber sido exagerada. Como mostraron los resultados del ACC, en algunos de los países que cuentan con sistemas eficaces de protección de la infancia, UNICEF también invierte con éxito en mecanismos de protección de la infancia basados en la comunidad. Invertir en los derechos civiles de los niños (a la información, la comunicación, la asociación y la participación cívica en los sistemas de protección de la infancia) puede suponer una oportunidad para que las niñas y los niños participen en el enfoque CPSS.

Conclusión 9: Las inversiones en capacidades de personal y aprendizaje para el enfoque CPSS han sido insuficientes.

En algunos países y regiones, el personal experimentado de UNICEF ha podido proporcionar un sólido liderazgo estratégico para movilizar a los donantes, los gobiernos y otros organismos de ejecución a fin de promover el programa del sistema de manera creativa. Sin embargo, muchos países carecen de esta capacidad. El conjunto de aptitudes necesarias para el enfoque CPSS va más allá del nivel habitual de capacitación del personal de protección de la infancia, e incluye las finanzas públicas, el desarrollo institucional, la gestión basada en los resultados, las aptitudes analíticas y de investigación y el liderazgo estratégico (convocatoria, persuasión e influencia). No parece que estas competencias hayan sido tenidas suficientemente en cuenta en la contratación, los ascensos y la retención del personal, así como en las iniciativas de aprendizaje.
Conclusión 10: Los sistemas institucionales de presentación de informes de UNICEF sobre los gastos y los resultados son inadecuados para demostrar el nivel exacto de la contribución de UNICEF.

Todavía no se han establecido mediciones coherentes a nivel institucional para el enfoque CPSS, tanto a nivel de los resultados intermedios (elementos del sistema de protección de la infancia) como a nivel de los gastos e inversiones de UNICEF que contribuyen a esos resultados. En el período 2014-2017, en particular, ha resultado difícil evaluar las inversiones a nivel de las oficinas de país, ya que cuando se registraron los gastos no estaba claro cuáles estaban dedicados al “fortalecimiento de los sistemas”. Los datos de los sistemas de presentación de informes de resultados institucionales de UNICEF, si bien han mejorado notablemente como parte del plan estratégico 2018-2021, siguen siendo irregulares. En general, UNICEF carece de la capacidad de realizar un seguimiento sistemático de su contribución al progreso y el desempeño del enfoque CPSS en todo el mundo, lo que impide que la organización demuestre resultados y movilice recursos para este enfoque.

Recomendaciones

Recomendación 1: Aclarar la manera en que UNICEF define el fortalecimiento de los sistemas de protección de la infancia y su función en esta tarea, y garantizar que este enfoque se refleje en las estrategias, políticas y planes de la organización.

Esto debe incluir:

- Perfeccionar el borrador de la vía a seguir del programa creado para esta evaluación;
- Definir las fases del proceso del enfoque CPSS (construcción del sistema, consolidación y reforma del sistema, o una tipología similar por determinar);
- Procurar que las clarificaciones de esta narrativa del enfoque CPSS se refleje en cualquier actualización futura de la Estrategia de protección de la infancia de UNICEF para 2008, estableciendo las responsabilidades del trabajo sobre el enfoque CPSS entre los diversos actores dentro de la organización.

Recomendación 2: Definir el nicho de UNICEF en el enfoque CPSS e invertir en las esferas más impactantes para fortalecer los sistemas de protección de la infancia.

UNICEF debería centrarse sin ninguna duda en el liderazgo y la rendición de cuentas del Estado, una tarea para la cual la organización está bien ubicada. UNICEF necesita posicionarse claramente en términos de temas y foros, por medio de los cuales se debe impulsar la agenda del enfoque CPSS.

UNICEF debería:

- Articular las esferas clave de trabajo prioritarias y los posibles puntos de entrada para el enfoque CPSS según el contexto, a fin de orientar la programación;
• Elaborar un menú de intervenciones en cada esfera prioritaria, con un conjunto diferente de opciones adaptadas a cada fase del proceso del enfoque CPSS y dirigidas a diferentes niveles (formal/menos formal).

Recomendación 3: Fortalecer las capacidades y el aprendizaje del personal y de los asociados en el enfoque CPSS

El enfoque CPSS requiere un conjunto de conocimientos que están más allá de las capacidades habituales del personal de protección de la infancia. Estas competencias deben fomentarse dentro de UNICEF y entre los asociados. Además, UNICEF necesita apoyar en mayor medida el aprendizaje entre países (y regiones) con perfiles y desafíos similares.

UNICEF debería:

• A nivel de la sede, invertir en aprendizaje y el fomento de capacidades para el personal y los asociados;
• A nivel de las OR, intensificar la asistencia técnica al enfoque CPSS;
• A nivel de la oficina en el país, adoptar el enfoque CPSS como una función de aprendizaje y una responsabilidad transversal y de gestión.

Recomendación 4: Aprovechar las asociaciones y los recursos para el enfoque CPSS

UNICEF debería redoblar urgentemente sus esfuerzos para revitalizar las asociaciones y las actividades de promoción en favor del enfoque CPSS. Esto debe incluir:

• Invertir en comunicación y promoción, incluyendo la presentación de casos institucionales en una amplia gama de contextos;
• Desarrollar una estrategia de asociaciones y recursos en favor del enfoque CPSS, y alentar a los donantes a mostrarse favorables al fortalecimiento de los sistemas de apoyo;
• Mejorar la suficiencia, equidad, eficiencia y eficacia de la financiación pública de los servicios y sistemas de protección de la infancia.

Recomendación 5: Abordar los retos de los datos y las mediciones del enfoque CPSS

Parte de lo que se percibe como falta de claridad conceptual sobre el enfoque CPSS está vinculada a la ausencia de métricas coherentes a nivel institucional para el enfoque CPSS y a la escasez de datos y pruebas a nivel mundial en todas las etapas de la cadena de resultados del enfoque CPSS.

UNICEF debería:

• Invertir en métricas coherentes a nivel institucional del enfoque CPSS;
• Abordar la falta de pruebas que obstaculizan el progreso hacia el impacto programático deseado.
Le présent rapport expose les conclusions d’une évaluation des stratégies et résultats des programmes de l’UNICEF en matière de renforcement des systèmes de protection de l’enfance (RSPE) à travers son action au niveau des pays, des régions et du siège. La protection de l’enfance (PE), qui, selon la Convention relative aux droits de l’enfant, consiste à prévenir et intervenir contre les violences, l’exploitation et la maltraitance exercées envers les enfants, occupe une place centrale dans la mission de l’UNICEF. Historiquement, l’UNICEF et d’autres entités œuvrant dans le domaine de la protection de l’enfance ont essentiellement concentré leurs efforts sur des thématiques spécifiques ou des populations distinctes, considérées comme particulièrement vulnérables aux menaces ciblant les enfants. Cependant, ces dix dernières années, la nécessité d’obtenir des résultats plus pérennes a entraîné un glissement progressif vers une approche plus holistique et générale. En tant que tel, le RSPE constitue un objectif stratégique qui s’inscrit dans la stratégie globale de l’organisation depuis l’adoption de la stratégie relative à la protection de l’enfance en 2008.


En l’absence d’une théorie du changement pour atteindre cet objectif, le Groupe consultatif en matière d’évaluation a élaboré un cadre conceptuel définissant six éléments clés pour créer un système de protection de l’enfance opérationnel, à savoir :

- Un solide cadre juridique et réglementaire, ainsi que des politiques spécifiques concernant la protection de l’enfance ;
• Des organes de gouvernance efficaces, permettant notamment la coordination entre ministères gouvernementaux, entités décentralisées et acteurs officiels et informels ;
• Un éventail de services (s’étendant à la prévention et à l’intervention) ;
• Des normes minimales et un dispositif de contrôle (mécanismes d’information, de suivi et de redevabilité) ;
• Des ressources humaines, financières et des infrastructures ; et
• La participation sociale, notamment le respect des opinions des enfants eux-mêmes, ainsi que la sensibilisation et le soutien du grand public.

L’évaluation se concentre sur l’analyse de la contribution de l’UNICEF au regard de ces six éléments, conçus comme des « cibles intermédiaires » dans le rapport.

L’évaluation s’articule autour de dix questions essentielles (voir annexe 1), combinées à quatre des critères standard préconisés par le Comité d’aide au développement de l’Organisation de coopération et de développement économiques (OCDE/CAD), à savoir : pertinence, efficacité, efficience et viabilité. Certaines questions d’évaluation se posaient à un niveau particulier – mondial (siège), régional (bureau régional) ou national (bureau de pays) – mais d’autres concernaient plusieurs niveaux, et ont généré des réponses et des conclusions différenciées pour chacun d’entre eux. L’efficacité au niveau du pays était, en outre, évaluée en fonction des progrès réalisés eu égard aux six éléments clés du système de protection de l’enfance opérationnel cité ci-dessus.

Grâce à l’étude d’un échantillon de 24 pays, des éléments de preuves détaillés ont pu être fournis à l’échelle nationale dans le cadre de l’évaluation afin de déterminer l’efficacité de la mise en œuvre du RSPE par l’UNICEF, et de mettre en lumière des faits probants permettant d’alimenter les efforts mondiaux et régionaux à l’avenir. Ces études de cas ont également réparties entre trois niveaux d’approfondissement : douze d’entre elles ont consisté en un examen documentaire, six ont en outre eu recours à des entrevues à distance avec des informateurs clés (de l’UNICEF et de ses partenaires), et six autres ont fait l’objet d’une étude approfondie s’appuyant sur des données recueillies lors de missions sur place par le biais d’entretiens en tête-à-tête, de groupes de discussions avec des adolescents et d’observations de terrain. Lors de missions dans les pays, deux visites ont été effectuées auprès des bureaux régionaux afin d’obtenir des données à l’échelle régionale. Des entretiens avec des informateurs clés au niveau mondial, un examen documentaire et deux enquêtes en ligne (l’une auprès des équipes de pays de l’UNICEF, l’autre auprès des partenaires gouvernementaux et de la société civile), ont permis de compléter les sources de données. L’analyse comparative qualitative (ACQ) a été utilisée pour savoir quelles étaient les combinaisons d’investissements les plus efficaces que pouvait réaliser l’UNICEF afin de contribuer au renforcement des systèmes de PE au sein de ces 24 pays.

L’évaluation a abouti à 42 conclusions en tout, dont voici une sélection :
Après examen des approches adoptées par les 24 bureaux de pays, il s’est avéré qu’elles étaient pleinement en accord avec la mission de l’UNICEF, les instruments pertinents en matière de droits de la personne, et les priorités mondiales.


L’accent est mis non seulement sur la nécessité d’obtenir des résultats en faveur des enfants, mais aussi de le faire en défendant les droits de la personne, l’égalité des genres et l’équité. En effet, l’analyse de la problématique hommes-femmes et la focalisation sur les enfants handicapés pourraient être améliorées.

L’ACQ a permis de déterminer que les interventions les plus percutantes menées indépendamment par l’UNICEF ont trait au développement des compétences (en particulier celles des travailleurs sociaux), à l’investissement en faveur de la recherche et des données probantes et à la mobilisation de ressources publiques. Pour ce qui est des systèmes hautement efficaces, c’est un ensemble d’interventions fondées sur la recherche et les données probantes, sur la mobilisation de ressources publiques, et sur le plaidoyer, qui s’est révélé avoir les incidences les plus importantes.

Les interventions de protection de l’enfance présentant le meilleur potentiel de viabilité, dans un cadre institutionnel, concernaient le soutien au niveau des systèmes de gestion de l’information, de gestion des cas et de la coordination.

Les objectifs du RSPE ne sont pas rendus de façon adéquate par les stratégies mondiales et les résultats prévus de l’UNICEF. Il y a notamment un manque de clarté quant au fonctionnement du RSPE et une absence de théorie du changement approuvée à l’échelle mondiale. De plus, en dépit d’une amélioration au cours de la période concernée, les dispositifs de suivi des résultats et des dépenses de l’UNICEF ne permettent pas de capturer réellement les efforts réalisés en matière de renforcement des systèmes.

On trouve de bons exemples de solides partenariats établis grâce à des initiatives de l’UNICEF à l’échelle nationale en matière de RSPE. Néanmoins, les données existantes laissent penser que l’UNICEF n’est pas parvenu à asseoir son rôle de chef de file sur le plan mondial et à tirer parti des partenariats essentiels pour garantir le renforcement constant des systèmes de protection de l’enfance.

L’UNICEF a été dans l’incapacité de mettre en place des partenariats propres à procurer les ressources nécessaires au RSPE. Qui plus est, le fait que les donateurs ont l’habitude d’allouer des subventions à des « thématiques » ciblées a encore aggravé le manque d’intérêt vis-à-vis du renforcement des systèmes de PE.
Cela dit, les bureaux régionaux de l'UNICEF ont largement contribué à l'effort de renforcement des systèmes de protection de l'enfance. Les parties prenantes ont repéré un certain nombre de domaines où un soutien supplémentaire de la part des bureaux régionaux serait précieux.

Les conclusions sont présentées dans leur intégralité dans les chapitres 3 et 4 de ce rapport. Une version abrégée des conclusions et recommandations est fournie ci-dessous ; la version intégrale peut être consultée au chapitre 5.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1 : Après dix ans d’efforts dans ce domaine, le concept de renforcement des systèmes de protection de l’enfance n’est toujours pas clairement défini au sein de l’UNICEF. En conséquence, le personnel de l’UNICEF, à divers échelons, et ses partenaires ne partagent pas une conception commune du RSPE.

Fondamentalement, il n’y a pas, à l’UNICEF, de définition officielle du renforcement des systèmes de protection de l’enfance en tant que tel, qui soit publiée et largement diffusée à tous les échelons de l’organisation. Par ailleurs, le cadre conceptuel n’est pas clairement défini, pas plus que le chemin à suivre pour obtenir l’impact programmatique souhaité ou les moyens de mesure connexes.

Conclusion 2 : Le personnel ne dispose pas du soutien technique nécessaire pour mettre en œuvre le renforcement des systèmes de PE dans des contextes programmatiques différents et sur fond de vastes initiatives axées sur des thématiques ayant pour concept unificateur la violence envers les enfants.

L’équilibre et la relation souhaités entre les approches thématiques et systémiques adoptées par l’UNICEF en matière de protection de l’enfance n’ont pas été explicités. À cet égard, le lien entre l’approche de renforcement systémique et les efforts pour remédier à la violence envers les enfants, laquelle a été définie comme concept unificateur en vertu de l’ODD 16.2 et du Groupe d’objectifs 3 du Plan stratégique, présente une difficulté d’ordre opérationnel. D’une façon plus générale, il y a un manque de clarté ou d’indications cohérentes quant au choix du meilleur point de départ pour mettre en œuvre le RSPE. Enfin, l’approche programmatique adoptée par l’UNICEF en matière de RSPE ne fait pas, jusqu’à présent, la distinction entre les différents niveaux de fonctionnement ou de maturité des systèmes de PE nationaux.

Conclusion 3 : L’UNICEF a remporté un succès considérable dans la promotion du renforcement des systèmes de protection de l’enfance à l’échelle nationale et dans la sensibilisation des partenaires nationaux. Cependant, dans l’ensemble, cela ne s’est pas traduit par les investissements nécessaires sur le plan national.

Dans la plupart des pays étudiés dans le cadre de cette évaluation, l’UNICEF, en produisant des données probantes, en établissant une cartographie des systèmes de protection de l’enfance, en analysant leur bilan et en estimant leur coût, a contribué à modifier la conception des partenaires gouvernementaux. Grâce au soutien technique de l’UNICEF, les composants
essentiels des systèmes de PE ont pu être améliorés. Cependant, dans la plupart des cas, cette conception partagée n’a pas abouti à l’investissement de ressources de la part des gouvernements.

Conclusion 4 : En allouant des financements à des thématiques étroitement définies, au cas par cas, et en utilisant des dispositifs de suivi et de rapport parallèles, les donateurs ont exercé une influence très néfaste à l’encontre du renforcement des systèmes de PE. Jusqu’à présent, l’organisation n’est pas parvenue à convaincre les principaux donateurs de la nécessité de renforcer les systèmes de protection de l’enfance.

Nombreux sont les donateurs qui exigent des résultats facilement et rapidement mesurables, exprimés en nombres d’enfants soutenus. Cela a entraîné l’utilisation préférentielle de dispositifs de prestation de services parallèles, ayant pour effet de saper le renforcement des systèmes. Le personnel de l’UNICEF fait donc face à la difficulté de concevoir des projets qui répondent aux attentes des donateurs en bénéficiant rapidement à un grand nombre d’enfants, et qui contribuent également à l’obtention de résultats de développement substantiels et durables en élaborant un système de PE solide.

Conclusion 5 : Dans l’ensemble, les résultats des programmes de l’UNICEF concernant le RSPE ont été modérés. Les progrès ont été inégaux, avec des écarts flagrants dans les pays à faible revenu, les situations précaires et les contextes humanitaires.

Dans un grand nombre des pays étudiés, l’UNICEF a contribué à des avancées modérées, vérifiables, en faveur du renforcement des six éléments qui, ensemble, permettent le fonctionnement des systèmes de PE. Cependant, il y a encore beaucoup à faire dans la plupart des pays étudiés. La contribution de l’UNICEF au RSPE a été particulièrement importante dans la consolidation du cadre juridique et réglementaire. En général, l’aide de l’UNICEF a été moins efficace là où les systèmes de protection de l’enfance étaient embryonnaires, et plus efficace dans les pays où l’organisation apportait son soutien à la réforme des systèmes existants par le gouvernement.

Conclusion 6 : L’évaluation a permis d’identifier un certain nombre d’interventions qui sont particulièrement efficaces pour renforcer les systèmes de PE, notamment le renforcement des capacités/des compétences des travailleurs sociaux, la mobilisation de ressources publiques, la recherche et les données probantes, et le plaidoyer. Cela fournit quelques éclaircissements sur les investissements prioritaires de l’UNICEF.

En ce qui a trait aux systèmes de protection de l’enfance les plus solides, les investissements les plus fructueux réalisés par l’UNICEF sont liés à la recherche et aux données probantes, à la mobilisation de ressources publiques et au plaidoyer. C’est l’investissement dans le renforcement des capacités (et notamment dans le renforcement des compétences des travailleurs sociaux) qui a fait la plus grande différence dans l’ensemble des 24 pays, ce qui laisse penser que ce type d’intervention est valable dans une grande variété de contextes. Dans les pays où les systèmes de PE sont plus fragiles, l’UNICEF réalise souvent des investissements substantiels dans les mécanismes communautaires et apporte un soutien financier et technique direct aux services et infrastructures de protection de l’enfance.
Conclusion 7 : Les ambitions de l’UNICEF par rapport à ce qui peut être accompli, dans des contextes particuliers et sur une période donnée, grâce à un système de protection de l’enfance, n’étaient pas réalistes.

Certains des objectifs de l’UNICEF en matière de renforcement des systèmes de protection de l’enfance s’inscrivent à court et moyen terme, alors que parvenir à rendre ces systèmes opérationnels est un projet très ambitieux, à long terme. De ce fait, il est possible que, dans certains contextes, l’impact des efforts ait été surestimé sans pour autant aboutir aux résultats escomptés, entraînant ainsi une perte de confiance de la part des partenaires vis-à-vis du RSPE. À ce sujet, dans les systèmes plus efficaces, les résultats en matière de protection de l’enfance reposent souvent sur un réseau de services paramédicaux, éducatifs et sociaux qui assume la majeure partie du travail de prévention et d’intervention précoce.

Conclusion 8 : En se concentrant sur la responsabilité des États par rapport aux droits des enfants et en collaborant avec les ministères gouvernementaux à l’échelle nationale, provinciale et des districts, l’UNICEF occupe un créneau bien défini. Cependant, l’organisation doit encore préciser son rôle eu égard à la participation des enfants, aux mécanismes communautaires de protection de l’enfance et à la coordination entre acteurs officiels et informels.

Concernant le chemin à suivre pour garantir l’impact programmatique du RSPE, il est possible que la dichotomie entre structures de protection de l’enfance officielles et informelles ait été exagérée. Comme le démontrent les conclusions de l’ACQ, dans les pays où les systèmes de protection de l’enfance sont efficaces, les investissements réalisés par l’UNICEF dans les mécanismes communautaires portent eux aussi leurs fruits. Investir dans les droits civils des enfants (en matière d’information, de communication, d’association et d’engagement citoyen vis-à-vis des systèmes de protection de l’enfance) peut représenter une occasion pour que filles et garçons participent au RSPE.

Conclusion 9 : L’investissement dans les compétences et la formation du personnel pour le RSPE a été insuffisant.

Dans certains pays et régions, des membres expérimentés du personnel de l’UNICEF ont fourni une orientation stratégique solide en vue de mobiliser les donateurs, les gouvernements et d’autres organismes d’exécution pour promouvoir le renforcement des systèmes de façon créative. Cependant, nombreux sont les pays qui n’ont pas cette capacité. Les compétences nécessaires dans le cadre du RSPE vont au-delà du niveau de qualification habituel du personnel dédié à la PE, car elles sont liées aux finances publiques, au développement institutionnel, à la gestion axée sur les résultats, à la recherche et l’analyse et au leadership stratégique (organisation, persuasion et influence). Il semble que ces compétences n’aient pas été suffisamment prises en considération dans le recrutement, la promotion et la rétention du personnel, ainsi que lors des initiatives de formation.
Conclusion 10 : Au niveau de l’organisation, la présentation des rapports de dépenses et de résultats ne permet pas d’illustrer avec exactitude l’étendue de la contribution de l’UNICEF.

Les moyens de mesurer l’efficacité du RSPE à l’échelle de l’organisation n’ont pas encore été établis, que ce soit au niveau des cibles intermédiaires (éléments constitutifs du système de PE) ou au niveau des dépenses et des investissements réalisés par l’UNICEF pour atteindre ces cibles. Plus particulièrement, en ce qui concerne la période 2014-2017, l’évaluation des investissements s’est avérée difficile, car l’enregistrement des dépenses par les bureaux de pays ne permettait pas de savoir clairement quels étaient ceux considérés comme contribuant au « renforcement des systèmes ». Les données probantes tirées de la présentation des résultats de l’organisation, bien qu’ayant connu une nette amélioration dans le cadre du Plan stratégique 2018-2021, demeurent fragmentaires. En conclusion, l’UNICEF est dans l’incapacité de faire un suivi systématique de sa contribution au renforcement des systèmes de protection de l’enfance dans le monde, ce qui empêche l’organisation de faire la démonstration de ses résultats et de mobiliser des ressources en faveur du RSPE.

Recommandations

Recommandation 1 : Clarifier comment l’UNICEF définit le renforcement des systèmes de protection de l’enfance et son rôle dans ce domaine, tout en veillant à ce que cela soit reflété dans les stratégies, les politiques et les plans de l’organisation.

Cela devrait consister à :

- Parfaire le chemin à suivre pour atteindre l’impact programmatique souhaité, ébauché dans le cadre de la présente évaluation ;
- Définir les phases du processus du RSPE (construction, consolidation et réforme des systèmes, ou typologie similaire à déterminer) ;
- Veiller à ce que ces éclaircissements sur le RSPE figurent dans toute future actualisation de la stratégie de l’UNICEF relative à la PE de 2008, en attribuant les responsabilités en la matière aux différents acteurs au sein de l’organisation.

Recommandation 2 : Définir le créneau occupé par l’UNICEF dans le RSPE et investir dans les domaines les plus rentables pour renforcer les systèmes de protection de l’enfance.

L’UNICEF devrait résolument se concentrer sur le leadership et la responsabilité des États, car il est bien placé pour le faire. L’UNICEF doit se positionner clairement pour ce qui est des thématiques et des forums qui lui permettent de promouvoir ses priorités de RSPE.

L’UNICEF devrait :

- Identifier les principaux domaines d’intervention prioritaires et les points de départ envisageables pour le RSPE selon le contexte, afin de guider la programmation ;
• Créer un menu d'interventions pour chaque domaine prioritaire, offrant un ensemble distinct de choix adaptés à chaque phase du processus de RSPE et ciblant différents niveaux (officiel/informel).

**Recommandation 3 : Consolider les compétences et la formation du personnel et des partenaires en matière de RSPE.**

Le RSPE exige un ensemble de compétences dépassant celles que possède habituellement le personnel dédié à la PE. L’acquisition de ces compétences doit être encouragée au sein de l’UNICEF et parmi ses partenaires. De plus, l’UNICEF doit encourager davantage la formation entre les pays (et les régions) partageant des ressemblances et confrontés à des défis similaires.

L’UNICEF devrait :

• Au niveau du siège, investir dans la formation et le développement des compétences du personnel et des partenaires ;
• Au niveau des bureaux régionaux, accroître l’assistance technique pour le RSPE ;
• Au niveau des bureaux de pays, envisager le RSPE comme une fonction d’apprentissage et une responsabilité de gestion transversale.

**Recommandation 4 : Optimiser les partenariats et les ressources en faveur du RSPE.**

L’UNICEF devrait immédiatement intensifier ses efforts pour relancer ses partenariats et son plaidoyer en faveur du RSPE. Cela devrait consister à :

• Investir dans la communication et le plaidoyer, notamment en présentant des études de cas illustrant toute la variété des contextes ;
• Élaborer une stratégie afin de mobiliser les partenaires et les ressources en faveur du RSPE, incitant les donateurs à soutenir le renforcement des systèmes ;
• Améliorer l’utilisation des fonds publics destinés aux services et systèmes de protection de l’enfance, en termes d’adéquation, d’équité, d’efficience et d’efficacité.

