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**For decision**

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## United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

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Item 8 of the provisional agenda\*

### **Management response to the evaluation report**

#### **Evaluation of UNICEF social protection responses towards universal child benefits**

##### *Summary*

The present report provides an overview of the UNICEF response to the evaluation of UNICEF social protection responses towards universal child benefits, completed in 2023. It provides a summary of the actions that the organization will take to address the recommendations.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section V.

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\* E/ICEF/2024/1.

*Note:* The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.



## I. Overview

1. The evaluation of UNICEF social protection responses towards universal child benefits sought to offer evidence-based suggestions to UNICEF for improving the effectiveness of UNICEF efforts in supporting Governments to expand child benefit programmes on pathways towards universal coverage. The evaluation builds on the “Rapid review of global social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic” (2020)<sup>1</sup> and aims to further strengthen UNICEF work on social protection under Goal Area 5 of the current Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

2. The report was based on analysis of UNICEF work at global, regional and country levels. The evaluation took a comparative case study approach, where information from 4 in-depth county case studies from Argentina, Nepal, South Africa and Thailand and 17 additional country data points were analysed to reveal generalizable knowledge in response to key evaluation questions.

## II. Analysis and findings

### A. Introduction

3. The evaluation recognizes the critical role of child benefits as part of child-sensitive social protection systems, particularly in the current context, where 333 million children are living in extreme poverty and more children face multifaceted impact of polycrises, such as the climate crisis, conflicts, inflation and debt crisis. It recognizes the role of child benefits in expanding coverage of social protection among children, ending child poverty, promoting human capital development, and contributing to bolster dignity, cohesion and inclusive economic growth.

4. The findings also focus on the rights-based approach of UNICEF to social protection that promotes universal social protection for all children, with strong focus on the most vulnerable. Therefore, the analysis focuses on “progressive expansion of child benefits” towards universal coverage, in recognition of the country contexts where universal child benefits may not be introduced immediately, but have outlined pathways to introduce, expand and improve child benefits to reach all children.

5. The evaluation examined four relevant action areas of the UNICEF Global Social Protection Programme Framework (2019)<sup>2</sup> and outlines the main findings in four domains of work: support for evidence generation and advocacy, fiscal space mobilization, government capacity-building and sustained partnerships.

### B. Main findings

#### 1. Overall effectiveness of UNICEF support

6. The evaluation concludes that UNICEF has implemented relevant actions to effectively support Governments to establish and progressively expand child benefits across the country examples. In diverse and often challenging country contexts, UNICEF has achieved remarkable progress by integrating policy advocacy with credible and relevant evidence mobilization, effective capacity strengthening and

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, “Rapid Review of Global Social Protection Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic” (New York, 2020). Available at [www.unicef.org/evaluation/reports#/detail/17169/rapid-review-of-global-social-protection-responses-to-the-covid-19-pandemic](http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/reports#/detail/17169/rapid-review-of-global-social-protection-responses-to-the-covid-19-pandemic).

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, “UNICEF’s Global Social Protection Programme Framework” (New York, October 2019). Available at [www.unicef.org/media/64601/file/Global-social-protection-programme-framework-2019.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/64601/file/Global-social-protection-programme-framework-2019.pdf).

comprehensive partnership-building, particularly when these activities align with exogenous factors that contribute to success.

## **2. National resource mobilization**

7. The evaluation finds that UNICEF has proactively engaged with Governments in public finance actions with the aim of increasing domestic resource mobilization for child benefits, guided by the UNICEF Public Finance for Children Global Programme Framework.<sup>3</sup> To strengthen the efficacy of these actions through capacity-building and evidence generation, the report also acknowledges the role of UNICEF headquarters and regional offices in developing global frameworks, guidance, toolkits, feasibility studies and other resources.

## **3. Capacity-building**

8. The report assesses that UNICEF has effectively supported technical, operational, institutional and human capacities within Governments to ensure the operational sustainability of child benefits, reduce exclusion errors, and increase support among government officials for establishing or expanding child benefits. In some cases, UNICEF has supported the implementation and administrative capacities at the subnational government level. UNICEF has supported training and knowledge-sharing activities for government officials, which have improved their capacities to design and deliver the programmes and, in some cases, effectively built bureaucratic support, while consultations with key informants suggest significant government demand for technical and operational capacity-building initiatives.

## **4. Partnerships**

9. The evaluation recognizes that UNICEF country offices prioritize partnerships with Governments, development partners and civil society to support the building of integrated and child-sensitive social protection systems that are reinforced by the expertise and comparative advantages of each partner. It acknowledges that such partnerships have led to the establishment of integrated and rights-based social protection systems, harmonization of various social protection programmes, and the building of integrated administrative systems and a global evidence base. Overall, it concludes that Governments, development partners, international financial institutions and civil society stakeholders collaborate with UNICEF as trusted partners on issues pertaining to children and the advancement of the child-sensitive social protection agenda.

