Child Protection Systems Strengthening

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APPROACH

BENCHMARKS

INTERVENTIONS

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About this paper

For more than a decade, UNICEF has prioritized child protection systems strengthening as a key approach to child protection programming. In response to the recommendations of the 2018 evaluation of UNICEF's work on child protection systems strengthening, this paper outlines UNICEF's approach to child protection systems strengthening going forward. Guided by UNICEF's Child Protection Strategy (2021 – 2030)1 which provides the overarching strategic framework for UNICEF's child protection programming globally, the paper discusses key considerations that have shaped this approach. It then goes on to describe the programme – impact pathways for child protection, focusing on the intermediate outcomes of child protection systems strengthening work and the main UNICEF investments and priority actions to achieve those outcomes. Finally, the paper proposes a four-phased approach to child protection systems strengthening based on a maturity model. It elaborates the priorities, processes, and results to be achieved in each phase of child protection systems strengthening and provides comprehensive benchmarks to effectively measure investments and results in systems strengthening.

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1 The UNICEF Child Protection Systems Strengthening Approach

Contents

1. Introduction

For more than a decade, UNICEF has prioritized child protection systems strengthening (CPSS) as a key approach to child protection programming. UNICEF first defined and articulated its approach to Child Protection Systems Strengthening (CPSS) in the 2008 Child Protection Strategy[2] as part of a broader vision to build a protective environment for children. Since then UNICEF, in collaboration with other key stakeholders and partners, has invested significantly in CPSS to protect children.

The adoption of the CPSS approach by UNICEF marked a significant strategic shift from issue-based programming, focused on specific groups and categories of children who need protection, to a more holistic and comprehensive systems approach which can provide protection to all children across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. Since 2012 UNICEF has been systematically monitoring its contributions to child protection systems strengthening. UNICEF's most recent Strategic Plan (2018-2021) explicitly states UNICEF's intention to "intensify the strengthening of national systems to assist the most disadvantaged girls and boys" and includes specific indicators to capture results from systems strengthening in its results framework.[3]

1.1 Conclusions and Recommendations of the 2018 Evaluation of UNICEF's Strategies and Programme Performance in CPSS

In 2018, more than a decade after adopting the CPSS approach, UNICEF conducted a comprehensive evaluation,[4] "Strengthening Child Protection Systems: Evaluation of UNICEF Strategies and Programmes Performance" ('the 2018 evaluation'), to examine UNICEF's implementation of the CPSS approach at country, regional and headquarter level between 2012 and 2018.

The 2018 evaluation found that *UNICEF has had considerable success in advancing the child protection systems strengthening agenda at national level and raising awareness among national partners.*[5] Several key interventions such as capacity-building, social service workforce strengthening, leveraging public resources, evidence and policy advocacy were identified as particularly effective in strengthening child protection systems.

At the same time, the 2018 evaluation identified several challenges to CPSS that continue to undermine UNICEF's work. The evaluation concluded that, *after a decade of work in this area, conceptual clarity on child protection systems strengthening in UNICEF is still incomplete.*[6] While UNICEF has had considerable success in advancing the child protection systems agenda at the national level, this has not translated into adequate domestic investments in CPSS. Donors have continued to play a *largely negative role in advancing national child protection systems by distributing funding on a narrow issue-by-issue basis and using parallel monitoring and reporting systems.*[7] UNICEF has a clear niche focusing on state accountabilities for children's rights and partnering with government departments at national, provincial and district levels. However, *the organization has yet to define its role with regard to children's participation, community-based child protection mechanisms and coordination between formal and less formal actors.*[8]

The 2018 evaluation also concluded that *UNICEF's corporate reporting systems on expenditures and results are inadequate to demonstrate the exact level of UNICEF's contribution.*[9] In the absence of coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS, both at the level of the intermediate outcomes and at the level of UNICEF expenditures and investments contributing to these outcomes, the evaluation noted that *UNICEF lacks the ability to systematically track its contribution to CPSS progress and performance globally, which hinders the organization from demonstrating results and mobilizing resources for CPSS.*[10]

The 2018 evaluation makes the following key recommendations:[11]

Clarify UNICEF's definition of, and role in, child protection systems strengthening, and ensure that this approach is reflected in organizational strategies, policies and plans. This should include:

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

Define UNICEF's niche in CPSS and invest in the most impactful areas to strengthen child protection systems. UNICEF should unapologetically embrace a focus on state leadership and accountability, for which it is well positioned. UNICEF needs to clearly position itself in terms of topics and fora through which to push the CPSS agenda. UNICEF should:

- Articulate key priority areas of work and possible entry points for CPSS by context in order to guide programming.
- Develop a menu of interventions in each priority area, with a different package of options tailored to each phase of CPSS process and targeting different levels (formal/less formal).

Address the CPSS data and measurement challenges, the absence of coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS and the scarcity of global-level data and evidence across the steps of the CPSS results chain. UNICEF should:

- Invest in coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS.
- Close evidence gaps along the CPSS programme-impact pathway.

1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Paper

In response to the 2018 evaluation, this paper aims to clarify and describe UNICEF's approach to child protection systems strengthening (CPSS), addresses critical issues such as the relationship between child protection systems and child protection services, the importance of child participation and community engagement in CPSS, the relationship between issue-based programming and CPSS, and the role of evidence and data in CPSS.

The paper describes the "programme – impact pathways", including the intermediate outcomes for CPSS, and defines the phases of CPSS. In so doing, the paper also considers the varying contexts and country typologies within which CPSS programming takes place, the collaboration with allied sectors, as well as UNICEF's role in and strategies to promote community and child participation.

Aligned to the programme-impact pathways, the paper also proposes milestones and benchmarks to track CPSS progress and performance globally. It describes coherent metrics to measure intermediate outcomes by phases of the CPSS process. The metrics consider the need to capture progress in diverse settings, including humanitarian and fragile contexts.

2. Key Considerations that Guide UNICEF's CPSS Approach

2.1 Defining Child Protection Systems

A "system" is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as "a set of things working together as parts of a mechanism or an inter-connecting network" or a "set of principles or procedures according to which something is done"; "an organizational method" or, in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a whole".

The UNICEF Child Protection Strategy of 2008 defines a child protection system as "the set of laws, policies, regulations and services needed across all social sectors – especially social welfare, education, health, security and justice – to support prevention and response to protection-related risks. These systems are part of social protection and extend beyond. At the level of prevention, their aim includes supporting and strengthening families to reduce social exclusion, and to lower the risk of separation, violence and exploitation. Responsibilities are often spread across government agencies, with services delivered by local authorities, non-State providers, and community groups, making coordination between sectors and levels, including routine referral systems, a necessary component of effective child protection systems."[12]

The definition of child protection systems was revisited and refined in 2012. It is this later definition which continues to be used by UNICEF and partner organizations today. The definition remains highly relevant in providing a structural framework for a child protection system.