**Recommandation 5 : Combler le manque de données et de mesures en matière de RSPE.**

Le sentiment que le concept de RSPE manque de clarté s’explique en partie par l’absence d’une méthode de mesure cohérente au niveau de l’organisation et par la production limitée de données et de faits probants à l’échelle mondiale, à chaque étape de la chaîne de résultats.

L’UNICEF devrait :

• Établir une méthode de mesure cohérente à l’échelle de l’organisation ;
• Remédier au manque de données probantes, qui entrave le cheminement vers l’impact programmatique souhaité.
1. Introduction

This report presents the results of an evaluation of UNICEF’s strategies and performance in applying a child protection systems-strengthening (CPSS) approach in its work across country, regional and headquarters (HQ) levels. Child protection (CP) – defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as “preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children” – is central to UNICEF’s mandate. Historically, UNICEF and others working in this field targeted their child protection efforts mainly at specific issues, or specific populations considered especially vulnerable to child protection threats. Over the past decade, however, the need for more sustainable outcomes produced a gradual shift towards a holistic, comprehensive approach. As such, a CPSS approach has been a strategic objective of the overall CP work of the organization since the adoption of the Child Protection Strategy in 2008. This evaluation is the first comprehensive attempt to gather and analyse evidence about the application of CPSS across UNICEF.

1.1. UNICEF’s approach to child protection systems strengthening

There is broad global consensus about State obligations to protect the rights of all children, as enshrined under international law in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, which officially interprets the provisions of the Convention, has increasingly referred to “child protection systems” in its deliberations, recommendations and concluding observations, demonstrating the progressive entrenchment of the systems approach in the global child rights discourse.

Such an approach reflects an understanding that several components that are essential for achieving better results work together across various sectors and tiers, forming a system of mutually reinforcing parts: “the child protection system”. In practice, as this report demonstrates, systems are complex webs of intersecting issues, actors, norms, regulations and policies that are difficult to capture in one simple model. Achieving comprehensive and sustained results for children in this area requires strengthening the whole system – its individual parts, the relationships among them, and their operation overall.

The UNICEF 2002 Protective Environment Framework defined eight interconnected elements that work individually and collectively to strengthen CP and reduce children’s vulnerabilities.¹ The framework was refined in the 2008 Child Protection Strategy, which identified the

１The eight elements of the Protective Environment Framework are: Government commitment to fulfilling protection rights (including appropriate policies and budgets); legislation and enforcement; attitudes, traditions, customs, behaviour and practices; open discussion, including the engagement of media and civil society; children’s life skills, knowledge and participation; capacity of those in contact with the child; basic and targeted services; monitoring and oversight.
“development of appropriate child protection systems” as a strategic objective for the organization, introduced the concept of “systems-building”, and recognized that systems-strengthening priorities vary by context.

The child protection strategy marked the beginning of the agency’s investment in child protection systems. The period from 2009 to 2012 was one of intensive analysis, learning and exchange. At the global level, UNICEF supported work to adapt a systems approach to child protection. Various regional offices (ROs) supported country offices (COs) to map existing legislation, structures, capacities and resources to protect children. These assessments were supported by UNICEF and other international child protection agencies (e.g. Save the Children, Plan International). They generated discussion among national child protection actors and prepared the ground for the development of country-specific strategies to build and strengthen child protection systems. The same child protection agencies also supported a meta-analysis of approaches to protect children in the community.

This initial phase in child protection systems strengthening culminated in 2012 in a global conference in Delhi and a sub-Saharan African conference in Dakar. Both conferences attracted a great deal of interest among governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in CP, and some donors. The Dakar conference was followed by the development of a joint statement on CPSS in sub-Saharan Africa (2013). However, the Delhi conference was the first and last global conference of its kind and marked the end of efforts to build and sustain a comprehensive global platform for CPSS. The definition of CP systems in use in UNICEF to this day dates from the Delhi conference in 2012:

2 The second objective relates to changing social norms that perpetuate violence and promoting positive norms. As noted in another recent corporate evaluation, social norms/social change work could also be understood as part of systems strengthening. United Nations Children’s Fund, “Protecting Children from Violence (VAC): A comprehensive evaluation of UNICEF’s strategies and programme performance”, UNICEF, New York, 2015.
3 United Nations Children’s Fund, “Child Protection Strategy”, E/ICEF/2008/5/Rev.1, ECOSOC, New York, 2008, pp. 2 and 5: “Low-resource countries may concentrate on defining a minimum package of child protection services and laws, and the policies and capacities to support them. Post-crisis countries will focus on re-establishment of rule of law and attention to child protection in various sectors as these are re-invigorated. Middle-income countries are likely to reform and improve existing social and legal systems. Common concerns include addressing gender power imbalances, strengthening coordination between sectors and increasing support through social protection and rule of law initiatives. In every setting, making sure that vulnerable, socially excluded or ‘invisible’ groups are included within the reach of child protection systems will require special emphasis.”
6 This definition has been drawn upon by many international and national bodies working in child protection. However, its distinction between formal and informal structures is not defined in UNICEF or other documents. As a working definition, the evaluation treated government-based elements as formal and “traditional” community-based and NGO elements as informal or “less formal”. Some elements, such as national committees, may span both structures.
Certain formal and informal structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. A child protection system is generally agreed to be comprised of the following components: human resources, finance, laws and policies, governance, monitoring and data collection as well as protection and response services and care management. It also includes different actors – children, families, communities, those working at sub-national or national level and those working internationally. Most important are the relationships and interactions between and among these components and these actors within the system. It is the outcomes of these interactions that comprise the system. 

Because some parts of a system may fall outside the recognized child protection sector, UNICEF definitions, policies and strategic plans acknowledge that CP systems tend to be multi-sectoral, cutting across parts of the social welfare, education, health, justice, social protection and security sectors. It is understood that these systems must be strengthened through an integrated approach. Similarly, ‘strengthening’ is, of course, a relative term. In this context, it denotes fortifying an existing system to make it more effective, efficient and/or sustainable from the standpoint of duty-bearers, practitioners and/or rights-holders (children and families). It is widely acknowledged that no system anywhere seamlessly addresses the protection needs of all girls and boys at all times. But even in the context of failed states where organized government responses are unavailable, community-based protection mechanisms can provide some degree of protection to children at risk.

After 2012, discourse and work around CPSS continued, but began to move in different directions, with limited opportunities for actors in different parts of the world to collectively reflect on achievements, challenges and learning. Countries and regions have supported different approaches or models, different entry points and thematic areas, and have focused on various technical components to strengthen CP systems. By using child protection themes as entry points, UNICEF also managed to tap into a wider range of funding sources to strengthen CP systems. As a share of overall child protection expenditures in 2016/2017, UNICEF investment in CPSS as such is relatively small, at 13 per cent. A range of regular and other resources not explicitly designated for work on CP systems nonetheless contributes to systems-strengthening results, most notably resources earmarked for addressing violence against children (VAC).

The following paragraphs provide some examples of the work done in different regions. The table in Annex 9 provides a more detailed overview.

8 For instance, the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 notes: “In protecting girls and boys from violence, exploitation and harmful practices, a key lesson is the importance of strengthening child protection, social protection, education and health systems in an integrated way”.
• In Eastern and Southern Africa region (ESAR), UNICEF used the orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) platform and its partnerships with the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS relief (PEPFAR) to promote and resource CP systems as well as social protection. Zimbabwe is a good example of where this partnership was used to good effect to align the agendas of donors, implementing agencies and government departments, and to mobilize significant funds for CP systems and social protection. Other countries in East Africa, such as Tanzania, used national studies on violence against children (VAC) as an advocacy platform to mobilize government support to develop child protection systems.

• In Eastern Europe and Central Asia region (ECAR), UNICEF forged close ties with the European Union (EU) to promote deinstitutionalization of children and juvenile justice as a focus for the reform of existing child protection systems that were not in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child or with a modern child protection system. The EU not only provided funding but also put additional pressure on member countries to accelerate CP systems reform.

• The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region concentrated efforts on the migration crisis and on strengthening services and systems for child migrants. The region also contributed to efforts to strengthen child protection systems in humanitarian situations.

Other countries and regions focused on specific technical components of CP systems. The East Asia and Pacific regional office (EAPRO) developed a set of child protection system indicators in 2014. In Myanmar, UNICEF worked with government and non-government child protection actors at the district level to develop model case management systems as a key component for an effective child protection system. In South Africa, UNICEF supported the improvement of a child protection management information system, and UNICEF collaborated with the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (GSSWA) to produce the “State of the Social Service Workforce in South Asia”.

These are just a few examples of the many different initiatives supported by UNICEF since 2013, and they reflect the wide diversity of country and regional contexts, as well as differences in funding and partnership opportunities.
1.2. **Organizational context**

UNICEF has monitored its contributions to CPSS since 2012, when the results framework of the updated Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) defined Key Result Area 1 for child protection as: “Better child protection systems that include national laws, policies and services across sectors, in particular justice and social protection, to protect all children from violence, exploitation and abuse.”

UNICEF’s Strategic Plan, 2014-2017 and 2018-2021 (SPs) include specific outputs on systems strengthening, i.e. Outputs 2 and 3 of Outcome 6 and Output 3a of Goal 3, respectively. The SP, 2014-2017 narrowly pitched systems strengthening as a capacity development and advocacy initiative, whereas the SP, 2018-2021 reflects a general shift towards more systemic thinking, with greater emphasis on cross-sectoral and multi-sectoral approaches overall. It introduces “an integrated approach” to protecting boys and girls from violence, exploitation and harmful practices, based on a key lesson from experience, namely, “the importance of strengthening child protection, social protection and health systems in an integrated way.”

The results framework for 2018-2021 systematically includes indicators aiming to capture ‘results’ from systems strengthening and policy support work. It also shows intended results from other agencies or members of the United Nations family.

The child protection narrative in the current SP is similar to that of previous strategic plans, and the CPSS output focuses on service delivery: “Output 3.a: Countries have strengthened child protection systems for prevention and response services to address violence against children (VAC).” However, CPSS indicators measure a fairly new set of initiatives:

- Quality assurance system for social service work;
- Legislative and policy framework to eliminate the worst forms of child labour; and

---

10 United Nations Children’s Fund, “Revised Annexes to Medium Term Strategic Plan: Annex 1 – results framework by focus area”, ECOSOC, New York, 2012. When the MTSP, 2006-2009 was extended to 2011 and then to 2013, child protection systems-strengthening work was operationalized through organizational targets. Key results Area 1 was previously defined as “Better national laws, policies, regulations and services across sectors to improve child protection outcomes, in particular justice for children, social protection systems, and services in place to protect, reach and serve all children, notably those identified as vulnerable to harm, marginalized, or in contact with the law”.

11 See Output 2, “Increased national capacity to provide access to child protection systems that prevent and respond to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect” and Output 3 “Strengthened political commitment, accountability and national capacity to legislate, plan and budget for scaling up interventions that prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation.”


13 For instance, WHO, UNFPA, UN-Women, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict for indicators related to outcome statement 3.

14 “51. UNICEF will focus on the specific protection needs of girls and boys and their best interests, and on strengthening the protective environment through critical investments in national systems, community dialogue and behaviour change. In particular, UNICEF will support Governments to strengthen and expand their social services infrastructure and case management systems, and will work with communities to increase their capacity to protect Children”.

15 United Nations Children’s Fund, “Final results framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018-2021”, ECOSOC, New York, 2017. The exact indicator wording is: 3.a.1. Number of countries with a quality assurance system in place for social service work. 3.a.2. Number of countries with legislative and policy framework to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. 3.a.8. Number of countries that have ratified the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.
• Ratification of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.

For humanitarian situations, the following are added, in addition to a variety of prevention, risk mitigation, and response services for protection violations and gender-based violence:

• Inter-operable information management system supports and tracks case management, incident monitoring and programme monitoring;
• Strategy to strengthen the protection of children from grave violations of international humanitarian law in countries affected by armed conflict; and
• Children on the move who receive protective services through UNICEF-supported programmes.

Violence against children is identified in this SP as a valid and compelling entry point justifying CPSS work in many countries. As a broad and inclusive issue – facing girls and boys in all communities, in schools, in homes, in the context of child labour, or in the form of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) – it is understood to help illustrate the need for strengthening CP systems.

While the supplementary note to the SP, 2014-2017 presented a ‘programme impact pathway’ for child protection, the current SP is not accompanied by such a note.

In the absence of a theory of change or results framework specifically for CPSS, the Evaluation Advisory Group (EAG) convened for the purposes of preparing and accompanying the evaluation identified six crucial elements for child protection systems to be deemed fully functional, drawing upon UNICEF’s 2015 Child Protection Resource Pack.16 The evaluation terms of reference designed the scope of the evaluation around these elements. The remainder of the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 evolved during the evaluation process.

The six key elements are presented in Figure 1 as “intermediate outcomes” (following results-based management logic). It is important to bear in mind, however, that these “intermediate outcomes” were developed for the purposes of the evaluation and are not currently part of any formal UNICEF plan or results framework.17

17 The “impact” statement represented below is the goal area 3 statement from the SP, 2018-2021. The “core investments” include key UNICEF interventions from both the SP, 2014-2017 and the SP, 2018-2021 periods.
The evaluation focused on analysing UNICEF’s contribution to the six key elements. It did not assess impact at the level of the child. The first three elements are core components of the system and the latter three are key requirements to their functioning:

1. **A robust legal and regulatory framework, as well as specific policies related to child protection**: This includes regulations and standards compliant with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international standards and good practices.

2. **Effective governance structures, including coordination across government departments, between levels of decentralization and between formal and informal actors**: Mechanisms must be in place to actualize the relationships between system components and actors, which may include those within the child protection sector and in different sectors at the same level or different levels working together to protect children. Equally important is to ensure that timely and adequate resources are available for the system actors to respond.

3. **A continuum of services (spanning prevention and response)**: A well-functioning system must have preventive, early intervention and response services (including integration with justice/legal sector, education, health, welfare) involving formal and informal sectors, including a process of care which includes identification, referral, follow-up, response, etc.

4. **Minimum standards and oversight (information, monitoring and accountability mechanisms)**: A child protection system must be accountable. Policy development, advocacy work and programming should be evidence-based. This includes information systems that support case management, performance monitoring, and scale-up.
5. **Human, financial and infrastructure resources:** Effective resource management must be in place, such as enough skilled workers in the right places, adequate budget allocations, effective training and appropriate infrastructure (from vehicles to meeting rooms).

6. **Social participation, including respect for children’s own views, and an aware and supportive public:** Communities, families and peers play crucial roles in promoting protective social practices and children’s empowerment. Access to civic education and to mechanisms that give adolescents a voice in decision-making make them more resilient to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.
2. Evaluation Scope and Methodology

This chapter sets out the evaluation purpose and scope, lists key evaluation questions, and describes the evaluation methodology and data collection and analysis methods. It concludes by discussing some limitations affecting the evaluation process and findings.

2.1. Purpose, objectives, scope and utility

The evaluation has two overall purposes: 1) to contribute to learning and decision-making with a view to improving UNICEF’s ongoing CPSS programming, and 2) to support accountability on CPSS. The objectives of the evaluation are to assess the appropriateness and coherence of UNICEF’s corporate approach to CPSS; to assess the performance of UNICEF country programmes in strengthening national child protection systems; to examine UNICEF’s leadership, guidance and technical support at all levels of the organization as well as the adequacy of UNICEF staffing and institutional capacity; and to provide forward looking lessons, and recommendations.

The evaluation seeks to assess UNICEF’s global, regional, and country-level strategies and programmes to strengthen CP systems in order to bring about better child protection outcomes. It aims to be as comprehensive as possible, examining CPSS from prevention through response and follow-up, involving formal and less formal actors, covering national and sub-national levels. The evaluation assesses UNICEF’s work in middle income, low income and fragile countries. Although CPSS is ongoing in industrialized countries, these fall outside the scope of this evaluation due to UNICEF’s limited involvement in these settings. Similarly, the evaluation excludes humanitarian response where UNICEF usually does not record any CPSS expenditures, although it does examine UNICEF’s role and performance in strengthening CP systems as part of recovery and reconstruction work. While the evaluation traces UNICEF’s CPSS work over the past decade (2008-2018), i.e. from the origins of the CPSS approach to the present, the main time period under review is from 2012 onward, when UNICEF started measuring its CPSS results.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations generated by the evaluation will be used to influence strategic direction, to inform theory and practice of child protection systems strengthening, and to build partnerships. In particular, the evidence presented and interpreted here will inform the mid-term review of UNICEF’s current strategic plan, 2018-2021, the planning and implementation of country programmes and partners’ and UNICEF’s positioning vis-à-vis the sustainable development goals, especially goal 16.2.
2.2. Evaluation framework and questions

The evaluation terms of reference (TOR) outlined an initial set of 36 questions and sub-questions to guide the evaluation. During the inception phase, these were revised in light of a preliminary document review and discussions with key stakeholders to produce ten key evaluation questions (listed below), categorized to reflect the multiple levels and areas of inquiry for the evaluation.

Global and regional level
1. How effective is UNICEF in global leadership and leveraging of partnerships that strengthen CP systems?
2. How appropriate, adequate and coherent are UNICEF global strategies, planned results and guidance documents for strengthening CP systems?
3. How effective is UNICEF’s regional leadership, guidance/support and leveraging role in helping to strengthen CP systems at the national level?
4. How adequately has UNICEF contributed to:
   • Global efforts in generating and sharing relevant research knowledge/evidence;
   • Data collection and analysis of child protection system strengthening; and
   • Monitoring and evaluation of the processes and results achieved by child protection systems?

Institutional
5. How effectively and efficiently has UNICEF allocated and managed human and financial resources for addressing child protection through a systems approach?

Country level
6. How relevant and appropriate are the UNICEF country programme strategies and interventions related to strengthening CP systems for securing the right of children to be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse?
7. How successful has UNICEF been in initiating, supporting and advocating for systems reform? Where/how have funds been allocated? To what extent has UNICEF been able to take a leadership role in generating partnerships and in leveraging national government and partner resources?
8. How effective are UNICEF country programmes, in terms of prevention and response, in achieving concrete results for protecting children (outcomes) through strengthened CP systems?
9. To what extent have sustainability considerations (technical, financial, institutional) been integrated in child protection systems-related programme design and implementation phases by UNICEF? These would include such aspects as replication, scaling up and mainstreaming.
In addition, the QCA asked: “Which combinations of UNICEF investments have contributed to success in systems strengthening within a set of 24 countries?”

**Participation, equity and gender equality**

10. To what extent do national programmes supported by UNICEF and related to CPSS: a) engage with boys and girls of different ages, especially those considered particularly vulnerable, marginalized and from minority groups and b) take into account and respond to their specific protection-related needs?

Each category of question was associated with the pertinent evaluation criterion, and this information was integrated into an evaluation matrix (provided in Annex 1), along with the corresponding data sources, data collection methods, data analysis methods and potential indicators. The matrix was the key tool for organizing data collection and shaping data triangulation, analysis and reporting.

### 2.3. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation takes a case-based and mixed methods approach with case studies of 24 UNICEF country offices providing the main data source for the evaluation. The evaluation was framed by the above questions in combination with four of the standard evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC), namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The long-term effects or impact of CPSS were not assessed due to the fairly recent onset of UNICEF’s involvement. While some evaluation questions specifically targeted one level—global (HQ), regional (RO), or country (CO)—others related to more than one level but generated differentiated evidence and findings for each. Effectiveness at the country level was, in addition, assessed in relation to progress towards the six key elements of a functioning child protection systems (presented as intermediate outcomes in Chapter 1). This was done using qualitative comparative analysis (QCA).

QCA is a case-based method which allows evaluators to identify different combinations of factors that are critical to a given outcome (in this case, CPSS), in given contexts. It was selected as a component part of this evaluation for its ability to generate robust findings about UNICEF inputs that have made a difference in different contexts, and to generalize those findings in conjunction with other theory-based, case-based approaches. Specifically, the aim of the QCA was to identify trajectories towards successful systems strengthening within a set of 24 countries where UNICEF supports such efforts. 

---

18 QCA is not appropriate in all circumstances – it requires a strong theory of change, clearly defined cases and cannot measure the net effects of an intervention, or provide the same level of precision in that sense as quantitative methods. However, it has certain unique strengths, including qualitatively assessing impact on the basis of a small number of cases and identifying multiple pathways to achieving change, which make it suitable for assessing UNICEF’s CP systems-strengthening efforts.
Case studies of a purposive sample of 24 countries enabled the evaluation to bring detailed evidence from the country level to bear on the question of UNICEF’s performance in implementing CPSS, and to generate evidence to inform regional and global efforts in the future. The cases were divided among three types of study: Twelve were examined through documentary desk study, six drew additionally on remote interviews with key informants, and six in-depth case studies also drew on data collected during field missions through interviews, focus group discussions and field observation. Two RO visits were combined with the country missions to collect additional regional-level data. Table 1 below shows the main data collection approaches used for each type of case study.

Table 1: Distribution of methods among case study countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Document Review</th>
<th>Interviews with UNICEF CO Staff</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Interviews with National Stakeholders</th>
<th>Country Missions/ Site Visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desk review countries (12)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study mission countries (6)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote plus desk study countries (6)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 24 case study countries were selected in consultation with the UNICEF Evaluation Office (EO), which in turn consulted with COs and ROs. Table 2 shows the countries selected for each type of case study, by region and type of study. For more details on case study selection, see Annex 5.

Table 2: Final sample countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>No. of Countries</th>
<th>Combined with RO visit</th>
<th>Country visit</th>
<th>Desk + Remote</th>
<th>Desk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECAR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td></td>
<td>Armenia, Uzbekistan, Moldova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LACR</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Peru, El Salvador</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAPR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thailand CO + EAPRO</td>
<td>Myanmar, Fiji, Mongolia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESAR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zimbabwe, Uganda</td>
<td>Ethiopia, South Africa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lebanon, Sudan</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sri Lanka, Afghanistan</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCAR</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cote d’Ivoire, Nigeria</td>
<td>DRC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data collection and analysis

The evaluation adhered to the UNICEF procedure for ethical standards in research, evaluation, data collection and analysis. The Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) approach as well as UNEG ethical guidance and the UNEG code of conduct for evaluations further informed the evaluation. The obligations of individual evaluators included independence, impartiality, honesty and integrity, accountability, confidentiality and others.

Ethical approval for the proposed methodology was granted by UNICEF’s external ethical review board prior to all field visits involving work with children and communities. The ethical protocol included, among other things: A verbal informed consent provision for all adult interviewees, written adolescent assent and parent/guardian consent for focus group participants under the age of 18, and the provision of backup psycho-social support for any adolescent who might feel disturbed by the protection issues discussed during focus group discussions.

Data collection

The main data collection methods for the case study and complementary research are described below.

**Comprehensive document review.** The evaluation reviewed documentary evidence pertaining to CP systems strategies and interventions at country, regional and global levels. These secondary data informed interview and focus group guides and survey questionnaires, as well as feeding into evaluation findings. For 12 of the case studies, this was the sole data collection method. The evaluation team reviewed project documents such as country office annual reports (COARs) and strategy notes, progress reports, previous evaluations, and project outputs. Other core documents included the SPs, 2018-2021 and 2014-2017, with supporting documents such as the results framework, the MTSP, 2006-2009 (extended until 2013), conference reports, and other conceptual and strategic pieces, as listed in Annex 3. The team also reviewed existing survey data on CP issues from various sources, including the 2014 report “Hidden in Plain Sight” and its successor.

**Key informant interviews.** The evaluators conducted in-person and remote semi-structured interviews on a range of topics, including implementation of CPSS efforts as well as their results, effects, and relevance in various contexts. In-person interviews collected feedback from

---


20 The case studies for Thailand and Sri Lanka excluded work with children and communities as they were carried out during a piloting phase.
UNICEF officers and national stakeholders and informants (such as representatives of other United Nations agencies and international experts) during the six field missions and two RO visits, and from a selection of regional and global stakeholders and informants. Remote interviews were carried out with national stakeholders and informants in the non-mission case study countries, and with many UNICEF HQ and international partner representatives. The evaluators met with more than 400 people in total, including more than 50 youth and adolescents during the field missions. (A sample interview guide is provided in Annex 6.)

**Focus group discussions.** Focus group discussions (FGDs), drawing on FGD guides adapted to the various contexts, were carried out during country missions. (See Annex 6 for sample consent forms containing the generic FGD outline). FGDs included stakeholders such as UNICEF staff, programme participants and community members, and permitted collection of participant perceptions of CPSS activities and their effects. During two country missions, evaluation team members also held focus group discussions with adolescents on such issues as:

- Relevance and appropriateness of CP systems/interventions for children needing protection;
- Children’s perceptions of the effectiveness of services/interventions; and
- Perceptions of any changes in the relevance, reach and quality of services provided in recent years.

For more information, see Ethics Protocol and Focus Group Guides in Annex 6.

**Field observation.** Narrative field observation notes were produced during brief (five- to seven-day) country missions, covering, for example, visits to the sites of significant CP interventions or facilities receiving UNICEF support. This gathered evidence about how CP systems operate, and about ongoing activities, behaviours, processes, discussions, social interactions, and observable results and outcomes.

**Surveys.** Online surveys were implemented to 1) reach as many respondents as possible at minimal cost; 2) collect a significant amount of quantitative data to triangulate qualitative data from other lines of inquiry; and 3) ensure confidentiality for potential respondents. Two surveys targeted different respondent groups. The objectives of the survey were to 1) distill trends among qualitative impressions from respondents provided through the close questions; and 2) collect further qualitative information to sustain quantitative data.

