

Evaluation of the social protection system for children and their families in Kazakhstan 2015-2020



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The scale of the problem

The share of Kazakhstan's population **living below the national poverty line** decreased from 47 per cent in 2001 to **2.7 per cent** in 2017.

Using the international poverty line for upper-middle-income countries of USD 5.5 per day, World Bank estimates that **5.9 per cent of the population lived in poverty in 2018.**

The **poverty gap**, has increased from **0.7 per cent** (in 2015) to **1.1 per cent** (in 2019).

Children below the age of 18 were found to be at an **increased risk** of living in poverty.

From 2015 to 2018 **child poverty was on the rise in Kazakhstan**, with an increase from 12.8 per cent to 19.3 per cent throughout the years.



The nationally defined poverty line is linked to the subsistence minimum level (SML), which amounted to **USD 2.6 per day in 2018.**

According to the revised methodology the **poverty rate has increased** throughout the years, from **3 per cent in 2015 to 4.1 per cent in 2019.**

The **near-poor rate** has increased from **10.3 per cent to 14 per cent between 2015 and 2019.**

Examining national **child poverty** figures reveals that **12.7 per cent of children lived in poverty in 2019.**

By end of 2018, the number of **children among beneficiaries of social assistance programs** had drastically **dropped from 562,300 to 363,200**, with a total number of 571,600 TSA beneficiaries.

Why this evaluation is important?



In 2018, the Government of Kazakhstan, more specifically the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, embarked on a reform process of its social assistance system for children and families. To further improve coverage, adequacy, and targeting effectiveness of its poverty-targeted transfers, the flagship poverty-targeted social assistance programme (TSA) has since undergone multiple amendments and reforms. With a vision of ensuring that more resources go to those who need them most and increasing the coordination and integration between cash assistance and social services, three main benefits for vulnerable and poor families – the special state allowance, state child assistance, and TSA – were integrated into the TSA through the reform. Additionally, a conditional employment link with the mandatory participation of able-bodied TSA beneficiaries in employment programmes based on a social contract, was introduced.

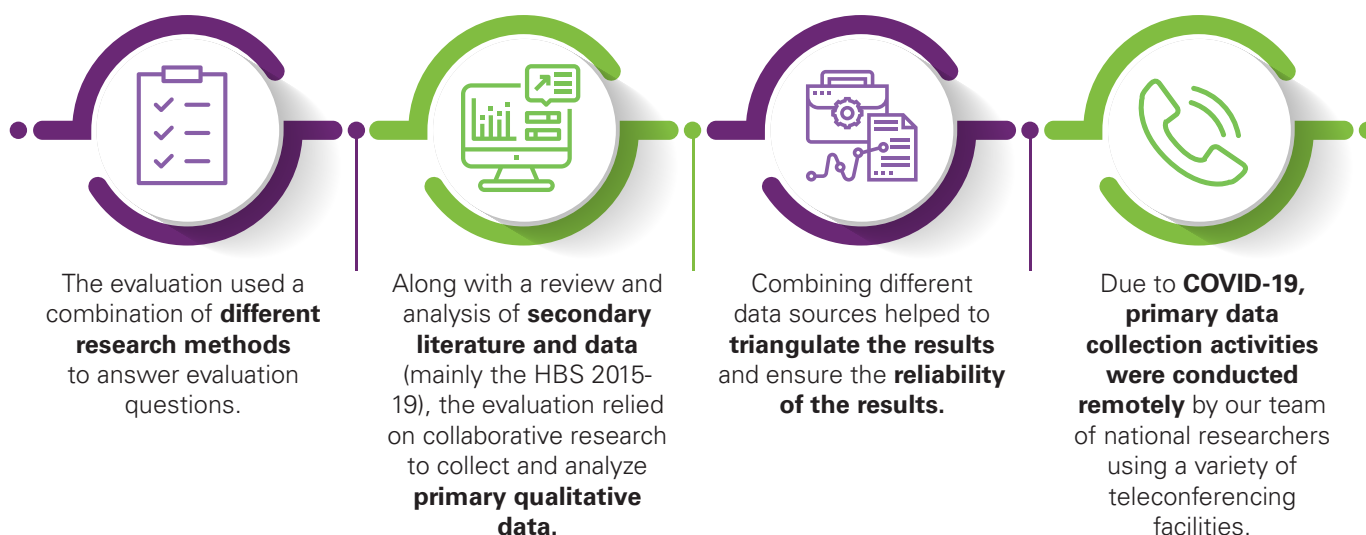


A UNICEF-led assessment of the proposed reform highlighted a heightened risk for exclusion of many low-income and poor children from the reformed cash transfer schemes. By end of 2018, the number of children among beneficiaries of social assistance programmes had drastically dropped, suggesting that the reformed TSA failed to take up existing beneficiaries as planned. More generally, the effectiveness of social assistance for children and their families remains a concern with several studies highlighting administrative and policy bottlenecks that restrict access to social assistance.



In light of the evidence on prevailing barriers that children and families face in accessing basic services and social protection services, UNICEF Kazakhstan commissioned the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI), to conduct an evaluation of the social protection system for children and their families in Kazakhstan. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the degree to which family- and child-focused cash transfer policies and programmes contribute to child and family well-being in Kazakhstan and to examine in how far transfers reduce barriers to access of basic social services and bottlenecks preventing the full realization of children's rights. In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation also explored in how far cash transfers helped families with children manage some of the socio-economic effects of the crisis.

