



Evaluation Report – Volume 1

Summative Evaluation of UNICEF Uzbekistan's Child Protection Programme from 2021 to 2024

5 February 2024

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List of Acronyms

CEDAW Committee	Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CPD	Country Programme Document between UNICEF Uzbekistan Country Office and the Government of Uzbekistan
CSI	Core Strategic Indicator
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DI	Deinstitutionalisation
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus group discussion
GEM	Gender equality marker
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH
GTA	Guardianship and Trusteeship Authority
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MOELR	Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOMFA	Ministry of Mahalla and Family Affairs
MOIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MPPC	Medical Psychological Pedagogy Commission
MPSE	Ministry of Preschool and School Education
NASP	National Agency for Social Protection
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PSN	Programme Strategy Note
RAM	Results Assessment Module
SBC	Social behavioural change
SCFWA	State Committee for Family and Women's Affairs
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound
SOPs	Standard operating procedures
SSW	Social service workforce
TOC	Theory of change
TOR	Terms of reference
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
USD	US Dollars

Executive Summary

1. Object, purpose, objectives and users

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of a summative evaluation of the Child Protection Programme between the Government of Uzbekistan and UNICEF Uzbekistan Country Office (the 'Programme' and **object** of the evaluation). The Programme comprises **Outcome 4** of the Country Programme Document between UNICEF and the Government of Uzbekistan (CPD) 2021-2025, which aims to ensure that, "*by 2025, the most vulnerable children benefit from a gender-responsive and functional child protection system that prevents and responds to separation, deprivation, violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect.*" The Programme involves **three outputs** broadly relating to: childcare reform and child protection system strengthening (CPSS); strengthening the social service workforce (SSW); and 'justice for children' system strengthening.

The Programme is **nation-wide**, involving stakeholders at the national, regional, district and community levels, and beneficiaries throughout Uzbekistan. However, certain outputs relating to modelling services and service delivery were planned solely in target regions, most notably in Surkhandarya. The evaluation assessed the Programme's implementation **from January 2021 to December 2024**. In terms of **implementation status**, at the time of writing, the Programme was almost at its conclusion.

The **purpose** of the evaluation is to provide a learning tool for UNICEF Uzbekistan, duty-bearers and key stakeholders in the child protection system by documenting the successes, barriers and bottlenecks in the design and implementation of the Programme. Its **objectives** are to:

1. Assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, coherence and, to the extent possible, impact of the Programme;
2. Provide guidance for policy-level decision-making by relevant stakeholders concerning reforms in the child protection sector;
3. Identify and document successes, challenges and lessons learned;
4. Where relevant, provide recommendations to more effectively integrate considerations of gender equality, equality for children with disabilities, and other equity issues into child protection programming.

The **primary intended users** of the evaluation are UNICEF, the Government, including the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) and its subsidiary agencies, line Ministries (particularly the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA), Ministry of Preschool and School Education (MPSE)), the Senate, Children's Ombudsperson, Supreme Court, Prosecutor's General Office, academic and training bodies for these sectors, NASP's regional offices and district Inson Social Service Centres (Inson Centre), local government, courts, mahalla committees, civil society, donors and organisations involved in child protection, and rights-holders - children, parents, guardians and caregivers.

2. Methodology

The methodology is based on the evaluation criteria of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee, namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, coherence and, to the extent possible, likely impact. The methodology was equity-informed and rights-based and adopted a **theory-based** and **non-experimental approach**. The likely contribution of the Programme to change was considered via a **contribution analysis**. The evaluation was **consultative and participatory** and adopted a **gender-responsive methodology**. A **mixed-methods** approach to data collection and analysis was adopted, incorporating both quantitative (using secondary data) and qualitative methods to gather data that is rich, explanatory, accurate and measurable. This enabled triangulation of results, improving their validity.

The evaluation involved: a desk review of literature and other documents relevant to the Programme; the collection and analysis of existing quantitative data relating to the Programme indicators; key informant interviews (KIIs) with experts or focal points from key stakeholders at the national and international levels; semi-structured individual or group interviews with regional or district level key stakeholders in the child protection system, those who had been involved in the Programme and frontline workers; and in-depth individual interviews with children, parents/ guardians.

Primary data collection was carried out at the **national level** in Tashkent City and, at sub-national levels, in **three research sites**: (i) Tashkent City and Olmazar district; (ii) Surkhandarya region, Termez City and Termez district; and (iii) as a comparator, Kashkadarya and Karshi City. The sites were selected based on the degree of programming presence, need to pilot the tools, and geographical and socio-economic diversity. A total of **156 participants (104 female and 52 male)** participated in the evaluation consisting of: 21 participants from UNICEF, international

organisations and donors; 40 from national-level stakeholders; 59 from stakeholders at the sub-national level; 13 children; and 23 parents/ guardians/ carers.

3. Key findings

Relevance: The Programme is relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 16. Support provided to children returning from armed conflict zones also responds directly to Uzbekistan's regional (and national) priorities. Outputs 4.1 and 4.2 respond to Uzbekistan's national priorities on deinstitutionalisation (DI). Output 4.3 which focuses on access to justice is also broadly relevant to Uzbekistan's national priorities, with diversion and alternative sentencing measures emerging as national priorities during the Programme. The Programme integrates gender and disability as cross-cutting issues, in line with Uzbekistan's national priorities, though these issues were not consistently explicit across all outputs and indicators. However, the support provided to migrant (Afghan) children is not yet a priority area in national laws and policies. The Programme is relevant to UNICEF's Child Protection Strategy 2021-2030, CPSS benchmarks, *Reimagine Justice for Children* agenda, and cross-cutting priorities on gender and disability. The Programme was adapted following the Mid-Term Review to respond to, among other things, NASP's establishment in June 2023. UNICEF also obtained funding to enhance emergency preparedness in child protection and respond to the humanitarian emergency facing Afghan children.

Effectiveness: Regarding **Output 4.1**, the Programme supported the development of the legal framework for child protection leading to the Law on the Protection of Children from all Forms of Violence 2024. The Programme contributed to NASP's establishment and DI, which involved the closure of 14 *mehribonlik* homes, four children's towns and five baby homes. The Programme achieved its targets in 16 out of 19 CPSS subdomains but did not achieve its results on: developing understanding and articulation of the child protection system; monitoring and oversight of minimum standards for child protection services; and data governance. There is also no functioning multi-sector coordination mechanism for child protection at the national level. Coordination mechanisms at the implementation level, SOPs and child protection case management and referral systems, are not yet fully in place. Gaps remain in the continuum of child protection services, though steps have been taken to model and test prevention services (Family Social Support Service (FSSS)).

The Programme has contributed to **Output 4.2**, through a draft Law on Social Work and strengthening the capacities of the SSW for child protection. By the end of 2023, a total of 1,282 para-professionals were trained in working with vulnerable families and children using case management. By the end of 2024, 2,909 children had received community-based MHPSS services and 1,030 children who had experienced violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect were reached through UNICEF-supported services. Progress under **Output 4.3** included the development of the National Strategy on Children's Access to Justice, though this has not been formally adopted. UNICEF-supported NGOs to deliver free legal assistance to 2,137 children (44 per cent female, 10 per cent Afghan) and 255 adults (66 per cent female, 28 per cent Afghan). The Programme also resulted in 2269 (56 per cent) of justice professionals being certified in dealing with cases involving children in conflict with the law and child victims and witnesses.

Regarding the Programme's **outcome**, between 2021 and 2023, the rate of children in formal residential care reduced from 257 per 100,000 to 182 per 100,000, surpassing the Programme's target, though the figures are not completely reliable. Several RCIs remain and the Centres of Social and Legal Support providing emergency/ temporary alternative care are a particular concern, as they are closed institutions under the MOIA. There has been a minor (6 per cent) reduction in the numbers of children with disabilities in formal residential care between 2021 and 2023. Several of the historical barriers to the DI of children with disabilities remain. Pre-trial diversion is not yet legally permissible, such that there is an absence of data on this measure and data on the numbers of children subject to alternative measures are not available. An unintended outcome of DI advocacy was the appointment of the National Guard to expedite and implement this process.

Efficiency: The Programme's estimated budget was USD 5.7 million, representing a five per cent decrease to the estimated child protection budget under the previous CPD. The Programme's actual budget until December 2024 was less than estimated (USD 4.4 million) and received the least funding compared to other programmes under the current CPD. Limited financial resources were not the main reason for partial attainment of Programme's outcome though funding constraints have affected the potential of the Programme to achieve more results as well as the achievement of certain Programme outputs. There were only two child protection officers working across the three outputs. There is little data to indicate that the Programme could have achieved the same results with less resources. Strategies were adopted to make the most of the limited funding available, e.g. UNICEF Child Programme team providing technical expertise inhouse rather than outsourcing this.

Sustainability: Several legal and policy reforms have been adopted, largely due to persistent and strategic engagement and evidence-based advocacy. The establishment of NASP has introduced sustainable institutional changes. Newly-hired staff within NASP lack sectoral and institutional knowledge, which risks impacting upon the quality and consistency of child protection services, at least in the short term. The transfer of training responsibilities to Government stakeholders have helped ensure ongoing, accessible training for staff. NGOs delivering UNICEF-supported free legal services faced significant challenges in recruiting and retaining lawyers. Interventions to raise awareness of children’s rights also rely exclusively on donor support. NASP has the potential to ensure targeted and sustained resource allocation to the sector, though this will require technical support. There is no legal or policy commitment from Government to reallocate resources from closed or reorganised RCIs to community-based services.

Coherence: The Programme involved various collaborations between UNICEF and other international organisations including the EU, UNHCR, UNDP, IOM, UNODC, and World Bank. Participants from international organisations spoke extremely positively about their collaborations. There is evidence of continuing collaboration, such as UNICEF and UNODC’s planned joint project to pilot diversion and alternative measures. Despite the Programme’s strong gender focus, there was limited collaboration between UNICEF and UN Women, though plans are in place for them to start work on a joint EU project to address harmful gender norms in April 2025. The fragmentation of the child protection and social welfare systems before NASP was a driving force for the close collaboration between UNICEF’s child protection and social protection teams. The child protection team collaborated with the education team on inclusive education and support to Afghan children, and with the health team on strengthening MHPSS though less on DI.

Impact: Feedback from children at the Inson Centres who had been involved in child protection cases due to orphanhood or abuse generally spoke positively about the outcomes of their cases, which often involved guardianship placements with relatives. There have been particular challenges in monitoring the safe and supported reintegration of children who were deinstitutionalised from RCIs during the Programme period; several stakeholders reported instances where children who were deinstitutionalised ran away return or ended up being placed in a penitentiary institution. Informational materials like brochures have been distributed to raise awareness, though there was no guarantee that these will effectively reach or impact children.

4. Conclusions and lessons learned

Relevance: The Programme was extremely relevant to Uzbekistan’s priorities at the national, regional and global levels, with pre-trial diversion and alternative measures emerging as national priorities due to targeted advocacy. Though not a priority for the Government, support for Afghan children responded to critical need. The Programme is broadly relevant to gender and disability issues though these elements could have been strengthened further in the Programme’s design. The Programme was generally extremely relevant to UNICEF’s global and regional priorities and responded extremely well to significant institutional changes, humanitarian crises and evolving political and social landscape. The Programme is also, on the whole, relevant to the child protection needs of boys and girls in Uzbekistan.

Effectiveness: The Programme made good progress in achieving its intended outcome and contributed to a reduction in the rate of children in formal residential care between 2021 and 2023. Programme strategies focusing on national-level reforms secured the commitment and leadership of government at the highest levels, leading to landmark, necessary changes to the legal, policy and institutional frameworks. With the backing of other stakeholders, particularly the Senate and Office of the Children’s Ombudsperson, the Programme achieved its targets in 16 out of 19 CPSS subdomains by the end of 2024. Similarly, the Programme has achieved its intended results relating to SSW-strengthening. Interventions post-NASP have adopted a more system-based approach to professionalising the SSW. Given NASP’s recent establishment, several interventions are ongoing, such as the development and adoption of the Law on Social Work and Social Services and minimum standards for social work, which are likely to achieve more results under this output.

The rate of deinstitutionalisation has outpaced the rate of other critical CPSS reforms, including the development of family-based alternative care, such that there is still a reliance on RCIs. There is a need to focus on developing foster care and reforming the Social and Legal Support Centres. Similarly, there is a pressing need to focus on building the capacity of a core team of social service workers to deal exclusively with child protection cases, particularly for mandatory child protection interventions for the most critical cases. Continued intervention is required to ensure that ongoing activities are completed and that the gains achieved before NASP’s establishment are not lost. Output 4.3 has contributed less to the outcome than other outputs. Continued advocacy and strategic partnerships are required to ensure the adoption and implementation of the National Strategy on Children’s Access to Justice and address

remaining barriers in the system including legal gaps on pre-trial diversion and alternative measures for children in conflict with the law.

The Programme's strategy of focusing on national level child protection reforms has been extremely effective, as has the Programme's approach to building sustainable partnerships, which have proved crucial for achieving results. The unintended outcome of DI (appointment of the National Guard to lead this process) led to rapid deinstitutionalisation and cases where children and their families have not been adequately supported during/after reintegration, requiring continuing advocacy to bring the process back under NASP's leadership.

Efficiency: The Programme has operated within financial constraints. While available resources were used efficiently to achieve intended results, more could have been achieved with more funding. Strategies were adopted to ensure that the limited funding available was used as efficiently as possible. Human resources allocated to the Programme were insufficient.

Sustainability: The legal and policy reforms supported by the Programme are broadly sustainable, though there is a need to continue supporting NASP as new systems are put in place and capacities are being built. Significant steps are being taken to sustain the capacity-building interventions, paving the way towards professionalising the SSW within the child protection system and mitigating against the risk of SSW turnover. The pro bono legal services and awareness-raising interventions have proved less sustainable than other UNICEF-supported services delivered under the Programme. The Programme has generally been extremely effective in supporting stakeholder buy-in, leadership and ownership of child protection reforms. The Programme has the potential to contribute to the efficient allocation and utilisation of national resources in the child protection sector.

Coherence: Collaborations between UNICEF, development partners and other UN agencies under the Programme have generally been effective in maximising contributions and preventing duplication of work. UNICEF's collaborations with development partners and UN agencies have also stimulated collaborative efforts. There has been strong coherence between UNICEF's Child Protection and Social Protection teams in achieving Programme results. Coherence is also evident between the Child Protection and Education and Health teams, though this should be strengthened further particularly in relation to supporting the DI of children with disabilities and elimination of violence against children.

Impact: Overall, the Programme has contributed to children, including children with disabilities, and their parents/carers, benefiting from enhanced governance systems and rule of law institutions for a life free from discrimination and violence. There is evidence of CPSS reforms and pro bono legal services contributing to positive outcomes for beneficiaries. However, there were significant challenges in monitoring the safe and supported reintegration of children who were deinstitutionalised from RCIs. The contribution of the Programme to generating demand for children's rights, freedom from discrimination and prohibition of violence, is also likely to be limited.

Lessons learned:

- (i) The evaluation highlights the value and importance of sustained advocacy and strategic collaboration to achieve sustainable legal and institutional reforms which are essential for progressing CPSS. Though the tangible results of these strategies may take more than one programme cycle to materialise, the continued investment of time and resources into building partnerships with influential government partners to advance child protection reforms can lead to landmark normative changes.
- (ii) The evaluation reinforces the importance of implementing DI gradually and that this must take place in parallel to the strengthening of child protection case management expertise and the expansion of a continuum of social and child protection services including family-based alternative care and specialist services for children with specific needs such as children with disabilities.
- (iii) The provision of legal information and advice is extremely important for preventing legal matters from escalating, requiring more specialist and resource-intensive legal assistance. However, as the experience in Uzbekistan shows, challenges arise in sustaining the provision of these services solely through the NGO sector. By engaging relevant Government and State agencies, strategies for the sustainable and efficient allocation of resources to developing accessible, free child-friendly legal information and advice (e.g. online information; helplines providing free legal advice etc.) can be agreed upon and coordinated, as well as incentivising and funding child-friendly legal representation (which is the most resource intensive form of legal aid) for priority cases.

5. Recommendations

Recommendation, timeframe and priority	Duty-bearers/ stakeholders, with UNICEF support
1. Law, policy and operational framework Finalise and adopt the pending laws, policies and operational documents developed under the Programme, ensuring gender and disability inclusion and a strengthened focus on child justice reforms (<i>short-term; high priority</i>)	NASP, Senate, Children's Ombudsperson, MOH, MPSE, MOIA, Prosecutor General, MOJ, Supreme Court, NGOs
2. SSW- strengthening 2.1. Comprehensive mapping of the SSW (<i>short-term</i>)	NASP
2.2. Developing a five-year action plan for SSW-strengthening, including a focus on tertiary-level, mandatory cases (<i>medium-term; high priority</i>)	
2.3. Development of a 20-year strategy for SSW-strengthening, including a focus on child protection and mainstreaming of MHPSS (<i>long-term</i>)	NASP, training academies and academia
2.4. Integration of child protection training into other sector-specific trainings (<i>short-term; high priority</i>)	MOH, MPSE, MOJ, training bodies, academia, Supreme Court, Prosecutor General, MOIA
3. Continuum of child protection services 3.1. Expansion and professionalisation of foster care including emergency and specialist foster care (<i>medium term; high priority</i>)	NASP with support and collaboration with NGO sector
3.2. Expansion of specialist, gender-responsive and inclusive community-based services for children to support DI, particularly for children with disabilities and children at high risk of offending (<i>medium-term; high priority</i>)	NASP in collaboration with MPSE, MOH and NGO sector
3.3. Scale-up of FSSS based on pilot results to prevent family separation (<i>medium-term; high priority</i>)	NASP
3.4. Development of social services to support children including those with disabilities aging out of the childcare system (<i>medium-term</i>)	NASP in collaboration with NGO sector
3.5. Ensuring links between the child protection system and a range of gender-responsive MHPSS services for children and parents/carers in need of this support (<i>medium-term</i>)	NASP in collaboration with other sectors, particularly MOH, MPSE and NGO sector
4. Deinstitutionalisation 4.1. Transfer DI tasks from the National Guard, and authority over the Social and Legal Support Centres from the MOIA, to NASP (<i>short-term; high priority</i>)	Legislature; National Guard; MOIA; NASP
4.2. Analysis of the costs of and resources allocated to RCIs to inform recommendations to reallocate resources to family- and community-based services (<i>short-term</i>)	NASP; RCIs and their overseeing Ministry
4.3. Develop plan for the gradual, monitored DI of children in RCIs with a view to their closure/ transformation over the next five years (<i>medium-term</i>)	NASP; MOH; MPSE; RCIs
5. Other CPSS priorities 5.1. Establish multi-sectoral coordination body for child protection (<i>short-term</i>)	NASP (leadership); Senate (support)
5.2. Develop a framework for the collection, monitoring and sharing of disaggregated data on child protection cases (<i>medium-term</i>)	NASP, MOH, MPSE, MOIA, Prosecutor General, MOJ, Supreme Court, NGOs
6. Social behavioural change Nation-wide, gender-sensitive and disability inclusive campaign on child rights, elimination of violence against children, reporting child protection concerns and accessing complaints mechanisms (<i>long-term</i>)	NASP; MOJ; Children's Ombudsperson
7. Justice for children 7.1. Formalise the institutionalisation of compulsory, gender-responsive pre- and in-service training for justice professionals, including social workers, on delivering child-friendly justice (<i>short-term; high priority</i>)	MOJ, MOIA, Supreme Court, Prosecutor's General Office, training academies, academia
7.2. Modelling, piloting and scale-up of gender-sensitive pre-trial diversion and alternative measures following legal amendment (<i>medium-term; high priority</i>)	MOJ, MOIA, Supreme Court, Prosecutor General, penitentiary system
7.3. Modelling, piloting and scaling-up a child-friendly and gender-sensitive legal aid service for children (<i>long-term; high priority</i>)	MOJ in collaboration with the NGO sector

1. Background

1.1. Object of the evaluation

UNICEF Uzbekistan has engaged Coram International to conduct a summative evaluation of the country's Child Protection Programme (the 'Programme' and **object** of the evaluation). The Programme comprises **Outcome 4** of the Country Programme Document between UNICEF and the Government of Uzbekistan (CPD) for the period 2021-2025, which aims to ensure that, "by 2025, the most vulnerable children benefit from a gender-responsive and functional child protection system that prevents and responds to separation, deprivation, violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect." The Programme involves three outputs broadly relating to: childcare reform and child protection system strengthening (CPSS); strengthening the social service workforce (SSW); and 'justice for children' system strengthening (see [part 3.3](#) for the Programme's theory of change (TOC)).

The Programme is **nation-wide**, involving stakeholders (including duty-bearers) at the national, regional, district and community levels, and child rights-holders throughout Uzbekistan (see further below for details). However, certain outputs relating to modelling services and service delivery were planned solely in target regions or districts, most notably, the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme implemented in Surkhandarya. Although this is a summative evaluation, the evaluation took place just before the conclusion of the Programme so that stakeholders could use the findings to inform the next CPD. Therefore, the evaluation assessed the Programme's implementation from January 2021 to December 2024. In terms of **implementation status**, at the time of writing, the Programme was almost at its conclusion.

The estimated **budget** for the Programme, as outlined in the CPD, was USD 5,740,000, made up of USD 3 million from regular resources and USD 2,740,000 from other resources (see [Table 1](#) for a breakdown by output). However, the actual budget allocated and spent by the Programme until the end of 2024 was USD 4,448,159, made up of USD 1,889,497 by regular resources and 2,558,662 by other resources (see

Table 2 for the breakdown of the actual budget per output).

Table 1: Estimated resources for the Programme by output (source: Programme Strategy Note 2020 and CPD)

Expected Results	Regular Resources	Other Resources	Total
	(in USD)	(in USD)	(in USD)
Output 3.1: Childcare system reform	1,700,000	1,000,000	2,700,000
Output 3.2: Social service workforce development	500,000	740,000	1,240,000
Output 3.3: Justice for children system strengthening	800,000	1,000,000	1,800,000
TOTAL	3,000,000	2,740,000	5,740,000

Table 2: Actual budget allocated and spent by the Programme until December 2024 (source: UNICEF Uzbekistan Country Office)

Expected Results	Regular Resources	Other Resources ¹	Total
	(in USD)	(in USD)	(in USD)
Output 3.1: Childcare system reform	633,934	243,440	877,374
Output 3.2: Social service workforce development	669,192	1,833,634	2,502,826
Output 3.3: Justice for children system strengthening	586,371	481,588	1,067,959

¹ The other resources include donors, mainly the EU Delegation (Uzbekistan), Japanese Government, German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH (GIZ), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the USA Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and the UNICEF's Global Child Protection Thematic Fund.

TOTAL	1,889,497	2,558,662	4,448,159
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The **beneficiaries** of and **rights holders** targeted by the Programme are all children (under 18s) in Uzbekistan including girls, boys, children with disabilities and other groups of children who are particularly vulnerable to or at risk of exclusion, violence or discrimination. Additionally, parents, guardians, and caregivers are recognized as beneficiaries of the Programme and rights holders, given the family-strengthening approach of the Programme in preventing and responding to child protection concerns. As of 2024, Uzbekistan's child population is approximately 12,928,189 (6,694,958 boys and 6,233,231 girls),² highlighting the extensive reach of this Programme. In 2023, 161,901 children were recorded as having an 'established disability,' out of which 93,121 were boys and 68,780 were girls.³ The status and needs of the rights holders are elaborated in **Part 2.7**. (Context). The main **duty-bearers** with responsibilities under the Programme and their geographical locations are listed in **Table 3**. The **key stakeholders, their relationships and contributions** are also outlined in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Summary of key duty-bearers and stakeholders and their roles

Key duty-bearers/stakeholders	Responsibilities and/or contribution	Geographical location
International organisations		
UNICEF	UNICEF's child protection team implemented the Programme, which was planned and monitored in collaboration with UNICEF's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) team. UNICEF's health, education, social policy, child rights monitoring, communications, gender and disability teams were also involved in designing and implementing this Programme.	Nationwide
Other UN Agencies	UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) worked on access to justice issues; the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) on combating gender-based violence; International Organization for Migration (IOM) on migrant children, particularly from Afghanistan; and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on displaced, refugee or stateless children, particularly from Afghanistan; UN Women (repatriation of women and children from conflict zones).	Nationwide
Government duty-bearers		
NASP	This is the lead child protection agency within government at the national level and is responsible for providing social welfare and child protection services. It is responsible for most residential care institutions (RCIs) in Uzbekistan and, during the Programme, has been the lead government partner for most interventions since its establishment in June 2023, including: legal and policy development; developing the regulatory framework and standards for service delivery, scaling child protection and social support services; enhancing data collection and monitoring; strengthening the SSW; and implementing DI. Also responsible for overseeing the remaining two mehribonlik homes/orphanages in Tashkent which have been transferred from MPSE.	National-level stakeholder acting through its branches at the regional level and through the Inson Social Service Centres (Inson Centre) at the district and Mahalla levels
Republican Centre for Rehabilitation and Adaptation of Women Suffered from Violence	The Centre is mandated to provide support and rehabilitation services to women who have experienced violence, including domestic violence, and their children, to help them reintegrate into society. The Centre was under the State Committee for Family and Women's Affairs (SCFWA) in 2022, but then moved to under NASP in 2023. ⁴	National-level stakeholder
Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA)	Responsible for participating in national legal and policy development, implementing reforms to transform the Social and Legal Support Centres, participating in modelling and testing gatekeeping and referral pathways of children into the child protection system, training law	National-level stakeholder including the Departments of Internal Affairs at the

² TransMonEE data.

³ TransMonEE data.