The **CO survey** questionnaire, which used 23 closed and open-ended questions to collect quantitative and qualitative information on key evaluation questions, treated each CO as a unit – as opposed to collecting views from individual staff. It generated information on issues such as the extent to which COs feel CP system efforts respond to the different needs of girls and boys, and how relevant they consider systems strengthening to country contexts. It received 95 completed responses for an 82 per cent response rate. An external country stakeholder survey was sent to UNICEF partners in government and civil society organizations identified by UNICEF CO representatives in the 24 sample countries, and included 13 closed and open-
ended questions gauging respondents' knowledge and opinions on CP systems-related issues. This survey counted 95 completed responses, equating to a 40 per cent response rate, which is acceptable considering the profile of the potential respondents. However, the data are treated with caution since they rely on just 24 full sets of responses.

Once the surveys closed, descriptive and multivariate statistical analyses were carried out to identify and interpret patterns and trends and establish cross-country comparisons.

**Data collation for QCA.** Based on the evaluation framework (Figure 1), a data collection protocol was developed to standardize data compilation and make country case data comparable. As part of this process, questions were developed in relation to existing UNICEF budget codes identified as being relevant to CPSS (“investment categories”). For the six systems elements, related UNICEF standard monitoring questions (SMQs) were selected, complemented by additional questions related to, among others: governance structures, oversight and accountability mechanisms, availability of human and financial resources for CP systems, and children’s participation in judicial hearings and their access to helplines and other reporting and complaint mechanisms. In total, the data collection protocol included 146 questions. For a complete list of the questions, see Annex 6.

The data collection protocol was filled with the following existing data sources:

- Case study reports for all 24 countries
- COARs and results analysis module (RAM) reports from UNICEF’s corporate VISION database
- SMQs, World Bank World Governance Indicators
- Where necessary to answer specific questions, country reports produced by UNICEF, governments and other child protection agencies.

The data collection tool was tested using data from Armenia, Peru and Uganda and subsequently completed with data from the remaining 21 countries. For the remaining gaps in data, relevant questions were sent to UNICEF child protection regional advisers in the seven

---

21 Examples for these SMQs (from the SP, 2014-2017 period) are: P6.b.1 Countries with functioning child protection systems offering preventive and response services. P6.c.1 Countries with legislation on child protection consistent with or better than international standards.

22 Answers to the SMQs are based on country reporting. They are not always adequately quality controlled or triangulated.

23 The set of 24 country case studies did not follow the same structure and were of variable quality, which made it difficult to extract the same information for each country. Some case studies included little information about UNICEF investments in child protection systems strengthening.

24 RAM reports and COARs vary greatly from country to country in terms of length/ conciseness and level of clarity/ analytical sharpness. Many do not report at outcome level but rather list activities, which meant there was considerable room for interpretation of results.

25 During this phase, references to civil registration and to child protection in emergencies were removed, since they were not considered direct contributions to strengthening national child protection systems as per the QCA model (Figure 1, above). Similarly, references to UNICEF’s contributions to reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child or the monitoring and reporting mechanism relating to Security Council Resolution 1612 were not considered as contributions to UNICEF’s investments in minimum standards and accountability mechanisms as per the QCA model.
regions, who then contacted the respective country offices to respond to the questions. The answers were added to the country worksheets to complete the data collection phase.

**Data analysis and triangulation**

The evaluation used a mix of standard data analysis methods:

- Descriptive and multivariate statistical analysis of survey data
- Content analysis of UNICEF and external documents
- Analysis of performance against the DAC criteria
- Content analysis of interview and focus group data
- Content and statistical analyses of data from corporate databases (expenditure and results reporting)
- Theory-based analysis of actual versus intended results and influencing factors, including from a gender, human rights, and equity perspective

Evidence was built up from case study data using the evaluation matrix as an organizational tool and aid to triangulation. The process of triangulation was critical for ensuring the validity of findings. Corroborating data were sought from the various lines of evidence to build up a set of confirmed findings, verifying that findings were supported by at least three data sources or methods. Where outlier data were encountered – that is, unique instances from a particular case, or findings from a particular line of evidence that were not corroborated through other research methods, their level of credibility and significance for the evaluation were assessed to determine the basis for their inclusion. In addition, when there was contradictory evidence, findings were nuanced to reflect both sides of the evidence.

The qualitative comparative analysis of the 24 countries cases followed standard protocol, i.e. a series of sequential steps, which can be repeated and iterated, creating a “dialogue between theory and data”:

1. The data were organized in a dataset of zeros and ones
2. The dataset was analysed using
   - Necessity analysis in R, with and without inclusion cuts;
   - Subset sufficiency analysis in R, with and without inclusion cuts;
   - Boolean minimizations for both positive and negative outcomes, in the following variants:
     - Complex solution;
     - Intermediate solution.
3. The findings were interpreted

For more details on data analysis and triangulation methods, including QCA, see Annex 8.
Stakeholder consultation and validation exercises

As a formative and learning-orientated endeavour as per ToR, the evaluation consulted with key stakeholders throughout the process. Key steps included:

Scoping and inception. The terms of reference for the evaluation, including the definition of the six elements of functioning child protection systems, and case study country selection were co-created with the Evaluation Advisory Group and regional child protection advisers.

National debriefing workshops and country reports. Toward the end of each of the six field missions, evaluation team members conducted a national debriefing workshop with UNICEF staff and key national stakeholders and informants. These offered an opportunity to present and validate preliminary findings and obtain feedback. Draft case study reports were sent to the six concerned UNICEF country offices for written feedback.

HQ-level stakeholder workshop on UNICEF’s core investments. A workshop was conducted to devise the matrix for analysing UNICEF’s contribution to the six intermediate outcomes (see Annex 2.2). The QCA “conditions” or UNICEF core investments as per Figure 1 were derived from this meeting.

QCA consultation with regional child protection advisers. Regional advisers contributed to the data collation and interpretation of the qualitative comparative analysis of 24 case studies.

Validation of recommendations at the Goal Area 3 network meeting. Regional child protection advisers and other key contributors to UNICEF’s Goal Area 3 (as per SP, 2018-2021) participated in a validation session to sharpen, validate and prioritize recommendations. Recommendations were further nuanced by the Evaluation Office in collaboration with the EAG.

2.4. Challenges and limitations

No impact-level analysis. By design (see evaluation ToR in Annex 2), the evaluation did not assess to what extent children were actually reached by the child protection systems supported by UNICEF. The evaluation stopped at the outcome level, i.e. capacities of systems to deliver services.

Data scarcity and low evaluability. The inception phase of the evaluation included a basic evaluability check, assessing whether CPSS has a clear and coherent logic, well-articulated

26 See acknowledgements for details of participating organizations. The exceptions were Côte d’Ivoire, where the final day of the field mission coincided with the Mouloud holiday and partners were unavailable for the planned workshop, and Lebanon, where the CO deemed it politically inopportune to meet with stakeholders due to ongoing funding cuts in the CP programme at the time.
indicators for success, and whether data requirements have been fulfilled. It became evident that evaluability was low across all dimensions. In particular, monitoring data on results at intermediate steps of the results chain was lacking, as was impact level data. As noted in the 2017 Annual Results Report on Child Protection, only 31 countries collected and published routine administrative data on violence, exploitation and abuse of children. In most countries, data on child protection needs and results are insufficient for advocacy, planning and management purposes. The evaluation worked with the best available data but recognizes quality and coverage issues.

**Results and expenditure reporting.** There were limitations associated with the UNICEF databases for results and expenditure reporting. The evaluation scope required financial data from two different programme cycles at country level, but because the two cycles used different budget lines based on different results frameworks, comparison of expenditures at country level over time was impossible. In addition, the databases use inconsistent headings for data from different countries. The results database, which includes information entered by COs, is not very user-friendly, inconsistent in terms of indicators and categories used and repetitive, making cross-country comparison difficult. Moreover, the two databases are not connected, which meant that it was impossible to link results to planned or actual expenditures.

**Attempts to mitigate data and evaluability challenges through QCA.** For the systematic cross-country analysis, conditions (UNICEF investments) were constructed based on actual UNICEF budget codes under the CPSS category. Questions under each of the main conditions were formulated on the basis of expenditure and activity codes. While this generated a reasonably robust data collection tool, the actual coding of expenditure data is not accurate or reliable enough to run calculations on how much UNICEF is spending in each category by country. The outcome data, meanwhile, were based on available SMQs, World Governance Indicators and additional questions. These include some highly relevant questions, while others are only proxies for systems-strengthening outcomes. While there were clear gaps in the data, all conditions used in the end were robust enough for the QCA: Several sensitivity tests were conducted, especially with uncertain values, and if a condition was not deemed robust, it was recalibrated or removed. In addition, the average outcome score for each country was vetted by stakeholders.

It should also be noted that the first iteration of the QCA did not include context indicators. These were added to the second round of analysis. Since QCA is an iterative method and is able to incorporate new evidence as it emerges, as well as test new models as new conditions are discovered to be relevant, this did not hamper validity of results.

**Assessment of country programmes.** In the absence of a theory of change or clear results framework for CPSS, the evaluation struggled to avoid judging programmes against standards that were not in place when the programmes were developed. To be comparable and useful for

---

the corporate exercise, country data collection had to be oriented to analysing the extent to which progress has been made towards the six key elements of a functioning child protection system captured in the conceptual framework above (Figure 1, see also Annex 7). However, country programmes were also analysed according to their own plans, objectives and intended results. A challenge was that some country operations had not, in the previous period, planned and allocated resources towards achieving one or several of the six CP system intermediate outcomes identified by the evaluation. In such cases, programme performance might be adequate in relation to their own plans, but is more limited in relation to what is the scope of this evaluation.

**Attribution of results to the CP systems-strengthening approach.** A closely related challenge concerns the danger of attributing all CP activity results in a given country to the systems-strengthening approach, even though some results might have been generated by standalone activities in the absence of a systems approach. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that the alternative would be “no CP systems strengthening,” because country approaches to CP would likely experience some development even without UNICEF inputs. The evaluation addressed this challenge by carefully assessing how changes occurred (or did not occur) in each country in relation to the intended pathways of change, and the extent to which UNICEF’s contribution could be verified. In addition, the inclusion of countries representing a broad range of characteristics and situations in the case study sample allowed the evaluation to note aspects that were similar across contexts which otherwise varied significantly. The evaluation was also highly attentive to context and the way that CPSS efforts have interacted with local circumstances to generate various degrees of progress towards CP objectives.

**Heavy reliance on UNICEF self-reporting.** As a learning-orientated exercise, the evaluation design was heavily geared towards stakeholder participation and analysis of internal data sources. The evaluation sought to avoid overreliance on UNICEF self-reporting in three ways (see section on data collection, above): First, an extensive literature was conducted including a wide range of external sources. Second, key informant interviews were conducted with some 282 external stakeholders at global, regional and country levels. Third, an online survey was administered to partners at the national level in the 24 case study countries.

**Additional challenges.** For the six field missions, the timeframe was limited to five to seven days, which in some cases did not allow comparative analysis of sub-national regions where UNICEF was present with those where other actors or no actors were present to support CPSS activities.
3. Country-Level Findings

3.1. Relevance and appropriateness of UNICEF interventions in child protection systems strengthening

Relevance refers to the extent to which UNICEF’s strategies and programmes are suited to the priorities and policies of rights-holders (children and communities) and duty-bearers (national governments and donors). Evidence presented in this chapter is strong, mainly based on an analytical desk review of published materials, online surveys with UNICEF COs and partners and key informant interviews.

Summary of key findings in response to evaluation question 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How relevant and appropriate are UNICEF country programme strategies and interventions for securing the right of children to be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• There is strong alignment with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, human rights instruments, SP, SDGs and national needs; CPSS has been operationalized differently in different countries because of context; alignment with country needs is usually high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are few examples of broad-based alliances with donors; UNICEF is largely unsuccessful in building resource partnerships: donors are mostly interested in single issues and in work at community level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engagement with rights-holders themselves tends to be weak.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finding 1: The approaches taken by the 24 country offices examined were found to be strongly aligned with UNICEF’s mandate, relevant human rights instruments and global priorities.

Country programming to support child protection systems strengthening was generally found to be informed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights instruments, UNICEF’s strategic plans, and – since 2015 – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite the scarcity of operational guidance on CPSS, there was a remarkable level of cohesion across the 24 country programmes in that they are usually rights-based, gender-responsive, and well anchored in SDG 16.2. All in all, the evaluation found that the objectives of the child protection systems-strengthening approach as formulated in 2008/2012 remain valid despite changing needs (comparing “relevance at design” with “relevance at evaluation”).

Finding 2: COs have gone to great lengths to ensure alignment of CPSS efforts to country needs. This is particularly the case for legal and regulatory reform. However, some government stakeholders perceive an unhealthy dominance by UNICEF in the area of child
protection systems strengthening. Investment in evidence generation on child protection is highly valued by national partners.

The evaluation found that in the 24 sample countries, programmes are generally well justified and aligned with national planning documents, including United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), and placed in the context of national development strategies. This includes specific policies, national action plans, and strategies targeting children in general and CP specifically (where these were made available to the evaluation team). In many cases, COs themselves have had significant input into these national action plans and strategies.

UNICEF staff perceptions are very positive overall with respect to alignment, but there are variations across different areas of CP systems work. One area consistently supported by COs is legal and regulatory reform, helping national governments align their constitutions and legal frameworks with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Survey responses show that UNICEF staff see substantial alignment between UNICEF and government objectives in this area; approximately 90 per cent of those surveyed regard CO efforts as either “very aligned” or “aligned” with government intentions.

**Figure 2: UNICEF staff perceive their country programmes to be generally well aligned with national priorities** *(Source: UNICEF CO survey)*

![Graph showing alignment of UNICEF's strategies and interventions with CPS objectives](chart.png)

Weaker areas of alignment concern setting and reinforcing minimum standards and oversight as well as social and child participation. Alignment is perceived to be weakest on consolidating

28 Desk and ‘desk plus remote’ case studies of Armenia, Moldova, Uganda, South Africa and Nigeria, among others.
human, financial and infrastructure resources for CP. As shown in Section 3.2 on effectiveness, these are the main areas where progress on system strengthening stalls at country level.

While UNICEF CP systems strengthening efforts are well aligned with country needs, remote and field interviews with key informants reveal that some government stakeholders perceive an unhealthy dominance by UNICEF in this area, with government and other partners treated as secondary actors in processes that concern them most. In a number of cases, government partners have questioned UNICEF’s approach to CPSS, seeing themselves as implementing UNICEF priorities rather than vice versa. This is particularly noticeable where UNICEF controls large amounts of funding for CPSS processes, leading government stakeholders to feel that they are “working for UNICEF”. External factors, such as the changing donor landscape, may also be at play. For example, Peru’s middle-income status has led to the withdrawal of donors, increasing NGO competition over limited funds and leaving UNICEF with reduced financial space for collaboration with such stakeholders.

One of UNICEF’s most relevant contributions to CPSS at all levels, as per key informant interviews (KII) and the partner survey, has been its investment in evidence generation on child protection, in particular the mappings and assessments of child protection systems carried out in 83 countries between 2010 and 2016. At CO level, mapping and assessment (M&A) exercises have provided important opportunities to build a common vision among partners, including governments, NGOs and donors, concerning what a CP system can look like and how all actors can contribute to creating and reinforcing it. A further contribution is in the use of participatory approaches to data analysis and planning, involving broad institutional participation of government, NGOs, and in some cases, donors.

Finding 3: There are few examples of broad-based alliances with donors around CPSS. UNICEF has been largely unsuccessful in building resource partnerships to support country needs in CPSS. Many donors are interested in single CP issues and in working at community rather than statutory systems level.

A major factor undermining the relevance of CPSS work is the tendency for donors and the NGOs they fund to circumvent government-led CP systems by creating single-issue, parallel CP service delivery channels. The success of CPSS work often depends on UNICEF’s ability to mobilize donors and other implementing agencies to support a common child protection agenda. Cases from the evaluation that stand out in this regard are Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Romania. In Zimbabwe, UNICEF built on long-standing partnerships around children affected by HIV/AIDS to strengthen the national child protection system. Investments focused not only on core child protection services, but also included large-scale support for social protection transfers. In Nigeria, UNICEF also built on existing partnerships with donors and government and used a series of mapping and assessments at state level led to mobilize support for greater investments in child protection systems. Romania is one of several countries in Eastern Europe where UNICEF has supported a care reform agenda over many years. With strong support from the EU and from UNICEF’s regional office in Geneva, the Romania CO has successfully
leveraged care reform and juvenile justice to push for a broader reform of the existing child protection system.

These cases highlight the potential of CPSS when all actors are collaborating around a common vision. However, in many countries, and at global level, UNICEF has not yet convinced donors to support this approach in a coordinated manner. A vast amount of donor funding continues to finance fragmented, issue-based projects and sub-systems defined by donor objectives rather than country needs.

**Finding 4: CP systems strengthening approaches utilise many of UNICEF’s comparative advantages.**

The evaluation found that UNICEF uses many of its comparative advantages when engaging in CP systems strengthening work, in particular with government. Notably, UNICEF capitalises on its ease of access to statutory systems and actors (by virtue of being an inter-governmental organization) and builds on the human rights based approach to programming championed by the organization for decades. Against the backdrop of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF’s eye to state accountability is put to good use in its CPSS approach. As one donor put it: “UNICEF should make CP systems strengthening more central to their mandate. While health and education are important sectors, the CP systems approach is really core to their mandate. This area should not remain as a cash-starved junior partner to the other sectors.”

**Finding 5: The extent to which CPSS addresses the actual needs of the most vulnerable rights-holders may be hampered by UNICEF’s focus on formal CP systems.**

As noted above, the focus of UNICEF’s CPSS approach primarily on government and state accountability (rather than community-based mechanisms) is overall well chosen. Yet, key informants in conflict-prone and least developed countries note that reaching the most vulnerable rights-holders may involve different strategies in countries characterised by weak governance and resource constraints. In particular, stakeholders favour investing in CP systems grown from the bottom up rather than “waiting for governments to invest in the high numbers of social workers required by western CP and welfare system models”, in the words of one respondent. This claim seems to be backed by some of the literature on CPSS in low income countries which emphasizes the importance of community ownership and inclusion and advocates for aligning formal and less formal sectors in CP system development, e.g. through a balance of top-down, bottom-up and “middle-out” approaches (Wessells 2015, p. 8).

Examples from Zimbabwe, Cote d’Ivoire, and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) demonstrate UNICEF’s recognition of the need to mobilize communities around CP where government cannot provide meaningful formal coverage. In DRC, in the absence of functioning government services, a ‘protective communities’ approach has emerged to address CP in areas where UNICEF and key partners can operate. In Zimbabwe, a cadre of community care workers trained in CP are linked to the state system through district social workers. In Cote d’Ivoire, animation communautaire, or community facilitation, around CP sees social work staff working
with communities to develop their own CP committees and plans, linking them, where necessary, to social welfare services.

However, it remains unclear in how far these actions are linked into or understood as systems-strengthening interventions. The evaluation identified only a handful of CP systems mappings and assessments (M&As) – for example from Sierra Leone and Uganda – documenting how community-based CP mechanisms function, and how they can effectively be strengthened. Most of the M&As carried out since 2011 acknowledge the existence of “less formal” or community-based institutions and structures, but do not consider these in any depth. Promising examples were identified – for example in Lebanon, Nigeria, and Peru – of UNICEF working with community actors in selected areas to develop models to link community mechanisms and formal protection systems in order to reaching the most vulnerable boys and girls.

3.2. Effectiveness of UNICEF programmes, including from a gender/human rights perspective

Effectiveness is a measure of the extent to which a UNICEF strategy or programmes attains its objectives at the outcome level (uptake or result of an output). The objectives at the outcome level referred to in this chapter are those of UNICEF’s strategic plans. As explained in Chapter 2 of this report, in the absence of a results framework specific to CPSS, the evaluation referred to the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1, which identifies six key elements crucial to a well-functioning child protection system. These six key elements were treated as ‘intermediate outcomes’ for the purposes of the evaluation, providing the basis for country-level assessment of performance. A customised scoring system has been developed and used to assess overall effectiveness of UNICEF’s CPSS programming, see section 3.2.3.

Data on programme effectiveness is mainly based on UNICEF self-reporting through the COARs/RAM and SMQs. Overall, data quality is considered medium-low despite some recent improvements (see chapter 4.3.2). One of the underlying problems is the low accuracy and comparability of partner and beneficiary data that forms the basis of UNICEF reporting, which is later aggregated at the global level. To bolster reliability, this chapter includes voices external to UNICEF (survey and interview data) as well as context data introduced through the QCA.

29 This analysis includes summative and formative elements. The summative elements relate back to SP, 2014-2017 where CPSS aimed to achieve “increased national capacity to provide access to child protection systems that prevent and respond to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect” and “strengthened political commitment, accountability and national capacity to legislate, plan and budget for scaling up interventions that prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation.” The formative elements relate to the current SP, 2018-2021 which describes the overall goal of child protection system strengthening as “Every child is protected from violence and exploitation” and the expected outcome as “Countries have strengthened child protection systems (for prevention and response services to address violence against children)”. 30 UNICEF largely relies on results data reported by its implementing partners in the field (i.e. national and local governments and civil society organizations/NGOs) with varying levels of capacity and quality assurance to collect, compile and verify these data.
Summary of key findings in response to evaluation questions 7 and 8

How effective are UNICEF country programmes, in terms of prevention and response, in achieving concrete results for protecting children (outcomes) through strengthened child protection systems?

- UNICEF has been more effective in countries where the context is favourable (e.g. better governance, national ownership and resourcing); i.e. ‘systems reform’ has been more successful than ‘system-building’ or ‘systems consolidation’.
- The major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of planned objectives were unrealistic planning (vis-à-vis CPSS as a long-term goal), lack of government commitment and funding, poor accountability mechanisms, ineffective donor support and UNICEF lobbying in this regard, poor coordination between statutory and community-based CP systems, weak data generation and knowledge management systems.

How successful has UNICEF been in initiating, supporting and advocating for systems reform at the country level? Where/how have funds been allocated? To what extent has UNICEF been able to take a leadership role in generating partnerships and in leveraging national government and partner resources?

- In middle-income countries, UNICEF been mostly agile and responsive in initiating, supporting and advocating for systems reform and in adjusting its planned results to changing contexts.
- Few or no funds have been directly allocated to CPSS in least-developed, fragile and humanitarian settings where investments have focused on CP ‘issues’.
- While there are good examples of positive results, the programmes have struggled to secure financing at the national and international levels to invest in CPSS.

3.2.1. Overview of CP systems success in the 24 case studies

Finding 6: The majority of the 24 countries have not shown significant success in strengthening CP systems. Functioning CP systems are more often found in upper middle-income countries than in low-income, fragile or humanitarian contexts.

As described in chapter 2.3. and Annex 6, data for the 24 case study countries were collected by CP system dimension: regulatory framework, governance, services, minimum standards, resources and participation. Data was based on the SMQ indicators and other qualitative outcome statements drawn from COAR/RAM reports and the 24 qualitative evaluation case and desk studies. Table 3 below shows which countries were deemed to have a ‘functioning CP system’ based on this data, i.e. the six dimensions of successful CP systems were found to be present in the country. The “overall score” (average) in the right-hand column of table 3 shows a number larger than 0.51 for these countries. Overall, 10 out of 24 countries were identified as having had some success at strengthening child protection systems. Four countries (Armenia,
Moldova, Romania and South Africa were assigned a number larger than 0.51 for each of the six systems dimensions. Another six countries (El Salvador, Fiji, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Zimbabwe) also received an average score of more than 0.51. The majority of the 24 countries however have not shown significant success in strengthening child protection systems.

Table 3: Child protection systems-strengthening outcome scores for the 24 case study countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Regulatory framework</th>
<th>Governance</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Minimum standards</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Overall score</th>
<th>Binary score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.Afghanistan</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Armenia</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Cote d'Ivoire</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.DRC</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.El Salvador</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.Ethiopia</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.Fiji</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.Guatemala</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.Lebanon</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.Moldova</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.Mongolia</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.Morocco</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.Myanmar</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.Nigeria</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.Pakistan</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.Peru</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.Romania</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.South Africa</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.Sri Lanka</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>unclear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To meet the requirements for crisp-set QCA (see chapter 2.3), countries’ scores needed to be rounded up or down to binary ratings, with countries receiving a 1 if the systems elements were found to be closer to ‘present’ or ‘achieved’ and a 0 if closer to ‘absent’ or ‘not achieved’. Seven countries with overall scores between 0.40 and 0.54 were considered “too close to call” because of low data quality and closeness to the mid-point. Out of the resulting list of 8 countries with better-functioning CPS (see “clear success” in table 4, below), Zimbabwe is the only low-income country.31

Table 4: Country classification based on binary scores (0s and 1s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clear success</th>
<th>Unclear middle</th>
<th>Clear lack of success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armenia, Fiji, Moldova, Mongolia, Romania, South Africa, Thailand, Zimbabwe</td>
<td>El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Morocco, Nigeria, Peru, Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Cote d’Ivoire, DRC, Lebanon, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sudan, Uganda, Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A closer look at the higher-performing countries shows that they are mostly middle-income countries with some forms of child protection systems that existed before UNICEF formally adopted32 a systems-strengthening approach to child protection: South Africa, Romania, Armenia, Mongolia and Zimbabwe. In these countries, UNICEF’s investments are often more narrowly focused on systems reform and on strengthening specific components of the child protection system.