Research Methodology



Primary qualitative data collection comprised key informant interviews with policy makers at national level and with implementers at sub-national level in four regions – **Astana, Kyzylorda, Turkestan, and West Kazakhstan**.

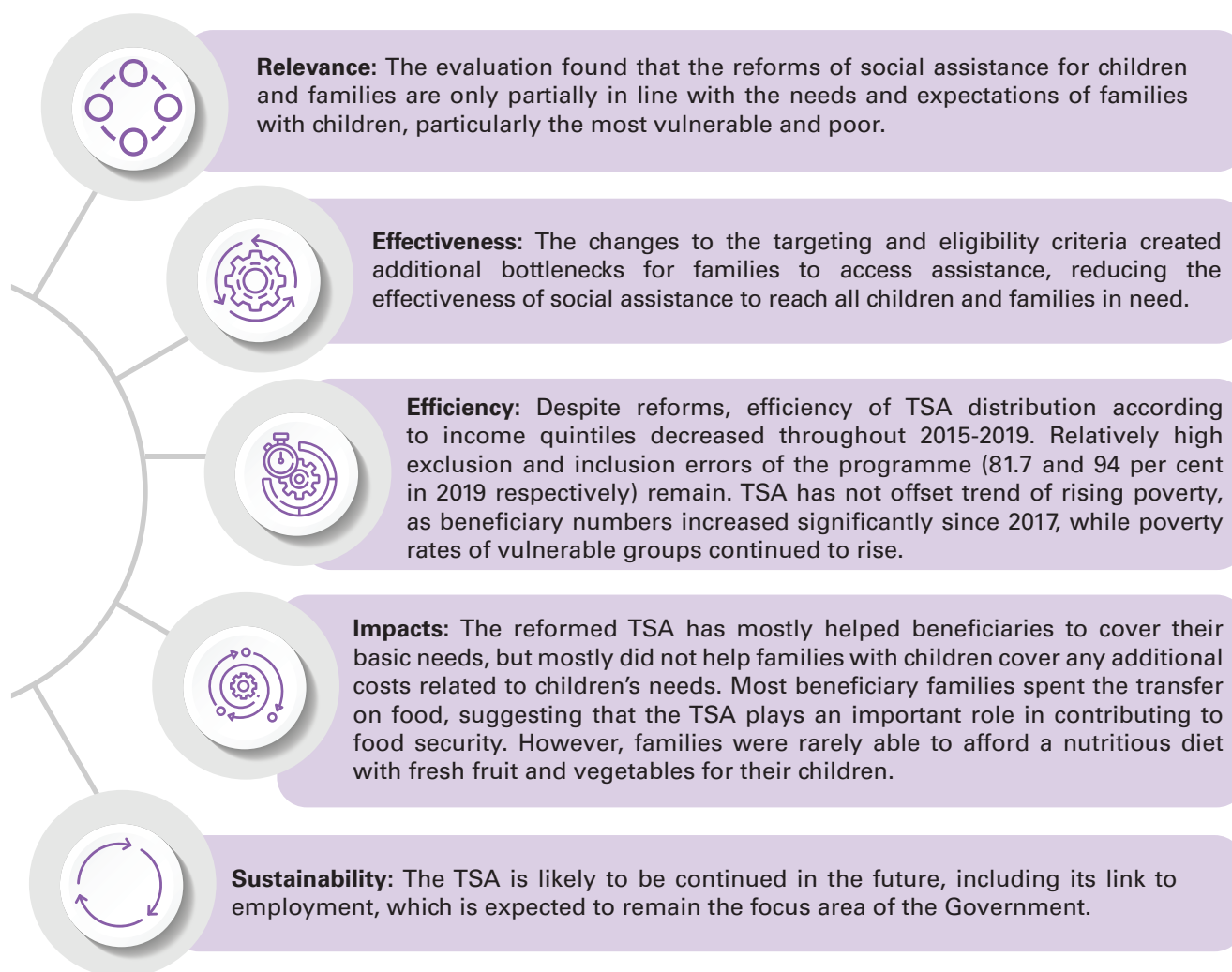


At total of **30 KIIs** were carried out.



100 interviews with beneficiaries of the TSA programme were conducted in these four regions.

Main findings



Lessons learned



Monetary assistance alone is not a panacea for alleviating the multiple deprivations faced by families and children.



When reforming programmes from categorical to means-tested, a share of beneficiaries' risks being dropped from the beneficiary list, including vulnerable groups.

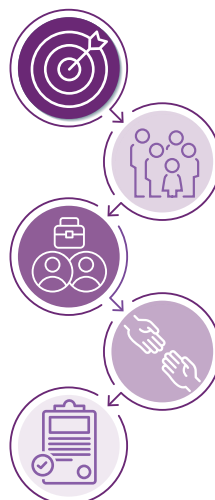


Programme requirements should be calibrated on the basis of needs and abilities of different beneficiary groups to reduce barriers to access.



In the case that social assistance is linked to a condition of employment, functionality needs to be ensured through context-specific solutions, that are adapted to regional labour markets and individual cases.

Recommendations



Review the TSA's current targeting approach to achieve the reduction of targeting errors.

Review the benefit adequacy for families with children.

Refine the employment linkage of the conditional TSA.

Upskill social workers to provide more comprehensive support to families.

Introduce an integrated social registry.

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