⁴ NASP, <https://ihma.uz/en/agency-category/subordinate-organizations/>, accessed 16 July 2024.

	enforcement on child-friendly justice, and modelling and testing diversion.	regional and district levels
Ministry of Preschool and School Education (MPSE)	Involved in national legal and policy development, testing and scaling gatekeeping mechanisms, child protection and social support services (pre-2023 through education departments), overseeing the transformation or closure of RCIs, including children's towns (now closed), and correctional institutions, developing inclusive education for children with disabilities (not under but linked to the Programme), and developing sector-specific child protection standard operating procedures (SOPs).	National-level stakeholder and equivalent departments within regional, district, city level Khokimiyats
Ministry of Health (MOH)	Involved in national legal and policy development, providing community-based services to prevent family separation and support reintegration, including care for children with disabilities and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services, overseeing baby homes before they were transferred to NASP, and developing sector-specific child protection standard operating procedures (SOPs).	National-level stakeholder and departments within regional, district, city level government authorities
Senate	Involved in system-level child protection reforms, particularly legal, policy and institutional reforms.	National-level stakeholder
Republican Center for Professional Orientation and Psycho-Pedagogical Diagnostics of Pupils ('Tashxis')	Mandated to provide psycho-pedagogical diagnostics for school-aged children including assessing students' educational needs and psychological well-being and providing guidance for their academic and personal development; was involved in providing support to repatriated children from armed conflict zones.	National-level stakeholder
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	MOJ oversees legal affairs nationwide. It was involved in developing national policies on children's access to justice and legal aid, including leading the drafting of the Law on the Protection of Children from all Forms of Violence, strengthening child protection monitoring, and implementing SBC strategies to improve children's access to justice.	National-level stakeholder
Ministry of Finance (MOF)	The MOF is responsible for approving the (re)allocation of funds towards developing the child protection system as proposed in the financial plans submitted by the relevant child protection stakeholder.	National-level stakeholder
Prosecutor General's Office	Responsible for developing the national legal and policy framework on children's access to justice, implementing reforms to prevent child offending, strengthening monitoring of child protection, modelling community-based services like diversion and alternatives to deprivation of liberty; delivering training on child-friendly justice and developing specialism of judges.	National, regional and district levels
Children's Ombudsperson	Protects and promotes children's rights and is involved in childcare reforms, efforts to eliminate violence against children, and monitoring children's rights, including within RCIs and detention facilities. ⁵	National-level stakeholder
Supreme Court and other courts	Involved in legal and policy development at the national level; modelling diversion and alternatives to deprivation of liberty; implementing child-friendly justice proceedings; delivering training on child-friendly justice and developing specialization of judges.	National-level stakeholder
Training, academia and civil society		
Training and academia stakeholders	The main stakeholders involved in the capacity-building components of the Programme were NASP's Department Re-Training and In-Service Training, Lawyer's Training Centre, the Law Enforcement Academy of the Prosecutor General's Office, the Columbia University, National University of Uzbekistan and the Legal Clinic at the University of the World Economy and Diplomacy.	Nationwide
NGOs	Key NGOs include national NGOs, Madad and Istiqbolli Avlod, which were involved in piloting child-friendly legal aid under output 4.3 and 'Soglom Avlod Uchun' involved in delivering community-based services	Ad hoc based on programme priorities of the

⁵ Written comments from UNICEF Uzbekistan Country Office on the draft inception report, submitted to Coram International on 31 July 2024.

	for children with disabilities, and international NGO, Caritas, who were involved in developing social work competencies and delivering community-based services for children with disabilities. The Republican Centre for Social Adaptation of Children is a key stakeholder involved in output 4.2, focusing mainly on supporting the reintegration of children returning from armed conflict zones and assessment of children released from RCIs, as well as in partnership with ‘Soglom Avlod Uchun’ involved in delivering community-based services for children with disabilities.	organisation
Donors and development partners		
Donors and development partners	Donors: the EU Delegation (Uzbekistan); Japanese Government; German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH (GIZ); Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; the USA Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration; the UNICEF’s Global Child Protection Thematic Fund. Development partners: World Bank (in relation to data collection and monitoring of children in RCIs); and EU/Foreign Policy Instrument (provision of social and child protection services to children from Afghan and host communities in Surkhandarya and reintegration assistance to children and women repatriated from conflict zones).	Nationwide

Additional details about UNICEF’s planned contribution, the contribution of other duty-bearers and stakeholders, the contribution to systematic change under the revised TOC, and underpinning risks and assumptions, are in [Annex B](#) (Programme TOC and planned interventions).

2. Context

2.2. Geographical and demographic context

Uzbekistan is a double landlocked country in Central Asia, bordered by Kazakhstan to the north, Kyrgyzstan to the northeast, Tajikistan to the southeast, Afghanistan to the south, and Turkmenistan to the southwest. Uzbekistan has the largest population in Central Asia with approximately 37 million people in 2024 (50.3 per cent female and 49.7 per cent male).⁶ Of the total population, around 28.7 per cent are children under the age of 18.⁷ In 2023, 161,901 children were recorded as having an ‘established disability,’ 58 per cent of whom were male and the rest female.⁸ Fifty one (51) per cent of the population lives in urban areas while 49 per cent resides in rural areas, highlighting the continuing significance of rural life for nearly half of the population.⁹ The ethnic composition of the population is: Uzbek (83.8 per cent); Tajik (4.8 per cent); Russian (2.3 per cent); Kazakh (2.3 per cent); and Karakalpak (2.2 per cent).¹⁰

2.3. Socio-economic, political and administrative context

Uzbekistan is classified as a lower-middle-income country by the World Bank, with a Gross Domestic Product of approximately US\$90.9 billion and a GDP per capita of US\$2,496.¹¹ At the outset of the evaluation period, investment in social protection in Uzbekistan was low, with the coverage of child-specific allowances having decreased over time.¹² In 2020, UNICEF reported that 17 per cent of children lived in households which received

⁶ Website of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, Demographic Situation, retrieved from <https://stat.uz/img/demografiya-english- p16588.pdf> on 31 October 2024.

⁷ Website of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, Demographic Situation, retrieved from: <https://stat.uz/en/official-statistics/demography> on 31 October 2024.

⁸ TransMonEE data.

⁹ Website of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, Demographic Situation, retrieved from <https://stat.uz/img/demografiya-english- p16588.pdf> on 31 October 2024.

¹⁰ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Situation Analysis of Children in Uzbekistan, 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 30.

¹¹ World Bank, The World Bank in Uzbekistan: Country Snapshot, April 2018, p 1; World Bank, Data for Uzbekistan, Lower Middle Income, retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=UZ-XN> on 31 October 2024.

¹² UNICEF Uzbekistan, Country Programme Document 2021-2025, 14 December 2020, available at: https://unicef.org/executiveboard/media/3111/file/2021-PL8-Uzbekistan_CPD-EN-ODS.pdf, paragraph 4.

some kind of child allowances, though 75 per cent of eligible families did not receive any.¹³ However, Uzbekistan has been taking important steps to address these challenges, including the establishment of NASP and significant legal and policy reforms to develop the social protection system, outlined further below.

The succession of a new president in 2016 brought about a significant shift in government policy and opportunities for the reform of the child protection system and social sector. The new government initiated ambitious economic and social reforms, reflected in the adoption of two National Development Strategies (one for 2017-2021 and the other for 2022-2026), which focused among other on economic liberalisation and improvements to the social protection system.¹⁴

In 2023, Uzbekistan held a constitutional referendum, which endorsed a new Constitution that emphasises a socially-oriented State. It also adopted a third National Development Strategy for the years 2023-2030.¹⁵ Its goals are directly relevant to the Programme and include providing opportunities for every person to realise their potential, fostering a healthy and educated generation, building a robust economy, and ensuring justice, the rule of law and security. One of the overarching goals of the Strategy is to achieve upper-middle-income status by 2030 and to halve poverty by 2026.¹⁶

Uzbekistan is administratively divided into twelve regions, the capital city of Tashkent, and the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan. Local governments are established at the regional, district, city and town levels, each of which is governed by local *Khokimiyats* (administrative offices).¹⁷ *Khokimiyats* have normally been responsible for local governance and delivery of public services such as education, healthcare and social welfare for residents in their administrative area. In addition, neighbourhoods (*mahallas*) are self-governed by Mahalla Committees, which are elected by local residents.

2.4. Legal context

Uzbekistan acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1994 and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2021. The rights of children in Uzbekistan are protected by the Constitution, particularly Article 78, which ensures that all children are equal before the law and mandates the State to protect their rights and development.¹⁸ At the outset of the Programme, in addition to their constitutional rights, the rights of children in need of care and protection were guaranteed by a range of domestic laws, most notably, the Family Code, the Law on the Guarantee of the Rights of the Child 2008, including protection from violations of the child's rights and legal interests and the right to be raised in a family environment, and the Law on Guardianship and Trusteeship 2014.¹⁹ The Programme intended to strengthen this existing legal framework further. Uzbekistan is not party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 and its 1967 Protocol.

2.5. Child protection system strengthening

Before the establishment of NASP in June 2023, child protection gatekeeping and case management functions were fragmented between Guardianship and Trusteeship Authorities (GTAs), Commissions on Children's Issues (formerly the Commissions on Minors' Affairs), and Medical Psychological Pedagogy Commissions (MPPCs) (for children with disabilities), among others. Children entered the childcare system via different routes depending on their situation (for example, children were placed in Social and Legal Assistance Centres by law enforcement bodies or the director/deputy of the centre, subject to judicial approval; children with disabilities were placed in RCIs through the MPPC etc.).²⁰ Cases involving children at risk of offending (i.e. involved in so-called "delinquent" behaviour) were handled by bodies of internal affairs via the Department for the Prevention of

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Programme Review Report, 23 November 2023, page 3.

¹⁵ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Country Office Annual Report 2023, page 1.

¹⁶ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Country Office Annual Report 2023, page 1.

¹⁷ Constitution of Uzbekistan, Article 120-125, available at: <https://lex.uz/en/docs/6451070>.

¹⁸ Constitution of Uzbekistan, Article 78, available at <https://lex.uz/en/docs/6451070>:

¹⁹ Law no.LRU-364 on Guardianship and Trusteeship, 2 January 2014.

²⁰ Law on the Prevention of Neglect and Delinquency by among Minors 2010, Article 12.

Child Neglect and Offending (district-level Departments of Internal Affairs) and the District/City Commissions on Children's Issues, rather than through a social welfare approach based on the needs of the child and their family. Further, para-professionals working within Mahallas reported to different authorities, such as the Mahalla Committee and the Khokimiyat, creating a degree of incoherence in the system and leading to absence of proper monitoring and reporting.²¹

The shortage of a trained SSW for child protection and the inadequate implementation of case management have been recognised as key barriers in the child protection system.²² Mahalla Committees have normally provided social support through para-professionals who often lacked specialist knowledge and skills in child protection. Further, once children were placed in residential institutions, there was little monitoring of outcomes, such as the implementation of individual care plans.²³ Additionally, maintaining contact with biological families was not a standard practice, which further isolated these children from potential support networks.²⁴

The inconsistent availability of quality social services to prevent family separation and support family reintegration, particularly outside of Tashkent City, have been key challenges, with the state-funded system primarily focused on residential care.²⁵ Previous studies have highlighted that essential services, such as rehabilitation, counselling, and parenting programmes, required significant strengthening to adequately address the needs of children and families at risk of separation.²⁶ The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) also identified a gap in social support services, particularly for poor families, children with disabilities and children left behind by migrant parents.²⁷

There have been various barriers and bottlenecks to developing a specialized and comprehensive child justice system in Uzbekistan. In 2022, the CRC Committee identified a lack of capacity to identify victims and a child-sensitive approach to victim protection, including the lack of designated specialized judges and prosecutors for children.²⁸ The CRC Committee noted the absence of a mechanism for non-judicial measures, such as diversion, mediation, and counselling for children accused of criminal offenses.²⁹ Additionally, the CRC Committee recommended that Uzbekistan should use non-custodial sentences, such as probation and community-based services, and ensure that deprivation of liberty should be consistently employed as a measure of last resort.³⁰

2.6. Cultural context

Uzbekistan's culture is rooted in collectivism, where traditional values and social norms hold considerable value. Mahallas have traditionally played an important role in community life and have been integral to community cohesion and preservation of cultural heritage,³¹ thus playing an influential role in shaping societal norms and practices in Uzbekistan. Reports highlight instances where customary practices in Uzbekistan favour patriarchal and traditional gender norms,³² contributing to limiting girls' access to education, especially higher education, and employment opportunities.³³ Gender stereotypes increase women's dependence on men and affect the

²¹ Information provided by UNICEF Uzbekistan through an online meeting held on 9 July 2024.

²² Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan, 27 October 2022, page 7, paragraph 31 (c).

²³ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Situation Analysis of Children in Uzbekistan, 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 80.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Situation Analysis of Children in Uzbekistan, 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 83.

²⁶ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Situation Analysis of Children in Uzbekistan, 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 83.

²⁷ CRC Committee, concluding observations, para. 30(b).

²⁸ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan, 27 October 2022, page 14, paras. 27(d) and 48.

²⁹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan, 27 October 2022, page 15, paragraph 48.

³⁰ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan, 27 October 2022, page 15, paragraph 48.

³¹ UNICEF, ILO, and World Bank, "An assessment of the social protection system in Uzbekistan", 2020, page 38.

³² UNICEF Uzbekistan, Situation Analysis of Children in Uzbekistan, 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 106.

³³ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Situation Analysis of Children in Uzbekistan, 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 107.

poverty levels of children, particularly in cases of divorce.³⁴ Social and gender norms that condone violence against children and gender-based violence (GBV), further perpetuate this issue.

2.7. Status and needs of the rights holders/ beneficiaries

There have been challenges in measuring the true scale of violence against children in Uzbekistan due to the lack of data and underreporting.³⁵ The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted by UNICEF in 2021-2022 revealed that 62 per cent of children aged 1-14 experienced some form of violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) in the month preceding the survey.³⁶ UNICEF is in the process of planning another MICS with the government with preparation for data collection expected to take place in 2027-2028 following the census.³⁷ The CRC Committee's 2022 concluding observations highlighted the widespread acceptance of corporal punishment in Uzbekistan, in the absence of a clear legal prohibition, as well as the lack of legislative and institutional frameworks to prevent and combat violence against children,³⁸ domestic violence, including corporal punishment of children, is often viewed as a private family matter, thereby hindering reporting and 'external' intervention.³⁹ However, significant strides are being taken in Uzbekistan to address this.

Like many other countries, children with disabilities in Uzbekistan face stigma and marginalization. The general public often approaches disability issues from a charity perspective, focusing on assistance and sympathy rather than inclusion, agency and empowerment.⁴⁰ Consequently, people with disabilities, including children, lack visibility in the public sphere, reinforcing their marginalisation and limiting their opportunities for social inclusion and participation. These attitudes and norms are historic drivers of institutionalisation of children with disabilities. Other key drivers include the lack of social and financial support for families, especially single mothers, to care for children with disabilities.⁴¹ The CRC Committee has issued recommendations to develop community-based prevention services (including early identification) and specialised alternative family-based care options to prevent institutionalisation.⁴² The CRC Committee has also recommended ensuring that the social sector and other professionals working regularly with children with disabilities have adequate knowledge and minimum standards of conduct, and that awareness-raising among professionals, the public and families to combat stigmatisation of children with disabilities should be strengthened.⁴³

With regard to gender, in addition to the socio-cultural norms mentioned in Part 2.6. the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) has highlighted "persistent barriers" to girls' access to justice, including limited knowledge of their rights and available remedies as well as the limited capacity of the judiciary and law enforcement officials to apply international standards.⁴⁴ The CEDAW Committee also raised concerns about the use of reconciliation within mahallas instead of prosecution to resolve cases involving gender-based violence.⁴⁵ Further, an estimated 3 per cent of children are married before they turn 18 years old,⁴⁶ though estimates are expected to be much higher if including unregistered religious marriages.

³⁴ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Situation Analysis of Children in Uzbekistan, 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 107.

³⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan, 27 October 2022, para. 27(a).

³⁶ State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics and UNICEF, "2021-2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Uzbekistan, Statistical Snapshot Report", October 2022, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 29.

³⁷ UNICEF Uzbekistan, written comments on draft inception report, July 2024.

³⁸ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan, 27 October 2022, page 6, paragraph 27 (b).

³⁹ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Situation Analysis of Children in Uzbekistan, 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 108.

⁴⁰ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Situation Analysis on Children and Adults with Disabilities in Uzbekistan 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 60.

⁴¹ UNICEF Uzbekistan Website "Prevention of family separation and childcare reform", retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/prevention-family-separation-and-childcare-reform>, and UNICEF ECARO, UNICEF Uzbekistan: Gender Programmatic Review, November 2020, page 19.

⁴² CRC Committee, Concluding Observations, para. 36.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ CEDAW Committee, Concluding Observations, 2022, para. 11.

⁴⁵ CEDAW Committee, Concluding Observations, 2022, para. 11.

⁴⁶ State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics and UNICEF, "2021-2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Uzbekistan, Statistical Snapshot Report", October 2022, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, page 33..

At the end of 2020 (i.e. at the outset of the Programme, noted here as baseline data for the evaluation), there were 31,402 children in residential care, with children with disabilities comprising 74 per cent.⁴⁷ In contrast, in 2020, 38,665 children were in formal family-based care, six of whom were children with disabilities.⁴⁸ Reasons included the absence of a formal foster-care system and inadequate support for guardians and caregivers.⁴⁹

Uzbekistan does not operate a national system for international protection. Consequently, child refugees are recognised as migrants and are at risk of being treated as an 'illegal migrant' in the absence of the relevant permits and visas, leading to challenges in accessing education, healthcare, social protection and other services, as well as the risk of deportation. The CRC Committee recommended that Uzbekistan establish a national system for international protection providing safeguards against arbitrary detention, deportation and refoulement, recognise and provide legal status to refugees and asylum-seeking children and their families, and facilitate their access to education, health care and social services.⁵⁰ Children left behind by migrating parents/carers is an issue. Although accurate statistics are unavailable, a UNICEF study from 2020 found that over 73 per cent of surveyed migrant families have two or more children left behind.⁵¹

2.8. Relevant SDGs targets and indicators

The Programme (and hence the evaluation) aims to contribute towards Uzbekistan's international development targets, most notably Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 and the following targets:

- 16.1 on significantly reducing all forms of violence and deaths;
- 16.2 on ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children;
- 16.3 on promoting the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensuring equal access to justice for all; and
- 16.a on strengthening national institutions for building capacity at all levels to prevent violence.

More broadly, noting the drivers of family separation, violence against children and institutionalisation, and the barriers and bottlenecks to child protection system-strengthening, the following SDGs and their targets are also relevant: 1 (no poverty); 3 (good health and wellbeing); 4 (quality education); 5 (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls); 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all); and 10 (reduce inequality within and among countries) and 16 (promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies).

3. Purpose, Objectives and Scope

3.1. Purpose, objectives use and intended users

The overall **purpose** of the evaluation is to provide a learning tool for UNICEF Uzbekistan, duty-bearers and key stakeholders in the child protection system by documenting the successes, barriers and bottlenecks in the design and implementation of the Programme for the period from 2021 to December 2024.

This summative evaluation is taking place towards the end of UNICEF's CPD 2021-2025 and aims to provide critical insights into what has worked well, where improvements are needed, and how UNICEF can better support key duty-bearers, stakeholders and rights holders/ beneficiaries moving forward. These insights will not only inform future strategic planning and programming but also serve as a basis for dialogue and collaboration with key duty-bearers, other stakeholders at international, national and sub-national levels, and with rights holders / beneficiaries. Ultimately, the evaluation plays a pivotal role in shaping the direction and priorities of

⁴⁷ TransMonEE, Database Explorer, retrieved on 03 July 2024 from <https://www.unicef.org/transmonee/>

⁴⁸ TransMonEE, Database Explorer, retrieved on 03 July 2024 from <https://www.unicef.org/transmonee/>.

⁴⁹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan, 27 October 2022, page 7, paragraph 31 (d).

⁵⁰ CRC Committee, Concluding Observations, 2022, para. 44.

⁵¹ UNICEF, Study Report on Effects of Migration on Children of Uzbekistan, 2020.

UNICEF's child protection interventions in the upcoming CPD 2026-2030, ensuring that children in Uzbekistan enjoy their rights to protection as enshrined in the CRC and other international standards.

More specifically, the **objectives of the evaluation** are to:

1. Assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, coherence and, to the extent possible, impact of the Programme;
2. Provide guidance for policy-level decision-making by relevant stakeholders concerning reforms in the child protection sector;
3. Identify and document successes, challenges and lessons learned;
4. *Where relevant*, provide recommendations to more effectively integrate considerations of gender equality, *equality for children with disabilities*, and other equity issues into child protection programming.

The **primary intended users** of the evaluation are as follows:

- UNICEF Uzbekistan, particularly senior management, M&E and child protection teams;
- The Government of Uzbekistan at the national level, including NASP and its subsidiary agencies, line Ministries (particularly the MOJ, MOH, MOIA, MPSE, MOF), the Senate, as well as the Supreme Court and Prosecutor General's Office;
- Academic and training bodies in the area of child protection and the SSW, particularly the National University of Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan-Columbia Centre for Advancing Community Strengths and Social Wellbeing, the Centre for Training Social Protection Workers and Lawyer's Training Centre;
- At the sub-national level – staff, including frontline workers, within NASP offices at the regional level and the Inson Centres, regional, district and city administration (particularly police, education and health departments), prosecutor's offices, courts and Mahalla Committees;
- Children's Ombudsperson;
- Civil society organisations involved in the child protection sector;
- Donors and international organisations involved in the child protection sector; and
- The rights-holders and beneficiaries of the Programme, namely children and their parents/ guardians/ carers.

The **secondary users** of the evaluation include other UNICEF teams, UN agencies, international organisations and donors working in sectors linked to the child protection sector. The evaluation findings aim to provide insights into effective approaches, highlight lessons learned, and foster greater alignment and complementarity in future interventions, particularly for organizations operating in the same or similar contexts.

3.2. Scope

The evaluation assessed the results of the Programme at the output and outcome levels and, to the extent possible, impact level, as set out in the TOC (Part 3.3. for the period from 2021 to December 2024. As the scope of the Programme is nation-wide, the evaluation assessed its results at the national level as well as at regional, district, and community levels, with a heightened focus on the Surkhandarya region, where most of the sub-national interventions were implemented. Due to logistical challenges and limited resources for conducting data collection, primary data collection was not conducted in the north-western region of Uzbekistan.

3.3. Theory of Change

The Programme (Outcome 4 of the CPD) aimed to contribute towards the following **impact**: by 2025, all people and groups in Uzbekistan, especially the most vulnerable, demand and benefit from enhanced accountable, transparent, inclusive and gender responsive governance systems and rule of law institutions for a life free from discrimination and violence. The Programme aimed to achieve this through the following **outcome**, which is measured by the indicators in Table 4: by 2025, the most vulnerable children benefit from a gender-responsive and functional child protection system that prevents and responds to separation, deprivation, violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect.

Table 4: Programme Outcome Indicators

Outcome Indicator	Data Source	Baseline	Target
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Rate of children in residential care institutions ⁵² (annually)	TransMonEE; MPSE; General Prosecutor's Office	255/100,000 child population (2019) (48% are girls)	200/100,000 child population (2025)
Percentage of children aged 1-14 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past one month	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 6	TBC by MICS6 (2021)	Reduction by \geq 10% (2025)
Percentage of girls and boys in conflict with the law who are subject to a diversion order or alternative measure as opposed to a custodial sentence in priority regions	Supreme Court, General Prosecutor's Office and MOIA	0 (2020)	20 per cent (2025)

Outcome 4 would be achieved through **three outputs** (see first column in Table 5 below). In 2023, UNICEF carried out a Mid-Term Review of the Programme, which concluded that the establishment of NASP in 2023 was a '*major game-changer*', providing '*unique opportunity for system-wide transformation*' while also requiring '*some realignment of programmatic approaches and key interventions.*' The review led to the following changes:

- refining the wording of Output 4.1 and 4.2 and updating the indicators to reflect UNICEF's core strategic indicators (see Table 5);
- refining and updating key interventions under each output to make them more specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART);
- making corresponding amendments to the TOC to outline the 'Pathway of Change' from bottleneck, UNICEF's contribution, the role of key duty-bearers and stakeholders, and intended contribution to systemic change (Annex B).

No changes were made to the risks and assumptions underpinning the TOC, which are set out in the Pathway of Change in Annex B).

Table 5: Amendments to the outputs and indicators following the Mid-Term Review

Original Output and Indicators	Changes following the 2023 Programme review
4.1. The Government has improved multisectoral prevention and response measures to prevent unnecessary family separation and foster a shift from large institutions to family/community-based care for boys and girls.	The government has improved multisectoral prevention and response measures to address violence against children and to reduce the reliance of the childcare system on institutional care.
Indicator: Country has a national, multi-sectoral plan or strategy for coordinated action to prevent and respond to violence against children that meets key quality criteria (Baseline: No; Target: Yes (2023)).	No change.
Indicator: Availability of costed government plans for transitioning from residential to family and community-based care (Baseline: No; Target: Yes (2023)).	Original indicator discontinued; new indicator added: Extent to which policies, programmes and mechanisms for prevention of family separation and promotion of family-based alternative care are in line with the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children 2009.
Indicator: Number of regions in which functional gatekeeping for entry and exit into family-based alternative care is established (Baseline: 0; Target: 5 out of 14 (2024)). ⁵³	Original indicator discontinued;

⁵² These are defined to include: Children's Homes (RCIs under the MOH for orphans and children aged between 3-7 years old, left without parental care and children with problems in psycho-physical development); *Mehrubonlik* Homes (RCIs under the MPSE for orphans and children without parental care aged 3-16); and Children's Towns (RCIs under the MPSE for children aged 0-16 left without parental care); UNICEF PSN 2020.

⁵³ The target regions were not defined in Programme documentation and kept as 'TBC' as interventions focused on generating support for this reform; Written comments from UNICEF Uzbekistan Country Office on the draft inception report, submitted to Coram International on 31 July 2024.

	new indicator added: phase of maturity of the child protection system. ⁵⁴
4.2. The social service workforce has the capacity to apply an integrated case management system and practice social work functions to prevent and respond to separation, violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children.	Social work professionals, paraprofessionals and other professionals with a mandate in child protection have the capacity to prevent and respond to separation, violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children.
Indicator: A policy providing a definition of the social service workforce and minimum standards of social work is in place (Baseline: No; Target: 2022).	Original indicator discontinued; new indicator added: Level of development of quality assurance system for SSW.
Indicator: Number of para-professionals with responsibility for child protection certified in applying a case management approach and dealing with vulnerable families and children (Baseline: 0; Target: 5000 (80% are female) (2025))	Original indicator discontinued; new indicator added: Number of UNICEF-targeted children, adolescents, parents and caregivers provided with community-based mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services ⁵⁵
Indicator: Percentage of girls and boys who have experienced violence assisted by health, social work or justice/law enforcement services in four priority regions (Baseline: 0; Target: 50 per cent of identified cases in four regions (2025)) ⁵⁶	Original indicator discontinued; new indicator added: Number of children who have experienced violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect reached by health, social work or justice/law enforcement services through UNICEF-supported programmes ⁵⁷
4.3. Justice professionals have increased capacity to apply child-friendly and gender-sensitive procedures, diversion and alternatives to deprivation of liberty for children.	No change.
Indicator: Existence of child-friendly and gender-sensitive procedures for children in contact with the law that are applied and delivered in line with international norms (Baseline: No; Target Yes (2025)).	Original indicator discontinued; new indicator added: Extent of development of specialized 'justice for children' system, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum age of criminal responsibility in the country is set at 14 years and above • Children have access to justice and legal aid in by law and in practice • Country provides child-friendly investigation, police and court procedures • Country has specialized, trained professionals, including for interviewing • Country has a multidisciplinary approach • Country has special measures for children who are victims and witnesses of crime
Indicator: Percentage of boys and girls released from closed institutions who continue to receive support in line with their individual reintegration and rehabilitation plans (Baseline: 30 per cent (15 percent are girls); Target: 70 per cent (30 per cent are girls) (2025))	Original indicator discontinued.
Indicator: Percentage of justice professionals that have been certified in and dealing with: (a) child offenders; and (b) child victims (Baseline: 0; Target: 20 per cent (2025))	No change.

⁵⁴ This refers to the phases of child protection system strengthening outlined in UNICEF, *Child Protection Systems Strengthening: Approach; Benchmarks; Interventions*, 2021. The phases are: system-building; system-enhancement; system integration; and system maturity.

⁵⁵ Originally, these services targeted children returning from armed conflict zones but, following the establishment of NASP, UNICEF has selected two target regions, Andijan and Tashkent regions, based on the needs of NASP and its transformation of RCIs and development of community-based services.

⁵⁶ The target regions were not defined as interventions focused mainly on system-level interventions to generate buy-in and support legal reforms to eliminate violence against children; Written comments from UNICEF Uzbekistan Country Office on the draft inception report, submitted to Coram International on 31 July 2024.