UNICEF’s efforts to strengthen child protection systems in Eastern Europe and in Southern Africa had a number of common distinctive features: strong strategic leadership for child protection systems strengthening internally; an alignment of key child protection systems actors (government departments, donors, and implementing agencies) around a common strategy; and strong links between child protection and social protection, which addressed the poverty-related causes of child protection. In Eastern Europe, UNICEF focused on deinstitutionalization in the context of care reform and mobilised major funding and political support from the European

31 Zimbabwe is a special case, since it received $30 million for child protection systems strengthening between 2013 and 2017, plus an additional $50 million for social protection.

32 A system was in place in ex-Soviet countries, but the outcomes for the system were not positive. The monolithic use of institutional care was a clear example of a high performing yet harmful child protection system. Reforming those systems was the work of the last 15 years.
Union. In Southern Africa, UNICEF formed strong partnerships with PEPFAR, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other donors to address the situation of children affected by HIV/AIDS through an integrated approach to child and social protection.

Zimbabwe offers an instructive example of a low-income country that was successful in this area. Concerted efforts there led to the investment of $30 million for child protection and an additional $50 million for social protection between 2014 and 2017. In both Eastern Europe and in Southern Africa, UNICEF regional offices provided strong strategic leadership and brokered major partnerships and funding support.

At the other end of the spectrum are conflict-affected countries and low-income countries with very limited child protective services. In the absence of a functioning national child protection system, people rely mostly on community-based and kinship-based care and protection, or on child protection in emergencies services funded by international donors and implemented mostly by NGOs (Afghanistan, DRC, Sudan). In countries with little or no investment or achievements in child protection systems, UNICEF provides mostly life-saving child protection in emergencies services that are delivered through international or local NGOs.

Countries in the middle offer a mixed picture that reflects a wide range of contexts, competing priorities, challenges and capabilities. It is not easy to find clear common patterns and pathways towards systems strengthening for these countries, although it is possible to identify some smaller clusters (e.g. large federal states; Latin American countries; etc.). In these “middle countries”, UNICEF supports a wide range of child protection work, some related to systems strengthening, other work addressing more specific child protection issues, such as ending violence against children, child marriage or child labour. Each of these areas comes with its own theory of change and partnerships. Sometimes child protection priorities overlap, but they may also compete for donor funding and staff time. In some countries, specific child protection issues have been used as entry points for child protection systems strengthening. Examples include violence against children, de-institutionalization and justice reform in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, or services for migrant children in some European countries. The relatively low scores of some of these country cases can – to some extent – be explained by external factors such as low economic performance or governance indicators.

33 Until 2000, Zimbabwe had one of the most well-developed social and child protection systems in Africa, which ensured adequate child and family welfare interventions by the state. However, socio-economic challenges and political instability in the post-2000 era had a negative impact on these systems. The health and education systems struggled to cope with underfunding and the loss of skilled personnel, critical water and sanitation infrastructure fell into disrepair, and social and child protection systems became dysfunctional. When most African countries were registering progress in reducing maternal and child mortality, these were rising in Zimbabwe.
3.2.2. Qualitative assessment of UNICEF contribution by key element (intermediate outcome)

The following analyses UNICEF’s overall achievements against each of the six key elements/intermediate outcomes identified in the conceptual framework developed for the evaluation (Figure 1).

Intermediate Outcome 1: A robust legal and regulatory framework, as well as specific policies related to child protection

Finding 7: Across all regions, the evaluation documented positive performance by UNICEF in supporting legislative and policy development and reform. The QCA did not yield an explanatory model specifying which UNICEF investments contributed to this intermediate outcome.

Support to bringing national legal and regulatory frameworks in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international good practice, as well as supporting specific policies related to child protection, has been a strong area of UNICEF contribution. CO staff participating in the evaluation survey largely see this as one of their most effective areas of operation, and national stakeholders broadly confirmed that UNICEF’s advocacy and technical support has been indispensable. This impression was confirmed by the case study work, which found that nearly all countries in the evaluation sample have made some progress in this area to which UNICEF has contributed. Programme performance in this area was moderate to good.

In Mongolia, for example, UNICEF’s contribution was instrumental to the approval of a new law on child protection. Upstream efforts were complemented by progress at local level through the implementation of the child-friendly community strategy to influence local governance for children, remove key bottlenecks, and provide scalable models for integrated service delivery. In Morocco, UNICEF played an important role in sustaining national efforts to implement justice system reform and ongoing reform of social welfare institutions. In Pakistan, where provinces have primary responsibility for CP legislation, legislation and policy in this area is weak overall. However, UNICEF reported a notable advance in 2016, when the Balochistan Provincial Assembly enacted its Child Protection Bill following UNICEF technical assistance, the first of its kind in the country to be fully aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In a number of other cases reviewed, UNICEF has contributed to ensuring that national laws and policies are evidence-based, compliant with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, other human rights instruments and informed by international good practice.
Although much has been accomplished, challenges and gaps remain – particularly with regard to implementation and enforcement. Underlying systemic challenges continue to present obstacles in many countries. Decentralized systems, where national legislation and policies are not necessarily binding at regional or state level, pose a particular challenge, and in countries with plural legal systems or several levels of standard-setting and implementation, the situation is even more complicated. In Nigeria, mappings found that the federal Children’s Rights Act had often not been adopted into state law; where it had been, it had not always been published, or was not fully implemented. Lebanon’s context of legal pluralism, which gives religious communities a significant degree of autonomy from the national civil system in relation to family law, also presents a challenge for CP legislation.

Considerable demands are placed on UNICEF to provide capacity-building and technical support at sub-national levels. Ministries that are weak nationally tend to be even weaker at sub-national levels. Another issue at the sub-national level is linkage to traditional or customary social systems, which include elements of child protection. In many countries in Africa, customary law continues to be the main channel of justice. UNICEF has not yet invested significantly in documenting how customary law in various countries addresses CP issues, and how harmonization with national and sub-national norms might be achieved. Only in Uganda did the evaluation find detailed research and analysis in this area.

Intermediate Outcome 2: Effective governance structures, including coordination across government departments, between levels of decentralization and between formal and less formal actors

Finding 8: Programme performance in terms of supporting the relationships between CP system components and actors has been moderate. The QCA identified that working through partnerships and leveraging public resources were the most influential interventions, with support to minimum standards also making a contribution.

An overarching challenge for CPSS is that child protection does not correspond neatly with national government sectors in the way that other programme areas such as health or education do. Child protection systems are inter-sectoral, and responsibilities cut across many different ministries. Hence, CPSS involves both horizontal coordination (between ministries and government functions) and vertical coordination (across tiers from national to local). In this context, in many of the sample countries, achievements in legislative and policy reform (see above) have not been adequately reflected in strengthened governance and coordination structures.

34 General Comment No. 13 (2011) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, CRC/C/GC/13 of April 18, 2011, section 40.
In many countries, UNICEF COs find themselves working with lead ministries (sometimes more than one) that are among the weakest in terms of funding, internal capacity, convening power, and influence. In some cases, there is no clear lead ministry on CP; in others, multiple ministries have related or overlapping mandates. By default, UNICEF often finds itself taking the lead on CPSS. This results in very limited ownership of CP system strategies and targets across sectors and limits opportunities for leveraging of CP resources from other sectors, such as the social protection, education and health sectors. This situation explains much of the observed weakness and slow progress in CPSS. In addition, the evaluation found internal coordination gaps between UNICEF CP sections and other UNICEF sections in many countries, as well as gaps in access and advocacy with other government ministries and with the offices of heads of state. In practice, leveraging resources often stops at ‘making the investment case’ and does not include hands-on work to leverage funds from the Ministry of Finance. The health sector in particular is rarely well integrated into CP systems work, and UNICEF CP sections often have limited contact with their health counterparts.

Yet UNICEF can play an important role as a convener across different sectors and levels of government, e.g. setting up and supporting national CP coordination structures such as inter-ministerial committees. There are a number of positive examples of it doing so. In Fiji, an inter-agency protocol on CP was endorsed by the Office of the Solicitor General and signed by the Ministries of Education; Health; Labour; Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; and the national police. In Nigeria, a UNICEF-supported survey on violence against children (VAC) in 2014 led to the development of inter-sectoral priority actions to prevent and respond to VAC by a high-level coordination body comprised of government ministries and agencies, civil society, and faith-based organizations. This high level of political commitment has also brought new donors, including USAID, on board, and helped elevate the issue beyond a single ministry.

The results of technical support, leveraging and partnerships to support incorporating systems strengthening interventions within ‘issue-driven’ or non-CP coordination bodies has been mixed. For example, UNICEF has sometimes sought to improve CP systems by working through ministries with a mandate in social policy or employment. However, this strategy risks becoming a ‘sectoral approach’, and contact primarily with just one ministry can be a limiting factor. A 2014 independent evaluation in Armenia showed that the emphasis on social protection reform did not strengthen the CP system already in place, but rather led to an assumed transfer of CP responsibility to the social protection sector, raising concerns about rights-holders without access to social protection who nonetheless need CP services.

**Justice for children as a major entry point and platform for CP systems strengthening.** In most of the countries reviewed, UNICEF has successfully drawn the justice sector into the CP system through new approaches to child-friendly justice and stronger coordination between police, judiciary, prosecutors, and CP case management systems. This is confirmed by UNICEF SMQ data, which show that 65 per cent of UNICEF CO staff consider that the country in which they work now uses child-friendly procedures and approaches for dealing with justice for children. In Sudan, Uganda, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Cote d’Ivoire, and Thailand there have
been significant improvements in linking justice and law enforcement sectors as part of a broader CP system. In Sri Lanka, UNICEF advocated with the Ministry of Justice to institutionalize CP training for newly-appointed junior magistrates, and partnered with the Ministry in supporting the Office of the Attorney General to develop an innovative web-based case management system to track child abuse cases, identify bottlenecks, and analyse the time spent in processing a case.

Indeed, some of UNICEF’s most successful CPSS work at country level addresses the challenge of inter-sectoral coordination through the development of integrated case management systems (CMS). This work was found to be particularly strong in ESAR, where the legacy of HIV/AIDS has generated public demand for assistance to girls and boys affected by HIV/AIDS. Programme performance has been good in this area in countries such as Uganda, South Africa, and Zambia. However, the extent to which CMS can be brought to scale is largely dependent on donor or government financing. In Zimbabwe, this required sustained support from pooled funds from a number of donor countries. These additional resources were eventually cut by donors, and UNICEF reduced its financial support to focus on fewer regions.

Since the CP system is usually largely decentralized, CMS are often implemented through pilot or demonstration schemes, intended for scale-up once found successful. In a demonstration project in Thailand, referral protocols were put in place, records were kept for tracking individual cases, and committees at sub-district level were strengthened to provide initial support. While the QCA performed as part of this evaluation suggests a link, further research is needed to detail how well CMS models support coordination across government departments, between levels of decentralization and between formal and less formal actors (where the latter have access) and thus serve to holistically address the protection needs of children.

A specific challenge hampering UNICEF’s effectiveness in contributing to CP systems governance regards vertical coordination – that is, ensuring lines of action and reporting to operationalize national legislation and policy at the sub-national and local levels. In the view of several UNICEF partners and key informants, UNICEF works at the government policy and framework level has tended to leave out the roles of NGOs, communities, families, and other less formal actors. These actors are therefore not included in governance mechanisms. However, in the West and Central Africa region (WCAR), UNICEF reports a growing trend for policies to fully or partially recognize different roles beyond central government and civil society to include families, communities and children in the CP system. Even so, recognition of the roles of different actors often falls short of clearly defining and supporting their functions and relationships and ensuring effective participation in coordination bodies.
Intermediate Outcome 3: A continuum of services spanning prevention and response

Finding 9: UNICEF has made solid contributions in most countries to establishing or strengthening prevention and response services. However, these rarely add up to functioning service delivery systems. Core interventions associated with success in services are policy dialogue/advocacy, capacity-building and coordination/partnerships.

A well-functioning CP system must incorporate a continuum of preventive, early intervention, and response services (integrated with legal, education, health and welfare services), including a process of care that includes identification, referral, follow-up and response. A major bottleneck confirmed by the evaluation is the inability of most countries reviewed to reach down to community level to provide effective prevention and response services where child rights violations actually occur. Universal coverage in services to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect is a weak area for systems strengthening, mainly because these services require funds, infrastructure, and human resources that have yet to be made available on a scale to permit national coverage – meaning services to all children in all parts of the country. According to UNICEF’s 2017 Annual Results Report on Child Protection, at least 50 countries (32 per cent of reporting countries) reported “functioning” child protection systems offering preventive and response services, a 32 per cent increase since 2014. The evaluation could not verify this assertion.

Finding 10: Overall, the evaluation did not find a clear UNICEF approach to prevention within CPSS. There was a tendency to focus on specific government services for children who are deemed “at risk” (secondary prevention).

“Prevention” can include a wide range of services, such as social protection; education, including early childhood education; routine health consultations; home visits by a nurse; parenting classes and programmes to change attitudes on different risk factors for children, including violence against children, early marriage, child labour and other issues. Social norms and behaviour-change programming, often treated as outside or parallel to a CPSS approach, can also be useful starting points for prevention services. However, in order for these services to offer genuine entry points for prevention, service providers must be appropriately linked to child welfare authorities and understand their role in identifying signs of risk. The evaluation found that the countries with the strongest child protection systems generally also have strong social protection systems to address some of the poverty-related vulnerabilities that contribute to the exploitation and neglect of children. In many other countries, preventive systems are weak and under-performing. Even where potentially preventive services exist, they are not adequately linked with the child protection system. The evaluation noted that UNICEF COs do not have a common approach to linking preventive interventions and CP systems.

A number of examples were identified of UNICEF contributing to preventive services for child protection, broadly falling into the areas of policy dialogue/advocacy, capacity-building and coordination/partnerships:
Policy dialogue/advocacy:

- **Evidence generation.** In Fiji, a joint UNICEF Pacific/United Nations Population Fund publication, “Harmful Connections”, was launched in May 2015. The publication has proven to be a useful tool for raising government awareness on violence against children and women and triggering prevention programming.

Capacity-building for children and families:

- **Parenting classes and family support centres.** These have been used in many countries to promote better parenting practices, including discouraging the use of corporal punishment. In Guatemala, UNICEF helped develop guidebooks for parents within the Educating in the Family programme, which assists 3,000 caregivers for child victims of violence.

- **Peer-to-peer approaches.** The development of youth volunteer cadres, including among those affected by and living with HIV/AIDS, has been an effective UNICEF contribution to preventative approaches in the CP system in several settings.

Cross-sectoral coordination/partnerships:

- **Sensitization and monitoring campaigns with employers.** In Cote d’Ivoire, child labour is a persistent issue within the cocoa industry and in other sectors. With UNICEF support, both government and NGOs have created sensitization campaigns, spot checks, and monitoring activities that may deter some employers from taking on child workers. However, no systematic longitudinal data on the effectiveness of these strategies has yet been collected, and child labour has tended to be addressed in isolation, rather than integrated into a CP system.

- **Establishing safer schools.** In several countries reviewed, with UNICEF support, national education ministries are going beyond banning corporal punishment and violence at school to understand the school as a key actor within the CP system. This allows schools to contribute significantly to improved child protection at the local level.

Finding 11: UNICEF support has led to improvements in response services (delivery structures and capacities) as part of CP systems. The road to success can include UNICEF providing financial resources, or leveraging public resources.

Key examples from UNICEF self-reporting, corroborated by partners, include:

- **Alternative care arrangements.** While often a slow process, UNICEF has invested in many countries in creating policies, standards, and models of alternative care for children at risk of CP violations, such as foster care systems and group home situations. Such efforts are showing results in the form of reduced institutionalization of children in several countries.

- **Improved processes (standard operating procedures, referral mechanisms), including at the community level.** While many community-based services exist, they
are often poorly integrated into an overall system. Referral pathways and procedures are not always clearly understood, and feedback loops between service organizations and CP authorities are often lacking. Process improvement in this regard is a significant line of effort for UNICEF in many countries, though a lack of resources limits the approach in some countries to pilot or demonstration models, such as in Lebanon. UNICEF Côte d’Ivoire has had some success in addressing critical gaps in CP standard-setting for specialized CP services, judiciary services, family- and institution-based alternative care. Although these standard operating procedures (SOPs) are not yet fully operationalized in much of the country, the existence of standards is an important step toward future effectiveness and accountability of service providers. In Zimbabwe, UNICEF has been effective in supporting the government to adopt a national case management system, as well as the National Social Protection Policy Framework.

- **Capacity development for CP professionals and community-based leaders.** UNICEF has been active in a growing number of countries in strengthening the capacities of frontline personnel by providing training, reporting channels, and clear operational guidelines, often in partnership with local NGOs. Two particularly interesting examples were found in Afghanistan, where UNICEF collaborated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs to mobilize religious leaders to work as agents of change in child rights and child protection. In addition, UNICEF successfully mobilized community leaders, teachers, and other local actors through community dialogues, which proved to be a powerful tool for changing harmful social norms and generating support for child protection. Immediate results were reported, including on prevention of child marriages.

- **The QCA underlined the importance of community-based child protection for countries such as Mongolia, Fiji, Moldova, El Salvador, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Zimbabwe to achieve improvements in response services.**

The QCA demonstrated that leveraging public financial resources was a stronger contribution than direct financial support and should remain UNICEF’s method of choice. In countries with less developed CP systems, however, direct financial support for services was sometimes effective: In two countries, financial support directly from UNICEF was related to the programme achieving the intended intermediate outcome.

**Finding 12:** There is good attention to not only achieving results for children, but also achieving them in a human rights-, gender- and equity-responsive fashion. However, reaching the most vulnerable children through UNICEF’s work appears to remain a challenge.

**Key achievements include:**

- **Child-friendly policing and justice services.** Significant improvements have been identified in the development of child-friendly policing and justice in many countries.

- **Child helplines.** In many countries, free, anonymous call-in services known as “child lines” have revolutionized access by children and communities to CP interventions and
response services. However, in some cases, the upsurge in reporting has outpaced the capacity of CP authorities to effectively address and manage cases, and use by the most disempowered children is limited.

Key challenges include:

- **Rural/urban and other regional services.** In many countries reviewed, including Myanmar, Sudan, Cote d’Ivoire, Uganda, Nigeria, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, there are enormous imbalances between the services of the CP system in different regions of the country.

- **Balancing demand against supply in prevention and response services.** Experience in many countries demonstrates the need to carefully balance demand for and supply of CP services if the system is to be seen as credible and reliable. One place where this has been achieved is Fiji, where a child helpline launched with UNICEF assistance received 6,704 calls within its first ten months of operation. To date, the Department of Social Welfare has been able to meet the additional demand for support by adding helpline operators.

- **Strengthening community-based structures.** Clarity on the role and functional competencies of community-based volunteers within the CP systems is often lacking. As noted, in many countries, volunteers are the main resource available at community level to help in prevention of and response to abuse of vulnerable children. Emphasis on these volunteers is sometimes underpinned by the suggestion that a focus on trained social workers is an internationally-driven approach that is not necessarily appropriate to the local context. For example, Thailand is said to have approximately a million volunteers, but very few trained social workers. Volunteers met by the evaluation team in that country expressed willingness to do more, but also felt ill-equipped to deal with more complex cases such as child abuse.

Intermediate Outcome 4: Minimum standards and oversight (information, monitoring and accountability mechanisms)

**Finding 13:** UNICEF has helped to introduce a range of data-collection and information management systems to track enforcement of standards and handling of individual CP cases. These can represent cost-effective approaches to ensure data are fed into decision-making and oversight functions. However, the extent to which specific countries use this information to enhance governmental oversight for child protection varies, and overall tends to be low.

Over the period under review, COs have supported a range of successful initiatives to support governments in establishing clear accountability and oversight systems for child protection. On one end of the spectrum, these included independent structures or mechanisms (creation of national ombudspersons and human rights/child rights tribunals). For example, in Morocco, UNICEF supported the role of the National Human Rights Council, paving the way for
independent monitoring of child rights and for supporting the process of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the other end of the spectrum, UNICEF supported government-run supervision and quality control mechanisms for child protection systems (inspection units, management information systems, quality assurance systems). The distinction between the two – independent human rights structures and oversight structures for child protection systems specifically – is not clear in UNICEF’s monitoring framework. Countries thus report against both tiers with, in the view of this evaluation, a tendency to inflate their actions and achievements in this area of work.

In principle however, key informant interviews and the UNICEF and partner surveys confirmed that UNICEF investments in the area of quality assurance and oversight are highly appreciated. Information management systems in particular have generated valuable information and led to common understandings of roles and responsibilities for systems actors as well as enhanced opportunities for accountability. In Lebanon, the government agreed that the lack of a centralized child protection information system led to weak reporting and accountability. In response, key ministries developed a national child protection information management system (CPIMS), for which UNICEF provided technical and advisory support. A key limitation is that the system has not been designed to include, even at a later stage, interventions conducted by local NGOs, faith-based organizations and other civil society actors.

Using Primero as found to be a cost-effective approach to ensuring viable and current data is collected about CP cases on a regular basis, to feed into decision-making and oversight functions. Primero is an open source, browser-based application that supports protection programmes by providing secure case management, family tracing, and incident monitoring capabilities. In recognition of these and other strengths, Primero has recently been selected by UNICEF as one of four organizational programming innovations to receive catalytic funding to go to scale. Box 1 below shows how UNICEF is using a policy dialogue/advocacy and coordination/partnership approach to contribute to success. The strength of this pathway to achieving results in the area of minimum standards and oversight was confirmed by the QCA.

Box 1: Primero in Lebanon

(Source: CPIMS+/Primero Implementation Plan - Lebanon system roll-out, 2017)

- The information management system will be implemented in line with the national Standard Operating Procedures for the Protection of Juveniles in Lebanon as well as negotiated inter-agency information-sharing protocols.
- CPIMS+/Primero is envisioned to be the central child protection case management data repository. A single web-accessible instance (with all provisions for data durability) will be hosted by UNICEF and accessible to all partners.
- This implementation will involve roll-out of Primero features developed for child protection case management in Lebanon, training (of case workers, service providers, managers, and a system administrator), the procurement of necessary infrastructure and equipment, and the provision of first-tier support, coordinated by UNICEF.
From a broader perspective, UNICEF is investing in data and evidence for child protection systems in many ways, including in terms of methodology and use. In Mongolia, for example, UNICEF made evidence generation on equity and children a priority. As a result, the National Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (N-MODA) set a baseline for monitoring government efforts to target child inequalities. A costing study of essential CP services was also provided to the government to ensure that the approved laws could be adequately financed. In the same year, children’s statistics were incorporated into the monitoring frameworks of the cabinet secretariat.

**Intermediate Outcome 5: Human, financial and infrastructure resources**

**Finding 14:** Many COs have been effective in supporting or implementing training programmes, both of the social service workforce and across sectors (police, magistrates, educators), to increase focus on their roles within the CP system. The QCA identified standard-setting/quality control and coordination/partnerships approaches as the most successful intervention strategies.

Data from the two evaluation surveys point to a lack of human and financial resources as the main obstacle to CPSS at the national level. Governments show commitment, but do not allocate resources for implementation. The requisite social service workforce is often lacking, and despite efforts by UNICEF and partners to reinforce those human resources that are available through training and infrastructure (e.g. investments in mobility, computers, cell phones and equipment), the resources available in most countries in the sample have been inadequate. Partners in several countries have expressed concern that the process of strengthening the social service workforce has stalled.

Outside of capitals and large cities, government and NGO social welfare personnel often lack the skills and financial resources to do their jobs. Lack of technical expertise at different levels was noted in Peru, Nigeria, Uganda, and Cote d’Ivoire, where UNICEF supported a mix of programmes ranging from in-service training for parapsychologists to supporting the drafting of operational guidance to legislation which specifies the roles and minimum qualifications of social services personnel. In Sudan, as in many other countries, a major issue is the wide gap in social worker coverage between rural and urban areas. Many COs now recognize that, given high levels of staff turnover in relevant sectors, the most sustainable approach may be to imbed training on CP systems, roles and responsibilities within professional training curricula linked to each sector (police academies, job description development for the ministries of justice/interior, etc.). This has been achieved to varying extents in Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Sudan, South Africa, Cote d’Ivoire, and Thailand.

Community volunteers often serve as the first line of response, often in tandem with community-based CP mechanisms. To be effective, however, community CP workers and leaders need to be trained in functional competencies and provided with infrastructure, equipment, mobility and
communications, and they must be effectively networked with government (or government and NGO) social workers who are legally accountable for CP prevention and response services. Positive examples of such systems, supported by UNICEF, were found in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Thailand, and Sudan. In some countries, community cadres also do much of the advocacy work in raising awareness and working to change social norms. In Ethiopia, for example, local volunteer para social workers are the key interlocutors trying to persuade families to eliminate early marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting.

Finding 15: There has been limited success to date in UNICEF programming to support government budgeting for CPSS. Insufficient capacity at CO level is one factor explaining this finding.

Identifying fiscal space and ensuring existing allocations within the national budget are well utilized requires specific skills and leadership on the part of UNICEF in order to understand and influence public financing processes in favour of CP systems. In general, capacities and focus are insufficient at CO level. Although the 2017 Annual Results Report for Child Protection mentions that UNICEF is increasingly scaling up efforts to support government budgeting for CPSS,\(^{36}\) overall, the evaluation finds that there has been limited results to date in this area.

As shown in Figure 3, while UNICEF CO staff feel they are effective in influencing national governments to engage in the CP systems approach, they report less success in catalysing financial contributions to CP systems. The lack of consistent funding commitments by governments and donors jeopardizes progress towards a functional CP system and effective protection for children.