Definition of Child Protection Systems

"Certain formal and informal structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children. A child protection system is generally agreed to be comprised of the following components: human resources, finance, laws and policies, governance, monitoring and data collection as well as protection and response services and care management. It also includes different actors – children, families, communities, those working at sub-national or national level and those working internationally. Most important are the relationships and interactions between and among these components and these actors within the system. It is the outcomes of these interactions that comprise the system."[13]

The systems strengthening approach requires various elements or components of a system – from policy and legislation to services and data collection to work in tandem to deliver results for children. For the system to work, individual parts of the system need to be strengthened while also strengthening the relationships between these various parts (see Section 3.2 below on Intermediate Outcomes for CPSS).

2.2 Child Protection Systems and Child Protection Services

Child protection services are broadly categorized under three types – namely, primary prevention, secondary prevention, and tertiary response.

FIGURE 1: Child Protection Service Typology[14]

Primary Prevention

Primary prevention activities are 'universal services' directed at the general population with the aim of stopping violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, preferably before it occurs. The purpose of primary prevention activities is to raise awareness, engage and empower the households and communities, service providers, practitioners, professionals and duty bearers to stop and address violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Secondary Prevention

Secondary prevention, also referred to as "early intervention", consists of activities offered to populations that have one or more risk factors associated with the various forms of violence against children (VAC), abuse, neglect, exploitation. Secondary services are targeted, though the "targets" may vary and may include those living in poverty, parental substance / alcohol abuse, parental mental health concerns, children with dis(abilities) and migrant children - especially unaccompanied migrant children and children left behind by migrating parents. Secondary prevention generally targets vulnerable communities or individuals where there is a high incidence of any or all of these risk factors.

Tertiary Response

Tertiary response is for children suffering or at risk of suffering serious harm – consists of response activities where violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation has already occurred (or child is highly at risk of it occurring) and seeks to reduce the negative consequences of the violence, abuse etc and to prevent its recurrence. Tertiary services generally include investigation, assessment, family support services, procedures for removal from a family, protection, legal aid, effective planning for a child, alternative community-based care and after-care, as well as services related to the administration of justice for children in conflict with the law, e.g., diversion, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

Tertiary response services and interventions have typically been recognized as central to public sector child protection systems. Tertiary child protection services are characterized by an individualised approach to service delivery for a particular child, and the engagement of a specialized child protection social service workforce for case management. For child protection systems to provide tertiary (and often specialized) services, it is critical that child protection policy and legislation provide this mandate and that services are established with adequate resources, and performance is monitored periodically. Secondary prevention services focused on early intervention are also often recognized as falling within the remit of child protection systems. Both tertiary and secondary services can involve the public and private sector including civil society and business. However, child protection systems also play an important role in *contributing* to primary prevention. Whilst primary prevention services are usually seen as being delivered through other systems such as health, education and social protection, child protection systems are also a means through which primary prevention interventions and programmes seeking to address and change gender and social norms that underlie harmful practices such as child marriage, violent discipline (corporal punishment) and female genital mutilation/cutting can be delivered. Primary and secondary prevention interventions usually require input from a range of sectors beyond the child protection system, including education, health, social protection, communications and so on. Interventions are often designed and implemented in tandem with these sectors with shared accountabilities, and in some cases, led by these sectors. The role of child protection systems in defining, designing, and implementing primary prevention interventions varies according to the context within which such interventions are implemented.

- **An important distinction must be made between child protection systems and the architecture established to deliver child protection services.**
- **Child protection services are often administered or organized by an entity, which may be referred to as "child protection services", "child protection scheme", "child protective services", and so on. It is important to understand that this service delivery architecture is a part of the larger child protection system (see intermediate outcome on the continuum of services), but is not by itself, the child protection system, as clarified in the definition of child protection systems.**

2.3 Community Engagement and Community-based Services

The 2018 evaluation noted that much of UNICEF's CPSS work in non-humanitarian developing country contexts has involved upstream approaches and is well aligned with UNICEF's institutional advantage in working directly with governments.

In certain contexts, especially where service delivery is decentralized, UNICEF invests in child protection programming closest to children and communities, with a focus on strengthening service delivery and referrals for child protection and other social services. This is especially relevant in countries where national laws, policies and structures are in place, but governance and service delivery structures are weak or ineffective. In such contexts, UNICEF also provides direct financial and technical support for child protection services and infrastructure. UNICEF offices also contribute to strengthening vertical accountability and ownership, given UNICEF's role in working simultaneously across national and sub-national levels. Simultaneously engaging in upstream, midstream and downstream approaches to CPSS is particularly important in the context of decentralization, where national law and policy reform may not have resulted in programme implementation and service delivery at sub-national levels, as well as in humanitarian situations.

UNICEF's Minimum Quality Standards and Indicators for Community Engagement[15]

Community engagement sits at the intersection of several objectives and connects a wide range of sector specific development and humanitarian objectives, including child protection, and is critical for achieving important governance goals such as decentralization, transparency, democratization, climate resilience, disaster preparedness, and social accountability. UNICEF's Minimum Quality Standards and Indicators for Community Engagement are intended for use by government leaders, policymakers, funders, researchers, and development and humanitarian practitioners in programme design, planning, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation systems.

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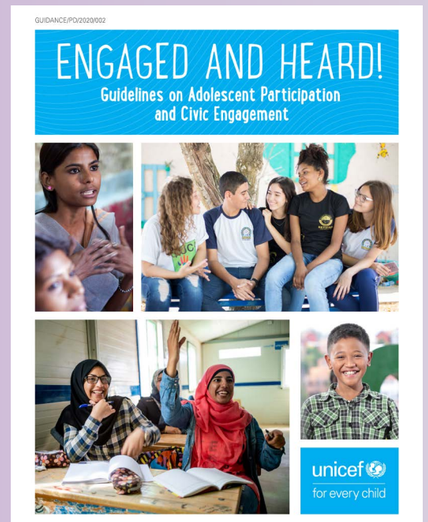
As noted in the 2018 evaluation, in countries with weaker child protection systems, UNICEF often invests significantly in community-based child protection mechanisms. To be sustainable, efforts to strengthen child protection systems must have broad national ownership and 'buy-in' from communities. To achieve this, investments are required in community engagement and social and behaviour change to address harmful practices, in systematic mechanisms for participatory planning, feedback and social accountability, and in partnerships with large community networks. While recognizing that UNICEF has not been systematic in supporting community engagement as part of CPSS efforts, the evaluation underlined the importance of community-based child protection mechanisms to achieve a successful child protection outcome, including outcomes for child protection systems.