⁵⁷ At the time of writing, these programmes were not yet established as the operational space to develop these programmes had only just started to open up; up until this point, UNICEF interventions focused on system level reforms, mainly through advocacy and supporting the development of the legal framework to eliminate violence against children; Written comments from UNICEF Uzbekistan Country Office on the draft inception report, submitted to Coram International on 31 July 2024.

4. Methodology

4.1. Conceptual Framework and Evaluation Criteria

The methodology for the evaluation is framed around the evaluation criteria of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC), namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, coherence and, to the extent possible, likely impact. The methodology is based on the UN Evaluation Group's (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016), Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020) and UNICEF Evaluation Policy (2023), and consequently adopts an **equity-informed and human rights-based** approach.

The methodology is also rooted in the CRC, CEDAW, the CRPD, the UN Guidelines on Alternative Care for Children and other key international child rights standards, including the general principles of the CRC (best interests of the child as a primary consideration; right to life, survival and development, non-discrimination including on the grounds of gender and disability, and the right to be heard).

The methodology is framed around UNICEF's broader strategic priorities, including the **Gender Policy 2021-30**, the **Gender Action Plan 2022-25**, the '**Leave No One Behind**' agenda (the approach to ensure that every child is protected, healthy and educated, focusing on children left behind by wider economic and social progress)⁵⁸ and the **UN Disability Inclusion Strategy**.⁵⁹ These standards were integrated into the methodology, including the evaluation questions, matrix indicators, data collection tools and research processes. These standards also formed the bedrock of the conceptual framework for the analysis of evaluation findings and development of recommendations and lessons learned. Special attention was also paid to vulnerable or 'at risk' groups of rights holders and beneficiaries – i.e. children, to ensure that their specific needs are identified, represented and addressed through data collection and sampling techniques, analysis and recommendations. These included: children with disabilities; boys and girls; children left behind by migrating parents; children returning from armed conflict zones; children in irregular migration situations; children living in poverty; and children with intersecting needs and circumstances.

As set out in the terms of reference (TOR) a **theory-based and non-experimental approach** was applied. The likely contribution of the Programme to change was considered via a **contribution analysis**. This approach allowed the evaluators to assess the Programme against the strategic intent laid out in the CPD through its TOC, the need to gather evidence to determine whether and how the Programme has led to the changes set out at each results level (output, outcome and likely impact), and why this may (or may not be) the case. This approach was considered most appropriate in light of the complexity and multi-component nature of the Programme, including the multiple partners involved in reforms and the Programmes links with other relevant sectors (including education, healthcare and social protection).

The evaluation applied a **mixed-methods approach** to data collection and analysis, involving the collection of primarily qualitative data, but also secondary quantitative data (administrative and UNICEF monitoring data). This approach enabled the collection of data that is rich and explanatory, as well as accurate and measurable. The range of methods used are explained in [Part 4.3](#).

The evaluation adopted a **consultative and participatory approach** with UNICEF, key duty-bearers, other stakeholders, and rights-holders/ beneficiaries. This approach was user-driven and learning-oriented to promote future implementation and sustainability of evaluation outputs and reinforce accountability through the process. The evaluators consulted with UNICEF and an Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) at all times, including a workshop to present preliminary findings after the data collection, and a consultation and validation conference. In addition, given that the ultimate **beneficiaries** and **target rights-holders** of the Programme are children, the evaluators paid particular attention to asking children for the views on recommendations for further reforms

⁵⁸ UNICEF ECARO, *Our mandate: no child left behind*, accessed from <https://www.unicef.org/eca/our-mandate-no-child-left-behind> on 18 October 2023.

⁵⁹ UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, accessed from https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/assets/documentation/UN_Disability_Inclusion_Strategy_english.pdf on 18 October 2023.

during the primary data collection. The methodology **did not involve any changes** to the general approach outlined in the TOR and the Inception Report.

4.2. Evaluation questions and matrix

During the inception phase, the evaluators agreed adjustments to the evaluation questions that were in the TOR with UNICEF and ERG. These adjustments aimed to clarify and refine the questions for evaluability purposes, eliminate assumptions and leading language, reframe certain questions as sub-questions under broader topics, include key questions that were previously missing, and enhance the integration of human rights, gender, disability, and other equity considerations. The original questions and the modifications made are detailed in [Annex C](#). The final evaluation questions are in [Table 6](#).

Table 6: Evaluation questions and sub-questions

Evaluation Questions	Sub-questions
Relevance	
Q1. To what extent was the Programme relevant to Uzbekistan’s global, regional and national priorities in child protection, including the SDGs, particularly as they relate to gender, children with disabilities and other vulnerable or marginalised groups of children?	
Q2. To what extent was the Programme relevant to UNICEF’s global and regional child protection priorities, particularly with regard to gender, children with disabilities and other groups of vulnerable or marginalised children?	Q2.1. In instances where the Programme diverged from UNICEF’s priorities, what were the underlying reasons for such deviations?
Q3. To what extent did the programme maintain its relevance amidst the political, social and economic transformations in the country?	Q3.1. What modifications were made to the Programme and how did these affect its relevance?
Q4. To what extent was the Programme relevant to the needs of boys, girls, children with disabilities and other particularly vulnerable or marginalised groups of children?	Q4.1. To what extent were gender, disability and other equity issues mainstreamed in the programme design?
Effectiveness	
Q5. To what extent did the programme achieve its intended results (output and outcome levels), including with regard to gender, children with disabilities and other vulnerable or marginalised groups of children?	Q5.1 What factors served to facilitate or impede the achievement of the intended results?
Q6. How effective were the gender, disability and other equity aspects of the Programme in achieving the intended results for girls, boys, children with disabilities and other vulnerable or marginalised groups of children?	
Q7 Which implementation strategies proved to be successful or unsuccessful and what were the reasons behind their effectiveness or lack thereof?	
Q8. Were there any unintended negative or positive outcomes and, if so, were they appropriately managed?	
Q9. How was the programme monitored and how effective was this monitoring system in informing decision-making relating to the programme?	
Efficiency	
Q10. Were the financial, material and human resources allocated to the programme sufficient to meet its intended results (output and outcome levels)?	
Q11. How cost-efficient was the programme in practice (i.e. could the same outputs have been achieved at a lower cost)?	Q11.1. Were there any opportunities for cost savings and were these opportunities taken?
Sustainability	
Q.12 How sustainable is the programme and why?	Q12.1. What are the potential opportunities for and risks to the sustainability of the Programme over the next year? Over the next five years (2026-2030)?
Q.13 To what extent has the Programme supported the buy-in, leadership and ownership by the government and other relevant stakeholders in child protection sector reforms?	
Q.14 To what extent did the Programme led to any sustained improvements in the efficient allocation and/or utilisation of resources by government and/or other key stakeholders in the child protection sector?	
Coherence	
Q15. How effectively did UNICEF collaborate with development partners and other UN agencies to prevent duplication, maximise contributions, and stimulate collaborative efforts?	

Q16. To what extent did the Programme synergise with UNICEF’s cross-sectoral and other sector programming priorities?
Impact
Q17. To what extent has the programme contributed to, or is likely to contribute to, achieving its intended impact, particularly with regard to gender, children with disabilities and other vulnerable or marginalised groups of children?

Based on the evaluation questions, an **evaluation matrix** was developed by the evaluators ([Annex D](#)). The matrix contains the evaluation questions and sub-questions (set out above), qualitative and quantitative SMART indicators which emerge from/relate to the evaluation questions, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and data sources for answering research questions and measuring indicators. Both the evaluation questions and the evaluation matrix incorporated a gender, equity, and rights-based approach.

4.3. Data sources and collection methods

The evaluators adopted a range of qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data to answer the evaluation questions, to ensure the reliability of results, promote impartiality, reduce bias, and ensure that the evaluation was based on the most comprehensive and relevant information possible within the resources available.

Desk review: The evaluators reviewed a large number of documents relating to the Programme, including UNICEF programme documents, UNICEF monitoring reports and data, in particular, Results Assessment Module (RAM) reports, documents relating to UNICEF’s regional and global priorities; Uzbekistan’s reports to and the outcome of international human rights monitoring mechanisms; key national documents including laws, policies, and action plans relevant to the Programme and NGO reports, as well as other research studies on violence against children and child protection sector reforms in Uzbekistan. A list of desk review documents is enclosed in [Annex E](#) (Bibliography).

Existing quantitative data: The evaluators identified and analysed existing quantitative data relevant to the indicators in the matrix. These sources were identified from the desk review and KIIs. Data was mapped against the TOC, with regards to whether the data relates to an input, output, outcome or likely impact. This data provided an overall description and numerical measure of Programme results (output, outcome and likely impact) and of the context in which the Programme operates. Quantitative data sources were as follows:

- Existing (published) collated administrative data to examine the Programme context and results (MICS; TransMonEE);
- Data requested from the Prosecutor General’s Office, MOIA and Supreme Court on diversion and alternative sentences to fill data gaps; and
- UNICEF monitoring data from RAM Reports including the numbers of children receiving UNICEF-supported services / participants in capacity-building interventions.

The evaluators analysed data disaggregated by age, gender, disability, age and geographical location, so far as these were available. Any gaps identified in the administrative data were a finding in themselves and integrated into the analysis.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted to obtain detailed and specific information from experts or focal points from key stakeholder entities (including key duty-bearers) at the national and international levels who had in-depth knowledge or involvement in the Programme. KIIs adopted a semi-standardised approach involving a standardised set of questions, which allowed for response-directed interaction (see data collection tools 1-5 in [Annex F](#)). Most KIIs were conducted in-person though certain KIIs (with UNICEF sector teams, consultants and international development partners/donors) were carried out online given the limited resources for in-country data collection and availability of participants. Most KIIs were carried out with one participant to make them feel more comfortable. However, in some cases, KIIs were conducted in a group, particularly where participants’ responses were likely to complement and build on each other or where it was useful to explore the nature of multi-sectoral working.

Semi-structured individual or group interviews with regional or district level stakeholders (including duty-bearers) in the child protection system and those who had been involved in the Programme directly or indirectly were carried out. The interviews aimed to understand the stakeholder’s role in the child protection system and, where relevant, how specific cases are handled in practice, including to explore the stakeholder’s involvement and views on the Programme. As with KIIs, in some cases, interviews were conducted in a group, particularly

where participants' responses were likely to complement and build on each other or were important for understanding inter-sectoral / multi-disciplinary practices and procedures. A semi-standardised approach was also adopted to ensure coverage of the evaluation questions while also allowing flexibility to discuss issues relevant to the participant (see data collection tool 6 in [Annex F](#)).

Semi-structured individual or group interviews with frontline workers were conducted particularly those who had provided services to or worked directly with children and their families under the Programme (tools 7-8, [Annex F](#)). These interviews aimed to understand practices and procedures for handling individual cases, participants' understanding and implementation of child-friendly processes and practices, and participants' views on the Programme, good practices, challenges, capacity needs and recommendations for further reform. These interviews were normally carried out with one to three participants as participants' responses complemented and built on each other and were important for gaining a broader range of views and perspectives on the handling of individual cases and Programme interventions.

In-depth individual interviews with rights holders / beneficiaries – i.e. children and their parents/guardians/carers were conducted where they had either received services or been involved in child protection or justice cases (tools 9-12, [Annex F](#)). Interviews were held with children only from the age of 12 given the sensitive nature of the subject matter of the research. The purpose was to gain a well-rounded understanding of children's and young people's experiences with the services received, their interactions with the child protection or child justice systems, and their recommendations for further reform. Child-friendly interviewing techniques were used and MHPSS-informed.

4.4. Sampling

4.4.1. Selection of research sites

Primary data collection was carried out at the national level in Tashkent City and in three research sites, as outlined in [Table 7](#).

Table 7: Research sites for primary data collection

	Regional level	District 1	District 2
<i>Region 1 (pilot)</i>	Tashkent City	Olmazar district	-
<i>Region 2 (intervention site)</i>	Surkhandarya	Termez City (urban)	Termez district (rural)
<i>Region 3 (comparator)</i>	Kashkadarya	Karshi City	-

These research sites were selected in consultation with UNICEF and the ERG and was informed by data collected from the preliminary desk review and Programme monitoring data. The sites were selected based on degree of programming presence, need to pilot the tools, geographical diversity (Tashkent in the north east, and Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya in the south, as outlined in) and socio-economic diversity.⁶⁰

Figure 1: Map of Uzbekistan highlighting the research sites

4.4.2. Selection of research participants

Given the qualitative nature of the data collection methods, a purposive and non-random sampling strategy was used to select key stakeholders, whereas 'typical case' and 'critical case' sampling strategies were applied for rights-holders/ beneficiaries (children) as explained below.

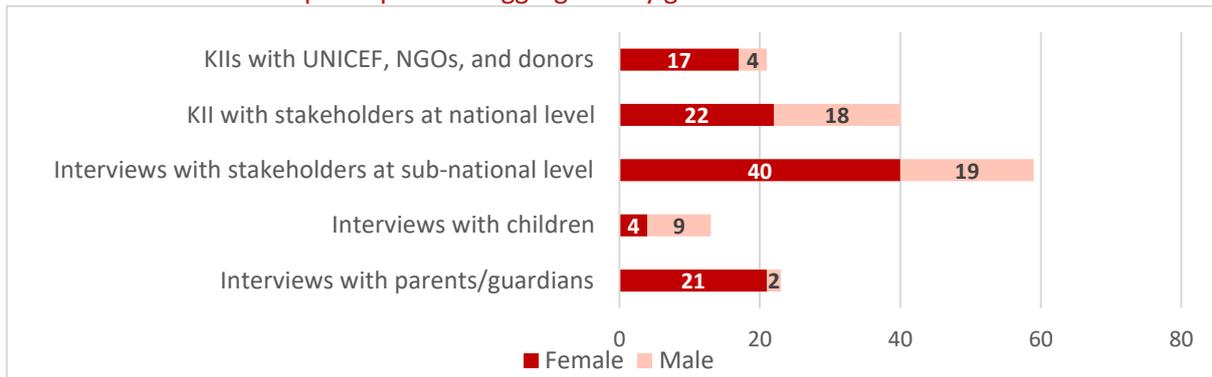
⁶⁰ Tashkent City has the lowest percentage of multidimensionally-deprived children at 6.7 per cent, Surkhandarya the highest at 65.92 per cent (and Kashkadarya region in a similar situation to Surkhandarya as it is the region with the third lowest percentage of multi dimensionally-deprived children at 57.31 per cent); UNICEF Uzbekistan, Multidimensional Child Poverty Report 2023, pg. 42, <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/media/5766/file/Uzbekistan%20Multidimensional%20Child%20Poverty%20Report%202023%20.pdf>, accessed 22 July 2024.

Key informants were selected purposively, and included key stakeholders (including duty-bearers) at international, national and, where relevant, sub-national levels, who possessed specific knowledge or involvement in the Programme and child protection system. This included UNICEF sector teams, government entities, UN agencies, development partners and donors, international and national NGOs, as well as academic stakeholders. The aim was to gather knowledge, expertise, and accurate information regarding the evaluation framework indicators. Efforts were made to maximize diversity among respondents based on gender, disability, and other equity-based considerations.

A similar purposive sampling strategy to that used for KIIs was adopted for the semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (including duty-bearers) at the regional and district levels and frontline workers. Participants at the regional and district levels were selected based on the relevance of their roles within the child protection system and/or the Programme. Interviews with frontline workers included professionals involved in delivering services to children within the child protection and justice systems related to Programme interventions. Where possible, participants were selected to represent diversity in gender and disability status, ensuring a broad range of experiences and perspectives.

Child participants were selected using ‘typical case’ and ‘critical case’ sampling strategies. Typical case sampling involved choosing average cases from the population (e.g., child protection cases managed by the Inson Centre), while critical case sampling focused on especially informative cases likely to provide key insights into the research questions. To gain a fuller understanding of each case, interviews were also conducted with parents or guardians/carers, incorporating their perspectives and outcomes. The evaluators did not interview children who had returned from armed conflict zones or those residing in Legal and Social Support Centres, due to potential risks of harm and challenges in obtaining official authorization for these interviews. A list of evaluation participants is contained in Annex G and summarised below (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of research participants disaggregated by gender



4.5. Data analysis

All qualitative data was reviewed and coded using MAXQDA software, which included a comprehensive review of the literature documents and transcribed interviews. The data was coded to identify key themes, patterns, and relationships relevant to the research questions. The **thematic analysis** of the qualitative data focused on understanding how the child protection system functions to protect children and various population groups, and the Programme’s role within this system. This also included a **contribution analysis**, to the extent possible, to identify evidence of results at each level (output, outcome, and anticipated impact) and assess the influence of external factors in evaluating the TOCs. The evaluators aimed to identify both anticipated and unanticipated Programme results, good practices and areas requiring development.

Quantitative data, including administrative, monitoring, and financial data, was analysed using Excel. This data provided descriptive and objective information about Programme results, particularly with regard to the quantitative indicators outlined in Programme documentation.

Qualitative and quantitative data were **triangulated** to identify any inconsistencies in information. Triangulation helped to ensure the accuracy of findings, analysis and interpretation; drawing upon different methods and theories helped the evaluators overcome any biases or weaknesses associated with a particular method.

4.6. Risks, limitations and mitigation measures

Table 8: Risks, limitations and mitigation strategies

Risks and limitations	Mitigation strategies
<p>Reporting bias - Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter of the evaluation (child protection, violence against children and access to justice), there was a risk of reporting bias; participating children and parent/guardians may have been reluctant or unwilling to share information about their personal experiences which may have been distressing for them to recount. Further, professionals and practitioners may have been reluctant to speak critically about the child protection system or their professional experiences, in case this reflected badly upon them or other stakeholders.</p>	<p>To mitigate against reporting bias, the evaluators carefully explained to all participants that the evaluation is learning-oriented and does not aim to cast blame or censure. Evaluators emphasised that the research team would keep the identity of participants confidential and that interview responses would be anonymous, to mitigate the risk of any negative personal or professional consequences from sharing open and honest information. Questions were asked sensitively and interactions were flexible and participatory to allow for the most authentic, spontaneous and participant-led exchange. Participants in group interview were given the option of an individual interview if they preferred. Also, to the extent possible, government and NGO participants were not interviewed with their line manager/supervisor to mitigate against any risks of negative repercussions if the participant expressed any criticism about their services and to help put the participant at ease, facilitating open and authentic discussion. Where it was necessary, due to government protocols, to interview participants with supervisors or others, the evaluators emphasized the voluntary nature of the interviews, that there was no obligation to respond to any questions that they did not want to answer and requested that the participants keep the discussions and identity of respondents confidential. The evaluators also refrained from asking any questions about supervision or their views of other stakeholders in the room that may have put the participant on the spot.</p>
<p>Limited data – There were gaps in administrative and financial data, particularly disaggregated administrative data on the grounds of gender, disability and other characteristics or equity grounds. These limitations restricted the extent to which an equity-informed approach could be taken in analysing quantitative data. In addition, the TOC and results framework for the Programme indicated that outcome indicator 2 (percentage of children aged 1-14 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past one month) would be measured by MICS, data collection for which was originally estimated to take place in 2025, after the evaluation. A comprehensive analysis of the achievement of indicator 2 of the Programme was therefore not possible.</p>	<p>The evaluators triangulated data from several sources during data analysis, to fill in and/or verify any data gaps as best as possible. Gaps in administrative and financial data were also factored into the findings, and informed the development of the conclusions, lessons and recommendations of the evaluation.</p>
<p>Broad scope of the Programme and limited resources for data collection – the Programme is vast covering multiple interventions and stakeholders. In light of the resources available for the evaluation, it was not feasible to undertake primary data collection in all Programme intervention sites, conduct research with all child protection stakeholders in all locations or select two research districts in each research region. This approach raises the risk that the data collection did not capture the full diversity of Programme interventions or the participation of all child protection stakeholders. This also</p>	<p>In developing the methodology and field plan, a balance was struck in selecting the main Programme intervention site (Surkhandarya region) and a comparator to strengthen the ability to undertake a theory-based and contribution analysis, as well as to maximise diversity in terms of geography and socio-economic situation of the research sites. Priority was given to interviewing participants in the Programme intervention site (rural and urban district selected in Surkhandarya, whereas one district was selected in the other two research regions) to understand the interventions and their results in these locations. Prioritisation was also given to interviewing key stakeholders in the child protection system (e.g. Inson Centres). Particular attention was paid to triangulating desk review, administrative and national-level primary data with sub-national level primary data, in order to build an accurate and rich understanding of the Programme results and context across Uzbekistan, which together</p>

<p>risked limiting comparisons between urban v. rural Programme and non-Programme intervention sites.</p>	<p>mitigated these limitations.</p>
<p>Selection of research participants through government, NGOs and service providers – due to administrative procedures in Uzbekistan, the names of focal points from government stakeholders had to be shared with the government in order to request the participation of those persons in the evaluation. Further, due to the nature of the Programme interventions, child rights holders / beneficiaries (children, parents/ guardians/ carers) had to be accessed through service providers. The government and selecting stakeholders were therefore aware of the identity of the evaluation participants, which may lead to the risk of negative repercussions for the participant if any evaluation findings are perceived to present the stakeholder in a negative light or if the participants reveals information which goes against dominant socio-cultural norms, values and beliefs.</p>	<p>To mitigate these risks, children and parents/ guardians/ carers were only accessed through NGOs or NASP/Inson Centres, which have duties of confidentiality towards service recipients and are therefore under an obligation not to disclose their identities or involvement in the research. Further, interviews with children involved in justice processes (and their parents/ guardians/ carers) were only carried out if proceedings have been completed (i.e. resolved, diverted, discharged or a judgment had been issued by the court of first instance), to mitigate any risk of jeopardising the child’s case. Interviews were not carried out with children in closed institutions (Legal and Social Support Centres) or children who have returned from armed conflict zones, given the sensitivities of the nature of the interviews and the risks of negative repercussions for the child.</p> <p>The ethical protocol also incorporated safeguards to mitigate this risk by protecting the confidentiality of evaluation responses. These included the research team not disclosing the identities of participants or transcripts to anyone outside of the research team and protocols for processing and destroying the data safely. Participants’ names were not written on interview transcripts and references which may have revealed the identity of the participant have not been included in this report. Particular care has been taken to ensure that participants are not identifiable from the information provided in, or any references for, quotes used in this report, particularly where a certain category of participant is few in number and quotes can be attributed to only a few people. The learning function of the evaluation was also emphasised. Government/NGO/service providers assisting in setting up the interviews as well as participants in group interviews and FGDs, were requested to keep the identities of research participants confidential. Participants in group interviews and FGDs were also asked not to share what was discussed during the interview/FGD with others.</p>
<p>Challenges in accessing certain stakeholders - it was not possible to access law enforcement stakeholders in all regions, limiting the diversity of responses during primary data collection. In addition, not all rights holders and beneficiaries (children, parents/ guardians/ carers) consented to participate in the interviews.</p>	<p>The evaluators triangulated data from several sources during data analysis, to fill in and/or verify any data gaps as best as possible.</p>

4.7. Validation and oversight

UNICEF established an ERG, which provided oversight and advice throughout the evaluation process. The ERG advised on the evaluation process, facilitated communication between the evaluator(s) and the partners/stakeholders, provided their comments on and validated the inception and evaluation reports, and will play a significant role in formulating the ‘management response’ to the evaluation. The ERG consisted of a representative from the following key stakeholder entities: Office of the Children’s Ombudsperson; NASP; Prosecutor General’s Office; MOJ; Republican Centre of Social Adaptation of Children; Tashxis; Republican Center for Professional Orientation and Psycho-Pedagogical Diagnostics of Pupils; MOIA; and Supreme Court. ERG inputs were provided through the following activities:

- Online consultation with the ERG on 16 August 2024 on the evaluation process and inception report;
- Online consultation with the ERG on 17 September 2024 on “initial reflections” following data collection;
- Providing comments on the draft report;

- Online consultation and validation with the ERG on 31 January 2025 to finalise the evaluation report findings, conclusions and recommendations.

4.8. Ethical considerations

All research was carried out in full accordance with the UNEG Ethical Guidelines, **UNICEF’s Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis 2021** and the compendium on conducting **Ethical Research involving Children** developed by UNICEF and others.⁶¹ These standards were tailored to the evaluation and are set out in the Ethical Protocol in **Annex H**, which also includes approval from UNICEF’s independent ethical review board.

5. Findings

5.1. Relevance

5.1.1. Relevance to Uzbekistan’s global, regional and national child protection priorities

The Programme is extremely relevant to Uzbekistan’s global priorities in relation to child protection, particularly SDG 16. The CPD was developed specifically around the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) to include “a stronger focus on exclusion and inequalities”⁶² and there is clear articulation in Programme documentation on how the Programme aims to contribute to UNSDCF targets. The intended impact of the Programme is UNSDCF outcome 1 and 4, with outputs 4.1 and 4.2 being closely aligned with Outcome 4.⁶³ Outputs 4.1 and 4.2 are also directly relevant to SDG targets 16.1 (on the reduction of violence and deaths) and 16.2 (on ending the abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children), Output 4.3 to SDG target 16.3 (promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice for all) and all Outputs to SDG target 16.a (strengthening national institutions for building capacity at all levels to prevent violence). Efforts to align the Programme with these global priorities were reinforced in the feedback from UNICEF participants, with one focal point affirming that, “...we are part of the UNSDCF. At the country level, we work closely with the government to ensure everything is in alignment.”⁶⁴

Certain elements of the Programme also responded directly to Uzbekistan’s regional (and national) priorities. The Programme included components of the EU-UN Support to the States in Central Asia for their Citizens Returned from Conflict Zones, which involved the delivery of training to social service workers and psychologists on, among other things, case management and providing MHPSS to children repatriated from armed conflict zones (under Output 4.2). The Government’s commitment to returning and supporting the reintegration of children from Iraq and Syria is also reflected in the Presidential Order and Inter-Ministerial Action plan No. 2157 adopted prior to the Programme period (2019), and a Plan of Action 2022-25, which was adopted for the same.

Outputs 4.1 and 4.2 of the Programme are extremely relevant to Uzbekistan’s national priorities and build upon the groundwork established during the previous CPD. Presidential Resolution 4185 (2019) envisaged “the gradual transformation of mehribonlik homes into small children’s towns and other alternative forms of social institutions” and required MPSE and others to develop a programme of measures for their deinstitutionalisation as well as proposals to improve the system of selection and support of foster carers and adoptive parents (para 3). The Roadmap adopted by this Resolution also includes, among other things, activities to improve the legal framework for family reintegration and to implement measures to prevent family separation (relevant to Output 4.1), and the development of a regulatory framework for the status, tasks, functions and qualification requirements for social workers (relevant to Output 4.2). This finding is also evident from the feedback of key stakeholders; participants including from the Office of the Ombudsperson, Senate and national experts affirmed that these outputs were national priorities.

⁶¹ <https://childethics.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ERIC-compendium-approved-digital-web.pdf>, accessed 22 July 2024.

⁶² CPD, para. 16.

⁶³ CPD, Annex: Results and resources framework, p. 15.

⁶⁴ KII, UNICEF Uzbekistan Communications Team, online, 10 September 2024.