COs in several countries reviewed have been active in strengthening government financial performance for CP systems in a number of areas. For example, UNICEF Mongolia successfully collaborated with the Ministry of Finance and other ministries to improve planning and budgeting ability for inclusive social policies and interventions to ensure sufficient allocation of resources to children, especially the most vulnerable. In many countries across all regions, mapping and assessment exercises have included costing of proposals for strengthening the CP system. This has provided vital information for governments regarding what is required in terms of financial investment in the system. In addition, financial benchmarking has been rolled out in Indonesia, Cote d’Ivoire, and Afghanistan, to enable comparisons between countries and longitudinal analysis to determine whether governments are increasing their public expenditures for CP.

Figure 3: UNICEF staff perceive that government engagement in CPSS is not yet matched by financial contributions

With regard to donor commitment, the evaluation identified only a few countries where UNICEF has successfully advocated for donor support at national level for a coherent approach to systems strengthening. A salient case is **Zimbabwe**, where UNICEF has been highly successful in mobilizing and leveraging donor funding for overall systems strengthening. In that country, a multi-donor Child Protection Fund was created to support comprehensive programme design around systems strengthening, which has shown effective results. Such cases show that donors can work with UNICEF and national governments on a coherent strategy that allows resources to be used to support components of the system in a harmonized manner.

**Intermediate Outcome 6: Social participation, including respect for children’s own views, and an aware and supportive public**

'Social participation' is an umbrella term created for the purposes of this evaluation. It includes children’s right to be heard and express their own views, as well as the existence of institutions and communities that respect these rights and ensure they are being implemented in practice.

**Finding 16: UNICEF has not been systematic in supporting social participation as part of CPSS efforts. The QCA was not able to produce an explanatory model specifying which UNICEF investments contributed to the intermediate outcome of “social participation”**.

In a number of the case study countries, such as **Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Cote d’Ivoire**, it is widely acknowledged that a crucial first step in reaching the hard to reach is to raise awareness at community level on issues of child rights and protection. UNICEF supports community sensitization via schools, CP committees, volunteer CP workers, media campaigns, families, children, customary and religious leaders, and other avenues. In addition, UNICEF supports free child helplines in many countries to make reporting child rights abuses easier. In several countries, stakeholders noted that timely response to cases flagged via the child helpline in hard-
to reach areas was a challenge. This was reportedly beyond the capacity of government social workers and would have required additional resources – vehicle and fuel for example – to respond. It should be noted that community sensitization and child helplines are usually not part of the CPSS portfolio in UNICEF COs (but pertain to the social norms portfolio), despite a 2015 corporate evaluation recommending greater cohesion.37

When it comes to the CPSS portfolio, the evaluation encountered few cases in which grassroots engagement practices – of children, communities, families and peers – around CP systems have been documented, and none where a range of social actors, other than NGOs, have been included in the development or design of child protection systems and strategies. Despite children’s participation being a core principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Comment 14 specifies that the extent of participation should be commensurate with evolving capacities and age), the evaluation found little evidence of governments creating space for child and adolescent engagement in child protection committees or other statutory bodies that are part of child protection systems, nor of UNICEF advocating for such space.

‘Social participation’ as an intermediate outcome has not been conceptualized with the same degree of clarity as other child protection systems elements. The difficulties in deriving an explanatory model for social participation through the QCA can be attributed to this lack of precision. However, the QCA underlined the importance of community-based child protection for countries such as Mongolia, Fiji, Moldova, El Salvador, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe to achieve a successful CPS outcome (a functioning system) overall.

Finding 17: To date, UNICEF has failed to articulate the role children should play in their own protection, as well as the ways in which girls and boys, communities and families should be included in CP systems.

The evaluation found that UNICEF has yet to bring conceptual clarity to the ways in which (a) children should be included in the operation of CP systems as a whole, and (b) the roles played by communities, families and peers in promoting protective social practices and children’s empowerment could be linked up with CPSS efforts.

In all countries examined, UNICEF works with governments to ensure that national legislation is in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes articles related to children’s rights to expression, access to information, and to form and join associations. In several of the countries examined, including Guatemala, Pakistan, Peru and Lebanon, UNICEF supported initiatives to ensure children are able to express their views in judicial and administrative hearings; that children have access to complaints and reporting mechanisms; and, to a lesser degree, that children are members of community protection committees and other bodies related to child protection. Again, these initiatives are not necessarily seen by

UNICEF staff and partners as part of CPSS. A small but vocal number of key informants suggested articulating children’s civil rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as integral parts of child protection systems. In their view, this could help UNICEF resolve the ‘social participation’ black box and help demonstrate tangible results while keeping a stronger focus on inclusion, including in terms of gender, disability and migration status.

Cross-cutting Issues: Equity, Gender, Disabilities, Human Rights Based Approach to Programming

Summary of key findings in response to evaluation question 10

To what extent do national programmes supported by UNICEF related to CPSS: a) engage with boys and girls of different ages, especially those considered particularly vulnerable, marginalized and from minority groups and b) take into account and respond to their specific protection related needs?

- Many programme documents show adequate attention to gender and the evolving capacities and age of children. Most response services target the most vulnerable boys and girls while prevention and early intervention services have a wider focus. However, gender analysis on population-level data, needs assessments and impact measurement are scarce.
- Efforts to strengthen the legislative framework for CP tend to be grounded in rights-based and gender-responsive approaches. This is not always the case for other UNICEF investments promoting duty-bearers’ capacities such as setting minimum standards and oversight. There were good synergies (and some competition) between GBV and CPSS programming. Children and adolescents with disabilities continue to be an overlooked population.

Finding 18: National programmes supported by UNICEF related to CPSS engage with boys and girls of different ages, especially those considered particularly vulnerable, marginalized and from minority groups.

CPS by definition cater to the most vulnerable children in society. UNICEF’s and partners’ focus has been on response services and mechanisms for children who are separated from their families, live in institutions, children who have been exploited and have been victims of violence. This tends to include the most vulnerable children of both sexes and of different ages. Many programme documents reviewed for this evaluation show adequate attention to gender and evolving capacities and age in programme design. A challenge in most countries examined have been population data and needs assessments, making it hard for UNICEF and partners to respond to specific protection related needs. In terms of prevention and early intervention related to child abuse, neglect and maltreatment, broader populations of boys and girls are targeted. These interventions are embedded in a network of allied health, education and social protection systems, especially in middle-income countries.
However, according to the country office survey administered as part of this evaluation, less than 50 percent of respondents consider that CP systems-strengthening efforts address the needs of particularly vulnerable children.

Finding 19: Efforts to strengthen the legislative framework for CP tend to be grounded in rights-based and gender-responsive approaches. There were good synergies (and some competition) between GBV and CPSS programming. Children with disabilities are sometimes overlooked and gender analysis could be strengthened, e.g. for case management data.

Human Rights Based Approach to Programming. UNICEF’s rights-based approach intends to support children in exercising their rights, as well as supporting and promoting duty-bearers’ capacities to fulfill those rights. Evidence from the countries reviewed for this evaluation indicates that all country programme documents report on alignment with the CRC. However, the nexus between the child rights approach and CP systems-strengthening is usually not made explicit. While efforts to strengthen the legislative framework for CP tend to be couched in rights-based language, this is not the case for other areas that promote duty-bearers’ capacities such as setting minimum standards and oversight. As noted above, ‘social participation’ as an element of systems-strengthening is ill-defined and not sufficiently linked to children’s civil rights.

Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Most of the country programmes reviewed show adequate attention to gender in programme design. Gender analysis could be strengthened in terms of the gendered distribution of power and resources, including in budgets, staffing and prioritization of intervention areas. The interactions between gender and other markers (disability, ethnicity, etc.) could be explored further, including in UNICEF-supported guidance on case management.

UNICEF’s work to implement the Gender Action Plan and CP programming are tightly linked. Notably, over the period 2014-2017, the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) among children was a key institutional priority. CP sections in some country offices included teams that worked exclusively on eliminating GBV or gender-based violence in emergencies (GBViE). UNICEF reported contributing to the adoption of legislation related to domestic violence and violence against women and children in many countries. However, this did not necessarily form part of a broader CPSS framework. Indeed, in some countries such as Peru, key informants suggested that government emphasis on violence against women may have diverted funds and attention away from the issue of violence against children. Conversely, in Lebanon, GBV was addressed in the context of the Syria crisis response and also became a priority item on the national child protection agenda – a result which, key informants stressed, would not have been achieved without gender accountabilities. In other countries, too, such as Guatemala, there were good synergies between GBV and CPSS, particularly in terms of legislative and policy reforms, response services and prevention. Preventive action included interventions to reduce the risk of GBV among at-risk populations, e.g. through parenting programmes, and interventions to raise awareness and change the social norms that underlie gender-based
violence against children. Targeted and mainstreamed gender efforts were seen as complementary, with both intended to contribute directly to systems-strengthening efforts.

Key areas where CPSS programming falls short from meeting corporate standards for gender-responsiveness are: monitoring and data disaggregation (see section 4.1.2), gender analysis of case management data and assessment of the differential benefits (impact) received through CPSS by different groups of children (see also limitations, section 2.4) and limited stakeholder engagement, including the participation of girls and boys (see discussion on intermediate outcome 6, above).

**Equity** - reaching the poorest and most deprived children. As will be discussed in section 3.3., UNICEF and national governments face immense challenges in bringing national CP policies and programmes to scale and ensuring national coverage. In many countries, resource limitations have led UNICEF and national partners to target a limited number of areas, often larger urban centres and pilot communities or regions, in hopes of developing models that can later be brought to scale. However, in the short- and medium term, this can exacerbate rather than reduce inequities in access to CP services and support, since capital cities and larger urban agglomerations often already possess stronger CP services and networks. Urban conditions make it easier for organizations like UNICEF, government, and NGOs to work together and demonstrate results, but an equity approach would require more investment in areas that lack infrastructure and social workers and other professionals, since this is where the most deprived and hard-to-reach children live.

**Children living with disabilities.** UNICEF’s Annual Report on Child Protection 2017 reported that 45 COs carry out CP interventions in support of children with disabilities, doubling the number from 2016. Nevertheless, the evaluation found limited evidence of this work as it relates to systems strengthening. An exception was Zimbabwe, where an NGO partner worked with government social workers to provide specialized services for children with disabilities and ensure their integration into the national case management system. In a number of countries reviewed, mostly in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, UNICEF’s work on improving standards for residential care and alternatives to institutional care is likely to have benefited children with disabilities, but COs have not yet documented the extent of these benefits. Overall, evidence suggests that children and adolescents with disabilities continue to be a largely overlooked population, especially in countries where resources devoted to CP systems are limited.

**Children on the Move.** Evidence from country studies and the desk review suggests that for CPSS to adequately address violence against children on the move, a cross border perspective is needed: UNICEF ROs, in collaboration with governments, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other partners need to be engaged and resourced to first of all generate evidence on population movements, and secondly, document CPSS models that work for children in different contexts. Work with regional governance institutions and national governments is also important.

---

to develop appropriate policies and legislation. So far, with the support of UNICEF, foster-care arrangements and alternatives to detention were extended to refugee and migrant children in some countries, capacity on best interest determination was built in others, and commitment was built among the social welfare workforce and probation officers to accept refugee and migrant children into their national case management systems. However, little is known as to the effectiveness of this fairly recent work that is yet to be evaluated.

Internally, UNICEF human and financial resources are essential to equip COs with the tools, staff, and monitoring frameworks to ensure that CPSS planning and programming adequately consider cross-cutting issues.

3.2.3. Assessment of specific UNICEF investments as contributors to success

Summary of key findings in response to the QCA question

Which combinations of UNICEF investments have contributed to success in systems strengthening within a set of 24 countries?

- The UNICEF interventions that made the strongest contributions to strengthening national child protection systems were: capacity-building/social workforce strengthening, leveraging public resources, evidence and research, and policy dialogue and advocacy.

Finding 20: Four UNICEF interventions made particularly strong contributions to strengthening national child protection systems. These were: capacity-building/social workforce strengthening, leveraging public resources, evidence and research, and policy dialogue and advocacy. Supporting minimum standards and quality control on the one hand, and case management and coordination on the other, also made solid contributions.

To assess the contribution UNICEF interventions have made to strengthening child protection systems, the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) looked at a set of 10 interventions. These were: policy dialogue and advocacy, evidence and research, capacity building, workforce strengthening, coordination and partnerships, case management, financial support for services and infrastructure, leveraging public resources, service delivery, minimum standards and quality control mechanisms, children’s participation, and community-based protection (see figure 1 and Annex 6). The analysis considered those interventions both separately and as part of ‘packages’ that include several interventions. Of these, four kinds of investments were found to be particularly effective, and two others also made solid contributions to success.

A few qualifications are important to bear in mind here. First, ‘success’ for the purposes of this analysis meant that the six dimensions of functioning CP systems discussed in the previous section were found to be present in the country (i.e. that a country received a binary score of ‘1’ in Table 3). Second, what is presented below are the results of the second iteration of the
qualitative comparative analysis which considered only the 17 most conclusive and ‘clear-cut’ countries, leaving out the “unclear middle” as per table 4. For these 17 cases, there was strong, quality data indicating that the countries clearly do or do not have a functioning CP system. Third, the QCA looked at the country cases from different angles and through a variety of lenses (odd ratios, necessary and sufficient conditions, Boolean minimization, etc.; see Annex 8). Seemingly contradictory results are in fact all valid, as they merely highlight different dimensions of the data and aim to identify the most parsimonious models and explanations, looking at UNICEF investments either separately or in combination.

Thus defined, UNICEF’s most powerful interventions were:

**Capacity-building/social workforce strengthening (strongest stand-alone interventions)**

UNICEF’s investments in capacity-building were assessed in the case study countries in terms of (1) support for training workshops and materials for child protection system actors; (2) curriculum development for the social service workforce; and (3) strengthening the social welfare workforce (beyond curricula). The effect of these elements was tested as “capacity-building” (all three questions) and as “social workforce strengthening” (questions 2 and 3 only). Both proved highly influential: Investments in capacity-building sharply increase the potential for success (functional child protection systems) compared to situations where UNICEF does not invest in capacity-building; see odds ratios table (presence divided by absence), Table 5 below. The increase is so stark that it is, mathematically speaking, infinite. Workforce strengthening was found to be ‘sufficient’ as a single condition, meaning that in each country where UNICEF engaged in this kind of work, a successful outcome (functioning CPS) was observed.

When considering capacity-building and social workforce strengthening as part of ‘packages’ of interventions, they fared less well. Only one pathway to success was found (for the full set of 24 countries), consisting of capacity-building, the absence of direct financial support, minimum standards, and community protection.

**Evidence and research (very effective separately and in combination with other interventions)**

UNICEF investments in evidence and research were captured via (1) child protection budget and public expenditure analysis and (2) research and evidence in support of child protection systems strengthening. Investments in evidence and research sharply (“infinitely”) increase the potential for success (functional child protection systems) compared to situations where UNICEF does not invest in this area; see Table 5. The QCA identified evidence and research as a ‘necessary’ condition for success. In other words, without this type of investment, success in CP systems strengthening is impossible. Most successful packages of interventions also included evidence and research as key ingredients.
Table 5: Capacity-building and evidence and research are the most powerful UNICEF interventions, when seen separately (Odds ratios of success)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNICEF investment</th>
<th>Effect on CPS outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity-building</td>
<td>Infinite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence and research</td>
<td>Infinite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy advocacy</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case management</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveraging public resources</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality control</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce strengthening</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based protection</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service delivery</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's participation</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financing services</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Leveraging public resources (very effective in combination with other interventions)**

Leveraging public resources was operationalized as: UNICEF support for budget and public expenditure analysis, leveraging funds from other UNICEF sections for child protection, leveraging public resources for child protection systems, leveraging resources from multilateral donors (EU, World Bank, etc.). In situations where UNICEF engages in these activities, the chance of the country having a functioning national child protection system (i.e. the country being graded ‘1’ or close to ‘1’ in Table 3), increases 5.5 times (see Table 5 above). Leveraging financial resources is ‘sufficient’ as a single condition: In each country where UNICEF engaged in this kind of work, a successful outcome (functioning national CPS) was observed.

Several packages included the absence of ‘financing services’ and the presence of ‘leveraging resources’ as an ingredient for success in systems strengthening. The direct provision of financial support for child protection services and infrastructure was associated with countries that had not succeed in building functioning national child protection systems.

**Policy dialogue and advocacy (very effective in combination with other interventions)**
UNICEF’s investments in policy dialogue/advocacy were operationalized in four ways: (1) policy advocacy and technical support for child protection systems; (2) UNICEF’s convening power; (3) child protection systems mapping and assessment; and (4) support for child protection systems strategy and plans. Single investments in policy dialogue/advocacy made systems-strengthening success over six times more likely. The investment was also a key ingredient when considered in combination with others.

**Minimum standards and quality control; case management and coordination**

Investments in minimum standards and quality control mechanisms (monitoring and oversight) were also effective, raising the chances of CPS success almost four times. Where UNICEF engaged in this line of work, functional CPS were observed in more than four out of every five country cases. Investments in case management and coordination (support for case management system, CPIMS and other administrative data systems, support for inter-departmental coordination, etc.) were similarly effective. Both had some bearing on the pathways to success.

**Finding 21: Patterns are emerging that illustrate optimal sequencing of CPSS investments over time, from system building to system consolidation and reform. UNICEF COs invest – and should invest – differently depending on the stage and capacities of a country’s child protection system.**

When looking at the data in terms of ‘packages’ or combinations of UNICEF interventions associated with success, the evaluation found variations between what works in higher-performing countries compared to what is better suited to countries at the lower end of the success spectrum. The best performing countries indicate what systems-strengthening efforts should aim towards in the long run. The lower-ranking countries, meanwhile, show what kinds of investments are needed in less affluent countries with weaker child protection systems, which may include paying for services or supporting community-based protection mechanisms.

The following depiction only looks at countries that were identified as having a functioning child protection system (coded ‘1’ in Table 3).39

39 In other words, this table does not show the types of positive systems-strengthening investments that less successful countries are making, including countries in the “unclear middle” that did not make it into the group of clear-cut countries considered in the second iteration of the QCA which included only 17 cases.
The combination of four investments forms a pathway to CPS success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNICEF investments</th>
<th>Weaker but ‘functioning’ CP systems</th>
<th>Strongest CP systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Thailanl Fiji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence and research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveraging public resources</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy advocacy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financing services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the right-hand side, one sees the package of UNICEF interventions which contributed to CPSS success in some of the countries with highly-rated CP systems. In these countries (Moldova, Mongolia, Romania and South Africa), UNICEF invests in a combination of evidence and research, leveraging public resources and policy advocacy, and does not engage in financing services. In Armenia, success in systems strengthening does not depend on policy advocacy, and in Thailand and Fiji, success does not depend on leveraging public resources. Finally, Zimbabwe has to continue to provide direct support for child protection services and infrastructure to ensure success in child protection systems. (Note that elements where packages deviate from the strongest model are shown in red.)

The above illustrates – from left to right – what sequencing of child protection systems investments may look like in terms of evidence and research, leveraging public resources, policy advocacy, and financing services. Drawing on the wealth of qualitative and quantitative data collected on the six other UNICEF investments (see Annex 6), and for the remainder of all 24 countries, a tripartite pattern emerges: UNICEF COs invest differently across the continuum of CP system building to system consolidation and reform:

**System building:** In low-income, fragile and humanitarian settings with very weak child protection systems, UNICEF generally finances child protection services and infrastructure with the aim of delivering essential life-saving services to children in need. Coordination as a first step to system building focuses on NGOs and international agencies, and capacity-building of government partners is initiated but remains limited.

**System consolidation:** In low- and middle-income contexts with embryonic formal child protection systems, UNICEF often supports models of child protection services, including case management systems, with the aim of taking them to national scale. Capacity-building focuses initially on curriculum development and partnerships with specific training institutions, rather than comprehensive social workforce-strengthening strategies. Investments in child protection information systems and in quality control mechanisms also often remain limited at this stage.
System reform: In countries with functioning formal child protection systems that have achieved some degree of nation-wide reach, UNICEF generally concentrates its efforts on improving the quality of services by strengthening information systems, quality assurance and accountability mechanisms and by increasing efforts to mobilize public financial resources to ensure sustainable funding of national child protection systems. Investments in capacities and coordination tend to become increasingly complex in parallel with a maturing child protection system. At this advanced stage in the child protection system-strengthening process, UNICEF no longer provides direct financial assistance for child protection services or infrastructure. The continuum of prevention and response services also becomes more diverse, and links between child protection services, education, health and social protection become closer over time.

The evaluation found that the area of UNICEF investment that followed the most varied trajectory was support for community-based child protection mechanisms, as well as fostering linkages between communities and formal, district-level child protection services. Some countries with functioning formal child protection systems continue to support community-based child protection mechanisms (e.g. Mongolia, Fiji, Moldova), while, perhaps counterintuitively, child protection in some fragile and humanitarian contexts does not include major investments in community-based protection mechanisms.

3.2.4. Overall assessment and factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of child protection systems-strengthening objectives

Overall, the evaluation found that UNICEF’s effectiveness in terms of contributing to the six intermediate outcomes is moderate. This means that UNICEF has contributed to a verifiable level of progress towards the overall outcome in most countries, at a level which shows some possibility of being sustained or scaled up sufficiently to lead towards the outcome. However, since broader supporting factors are usually only weakly present, there is still a long way to go...

40 The following scoring system has been developed and used for this evaluation: No Progress: UNICEF contributions have not yet led to any identifiable progress towards the outcome. In principle, even if all outputs have been achieved, there may be no progress towards the outcome if broader supporting factors are not present. Limited Progress: UNICEF has contributed to a low level of progress towards the outcome, a level which appears unlikely to be sufficiently sustained or scaled up to lead towards its realization in the foreseeable future. In principle, even if outputs have been achieved, there may be a low level of progress towards the outcome if broader supporting factors are not present. Compared with a ‘No Progress’ score, some factors can be identified that suggest progress, but this is not sufficient to predict that the outcome can be reached in the foreseeable future. Moderate Progress: UNICEF has contributed to a verifiable level of progress towards the outcome, at a level which shows some possibility of being sufficiently sustained or scaled up to lead towards the outcome. In principle, even if outputs have been achieved, there may still be a moderate level progress towards the outcome if broader supporting factors are only weakly present. Compared with lower scores, several factors can be identified that suggest progress, with a possibility that the outcome can be reached in the foreseeable future. Strong Progress: UNICEF has contributed to a level of progress that looks likely to be sustained or scaled up in a definite movement towards the outcome. Outputs have been achieved and the national child protection environment is sufficiently supportive to suggest that the outcome could be attained in the foreseeable future. Achieved: UNICEF has contributed towards verified attainment of the intermediate outcome, for which all requirements have been met.
in most of the countries reviewed before comprehensive national child protection systems will be fully operational.

Why is UNICEF only moderately effective? The evaluation found several underlying constraints to CPSS that are likely to remain extremely challenging going forward:

- **Some of UNICEF’s objectives in terms of child protection systems strengthening, which are oriented to the short- and medium-term, appear mismatched to the widely-understood reality that achieving functional child protection systems is a highly ambitious long-term goal.** The prevailing opinion among a broad range of stakeholders contacted by the evaluation is that it is unlikely that many countries will be able to deliver a comprehensive and effective child protection system within 15 to 20 years. This would require effectiveness on all six of the intermediate outcomes, which is very difficult to achieve in the short to medium term. As this evaluation observed among the 24 sample countries, UNICEF support may provide concerted support for progress on two or three of the intermediate outcomes, but progress on others may remain weak and reduce overall system effectiveness, often substantially.

- **There is a lack of effective government commitment to delivering child protection system results with regard to adequate financial, human, and infrastructure resources and system governance and coordination.** Few governments among the 24 countries reviewed had made major progress on either of these essential intermediate outcomes. A compounding factor in many countries was ineffective decentralization. Responsibilities have been fragmented and parcellled out to different bodies at various levels of the system, usually with insufficient capacity, resources and sometimes mandates to fulfil them. A specific aspect of weak government commitment in many countries is the substantial under-resourcing and concomitant low status of the social work profession, which could be expected to play an important role in the CP system. In many countries, the potentially positive contribution of national NGOs, volunteers, and community organizations has not been systematically encouraged and incorporated by government or, often, by UNICEF.

- **Standard procedures and protocols for handling child protection cases and issues have not yet been taken to scale in many countries.** These procedures contribute to building shared expectations among all actors involved in case management, promoting accountability and enabling them to understand their roles within a larger integrated system.

- **Government motivation to focus on the child protection system is undermined by weak public support for spending and limited national resources in this area.** In many countries reviewed, popular opposition to violence against children, corporal punishment in schools and child labour, which might pressure government to focus on the CP system, is lacking. Even practices considered wrong, such as sexual abuse, are often viewed as private matters beyond the scope of government action. Such attitudes also influence the failure of governments (and in considerable measure UNICEF) to consider the participation of children, and particularly adolescents, as an essential element of system improvement.
• The profile of the international community on the child protection systems approach, and by extension UNICEF’s position as the major mandate holder and representative on child protection systems strengthening, is weakened by ineffective donor support for this approach. Although UNICEF and many international NGOs have a consistent CP system emphasis, many donors still respond more readily to specific issues, which are more fundable within their national contexts than the systems approach, with its long time horizon and less visible immediate results.

• UNICEF senior management has not yet not delivered strong and effective lobbying with donors at HQ level to help them understand that while issues-based approaches may provide an entry point into systems strengthening, they can actually weaken CPSS if adopted in isolation.