- **Working at upstream, midstream and downstream levels is not an "either or" consideration and UNICEF will continue to work at all three levels, and based on the national/local context, determine the balance between work at upstream, midstream and downstream levels.**
- **Communities are an integral part of child protection systems, and their participation is vital to the success of the systems. UNICEF has a key role in ensuring that community-based child protection services and mechanisms are supported by capacity-building, monitoring, and functioning accountability mechanisms to ensure quality and "do no harm".**
- **UNICEF will continue to support efforts to strengthen vertical coordination – from national/state level to district and community-level, where services are delivered to children and families. UNICEF will also support strengthening horizontal coordination across agencies and entities at various levels.**
- **UNICEF will focus on strengthening the vertical and horizontal linkages between community-based child protection mechanisms, public sector services, and the national child protection systems and will prioritize investments in standard setting, monitoring and oversight mechanisms to ensure quality, accountability and long-term sustainability of these community-based services and mechanisms.**

2.4 Child Participation and Child Protection Systems

The 2018 evaluation concluded that UNICEF has a clear niche focused on state accountabilities for children's rights and partnering with government departments at national, provincial and district levels. At the same time, the evaluation noted that UNICEF has yet to define its role with regard to children's participation, and concluded that *investing in children's civil rights (to information, communication, association and civic engagement in child protection systems)*[16] as they relate to child protection, may be an area of opportunity with regard to the participation of girls and boys in CPSS.

Promoting adolescent participation in child protection systems[17]



UNICEF 2020 Guidelines on adolescent participation and civic engagement state that adolescents should be able to participate in community-based child protection mechanisms, subnational and national child protection systems. These guidelines also highlight some key challenges to participation and call for systematic efforts to ensure that strategies and interventions for adolescent participation and civic engagement transform, rather than reinforce, existing patterns of exclusion, discrimination and inequity, and provide a set of actions to address these challenges. The Guidelines also provide a comprehensive set of practices to promote adolescent participation in improving child protection outcomes.

The right of children to be heard, both as agents of change in relation to specific issues, and as recipients of child protection services is crucial. It is important that individual children can contribute to decision making when they are the subject of child protection procedures (or a failure to use child protection procedures). Equally important is that they have a right of complaint and can feedback their experiences of the child protection system. With regard to services, feedback from service users is important to assess the effectiveness, efficacy and relevance of the services provided.

The direct engagement and participation of children and adolescents in child protection committees or other statutory bodies that are part of the child protection system should always be age appropriate and include child safeguarding measures to protect children from exposure to harm. Care needs to be taken to engage and hear from all groups of children without discrimination and children who tend to be excluded, such as children with disabilities, migrant, refugee and internally displaced children, or children from ethnic minority groups.

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UNICEF will prioritize efforts to strengthen children's participation in CPSS by:

- **Supporting efforts to establish mechanisms to hear, review and address individual child protection related complaints, including complaints related to child protection services in a safe and age-appropriate manner without discrimination, taking into account the evolving capacities of the child, as well as ensuring the inclusion of children which tend to be excluded.**
- **Supporting establishment of formal mechanisms through which national/sub-national/local governments receive and respond to complaints and feedback from individual children and children's groups.**
- **Promoting the substantive engagement of children with lived experiences of the child protection systems to inform ongoing reforms of the system.**
- **Supporting efforts to strengthen and monitor the functioning of child protection-related forums such as children's groups established at local government/ community level.**

2.5 Social and Behaviour Change and Child Protection Systems

Several of UNICEF's child protection programme interventions focus on social and behaviour change to address harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation or the use of corporal punishment. While child protection systems can contribute to addressing harmful social norms through behaviour change, prevalent social norms also influence child protection systems.

Social and behaviour change has proven to be a key child protection strategy, including for primary prevention, and is often used in programme implementation. Child protection systems can build collective efficacy and empower communities through social and behaviour change and community engagement. These approaches can challenge and shift dominant norms that uphold harmful practices by mobilizing large scale community networks for systematic engagement, establishing mechanisms for participatory planning, including feedback mechanisms, monitoring and social accountability by children, adolescents, parents and communities, and by gathering SBC data on harmful practices to inform evidence-base interventions.

Child protection systems contribute to as well as facilitate implementation of social behaviour change programmes. To support changes in harmful behaviours at the household and community levels, it is important to engage with

the legal and political sectors, to ensure that policies, laws and regulations, support the desired changes, thus creating an enabling environment for change. Social and behaviour change and communication capacities of social service workforce and community networks provide a vehicle for shifting harmful norms and promoting the adoption of positive behaviours. Social and behaviour change can therefore be an outcome of strong child protection systems, engaging families and communities to achieve the desired change in norms and behaviours. and promote positive behaviour change in allied sectors, including among law enforcement, teachers and health care workers.

2.6 Systems Strengthening and Issue-specific Programming

The strategic decision by UNICEF to shift from issue-based child protection programming to a systems-strengthening approach was motivated by several factors. A 2010 paper notes that, "although issue-based programming has produced substantial benefits, this diffuse approach often results in a fragmented child protection response, marked by numerous inefficiencies and pockets of unmet need."[18] By contrast, systems strengthening work has the potential to be more efficient, comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable, ensuring coverage at-scale delivered by national governments in the context of long term legislative or policy commitments.

Despite the organizational prioritization of a CPSS approach over issue-based programming, it has been difficult to mobilize resources for CPSS. UNICEF has so far been unable to present donors with a compelling business case for CPSS as a programming approach and a priority area of investment. In the absence of a strong evidence-based narrative on how CPSS can change children's lives, there is a tendency to resort back to issue-based programming and advocacy to raise funds.

According to the 2018 evaluation, the absence of a strong narrative for investment in CPSS has resulted in donors' continued preference to fund programmes on a narrow issue-by-issue basis. The evaluation noted some reasons for this donor preference on the donor side as well, including that many donors primarily require "readily- and quickly-measurable results expressed in terms of numbers of children benefitted".

Despite the advantages of CPSS over issue-based programming, child protection issues are frequently prioritised by donors, who then encourage programming that can demonstrate a large-scale response. Issues are, in effect, an 'easier sell'. Results are often measured through the number of individual children reached, which is compelling from a human-interest perspective. Taking funding for issue-based programmes may, however, encourage actors to address the 'low hanging fruit' or to focus on cases which fit a certain profile, rather than identifying the most difficult cases where children are subject to the highest level of risk and, as a result, detract from systems strengthening.

The narrow approach to funding issue-based work has had impacts beyond funding for and investment in CPSS and led to situations where parallel service-delivery systems that undermine systems strengthening have been prioritized. UNICEF is often challenged to design projects that meet donor expectations for high numbers of early beneficiaries, while also contributing to broad and lasting development results in terms of robust child protection systems. Furthermore, rather than reaching the most vulnerable, this approach may be perpetuating inequalities or even further exclusion, rather than inclusion, of certain categories of vulnerable or at-risk children through the establishment of 'separate' structures, thereby undermining the very equity and 'leave no one behind' agendas that donors and partners seek to advance.