Output 4.3 is broadly relevant to Uzbekistan’s national priorities, though as subsequent analyses show, this is an area requiring ongoing advocacy to gather momentum. Goal 14 of the National Development Strategy 2022–2026 on ensuring the rule of law and constitutionality includes a component on “*the formation of the juvenile justice system and codification of legislation on children’s rights*”, aligning with Output 4.3. Goal 20 of that Strategy also aims to strengthen the “*legal culture and legal awareness of the population*”, which is relevant to the child rights awareness-raising activities under Output 4.3. This output is also reflected in Pillar II of the government’s Five Pillar Action Strategy for Five Priority Development Areas 2017-2021, which includes developing alternatives to the deprivation of liberty. However, until a multi-stakeholder conference in November 2024, there is little data to evidence the establishment of diversion and alternative measures for children in conflict with the law as a national priority.

The Programme is relevant to Uzbekistan’s priorities to achieve gender equality,⁶⁵ especially to combat gender-based violence. The intended Outcome of the Programme refers specifically to children benefiting from a “*gender-responsive*” child protection system. The CPD also includes gender as a cross-cutting programme priority.⁶⁶ The gender review of the Programme in 2023 identified all three outputs to be “GEM significant” – (i.e. expected to make a significant contribution to gender equality/ are gender-responsive). Although the 2023 gender review noted that Programme baselines and indicators were “gender blind,”⁶⁷ it was clarified that this is because UNICEF aligns their indicators with the Core Strategic Indicators (CSIs) but reports on gender disaggregated data where possible.⁶⁸ Further, although some outputs and indicators do not refer specifically to girls or boys or gender (e.g. Outcome indicators 1 and 2 and output 4.2), this was intended to avoid excessively long output/outcome formulations.⁶⁹ Additionally, the formulation of bottlenecks and the focus on ‘monitoring for equity’ in the TOC specifically address gender gaps within the system, underscoring the integration of gender considerations into the Programme.⁷⁰

The Programme’s outcomes, outputs and indicators pays specific attention to children with disabilities, in line with Uzbekistan’s national priorities, though this element was not explicit the outcome or in all outputs or indicators. Uzbekistan’s national priorities are reflected in its ratification of the CRPD on 28 June 2021 and adoption of Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2020, particularly Article 20.⁷¹ The National Action Plan for the Social Protection of Disabled People (2021-2025) also advocates for the DI and inclusive community services for children with disabilities. The CPD integrates disability as a cross-cutting priority across all sectors, including the Programme, paying “*stronger emphasis on early identification and intervention, preventing institutionalization, supporting inclusive education and expanding social protection measures for children with disabilities.*”⁷² Although there are no specific references to children with disabilities in the original or revised outcome, outputs or indicators, it refers “*to the most vulnerable children*” and the Mid-Term Review acknowledges the needs of children with disabilities as a priority area.⁷³ Further, this formulation is due to the requirement to integrate CSIs, in relation to which data on children with disabilities is collected and shared where possible.

⁶⁵ These priorities are partly enshrined in the laws and policies in force at the outset of the Programme, including the prohibition of discrimination against “women” in the Law on Guarantees with respect to Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2019 and the protection of “women” from gender-based violence in the Law on the Protection of Women from Harassment and Abuse 2019. Similarly, priorities relating to ensuring equality between “men and women” in combatting violence are set out in Part 5 of the Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030 (‘Gender Equality Strategy 2030’, adopted in 2021), Goal 69 of the Five Pillar Action Strategy 2017-2021, among others.

⁶⁶ CPD, para. 19.

⁶⁷ UNICEF, Light Gender Programmatic Review, September 2023, pp. 5 and 12.

⁶⁸ Information provided by UNICEF on draft evaluation report.

⁶⁹ Information provided by UNICEF on draft evaluation report.

⁷⁰ Information provided by UNICEF on draft evaluation report.

⁷¹ Article 20 requires the State to take measures to uphold the rights children with disabilities to a family and family environment and to reduce the number of children with disabilities in specialised institutions, providing them with alternative care with relatives in family settings and other forms of accommodation. See also Article 38 which establishes a general obligation on the State to guarantee the development of inclusive education for persons with disabilities.

⁷² CPD, para. 18.

⁷³ UNICEF Mid-Term Programme Review Report, 2023, p. 3.

Certain components of the Programme cannot – as yet - be said to be a priority for the Government. However, as outlined in Part 5.1.4. these components responded to critical areas of need and aimed to contribute to generating buy-in. The support provided to children in the context of migration (outside the context of returnees from Syria and Iraq) through the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme is not yet a priority area in national laws and policies. Although some participants considered this project to diverge significantly from Uzbekistan’s national priorities,⁷⁴ as noted above, Uzbekistan has accepted the recommendations of the 2023 Universal Period Review to accede to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 and its 1967 Protocol,⁷⁵ demonstrating a degree of political commitment to strengthening protections in this area.

5.1.2. Relevance of the programme to UNICEF’s global and regional child protection priorities

The Programme is relevant to UNICEF’s global and regional priorities, as reflected in UNICEF’s Child Protection Strategy 2021-2030 and UNICEF’s CPSS benchmarks.⁷⁶ The Outcome is directly relevant to the overarching vision of the global Strategy (a “*world where all children are free from violence exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices*”).⁷⁷ The three objectives of the global Strategy are reflected in the Programme Outputs to varying degrees. Universal prevention (objective 1 of the Strategy) is integrated throughout the three Programme outputs; the development of services to address risk factors and the prevention of family separation and child institutionalisation is reflected in Output 4.1, the development of the SSW to deliver these services in Output 4.2 and contribution to children’s universal access to justice in Output 4.3. Objective 2 of the Strategy (leaving no one behind) is reflected through the Programme’s focus on helping the most vulnerable groups of children. Objective 3 on response and preventing recurrence is similarly reflected to some degree across all outputs, but particularly in Output 4.1 on developing multi-sectoral mechanisms for response and Output 4.2 on SSW-strengthening.

Output 4.3 is particularly relevant to UNICEF’s Reimagine Justice for Children agenda.⁷⁸ The Output’s focus on strengthening child-friendly justice procedures, children’s awareness of their rights, access to legal assistance, diversion and alternatives to deprivation of liberty are directly relevant to Pillars 1 (every child knows and can claim their rights), 2 (every child can access free legal aid, representation and services), 3 (diversion), 4 (protection of detention) and 5 (access by child survivors of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation to justice), respectively. Output 4.3 also captures the final, sixth pillar of the agenda on developing child-friendly courts (through developing specialist judges and other justice professionals) and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

The Programme is relevant to UNICEF’s cross-cutting priorities, particularly in relation to gender and disability inclusion. The Mid-Term Review aimed to assess and respond to changes in the Programme context, specifically including the introduction of UNICEF’s Gender Action Plan 2022-2025. The Mid-Term Review also explicitly aimed to integrate cross-cutting issues including gender more effectively.⁷⁹ The Gender Programmatic Review 2023 recommended adjustments to the Programme by lifting the GEM rating of an output to “GEM Principal”, making gender equality its principal objective, and identifying more concretely specific strategic interventions and partnerships for this purpose.⁸⁰ This appears to have been reflected partially in the Programme, which resulted in an increased focus on addressing harmful social and gender norms and stereotypes condoning violence against girls and boys through social and behavioural change (SBC) activities.⁸¹ The Programme’s

⁷⁴ 2 x Online KIIs, details withheld to protect anonymity; KII, national stakeholder, withheld to protect anonymity.

⁷⁵ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Uzbekistan, 18 Dec 2023, para. 135.23.

⁷⁶ UNICEF, *Child Protection System Strengthening, Approach, Benchmarks and Interventions*, September 2021.

⁷⁷ UNICEF, *Child Protection Strategy, 2021-2030*, accessed via <https://www.unicef.org/documents/child-protection-strategy> on 11 November 2024.

⁷⁸ UNICEF, *Reimagine Justice for Children Agenda*, accessible here: <https://www.unicef.org/media/110176/file/Reimagine-Justice-for-Children.pdf>

⁷⁹ UNICEF, *Mid-Term Review, 2023*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ UNICEF *Mid-Term Programme Review Report, 2023*, pp. 5 and 11.

⁸¹ UNICEF *Mid-Term Programme Review Report, 2023*, p. 10.

approach is consistent with UNICEF's Global Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy,⁸² reflecting a coherent alignment between national, organizational, and global priorities in advancing the disability rights.

The Programme has responded well to key gaps in the child protection system. The Programme integrates a specific indicator on the CPSS framework as a result of the Mid-Term Review.⁸³ In particular, the Programme design focuses on addressing the fragmentation in the governance framework, deinstitutionalisation, preventing family-separation, SSW-strengthening, developing a continuum of services, strengthening children's access to child-friendly justice, strengthening decision-making on data and evidence, and SBC to address socio-cultural bottlenecks, all of which respond directly to the most pressing child protection concerns summarised in **Parts 2.5 to 2.7.**

5.1.3. Relevance of the programme amidst political, social, and economic changes

During the Programme period, Uzbekistan continued to experience political, social, and economic transformation, resulting in changes to the structure and mandate of various government ministries and agencies. These included the establishment of NASP in 2023, which was deemed a *"major game-changer"* that provided a *"unique opportunity for system-wide transformation"* and required *"some re-alignment of programmatic approaches and key interventions."*⁸⁴ This reform, combined with the launch of the Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy and the 2022–2026 Development Strategy, introduced new opportunities for CPSS reforms. These reforms also coincided with continuing shifts in the socio-cultural context and increasing openness among stakeholders to discuss issues relating to child protection and gender-based violence,⁸⁵ shaping the Programme's operational context.

The Programme has maintained its relevance amidst these changes. The aim of the Mid-Term Review was to respond to the country's evolving context, and adapt priorities to capitalize on new opportunities in the programming environment.⁸⁶ This sentiment was echoed by the various teams across UNICEF, who noted that the process was essential for aligning the Programme with UNICEF's broader strategies and the country's needs at the time.⁸⁷ Key changes included focusing more explicitly on addressing violence against children in Output 4.1,⁸⁸ capitalizing on the social shift towards greater discussion of these issues and the government's increasing focus on this area, enabling more targeted action. Key activities under Output 4.1 were also realigned with NASP's core mandate as the lead child protection agency.⁸⁹ Similarly, key activities under Output 4.2 were adjusted to focus on building the capacities of NASP's SSW, many of whom were new recruits and not social work or psychology graduates.⁹⁰ Although the succession of institutional changes presented challenges in ensuring continuity of Programme activities, evaluation participants generally echoed the view that the Programme design adapted well to the changing operational environment, with praise for UNICEF's *"ability to adjust initiatives quickly to respond to on-the-ground priorities."*⁹¹

The Programme remained extremely relevant in light of humanitarian crises in the region. Between 2021-2022, UNICEF worked in partnership with the Government of Japan to enhance emergency preparedness in child protection. The project aimed to improve access to critical child protection support services for both local and Afghan children, through an improved regulatory framework and capacity-building of relevant social service professionals.⁹² The EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme built on this success, specifically targeting Afghan and host communities in Surkhandarya. The Programme aimed to respond to the protection

⁸² Accessible here: www.unicef.org/unicef-disability-inclusion-policy-and-strategy-dipas-2022-2030

⁸³ CSI 3.2.2

⁸⁴ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Mid-term Programme Review, 23 November 2023, pg 10.

⁸⁵ KII, international organisation, Online, 13 August 2024; UNICEF, Light Gender Programmatic Review, September 2023, p. 12.

⁸⁶ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Mid-term Programme Review, 23 November 2023, pg. 3.

⁸⁷ KII, international organisation, 13 August 2024.

⁸⁸ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Mid-term Programme Review, 23 November 2023, pg. 10.

⁸⁹ Reconstructed TOC, Key Interventions, 4.1.3.

⁹⁰ Reconstructed TOC, Key Interventions, 4.2.1.

⁹¹ Interview, national expert, 12 August 2024.

⁹² Final Report to the Government of Japan for the Emergency Grant Aid for UNICEF Uzbekistan, donor report, May 2022.

needs of large numbers of migrant and displaced children and their families and fill a critical gap in services for these groups of children (see [part 0](#) for details).

5.1.4. Relevance of the programme to the needs of boys, girls, children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups

The Programme is broadly relevant to the child protection needs of boys and girls in Uzbekistan. This is reflected most notably through the integration of gender as a cross-cutting programme priority,⁹³ the integration of a “gender-responsive” child protection system in the Outcome and the focus on gender in the Mid-Term Review and Gender Programmatic Review in 2023. The increased focus on SBC to combat gender-based violence,⁹⁴ and the explicit focus on gender in Output 4.3, responds directly to the concerns and recommendations raised by the CEDAW Committee in 2022.⁹⁵ Although there is little explicit reference in the Programme TOC and results framework to intersecting vulnerabilities, particularly with regard to girls with disabilities, or to gender-based violence in the capacity-building components,⁹⁶ this has been attributed to the need to avoid excessively lengthy formulations. Further, *in practice*, these considerations have been integrated into key interventions, including a strong focus on addressing gender-based violence through trainings (for which see [Part 0](#)). Some participants expressed concern that the Programme does not explicitly factor in child marriage. However, MICS data reports that 3 per cent of women aged 20-24 were married or in a union before 18 years old⁹⁷ such that, given limited resources, the Programme prioritised other more prevalent or pressing child protection/CPSS issues in the country.⁹⁸

The Programme is broadly relevant to the needs of children with disabilities. As noted further above, disability inclusion is integrated as a cross-cutting issue⁹⁹ with several elements of the Programme responding directly to the needs highlighted by the CRC Committee in 2022.¹⁰⁰ Further, bottlenecks to achieving these outputs (such as the lack of community-based prevention services and family-based alternative care, and socio-cultural barriers), many of which have also been raised by the CRC Committee, are explicit in the reconstructed TOC. Although there are no explicit references in the TOC to building the capacity of the child protection SSW or justice professionals to respond to the needs of children with disabilities, this occurred extensively in practice (see [Part 0](#)).

Certain other child protection needs are not reflected explicitly or fully in the Programme’s design although the Programme paid attention to these in practice. The focus on the protection needs of children in irregular migration situations under the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme (see effectiveness analysis in [Part 0](#)) is particularly relevant and responds to a critical gap in services in the national framework including non-recognition of legal status of refugees and absence of a national system of providing international protection. During data collection, stakeholders and rights holders/ beneficiaries spoke about the services being a lifeline and only form of support for these children.¹⁰¹ Similarly, the Programme’s CPSS approach naturally integrates the needs of children who are left behind, though this is not mentioned explicitly in the Programme TOC. Indeed, feedback from children and staff interviewed at the Inson Centres indicated that the Inson Centres were actively assisting in formalizing guardianship arrangements for these children.

Though not explicit in the Programme documentation, the Programme aimed to respond to the need to provide support services for children aging out of care. UNICEF clarified that care leaving and support for semi-

⁹³ CPD, para. 19.

⁹⁴ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Mid-term Programme Review, 23 November 2023, pp. 10-11.

⁹⁵ CEDAW Committee, Concluding Observations, 2022, para. 11.

⁹⁶ As recognised in UNICEF, Light Gender Programmatic Review, 2023, pp. 13-14.

⁹⁷ State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics and UNICEF, “2021-2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Uzbekistan, Statistical Snapshot Report”, October 2022.

⁹⁸ UNICEF comments on the draft report.

⁹⁹ UNICEF Mid-Term Programme Review Report, 2023, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Reconstructed TOC, Key Interventions, 4.1.3.

¹⁰¹ IDI with parent of child with disabilities, NGO, Surkhandarya, August 2024.

independent living fall under output 4.1.3.¹⁰² Despite this, stakeholders still expressed concerns over the lack of prioritisation given to children leaving the care system, noting it to be a gap in the child protection system.¹⁰³

“The management of children leaving the care system – there is a need to follow them and accompany them. Those reaching 18, nobody deals with them. It may not be UNICEF’s area but there is a need to follow the child. The gap between childhood and adult – 18 to 25 years, no one deals with this.” (National stakeholder, anonymised)

Indeed, due to the lack of funding for deinstitutionalisation, the Programme has, in practice, focused on developing foster care as a priority area.

5.2. Effectiveness

5.2.1. Extent to which the programme achieved its intended results (output and outcome level)

Output 4.1: The Programme has supported the development of a nationwide, multi-sectoral plan or strategy for coordinated action to prevent and respond to violence against children (Indicator 1), contributing particularly to CPSS subdomain 3.2 (SOPs for child protection). In 2022, a multi-stakeholder group under the leadership of the Prosecutor’s General Office, the Child Protection Sector under the Cabinet of Ministers and the Ombudsperson for Children and with UNICEF’s advocacy and technical expertise, developed SOPs on child protection, including in emergencies. The working group also drafted a resolution for the adoption of the SOPs, a manual on the implementation of the SOPs and child protection SOPs for the education sector.¹⁰⁴ Between 2023 and 2024, UNICEF has also been supporting the development of sector-specific SOPs for the health and law enforcement sectors, and Inson Centres.¹⁰⁵ Further, at the time of writing, the government is reported to have committed to developing a joint strategy and action plan to address violence against children.¹⁰⁶

Significant strides have also been made in developing a coordinated legal and policy framework to prevent and respond to violence against children (Indicator 1), contributing to CPSS benchmark 1 (legal and policy framework). In August 2024, the Senate approved a landmark Law on the Protection of Children from all Forms of Violence, which was developed with the advocacy and technical assistance of UNICEF and signed into law by the President on 14 November 2024. This law responded directly to a recommendation from the CRC Committee.¹⁰⁷ The Law outlines key parameters for the child protection system and is inclusive of all children. Key informants overwhelmingly reported that UNICEF played an “enormous”, “significant” and “huge” role in supporting them to develop the legal framework for child protection by sharing good practices from other countries and advising on children’s rights.¹⁰⁸ UNICEF also provided technical assistance to the government on amendments to national laws to, among other things, criminalize domestic violence through the introduction of new Article 126 in the Criminal Code in 2023.¹⁰⁹

One of the most notable contributions of the Programme towards Output 4.1 (Indicator 1) is to the establishment of the NASP in June 2023,¹¹⁰ contributing significantly to CPSS subdomain 2.1 (lead Ministries/agencies). This reform also responds directly to a CRC Committee’s recommendation.¹¹¹ UNICEF is described as playing a pivotal role in its establishment through advocacy and provision of technical expertise.¹¹²

¹⁰² Information provided by UNICEF on draft evaluation report.

¹⁰³ Online KII, national expert, September 2024.

¹⁰⁴ UNICEF, RAM Reports for 2022.

¹⁰⁵ UNICEF, RAM Report, 2024.

¹⁰⁶ UNICEF, RAM Report, 2024.

¹⁰⁷ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan, 27 October 2022, page 6, paragraph 28.

¹⁰⁸ KII, Law Enforcement Academy, August 2024; three x KIIs, NASP, August 2024; KII, Office of the Children’s Ombudsperson, August 2024; KII, Senate, August 2024.

¹⁰⁹ UNICEF, RAM Report, 2023.

¹¹⁰ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

¹¹¹ CRC Committee, Concluding Observations, 2022, para. 32(a).

¹¹² UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4; Online KII, international organisation, 8 August 2024; KII, Office of the Children’s Ombudsperson, August 2024.

By delivering child protection services through district-level Inson Centres (which fall under NASP),¹¹³ this reform addresses one of the main historical barriers to CPSS in the country, namely, the fragmentation of child protection functions between local level stakeholders the GTAs and Commission on Children’s Issues, and brings community social workers under the supervision of case managers within the Inson Centres. NASP, acting through the Inson Centres and mahalla social workers, are responsible for key child protection functions, including acting as the GTA, undertaking assessments and management of child protection cases and establishing a continuum of protective services.¹¹⁴ This development was viewed as an extremely positive reform by stakeholders during data collection.¹¹⁵ Evaluation participants from national and international organisations also reported that the reform facilitated their work, as they now have a clear partner for child and social protection issues and a “*more substantial home*” in terms of child protection service delivery.¹¹⁶ Key child protection stakeholders at the national level also generally recognised NASP’s leading mandate in social services (if not child protection specifically).

The Programme partially achieved original Indicator 2 of Output 4.1, relating to the development of a costed government plan to transition from residential to family- and community-based alternative care, contributing to the development of a continuum of services under CPSS benchmark 3. In 2022 a working group convened with UNICEF’s assistance¹¹⁷ developed a national Strategy and Roadmap on the Deinstitutionalisation of the Childcare System for 2023-2030. The Strategy and Roadmap aimed to reduce the number of children in institutional care by 80 per cent by 2030 and introduce a ban on the placement of children aged 0-3 in residential care from 2024.¹¹⁸ UNICEF reports that there was insufficient financial data to be able to cost the strategy, although efforts were taken to do this in 2023.¹¹⁹ Although the Strategy and Roadmap were not adopted by Government, NASP is also reported to have pledged to adopt and implement this Strategy and Roadmap, with UNICEF’s support, in 2024, and is evidenced by NASP leading related efforts (developing the regulatory framework for family support services, gate-keeping, foster care etc.).¹²⁰ Further, a subsequent Presidential Resolution laid the foundation for reforming the child care system and included a moratorium on establishing new large-scale facilities and promoting the development of services for children with disabilities, among others. In 2023, UNICEF engaged an international consultancy group to develop a vision for community-based care and support services for children with disabilities, including a financing framework. However, this cross-sectoral effort faced challenges due to insufficient data, and the initiative could not progress as planned.¹²¹

The Programme achieved its targets in 16 out of 19 CPSS subdomains (revised Indicator 2, Output 4.1). An overview of the assessment per subdomain is summarised in [Annex I](#), as it draws upon findings from all sections of this report. Programme interventions contributed towards the achievement of its CPSS targets in the following areas: 1.2 (legislation on child protection systems and implementation structures/ mechanisms); 2.1 (lead agencies, as analysed above); 2.3 (intra- and inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms at the implementation level); 3.2 (availability of SOPs); 3.3 (availability of child protection case management and referral systems); 4.1 (availability of independent accountability and oversight mechanisms for child protection); 5.1 (availability of a qualified SSW for child protection, for which see Output 4.2 below); 5.2 (financing of child protection services, for which see [Part 5.4.3](#)); 6.1 (child-friendly and gender-responsive legal procedures, for which see Output 4.3 below); 6.2 (independent complaint mechanisms); 6.4 (existence of community-based mechanisms for child protection); and 7.1 (administrative data systems).

¹¹³ Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On a set of measures to provide high-quality social services and assistance to the population, as well as to establish a system of their effective control” 01 June 2023.

¹¹⁴ Ibid,

¹¹⁵ E.g. KII, government justice stakeholder, August 2024; 2 x Online KII, international organisation, August and September 2024; KII, NGO, Surkhandarya region, August 2024.

¹¹⁶ 3 x Online KIIs, international organisation, August and September 2024; KII, director of RCI, August 2024; Online KII, development partner, September 2024; KII, national expert, August 2024.

¹¹⁷ KII, NASP, August 2024.

¹¹⁸ Government of Uzbekistan’s Strategy and Roadmap to Reform the child care system (English translation), Part 2.1 (Strategy Goal).

¹¹⁹ UNICEF, RAM Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

¹²⁰ UNICEF, RAM Reports for 2023 and 2024.

¹²¹ UNICEF comments on the draft report.

Some progress was made in achieving original indicator 3 of output 4.1, relating to establishing functional gatekeeping mechanisms. Before NASP's establishment, the Programme focused on establishing gatekeeping in Surkhandarya through the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme, including the capacity-building and mentoring of the SSW and referring bodies in implementing the inter-agency SOPs.¹²² These activities were put on hold immediately following NASP's establishment, though it is reported that NASP has committed to establishing gatekeeping in across all districts.¹²³

Significant progress has been made in developing policies, programmes and mechanisms for preventing family separation and promoting family-based alternative care in line with the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children 2009 (revised Indicator 3; CPSS subdomain 3.1). The DI process involved the creation of 139 'family-type small group homes' for 780 children and the closure of 14 *mehribonlik* homes, four children's towns, and five baby homes.¹²⁴ Following NASP's establishment, all RCIs originally under MPSE (namely, *mehribonlik* homes, specialized boarding schools for children with disabilities and the Republican educational correctional facilities for girls) and MOH (namely the murruvat homes, which was under the Agency for Medical Social Services, and the baby homes), were eventually transferred to NASP, which is continuing the process of DI.¹²⁵ Reports indicate that children deinstitutionalised from RCIs during this process were largely placed into family-type small group homes,¹²⁶ which were reportedly established pursuant to recommendations from the Senate.¹²⁷ Specifically relating to the closure of Chinaz closed-type special educational facility in November 2023, 185 girls received assistance aimed at facilitating their reintegration into families or family-type small group homes.¹²⁸ At the time of data collection, baby homes continued to exist though there were plans to reorganise these RCIs into shelters for mothers and babies, during which the time staff would work with the mothers to train them on how to care for the child, preventing child abandonment.¹²⁹ Towards the end of 2024, NASP, with UNICEF's support, is reportedly developing regulations on child protection prevention and response services, including alternative care, which at the time of writing were pending Presidential approval.¹³⁰ These provisions reportedly prioritise family-based solutions including kinship care and foster care.¹³¹ NASP also introduced a moratorium on the separation of children from their caregivers due to poverty from 1 January 2025.¹³²

The Programme has maintained the momentum of the DI process.¹³³ UNICEF supported the DI process by providing methodological advice and mentoring assessments and reintegration plans for individual children.¹³⁴ This was achieved by funding experts within the NGO, Republican Centre of Social Adaptation of Children.¹³⁵ UNICEF supported the development of assessment tools and delivered a training for social workers, who were supporting the deinstitutionalisation of children from the RCI in Chinaz.¹³⁶ The UNICEF-supported Programme also established a working group for this purpose.¹³⁷ Importantly, during the National Guard's leadership of DI, UNICEF advocated for the process to be transferred to a social welfare agency, and now falls under NASP's leadership.¹³⁸ Several government stakeholders highlighted the Programme's contribution to these DI results.

¹²² UNICEF, End of Year Report 2022 on Outcome 4.

¹²³ UNICEF comments on the draft report.

¹²⁴ Information provided by UNICEF on 13 August 2024 in written comments to the Inception Report.

¹²⁵ Information provided by UNICEF Uzbekistan through an online meeting held on 9 July 2024.

¹²⁶ UNICEF End of Year Report 2022 on Outcome 4, *Outcome Analytical Statement of Progress*; 2 x KII, NASP, August 2024.

¹²⁷ KII, government stakeholder [anonymised], August 2024.

¹²⁸ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4; KII, NASP, August 2024.

¹²⁹ KII, NASP, August 2024; UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹³⁰ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹³¹ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹³² UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹³³ KII, national expert, September 2024.

¹³⁴ KII, Office of the Ombudsperson, August 2024; KII, NASP, August 2024.

¹³⁵ KII, non-government organisation, August 2024.

¹³⁶ 2 x KIIs, NASP, August 2024.

¹³⁷ KII, NASP, August 2024.

¹³⁸ KII, international organisation, 23 September 2024.