• Some opportunities for progress on systems strengthening have been lost due to insufficient emphasis on improving coordination and articulation between formal and less formal stakeholders. In many settings, these stakeholders must work together if a functioning child protection system is to emerge in the foreseeable future, but this is not always well understood, and support and systems for coordination are lacking.

• Evidence of child protection systems-strengthening results is weaker than it should be due to a lack of comprehensive and functional data generation and knowledge management systems. Evidence of results in the CP systems-strengthening area is essential to build a more effective and compelling case for this approach.
3.3. Sustainability of UNICEF interventions in CPSS

Sustainability is concerned with measuring how durable an intervention has been and whether the benefits of that intervention are likely to continue once UNICEF resources are withdrawn. Programmes and strategies need to be financially sustainable and foster resilience to risk.

UNICEF’s corporate monitoring and reporting system is not set up to track the sustainability of achieved results. Most of the evidence for this evaluation regarding the sustainability of UNICEF-supported interventions comes from document review (including past studies and evaluations), key informant interviews, the two online surveys, and a critical appraisal of effectiveness data vs. field-based observations, in particular in the six in-depth case studies. The strength of evidence to assess this parameter is deemed adequate.

Summary of key findings in response to evaluation question 9

To what extent have sustainability considerations (technical, financial, institutional) been integrated in child protection systems-related programme design and implementation phases?

- UNICEF’s role is to support nationally-owned, -funded and -run systems. Promising interventions include support to case management and coordination that can be sustainable if institutionalized (owned). In addition, some of the strategies found effective in the QCA are also associated with sustainability: advocacy/building political commitment, leveraging resources and capacity-building.

- The lack of financial commitment by national governments, coupled with weaknesses in UNICEF’s planning for and operationalization of sustainability elements in programme implementation, undermines the sustainability of results achieved in terms of strengthening CP systems.

Finding 22: Inadequate planning for sustainability weakens opportunities for replication, scaling up, and mainstreaming from country programme design into implementation. This can be seen as partly deriving from weak programme design or use of theories of change, which do not clearly identify what is required to promote sustainability and how UNICEF can contribute towards this process.

UNICEF’s role is ultimately to support nationally-owned, -funded and -managed CP systems – in other words, to ensure that results from its contributions are sustainable in the long term without additional support from external actors. This implies adequate national ownership, capacity and resources. Indeed, the QCA determined that the most successful strategies employed by UNICEF to strengthen child protection systems were precisely those usually associated with sustainability, namely: advocacy/building political commitment, research and evidence-generation, leveraging resources and capacity-building. Conversely, inherently unsustainable practices such as paying directly for services or infrastructure were found to be associated with less success in CPSS results.
Despite global commitment to sustainability as evidenced in UNICEF’s SPs, planning for it at country level remains relatively weak. UNICEF country programmes have largely been designed with a focus on outputs rather than longer-term outcomes or impacts. The introduction of a theory of change approach in newer country programmes may help, although many of the theories of change reviewed by the evaluation retain an output focus, with inadequate consideration of how UNICEF’s contribution in the short- to medium-term will promote long-term results. In Uzbekistan, for example, there does not appear to have been much consideration of sustainability in programme design. Neither the country programme document (CPD) and accompanying action plan nor most of the interventions contain clearly-articulated sustainability strategies. Some of the CO’s strategies in support of CPSS – for instance, the education strategy for 2011-2013 – mention sustainability, but in most cases these strategies post-dated the design of the interventions. In addition, the extensive use of pilot modalities – with, for example, over $1.01m spent over the implementation period – while lacking clear strategies for replication or scaling up is also undermining sustainability.41

It should be noted that sustainability is significantly influenced by factors outside of UNICEF’s control, notably the context itself. Aspects such as whether the country is stable or fragile, middle-income or low-income, has an existing CP system in need of strengthening or lacks even a nascent national structure, are all highly deterministic, yet largely beyond the influence of UNICEF or external actors generally. The QCA found that country context has significant implications for both the nature of UNICEF’s contributions to CPSS as well as their likelihood of success.

Finding 23: Many governments fail to translate ‘in principle’ commitment to child protection systems strengthening into appropriate budgets and resource allocations. This implies the need for additional UNICEF support to ‘create fiscal space’ as well as additional technical support and capacity-building with regard to budgeting.

To be sustainable, efforts to strengthen child protection systems must have broad national ownership, which includes political commitment but also ‘buy-in’ from non-governmental stakeholders, including communities themselves. UNICEF can influence the national agenda, but it cannot force commitment. Many country programmes face major challenges in this area. For example, UNICEF Sri Lanka has experienced challenges with national ownership and commitment at all levels of the decentralized system, including lack of government commitment, weak capacity to scale up pilot initiatives, inadequate CP system budgets, a low level of policy commitment, lack of public awareness and support for CP measures, low technical capacity in many government institutions, inadequate systems for monitoring CP results, and suboptimal coherence and coordination across the decentralized governance system. Similarly, in Peru, despite good results at decentralized levels where UNICEF has provided assistance, the

evaluation found no evidence that UNICEF has been able to ensure government will commit the national resources necessary for CP. There has been little uptake of system strengthening by the national government, although it recognizes the needs.

UNICEF Morocco has had more success, helping to secure government political commitment to prioritize CP on the national agenda, including in the budget process. It has also secured a formal agreement to consider a holistic systems approach to CP, a formal agreement with the Ministry of Social Affairs on ways to coordinate and regulate national and local work on child protection, a formal agreement with the Ministry of Justice to include justice for children in national justice system reform, public recognition of the need to review and transform the alternative care system, and political commitment by the government, independent human rights institutions and NGOs to establish mechanisms for child rights monitoring.42

Each country presents unique challenges and opportunities with regard to government commitment, and COs mainly show good ability to identify and support the best opportunities and approaches to improve national willingness to act in support of system strengthening. Nearly 80 per cent of UNICEF CO stakeholders who responded to the evaluation survey affirmed that they feel national ownership of CPSS has been effectively catalysed by country programmes.

However, the extent to which this ownership extends to financial commitment of national resources is less clear. 56 per cent of respondents feel this is the case, and about one third of respondents feel this has been ineffectively built into programme design. This is particularly significant given that the QCA identified leveraging resources as one of the most effective CPSS strategies UNICEF can employ. This implies the need for additional UNICEF support to ‘creating fiscal space’ as well as additional technical support and capacity-building with regard to budgeting.

Finding 24: While it is not always explicit, UNICEF is investing in sustainability in a number of countries, notably through policy advocacy, evidence-generation and capacity-building, and these lines of effort are strongly associated with successful outcomes in CPSS.

At country level, UNICEF has pursued a wide range of advocacy approaches to child protection and child protection systems strengthening. CPSS advocacy was reported to be more effective when based on solid evidence, which was available in many countries because of M&A exercises and research into relevant CP issues. In other cases, strategic partnerships – for example, between UNICEF and the National Ombudsman’s Office in Peru – were critical for bringing particular issues to government agendas.

The evaluation country studies revealed many examples in which UNICEF advocacy was a key strategy for systems-strengthening efforts at all levels. UNICEF Lebanon, for instance, invested in advocacy for the development of a national strategy to end child marriage and the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. UNICEF also supported the development and implementation of the government-led work plan to prevent and respond to the association of children with armed violence in Lebanon. High-level advocacy in Peru proved crucial to ensuring continued elaboration and review of new legislation related to the reform of the residential care system, which otherwise might not have come to fruition. In Romania, through combined capacity-building, technical assistance and advocacy efforts, UNICEF influenced national policies and contributed to resource mobilization, improving governance structures and processes, strengthening the child rights monitoring system, and generating evidence in several areas related to CP. These efforts appear to be bearing fruit: the QCA identified investing in ‘policy advocacy’ and ‘evidence and research’ as strategies highly associated with success in strengthening CP systems.

All UNICEF country programmes include capacity-building elements, which are widely regarded as useful and effective. Seventy-three per cent of UNICEF CO staff survey respondents regarded “strengthening national institutions” as “very integrated” or “integrated” in country programme implementation. COs adopt various approaches to capacity-building depending on context and needs. The data gathered for the QCA show that capacity-building often follows a trajectory from training workshops to curriculum development and finally to a comprehensive workforce-strengthening strategy. Some of these strategies may be more effective than others; a further breakdown of capacity-building into different “conditions” in the QCA model would be necessary to demonstrate the relative contribution of different forms of capacity-building. For example, while training individuals may yield short-term gains, high staff turnover within government structures often results in newly-built capacities being lost, meaning these gains are often not sustained in the medium to long term. Despite this and other challenges, however, the QCA identified capacity-building as a necessary condition for success.

As noted in Section 3.2 (intermediate outcome 2), in many countries, UNICEF plays a key supporting or convening role in advocating for effective coordination across government departments, between levels of decentralization and between formal and informal actors. For these efforts to be sustainable, however, this role needs to be transferred to national institutions. Where coordination is absent, weak, or intermittent, the viability and sustainability of UNICEF’s own CP systems approach is compromised. On the other hand, the QCA showed that where coordination is present and effective, it is highly correlated with success in strengthening CP systems. A coordinated approach by international partners can influence government to meet its obligations in this area, and UNICEF has attempted to foster such an approach in a number of countries, with varying results. Nearly 60 per cent of UNICEF CO survey respondents feel that fostering coordination is “very integrated” or “integrated” into country programme design. However, this view may be overly optimistic, given that country-level evidence shows that lack of coordination is often a major challenge in the national CP system.
A core component of improved governance and coordination of CP systems in many countries is the development and strengthening of case management systems (CMS). Myanmar provides a good demonstration of the opportunities and challenges of sustainability in such systems (see Box 2 below). Though unique in its details, the Myanmar experience illustrates that while a CMS can assist in the provision of essential services to vulnerable children, expansion is necessary to provide national coverage of acceptable quality. This in turn requires political commitment at all administrative levels, substantial human and financial resources, mainstreamed capacity-building systems, and long-term support from government ministries and other partners.

Box 2: Strengthened case management systems for sustainability in Myanmar

The Myanmar Formative Evaluation found significant positive indications of the sustainability of the case management system. UNICEF’s advocacy efforts have been well targeted, building government commitment to developing a national child protection system. Additionally, there is evidence that progress is being made towards building trust in, and demand for, the case management system at the community level, further consolidating the system’s long-term viability. Nevertheless, a number of threats to sustainability remain. Support and commitment to UNICEF’s vision of the child protection system appears to be largely concentrated within one part of Government, the Department of Social Work. Achieving support from other government departments, particularly within the justice, health and education sectors, remains a challenge. The need for greater financial investment is also critical as the case management system is brought to scale, particularly in the absence of NGO support.

Additional financial resources are necessary to contribute to the sustainability of this CMS approach. It is important that UNICEF demonstrates the need for greater investment and a realistic view of cost to government partners as the system is brought to scale. This is likely to be particularly critical as the government expands the CMS to townships where there is no available NGO support. A failure to address the need for full-time, dedicated staff, would risk undermining the value of the CMS approach and compromising its long-term viability and sustainability.

Finding 25: In many countries, critical sustainability aspects of replication, scaling up, and mainstreaming have proved challenging.

The evaluation evidence suggests that often UNICEF’s pilot approaches are successful because they receive resources and technical support in their initial stages. Beyond these initial

stages, however, there is often no plan for generating the resources needed to scale them up to the national level.

A pilot programme in Ayacucho, Peru, demonstrated the potential for leveraging resources for CPSS with properly trained staff and multi-sectoral coordination. With an investment of about $19,713, UNICEF managed to generate $1,965,112 to create or strengthen existing services for the local department for adolescents and children. The Peruvian government recognized the experience in Ayacucho as an “example of good practice” in 2016; however, the CO has not been able to ensure national resources are raised or allocated, and the example has not been taken up by the national government. In Pakistan, a key lesson from the 2012-2017 country programme concerned the need to properly assess pilots and projects to determine the feasibility of scaling up and leveraging resources from the outset. The 2018-2022 country programme plans to address this through a programme approach for at-scale results, with a view to promoting government ownership and accountability.

A substantial challenge to replication and scaling up is that UNICEF inputs face different pathways of change in different countries (or indeed regions within a country). While some countries, such as China, may be able to rapidly implement innovations supported by UNICEF, others may require considerable time and resources before change reaches vulnerable children in communities. Given this complexity, some stakeholders suggest that ROs could improve their effectiveness by focusing on sharing successful practices, so others can assess how they might be adapted for their own contexts. The finding from the evaluation country studies indicating the prevalence of substantial barriers to sustainability and scaling up is corroborated by the CO survey, with nearly 40 per cent of respondents indicating that sustainability considerations are only “somewhat integrated” or “not integrated at all” in programming. This suggests that many COs are aware of the substantial challenges related to sustainability.
3.4. Efficiency of UNICEF’s use of human and financial resources for CP systems work

Efficiency measures how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results. It assesses whether UNICEF uses the least costly and most beneficial path, in monetary and non-monetary terms, in order to achieve the desired results.

There is a considerable lack of organization-wide and historical data that could be used for efficiency analysis, e.g. on staffing and resourcing. Perception-based data from the key informant interviews and surveys has been used to supplement the analysis. The strength of evidence to assess this parameter is medium to low.

Summary of key findings in response to evaluation question 5

How effectively and efficiently has UNICEF allocated and managed human and financial resources for addressing child protection through a systems approach?

- Many stakeholders consider that UNICEF manages its child protection systems-strengthening resources efficiently. Country offices implement many activities to strengthen CP systems with minimal human and financial resources, which can be considered a sign of efficiency. However, UNICEF’s financial and results data systems are not adequate to support effective monitoring and reporting on CP system strengthening.

Finding 26: Overall, there is a weak relationship between UNICEF spending on CP systems and success in systems strengthening. Many middle-income country offices spend all or large parts of their CP budgets on CPSS. Evaluation evidence suggests that this is a good use of scarce resources (human/financial/social capital) in such settings.

Since 2014, UNICEF’s global child protection budget has remained at 12 per cent of the overall programme budget. Expenditures for CPSS in the 24 countries amounted to about 14 per cent of overall child protection spending for the 2014-2017 period. In contrast, spending on violence against children expanded from 13 per cent in 2014 to 29 per cent of child protection spending in 2017. Figure 4 shows large differences in CPSS spending across the 24 countries, with Zimbabwe at the top. The percentage of UNICEF CP funds spent on CPSS shows that low income, fragile and conflict-affected countries often spend a very small proportion of their CP budgets on CPSS. On the other hand, many middle-income countries receive very limited child protection funds overall due to the loss of official development assistance and the increased fiscal space in middle-income countries to finance public services.

44 Note that in the 2018-2021 strategic plan period the argument is made that violence against children (VAC) is the preferred “vehicle” for systems strengthening. Therefore, a certain amount of systems-strengthening expenditures may be hidden under the VAC label.
As the QCA showed, the large differences in CPSS expenditures are not directly correlated with systems success. There is a weak relationship between overall UNICEF spending on CP systems and systems outcomes. Most of the successful countries spend small or moderate amounts of money on CPSS, while some countries with limited success are spending considerable funds on CPSS. **Zimbabwe** is an exception, being the country with the highest spending on CPSS. It is an example of a low-income country that has been able to achieve considerable success in CPSS, but this has come with a steep price tag and large amounts of funding provided by international donor agencies.

**Finding 27:** UNICEF efforts to leverage funds for CPSS through ‘issue approaches’ are efficient in that they contribute to medium-term processes such as capacity-building and the development of an enabling environment.

While donor funding for CPSS has been limited, UNICEF has managed to tap into different resource pools to finance CPSS, leveraging funding from other sectors (e.g. education) or developing fundraising strategies to mobilize additional resources. Most CPSS work uses child

---

45 The spending figures exclude staff costs, but include technical assistance provided by consultants.
protection issues to advocate and mobilize funding for CPSS. This is an efficient strategy that makes use of available opportunities to advance specific child protection issues, while at the same time contributing to the strengthening of broader child protection systems.

The QCA showed the critical importance of leveraging national financial resources for sustainable child protection systems. Most successful countries supported public finance and budget tracking reviews and used this to leverage public resources for CPSS. Some middle-income countries, such as Thailand, rely entirely on public resources to finance CPSS. This type of UNICEF intervention is highly efficient, being both beneficial and inexpensive (for UNICEF).

**Finding 28:** Some frequently implemented programmes are known not to be cost-efficient. Yet compared to alternatives, they are chosen due to budget restrictions and the need for visibility. Other interventions, such as partnerships for CPSS and seeking low-cost additions or alternatives to government systems, are usually efficient.

Delivering outputs with limited resources can be efficient if they contribute to outcomes in the longer term. There is often insufficient evidence at country level to determine whether this is the case. Often, COs undertake a range of small activities they know to be relatively inefficient in order to promote their visibility in CPSS with a broad range of national stakeholders (e.g. advocacy, capacity-building, assistance to legal reform, and pilot interventions that cannot be scaled up or repeated and therefore become highly inefficient in the long term).

In contrast, UNICEF partnerships appear broadly effective in that they help generate other stakeholders’ commitment to CPSS, even if they fail to encourage the provision of adequate financial resources to make CP systems work. The efficiency of such partnerships in terms of their contribution towards results can therefore not be confirmed. Overall, the great majority of UNICEF staff feel that their COs have influenced national governments to engage with a CP systems approach, but have had less influence with regard to government commitment of financial resources to make the system work. This latter perception is especially evident in West and Central Africa.

Partnerships have not always been successful in building efficiency in the use of UNICEF CP systems funds. In several countries, NGOs reported dissatisfaction with UNICEF approaches to transparency and sharing of credit for contribution. A further issue raised is the tendency for UNICEF to assume that national NGOs are ‘junior partners’, even when they have greater experience than UNICEF in a particular situation. These negative factors were said to have discouraged some well-established NGOs from working with UNICEF, which has implications for the efficiency of operations.

Country studies show that national circumstances lead to a range of UNICEF efforts to promote efficiency through additional or alternative service providers. Specific situations have required tailored responses to achieve efficiency, and it is therefore not possible to identify a blueprint approach that is applicable across countries or regions. Increases in efficiency are often sought
through the use of additional or alternative service providers to those available from government. These may be volunteers, para-professionals, or NGO teams. In Guatemala, for example, UNICEF moved from a direct implementation role to supervising national NGOs to deliver services; an external formative evaluation noted that this implementation modality had been more efficient than direct implementation by UNICEF.

Finding 29: Major barriers hampering UNICEF’s efficiency in CPSS include national operating approaches and limited national investments in CP systems (external) and weaknesses of results-based management (internal).

In many countries, national operating approaches make it extremely difficult for UNICEF to operate efficiently. Common challenge include high government staff turnover, leading to frequent changes or even reversals of position, and inadequate allocation of human and financial resources to enable strengthened or reformed structures to work effectively. Staffing levels and operating budgets are often particularly inadequate in the case of decentralized service providers, which are often unable to operate effectively, manage reform processes, or assess what is being achieved. In addition, as noted earlier, in many of the countries reviewed, governments lack the ability to bring together all of the entities engaged in CP.

UNICEF CO staff have more positive perceptions of efficiency than the country study evidence suggests is warranted. Staff feel that offices are well coordinated around the CP systems approach, and that the relationships between COs, ROs and HQ are broadly efficient and effective, whereas the country studies highlight more challenges and suggest ample room for improvement.

UNICEF’s financial and results data systems are not adequate to effectively and efficiently manage human and financial resources for CPSS. While the overall spending towards CPSS appears to be broadly in line with the qualitative information available for each country, the coding of expenditures for specific investments in child protection systems (e.g. capacity-building, service provision, quality control, etc.) are not always reliable. A spot-check comparison of the expenditure coding of South Africa and Romania showed that country offices use widely differing interpretations when coding the specific purpose of expenditures. Accordingly, expenditure data are a reliable indicator for overall spending on CPSS, but are not robust enough for more disaggregated analysis by conditions. Assessing the efficiency of country programme contributions to CPSS posed a challenge because earlier programmes were not based on a theory of change and tended to have weak frameworks for reporting results. Monitoring systems focus largely on outputs, with little or no emphasis on progress toward outcomes, and still less on impacts. Systematic evidence on efficiency thus did not emerge from CO sources or from central data systems. Indicators were often difficult or

46 Expenditure figures for CP systems strengthening should be seen as approximate at best, given limitations in conceptual clarity of the codes and in application/coding by UNICEF offices. Ethiopia CO, for instance, did not code any expenditures as pertaining to CP systems strengthening.
impossible to measure, and baselines were rarely established. Results reporting did not make any attempt to accurately assess UNICEF’s contribution to identified changes.

Underlying this challenge is the prevalence of weak national data systems, which do not provide sufficient information to monitor any progress, let alone provide a basis for reporting on the effects of UNICEF’s support. **Use of evaluation** is similarly weak, with very few specific evaluations assessing CP systems work specifically. This is understandable in the many countries where the portfolio is very small, but less so where substantial resources have been invested. The absence of such instruments would be less challenging if country programme evaluations were standard practice, but this does not appear to be the case. A more common approach is to conduct mid-term reviews, on the basis of which the programme can be re-aligned, sometimes substantially. In countries adopting this approach, the redesigned interventions have to be completed in a short time, at which point it is too early to assess the extent to which they have delivered results. A new programme is then designed, and implementation begun, without the benefit of sufficient evidence. While mid-term reviews help redirect elements that are not working as expected, they should not be a substitute for programme evaluation, which can look in detail at such issues as effectiveness and sustainability.

**Finding 30: UNICEF has not been able to provide adequate technical and leadership capacities for CPSS across all levels of the organization. Staffing is constrained, especially in some of the smaller and less well-funded country offices.**

CPSS is an area of work that requires a skill set beyond what is typically found in CP staff, to include public finance, institutional development, results-based management (RBM), research/analytical skills and strategic leadership (convening, persuading and influencing). A 2013 capacity mapping survey of 301 CP staff globally noted that less than half of the respondents (41 per cent) reported having experience in strengthening child protection systems. The most frequent self-reported gap in experience at the time was “social budgeting”. 47

While a comprehensive assessment of capacities could not be conducted as part of this exercise, the evaluation found indications that some CP units do not have sufficiently qualified or experienced staff to provide technical advice and strategic leadership for CPSS. Stakeholders broadly describe two scenarios: 1) Staff have qualifications in social work or juvenile justice, but lack the managerial competencies or leadership capacities to guide CPSS processes, which can lead to small-scale and piecemeal technical interventions. 2) Staff have leadership abilities but lack specific technical knowledge of child protection systems, which may lead to ambitious but poorly designed and conceived initiatives that end in failure.

Key informants reported that at HQ and RO levels, as well as in larger and better-funded country offices, UNICEF is usually able to recruit diversified teams of child protection specialists who are able to provide technical expertise on CPSS. However, high staff turnover and long periods of time between filling vacancies have been noted by the evaluation, including at the HQ level. In some of the smaller and under-funded country offices, meanwhile, UNICEF sometimes only has a single child protection specialist who does not have the full range of qualifications, competencies and experiences to lead and guide CPSS efforts at national and sub-national levels. Often, those staff members lack sufficient time to devote to CPSS given other pressing programmatic and operational priorities. In addition, CPSS in low- and middle-income countries is a relatively new area of programming. This means that evidence is still emerging and there are few proven models to draw on. The lack of blueprint approaches means that people responsible for CPSS have to be flexible and creative in developing solutions, learning as they go and building consensus and support among key systems actors. Evaluation evidence suggests that while UNICEF has many highly experienced child protection staff, not all of them have the capacities or expertise to provide adequate leadership for such complex processes.

According to respondents, the area where UNICEF’s child protection teams face the most serious human resource constraints relates to data, research, monitoring and evaluation. Some larger offices have begun to recruit research, monitoring and evaluation (RME) specialists to work in child protection teams, and this has had an impact on the quality of data and data systems, according to staff at HQ who monitor such data.
4. Institutional, Global and Regional Findings

4.1. Institutional effectiveness: policies, strategies, monitoring and evaluation

This section discusses how UNICEF has contributed at the global level to the development and implementation of a systems-strengthening approach to child protection. This includes efforts related to strategy and conceptualization of the approach, support for country and regional implementation, and evidence, knowledge-sharing and monitoring.

The evidence presented in this chapter is strong, mainly based on an analytical desk review of published materials and key informant interviews.

4.1.1. Strategies, results frameworks and guidance

Summary of key findings in response to evaluation question 2

How appropriate, adequate and coherent are UNICEF global strategies, planned results and guidance documents for strengthening child protection systems?

- Global strategies and planned results do not adequately capture latest developments in CPSS. Notably, there is a lack of conceptual clarity regarding the desired balance and connection between issue-based and systems approaches, and between the CP systems approach and programming to address violence against children. The role of community-based child protection and children’s/social participation also needs to be made more explicit.

Theory of change and conceptual frameworks for child protection systems strengthening

Finding 31: UNICEF has yet to endorse and communicate a clear conceptual framework with regard to child protection systems strengthening. As a result, the organization lacks a shared understanding of the concept, and limited guidance is available to staff, partners and other stakeholders on how to implement it.

The initial conceptual work on CP systems done ten years ago by UNICEF and others provided some degree of clarity on what CP systems are and how they operate. The approach remains valid in principle. Yet no particular conceptual framework has so far been officially endorsed by UNICEF and communicated to staff and partners.