Systems strengthening and issue-based programming should not be regarded as incompatible or mutually exclusive. Child protection systems are intended to respond to child protection issues whilst issue-based work can contribute to strengthening child protection systems. In contexts where a child protection issue is of significant concern, the development or use of specific services within the broader child protection systems may strengthen the overall response the systems can offer to a broader range of child protection issues in the future. As the 2018 evaluation concluded, using child protection issues as entry points has helped make child protection systems strengthening more concrete and focused, capitalising on issues that already had considerable traction among policymakers and donors, and has tapped into readily available sources of funding to strengthen systems while addressing specific child protection issues.

- **Issue-based funding can lead to fragmentation of the child protection systems or the creation of 'ad-hoc' parallel structures for certain categories of children which may be unsustainable; however, specific child protection issues are more likely to attract funding.**
- **UNICEF can seek issue-based funding but must ensure that it is strategically used to strengthen and enhance existing child protection systems and that this approach does not lead to investments in and the establishment of separate, parallel structures which may undermine the mandate and authority of child protection systems.**
- **Further, UNICEF will invest in a compelling business case and narrative to build understanding of the importance of strengthening inclusive child protection systems that are able to address a host of child protection issues, and to promote equity in access to and delivery of child protection services.**
- **UNICEF will strengthen the articulation of child protection and the importance of investments to strengthen child protection systems as essential to achieving the SDGs and the 'leave no one behind' agenda. To do so, UNICEF will also work closely with other UN agencies to ensure that support to national governments for specific programmatic/sectoral interventions follows the CPSS approach.**

2.7 Strengthening Child Protection Systems in Humanitarian Situations

From conflict to climate change, the increasing frequency, duration, and the sheer scale of the impact of humanitarian crises around the world call for developing and implementing responses that are systemic and embedded within larger national systems-based responses. At the same time, it is vital that specific responses are designed to suit the diverse and dynamic environment within which humanitarian actors operate.

A 2019 Alliance CPHA (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action) paper[19] highlights how, despite years of reform, the humanitarian sector continues to fall short of meeting humanitarian needs. The linkages between humanitarian action, sustainable development and conflict prevention and peacebuilding, have been referred to as the ''humanitarian – development – peace nexus" that aims to define and achieve collective outcomes based on a common analysis as well as prevention and response measures. A 2019 evaluability assessment of child protection in humanitarian action[20] concluded that, as an area of work, CPHA is not currently able to demonstrate full contribution to either humanitarian results or results across the humanitarian – development nexus, supporting longer-term impact, partly because CPHA's contributions to strengthening child protection systems at the sub-national, national and regional levels are not well integrated into results frameworks.

Strengthening Child Protection Systems: A Core Commitment for Children in Humanitarian Action

The Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)[21] enable UNICEF and partners to deliver principled, timely, quality and child centred humanitarian response and advocacy in any crises with humanitarian consequences, and *"Strengthening of child protection systems: Child protection systems are functional and strengthened to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices"* is one of the CCCs for child protection.

The CCCs offer specific priority actions to strengthen child protection systems to reinforce the humanitarian – development nexus. These include:

- Mechanisms to assess, analyze, monitor and report child protection concerns and their root causes are established and functional at national and local levels
- Mapping of the social service workforce is conducted, and capacity-building plans are developed accordingly
- Integrated case management system, including referral pathways for services and a safe information management system, is functional
- Families and communities are supported in their protective functions, with measures in place to mitigate and prevent abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children
- Civil registration systems provide accessible and safe birth registration and certification for children and their families

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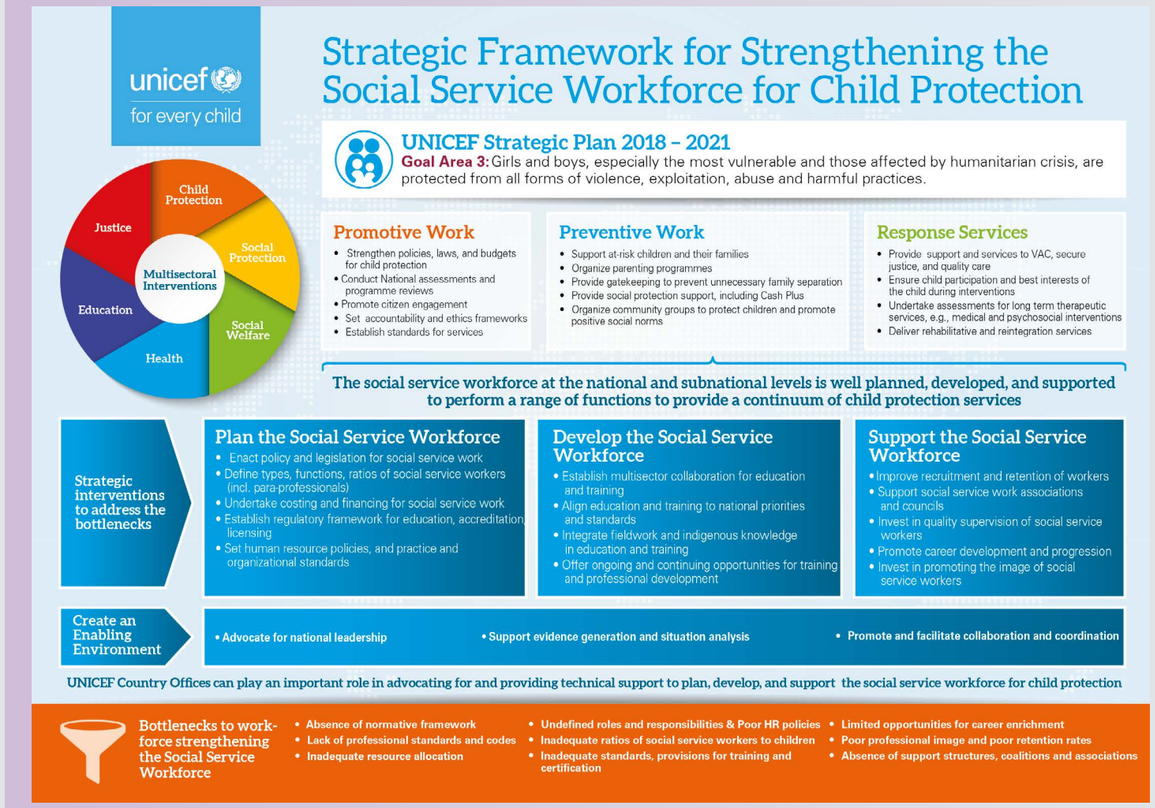
It is now acknowledged that collaboration must be intensified between humanitarian, development and peace actors to collectively reduce fragility, address insecurity and decrease the vulnerability of people living in crisis-prone contexts.

Humanitarian assistance must be viewed as one part of the picture. The approach seeks to capitalize on the comparative advantages of each sector to reduce needs, risks and vulnerabilities along the humanitarian – development continuum.