“...I want to say that we had a project on DI that was not initially understood by organizations, but UNICEF was instrumental in helping to implement it. Others also wanted to learn from our experience.” (National organisation, anonymised)

“In course of DI, UNICEF actually shared its methodological approach on how to implement this [process] flawlessly by providing international experience and specialists, and to [help us] understand how other countries have gone through this process and how they overcame the obstacles and challenges. Their most important contribution was that they trained the specialists who directly dealt with children. Because we need specialists who can ensure children interests and rights within family-based homes and patronage.” (Government stakeholder, anonymised)

However, there is a need to continue CPSS interventions in order to achieve Output 4.1 in full. As highlighted in **Annex I**, the Programme has not fully achieved its targets in relation to CPSS subdomains **1.1 (understanding and articulation of the child protection system)**, **4.2 (monitoring and oversight of minimum standards for child protection services)** and **7.3 (data governance)**, which remain at the ‘system-building’ phase. UNICEF’s RAM results for 2024 indicate that there is still limited understanding of the child protection system among policymakers, though there is a growing recognition of the need to move away from an issue-based approach to providing a holistic approach to child protection. Indeed, it has been reported that there is some lack of distinction between child protection interventions and other services provided by NASP to vulnerable children and families (relevant to subdomain 1.1 of the CPSS benchmarks), with the child protection department not yet having a “complete vision of the division of responsibilities between the social workers of the department for the placement of orphans and children left without parental care, and the social protection of minors”.¹³⁹ Similarly, when interviewing SSW about child protection cases, participants often referred to providing social support to vulnerable families or financial and material support for children with disabilities as opposed to child protection services. In relation to subdomain 4.2, as outlined further below, minimum standards for social work do not yet exist though progress is being made towards this through the development of a new Law on Social Work and Social Services. Regarding subdomain 7.3, there is as yet no legislation on the collection, transfer, sharing or use of data on child protection, with access to data occurring mainly on an ad hoc basis. Further, there are no unified policies or procedures to ensure the confidentiality and safety of data subjects.

At the time of writing, there was no functioning formal, multi-sector coordination mechanism at the national level (CPSS subdomain 2.2). NASP is tasked with leading a national, multi-sector coordination mechanism for child protection under the Law on the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence.¹⁴⁰ As one stakeholder reported, “there is cooperation but not coordination” between agencies and ministries in relation to child protection, though with the introduction of NASP, the stakeholder was hopeful that inter-sectoral coordination would improve. Further, UNICEF RAM Report 2024 indicates that a decision was made in November 2024 for the Senate to support NASP to coordinate the implementation of the new Law, to address this challenge.

Despite progress in this area, intra- and inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms at the implementation level (CPSS subdomain 2.3), availability of SOPs for child protection services and child protection case management and referral systems (subdomain 3.3), are not yet fully in place. While standard child protection case management procedures have reportedly been established within NASP, their implementation is weak.¹⁴¹ The inter-agency SOPs developed pre-NASP are being finalised and have not yet been formally adopted.¹⁴² It was noted during data collection that, before NASP, there were challenges in changing local authorities’ internal rules and procedures and to securing local ownership and implementation of the SOPs,¹⁴³ though the legal and institutional reforms are likely to alleviate this challenge.

¹³⁹ UNICEF, Consultancy Report, *Activities, Results, Challenges and Recommendations*, 20 November 2024.

¹⁴⁰ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹⁴¹ UNICEF RAM Report 2024; see also the analysis on Output 4.2.

¹⁴² UNICEF, Final Report to the Government of Japan for the Emergency Grant Aid for UNICEF Uzbekistan (grant period 26 Oct 21 to 31 March 2022).

¹⁴³ KII, national expert, September 2024.

Gaps remain in the continuum of child protection services (CPSS benchmark 3), though steps have been taken under the Programme to model and test prevention services.¹⁴⁴ During data collection, stakeholders and rights-holders/ beneficiaries echoed a continuing need for prevention services; for example, one adolescent girl recommended more monitoring by mahalla committees of the situation in families in order to prevent violence and abuse against children, “*regardless of gender*” and “*to have prevention talks for parents.*” Participant responses also highlighted need to provide sustained social work to support families rather than one-off interventions.¹⁴⁵ To address this, with UNICEF’s support, NASP has developed a model Family Social Support Service (FSSS), the framework for which is reportedly included in the draft regulations.¹⁴⁶ At the time of writing, NASP is reported to have rolled out a ‘family outreach service’ in Andijan and Tashkent regions and Tashkent City, including for women and children repatriated from Syria and Iraq. Interventions have reportedly focused on strengthening family communication and mental health and wellbeing, and building life skills for adolescents using a gender-responsive approach.¹⁴⁷

Significant challenges remain in collecting accurate, up-to-date data on child protection cases including children in alternative care (CPSS subdomain 7.1), despite some steps under the Programme to strengthen this. UNICEF and the World Bank obtained a grant to support the development of a monitoring system for children in RCIs to respond to data gaps. The project involved supporting NASP to develop the electronic data collection tools, which were piloted in Ferghana region.¹⁴⁸ At the time of data collection, the pilots were ongoing. More generally, the Agency of Statistics has reported challenges in obtaining data on children in alternative care due to changes in responsibilities for RCIs.¹⁴⁹ Further, different ministries and agencies involved in child protection adopt varying indicators, formats and tools for collecting and storing data, and institutionalized quality assurance processes and procedures require development.¹⁵⁰ Particular challenges arise in collecting consistent disaggregated by sex, age, disability and other characteristics.¹⁵¹ Stakeholders generally echoed these challenges during data collection.¹⁵²

UNICEF supported some SBC activities to prevent violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse of children. Although this does not correspond to a particular indicator in the Programme’s design, it was identified as a key area in the Mid-Term Review. In 2022, 18 video clips were produced with national experts raising awareness of the importance of children growing up in a loving and caring family environment, which was expected to reach families as well as health, education and child protection professionals.¹⁵³ The Programme also supported the development of a video for schools on preventing violence and abuse in home and schools, which was introduced in the 2023 academic year.¹⁵⁴ Participants explained that these activities aimed to challenge the view that institutionalisation is the best alternative care option for children and “relearning” that this is not in fact in their best interests.¹⁵⁵

Output 4.2: The Programme has contributed to Output 4.2 (original and revised Indicator 1) and is working towards strengthening CPSS subdomain 4.2 on monitoring and oversight of minimum standards for child protection services. In 2021, the government developed a draft Law on Social Work providing a definition of social work and the SSW, with technical input from UNICEF.¹⁵⁶ The draft law, the lead agency for which is now NASP, is in its final stages of development.¹⁵⁷ UNICEF supported NASP to integrate social work competencies in

¹⁴⁴ KII, national-level government stakeholder, August 2024.

¹⁴⁵ KII, international organisation, August 2024.

¹⁴⁶ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹⁴⁷ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹⁴⁸ KII, World Bank, 10 September 2024; UNICEF End of Year Report on Outcome 4, 2023.

¹⁴⁹ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹⁵⁰ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹⁵¹ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹⁵² KII, international organisation, September 2024.

¹⁵³ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Country Annual Report, 2022.

¹⁵⁴ KII, Tashxis, August 2024.

¹⁵⁵ Online KII, international organisation, September 2024.

¹⁵⁶ UNICEF End of Year Reports on Outcome 4 for 2022 and 2023; KII, NASP, August 2024.

¹⁵⁷ KII, NASP, August 2024.

the functional responsibilities of social work specialists.¹⁵⁸ The Programme also contributed significantly to developing minimum standards of social work; NASP's Department for Standardisation focusing on Quality Standards for Social Services and Professional Social Work Standards was established based on the technical and strategic advice of UNICEF experts and will be responsible for regulating the social work profession, addressing a key gap in the system.¹⁵⁹ In 2023, UNICEF also supported NASP to draft 'Professional and Safety Standards for Social Workers', a framework for performance evaluation and key performance indicators, as well as an Internal Code of Ethics in Social Work.¹⁶⁰ NASP has established the role of a supervising SSW within each Inson Centre.¹⁶¹

Important results have been achieved in relation to strengthening the capacity of the child protection SSW to apply case management and work with vulnerable families (original Indicator 2), contributing to CPSS subdomain 5.1 on availability of a qualified SSW for child protection. Before NASP's establishment, the trainings broadly covered core social work principles, case management, prevention and response to child protection issues, including in emergency settings, and provision of MHPSS. The trainings were delivered to service providers, particularly women's activists in mahallas and the then newly-established Child Protection Sectors and Inter-Sectoral Commissions on Children's Issues, with a focus on Surkhandarya. This included the training of 681 women's activists and district-level workers from the SCFWA, who were trained pursuant to a State programme for rolling out a training on 'integrated social services using a case management approach'.¹⁶²

Following the establishment of NASP, capacity-building activities under the Programme have adopted a more systematic approach to developing the SSW, including para-social service social workers at the mahalla level. Departments dedicated to developing the SSW have been established within NASP, with the technical advice of UNICEF's experts. These include Departments of Human Resources and Social Work Methodology Development, and Advanced Training Center for SSW.¹⁶³ In 2023, NASP created 3,300 social worker positions within mahallas and Inson Centres to work with children and their families¹⁶⁴ (though not necessarily exclusively on child protection). Capacity-development interventions developed with NASP are reported to include:¹⁶⁵

- Supporting NASP to develop an in-service and re-training programme curriculum for newly-hired personnel (2023);
- Assisting NASP to develop a strategy and roadmap to build the capacity of its SSW, which aimed "to institutionalize professional social work, particularly at community and district levels, with strong inter-sectoral referral mechanisms, case management, and supervision as key methodologies for service provision";¹⁶⁶
- Supporting the delivery of an 'onboarding' orientation to all (164) directors of the Inson Centres and a roll-out of the retraining programme to 747 community social work para-professionals and 28 lead social workers from Inson Centres across the country (2023); and
- Development and delivery of child protection training to over 1,300 child and social protection specialists across four districts of Surkhandarya, focusing on the assessment of the needs of 'at-risk' children and families and response.

Based on the data available, original Output indicator 2 was partially achieved and appears to have focused mainly in Surkhandarya. As at the end of 2023, a total of 1,282 para-professionals were trained in applying a case management approach and dealing with vulnerable families and children, consisting of: 410 para-professionals with child protection functions in Surkhandarya trained and certificated in the UNICEF-supported training (2023); and 872 para-professionals from trainings delivered earlier in the Programme (60 in social work retraining between 2021-22; 35 in social work training developed and delivered in partnership with Columbia University; 30 in the TOT delivered as part of the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme; 25 in the

¹⁵⁸ UNICEF End of Year Reports on Outcome 4 for 2023.

¹⁵⁹ UNICEF End of Year Report for Outcome 4, 2023; Online KII, child protection expert, August 2024.

¹⁶⁰ UNICEF, Country Office Annual Report 2023, p. 5.

¹⁶¹ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹⁶² UNICEF End of Year Report for Outcome 4, 2022.

¹⁶³ UNICEF End of Year Report for Outcome 4, 2023.

¹⁶⁴ UNICEF End of Year Report for Outcome 4, 2023.

¹⁶⁵ UNICEF RAM Reports for 2022 to 2023.

¹⁶⁶ UNICEF and the European Union, Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report, p. 16.

training for staff in day-care centres on children living with HIV; 50 in the training to test the case management system; and 681 women's activists in training on child protection).

However, a higher number of social service workers, including para-social service workers, were reached through these capacity-building activities. Through the EU Strengthening Resilience Programme alone, 1,072 professionals participated in capacity-building interventions¹⁶⁷ including 950 (F:409, M:541) social service professionals in Surkhandarya region. Training was provided on core social work concepts, social welfare management, supervision in social work, child protection, child rights and implementation of the inter-agency SOPs, gatekeeping by the Commissions on Children's Issues (pre-NASP), preventing family separation, deinstitutionalisation and MHPSS. Participants included members of mahalla committees, regional and district Child Protection Specialists and Family and Women's Affairs Specialists, deputy Khokims, patronage nurses, among others, and following NASP's establishment, members of its SSW.¹⁶⁸ Further, a total of 725 social service professionals, 32 per cent of whom were women and 96 per cent of whom were from Surkhandarya region, were reached through capacity-building interventions delivered under the Emergency Grand Aid project funded by the Government of Japan, through trainings on the implementation of the child protection SOPs.¹⁶⁹ Participants included representatives from all 15 district/city Commissions of Children's Issues and Child Protection Sectors in Surkhandarya, representatives from the other 13 regional Commissions of Children's Issues and Child Protection Sectors and 150 school psychologists in the Surkhandarya region.

The Programme has contributed to strengthening the system of providing social work education, including in the area of child protection, again contributing to CPSS subdomain 5.1. Together with Caritas Germany in Tajikistan and the Regional Association of Schools of Social Work in Samarkand, UNICEF co-organised a summer school on social work aimed at strengthening skills and teaching tools relating to social work with children, including children with disabilities, which was attended by 40 teachers from newly-established departments of social work at regional universities (2022).¹⁷⁰ UNICEF also supported the National University of Uzbekistan to design an online foundation course on social work consisting of four modules (Social Work with Children, Families and Communities: Required Soft Skills; Child Protection: Family Strengthening and Support; Social Work Case Management; Social Work with Adults and Children with Disabilities), which is reported to be accessible free of charge on the university's learning platform. An estimated 60,000 social service professionals from different sectors were expected to complete the course in 2024-2025.¹⁷¹ As at June 2024, 414 social service workers had completed the first two modules.¹⁷² Further, UNICEF fostered a tripartite partnership with the Columbia School of Social Work and NASP to establish the Uzbekistan-Columbia Centre for Advancing Community Strengths and Social Wellbeing, which was established in September 2024.¹⁷³ This collaboration is anticipated to enhance social work research and practice in social protection, child protection and mental health.¹⁷⁴

The Programme has contributed to strengthening the capacities of the SSW for child protection, contributing to Output 4.2 and CPSS subdomain 5.1. Research participants from various stakeholders reported that the Programme has contributed to raising awareness among child protection stakeholders of the need to develop a SSW for child protection and to generating their buy-in to the capacity-building interventions.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, NASP is reported to have incorporated all UNICEF-supported trainings, including those developed under the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme, into their in-service training programme.¹⁷⁶ Following

¹⁶⁷ UNICEF and the EU, *Ensuring resilience and preventing instability in the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan bordering Afghanistan through enhanced access to inclusive education, social services and legal aid in host communities*, Final Progress Report (Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report), p. 5.

¹⁶⁸ UNICEF and the EU, *Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report*, pp 5-6.

¹⁶⁹ UNICEF, Final Report to the Government of Japan for the Emergency Grant Aid for UNICEF Uzbekistan (grant period 26 Oct 21 to 31 March 2022).

¹⁷⁰ UNICEF End of Year Report on Outcome 4, 2022.

¹⁷¹ UNICEF End of Year Report on Outcome 4, 2023.

¹⁷² UNICEF and the EU, *Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report*, p 7.

¹⁷³ UNICEF, RAM Report 2024.

¹⁷⁴ UNICEF End of Year Reports on Outcome 4, 2023

¹⁷⁵ Online KII, international organisation, September 2024.

¹⁷⁶ UNICEF and the EU, *Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report*, p 16.

advocacy and technical advice from UNICEF experts, NASP committed to funding the retraining programme for its newly-hired personnel (primarily para-professionals), which had been developed with UNICEF's support,¹⁷⁷ reinforcing buy-in. NASP participants and social service workers also reported that the trainings contributed significantly to building their capacities to handle child protection cases.¹⁷⁸ NASP itself remarked that the UNICEF-supported trainings to GTAs in Tashkent region, Samarkand, Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya on child rights, case management and gatekeeping "*were timely*" because "*the structural capacity-building of GTAs had stopped for some time*" and the "*trainings helped to build the skills of our experts.*"¹⁷⁹

The Programme has contributed to developing the material capacities of the SSW. Under the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme, 15 district level Child Protection Sectors, the regional level Child Protection Secretariat of Surkhandarya region and the central level Child Protection Sector received 30 tablets, 16 copier-scanner-printers and 16 ink/toner/cartridge for multifunctional devices.¹⁸⁰

Despite these positive results, there is a need to continue supporting the capacity-building of the SSW. This finding which was echoed by national and international stakeholders during data collection,¹⁸¹ and is unsurprising given the recent establishment of NASP and the recruitment of new social service workers. Not all staff within the Inson Centres and mahalla social workers have been trained on child protection or on children's rights, with some having no prior social work experience, as was noted by participants¹⁸² and observed by the evaluators during data collection. Recent recruits include former teachers, among others,¹⁸³ with little to no experience of social work or child protection.

There is a particular need to ensure that training is provided to mahalla social workers and case managers in Inson Centres specifically on handling tertiary level child protection cases (i.e. the most critical cases, where the child is suffering or is at high risk of suffering serious harm as a result of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation), as opposed to providing social services to vulnerable families more generally. This includes training on identifying child protection concerns, assessing the risk of harm to the child and developing, adjusting and monitoring plans according to the child's best interests. For instance, one community social worker reported that, in cases where a child is being abused or neglected in the home, the first stage would be for them and the GTA authorities to "*try to talk to the parents and try to persuade them not to abuse or neglect*", suggesting a lack of training and understanding on identifying and reporting child protection risks. This barrier is linked to the ongoing development of child protection SOPs and multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms at the implementation level.

There is a critical need for systematised training on identifying and reporting child protection concerns for referring bodies, particularly in more complex cases such as those involving serious domestic violence between caregivers (normally involving abuse against the mother). This was apparent from the interviews with referring bodies as well as rights holders/ beneficiaries in all research sites. For example, during interviews with certain referring bodies in Tashkent and Surkhandarya, participants reported that they would only refer children in such cases to the Inson Centre with the consent of the caregiver who is experiencing the abuse, rather than recognising the importance of reporting the *child protection* concern, which does not require the caregiver's consent. This feedback also reinforces the need to strengthen understanding of the child protection system (CPSS subdomain 1.1) and child protection case management and referral systems (CPSS subdomain 3.3).

There is a need to continue developing the system of supervision provided to the SSW, which is particularly relevant to CPSS subdomain 6.4 on community-based mechanisms for child protection. Stakeholders noted that the current system adopts a sanction-based approach to supervision, rather than establishing a space for

¹⁷⁷ UNICEF End of Year Report on Outcome 4, 2023.

¹⁷⁸ KII, Inson Centre staff, Tashkent City, August 2024; KII Inson Centre staff, Surkhandarya region, August 2024.

¹⁷⁹ KII, NASP, August 2024.

¹⁸⁰ UNICEF and the EU, Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report, p 7.

¹⁸¹ KII, national expert, August 2024.

¹⁸² KII, national stakeholder [anonymised], August 2024.

¹⁸³ KII, social worker at mahalla level, [location withheld to protect anonymity], August 2024.

discussing and addressing challenges through open, supported supervision.¹⁸⁴ Further, the model of having one supervisor per Inson Centre for all mahalla social workers is unlikely to be sustainable as referrals of child protection cases are likely to increase over time (due to more reporting), although it is noted that a supervisor who was interviewed for the evaluation considered her workload to be manageable.

Stakeholders noted other potential challenges relating to the SSW. Stakeholders believed that staff turnover would affect the sustainability of the training (for which see [Part 5.4](#), as well as create challenges to delivering services, which relies on developing a trusting working relationship and rapport with the clients.¹⁸⁵ In addition, stakeholders noted that mahallas address a large number of social issues such that it is likely to become challenging for one social worker within a mahalla to take on all child protection cases in addition to all other social welfare issues arising in the community.

As at the end of 2024, 17,928 rights-holders/ beneficiaries, including 2,909 children, are reported to have received community-based MHPSS services as a result of UNICEF-supported interventions (revised Indicator 2).¹⁸⁶ Most recently, UNICEF supported NASP to develop an MHPSS guidebook and deliver training on this to 339 of NASP's psychologists (78 per cent of whom were female), who went on to deliver these services. Earlier in the Programme, child protection expertise was provided during the development of draft standards for providing MHPSS to people living with HIV (2022)¹⁸⁷ (through a joint initiative of the UNICEF child protection and health teams) and a training delivered to psychologists and paediatricians in the 14 regional centres of the Republican AIDS Centre under the MOH to provide MHPSS to children and their families living with HIV. This included developing an online platform for aid centre staff in 2023 offering 10 courses on providing MHPSS to children and families with HIV.¹⁸⁸ By the end of 2023, 3,754 children living with HIV (2,207 female) are reported to have benefitted directly from these services.¹⁸⁹ Services delivered under the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme also included MHPSS.¹⁹⁰ In addition, the Programme supported the development and delivery of training to Tashxis psychologists and provided methodological support to 25 of its sub-national centres which provided MHPSS to children from Afghan families. As one national expert stated, this *"was our first conversation about mental health per se"*, contributing to strengthening understanding of MHPSS and broadening knowledge and awareness of this within the SSW, and not solely among psychiatrists and the healthcare sector. The effectiveness of these interventions was reflected in feedback from child beneficiaries/ rights-holders who reported receiving MHPSS from the Inson Centres; for instance, one child who had been placed in the guardianship of a relative following abuse from her single parent father and received psychological support from the Inson Centre spoke positively about her experience, stating that, *"it's because of the psychologist that we are at this stage now."*

Based on the data available, original Indicator 3 of Output 4.2 was partially achieved. UNICEF's internal monitoring reports provide that, from January to September 2022, less than 10 percent of cases of physical and sexual violence were dealt with and that there was need to raise awareness on violence against children and referral pathways.¹⁹¹ Due to administrative data gaps, it was not possible to measure this indicator in 2023.¹⁹²

UNICEF reports that 1,030 children who have experienced violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect were reached by health, social work or justice/law enforcement services through UNICEF-supported programmes (revised Indicator 3).¹⁹³ However, the Programme has involved many components which have reached much higher numbers of rights holders/ beneficiaries. Although it is not possible to determine which of these cases were tertiary-level child protection cases, it is likely that the 1,030 children reported is a conservative estimate., For instance, under the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme alone, 20,031 individuals including

¹⁸⁴ Online KII, international organisation, 2024

¹⁸⁵ KII, national expert, August 2024.

¹⁸⁶ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

¹⁸⁷ UNICEF End of Year Reports on Outcome 4, 2023.

¹⁸⁸ Online KII, UNICEF, August 2024.

¹⁸⁹ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4; UNICEF Country Office Annual Report 2023.

¹⁹⁰ UNICEF and the European Union, Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report, p. 17.

¹⁹¹ UNICEF End of Year Report on Outcome 4, 2022.

¹⁹² UNICEF End of Year Report on Outcome 4, 2023.

¹⁹³ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

13,492 children are reported to have received integrated social services including child protection case management in Surkhandarya, while 309,529 people in the region benefitted directly or indirectly from such services.¹⁹⁴ Further, in 2023, in Surkhandarya region, UNICEF-supported integrated social services, child protection support and legal aid were delivered to 15,348 individuals (8,869 children, 8,306 females, 489 Afghan individuals).¹⁹⁵ Further, with UNICEF's support, a total of 333 children returned to Uzbekistan from armed conflict zones under the "Mehr" programme.¹⁹⁶ Reintegration assistance to children and families returning from armed conflict zones included needs assessments, MHPSS, legal assistance to obtain key documents, referrals to essential social services including housing, material assistance, healthcare, employment, vocational training and education.¹⁹⁷ Previous studies indicate that, although 38 of these children were initially placed in State institutions, only three remained in these institutions as of March 2023, with the remaining 35 being placed in family-type small group homes (16 children) or with extended families (19 children).¹⁹⁸

Output 4.3: Progress has been made in achieving Output 4.3 through efforts to develop a specialised 'justice for children' system (revised Indicator 1), including child-friendly and gender-sensitive procedures for children in contact with the law in line with international norms (original Indicator 1). These efforts have contributed to CPSS subdomain 6.1 on legal procedures for children's access to justice. Key outputs include strengthening the legal and policy framework, particularly a national Strategy on Children's Access to Justice, which was developed by an inter-agency working group led by the MOJ and Children's Ombudsperson with UNICEF's strategic, advocacy and technical assistance.¹⁹⁹ Consultations were held with 28 children to listen to their views on access to justice to inform the development of the Strategy²⁰⁰ which is good practice. Amendments to the legal framework outlined above in relation to Output 4.1 also contributed to strengthening legal prohibitions against violence against children under Output 4.3. In 2021, the minimum age of criminal responsibility was raised to 14, in line with CRC Committee guidance.²⁰¹

The Programme has involved multiple activities involving the provision of pro bono legal information and advice to children and their families, contributing to children's rights to access justice (CPSS subdomain 6.1). Through grants provided to the NGOs Istiqbolli Avlod and Madad, UNICEF supported the delivery of free legal assistance to children and their families in Tashkent City, Tashkent Region and Surkhandarya Region on matters relating to child protection, social protection, access to education and healthcare and family law matters (e.g. divorce; alimony; custody) including documentation to obtain access to schools and healthcare services, and removal of children believed to be at risk of offending from the police register.²⁰² By the end of 2023, the project reached 2,137 children (44 per cent female, 10 per cent Afghan) and 255 adults (66 per cent female, 28 per cent Afghan).²⁰³ As part of this project, six lawyers from Istiqbolli Avlod and four lawyers from Madad received five bi-monthly supervision sessions to support the exchange of good practices and address challenges arising in their cases.²⁰⁴ In addition, UNICEF worked with the MOJ to add approximately 100 forms to the online platform www.yurxizmat.uz (an electronic system enabling automated preparation of legal documents without a lawyer), reportedly constituting approximately 5 per cent of the documentation on the website.²⁰⁵

As envisaged in the TOC, the Programme aimed to strengthen children's access to justice through awareness raising of children's rights. By the end of 2023, approximately 310,000 children received information on their

¹⁹⁴ UNICEF and the European Union, Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report, p. 5.

¹⁹⁵ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

¹⁹⁶ Description of Action: NDICIC-Global Europe Crisis Response Action in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

¹⁹⁷ UNICEF, Country Office Annual Report, 2021.

¹⁹⁸ Lord, R., UNICEF, *Repatriation and reintegration of children affected by conflict in Syria and Iraq to Central Asia: A Compendium of Promising Practices from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan*, March 2023, p. 26.

¹⁹⁹ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4; UNICEF End of Year Report 2022 on Outcome 4; KII, UNICEF, September 2024; KII, MOJ, August 2024.

²⁰⁰ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

²⁰¹ Previously, children from the age of 13 could be made criminally responsible for premeditated murder under aggravated circumstances, *The Tashkent Times*, 9 December 2021, <https://www.tashkenttimes.uz/national/7950-minimum-age-of-criminal-responsibility-raised-to-14>, accessed 5 November 2024; CRC Committee, General Comment No. 12 (2019), 18 September 2024.

²⁰² KII, service provider, Tashkent, August 2024.

²⁰³ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

²⁰⁴ UNICEF and the European Union, Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report, p. 9.

²⁰⁵ KII, MOJ, August 2024.

legal and human rights²⁰⁶ through the legal pro bono programme above as well as through the following interventions:

- UNICEF supported the MOJ to develop its online child rights platform (www.bolahuquqlari.uz) to include information and resources on children's rights and wellbeing, including an online chat function allowing children and adults to seek free legal information and advice regarding children's rights, which, as at October 2023, received 1,122 anonymous and 353 open requests relating to education, violence against children and family law matters.
- UNICEF supported the MOJ to develop six child-friendly brochures providing information on children's rights in a range of contexts (in civil proceedings; children in conflict with the law; child victims and witnesses of crimes; children participating in administrative proceedings; protection of children from all forms of violence; and child right defenders), which were distributed to 499 out of 943 schools (53 per cent) in the Surkhandarya region, estimated to reach over 309,000 children.²⁰⁷
- At the time of data collection, the MOJ, with UNICEF's support, developed an animated version of the awareness-raising materials with sign language and voice description for children with visual and hearing impairments, developed following consultations with children with disabilities in two boarding schools.²⁰⁸
- UNICEF supported the MOJ to develop an innovative website and mobile application, 'Safeme.uz', to educate children, caregivers, and professionals about the risks to children online, which also included an SOS-button on the app for children requiring immediate assistance from law enforcement agencies.²⁰⁹

Participants from the MOJ provided anecdotal accounts of children and teachers liking the format of the awareness-raising materials under Output 4.3.