# **III. Recommendations**

10. Overall, UNICEF agrees with the recommendations as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, “UNICEF’s Engagements in Influencing Domestic Public Finance for Children (PF4C): A Global Programme Framework” (New York, December 2017). Available at [https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/UNICEF\\_Public\\_Finance\\_for\\_Children.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/UNICEF_Public_Finance_for_Children.pdf).

## IV. Key evaluation recommendations and UNICEF management response

<i>Action</i>	<i>Responsible section(s)</i>	<i>Expected completion date</i>	<i>Actions taken and implementation stage: Not started Under way Completed Cancelled</i>	<i>Supporting documents</i>
<p><b>Evaluation recommendation 1 (Evidence and advocacy):</b> Continue to produce and actively disseminate knowledge products with a specific focus on evidence generation and fiscal space analyses, with an increased emphasis on collaboration with national research organizations and partners. Strategically balance, sequence and integrate evidence, advocacy, capacity development and partnership-building activities according to stakeholders' involvement in joint activities and approaches to social protection.</p> <p>Specifically, UNICEF headquarters should expand its support for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building partnerships linking Governments, development partners, civil society and research institutions to build the necessary evidence (including impact assessments, situation analyses, cost-benefit assessments, political economy analyses and other evidence generation exercises and evaluations) to advance child benefit programmes;</li> <li>• Developing global advocacy messages and strategies to support Governments in expanding social protection responses, including child benefit programmes, at the country level; and</li> <li>• Generating timely evidence on shock-responsive social protection, including child benefit programmes, to better position UNICEF for advocacy and to support Governments and development partners.</li> </ul> <p><b>Management response: Agree.</b> Evidence generation and advocacy are cornerstones of UNICEF work to expand child benefits at global, regional and country levels. Specific actions to further expand our efforts are outlined below.</p>				
Develop and implement organization-wide advocacy strategy on child poverty and social protection to elevate advocacy messages and identify specific change objectives that support national Governments in expanding social protection.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy; Division of Global Communication and Advocacy	December 2024	Not started	
Leverage and enhance regional and global multi-stakeholder partnerships that support data analysis, evidence generation, research-policy dialogue, and development of evidence-based advocacy, with a focus on South-South and North-South partnerships – for example, the Transfer Project, socialprotection.org, BMZ/UNICEF partnership on evidence generation on adaptive social protection. Work with existing partners on inclusion of evidence and policy recommendations in global flagship reports and platforms, including the <i>World Social Protection Report</i> and <i>The State of the World's Children</i> report.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy; Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring; Innocenti-Global Office of Research and Foresight	December 2025	Under way	
Develop and synthesize multi-country evidence on adaptive social protection for children in fragile contexts.	Programme Group/Social Protection	December 2025	Under way	

<i>Action</i>	<i>Responsible section(s)</i>	<i>Expected completion date</i>	<i>Actions taken and implementation stage: Not started Under way Completed Cancelled</i>	<i>Supporting documents</i>
	and Social Policy; Evaluation Office; Innocenti-Global Office of Research and Foresight			
<p><b>Evaluation recommendation 2 (Fiscal space):</b> Leverage the growing expertise of UNICEF in public finance through internal capacity-building initiatives and continue to support Governments and civil society organizations on child-sensitive budgeting and fiscal space expansion through technical assistance and other engagements.</p> <p>UNICEF headquarters should expand its support for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocating for mobilization of fiscal resources for the expansion of child benefits;</li> <li>• Further engagement with United Nations agencies, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, regional multilateral development banks and other relevant donor agencies to advocate for increased investment with Governments in child benefit programmes;</li> <li>• Providing guidance on climate finance mechanisms and their links to social protection, and their operationalization; and</li> <li>• Building the capacity of UNICEF staff to engage with Government and civil society organizations on budgetary processes and domestic resource mobilization.</li> </ul> <p><b>Management response: Agree.</b> As underlined in the report, financing is essential to scale up social protection and child benefits coverage, adequacy and sustainability. As the evaluation acknowledges, UNICEF has been leveraging its dual expertise in financing and social protection, and will further solidify joint efforts through the actions listed below.</p>				
Include social protection financing in the Global Technical Team's initiative to update the public finance for children strategy.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy	December 2025	Under way	
Develop practical tools and resources to support country offices to leverage emerging areas of financing for social protection, including climate and emergency financing, covering revenue, expenditure, debt and financing options.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy	December 2025	Under way	
Strengthen UNICEF engagement and strategic contributions in the area of social protection financing and related fiscal space issues across development agencies, multilaterals and international financial institutions, at global, regional and country levels. Continue to co-lead and convene partnerships and events, including with USP2030: Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the Group of 20.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy	December 2025	Under way	