UNICEF's Strategic Framework for Strengthening the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection



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2.8 Engagement Across Sectors to Strengthen Child Protection Systems

The 2018 evaluation notes that in many countries, UNICEF country offices find themselves working with lead ministries that are among the weakest in terms of funding, internal capacity, convening power, and influence. In some cases, there is no clear lead ministry on child protection whilst in others, there are multiple ministries with related or overlapping mandates. As a result, UNICEF often finds itself taking the lead on CPSS, which, as the evaluation notes, results in limited ownership of CPSS strategies and targets across sectors, and, according to the evaluation, explains much of the observed weakness and slow progress in CPSS.[22]

For child protection systems to deliver outcomes for children, it is important to recognize and strengthen links between child protection systems and other systems, sectors, organizations. This is essential to ensure that a protective environment is available to all, that children's rights to basic services are met, and that child protection services can make efficient and effective referrals so the most vulnerable children have access to quality and timely services. As articulated in UNICEF's Child Protection Strategy, it is vital to recognize the inter-relatedness and inter-dependency across sectors to establish a continuum of services that contribute to Child Protection programming and outcomes, particularly Education, Health, Social Policy & Social Protection, Nutrition and WASH. Child Protection outcomes cannot be delivered without these sectors – their systems, institutions, resources and professional staff.

While there are no quick remedies or solutions, advocating for a stronger, better resourced social services ministry or agency should remain a priority for UNICEF. Equally important, is advocacy for the establishment and support of, or enhancement of an existing inter-ministerial child protection structure at the highest possible level of government to bring together national stakeholders in child protection and ensure cross-sectoral buy-in and ownership of CPSS at national and state/subnational levels.

- **UNICEF will advocate for a well-resourced lead ministry for child protection at the national levels and for national, subnational and local level inter-ministerial/sectoral mechanisms to ensure coordination between sectors and services within CPSS.**
- **UNICEF will support governments to proactively engage with and involve all relevant ministries and departments such as health, education, justice, interior, gender, finance, sport and culture, business, environment etc. to strengthen cross-sectoral linkages with child protection systems.**

Relationships between other sectors and Child Protection programming and outcomes

EDUCATION

(i) schools can and should be a safe and protective space for children, particularly in emergencies, (ii) education systems should address bullying and violence in schools, (iii) children in school can learn about threats and protective factors, e.g. gender-based violence, sexual violence, comprehensive sexuality education FGM, child marriage, (iv) schools can act as identification and referral points for specialist child protection services, (v) schools should ensure the safety of students as they travel to and from schools.

HEALTH

(i) violence-related public health research, (ii) violence prevention and case detection, particularly through community health workers, (iii) care and support – including mental health services – for children, adolescents and women who experience violations related to child protection or, for example, intimate partner violence, (iv) timely and accurate vital registration (birth registration, marriage and death) (v) behavioural and regulatory issues relating to safety for children and adolescents, including road safety, (vi) school health, as it relates to child protection issues.

NUTRITION

(i) preventing child marriage and adolescent pregnancies can make major contributions to nutritional outcomes for girls who are yet to complete their physical growth, and who would additionally be at risk of maternal mortality, pregnancy complications and low birthweight, (ii) unethical marketing of food and beverage products is both a nutritional issue and a child protection issue.

WASH

(i) gender-based violence, particularly in emergencies, (ii) climate change and water scarcity, which can both be drivers of child protection violations (iii) menstrual hygiene management.

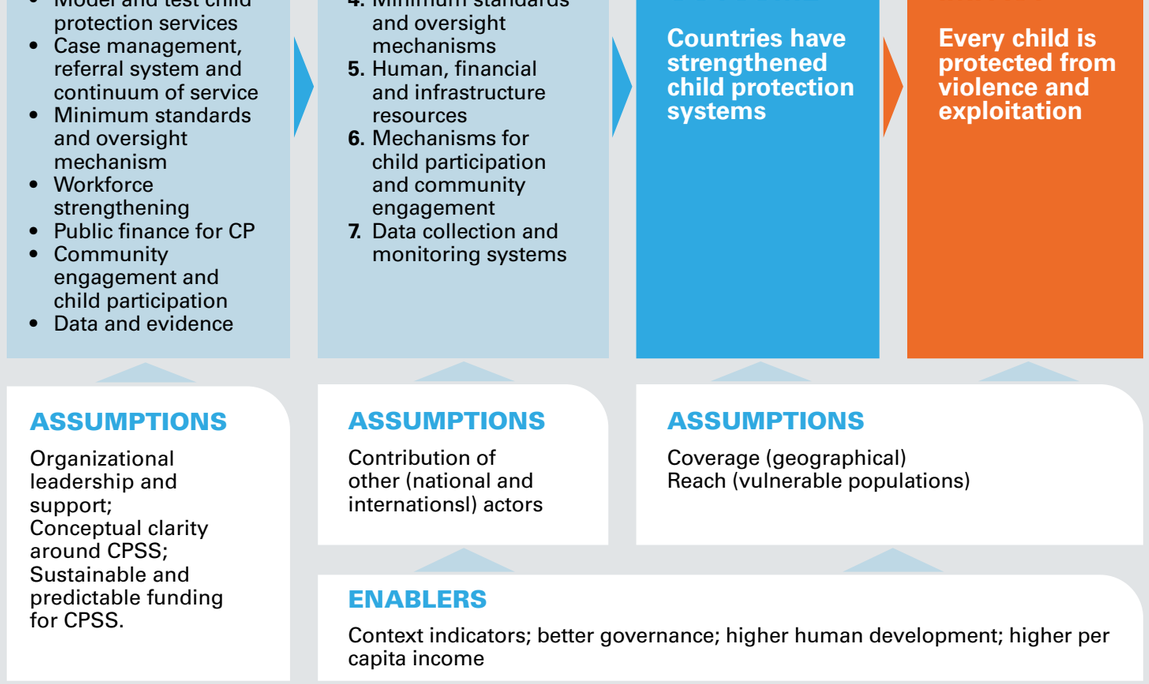
SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

(i) advocacy and technical support for public financing for children relating to child protection systems and services, (ii) cash transfers and other safety net mechanisms to support the most vulnerable children and households (both prevention and response), (iii) support to both child protection and social protection systems – including the social service workforce – to ensure a continuum of protective and responsive child protection services.

3. UNICEF's Approach to Child Protection Systems Strengthening

3.1 Programme – Impact Pathways of CPSS

FIGURE 2: Programme – Impact Pathways for Child Protection Systems Strengthening[23]



The 2018 evaluation concluded that UNICEF lacks a clear conceptual framework or programme – impact pathways with associated measurements for child protection systems strengthening work.[24] It recommended that a programme-impact pathway be identified 'that offers a logical framework of how strengthening the various elements contributes to strengthening child protection systems holistically'. Following a comprehensive consultative process, Figure 2 on the previous page describes the – impact pathways for child protection systems strengthening that will guide UNICEF's work moving forward.

The following sections outline two critical components of the programme – impact pathways, namely, the key elements or the intermediate outcomes of CPSS and the core investments essential to achieve these intermediate outcomes.