The Programme involved strengthening understanding of the situation of children in the child justice system, which is essential for informing evidence-based programming. UNICEF supported the Legal Clinic at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy with a project, led by the Children's Ombudsperson to monitor the situation of children at pre-trial and post-trial detention facilities in the Tashkent region.²¹⁰

The Programme exceeded its target for Indicator 2 of Output 4.3; 2269 (56 per cent) of have been certified in dealing with cases involving children in conflict with the law and child victims and witnesses (CPSS subdomain 6.1).²¹¹ This included 25 legal professionals undergoing in-depth training on providing child-friendly and gender-sensitive legal assistance via NGOs (i.e. the legal pro bono project outlined above).²¹² Trainings were delivered in Tashkent and Surkhandarya (Termez City) and included participants from the MOJ, judiciary, Lawyers' Training Centre and Tashkent State University of Law, Chamber of Defence Lawyers, inspector-psychologists, specialists from the former Child Protection Sectors, among others, covering theory and practice relating to access to justice, child-sensitive communication and interviewing, violence against children, as well as working with children in civil and administrative proceedings.²¹³ Pre- and in-service training has been integrated into the training plans of the Lawyer's Training Centre and Prosecutor General's Office.²¹⁴ An 11-module training Programme was developed with and integrated into the curriculum of the Law Enforcement Academy for investigators and instructors involving 108 hours of distance learning and 36 hours of face-to-face sessions, as well as a training course on child rights and children's access to justice for Master level students at the Law Enforcement Academy.²¹⁵ In addition, a nine-module distance learning course on child-friendly and gender-sensitive legal aid for legal and other practitioners was designed in cooperation with the Lawyers' Training Centre. The training is available as a free elective course for defence lawyers. Participants who have been involved in these trainings generally considered them to be effective, strengthening their skills and tools for

²⁰⁶ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

²⁰⁷ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

²⁰⁸ KII, UNICEF, 2024; KII, MOJ, August 2024.

²⁰⁹ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

²¹⁰ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

²¹¹ UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

²¹² UNICEF End of Year Report 2023 on Outcome 4.

²¹³ UNICEF and the European Union, Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report, p. 8.

²¹⁴ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

²¹⁵ UNICEF RAM Report 2024; UNICEF comments on the draft report.

working with children in a child-friendly way.²¹⁶ UNICEF has also supported the delivery of workshops and round table discussions for justice professionals on providing child-friendly legal assistance and developing a specialised legal system including most recently a workshop in 2024 for 200 prosecutors on their role in implementing the Law on the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence.²¹⁷

It is not possible to evaluate the achievement of original Indicator 3 (percentage of boys and girls released from closed institutions who continue to receive support in line with their individual reintegration and rehabilitation plans) due to data gaps. However, through the DI interventions outlined in relation to Output 4.1, the Programme led to the closure of the two remaining closed-type special education institutions and aimed to support the reintegration of the children released. The Programme has also involved steps to reform of the Social and Legal Support Centres; NASP reports that during the first 10 months of 2024, 8,924 children (6,089 boys and 2,835 girls) benefited from the services of the Centres. As this took place after data collection, it has not been possible for the evaluators to assess this.

Child justice reforms have progressed at a much slower pace than those to the child protection system, such that further intervention is required to generate momentum. This view was generally echoed by participants during data collection.²¹⁸ Further intervention is needed to strengthen the legal and policy framework.²¹⁹ At the time of data collection, the Strategy on Children’s Access to Justice was with the Cabinet of Ministers and President’s Administration for approval. Significant reforms are needed to the system of detention of children in conflict with the law, particularly the conditions in isolators.²²⁰ Existing research indicates that the conditions are not aligned with international standards and, in some areas (e.g. hygiene), with national laws, including instances of children crossing paths with adult detainees in pre-trial detention settings (e.g. in yards and corridors).²²¹ Legal aid provided during the Programme was limited to legal information and advice, mainly on documentation and helping families to access financial and social support services, rather than legal assistance and representation during criminal investigation or judicial proceedings, which can only be done by qualified attorneys.²²² Government legal aid is only available for children in conflict with the law involved in criminal proceedings and not for other categories of cases.²²³ In addition, the quality of government legal aid was raised as an area requiring significant reform, with reports of legal aid attorneys taking a passive and “tick box” approach to handling cases.²²⁴

Outcome: Through the outputs above, the Programme has made good progress towards achieving its intended Outcome. There has been a reduction in the rate of children in formal residential care²²⁵ from 257 per 100,000 children in 2021 to 182 per 100,000 children in 2023, surpassing the Programme’s target (Outcome Indicator 1) (figures for 2024 were not yet available at the time of writing). Notably, the rate for children aged 0-2 reduced significantly from 11 to 1 per 100,000 children in the same period (Table 9). However, the figures for 2023 may not be accurate due to changes in Government and significant challenges in obtaining accurate, up-to-date data on the child protection system.

Table 9: Rate of children in formal residential care, per 100,000 (source: TransMonEE)

	2021	2022	2023
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²¹⁶ E.g. KII, NGO staff, Tashkent, August 2024.

²¹⁷ UNICEF and the European Union, Ensuring Resilience Final Progress Report, p. 9.

²¹⁸ Online KII, international organisation, 10 September 2023.

²¹⁹ Online KII, international organisation, 10 September 2023.

²²⁰ KII, national stakeholder [anonymised], August 2024; Commissioner for Children’s Rights of Oily Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, University of World Economy and Diplomacy Legal Clinic and UNICEF, Report on the monitoring of closed institutions for minors, ENG (unofficial translation), undated.

²²¹ KII, national stakeholder [anonymised], August 2024; Commissioner for Children’s Rights of Oily Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, University of World Economy and Diplomacy Legal Clinic and UNICEF, Report on the monitoring of closed institutions for minors, ENG (unofficial translation), undated.

²²² KIIs, service providers, Tashkent and Surkhondaryo, August 2024.

²²³ UNICEF RAM 2024.

²²⁴ KII, national stakeholder [anonymised], August 2024; KII, NGO, August 2024.

²²⁵ This figure captures placements in *mehribonlik* homes, children's homes, family-type children's homes, children's towns, SOS Villages, sanatorium-type boarding schools, boarding schools for children with disabilities and *muruvvat* boarding schools for disabled children; TransMonEE notes.

Rate	256.8 ²²⁶	241.3	182.3
Boys	312.8	292.1	217.0
Girls	196.8	186.8	145.1
Children aged 0-2	10.5	9.0	1.2

Data indicates that the Programme has contributed to these results. During data collection, participants reported that respect for UNICEF as an organisation helped open doors and provide access to RCIs, facilitating the reforms.²²⁷ Participants also emphasised the value provided by UNICEF’s advocacy and technical assistance during the DI process.

However, there is a need to develop foster care and incentivise potential foster carers in order to ensure that residential care is in fact a last resort for all children, a recommendation which was raised by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2023.²²⁸ Participants from all sectors, including mahalla committee members and staff from the Inson Centres, RCIs and NGOs, continued to speak about the placement of children in an RCI as a primary alternative care option, with the only other alternative being guardianship/trusteeship by a relative.²²⁹ One participant from an international organisation also noted that, during DI, where it was not possible to place children back in their families, they were placed in another RCI “*because there were no other options.*”²³⁰ Emergency foster care is particularly needed in order to prevent the placement of children in the Social and Legal Support Centres, which are the first emergency care option.²³¹ Long-term foster care and other permanence options also require further development in light of reports of children remaining in limbo in alternative care where their parents/guardians do not have the capacity to care for them but at the same time retain parental rights, making the child ineligible for adoption.²³²

Indeed, **several RCIs remain at the time of writing;** five RCIs for children with disabilities, two *mehribonlik* homes,²³³ eight baby homes and 14 Centres for Social and Legal Support to Minors (under the MOI) remain.²³⁴ Specialised boarding schools also remain. **The Centres of Social and Legal Support are a particular concern, as they are closed institutions under the MOI rather than family-based emergency care options within the social welfare sector.** Discussions with stakeholders during data collection indicated that these Centres are not fully integrated into the case management and gatekeeping system established under NASP, with placements often taking place before an initial assessment by the Inson Centre and Centre workers continuing to take on child protection case management functions for these children, though the Centres reportedly ‘notify’ the Inson Centres of cases received.²³⁵ UNICEF has supported the government to develop a resolution and presidential decree to reorganise the Legal and Social Support Centres into life-skills schools as part of a broader process of DI, though these laws are awaiting approval.²³⁶ Under these plans, children with so-called “delinquent” behaviour would only be placed in these centres as a last resort, where they would remain for a limited period of time and obtain therapeutic services.²³⁷ It is reported that these placements would be separate to the placements of children for other child protection reasons (e.g. victims of abuse who are placed there as a temporary measure pending determination of alternative care). Indeed, during data collection, it was observed

²²⁶ UNICEF’s End of Year Child Protection monitoring report for 2023 indicates that according to improved TransMonee data, the rate was in fact 268.

²²⁷ KII, NGO, Surkhandarya, August 2024.

²²⁸ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Uzbekistan, 31 March 2022, para. 40.

²²⁹ KII, mahalla committee social worker, location withheld to protect anonymity, August 2024; KII, NGO staff, August 2024; KII, Inson Centre staff, August 2024; KII, government SSW [details withheld to protect anonymity], August 2024.

²³⁰ KII, international organisation, 3 September 2024.

²³¹ KII, Inson Centre staff, August 2024.

²³² KII, SSW [details withheld to protect anonymity], August 2024.

²³³ Information provided by UNICEF Uzbekistan through an online meeting held on 9 July 2024.

²³⁴ Information provided by UNICEF Uzbekistan through an online meeting held on 9 July 2024.

²³⁵ KIIs anonymised to protect anonymity.

²³⁶ KII, NASP, August 2024; KII, UNICEF, 3 September 2024.

²³⁷ KII, international organisation, September 2024.

that children placed in these centres are in extremely vulnerable situations, requiring case management and monitoring by specialist SSW under NASP.

The extent to which RCIs are being replaced by family-type small group homes should be considered in any future programming. These homes, which are a type of foster care, were included in TranMonEE figures relating to residential care settings, as they could accommodate between three and 10 children. However, since then, NASP has reduced the maximum number to five.²³⁸

It is not possible to provide a result for Outcome Indicator 2 (percentage reduction of children aged 1-14 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month), as the MICS study to evaluate this outcome is due to take place in 2027-28 after the Government census.

Similarly, it is not possible to provide a result for the percentage of girls and boys in conflict with the law who are subject to a diversion order or alternative measure as opposed to a custodial sentence (Outcome Indicator 3). Pre-trial diversion is not yet legally permissible in Uzbekistan, explaining the absence of data on this measure. Further, data on the numbers of children subject to alternative measures in place are not available. In order to gather momentum for reform, UNICEF invited the former Chairperson of the CRC Committee to Uzbekistan and, in collaboration with the National Human Rights Centre and the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, organised an international roundtable on 20 November 2024 to showcase good practices in this area and emphasise the urgent need for reform. Though this took place after data collection, UNICEF reports that this event, along with bilateral meetings, “*successfully re-engaged key stakeholders, including the NASP, Supreme Court, and Prosecutor General’s Office, who expressed their commitment to supporting diversion and alternative measures once the necessary legal amendments are enacted.*”²³⁹ The partial attainment of this component of the outcome was also reflected in the views of stakeholders, who recognised the need to continue strengthening of the ‘justice for children’ system.²⁴⁰

5.2.2. Effectiveness of gender, disability, and equity aspects in achieving results for vulnerable children

Programme interventions focused heavily on addressing issues relating to gender, disability and other vulnerabilities of targeted rights holders/ beneficiaries. These considerations were integrated into interventions involving advocacy and technical assistance for system-level reforms outlined above as well as interventions involving service delivery and capacity-building. For example, it was reported that particular effort was made to integrate gender-based violence and working with children with disabilities into the in-service and re-training curriculum with NASP.²⁴¹ Feedback from stakeholder participants reinforces integration of equity-based issues; for example, in relation to Programme interventions for children and families returning from armed conflict zones or Afghan communities:

“Special services for boys and girls or children with disabilities within the Programme was mainly done on an individual level, for example, if the family doesn’t want the girl to go to school, we worked with the family to make sure the girl should go to school and get an education. It was the same with children with disabilities; we did this mainly on individual level, [for example,] if a child with disabilities needed a particular service in order to be involved in education.” (National expert)

One of the main challenges to evaluating the results of Programme interventions relating to equity issues is the lack of disaggregated data, particularly on children with disabilities. Participants also noted this challenge during the data collection.²⁴² **However, based on the data available, in relation to Output 4.1 and Outcome Indicator 1, there has been a minor (6 per cent) reduction in the numbers of children with disabilities in formal residential care during the Programme period, with the numbers remaining broadly consistent with those immediately preceding the Programme** (see Figure 3). This is despite the fact that, in 2022, all *mehribonlik*

²³⁸ Presidential Resolution No. 345, 4 August 2022, para. 1, <https://lex.uz/docs/6141590>; KII, NASP, August 2024.

²³⁹ UNICEF RAM Report 2024.

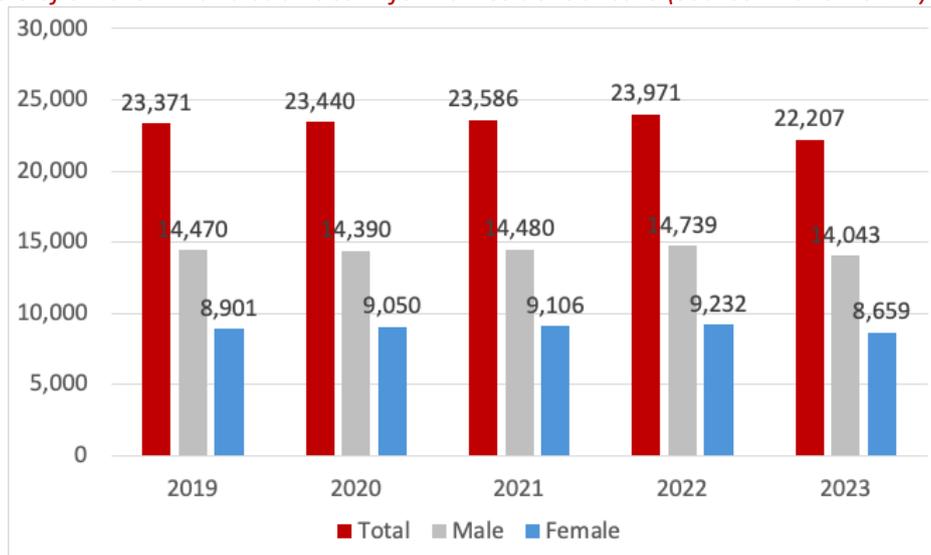
²⁴⁰ E.g. Online KII, international organisation, 10 September 2024; see output results for additional supporting data.

²⁴¹ KII, national expert, August 2024.

²⁴² Online KII, international organisation, 7 August 2024.

homes and children’s towns were liquidated.²⁴³ Data on the numbers of children entering and leaving formal residential care during the year are unavailable.

Figure 3: Numbers of children with disabilities in formal residential care (source: TransMonEE)



Stakeholders considered that one of the main barriers to the DI of children with disabilities is the lack of specialised family-based alternative care and community-based services to prevent institutionalisation and support family reintegration.²⁴⁴ There are particular challenges in recruiting foster carers for children with disabilities due to the socio-cultural drivers of institutionalisation and stigma associated with disabilities (on which see below) as well as the expense associated with caring for children with specific needs.²⁴⁵ Similar challenges reportedly arise in recruiting adopters for children with disabilities.²⁴⁶ However, this gap in the continuum of services was acknowledged by NASP’s Department for Services for Children with Disabilities, which is focusing on developing accessible community-based services to prevent and provide alternatives to institutionalisation of children with disabilities.

Stigma and negative attitudes towards children with disabilities, as well as a belief that residential care is in the child’s best interests, continue to be a barrier to DI.²⁴⁷ During data collection, attitudes towards residential care for children with disabilities were mixed; while some participants (among them SSW and RCI staff) recognised the importance of providing a family-based environment for children with disabilities, there was still a belief among some participants from service providers that children with disabilities will be better looked after and receive the specialised services they need in RCIs, and hence that these RCIs should not be closed.²⁴⁸ It is noted, however, that UNICEF has received funds to undertake a SBC campaign relating to promoting educational and social inclusion for children with disabilities.²⁴⁹

The approach to disability remains predominantly medicalised, creating further barriers to the social inclusion and DI of children with disabilities. Indeed, it was reported during data collection that, although they are now subsumed within NASP, the MPPCs are still staffed by doctors who focus on diagnosing children with disabilities and referring them to specialised educational institutions.²⁵⁰

While progress has been made in developing inclusive education, this is an area which is still in progress and remains a barrier to DI of children with disabilities. UNICEF is supporting the government to establish inclusive

²⁴³ Notes to TransMonEE data.

²⁴⁴ KII, international organisation, 23 September 2024; KII, government stakeholder, August 2024.

²⁴⁵ 2 x KIIs, national-level government stakeholder, August 2024; KII, NGO, August 2024.

²⁴⁶ KII, national-level government stakeholder, August 2024; KII, Inson Centre staff, August 2024.

²⁴⁷ KII, international organisation, 23 September 2024; KII, SSW, August 2024.

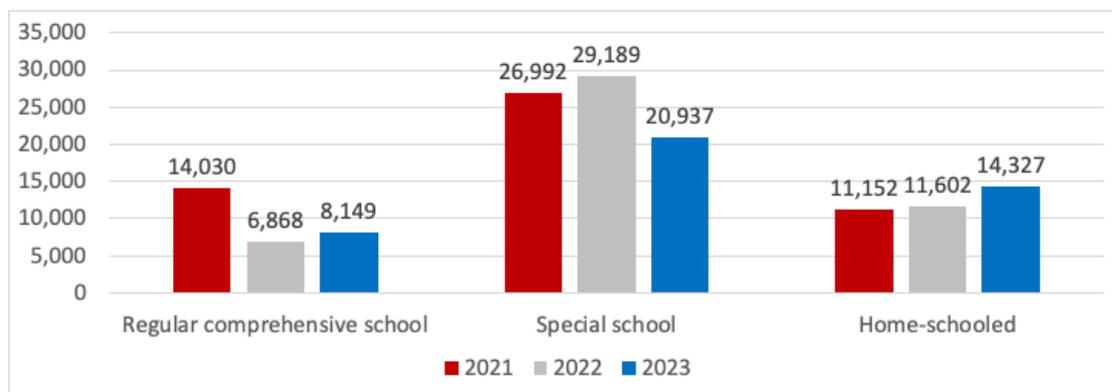
²⁴⁸ KII, NGO, August 2024.

²⁴⁹ KII, UNICEF, 10 September 2024.

²⁵⁰ KII, sub-national government stakeholder, August 2024.

schools, the first of which was set up in 2022.²⁵¹ At the time of data collection, there were a total of 250 ‘inclusive schools’, providing an alternative to home-schooling or placement in a specialised RCI or school for children with disabilities.²⁵² Service providers also considered that there has been significant improvement in inclusive education over recent years.²⁵³ Indeed, an interview with a child with a hearing impairment who attended general school reported that he felt supported and found mainstream schooling “easy.” Specialised, non-boarding schools are also available; one parent reported that such schools have a “more merciful” approach and reported that her child had made physical progress and no longer cries as much than when they were in mainstream schooling.²⁵⁴ However, at the time of data collection, only 750 children with disabilities were enrolled in inclusive education schools.²⁵⁵ Further, as set out in Figure 4, between 2021 and 2023 (noting that 2024 figures were not available at the time of writing), the majority of children with disabilities who were in the education system attended special schools, including boarding schools and sanatoria.²⁵⁶

Figure 4: Number of children with disabilities in the education system and home-schooled (source: TransMonEE)²⁵⁷



Significant numbers of children with disabilities do not appear to be in the education system at all; in 2023, 18 per cent of children registered as having disabilities were in the education system (29,086 out of 161,901; TransMonEE). Notably, there are significant disparities in the numbers of boys and girls with disabilities in the education system, with boys accounting for between 60 and 70 per cent of the numbers of children with disabilities in the education system (TransMonEE data from 2021 to 2023). These results are supported by qualitative data. During data collection, one parent of a child with disabilities spoke about the challenges their child faced in normal school and noted that the closest specialised school was two hours away, resulting in them taking the child (with hearing problems) out of the school altogether.²⁵⁸ Similar feedback was provided by two children with vision impairments, who stopped attending normal school and were transferred to a specialised (non-boarding) school.²⁵⁹ Participants cited stigma by teachers and parents towards children with disabilities²⁶⁰ and administrative challenges to implementing the laws on inclusive education as reasons for these results.²⁶¹

²⁵¹ KII, UNICEF, August 2024.

²⁵² KII, UNICEF, August 2024.

²⁵³ KII, NGO, August 2024.

²⁵⁴ IDI, Parent, Tashkent.

²⁵⁵ KII, UNICEF, August 2024.

²⁵⁶ The special schools comprise: (i) specialised pre-school educational institutions, (ii) sanatorium-type boarding schools, including those for children with scoliosis and children at risk of tuberculosis and chronic respiratory diseases who need treatment and rehabilitation in special conditions; and (iii) schools, including boarding schools for children with disabilities in physical and mental development. Source: notes to TransMonEE data.

²⁵⁷ Notes to TransMonEE data state that a new observation method was implemented in 2023, contributing to the differences in data.

²⁵⁸ IDI, Parent, Surkhandarya.

²⁵⁹ IDI, children, Surkhandarya.

²⁶⁰ KII, national-level government stakeholder, August 2024.

²⁶¹ Online KII, international organisation, August 2024.

Several stakeholders also reported the need to continue strengthening links and coordinating efforts between the education and child protection sector to support the DI of children with disabilities.²⁶²

5.2.3. Effectiveness of implementation strategies and reasons behind their effectiveness or lack thereof

The Programme's strategy of focusing on national level child protection reforms has been extremely effective. The passing of the Law on the Protection of Children from all Forms of Violence and the establishment of NASP have addressed key barriers to CPSS, which would not have been possible without the Programme's consistent advocacy, technical assistance and strategic partnership-building at the national level. The *importance* of this strategy is apparent from the results of Output 4.3, where gaps in the legal framework have hindered plans under the Programme to model, pilot and scale-up diversion mechanisms. This was emphasised by a justice stakeholder during data collection, who remarked, *"if their [UNICEF's] recommendations or the recommendations of other international organisations are not included in national legislation, we cannot apply them. For example, if international law says you shouldn't use the penalty of imprisonment for minors before the age of 14, if in Uzbekistan, the legislation is different, we cannot use your recommendations."*²⁶³ This is also reinforced in the recommendations of the international child justice conference held in November 2024 (UNICEF RAM 2024).

Another effective strategy has been the Programme's approach to building sustainable partnerships, which have proved crucial for achieving results. These include partnerships with the Senate and Office of the Ombudsperson, which were essential for childcare reforms (see [Part 5.2.1](#)). UNICEF's pragmatism of building partnerships with new agencies following government restructurings was considered to be particularly valuable.²⁶⁴ Importantly, the Programme has taken a strategic approach to partnership-building. Partnerships with development partners have also been extremely effective (see [Part 5.5.1](#)). As one international partner remarked:

"But I think the only reason we were able to push this work is by this collective effort, because UNICEF was able to transmit the message that the value of the data that can be collected is absolutely tremendous, and that they [the government] really needs it... that was super valuable." (Development partner)

The Programme leveraged existing expertise within the NGO sector, which, though valuable, is not necessarily sustainable. The NGO Republican Centre for Social Adaptation of Children supported interventions for children returning from armed conflict zones, delivered trainings to local authorities and SSW in Surkhandarya under the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme, and conducted assessments for children deinstitutionalised from special education schools, which contributed to the results in [Part 5.2.1](#). Stakeholders also emphasised the value of NGO knowledge and experience in supporting and mentoring the SSW during these projects.²⁶⁵ However, as the analysis in [Part 5.2.1](#) notes, there is a need to strengthen coordination among stakeholders, including between government and civil society. Indeed, during data collection, some NGO participants expressed disappointment that, following NASP's establishment, their collaboration with UNICEF and other international organisations in child protection had declined.

While the approach to Output 4.2 and SSW-strengthening has generally been effective, it is important that ongoing training efforts maintain a focus on tertiary-level child protection services. In the absence of a broader strategy for SSW-strengthening, interventions implemented under Output 4.2 necessarily addressed the development of the SSW as a whole but included strengthening capacities in child protection.²⁶⁶ However, as outlined in [Part 5.2.1](#), there is a need to developing the specialist capacities of the SSW to identify, assess and

²⁶² Online KII, international organisation, August 2024.

²⁶³ KII, national level justice stakeholder, August 2024.

²⁶⁴ KII, national expert, August 2024.

²⁶⁵ KII, national expert, August 2024.

²⁶⁶ KII, UNICEF, August 2024.

respond to child protection risks at the tertiary level, which is the core of the child protection system, and to ensure that resources are dedicated towards this.

5.2.4. Unintended negative or positive outcomes

An unintended outcome of DI interventions was the appointment of the National Guard to expedite and implement this process. At the outset of the evaluation period, the government assigned responsibility for DI to the National Guard.²⁶⁷ “Social guardians” were then appointed by the National Guard and MOI who monitored and coordinated the DI process and the reintegration of individual children.²⁶⁸ According to participants during data collection, the National Guard is likely to have been appointed because it had the authority, reach and resources to take on this ambitious mandate. This result cannot solely be attributed to the Programme, as it took place during the first year of the Programme following DI discussions which started under the previous CPD. However, it is nevertheless an unintended result to which DI interventions as a whole have contributed. Following UNICEF advocacy, this issue was addressed in part by NASP taking over leadership of the DI process. However, at the time of writing, the National Guard had just been tasked with advancing DI of 500 children into family-based care with NASP’s support.

Unintended positive results or consequences have also emerged from the Programme, identified mainly from participants’ responses during data collection. These include: experts using their experience from the Programme to support similar interventions in other countries in the region (e.g. developing a manual on how to work with families returning from armed conflict zones with UNICEF Kazakhstan);²⁶⁹ more experienced social service workers becoming hired by NASP and sharing their expertise / good practices with mahalla social workers while on the job;²⁷⁰ focal points from international development partners sharing their new knowledge on child protection in Central Asia with academic colleagues in west Europe;²⁷¹ and trainings for mahalla committee workers, particularly the sessions on discussing and resolving shared challenges, serving a therapeutic purpose for the participants.²⁷²

5.2.5. Effectiveness of systems for monitoring and informing decision-making

The Programme adopts a robust system for monitoring results and informing decision-making. The publication of new UNICEF planning guidance in 2022 and Mid-Term Review 2023 led to UNICEF adding a new element to the Programme’s TOC – namely, contribution of each output to systemic change.²⁷³ The new ‘pathway of change’ clarifies, for each output: the bottlenecks that the Programme aims to address; and, for each bottleneck, UNICEF’s contribution, role of duty bearers and their contribution to systemic change. The TOC and accompanying Programme documentation (particularly the Programme Strategy Note) are used to develop UNICEF’s workplans, which normally span two years, providing flexibility for Programme adjustments, and are aligned closely with the UNSDCF’s work plan cycles.²⁷⁴ UNICEF’s work plans are comprehensive and set out, for each output, the activities, geographic location, implementing partner, timeline, and amount funded and unfunded (the latter of which is broken down even further).²⁷⁵ ‘Core strategic indicators’ that form part of UNICEF’s global and regional priorities are integrated into this framework. Reporting against these indicators is carried out by UNICEF’s monitoring and evaluation / child rights monitoring specialists in coordination with the child protection sector team which is responsible for monitoring operational outputs of Programme interventions.²⁷⁶ Data is also collected from relevant government counterparts (e.g. for targets based on MICs results or administrative data). Monitoring is carried out using UNICEF’s internal RAM, which produces annual

²⁶⁷ Presidential Resolution No. 5215, 9 August 2021, <https://lex-uz.translate.goog/docs/5570975? x tr sl=auto& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en-US& x tr pto=wapp>, accessed 5 November 2024.