Not surprisingly, therefore, there are varying interpretations among UNICEF staff about what should be considered “systems strengthening” within the overall CP area of work. This issue arose frequently in the evaluation work at decentralized level, for example in key informant interviews and CO survey responses, many of which pointed to a strong need for HQ-level policies detailing
the CPSS approach and how to implement it. In particular, there was considerable confusion at
decentralized level on how VAC programming relates to systems strengthening. As previously
noted, VAC is identified in the SP, 2018-2021 as a possible entry point for CPSS. The argument
is that as a broad and inclusive issue, VAC can help to illustrate the need for strengthening CP
systems. This information seems to not have been available to UNICEF staff at CO level at the
time of fieldwork for this evaluation (June through December 2017). In addition, the evaluation
evidence (see Chapter 3) shows that CPSS is most effective when it builds on national priorities,
which may or may not include VAC. Tightly linking CPSS to VAC programming risks leaving it off
the agenda in many countries. The question thus arises: If UNICEF truly believes CPSS is the
right strategy, why does it not push for it more openly?

On the other end of the spectrum, the evaluation encountered another risk: Certain quarters within
UNICEF tend to claim that strengthened child protection systems can achieve all CP results. Yet
CP systems overlap with broader welfare, health, education, social protection systems. Suggesting
that child protection systems should be able to deliver all the services necessary for
the prevention of FGM/C, child trafficking, child labour, child marriage, violence against children,
etc. is thus unrealistic, because the solutions require efforts from various sectors including law
enforcement, education, health, social protection and poverty reduction, and social and behaviour
change promotion. Only a small part is being played by core child protection actors with specialist
skills in child welfare and protection. The evaluation notes that ‘overselling’ the role and capacity
of child protection systems risks setting CPSS up to fail.

Building on Chapter 3 of this evaluation, a number of conceptual issues need clarification. First,
the desired balance and connection between UNICEF’s issue-based and systems approaches to
child protection needs to be spelled out. Second, the relationship between the systems approach
and violence against children (as the unifying umbrella concept) as per SDG 16.2 and SP Goal
Area 3 – needs to be clarified. Third, a phased approach to systems strengthening, i.e. support
to building, consolidating/scaling-up and reforming national child protection systems should be
further articulated and communicated to staff and partners. Fourth, the role of community-based
child protection and participation needs to be made explicit.

Finding 32: Systems strengthening is captured in key strategic documents (2008 Child
Protection Strategy; SP, 2018-2021), but was not adequately included in the previous SP,
2014-2017, which is the heart of the more summative part of this evaluation, i.e. the
assessment of effectiveness. The Child Protection Strategy is outdated and does not
reflect current thinking about CPSS.

A key role for UNICEF HQ is to develop effective strategies and approaches for achieving
institutional objectives. However, a review of key documents, including the 2008 Child
Protection Strategy and the Strategic Plans, 2014-2017 and 2018-2021, along with their results
frameworks, found that they do not constitute a clear and consistent conceptual framework for
systems-strengthening work.
The 2008 Child Protection Strategy has not been updated in a decade, although systems thinking related to child protection has evolved. The SP, 2014-2017 identifies systems strengthening as one of six programme areas under the CP outcome, implying that it is a discrete area of work rather than an approach to achieving results across programme areas. The SP, 2018-2021, meanwhile, explicitly identifies the need to “intensify the strengthening of national systems to assist the most disadvantaged girls and boys”.

However, a theory of change related to UNICEF’s CPSS work— including linkages between components, system dynamics, multi-sectoral dimensions, and the specific complexities of child protection systems— does not currently exist outside of the model established for this evaluation (see Figure 1).

**Guidance and capacity-building**

**Finding 33**: HQ has not produced enough in the way of tools, resources or guidance on child protection systems strengthening, especially for the countries facing the greatest challenges and showing the least success in relation to CPSS.

CPSS has placed a wide range of new demands on UNICEF’s CP staff, many of whom have little technical training in areas required by a systems-strengthening approach, as discussed in Chapter 3. Evidence suggests, however, that the guidance available to staff falls short of addressing these capacity gaps. A noteworthy exception is the 2015 “Child Protection Resource Pack: How to Plan, Monitor and Evaluate Child Protection Programmes”, which contains some concrete guidance on CPSS, including a table on the “child protection system framework” (pages 24-25) that was a key input into defining the six intermediary outcomes used in this evaluation (Figure 1). However, it has not been accompanied by a systematic strategy to roll out the pack and train staff. As identified through field missions, KIIIs, and the evaluation survey, many CP staff feel abandoned by HQ and pressured by high expectations for systems strengthening in an under-resourced environment.

Satisfaction is higher with HQ’s role in knowledge generation: Just over half of CO respondents were positive about UNICEF’s knowledge-sharing on CPSS at the global level. The evaluation identified a number of international meetings and consultations intended to extract learnings and institutional knowledge about CPSS, and a series of webinars in 2013 and early 2014 were a notable effort to socialize emerging systems approaches within the organization and guide those dealing with practical issues related to CPSS in the field. However, these efforts have not reached all staff (e.g. the webinars were only made available in English, excluding many country-level UNICEF staff) and were discontinued as of 2014. As one survey respondent put it, “We have not heard much from HQ in recent years in terms of learning or new tools and resources/guidance on CPSS.”

### 4.1.2. Evidence generation and monitoring and evaluation

**Summary of key findings in response to evaluation question 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How adequately has UNICEF contributed to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Global efforts in generating and sharing relevant research, knowledge and evidence,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Data collection and analysis of child protection systems strengthening, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Monitoring and evaluation of the processes and results achieved by child protection systems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There is a general sense that UNICEF has adequately contributed to knowledge generation and data collection on child protection systems strengthening. However, weaknesses in knowledge-sharing, analysis/synthesis, and in monitoring and evaluation limit UNICEF’s influence in this sphere.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Finding 34:** UNICEF’s contribution to global efforts in generating and sharing research, knowledge and evidence on child protection systems strengthening in low- and middle-income countries has been significant. Initial aspirations of establishing a permanent knowledge platform and community of practice on child protection systems strengthening were however not realized.

Since 2008, UNICEF has made major contributions to global efforts to define child protection systems in low- and middle-income countries and to provide some degree of conceptual clarity through publications and a global conference. Major contributions included guidance documents on child protection mapping and assessments at national level and thematic guides on child protection and violence against children, alternative care, children affected by HIV/AIDS and children affected by humanitarian emergencies. In recent years, UNICEF has focused more on producing guidance on specific technical elements of child protection systems, such as case management, child protection data and information systems, financial benchmarking, and the strengthening of the social service workforce. While much work was done at the global level, regional offices also made major contributions related to issues that were of particular relevance to countries in their geographic areas. However, aspirations of establishing a permanent knowledge platform for a global discourse and community of practice on child protection systems in low- and middle-income countries were not realized. Instead, knowledge generation and knowledge-sharing related to child protection systems is now taking place in a more decentralized fashion, related to specific child protection issues or to technical elements of child protection systems.

**Finding 35:** UNICEF has greatly contributed to data collection and analysis of child protection systems strengthening. However, resulting insights were sometimes not widely disseminated or synthesized for non-technical audiences.
UNICEF is recognized as the world’s leading agency for the generation and publication of data related to child protection. Much of the published data are being generated through UNICEF-supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), and increasingly through thematic studies on VAC, child marriage, FGM/C, child migration, child online protection and other child protection topics. As a consequence, the data and knowledge base related to child protection continues to expand due to UNICEF’s investments and leadership in this area. The mapping of child protection systems in many countries has greatly expanded stakeholders’ understanding of existing child protection structures and of capacity and resource gaps. Several countries and regions have commissioned reviews of efforts to strengthen child protection systems. These are valuable reports, but little effort has been made to disseminate these reports to larger audiences, or to synthesize their insights related to child protection systems strengthening across countries and regions.

In recent years, UNICEF has stepped up efforts to strengthen child protection data and information systems as part of a comprehensive effort to strengthen child protection systems (see Chapter 3). This work has focused on administrative data systems, case management systems and child protection information management systems. A growing number of countries are now investing in such data systems. This work will need to continue for an extended period before these systems generate large enough data sets of acceptable quality to measure the performance of child protection systems.

Finding 36: The indicators used agency-wide to identify progress toward more robust, sustainable and effective child protection systems remain weak, particularly in terms of their capacity to capture the effects of UNICEF’s contribution. The evaluation however noted improvements made as of 2018, including the ability to capture systems-related expenditure (via improved specific intervention codes) as well as systems-related qualitative data on UNICEF work (via improved SMQs).

Little evidence was found for the use of monitoring data for decision-making on CPSS over the period examined. Part of this is due to the inadequacy of the RBM framework for systems-strengthening, with intermediate results across the programme-impact pathway receiving little attention: Qualitative and quantitative milestones or benchmarks for measuring progress along the different phases of CPSS (rather than just at the final stage of “functioning CPS”) are still lacking.

Similarly, disaggregation of data by sex, age, disability, etc. concerns mainly impact and case management data. The application of a gender-lens to measuring systems-strengthening success has not been systematic. The evaluation found that many country programmes – among them Lebanon, Romania, El Salvador, Peru, Morocco, and Nigeria included outputs, outcomes, and indicators that were disaggregated by sex. However, some donors noted in key informant interviews that where gender is addressed adequately in CPSS monitoring efforts, this largely reflects demands from the donors themselves.
Most indicators reviewed by the evaluation relate to specific CP issues, projecting results in terms of percentages and numbers of children reached. The majority of these indicators do not reflect systems progress, not all can be disaggregated by sex and other markers, and not all of the six systems elements have a corresponding indicator to begin with. CPSS success thus remains hard to "aggregate up". Some of the indicators relating to systems elements are actually tied to a specific CP issue, e.g. current indicator 3.a.2. on the number of countries with legislative and policy frameworks actually only refers to child labour. This situation has weakened the credibility of CPSS results claimed in UNICEF reporting as well as the evaluability of those results, particularly during the SP, 2014-2017 period.

For the 2018-2021 period, important improvements are being institutionalized. These include the ability to capture systems-related expenditure through ‘specific intervention codes’ (SICs) as well as the ability to better capture UNICEF’s contribution through improved SMQs that include more qualitative data. Recent efforts such as the CP indicator manual and SMQ Guidance also provide clear improvements. Some newly-developed country programmes also have indicator frameworks that are more systems-oriented.

Data from interviews and surveys point to other weaknesses, including incoherencies in results reporting and inconsistent use of theories of change and evaluation, which reduce the efficiency of systems strengthening by making it more difficult to monitor progress and learn and apply lessons to improve outcomes. These weaknesses also limit the quality of results reporting, making it more difficult to persuade donors and national stakeholders of the value of the systems-strengthening approach.

The inconsistent use of theories of change, RBM principles, and best practices in M&E for CP has long been noted. Weaknesses identified include lack of baseline measurements, lack of comparison groups for pre- and post-intervention measures, unclear programme logic, poorly developed M&E frameworks, and a focus on measuring outputs rather than outcomes for children. Some stakeholders contend that what is perceived as lack of conceptual clarity on CPSS is actually a measurement issue: Because coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS are not given, the concept is perceived as unclear in an operational agency such as UNICEF.

---

Finding 37: Impact measurements at the level of the child will take time to develop, as the basic data requirements have so far not been met.

The evaluation found that in many areas, population-level data are still lacking (e.g. data on overall numbers of children in need of care and protection; number of children in the child protection system; outcomes and impact of child protection systems strengthening). Where administrative data exist, they capture only a small fraction of children without adequate care or who are children victims of violence. This creates a situation where child protection systems are faced with conflicting realities: an overwhelmingly large number of boys and girls in need of care and protection vs. comparatively small numbers of children who come in contact with the child protection system. This story is hard to ‘sell’, since the numbers of children reached are so small. The default position encountered by this evaluation, within UNICEF and without, was not to take too close a look at the data. This potentially perpetuates a situation where actors can believe that the child protection system is having a major impact when, in fact, most child protection systems in low- and middle-income countries probably only touch the tip of the child protection iceberg.

4.2. Global leadership, advocacy and partnerships

Summary of key findings in response to evaluation question 1

How effective is UNICEF in global leadership and leveraging of partnerships that strengthen child protection systems?

- UNICEF has not been fully and continuously effective in taking a global leadership position and in leveraging partnerships in favour of the systems agenda. This is particularly true when it comes to leveraging financial commitments from partners. Donor practices of earmarking grants have disincentivized a greater focus on systems-strengthening.

- UNICEF lacks a full roster of partnerships reflecting the broad governance agenda entailed by CPSS.

Finding 38: UNICEF has not used its partnerships, particularly those that include donor governments, to maximum effect in order to promote the CP systems agenda. No comprehensive global platform exists for pooling efforts and resources to strengthen child protection systems. Several major donors continue to effectively weaken development of national CP systems by distributing funding on a narrow issue-by-issue basis.

UNICEF is directly involved in a number of global strategic partnerships relevant to CP systems strengthening, including:
The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (which promotes the INSPIRE package, of which CP systems are a key component);

The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (which has evolved as a major platform of expertise in relation to strengthening the workforce needed for effective CP systems in low- and middle-income countries);

The CPC Learning Network (which is the main source of evidence and innovations related to community-based child protection, as part of an overall systems approach);

The Better Care Network (which is the global source of information in relation to alternative care and deinstitutionalization of children);

The Global Alliance on Child Protection in Humanitarian Assistance (which promotes systems approaches in emergency settings).

These partnerships and alliances have – often indirectly – supported the strengthening of child protection systems in low- and middle-income countries since 2013. Overall, however, there is limited evidence that UNICEF has used these fora, particularly those that include donor governments, to maximum effect in order to promote the CP systems agenda.

The evaluation found that after ten years of investments in child protection systems in low- and middle-income countries, no comprehensive global platform exists for pooling efforts and resources to strengthen child protection systems. More focused technical initiatives exist on the social service workforce or on child protection information systems and global platforms related to child care reform, juvenile justice, child migration, and violence against children, and these allow some level of discussion on CPSS. However, the divergence between the CPS and VAC agendas is striking in this regard: While there is a vibrant global VAC agenda and platform, the CPS agenda seems fragmented and disconnected.

Several major donors continue to effectively weaken development of national CP systems by distributing funding on a narrow issue-by-issue basis, using parallel case identification, service delivery, monitoring and reporting channels. In some of the countries examined, UNICEF’s own fundraising needs inadvertently caused UNICEF offices to comply with donor initiatives that are antithetical to a systems-strengthening approach. Donors who were asked about a lack of commitment to CPSS stated that UNICEF has failed to ‘make the business case’ linking the approach to tangible results for girls and boys. Some of the agencies and donors that had supported UNICEF’s early child protection systems-strengthening work felt that the agency was concentrating too much on formal statutory systems and relationships with government at the expense of greater investments in community-based approaches and links between communities and formal child protection systems. Key informants also noted that donors have generally preferred to focus on specific issues. ‘Systems’ seem abstract and impersonal in comparison, and do not engender the type of emotive response as, for example, child abuse, child marriage or child labour. Systems strengthening is obviously linked to these issues, but the evaluation found that UNICEF, at a global level, had not clearly presented donors with well-documented examples demonstrating the value-added of CPSS, or of pooling and coordinating funds over a multi-year period for this purpose.
Many NGOs expressed great respect for UNICEF’s convening and thought leadership role in CP systems work, acknowledging that UNICEF has created space in decision-making and policymaking circles for NGOs to bring their knowledge and experience to bear with government counterparts. At the global level, UNICEF has a cooperation agreement with Save the Children and Plan International to work together to advance common strategies at country level, including building strong child protection systems. However, there appears to be little willingness to come together at a strategic level beyond UNICEF’s relationships with Plan and Save as implementing partners.

**Finding 39: Private sector partnerships and partnerships with governance-oriented institutions, including the World Bank, are areas of opportunity for UNICEF’s CPSS partnerships agenda.**

UNICEF also has opportunities to use its convening power to leverage private sector partnerships and sponsorships for CPSS, both in-country and at international level. The SP, 2018-2021 recognizes the importance of harnessing the power of business and markets for children and calls on UNICEF offices to leverage private sector and corporate partnerships for child protection systems. However, there is little evidence of this happening in practice.

Strengthening collaboration with other UN entities to achieve results for children has been recognized as an important ‘change strategy’ within the SP, 2018-2021. However, the evaluation found that many UN sister organizations find it challenging to partner with UNICEF on CPSS, even where such partnerships appear to be a natural fit. Some felt that UNICEF has a highly ‘specialist’ culture that feeds a siloed, sectoral mentality and complicates work with partners from different backgrounds at international and field levels. The evaluation also found that UNICEF does not have direct partnerships around CPSS with governance-oriented institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), even though many of the limitations on CP systems are linked to governance challenges at national level. There are opportunities for UNICEF to further enhance cooperation with these actors around issues such as social welfare systems, fiscal space, sustainable government financing for local social plans, and developing proposals for territorial development funds or other instruments.
4.3. Regional leadership, leveraging and support

Summary of key findings in response to evaluation question 3

How effective is UNICEF’s regional leadership, guidance/support and leveraging role in helping to strengthen child protection systems at the national level?

- UNICEF regional offices made important contributions to child protection systems-strengthening work, including by documenting challenges faced by countries in their regions and, to a certain extent, by guiding stakeholders in adapting the CPSS approach to regional realities.

UNICEF’s regional offices primarily play a support role for COs, but they also perform a quality assurance function that includes assessing the appropriateness of country programmes to UNICEF corporate strategies.

Different regions have used different child protection issues as entry points for strengthening child protection systems. These issues have included violence against children, deinstitutionalization of children, child migration, children affected by HIV/AIDS, or juvenile justice, as shown in Table 9 below. Using child protection issues as entry points has helped make child protection systems strengthening more concrete and focused, capitalizing on issues that already had considerable traction among policymakers and donors, and has tapped into readily-available sources of funding to strengthen systems while addressing specific child protection issues. ROs have provided technical guidance to COs, strengthened partnerships with donors, implementing agencies and inter-governmental bodies, mobilized funding and provided platforms for advocacy and the exchange of experiences.

4.3.1 Leadership and partnerships

Finding 40: Regional offices have played important roles in providing leadership and strengthening partnerships for child protection systems, including through the promotion of VAC as an entry points for CPSS.

Based on the literature review and key informant interviews, the evaluation found that the entry points chosen by UNICEF for CPSS work have often varied by region (see Annex 9). Table 7 below also shows how regions have focused on various specific technical components such as measuring and monitoring child protection systems, case management, and social service workforce strengthening.

The evaluation found that VAC has been most strongly promoted as an entry point from the regional level, due to the fact that it is well-funded by donors at an international level and corresponds to one of the most universal forms of child rights violations – affecting rich and
poor, girls and boys, urban and rural children in all countries. Key informants from the regional level stressed that the universality of the phenomenon of violence against children makes it a particularly good entry point for CP system strengthening because it is so pervasive and requires a strategic, inter-sectoral and systemic approach to address it.

Table 7: Entry points and focus areas for child protection systems-strengthening vary by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry points/technical areas for child protection systems-strengthening</th>
<th>West and Central Africa</th>
<th>Eastern and Southern Africa</th>
<th>Eastern Europe and Central Asia</th>
<th>Middle East and North Africa</th>
<th>South Asia</th>
<th>East Asia and the Pacific</th>
<th>Latin America and the Caribbean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child protection issues used as entry points for CPSS, by region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child migration</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based child protection structures</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children affected by HIV/AIDS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-sensitive social protection</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in humanitarian situations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deinstitutionalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice for children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against children</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child online protection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical areas of child protection systems-strengthening invested in, by region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case management</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social service workforce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring and monitoring CPS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional offices have organized conferences and events to raise the profile of CPSS, and to build understanding and mobilize buy-in among governments, regional inter-governmental bodies, NGOs and donors. A notable example was the 2012 Child Protection Systems Conference for Sub-Saharan Africa, held in 2012 in Dakar. Such regional convening opportunities can help create platforms for political advocacy and are appreciated by partners and by UNICEF country offices. To maintain the political momentum generated by the Dakar conference, the two sub-Saharan ROs provided support for a joint inter-agency statement on “Strengthening Child Protection Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa: A call to action (2013)”. In subsequent years, ROs worked with regional inter-governmental bodies, such as the Economic Community of West African States, the Southern Africa Development Community and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to articulate and propagate CPSS.
The evaluation identified a number of challenges with regional leadership and partnerships. In WCAR, ESAR and East Asia and the Pacific region (EAPR) it was noted that UNICEF’s strong influence on child protection policy development can lead to weak ownership by national stakeholders and low levels of sustainability for policy implementation processes. A key message from regional NGO stakeholders, especially in EAPR, was that UNICEF ROs should help COs focus on fewer areas to promote more tangible results. These NGOs consider the UNICEF systems approach overly ambitious, based on an unrealistic assumption that “CP systems can solve all problems” and not sufficiently grounded in an adequate understanding of the realities facing girls and boys in local communities.

4.3.2 Evidence generation, analysis and sharing of knowledge

Finding 41: Regional offices have made valuable and relevant contributions to understanding the specific challenges and bottlenecks to improving child protection systems-strengthening performance in their regions.

The evaluation identified numerous examples of ROs supporting CPSS through evidence generation. Examples include a mapping of the child protection policy environments in WCAR, studies and systems-mapping in EAPR, and a study on comprehensive child protection systems in the Latin America and Caribbean region (LACR). This type of learning exercise represents a valuable and cost-effective approach to analysis that highlights gaps and the need for further action at a regional level that could be replicated by other ROs. COs have used RO research and documents to position their work in a way that influences countries to feel that they need to perform better. Internal and external stakeholders see potential to increase RO contributions to building a compelling regional evidence base highlighting the cost of inaction.

Finding 42: Country offices see opportunities for regional offices to increase the relevance of their work by holding more regional events and workshops related to CPSS in which countries could address common issues, share experiences, gain access to leading external experts, and explore challenges and how to overcome them by building on good practices within the region.

Capacity-building for CO staff on child protection systems strengthening has not been adequate or systematic at regional level. Some regions have done more than others, often focusing on specific regional priorities (e.g. indicators and measurements in EAPR; deinstitutionalization in Eastern Europe; or case management ESAR). The evaluation identified good examples of UNICEF combining RO and CO efforts to demonstrate learning and results from CPSS, providing opportunities for South-South learning and sharing of challenges and good practices. ROs play important roles in gathering and disseminating information, especially on good practices and lessons learned. They also play an important role in translating UNICEF’s work into policy briefs and other tools and products. However, some stakeholders mentioned that UNICEF can have a greater impact if it makes better use of the available evidence. ROs are
expected to play an important role in this by gathering, compiling, analysing, and sharing evidence from COs.

4.3.3 Country support and quality assurance

Given their primary role of supporting COs, RO achievements are mainly reflected in improved CO performance. EAPRO, for example, proposed ‘core indicators’ for the region,\(^\text{52}\) which have enabled comparison between countries, pinpointing of strong and weak areas of a CP system, targeting of areas where UNICEF can make a difference, and setting of baselines and benchmarks for progress. The Eastern and Southern Africa regional office (ESARO) has also developed valuable analysis and tools, such as the 2012 “Strengthening Child Protection Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa”,\(^\text{53}\) which was produced in collaboration with the West and Central Africa regional office (WCARO), and the 2017 “Integrating Case Management for Vulnerable Children: A process guide for assessing and developing an integrated case management system”.\(^\text{54}\) These tools are seen as valuable and practical contributions to building capacity of COs.

UNICEF’s regional offices also perform a quality assurance function that includes assessing the appropriateness of country programmes to UNICEF corporate strategies.

The following areas for further support were identified by COs:

- More practical guidance on what needs to be done to strengthen CP systems and what results can reasonably be expected. Examples would be particularly welcome, e.g. advice on how lessons from a well-functioning system can be adapted to other countries.

- The different components of the system need to be further clarified by ROs, taking into account different contexts.

- ROs need to focus more on interactions and interconnections among system components, since strengthened components alone do not constitute a functioning system.

The evaluation encountered some CO frustration around resourcing for CPSS, with a generalized perception that insufficient funds have been made available to promote the CP systems approach. Along these lines, RO contributions were widely seen as constrained by the limited resources – especially human resources – available to cover the large number of countries within most regions.


5. Conclusions, Lessons and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

Conclusion 1: After a decade of work in this area, conceptual clarity on child protection systems strengthening in UNICEF is still incomplete. As a result, there is a lack of shared understanding around CPSS among UNICEF staff at various levels, and with partners.

The initial theoretical work on CP systems done ten years ago by UNICEF and others provided some degree of clarity on what CP systems are and how they operate. This work has informed corporate strategies and plans since, and, even though highly abstract and theoretical, remains valid in principle. Yet this conceptual groundwork is unfinished business in at least three regards. At the most basic level, there is no official UNICEF definition of child protection systems strengthening that is positioned as such, published and widely shared across all levels of the organization. Second, a clear conceptual framework or programme-impact pathway with associated measurements is missing. Such a framework would lay out the elements that constitute a functioning national CP system on the outcome side and spell out how UNICEF is expected to contribute on the activity side. Finally, the role of community-based child protection and the participation of boys and girls, and communities, in CPSS remains nebulous.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the evaluation encountered a significant degree of confusion among UNICEF staff and partners around the positioning of the CPSS approach. Is CPSS a programme area? A cross-cutting approach? The umbrella for everything UNICEF does in child protection? Country level staff either (a) repeated the mantra that within UNICEF all CP issues should be addressed through a systems approach to the extent possible and that all levels of the organization should specify how their work advances CP systems, or (b) saw CPSS as one specific programming area alongside others, in line with expenditure coding, results reporting and the narrative of the SP, 2014-2017. Among HQ and RO staff, on the other hand, the CPSS discourse has evolved to focus on specific technical components, including how to choose the best ‘entry point’ and which issues lend themselves more to CPSS than others (which are the best ‘vehicles’ for CPSS) in an issue-dominated landscape. This shift has not been communicated across the organization.