3.2 Intermediate Outcomes of CPSS

UNICEF's Child Protection Strategy (2021 – 2030)[25] offers the overarching strategic framework driving UNICEF's child protection programming globally. UNICEF's 2018 – 2021 Strategic Plan explicitly reflects the CPSS approach outlined in the 2008 strategy, and states UNICEF's intention to "intensify the strengthening of national systems to assist the most disadvantaged girls and boys."[26]

Noting the absence of a theory of change for UNICEF's CPSS work, the 2018 evaluation identified six key elements (intermediate outcomes) of a functioning child protection system to evaluate UNICEF's work. These were defined as:

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

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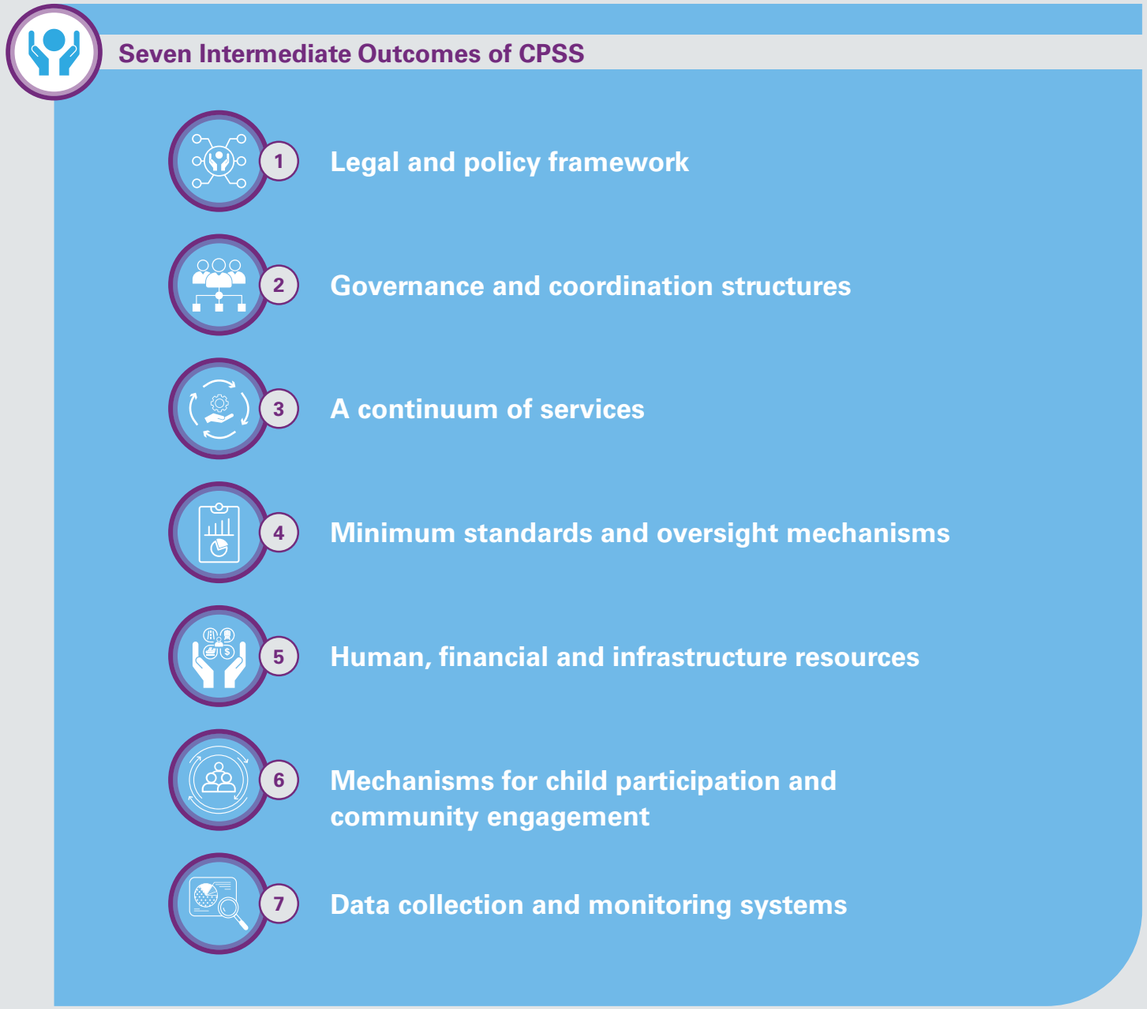
The proposed CPSS programme – impact pathway identifies seven, rather than six elements or intermediate outcomes, as identified in the 2018 evaluation. While elements one to five used for the purpose of the evaluation have been retained, element six is now more explicit, focusing on child participation and community engagement. An additional element seven on data and information systems has been added to reflect the importance of administrative, statistical and behavioural data in strengthening a child protection system. Following are the seven elements of the child protection systems that have been identified as priorities for UNICEF's work on child protection systems strengthening. These elements constitute a functioning national child protection system.



Each of these seven intermediate outcomes advance the CPSS agenda, and in turn leads to the intended outcome of strengthened child protection systems. The following paragraphs describe the ***state of achievement*** of these intermediate outcomes.

3.2.1. Legal and policy framework

Investments in policy advocacy and technical support lead to strong legal and regulatory framework for child protection and child protection systems. Investments result in formal high-level political commitment to CPSS, adequate allocation of financial and human resources for child protection, establishment and recognition of lead ministries/agencies for child protection and CPSS. The lead agency/ministry establishes and strengthens relationships with other allied systems/sectors. Child protection interventions (prevention and response) within the broader multisectoral responses are led by the recognized national/sub-national ministry/agency and better coordinated within and across sectors.

3.2.2. Governance and coordination structures

Improved coordination and governance mechanisms result in the lead ministry/agency responsible for delivery of child protection at central government level being linked to sub-national bodies with responsibility for child protection. Multi-sector child protection coordination mechanisms are formalized and functional at the national and subnational levels, as well as across borders, and stakeholders are aware of their own roles. Intra and inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms for planning, programme implementation, monitoring and reviews are formalized, and the functioning of these mechanisms is reviewed regularly.

3.2.3. A continuum of services

Scaled-up prevention and response related child protection services are available and integrated through national case information management systems. The services may be funded and implemented by the government or civil society or the private sector, with government oversight. Protocols for child protection services are in place, are regularly reviewed and revised to adapt to emerging situations.

3.2.4. Minimum standards and oversight mechanisms

Periodic/annual audits, review and evaluation mechanisms for child protection services are established and implemented, and services often see changes and improvements based on findings of audits and external evaluations. Services are coordinated by case management and referral and supervised through robust supervision systems. Additionally, regular monitoring and reporting of child protection services is carried out by national or local governments to ensure national minimum standards are fully enforced. Child protection concerns can be reported to functional national human rights institutions and courts empowered to hold governments accountable.