²⁶⁸ KII, NASP, August 2024.

²⁶⁹ KII, national expert 1, August 2024.

²⁷⁰ KII, national expert 2, August 2024.

²⁷¹ KII, international development partner, August 2024.

²⁷² KII, international development partner, August 2024.

²⁷³ KII, UNICEF, September 2024; Programme Pathway of Change.

²⁷⁴ KII, UNICEF, September 2024.

²⁷⁵ UNICEF Work Plan, 2024-2025.

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*

reports on the quantitative results of Programme outputs by indicator and target and accompanying narrative. UNICEF's planning, monitoring and evaluation teams also work with the child protection sector on 'knowledge products' (research projects), mainly providing a quality assurance role, as was reportedly done for the mapping of children in residential care in Tashkent.²⁷⁷ Results of monitoring activities are intended to inform the development of the new CPD and inform future Programming (as is the case with this evaluation).

There is a need to continue strengthening the integration of cross-sectoral priorities into the monitoring of the Programme. Participants explained that a key learning point from the Mid-Term Review was to move from monitoring results of ad hoc cross-sectoral interventions to integrating cross-sectoral priorities more into Programme planning (for example, through the integration of SBC interventions into the Programme TOC following the Mid-Term Review).²⁷⁸ However, as noted previously, the integration of gender and disability could be reflected more consistently across Programme outputs, indicators and targets. Further, a review of Programme RAM reports produced by the monitoring activities provide little detail on Programme activities and results specifically in relation to gender (there is slightly more focus on results relating to children with disabilities) and cross-cutting activities / activities with other sectors.

5.3. Efficiency

5.3.1. Sufficiency of financial, human and material resources

The Programme has operated within financial constraints. The Programme's planned budget in the CPD was USD 5.7 million, representing a five per cent decrease compared to the estimated budget of the child protection programme under the previous CPD (2016-2020).²⁷⁹ As of the end of 2024, the actual budget was USD 4,448,159 with additional funds in the pipeline for the remaining Programme until April 2025. Compared to other programmes in the CPD the child protection Programme received the least funding.²⁸⁰

While the planned CPD budget expected to rely more on regular resources (USD 3 million compared to USD 1.9 million from other resources), the actual funding primarily came from other resources (USD 2.5 million compared to USD 1.8 million from regular resources). The main donor was the EU Delegation in Uzbekistan (particularly for the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme and projects on providing reintegration support to children and women returned from armed conflict zones) which contributed approximately 1.5 million.²⁸¹ Other contributors included the Japanese Government (USD 200,000 for capacity development and SOPs on child protection), GIZ (USD 70,000 for humanitarian assistance, including legal aid and social services), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (USD 100,000), the USA Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (USD 135,000), and UNICEF's Global Child Protection Thematic Fund (USD 480,000).²⁸²

Financial resources allocated to the Programme have been broadly sufficient. As outlined in **Part 0** limited financial resources were not the main reason for partial attainment of Programme's outcome. **However, funding constraints have affected the potential of the Programme as well as the achievement of certain Programme outputs.** As noted by one participant:

"[funding priorities].... are not favourable to the child protection programme, which was always, you know, a question for me, like why are other programmes...like the health programme or the education programme funded way more than the child protection programme? [rhetorical question] And I think that's one of the key issues that my colleagues experience as well, because we could do more, but we were always limited by the funding."²⁸³

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*

²⁷⁸ KII, UNICEF, September 2024.

²⁷⁹ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Country Programme Document 2016-2020, 10 August 2015, page 9.

²⁸¹ Information provided by UNICEF Uzbekistan for the evaluation.

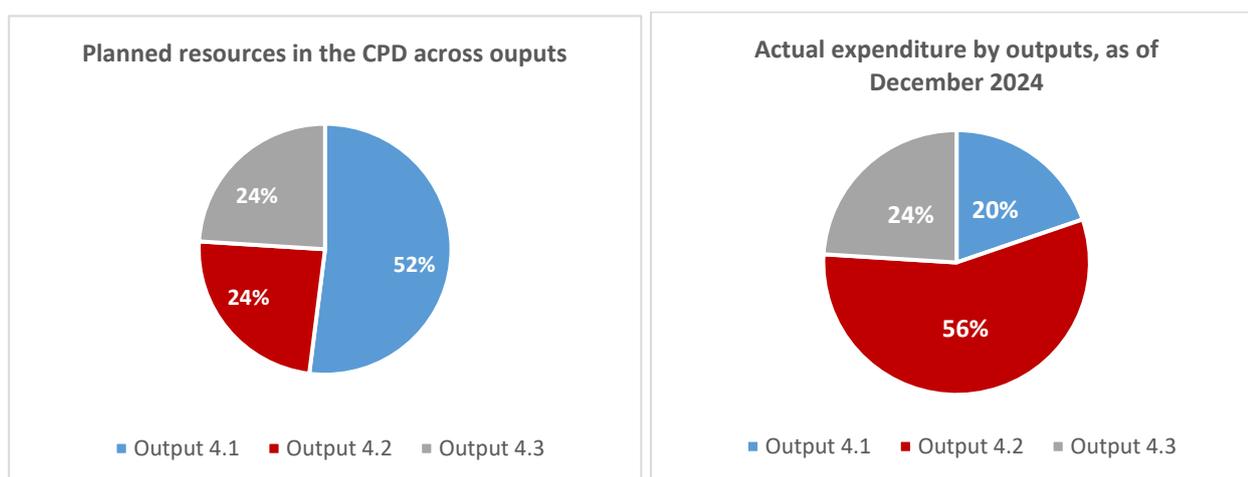
²⁸² Information provided by UNICEF Uzbekistan for the evaluation. All figures are rounded to the nearest thousand for simplicity.

²⁸³ KII, national expert, August 2024.

Another participant echoed these concerns, noting that, “A lot of things that have been done, were done because there’s a very strong technical team... But then that’s not always enough, you need some additional funding for some additional things that happen, and that’s not unfortunately the case.”²⁸⁴ Stakeholders identified opportunities to expand Programme activities had additional funding been available, such as cascading the MHPSS training, developing additional awareness-raising materials under Output 4.3 (justice for children) and continuing to provide support to Afghan children and their families.²⁸⁵ However, a continuation of social services for Afghan communities would not necessarily have increased the sustainability of these interventions.

There were differences between the planned and actual expenditure for each Programme output. As illustrated in Figure 5, there is a significant difference between the planned resource allocation and actual expenditure for Outputs 4.1 and 4.2. While the majority of funds (52 per cent) were initially planned to be spent under Output 4.1 (childcare reform), the actual the expenditure was significantly less (20 per cent). In practice, the vast majority of funds (56 per cent) were spent on Output 4.2 (SSW development), followed by Output 4.3 (24 per cent towards justice for children). This was due to a shift in approach during the Mid-Term Review, where all social services (design, standards, and service delivery support) were consolidated under Output 4.1, with capacity-building of the social service workforce moved to Output 4.2. Additionally, projects funded by EU and Japanese government were also included under Output 4.2. It was further noted that reporting services under Output 4.1 only began after the Mid-Term Review, so these figures may change by the end of the Programme cycle.²⁸⁶

Figure 5: Estimated resources and actual expenditure per Programme output (2021-2024)²⁸⁷



The mid-term review also noted that many social service professionals were paraprofessionals without formal academic training, necessitating extensive capacity development interventions.²⁸⁸ The decision to include a focus on capacity-building was also highlighted during data collection as a strategic decision; by supporting the development of national capacities, there would be a reduced reliance on external expertise to progress and sustain the reforms.²⁸⁹

Human resources allocated to the Programme were insufficient. Initially, the UNICEF child protection team had three project officers, each responsible for one output, but later had only two, which placed a significant burden on the team.²⁹⁰ Due to these limited resources, the team had to work overtime to meet the demands of the

²⁸⁴ KII, international organisation, online, September 2024.

²⁸⁵ KII, national expert, September 2024; KII, national expert, August 2024.

²⁸⁶ UNICEF comments to the draft report.

²⁸⁷ The source for the first diagram is the Country Programme Document 2021-2025 while for the second diagram is the “Financial Summary” document provided by UNICEF for the evaluation.

²⁸⁸ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Programme Review, 23 November 2023, page 11.

²⁸⁹ KII, UNICEF, September 2024, Tashkent.

²⁹⁰ Information provided by UNICEF Uzbekistan for the evaluation.

Programme.²⁹¹ Funding constraints also meant that the UNICEF child protection team provided technical expertise themselves for certain aspects of the Programme rather than outsourcing this to external experts, an approach that was adopted – by way of example - to support the development of the National Strategy on Children’s Access to Justice.²⁹² Participants from national and international stakeholders generally praised UNICEF’s skill and efficiency, despite there being only three permanent staff members within the child protection team and a team of national expert consultants. Participants generally considered that material resources for implementing the Programme were sufficient and did not raise any concerns in this regard.

5.3.2. Cost-efficiency of the Programme

Data indicates some duplication of work during the Programme, but this was due to institutional changes in Government. For example, as one participant reported regarding the transfer of the e-case management system to NASP: *“When the whole system went into the NASP, they were not given all the digital keys they needed to implement this case management system. So, they started again from scratch from the papers that were developed...it was a very interesting learning curve.”*²⁹³ Similarly, UNICEF highlighted the recurring need to train new social service professionals due to changes in government structures and staff turnover at community and district levels, which necessitated repeated efforts to ensure continuity.²⁹⁴ **Apart from these operational challenges, there is little data to indicate that the Programme could have achieved the same results with less resources. In fact, the analysis above indicates that strategies were adopted to ensure that the limited funding available was used as efficiently as possible.** These include the UNICEF Programme team providing technical expertise inhouse in certain areas rather than engaging external expert consultants. Further, the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme, which aimed to respond to the humanitarian crisis, was also used as an entry point for CPSS efforts, including strengthening gate-keeping and case management practices. The Programme team also built upon existing training materials from previous initiatives rather than incurring additional costs to create entirely new training packages or ‘reinventing the wheel’. For instance, a participant reported that the Programme utilized case management materials from earlier collaborations with Columbia University for the new training sessions conducted with social workers.²⁹⁵

5.4. Sustainability

5.4.1. Sustainability, risks and opportunities

The legal and policy reforms supported by the Programme are broadly sustainable, as they embed child protection priorities within the national framework. These reforms include the landmark Law on the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence. Despite the national buy-in and ownership supported through the Programme (for which see below), some participants noted concerns that any future changes within government may affect the degree of political will to implement these reforms, hindering sustainability,²⁹⁶ though this is a general risk which is not exclusive to Uzbekistan. However, this risk affects, in particular, the draft laws and policies developed under the Programme which have yet to be adopted, as well as the implementation of laws and policies which were passed during the Programme period. Pending actions include the adoption of the inter-agency SOPs developed under Output 4.1, draft Law on Social Work under Output 4.2 and the National Strategy on Children’s Access to Justice under Output 4.3.

The establishment of NASP has introduced sustainable institutional changes, which are essential for strengthening the governance structure of the child protection system. This view was generally echoed by stakeholders during data collection. One participant added that there is a risk that NASP may not be able to deliver upon its significant mandate, affecting the sustainability of child protection reforms so far,²⁹⁷ though this view was not expressed by other participants. Another participant believed that the *pace* of child protection

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² KII, UNICEF, September 2024.

²⁹³ KII, [details withheld to protect anonymity], August 24.

²⁹⁴ Comment by UNICEF to the draft evaluation.

²⁹⁵ KII, UNICEF, August 2024.

²⁹⁶ KII, international organisation, September 2024.

²⁹⁷ Online KII, [stakeholder anonymised], August 2024.

reforms would slow down as systems are put in place and capacities built within NASP. However, the participant believed this to be an inevitable and natural part of the reform process rather than affecting the sustainability of the programme per se.²⁹⁸ Indeed, as elaborated in **Part 5.2.1.** newly-hired staff, though enthusiastic about building their capacities, lack sectoral and institutional knowledge, which risks impacting upon the quality and consistency of child protection services provided, at least in the short-term pending roll outs of trainings.

Significant steps are being taken to sustain the capacity-building interventions under Output 4.2, paving the way towards professionalising the SSW within the child protection system. The transfer of training responsibilities to in-house institutions within key government ministries/agencies, such as the NASP's Department for Re-Training and In-Service Training, the Lawyers Training Centre under the MOJ and the Republican Centre of Rehabilitation and Adaptation of Women, have helped to ensure ongoing, accessible training for staff, while empowering these institutions to take ownership of the training process.²⁹⁹ In particular, strategic partnerships with the National University of Uzbekistan, which involved a national team of trainers in developing the re-training course for SSW, was considered by stakeholders to help sustain the interventions by promoting their uptake among academia and delivery among their students.³⁰⁰ Similar benefits were realized through the strategic partnership with the Advanced Training Centre under NASP, which delivers training to community and district specialists.³⁰¹ The online courses and e-resources were also considered to facilitate continuous learning³⁰² and help overcome barriers to delivering trainings to professionals in rural areas.³⁰³ Despite the restructuring following NASP's establishment, there is evidence of the enduring value of UNICEF-supported trainings provided during the Programme before 2023, for example:³⁰⁴

“When I was working a women activist, UNICEF provided sufficient amounts of trainings on how to deal with families, women and children. I will also like to say from my own experience based on skills and norms I have acquired; I am not experiencing any difficulties working with families and I can independently divide these services be it for parents or children of different ages.” (Inson centre staff, previously women's activist, location withheld to ensure anonymity).

Although staff turnover presents some challenges to the sustainability of these trainings,³⁰⁵ the steps above aim to mitigate this.

Despite significant progress and strong buy-in from stakeholders in relation to DI, there remains a reliance on UNICEF to provide continued support in terms of technical expertise and methodological/strategic advice. As the effectiveness analysis shows, there is a *need* to continue interventions to progress DI including by supporting the expansion of family-based alternative care, developing a continuum of services, and strengthening monitoring of individual cases to ensure the safe transition of children from RCIs, particularly for children with disabilities. Data from the desk review and interviews highlight UNICEF's strategic advantage in this area, noting its strong political convening power and specialized child protection expertise, making it better equipped and more adaptable than other actors.³⁰⁶

The sustainability of UNICEF-supported services delivered under the Programme has varied. In Surkhandarya, the NGO, Soglom Avlod, has continued to provide rehabilitation services to some extent to both local and Afghan children with disabilities beyond the project's duration while NASP is continuing to provide the government social welfare services for local (i.e. non-migrant) communities, which were developed during the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme.³⁰⁷ Interestingly, the reliance on external funding to continue delivering

²⁹⁸ KII, international organisation, August 2024.

²⁹⁹ KII, international organisation, August 2024; KII, national expert, August 2024.

³⁰⁰ KII, national expert, August 2024.

³⁰¹ Information provided by UNICEF Uzbekistan in comments on draft evaluation.

³⁰² KII, NASP, August 2024.

³⁰³ KII, Lawyer's Training Centre, August 2024.

³⁰⁴ KII, social service worker, Inson Centre, Tashkent, August 2024; KII, social service worker, Inson Centre, Surkhandarya, August 2024.

³⁰⁵ KII, staff, Inson Centre, Tashkent, 20 August 2024.

³⁰⁶ Kacapor-Dzihic Z., Perolli-Shehu, B., Amanov S., Evaluation of the UN-Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan (January 2020- February 2022) Evaluation Report, March 2022.

³⁰⁷ UNICEF Comments on draft report, received 10 January 2025.

pro bono legal services was not considered by NGO staff to be a risk to the sustainability of those services, as they reported that they were able to leverage funds for this purpose.³⁰⁸ However, NGOs reported facing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining lawyers to work on the Programme due to the labour-intensity, long duration and challenging nature of their cases.³⁰⁹ As one NGO staff member reported,

“We interviewed around 40-50 lawyers and very few agreed to complete this job. Why? It’s difficult for them. Why? We should ensure the protection of children and work with parents. Legal issues cannot be solved immediately. For example, the cases you saw today last at least one year. For the last [case], we have been helping her for the last four years. The lawyers see the volume of work and refuse.”

Interventions which aim to raise awareness of children’s rights under Output 4.3 also face sustainability challenges. Participants explained that these interventions (brochures; cartoons etc.) are not funded from the State’s budget and rely exclusively on donor support. It was reported that plans to continue these activities have been put on pause as UNICEF seeks funding.³¹⁰

Though not an opportunity to sustain existing Programme activities, participants reported potential entry points for additional interventions. Participants from the judiciary highlighted that family courts were being piloted since February 2024 in the Inter-District Family Courts in Samarkand, Namangan and Mirzo-Ulugbek and welcomed working with UNICEF to understand international experiences in this area.

5.4.2. Supporting stakeholder buy-in, leadership, and ownership

Considerable effort has been taken to integrate government and other relevant stakeholders in the Programme, in order to support their buy-in, leadership and ownership. The Programme was designed in consultation with government and other high-level partners, as evidenced in the 2018 Strategic Moment of Reflection roundtable and ensuing consultations, which helped to align government and other stakeholders with the Programme’s objectives.³¹¹ The Programme’s TOC identifies specific government and other partners as central collaborators in implementing key activities, underscoring their integral role. **Part 5.5.** on coherence also highlights the strong partnerships among stakeholders in Uzbekistan in implementing the Programme.

The Programme has generally been extremely effective in supporting stakeholder buy-in, leadership and ownership of child protection reforms, contributing to the sustainability of several aspects of the Programme, as outlined in Part 5.4.1. Persistent and strategic engagement and evidence-based advocacy (a need which was identified in the Annual Country Report 2022)³¹² has led to significant policy, legislative and institutional changes contributing to CPSS, such as NASP’s establishment. As one participant reflected, *“After years of discussion and effort, things finally came together. The child protection team, for example, had been working on social work for over ten years, establishing various training programs in universities and elsewhere. Recent years have identified an authentic demand for these services, which marked the beginning of real progress.”*³¹³ Data also indicates that UNICEF’s advocacy and strategic leadership during the Programme contributed significantly to generating government buy-in to developing a monitoring system for children in residential care institutions³¹⁴ and a commitment to enhance inclusive service delivery to support DI.³¹⁵

Although the Programme has strengthening government buy-in to child justice reforms, this is an ongoing area that requires continued intervention, as highlighted by the results above. Further, also as outlined in the analysis above, **government buy-in and ownership is more limited in relation to the extension of secondary level social services to children and families in irregular migration situations.**

³⁰⁸ KII, staff member, NGO, August 2024.

³⁰⁹ KII, staff member, NGO, August 2024.

³¹⁰ KII, government stakeholder, August 2024.

³¹¹ UNICEF Uzbekistan, UNICEF and Government of Uzbekistan Country Programme 2021-2025: Programme Strategy Note for Child Protection.

³¹² UNICEF Uzbekistan, Country Office Annual Report 2022, p. 9.

³¹³ KII, international organisation, September 2024.

³¹⁴ KII, international organisation (non-UNICEF), September 2024.

³¹⁵ UNICEF Uzbekistan, Country Office Annual Report 2022, p. 7; KII, international organisation (non-UNICEF), August 2024.

5.4.3. Impact of the Programme on sustained efficient use of national resources

The Programme has the potential to contribute to the efficient allocation and utilisation of national resources in the child protection sector though insufficient time has passed to be able to assess their sustainability. The creation of NASP in 2023, to which the Programme has contributed, has the potential to ensure targeted and sustained resource allocation to the sector (e.g. towards SSW-strengthening, developing information management systems to monitor child protection cases and developing a continuum of child protection services), though this will require ongoing technical support, as emphasised in **Part 0** Further, as mentioned in **Part 5.4.1.** the systematic approach to SSW-strengthening has the potential to contribute to the efficient allocation of capacity-building resources by providing structured training opportunities rather than ad hoc, overlapping trainings. Further, free online training resources such as the National University’s foundation course on social work, will potentially provide greater flexibility and access, particularly for social service workers in remote areas who would otherwise have to take time off work to travel to central locations to attend the training.³¹⁶ However, as at the end of 2024, funding for the child protection system continued to be largely “response oriented and infrastructure related,” rather than systematic analysis of public finance for child protection.³¹⁷

The Programme is likely to partially improve the sustained and efficient allocation and utilisation of resources in the childcare system. Stakeholders noted the absence of a legal or policy commitment from government to invest resources freed up from closed or reorganised RCIs in community-based alternative care, inclusive education and other services necessary to progress and sustain DI.³¹⁸ Following the transfer of most RCIs to NASP, this risk is mitigated but not eliminated, as there is still no obligation on NASP to reinvest freed up resources in this way.

5.5. Coherence

5.5.1. Effectiveness of UNICEF collaboration with development partners and other UN agencies

The Programme involved various collaborations between UNICEF, development partners and other UN agencies. Examples include: collaborating with the EU, UNHCR, UNDP and IOM on issues relating to Afghan children and their families through the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme; working with UNODC to support the development of the National Strategy on Children’s Access to Justice; working with the World Bank to develop a monitoring database and tools for children in residential care; and working with the EU and UN to support the repatriation and reintegration of children from armed conflict zones. For this latter intervention, UNICEF acted as the lead agency for coordinating UN support under the ‘*Global Framework on United Nations Support to Member States on Individuals Returned from the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq*,’ carried out in collaboration with the Government of Uzbekistan.³¹⁹ A joint steering committee of government, NGO and UNICEF was formed under this framework to oversee the repatriation process and facilitate planning and delivery of support services.³²⁰ UN Women was also involved in the first phase of this project, with the support of GIZ. UNICEF also collaborated with other UN agencies, including UNFPA and UN Women, through the UN Gender Thematic Group to coordinate their approach to supporting the development of the various laws on combatting violence against children and gender-based violence which were developed during the Programme period.³²¹

UNICEF’s collaborations have generally been effective in maximising contributions and preventing duplication of work between UN agencies. UNICEF’s joint work with UNODC on access to justice is reported to have provided opportunities to “unite” their partners and conduct joint advocacy with policymakers, leading to the development of the National Strategy on Children’s Access to Justice.³²² Existing research on the repatriation

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ UNICEF, RAM Report, 2024.

³¹⁸ KII, international organisation, August 2024.

³¹⁹ NDICI-Global Europe Crisis Response Action in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, Annex 1.

³²⁰ UNICEF, Repatriation and Reintegration of Children from Uzbekistan Affected by Armed Conflict in Syria and Iraq, 2023.

³²¹ KII, international organisation, September 2024; KII, government stakeholder, August 2024.

³²² KII, UNODC, August 2024.

programme found that the teams involved worked together cohesively and with strong coordination.³²³ Through the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme, interventions focused not only on providing protective services to vulnerable Afghan children and their families but also on providing advocacy, technical and capacity-building interventions aimed at developing the child protection system more generally. A participant from the EU praised the collaboration with UNICEF, finding particular value in UNICEF's ability to maintain good collaborative relationships with other institutions and NGOs to carry out their work, despite changes in governance structures over the project period.³²⁴ UNHCR also reported referring individual cases involving vulnerable Afghan children and their families to UNICEF-supported services in Surkhandarya. More generally, UNICEF engaged in joint advocacy efforts with UNHCR, UNDP and IOM, which are reported to have facilitated greater legal protections and services for Afghan refugees, including extending visas and expediting the processing of asylum applications.³²⁵ One participant from a UN agency considered their joint action in this area to be "crucial" given the political sensitivities relating to this issue and the gap in statutory social services for migrants and refugees. Feedback from another international partner was similarly extremely positive: "*The team there was absolutely terrific, and they understood the value added that this work can bring, and our joint efforts, and they were very transparent, very collaborative, and even though this was 100% our funding, they were taking it as a joint project and helping make sure this works, because it helps the country.*"³²⁶ Another international organisation also reported "*real collaboration*" with UNICEF and considered that their work complemented each other.³²⁷

UNICEF's collaborations with development partners and UN agencies have also stimulated collaborative efforts. UNICEF and UNODC are continuing their collaboration on access to justice issues by planning a joint project to pilot diversion and alternative measures for children in conflict with the law.³²⁸ UNODC participants have also expressed interest in expanding this partnership to building the capacities of judges and penitentiary staff.³²⁹ Further, following their collaboration with UNICEF in connection with the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme, UNHCR reported collaborating with UNICEF more closely on interventions relating the situation of stateless people by inviting UNICEF to workshops, trainings and other similar interventions on this issue. UNICEF and UNFPA also plan to continue their collaboration by supporting the capacity-development of NASP's SSW.³³⁰

Despite the Programme's strong gender focus, there was limited collaboration between UNICEF and UN Women; however, there are plans to strengthen collaboration on child protection issues in the near future. In April 2025, UNICEF and UN Women plan to work together on a joint EU project focused on women's economic empowerment and addressing harmful gender norms.³³¹

5.5.2. Coherence of the Programme with UNICEF's cross-sectoral and sector-specific priorities

Attention has been paid to ensuring coherence between the Programme and UNICEF's cross-sectoral and sector-specific priorities. As one participant explained, "*[t]here have been huge improvements, because of the ongoing discussions. Joint planning often leads to a smoother transition into joint implementation.*"³³² This coherence is also built into the Programme's design. The Programme Strategy Note explicitly promotes joint-efforts between child protection and social protection to support vulnerable families, prevent child

³²³ UNICEF ECARO, Repatriation and reintegration of children affected by conflict in Syria and Iraq to Central Asia, 2023.

³²⁴ KII, EU delegation, August 2024.

³²⁵ UNICEF and EU, Ensuring resilience and preventing instability in the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan bordering Afghanistan through enhanced access to inclusive education, social services and legal aid in host communities: Final progress report, NDICI CRISIS FPI/2022/434-101, 2022, p. 5; KII, Centre for training social protection workers, Tashkent City, 20 August 2024; KII, UNHCR, August 2024.

³²⁶ KII, international organisation, September 2024.

³²⁷ KII, international organisation, August 2024.

³²⁸ KII, international organisation, August 2024.

³²⁹ KII, UNODC, August 2024.

³³⁰ KII, UNFPA, August 2024.

³³¹ Information provided by UNICEF Uzbekistan in comments on draft evaluation.

³³² KII, international organisation, September 2024.

abandonment, and enhance social worker outreach to connect families with services.³³³ Gender and disability are also integrated into the Programme, albeit to varying degrees, as outlined in Part 5.1.2. (relevance).