<i>Action</i>	<i>Responsible section(s)</i>	<i>Expected completion date</i>	<i>Actions taken and implementation stage:</i> <i>Not started</i> <i>Under way</i> <i>Completed</i> <i>Cancelled</i>	<i>Supporting documents</i>
<p><b>Evaluation recommendation 3 (Government capacity support):</b> Expand efforts to support government capacity-building to design, implement, evaluate and institutionalize child benefit programmes, strategies and systems. Ensure that capacity-building efforts strengthen national and local capacities.</p> <p>UNICEF headquarters should expand its support for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing tools to UNICEF country offices to strengthen the capacities of subnational governments to address policy, implementation and coordination gaps found at the local level, drawing on global lessons in supporting local governance with social protection capacity-building; and</li> <li>• Ensuring that UNICEF technical support for social protection management information systems adopts open-source architecture and strengthens government capacity, enabling national and local governments to take ownership of the systems and enabling the intellectual property to serve as a global public good, thereby supporting operational capacity to expand child benefit programmes.</li> </ul> <p><b>Management response: Agree.</b> UNICEF work on social protection, including child benefits, is underpinned by core principles set out in the Global Social Protection Programme Framework, including the commitment to support national systems and capacities. Additional actions are outlined below to further strengthen our support on government capacity-building.</p>				
Update UNICEF social protection capacity-building activities, at global, regional and country levels, drawing on existing UNICEF/joint partner initiatives on social protection government training and capacity-building, to identify gaps (internally and externally) and where UNICEF can bring added value.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy; regional offices	December 2025	Under way	
Work with regional offices to support country office engagement with subnational governments, as appropriate, by integrating social protection into programming guidance, frameworks and capacity-building initiatives.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy; regional offices	December 2025	Not started	
Expand UNICEF technical capacity at headquarters/regional office/country office levels to provide implementation and operational support to national social protection systems delivery, including on management information systems.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy; regional offices	December 2025	Not started	
<p><b>Evaluation recommendation 4 (Partnerships):</b> Work towards unified messaging and joint programming approaches for building partnerships with other United Nations agencies, development partners, international financial institutions (including regional multilateral development banks) and civil society organizations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of support to Governments in initiating, designing, implementing, evaluating and institutionalizing child benefit programmes and strengthening service delivery.</p> <p>UNICEF headquarters should expand its support for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening the delivery of harmonized messages related to social protection across United Nations agencies and international financial institutions, particularly when engaging with Governments to support the expansion of child benefits;</li> <li>• Strengthening collaboration among UNICEF programme areas to develop more integrated programming for children; and</li> </ul>				

<i>Action</i>	<i>Responsible section(s)</i>	<i>Expected completion date</i>	<i>Actions taken and implementation stage:</i> <i>Not started</i> <i>Under way</i> <i>Completed</i> <i>Cancelled</i>	<i>Supporting documents</i>
<p>• Building and supporting the capacities of communities of practice to adapt generic guidance frameworks into specific actions for various practice areas, including child benefits.</p> <p><b>Management response: Agree.</b> UNICEF has played critical roles in catalysing and mobilizing partnerships for child-sensitive social protection, as part of the global commitments to end child poverty and scale up social protection. UNICEF is committed to and plays leadership roles in a number of multi-partner global and regional initiatives to enhance joint coordination and support to national Governments on social protection, including the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transition, Universal Social Protection 2030, the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board, and the Africa Community of Practice on Cash Transfers.</p>				
Engage with partners at global, regional and country office levels, (United Nations, development partners, international financial institutions, and civil society) on implementation of and resource mobilization to support the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transition in expanding social protection coverage among families with children, including through supporting child benefits.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy; regional offices	December 2025	Under way	
Leverage existing communities of practices both internally and externally to strengthen the knowledge base and collaboration among UNICEF.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy	December 2025	Under way	
Develop knowledge products to document good practice and enhance linkages between social protection and other programme areas, including nutrition and child protection.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy	December 2024	Under way	
Continue to strengthen bilateral and multilateral partnerships to mobilize additional resources to support both UNICEF and joint partner efforts in support of above actions, in the context of thematic UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 Goal Area 5 funding and beyond.	Programme Group/Social Protection and Social Policy; Public Partnerships Division; Private Fundraising and Partnerships; regional offices	December 2025	Under way	

## V. Draft decision

### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the evaluation of UNICEF social protection responses towards universal child benefits, its summary ([E/ICEF/2024/3](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2024/4](#));
  2. *Also takes note* of the evaluation of phase II (2020–2023) of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, its summary ([E/ICEF/2024/5](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2024/6](#)).
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