Conclusion 2: Staff lack technical support on operationalizing the systems-strengthening approach in different programming contexts and against the backdrop of dominant, large issue-based initiatives and VAC as the new unifying umbrella concept.

In recent years, UNICEF has engaged in a number of large issue-based CP initiatives that are perceived by many to have undermined the systems approach. Systems-related work has focused on specific technical components (social workforce strengthening, CP information systems, etc.) at the expense of a broader and more strategic operationalization of the systems-strengthening approach. Across UNICEF levels and functions, the evaluation witnessed unresolved tensions between producing rapid, quantifiable, and measurable outcomes for children and providing long-term support for strengthening sustainable systems. The desired balance and connection between UNICEF’s issue-based and systems approaches to child protection has not been spelled out.
A related operational challenge is the relationship between the systems approach and work to address violence against children, which has been positioned as the unifying umbrella concept in SP Goal Area 3, as per SDG 16.2. While there is a vibrant global VAC agenda and platform, the CPS agenda seems fragmented and disconnected. UNICEF has not yet specified how CPSS work is supposed to be integrated into VAC initiatives as a ‘preferred vehicle’, even if the idea has been floated.

More generally, there is little clarity or systematic evidence on how to choose the best entry point or which issues lend themselves more to CPSS than others. Many past success stories seem to have depended on context, opportunities and the expertise and creativity of individual child protection staff, rather than on a clear and operational corporate approach to child protection systems strengthening.

Finally, UNICEF’s programmatic approach to CPSS has so far not distinguished between different levels of functioning and maturity of national CP systems. Rather, UNICEF’s guidance, exchanges and lesson learning on CPSS have tended to favour the better performing countries with stronger functioning child protection structures. The qualitative comparative analysis of 24 country cases, conducted as part of this evaluation, has shown that requirements for CPSS support range from building child protection systems from scratch to strengthening and scaling up embryonic child protection systems or models; to reforming existing child protection systems.

Conclusion 3: Despite the challenges noted in Conclusions 1 and 2, UNICEF has had considerable success in advancing the child protection systems agenda at the national level and in raising awareness among national partners (with variation across countries and regions). However, by and large, this has not translated into adequate domestic investments in CPSS.

In most countries reviewed as part of this evaluation, UNICEF’s role in evidence generation on CP violations, systems mapping and assessments, and costing child protection systems has helped to change the understanding of government partners. Many countries have gradually incorporated a range of policies, procedures, and structures required by the CP systems approach, in many cases with UNICEF support. UNICEF technical support has also helped to improve key components of CP systems, including legislation, information management, SOPs, and delivery of services to families and children. Many countries now affirm that a systems approach is the only way to tackle pressing child protection challenges and meet international obligations. However, in most cases, this shared understanding has not resulted in resource commitments from governments. In the many of the 24 cases examined, UNICEF’s CPSS initiatives have not included hands-on work to leverage funds from the Ministry of Finance.

Conclusion 4: Donors have played a largely negative role in advancing national CP systems by distributing funding on a narrow issue-by-issue basis and using parallel monitoring and reporting systems. The organization has so far failed to present key donors with a compelling ‘business case’ for child protection systems strengthening.
With some notable exceptions, donors have had a largely negative influence on the CPSS agenda, since many of them primarily require readily- and quickly-measurable results expressed in terms of numbers of children benefitted. This has led to favouring parallel service-delivery systems that undermine systems strengthening. Donors’ notional interest in strengthening national policies and inter-sectoral linkages, or raising the number and capacity of staff required to achieve these outcomes, has low priority for funding support. This situation is aggravated by the fact that no comprehensive global platform exists for pooling efforts and resources to strengthen child protection systems. UNICEF staff are therefore challenged to design projects that meet donor expectations for high numbers of early beneficiaries, while also contributing to broad and lasting development results in terms of a robust CP system. In this context, UNICEF has operated in a reactive, rather than proactive mode, failing to present key donors with a compelling ‘business case’ for child protection systems strengthening. By neglecting to provide evidence of results achieved and evidence underpinning future programming needs, the organization has not yet enabled its partners to judge the CPSS approach on its own merits.

**Conclusion 5: UNICEF’s programme performance on CPSS has been moderate overall. Progress was uneven, with stark gaps in low-income, fragile and humanitarian contexts.**

The evaluation did not include an assessment of impact at the level of the child. It did however demonstrate that in many of the countries examined, UNICEF contributed to a moderate, verifiable level of progress toward strengthening the six dimensions that together make up functioning CP systems. In other words, UNICEF attained some of its objectives at a level that shows some possibility of being sustained or scaled up sufficiently to lead to the outcome. However, since broader supporting factors are usually only weakly present, there is still a long way to go in most of the countries reviewed before comprehensive national child protection systems will be fully operational.

Across the set of 24 countries examined, UNICEF’s contribution to CPSS has been particularly strong with regard to strengthening the legal and regulatory framework. UNICEF support was less successful where child protection systems were embryonic and more successful in countries where UNICEF supported the government-led reform of existing child protection systems. Especially in low-income, fragile and humanitarian contexts, child protection systems strengthening has been slow, as UNICEF and other child protection actors continue to support issue-based approaches. In these settings, COs report spending little or no funds on child protection systems strengthening. Across the board, most countries still lack the institutional capacity, human and financial resources to rapidly address the gaps in existing systems, particularly at the service delivery level.

**Conclusion 6: The evaluation has identified a number of interventions that are particularly effective for strengthening CP systems, including capacity-building/social**

---

55 Regulatory framework, continuum of services, governance structures, minimum standards and oversight, resources, social participation.
workforce strengthening, leveraging public resources, evidence and research and policy advocacy. This provides some clarity on priority investments for UNICEF.

Stronger child protection systems benefit most from UNICEF investments in evidence and research, leveraging public resources, and policy advocacy. Successful countries supported at least two of these types of interventions. Investments in capacity-building (including workforce strengthening) made the biggest difference across the entire set of 24 countries, suggesting that this intervention is worthwhile in a wide range of contexts. Support for quality control mechanisms, coordination and case management was also important.

In countries that do not have functioning CP systems, or where these systems are functioning to a very limited extent, UNICEF often invests significantly in community-based child protection mechanisms and provides direct financial and technical support for child protection services and infrastructure. While these investments have not yet yielded functioning CP systems, they appear to be more important in the early stages of strengthening child protection systems – especially in low-income and conflict-affected countries. However, this cannot be confirmed conclusively, since UNICEF has not established intermediate outcome targets along the CPSS process.

**Conclusion 7:** UNICEF’s ambitions for what a child protection system can be expected to accomplish in specific contexts, and in what timeframe, have not been realistic.

Some of UNICEF’s objectives in terms of child protection systems strengthening, which are oriented to the short- and medium-term, appear mismatched to the widely-understood reality that achieving functional child protection systems is a highly ambitious long-term goal. Moreover, as discussed above, CPSS programming is not (yet) differentiated by programming context and phase, i.e. building, consolidating/scaling-up and reforming national child protection systems. This may have led to ‘over-selling’ and ‘under-delivering’ on systems-strengthening efforts in some contexts, which may in turn have undermined partners' confidence in CPSS.

A related point is that there is little agreement on how far a child protection system should extend. UNICEF’s initial focus has been on response services and mechanisms for children who are separated from their families and/or live in institutions, and girls and boys who have been exploited and/or have been victims of violence. In the middle-income countries examined as part of this evaluation, child protection systems can claim some results in prevention and early intervention related to child abuse, neglect and maltreatment. However, these are embedded in a network of allied health, education and social protection systems that shoulder the main burden of prevention and early intervention. In low- and lower middle-income countries, where allied systems were found to be weak, much more of the prevention and early intervention work tended to fall on the core child protection system, leaving it overwhelmed.

**Conclusion 8:** UNICEF has a clear niche focusing on state accountabilities for children’s rights and partnering with government departments at national, provincial and district levels. The organization has yet to define its role with regard to children's participation,
community-based child protection mechanisms and the interconnectedness between formal and less formal actors.

As an inter-governmental organization and through its rights-based approach, UNICEF has a distinct comparative advantage in CPSS. It has access to government at all levels and is well placed to advocate for the duty-bearer’s responsibility to protect all girls and boys living on its territory. However, UNICEF has yet to define its niche with regard to community-based child protection mechanisms and the interconnectedness between formal and less formal actors, especially in countries without functioning formal CP systems. In terms of the ideal programme-impact pathway for CPSS, the dichotomy between formal and less formal child protection structures may have been overstated. As the QCA findings showed, in some of the countries with functioning child protection systems, UNICEF also successfully invests in community-based child protection mechanisms. Investing in children’s civil rights (to information, communication, association) and civic engagement in child protection systems may be an area of opportunity with regard to the participation of girls and boys in CPSS – not least with a view to partners and donors who had supported UNICEF’s early child protection systems-strengthening work and who believe that the agency is concentrating too much on formal statutory systems and on relationships with government.

**Conclusion 9: Investments into staff capacities and learning for CPSS have been insufficient.**

In some countries and regions, experienced UNICEF staff have been able to provide strong strategic leadership to mobilize donors, governments and other implementing agencies to advance the systems agenda in creative ways. However, many countries lack this capacity. The skill set needed for CPSS goes beyond what is typically found in CP staff, and includes public finance, RBM, research/analytical skills and strategic leadership (convening, persuading and influencing). These competencies do not seem to have been sufficiently considered in hiring, promotion and retention of staff as well as in learning initiatives.

**Conclusion 10: UNICEF’s corporate reporting systems on expenditures and results are inadequate to demonstrate the exact level of UNICEF’s contribution to CPSS. This limits their utility, including for accountability and resource mobilization purposes.**

Coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS are yet to be established, both at the level of the intermediate outcomes (elements of the CP system) and at the level of UNICEF expenditures and investments contributing to these outcomes. For the 2014-2017 period in particular, it has been difficult to assess investments, as it is unclear which ones were considered “systems strengthening” at CO level when expenditures were recorded. Evidence from UNICEF’s corporate results reporting systems, while markedly improved as part of the SP, 2018-2021, remains patchy; there is a scarcity of data across the steps of the CPSS results chain, especially in areas such as coordination and participation. Relevant common indicators gathered globally (through SMQs and the RAM module) are limited and the data entered are of variable quality and reliability.
While some countries and regions have made efforts to define CPSS indicators, they have rarely found broader application. Moreover, UNICEF has failed to establish milestones or benchmarks for CPSS that would make it possible to measure intermediate systems performance by phase. This further perpetuated the lack of conceptual and operational clarity (“what gets counted, counts”). It also limited the ability of the evaluation (in particular the QCA) to assess the achievements of intermediate targets. All in all, UNICEF lacks the ability to systematically track its contribution to CPSS progress and performance globally, which hinders the organization from demonstrating results and mobilizing resources for CPSS.

5.2. Lessons learned

Lesson 1: A number of the findings, conclusions and recommendations from this evaluation echo those of other evaluations touching on systems issues, including the evaluation on rural water supply (2018) and early findings from the evaluation on health systems strengthening (2019). This suggests that some of the strengths, weaknesses and challenges observed in this report are not specific to child protection, but are relevant to UNICEF’s systems-strengthening efforts in general.

Some of the transversal issues are: difficulties attracting funding for systems-strengthening efforts and other longer-term commitments; limited ability to track resources and monitor results in systems-strengthening; need to develop staff capacity, including through more targeted recruitment, and need for concrete guidance, support and tools to promote and facilitate the shift towards systems thinking. UNICEF could identify these common themes, using the learning to inform work in all sectors where the organization is engaged in systems-strengthening efforts. Thinking around how to improve monitoring and evaluability of systems outcomes, for example, or how to strengthen linkages between upstream and downstream work would benefit from a cross-cutting approach bringing together all relevant sectors.

Lesson 2: UNICEF’s comparative advantage as a child protection actor is its tremendous reach and convening power, which allow it to influence the global agenda for children and work hand-in-hand with governments at the policy level to strengthen systems. In practice, however, UNICEF is often opportunistic when it comes to securing funding, which can lead to fragmented efforts that ultimately undermine systems-strengthening outcomes.

The evaluation shows that UNICEF can do more to leverage its institutional strength and upstream role to influence key stakeholders. At the global level, this means ‘talking the talk’: greater strategic clarity and commitment to systems-strengthening as such (rather than attempting to couch systems work in issue-based approaches), as well as a concerted effort to get partners on board with the approach. At country level, it means ‘walking the walk’: using UNICEF’s convening role to promote a systems approach and help ensure that downstream, issue-specific efforts by other child protection actors feed into a coherent approach that adds up to more than the sum of its parts.
This lesson could apply equally to systems-strengthening efforts in other sectors, and indeed UNICEF may be able to leverage successful evidence-based advocacy in one sector to highlight the merits of systems-strengthening in general. In other words, UNICEF should approach donors and partners ‘on all fronts’ to promote systems-strengthening as an approach. As an organization with a broad mandate and tremendous reach, it is well placed to do this effectively.

**Lesson 3:** UNICEF’s monitoring systems fall short of accurately capturing what the organization is doing, and whether it is achieving results, and for whom, with regard to systems strengthening. This is particularly worrisome from a gender and equity perspective.

Despite significant investment in evidence generation, the indicators and measures used by UNICEF to identify progress toward more robust, sustainable, and effective child protection systems remain weak. Quantitative indicators, particularly focusing on numbers of children reached, are appropriate where UNICEF and its partners have a direct service delivery role, but are less able to capture systemic results – especially ‘softer’ or ‘intermediate’ elements such as policy and normative shifts, child participation, gender and human rights-responsiveness, community engagement and behaviour change. Benchmarks for measuring progress on the different steps along a CPSS programme-impact pathway are lacking. This is a challenge not only for child protection, but for all sectors where systemic outcomes need to be measured. More thinking is needed on how to consistently capture cross-cutting results and expenditures. In particular, CPSS efforts are not currently set up to demonstrate positive results related to gender equality, geographical equity, disability and children on the move. Relatedly, UNICEF should do more at HQ level to sensitize donors on the types of results that systems-strengthening efforts can be expected to show – and what they cannot show. So long as there is a disconnect between what donors expect and what can feasibly be demonstrated with regard to systems-strengthening results, UNICEF will struggle to convince donors of the ‘investment case’.

**Lesson 4:** UNICEF’s relatively modest success in leveraging national financial resources for sustainable child protection systems partly reflects a lack of institutional expertise and partnerships in this area at country level. Creating ‘fiscal space’ for strengthened child protection systems within the national budget requires specific skills in child-friendly budgeting, and in general, that capacity is lacking is COs.

UNICEF child protection staff are now expected to address issues related to public finance, costing of CP systems, budget analysis and advocacy, information management systems, public service management and accreditation, quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, and a range of other areas that are often relatively new to them. These competencies are relevant for other sectors where UNICEF is engaged in systems-strengthening work as well; increased capacity in these cross-cutting areas at CO level could therefore benefit UNICEF’s work in multiple sectors. In a similar vein, increased focus at CO level on strengthening
relationships with ministries of finance and planning would benefit not only UNICEF’s efforts in CPSS but other areas of systems strengthening as well.

**Lesson 5: Limited opportunities for global learning and exchange around CPSS point to challenges in ensuring knowledge management in a global, decentralized organization.**

Although the evaluation identified good examples of UNICEF combining RO and CO efforts to share lessons learned and results from CPSS, there is limited evidence of this learning being disseminated globally or feeding back into UNICEF’s corporate approach to CPSS. Yet it is widely agreed that UNICEF can have a greater impact if it makes better use of the available evidence. ROs are expected to play an important role in this by gathering, compiling, analysing, and sharing evidence from COs, but HQ also has an important role to play here, e.g. by creating a joint learning agenda with other partners and systematically sharing success stories, other lessons, knowledge and tools in relation to CPSS programming.

### 5.3. Recommendations

1. Clarify UNICEF’s definition of, and role in, child protection systems strengthening, and ensure that this approach is reflected in organizational strategies, policies and plans.

Large issue-based initiatives have in recent years been perceived to undermine the systems approach to child protection and systems-strengthening efforts. In addition, the relationship between systems-strengthening and protection from Violence Against Children – as the new unifying umbrella concept as per SDG 16.2 – needs clarification.

1.1. Through a consultative process, clarify the desired relationship between issue-based and systems approaches in UNICEF’s child protection work and refine the draft programme-impact pathway for CPSS created for this evaluation, specifying:

- UNICEF’s corporate priority entry points and vehicles for CPSS, if any;
- The relationship between VAC and CPSS, drawing on the ToC/programme guidance for VAC and other sources;
- How UNICEF’s work relates to both statutory and community-based child protection systems, grounded in a rights-based approach and recognizing UNICEF’s normative role in CPSS;
- What precisely is meant by “social participation” as one of the six intermediate outcomes for CPSS.

The above process should also clarify:

- The inter-sectorality of child protection systems, i.e. whether there are core systems and allied systems in other sectors and how UNICEF can support their interplay in the continuum of services, looking at opportunities through UNICEF’s work in communications for development, public finance and other cross-sectoral approaches.
• How CPSS relates to specific vulnerabilities (gender, disability, etc.) and situations (children on the move, separated children, children in institutions, street and homeless children, etc.).
• The role girls and boys should play in their own protection, building on General Comment 12 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child concerning the right of the child to be heard.

1.2. Through further documentation, lesson learning and research, define the phases of the CPSS process (system-building, system consolidation and system reform, or a similar typology to be determined).

In so doing, particular care should be taken to document lessons from the early stages of the CPSS process, including in humanitarian settings, which are currently less well understood.

1.3. Reflect this clarified narrative on CPSS in any future update of UNICEF’s 2008 CP Strategy, setting out accountabilities for CPSS work among the various actors within the organization.

Who: CP section with wider consultation in Programme Division, PD (health, social policy, etc.) and the Office of Emergency Programmes; with involvement of CP staff at regional and country levels and senior management at HQ level

Priority: Very high, for immediate implementation

2. Define UNICEF’s niche in CPSS and invest in the most impactful areas to strengthen child protection systems.

The evaluation showed that some of UNICEF’s investments in CPSS have yielded better results than others. UNICEF should unapologetically embrace a focus on state leadership and accountability, for which it is well positioned. UNICEF needs to clearly position itself in terms of topics and fora through which to push the CPSS agenda.

UNICEF should:

2.1. Articulate key priority areas of work and possible entry points for CPSS by context in order to guide programming, keeping in mind:

• The most effective and sustainable interventions as identified by the evaluation, namely: social services workforce strengthening, leveraging public resources, evidence and research, policy advocacy, child protection information systems, case management and coordination;
• The seven priority interventions identified through the VAC programme guidance, including two high priority interventions (social services workforce strengthening and parenting);
• The different speeds and opportunities in different programming contexts as per recommendation 1.2.

2.2. Develop a menu of interventions in each priority area, with a different package of options tailored to each phase of the CPSS process as described in Recommendation 1.2 (system-building, consolidation or reform) and clearly setting out what investments are required at different levels (formal/less formal) of the CP system.
• Issue technical briefs and/or programme guidance for CPSS for each phase, outlining the minimum package of UNICEF interventions from prevention through early intervention and response, keeping in mind the priority areas;
• Issue a separate technical brief or programme guidance on systems strengthening in humanitarian action;
• Reflect the above in the mid-term review of the SP, 2018-2021.

Who: CP section with wider consultation in PD, with senior management, regional advisors, and key partner agencies
Priority: Very high, for immediate implementation

3. Strengthen staff and partner capacities and learning on CPSS

CPSS is an area of work that requires a skill set beyond what is typically found in CP staff and includes public finance, institutional development, RBM, research/analytical skills and strategic leadership. These competencies need to be fostered within UNICEF and among partners to support effective CPSS. In addition, UNICEF needs to do more to support learning between countries (and regions) with similar profiles and challenges.

UNICEF should:

3.1. At HQ level, revise job descriptions for CP chiefs and invest in learning and skills development for staff and partners, e.g. by

• Connecting staff and partners with training opportunities in public finance and results-based management;
• Devising practical protocols to (a) track and analyse public expenditure for child protection in national and sub-national budgets and (b) monitor results of UNICEF-supported CPSS interventions;
• Developing a resourced learning hub to systematically share knowledge, lessons learned and success stories in relation to CPSS programming and to develop and share tools to deal with constraints.

HQ should ensure sufficient staffing to carry the CPSS portfolio, including global-level knowledge exchange and learning, and seek closer collaboration with the social policy/social protection sector.

3.2. At RO level, step up technical assistance for CPSS, e.g. by

• Assessing capacities at CO level to provide strategic leadership to CPSS processes;
• Developing technical support mechanisms, especially for countries that have so far not been able to make significant strides towards building child protection systems;
• Supporting countries to invest early on in the CPSS process in information, gender and human rights-responsive monitoring and feedback mechanisms.

ROs should ensure regional monitoring of CPSS through staffing or LTA arrangements.

3.3. At CO level, embrace CPSS as a learning function and a cross-cutting and management responsibility, e.g. by
• Documenting experiences, particularly on scaling up and innovation in systems work, strengthening links between community and formal government protection structures and systems, CPSS in humanitarian and least developed settings;
• Fostering joint work and exchange across programme sections;
• Systematically engaging country representatives in CPSS work;
• Routinely including identification of ‘vehicles’ for CPSS (issues or projects through which a systems approach can be strengthened) in situation analyses;
• Reflecting the skill set needed for effective CPSS in hiring, promotion and retention practices for CP chiefs and staff;
• Supporting the capacity development of national partners, including in RBM for CPSS.

Who: CP section with wider consultation in PD and the Office of Emergency Programmes, Office of Research-Innocenti, regional directors, regional child protection advisors, country representatives, Field Results Group, Division of Human Resources, key partner agencies

Priority: High, for implementation once Recommendations 1 and 2 have been acted upon

4. Leverage partnerships and resources for CPSS
UNICEF should step up its efforts to revitalise partnerships and advocacy in favour of CPSS.

The organization should:

4.1. Invest in communication and advocacy, including by putting forward business cases across the range of CPSS contexts. Implementation should include:

• Developing advocacy briefs on CPSS for various audiences, including internal audiences, donors, governments in programme countries;
• Ensuring CPSS is duly reflected in the emerging CP advocacy strategy; and
• Speaking out at key conferences, in web-based fora and interest groups about UNICEF’s priorities and niche in CPSS as per Recommendation 2.1.

4.2. Develop a partnerships and resourcing strategy for CPSS, assisting donors to open up to supporting systems strengthening. Implementation should include:

• Starting immediately, systematically include a budget line for CPSS programming and related M&E in large-scale donor agreements on ‘issue-focused’ child protection work, including in humanitarian action;
• Seek new partnerships for CPSS, including with philanthropic foundations and governance, financing and social policy-orientated institutions (e.g. World Bank); and
• Revitalize initiatives to build consensus among major donors around the need to finance CPSS, building for example on lessons from the Zimbabwe experience.

4.3. Improve the adequacy, equity, efficiency and effectiveness of public finance for child protection services and systems, building on the successful financial benchmarking work done to date and through closer collaboration with social policy teams at country level

• Carry out rapid reviews of expenditures and financing strategies for CPSS at national level to identify the true level of CPSS spending and sources of financing;
• Step up efforts to make the investment case for CP and CPSS, including through hands-on work to leverage funds from ministries of finance; and
• Document the domestic resources available and analyse how well these are spent.

Who: CP section with social inclusion/PD, divisions of data, research and policy, communications, and public partnerships, and senior management at HQ and in the field

Priority: High

5. Address the CPSS data and measurement challenges

Part of what is perceived as lack of conceptual clarity on CPSS is linked to the absence of coherent corporate-level metrics and the scarcity of global-level data and evidence across the steps of the CPSS results chain. This is turn is linked with difficulties in demonstrating results and mobilizing resources for CPSS.

UNICEF should:

5.1. Invest in coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS, including:

• Defining indicators for CPSS, drawing on work already done in EAPR, India, LAC and elsewhere and linking this process to SDG measurement efforts, the work of health, social protection and other sectors;
• Establishing qualitative and quantitative milestones/benchmarks for measuring progress along the different phases of CPSS (rather than just at the final stage of “functioning CPS”) and identifying means of verification;
• Investing further in tools such as CP systems scorecards or indices and CP information systems and dashboards to strengthen accountabilities and reinforce a consistent and coherent CPSS narrative as well as gender- and human rights-responsiveness; and
• As part of the “collaborating for results” initiative, ensure that CPSS investments and results can be systematically tracked.

5.2. Close evidence gaps along the CPSS programme-impact pathway, to include:

• Development of methodologies for measuring the impact of CPSS on the well-being of boys and girls of different ages, abilities and positions in society;
• Generation of prevalence data for violence, exploitation and abuse, including through systematic use of the CP module in the MICS/Demographic and Health Survey;
• Gender and equity analyses of CP case management data to assess the inclusiveness and reach of CPSS;
• Operational research on emerging issues, e.g. CPSS for children on the move; and
• Strengthening evaluation coverage on CPSS and learning from evaluations (e.g. through a meta-analysis on lessons learnt from systems-strengthening, see Lesson 1), and tracking how evaluations are used.

Who: CP section, Fields Results Group, Division of Data, Research and Policy, Office of Research-Innocenti, Evaluation Office, regional directors and country representatives.

Priority: Very high, immediate implementation (with some level of sequencing for 5.1. which builds on Recommendations 1 and 2).