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3.2.5. Human, financial and infrastructure resources

A well-planned,-developed and-supported– social service workforce is in place. Licencing and accreditation systems as well as supportive supervision systems are fully functional. Human resources information is regularly gathered, analysed and used to refine/revise social service workforce strategies. All or a vast majority of child protection tertiary services are funded by the public sector. Budgets and expenditures are regularly/annually tracked.

3.2.6. Mechanisms for child participation and community engagement

There is an independent child complaints procedure (e.g., an ombudsperson) that is fully compliant with the Paris Principles, with an ability to hear, review and enforce individual complaints from children about refusal to receive child protection services or about the child protection system or services received. Specialized courts and procedures compliant with international standards are in place for children in contact with the law and for children to access justice and seek redress and remedies for violations of their child protection rights. Government supports forums such as children's groups established at local government/community level, and a formal mechanism is in place through which national/sub-national/local government receives and responds to fe edback from children and children's groups who have received child protection services. Community-based mechanisms are functional across the country where necessary and per applicability (urban/rural) and per protocols or procedures. The effectiveness of these mechanisms is monitored through fully functional accountability mechanisms.

3.2.7. Data collection and monitoring systems

Data collection takes place at regular intervals, using definitions that are in line with international standards or national legislations. Detailed and comprehensive ethical protocols are adopted and used. Data can be disaggregated according to different stratifiers to ensure that no child is left behind. Data on hard-to-reach populations, including street-connected children, are also generated at regular intervals. Data are analysed, widely disseminated and used for policy, planning and monitoring of programmes. There is legislation on data collection, transfer of data, quality record-keeping, usage of data, and the roles and responsibilities of relevant actors. Data protection protocols are in place and adhered to. There is a centralised coordination body to oversee the system and ensure effective coordination and data-sharing between the different agencies, with the national statistical offices playing a critical role in the coordination of any data collection system.

2 Phases of CPSS and Benchmarks for Measurement

Contents

1. Measuring Progress of CPSS Interventions

The 2018 evaluation concluded that UNICEF does not have coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS, either at the level of the intermediate outcomes or at the level of UNICEF expenditures and investments contributing to these outcomes. The evaluation noted the lack of clarity on how UNICEF's investments in CPSS could be assessed, given the absence of standardized and uniform understanding of which investments were considered "systems strengthening" at country office level when expenditures were recorded. According to the evaluation, UNICEF lacks the ability to systematically track its contribution to CPSS progress and performance globally, which hinders the organization from demonstrating results and mobilizing resources for CPSS.

The 2018 evaluation recommended that UNICEF should invest in coherent corporate-level metrics for CPSS, including establishing qualitative and quantitative milestones/benchmarks for measuring progress along the different phases of CPSS rather than just at the final stage of functioning child protection systems and identifying means of verification.[27]

There are two purposes in putting in place benchmarks: first to measure results against the "intermediate outcomes", and second, to assist UNICEF in determining where it should invest its resources and in measuring the value of this investment.

1.1 Phases of CPSS

The 2018 evaluation found that, as systems mature, the priority interventions and investments in CPSS change, and so do UNICEF's programming and investment approaches. The evaluation highlighted the importance of articulating how the systems evolve as they pass from one stage to another, calling for optimal sequencing of CPSS investments and recommended that UNICEF country offices invest differently depending on the stage and capacities of a country's child protection system.[28]

UNICEF recognizes the need to determine the different stages of CPSS and proposes the use of a maturity model with four levels or phases of CPSS.

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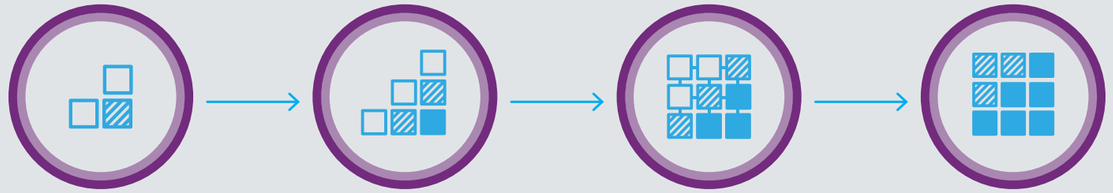
FIGURE 1: The four-phase model of CPSS



The four phases are 'system building'; 'system enhancement'; 'system integration' and 'system maturity'. This four-phase approach to measurement will enable a more nuanced view of the level of development of the child protection system and better illustrate the differences between a child protection system that is still being built, and a fully functioning child protection system that is mature and continues to adapt to changing circumstances and child protection issues.

While the model is designed for an individual country context, it will also offer UNICEF valuable comparative information across various countries and programming contexts within which UNICEF works.

This model will enable UNICEF and its Government partners to assess the state of the child protection system, identify priorities or critical investments for systems strengthening, and build consensus around the system strengthening approach and priority interventions.

Some important considerations that must be kept in mind to understand each of these phases and assess where a country stands at any given point in time are:

- The descriptions in the following paragraphs are meant to be indicative of how several parts (intermediate outcomes) of the systems evolve and are not supposed to be a mandatory checklist of exclusive criteria.
- Each intermediate outcome, and very often, the subdomains within each of these intermediate outcomes evolve and move from one phase to the next independently of another. It is important to note that not all seven intermediate outcomes and the subdomains move in tandem from one phase to the next.
- Similarly, various parts of the systems, i.e., intermediate outcomes (and individual subdomains), have the potential of moving back from a higher phase to a lower phase; e.g., sudden shocks and humanitarian situations can set back the progress made in systems strengthening, and some or all intermediate outcomes or subdomains may witness negative progress as a result.

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2. Benchmarks for Child Protection Systems Strengthening

While the four phases of CPSS are not watertight compartments, they are remarkably distinct – in terms of priorities, processes, and the results achieved in each of these phases. Based on the recommendation of the 2018 evaluation, the following comprehensive benchmarks have been developed to determine at which stage a country finds itself in the process of CPSS. This in turn will enable UNICEF country offices to tailor their investments and resources for maximum impact and to ascertain the appropriate sequencing of their investments. While setting up these benchmarks, it is well recognized that several external factors may impact investment decisions and programme approaches. Though the four-phase approach is intended to guide the CPSS process in a sequential manner, the reality on the ground may be different. Country contexts, including ever-changing political, social and economic factors, may slow down progress in certain areas whilst creating opportunities or "entry points" to strengthen the CPS in other areas. Whilst opportunities should be exploited, it should not detract from the bigger picture and efforts should be sustained to also make progress in areas which are lagging.

The benchmarks are based on the seven intermediate outcomes of CPSS. As shown in the table below, multiple subdomains have been identified for each of the seven intermediate outcomes. Various priorities, processes, and results have been articulated for each subdomain across the four phases of CPSS.

The CPSS benchmarks, described in the table below elaborate on the characteristics of each of the subdomains through the course of systems strengthening, indicating a gradual progression/ advancement of that subdomain from system building (Level 1) to system maturity (Level 4). These benchmarks will be converted into a benchmarking tool that will enable UNICEF Country Offices to determine the level of maturity of the child protection system in the country and identify interventions across various elements and subdomains that need further investments to systematically move along the systems strengthening trajectory.