There is strong coherence between UNICEF’s Child Protection and Social Protection teams, particularly in supporting the establishment of NASP and building the capacity of the SSW. The fragmentation of the child protection and social welfare systems before NASP’s establishment was a driving force for the close collaboration between these two teams, which are reported to have paid close attention to ensuring a coordinated approach to their work with government partners as a result.³³⁴ These teams also worked together to support the development of NASP’s e-case management system, which reportedly integrates social and child protection services.³³⁵ UNICEF reported the importance of their collaboration in this area, noting that there is scope for further collaboration as DI progresses.³³⁶ Participants considered that these efforts demonstrated a mutual understanding of each team’s expertise, fostering collaboration that avoids duplication and yielded more positive outcomes.³³⁷

There is also evidence of good synergy between UNICEF’s Child Protection and Education teams, which participants considered had improved during the Programme compared to previous years.³³⁸ The Child Protection Team provided input into the Partnership Compact for Education Reform 2023-26, which aims to ensure equitable access to quality education including inclusive education and which is integral for DI of children with disabilities and special educational needs. Synergy between the two programmes is also evidenced through the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme where the Child Protection and Education teams supported interventions targeting Afghan and host communities in Surkhandarya. Interventions supported by the Education Team included joint-advocacy and coordination to identify and enrol out-of-school Afghan children, with a total of 229 children in Surkhandarya enrolled in schools as a result of this advocacy.³³⁹

There has been some collaboration between the Child Protection and Health sectors, though this is an area which can be strengthened, particularly in relation to DI. Collaboration during the Programme has focused mainly on strengthening MHPSS services (revised indicator 2, Output 4.2 Part), which links specifically with the objective of the health programme to equip service providers to deliver gender-responsive, adolescent-friendly health services at the primary healthcare level, with an emphasis on mental health.³⁴⁰ Participants considered that there is a clear division of tasks between the UNICEF Child Protection and Health teams regarding MHPSS interventions and that their strategies complement each other effectively.³⁴¹ This included a study conducted by the MOH, MPSE, supported by the Health team and with input from the Child Protection team, on adolescent mental health and psychosocial well-being in schools.³⁴² There is comparatively less evidence of collaboration with the health team in the DI process. Output 4.1 foresaw the development of early identification and intervention framework and services.³⁴³ This involved strengthening the capacity of patronage nurses to carry out home visits.³⁴⁴ Continued collaboration will be essential for ensuring a continuum of services for children with disabilities, particularly as they intersect with the social services provided by NASP.

³³³ UNICEF Uzbekistan, UNICEF and Government of Uzbekistan Country Programme 2021-2025: Programme Strategy Note for Child Protection.

³³⁴ KII, UNICEF, September 2024.

³³⁵ KII, national expert, August 2024.

³³⁶ KII, UNICEF, September 2024.

³³⁷ KII, UNICEF September 2024.

³³⁸ KII, UNICEF, August 2024.

³³⁹ UNICEF and EU, Ensuring resilience and preventing instability in the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan bordering Afghanistan through enhanced access to inclusive education, social services and legal aid in host communities: Final progress report, NDICI CRISIS FPI/2022/434-101, 2022.

³⁴⁰ Output 2.4, found in: UNICEF Uzbekistan, Mid-term Programme Review, 23 November 2023.

³⁴¹ KII, UNICEF August 2024.

³⁴² Duci V., Adolescents’ Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-being at schools, 2022. Accessible here: www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/media/5186/file/Adolescents%20mental%20health%20at%20school.pdf

³⁴³ UNICEF Mid-Term Programme Review Report, 2023.

³⁴⁴ KII, UNICEF, August 2024; UNICEF Uzbekistan, Country Office Annual Report 2023.

5.6. Impact

There is data indicating that the Programme has contributed to children, especially the most vulnerable, and their parents/carers, benefiting from enhanced governance systems and rule of law institutions for a life free from discrimination and violence. Feedback from children at the Inson Centres who had been involved in child protection cases due to orphanhood or abuse generally spoke positively about the outcomes of their cases, which often involved guardianship placements with relatives. There is feedback from SSW in all research sites that the introduction of the Inson Centres had improved the quality of child protection work by ensuring that there are designated social workers to take on cases, clarifying their child protection mandate and strengthening the focus on addressing children's issues, including those living with parents/guardians who are in difficult life situations.³⁴⁵ This includes feedback from SSW in Kashkadarya, which was not a target location for sub-national interventions under the Programme, reinforcing the positive impact of system-level Programme interventions:

“Well, the social worker introduction into system is one of the most successful moves/changes in the system. For instance, he or she is in direct touch with the child who was abandoned by his other parents for labour migration, which wouldn't have been possible for one person in charge at the district or city level.” (Inson Centre staff, Kashkadarya)

Despite these successes, there have been particular challenges in monitoring the safe and supported reintegration of children who were deinstitutionalised from RCIs during the Programme period.³⁴⁶ Several stakeholders reported instances where children who were deinstitutionalised ran away return or ended up being placed in a penitentiary institution.³⁴⁷ According to participants, these challenges were due to the families not being prepared to care for their children as well as monitoring functions being fragmented between agencies (before NASP's establishment), resulting in no particular agency taking on this responsibility.³⁴⁸ Further, most of the support provided to families consisted of financial benefits or assistance to parents to help them find employment rather than social work input to address the social drivers of family separation.³⁴⁹ Feedback from stakeholders and children also suggest that children's views were not heard in the process.³⁵⁰ Although a voluntary mentorship scheme was established for children deinstitutionalised from special schools further to advocacy and technical input from UNICEF,³⁵¹ participants reported that this scheme depended on the commitment and willingness of the individual volunteer and there were no quality standards or monitoring mechanisms,³⁵² such that it is unlikely to have had a significant impact.

There is some evidence that the legal aid interventions have had a positive impact on rights holders/beneficiaries. Feedback from both children and parents/carers receiving legal aid from NGOs under the Programme was extremely positive, with parents reporting that the was their only source of legal support.

Based on the evidence available, the likely contribution of SBC interventions generating demand for children's rights, freedom from discrimination and prohibition of violence appears to be limited. As one participant noted, informational materials like brochures have been distributed to raise awareness, though there was no guarantee that these will effectively reach or impact children.³⁵³ More generally, feedback from both children and parents/carers on whether children and adults know about children's rights were mixed. Many of the child participants demonstrated good knowledge and awareness of their rights, which they reported learning about in schools, social media (YouTube) and TV. However, it should be noted that these children were beneficiaries of UNICEF-supported services and are therefore may be more likely to be sensitised to child rights issues than children who have not received UNICEF-supported services. Indeed, several child participants did not think that

³⁴⁵ 2 x KIIs, Inson Centre staff, Surkhandarya region, August 2023; KII, Inson Centre staff, Kashkadarya region, August 2024.

³⁴⁶ UNICEF, End of Year Report, Outcome 4, 2023.

³⁴⁷ KII, international organisation, 23 September 2024; KII, national stakeholder, [anonymised], August 2024; KII, national stakeholder [anonymised], September 2024.

³⁴⁸ KII, national stakeholder [anonymised], August 2024; KII, national expert, September 2024.

³⁴⁹ KII, national expert, September 2024.

³⁵⁰ KII, national stakeholder, anonymised, September 2024; IDI, child beneficiary of Inson Centre, August 2024.

³⁵¹ Online KII, national expert, September 2024.

³⁵² KII, national expert, August 2024.

³⁵³ KII, international organisation, September 2024.

children or adults in their community had such knowledge.³⁵⁴ Parents/carers similarly provided mixed feedback on whether children in their community had knowledge and awareness of their rights, but considered that adults in their community had such knowledge from social media³⁵⁵ and mahalla committee chiefs.³⁵⁶ Further, anecdotal evidence indicates that stigma remains a hurdle for reporting sexual offences committed against children; for example, one Inson Centre staff member reported a case where the family of a girl who had been raped did not want to report the matter due to “shame”. Further, as outlined in [Part 5.2.2](#), stigma and negative attitudes towards children with disabilities, as well as a belief that residential care is in the child’s best interests, continue to be a barrier to DI.

6. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

6.7. Conclusions

6.7.1. Relevance

The Programme was extremely relevant to Uzbekistan’s priorities at the national, regional and global levels, including SDG 16. Outputs 4.1 and 4.2 built upon the groundwork established in these areas during previous programmes. Although justice for children reform (Output 4.3) was broadly relevant to Uzbekistan’s national priorities, the establishment of diversion and alternative measures for children in conflict with the law has not been an area of focus for government, requiring targeted advocacy and generation of stakeholder buy-in to progress these reforms. This is recognised within UNICEF with steps already being taken to address this. The focus of the Programme on supporting Afghan children and families through the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme was not a priority for the Government, though these interventions responded to the critical needs of this particularly vulnerable group of children, who would otherwise not have had access to secondary level social services. The Programme is broadly relevant to gender and disability issues and has included a focus on these issues in practice, these elements could have been strengthened further in the Programme’s TOC, indicators and targets, including in the CSIs.

The Programme was generally extremely relevant to UNICEF’s global and regional priorities, particularly UNICEF’s Child Protection Strategy 2021-2030, CPSS benchmarks and ‘Reimagine Justice for Children’ agenda, and in relation to gender and disability.

The Programme has responded extremely well to significant institutional changes, humanitarian crises and evolving political and social landscape. This was largely due to adjustments made following the 2023 Mid-Term Review and UNICEF’s pragmatism, readiness and strategic stewardship of the Programme. The Programme is also, on the whole, relevant to the child protection needs of boys and girls in Uzbekistan.

6.7.2. Effectiveness

The Programme generally made good progress in achieving its intended outcome. Results under Output 4.1 (childcare reform) contributed to a reduction in the rate of children in formal residential care between 2021 and 2023.³⁵⁷ Although TransMonEE data indicates a 28 per cent reduction during this period, significantly exceeding the Programme’s target, this figure is not completely reliable due to challenges in collecting accurate monitoring data, partly caused by institutional changes. Nevertheless, the findings show that Programme strategies focusing on national-level reforms secured the commitment and leadership of government at the highest levels, leading to landmark, necessary changes to the legal, policy and institutional frameworks. These reforms included the establishment of NASP, designation of Inson Centres as the child protection authority at the district level, bringing community social workers under the supervision of the Inson Centres, and the adoption of the Law on the Prevention of All Forms of Violence against Children. These reforms address the historical fragmentation of child protection responsibilities among stakeholders and, more practically, are facilitating CPSS reforms by assigning a clear government partner with responsibility to lead in this area. With the backing of other

³⁵⁴ 3 x IDI, child, Surkhandarya, August 2024.

³⁵⁵ IDI, parent/guardian, Inson Centre, August 2024.

³⁵⁶ IDI, parent, August 2024.

³⁵⁷ The results for 2024 were unavailable at the time of writing.

stakeholders, particularly the Senate and Office of the Children’s Ombudsperson, the Programme achieved its targets in 16 out of 19 CPSS subdomains by the end of 2024.

Similarly, the Programme has achieved its intended results under Output 4.2 on SSW-strengthening, including the training of at least 1,282 para-professionals on case management and working with vulnerable children and families, with the numbers of SSW trained being much higher. Interventions post-NASP have adopted a more system-based approach to professionalising the SSW. Pending the MICS study to measure outcome indicator 2 (percentage reduction of physical and psychological violence by caregivers in the past month), it has not been possible to provide more detail on the (likely) impact of these interventions on preventing child protection issues. Further, given NASP’s recent establishment, several interventions are ongoing, such as the development and adoption of the Law on Social Work and Social Services and minimum standards for social work, which are likely to achieve more results under this output.

However, the rate of deinstitutionalisation has outpaced the rate of other critical CPSS reforms, including the development of family-based alternative care, such that there is still a reliance on RCIs. The evaluation highlights a need to focus on developing foster care and incentivising potential foster carers. In addition, the extent to which RCIs are being replaced by family-type small group homes should be factored into these interventions, in line with the recommendations of UNICEF ECARO for these to be small-scale, temporary placements.³⁵⁸ Particular concerns arise with the Social and Legal Support Centres under the MOIA in which children are deprived of their liberty as a temporary/emergency alternative care measure.

Similarly, the rate of SSW-strengthening has not kept up with the rapid rate of deinstitutionalisation. There is a critical need to focus on building the capacity of a core team of social service workers to deal exclusively with child protection cases, particularly for tertiary-level, mandatory child protection interventions, which is the core of the child protection system. This includes social work skills to identify child protection concerns, assess the risk of harm to the child and develop, adjust and monitor child protection and/or care plans according to the child’s best interests (whether or not the child is placed in alternative care). The framework of supervision is also in need of development (particularly relevant to CPSS subdomain 6.4 on community-based mechanisms for child protection), as it will not be feasible for one supervisor within the Inson Centres to supervise all community social workers in the district. Continued intervention is also required to ensure that child protection trainings are integrated and rolled out among the SSW, with a view to developing a system of licencing and accreditation for social work in the future.

The child protection system is also approaching a pivotal juncture; continued intervention is required to ensure that ongoing activities are completed and that the gains achieved before NASP’s establishment are not lost. Besides continued strengthening of the SSW, ongoing activities include finalisation and adoption of inter-sectoral and sector-specific SOPs, adoption of NASP’s child protection and care regulations, the development of a national joint strategy and action plan to combat violence against children, and testing and scale-up of FSSS. In addition, the evaluation has highlighted a need to continue developing a shared understanding of “child protection” among stakeholders (subdomain 1.1), minimum standards for child protection services and monitoring and oversight of their implementation (4.2) and the coordination, oversight and secure management of data relating to the child protection system (7.3), which remain at the system-building phase, as well as development of the system for strengthening data collection and monitoring of the child protection system (subdomain 7.1). There has been limited operational space to strengthen data collection and monitoring systems related to child protection issues. However, the recent Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Children provides a solid foundation to enhance data collection and monitoring systems in this area. Further, as yet, there is no functioning formal, multi-sector coordination mechanism at the national level for child

³⁵⁸ UNICEF ECARO, White Paper on *The role of small-scale residential care for children in the transition from institutional- to community-based care and in the continuum of care in the Europe and Central Asia Region*, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/13261/file#:~:text=The%20White%20Paper%20summarizes%20evidence,loving%20and%20stable%20family%20environment>, accessed 7 November 2024.

protection (subdomain 2.2), though steps are being taken by NASP, with the support of the Senate, to implement this.

Due to data gaps and the law not including pre-trial diversion as a mechanism, it has not been possible to provide a comprehensive assessment of the Programme's contribution to developing the justice for children system (Outcome Indicator 3). Based on the data available, Output 4.3 was partially achieved and has contributed less to the Outcome than other outputs. Despite this, the development of the National Strategy on Children's Access to Justice was an important step towards developing a specialised 'justice for children' system. Continued advocacy and strategic partnerships are needed to ensure that it is formally adopted and implemented. UNICEF-supported NGO services to provide children and families with pro bono legal assistance contributed to children accessing justice while materials to raise children's awareness of their rights have also been disseminated, including materials for children with visual and hearing impairments. Importantly, the Programme almost doubled its target for its capacity-building interventions, with 2269 (56 per cent of) justice professionals being certified to handle cases involving children in conflict with the law and child victims and witnesses. Important steps are also being taken to integrate these trainings into existing curricula. However, barriers remain, including gaps in the legal and policy framework, limited alternatives to deprivation of liberty and a need to strengthen the availability and quality of government legal aid. Further, future programme should ensure that trainings in this sector are linked with parallel child protection reforms, particularly in identifying and reporting child protection concerns to the Inson Centres.

Programme interventions focused heavily on addressing issues relating to gender, disability and other vulnerabilities of targeted rights-holders/ beneficiaries. However, there has been a minor (6 per cent) reduction in the numbers of children with disabilities in formal residential care during the Programme period, with the numbers remaining broadly consistent with those immediately preceding the Programme. Barriers to deinstitutionalisation of children with disabilities include a lack of specialised family-based alternative care and community-based services to prevent institutionalisation and support family reintegration, stigma and negative attitudes towards children with disabilities, as well as a belief that residential care is in the child's best interests, a predominantly medicalised approach to disability issues and barriers to inclusive education.

The Programme's strategy of focusing on national level child protection reforms has been extremely effective, as has the Programme's approach to building sustainable partnerships, which have proved crucial for achieving results. The Programme leveraged existing expertise within the NGO sector, which, though valuable, is not necessarily sustainable (see below). An unintended outcome of DI interventions was the government's appointment of the National Guard to expedite and implement this process, leading to rapid deinstitutionalisation and cases where children and their families have not been adequately supported during/after reintegration (see impact). Despite an intermittent period under NASP's leadership, deinstitutionalisation has once again been assigned to the National Guard, requiring continuing advocacy to bring the process back under NASP's leadership. Further, the Programme adopts a robust system for monitoring results and informing decision-making though there is a need to continue strengthening the integration of cross-sectoral priorities into the monitoring of the Programme.

6.7.3. Efficiency

The Programme has operated within financial constraints. While the team made effective use of the available resources to achieve its intended results, it is evident that more could have been achieved with more funding, especially in areas such as capacity-building for professionals and improving the quality of services. In addition, human resources allocated to the Programme were insufficient. Despite some duplication of work to respond to institutional changes within government, there is little data to indicate that the Programme could have achieved the same results with less resources. In fact, the analysis indicates that strategies were adopted to ensure that the limited funding available was used as efficiently as possible.

6.7.4. Sustainability

The legal and policy reforms supported by the Programme are broadly sustainable, though there is a risk (that is shared in many countries) that any future changes within government will affect the degree of commitment to continue these reforms going forward. The establishment of NASP has introduced sustainable institutional

changes, which are essential for strengthening the governance structure of the child protection system. However, there is a need to continue supporting NASP as new systems are put in place and capacities are being built. Significant steps are being taken to sustain the capacity-building interventions, paving the way towards professionalising the SSW within the child protection system and mitigating against the risk of SSW turnover. Despite significant progress and strong buy-in from stakeholders in relation to DI, there remains a reliance on (and a need for) UNICEF to provide support in terms of technical expertise and methodological/strategic advice. UNICEF-supported services delivered under the Programme have proved less sustainable than other interventions, due to challenges in recruiting and retaining lawyers (for pro bono legal services) and limited government buy-in to expand secondary-level social services to children and their families in irregular migration situations. Interventions which aim to raise awareness of children's rights under Output 4.3 also face sustainability challenges.

The Programme has generally been extremely effective in supporting stakeholder buy-in, leadership and ownership of child protection reforms, contributing to the sustainability of several aspects of the Programme, except in relation to secondary level social services for children and families in irregular migration situations. Although the Programme has been effective in strengthening government buy-in to child justice reforms, this is an ongoing area that requires continued intervention. The Programme has the potential to contribute to the efficient allocation and utilisation of national resources in the child protection sector though insufficient time has passed to be able to assess their sustainability.

6.7.5. Coherence

The Programme involved various collaborations between UNICEF, development partners and other UN agencies, which have generally been effective in maximising contributions and preventing duplication of work. UNICEF's collaborations with development partners and UN agencies have also stimulated collaborative efforts. Attention has been paid to ensuring coherence between the Programme and UNICEF's cross-sectoral and sector-specific priorities. There has been strong coherence between UNICEF's Child Protection and Social Protection teams in achieving Programme results. Strong coherence is also evident between the Child Protection and Education teams, though this should be strengthened further particularly in relation to inclusive education, DI and elimination of violence against children. Collaboration between the Child Protection and Health sectors should also be strengthened in these areas and in developing services to prevent abandonment and institutionalisation of children with disabilities.

6.7.6. Impact

Overall, the Programme has contributed to children, including children with disabilities, and their parents/carers, benefiting from enhanced governance systems and rule of law institutions for a life free from discrimination and violence. There is evidence of CPSS reforms and pro bono legal services contributing to positive outcomes for rights holders/ beneficiaries. However, during the Programme, there were significant challenges in monitoring the safe and supported reintegration of children who were deinstitutionalised from RCIs during the Programme, with reports of children not being adequately supported or monitored to ensure their safe reintegration. Legal barriers and sustainability challenges to providing social services for Afghan children and their families are also likely to reduce the impact of the EU-Supported Strengthening Resilience Programme. There is insufficient data to assess the impact of SBC interventions under the Programme though existing data suggests that their contribution to generating demand for children's rights, freedom from discrimination and prohibition of violence is likely to be limited.

6.8. Lessons Learned

1. The evaluation highlights the value and importance of sustained advocacy and strategic collaboration to achieve sustainable legal and institutional reforms which are essential for progressing CPSS. Though the tangible results of these strategies may take more than one programme cycle to materialise, the continued investment of time and resources into building partnerships with influential government partners to advance child protection reforms can lead to landmark normative changes. In Uzbekistan's case, continued attention to developing strategic partnerships with the Senate and Office of the Children's Ombudsperson significantly contributed to the establishment of NASP which, together with the MOJ, all played key roles in the passing of

the Law on the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence and development of the Strategy on Children’s Access to Justice.

2. The evaluation reinforces the importance of implementing DI gradually and that this must take place in parallel to the strengthening of child protection case management expertise and the expansion of a continuum of social and child protection services including family-based alternative care. Without this, there is a real risk that children and families do not receive the reintegration support and *monitored* transition that they need, leading to children returning to unstable or unsupported environments or even getting “lost” in the system.

3. To develop a sustainable child-friendly legal aid service, it is necessary to also engage Government and relevant State agencies responsible for the regulation of the legal profession in these efforts, not only to generate political will, but also to develop a coherent vision for the efficient provision of the different levels of legal aid (free legal information v. free legal advice v. free legal representation). The provision of legal information and advice is extremely important for preventing legal matters from escalating, requiring more specialist and resource-intensive legal assistance. However, as the experience in Uzbekistan shows, challenges arise in sustaining the provision of these services solely through the NGO sector. By engaging relevant Government and State agencies, strategies for the sustainable and efficient allocation of resources to developing accessible, child-friendly free legal information and advice (e.g. online information; helplines providing free legal advice etc.) can be agreed upon and coordinated, as well as incentivising and funding child-friendly legal representation (which is the most resource intensive form of legal aid) for priority cases.

7. Recommendations

The recommendations below were developed with the key duty-bearers and/or users of the report, most notably the ERG and UNICEF Uzbekistan. This collaboration consisted of an online consultation with the ERG and UNICEF Uzbekistan on 31 January 2025 and two rounds of written comments from these stakeholders (see **Part Error! Reference source not found. 4.7.** for the ERG’s composition). During the inception phase, it was recognised that it would not be possible to consult with children and other rights-holders/ beneficiaries on the recommendations during the report-writing and validation stage of the evaluation (due to the need for official authorisations; ethical considerations; and resource availability). As outlined in the Inception Report, particular attention was therefore given to consulting with children and other rights-holders/ beneficiaries on their recommendations during the in-country data collection. Their feedback has been instrumental in developing these recommendations.

In these recommendations, “**short-term**” refers to recommendations which should be implemented within one year, “**medium-term**” within three years and “**long-term**” within five years.

Type of Reform and Recommendation	Key duty-bearers/ stakeholders	UNICEF’s Role	Timeframe and priority
1. Law, policy and operational framework 1.1. Finalise and adopt the pending laws, policies and operational documents developed under the Programme (including the joint strategy and action plan to combat violence against children), ensuring gender and disability inclusion and a strengthened focus on child justice reforms	NASP, Senate, Office of the Children’s Ombudsperson and key referring bodies (MOH, MPSE, MOIA, Prosecutor’s General Office, MOJ, Supreme Court, NGO sector)	Provision of technical and advocacy input	Short-term; high priority
2. SSW- strengthening 2.1. Comprehensive mapping of the SSW	NASP	Technical input	Short-term
2.2. Development of a five-year action plan for SSW-strengthening, including a focus on the SSW for tertiary-level, mandatory child protection cases	NASP, training academies and academia	Technical and advocacy input	Medium-term; high priority
2.3. Development of a 20-year strategy for SSW-strengthening (planning, development	NASP, training academies and academia	Technical and	Long-term

and support of the SSW), including a focus on child protection and mainstreaming MHPSS		advocacy input	
2.4. Integration of child protection training into other sector-specific trainings highlighting NASP's mandate and intersectoral cooperation for mandatory reporting and response to child protection cases	MOH; MPSE; MOJ; training academies; academia; Supreme Court; Prosecutor's General Office; MOIA	Technical input	Short-term; high priority
3. Continuum of child protection and social services			
3.1. Expansion and professionalisation of the system of foster care including emergency and specialist foster care (at least for children aged 0-7)	NASP with support and collaboration with NGO sector	Technical and strategic input	Medium-term; high priority
3.2. Expansion of specialist, gender-responsive and inclusive community-based services for children to support DI, particularly children with disabilities and their parents/carers (rehabilitation services for children with severe disabilities, daycare and respite care) and children at high risk of offending	NASP in collaboration with MPSE, MOH and NGO sector	Technical and strategic input	Medium-term; high priority
3.3. Scale-up of FSSS based on pilot results to prevent family separation	NASP	Technical and strategic input	Medium-term; high priority
3.4. Development of social services to support children including those with disabilities aging out of the childcare system to transition to more independent living arrangements but which still provide social and pastoral support	NASP in collaboration with NGO sector	Technical and strategic input	Medium-term
3.5. Ensuring links between the child protection system and a range of gender-responsive MHPSS services for children and parents/carers in need of this support	NASP in collaboration with other sectors particularly MOH, MPSE and NGO sector	Technical, strategic input, coordination support	Medium-term
4. Deinstitutionalisation			
4.1. Transfer DI tasks from the National Guard, and authority over the Social and Legal Support Centres from the MOIA, to NASP	Legislature; National; Guard; MOIA; NASP	Technical, advocacy and strategic input	Short-term; high priority
4.2. Analysis of the costs of and resources allocated to RCIs to inform recommendations to reallocate resources to family- and community-based services	NASP; RCIs and their overseeing Ministry	Technical input	Short-term
4.3. Develop plan for the gradual, monitored DI of children in RCIs with a view to their closure/transformation over the next five years	NASP; RCIs and their overseeing Ministry; MOH; MPSE	Technical, advocacy and strategic input	Medium-term
5. Other CPSS priorities			
5.1. Establish multi-sectoral coordination body for child protection	NASP (leadership); Senate (support)	Advocacy and coordination support	Short-term
5.2. Develop a framework for the collection, monitoring and sharing of disaggregated data	NASP and key child protection stakeholders	Technical input and	Medium-term

(age, gender, disability, migration status etc.) on child protection cases including numbers of referrals and their outcomes	(MOH, MPSE, MOIA, Prosecutor's General Office, MOJ, Supreme Court, NGO sector)	coordination support	
6. Social behavioural change 6.1. Nation-wide, gender-sensitive and disability inclusive campaign on the elimination of violence against children, child protection, reporting to community social workers or Inson Centre and the importance of the child growing up in a family	NASP; Children's Ombudsperson	Technical and strategic support	Long-term
6.2. Nation-wide, gender-sensitive and disability inclusive campaign on children's rights and how to access to complaints mechanisms for violations of their rights	MOJ; Children's Ombudsperson		
7. Justice for children 7.1. Formalise the institutionalisation of compulsory, gender-responsive pre- and in-service training for justice professionals, including social workers, on delivering child-friendly justice	MOJ, MOIA, Supreme Court, Prosecutor's General Office, training academies, academia	Technical and advocacy input	Short-term; high priority
7.2. Modelling, piloting and scale-up of gender-sensitive pre-trial diversion and alternative measures following legal amendment	MOJ, MOIA, Supreme Court, Prosecutor's General Office, penitentiary system	Technical and strategic input	Medium-term; high priority
7.3. Modelling, piloting and scaling up a child-friendly and gender-sensitive, legal aid service, including professional representation for children in conflict with the law and other priority areas	MOJ in collaboration with the NGO sector	Technical, advocacy and strategic input, and coordination support	Long-term; high priority