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TABLE 1: CPSS Benchmarks

Intermediate Outcome	Subdomain	Criteria according to 4 phases of systems strengthening			
		System Building	System Enhancement	System Integration	System Maturity
1. Legal and policy framework	**1.1** Understanding and articulation of national child protection systems	Limited understanding of child protection system among policymakers. Child protection interventions (both prevention and response) are issue-based, may exclude certain population groups and addressed as standalone interventions or ad-hoc responses.	Increased attention to understanding and responding to child protection concerns in a systematic manner results in analysis of the existing system(s). Mapping and assessment of existing child protection system is undertaken/ completed but interventions/response continue to be issue-based/standalone.	The (national) child protection system (and its key elements) is/are clearly defined and agreed upon in national policy (and plans). The definition of child protection system includes a clear articulation of its boundaries and relation to other/allied systems (i.e., health, justice, education, social protection etc.) Specific issues may be identified and addressed, but the responses designed are system wide.	There is formal high-level (political) commitment to child protection system strengthening, including adequate allocation of financial and human resources and its relationships with other/allied systems. All child protection interventions (prevention and response) within the broader multisectoral responses are led/coordinated by the recognized national/sub-national child protection system.
	1.2 Legislation on child protection systems and implementation structures/mechanisms	Normative framework/legislation outlining the national child protection system does not exist.	Normative framework/legislation outlining the national child protection systems exists, and is inclusive of all children in a country, but implementation structures/mechanisms do not exist or are weak/ad-hoc.	Implementation structures/mechanisms for the normative framework/legislation outlining the national child protection system is in progress but not uniform (across the country and across workstreams) and progressively become gender responsive and inclusive of all children.	Implementation structures/mechanisms for the normative framework/legislation outlining the national child protection system are mostly/ fully in place. Regular reviews, evaluations and audits of functioning of the national child protection system are undertaken, and recommendations are made for revision to legislation and regulations that govern the child protection system.
2. Governance and coordination structures	**2.1** Lead ministries/ agencies with responsibility and mandate to strengthen child protection	There is/are no lead ministries/agencies at national government level in charge of child protection.	There are lead ministries/agencies at the national government level in charge of child protection systems, but it is weak due to limited authority, human capacity, financial resources, and limited mandate.	The lead ministries/agencies in charge of child protection systems are functional and adequately resourced (human and financial resources). Its mandate and authority related to child protection has been established, well-articulated, and formally communicated and recognized across government at national and state levels, as well as outside of the government. Work is underway to improve/strengthen its links with other national/sub-national bodies with responsibility for child protection.	The lead ministries/agencies responsible for delivery of child protection at central government level is linked to sub-national bodies (either ministerial departments or local government authority) with responsibility for child protection and is active and effective in fulfilling its child protection responsibilities across the country.
	2.2 National, multi-sector, coordination mechanisms	There is no national, multi-sector coordination mechanism that steers/directs child protection work and functioning of the child protection system.	Multiple national, multi-sector child protection coordination mechanisms have been established; however, all or most of such mechanisms are issue-based (e.g., child labour task force, anti-trafficking coordination committee), and often work in silos/in isolation from one another due to the lack/absence of mandate with the lead ministry/agency or the child protection authority to unify such mechanisms.	A national, multi-sector child protection coordination mechanism has been established under the aegis of the lead ministry responsible for child protection, with specific terms of reference, high-level authority/leadership to convene different sectors/ministries and is currently working towards strengthening coordination across sectors.	The national, multi-sector child protection coordination mechanism is formalized and fully functional, its role is known to stakeholders and its work is reviewed against the terms of reference and disseminated regularly. The terms of reference are revised as needed and the lead ministry/agency has oversight of the functioning of the mechanism.

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Intermediate Outcome	Subdomain	Criteria according to 4 phases of systems strengthening			
		System Building	System Enhancement	System Integration	System Maturity
2. Governance and coordination structures	**2.3** Availability of intra- and inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms at the implementation level	Informal coordination (in the absence of formal SOPs) exists amongst service providers at the implementation level, but it is largely voluntary, driven by individual initiative.	Formal coordination mechanisms across select agencies/departments at local level, including for humanitarian coordination, exist but such mechanisms are ad-hoc and primarily related to service provision.	SOPs/regulations for formal coordination mechanisms that focus holistically on planning, programme implementation, monitoring and reviews across agencies and departments have been established but implementation of these mechanisms is not uniform across the country.	Intra- and inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms for planning, programme implementation, monitoring and reviews have been formalized and the functioning of these mechanisms is reviewed against SOPs/ regulations and disseminated regularly.
3. A continuum of services	**3.1** Modelling, testing and scaling of child protection services	Child protection services are available but are ad-hoc and do not address all child protection concerns. Government funded programmes primarily/largely focus on response services for specific "groups" of children and address some child protection issues. Some "pilot" prevention focused services exist, but are largely donor funded, and limited in geographic/programmatic scope.	Systematic modelling and testing of a host of prevention and response related child protection services is currently underway, mostly funded by partners and donors. Governments continue to focus on response related services, which see expansion across the country.	Increased investments are currently being made by the government in replicating proven models of prevention and response related and gender-responsive child protection services in various parts of the country. Partners increasingly limit their investments to technical assistance for policy advocacy and investments in capacity building shift from trainings to systematic institutional capacity building. Significant focus is on routine and regular monitoring of child protection services, but majority or all such monitoring is internal monitoring.	Government managed and funded national level scale-up of prevention and response related child protection services is underway through national programmes. All child protection services are subject to periodic/ annual audits and external evaluations, and services often see changes based on findings of audits and external evaluations.
	3.2 Availability of Standard Operating Procedures and/or Protocols for child protection services, as outlined in statutory provisions	No SOPs or protocols exist that set out child protection roles, referral processes and procedures to be followed, or SOPs are developed by individual agencies for their own personnel and are not fully compliant with national legislation and international standards.	Comprehensive SOPs/protocols largely compliant with national legislation and international standards are currently being developed or are already in place, including in humanitarian situations, but implementation of these SOPs/protocols is ad-hoc at best, often constrained by lack of adequate financial or human resources and limited capacities.	Comprehensive gender responsive and inclusive SOPs/protocols largely compliant with national legislation and international standards are available and are widely disseminated and effectively implemented in practice by most/all agencies/organizations while delivering child protection services.	Implementation of such SOPs/protocols is institutionalized through formal case management systems and these SOPs/ protocols are regularly reviewed and revised to adapt to emerging situations.
	3.3 Availability of child protection case management and referral systems	There are no standardized child protection case management and referral SOPs; case workers are often trained on agency-specific SOPs for case management and referrals, and case management approach to service delivery is practised in an ad-hoc manner.	Standard child protection case management SOPs have been established, but implementation of SOPs is weak/ad-hoc due to (a) absence of commonly agreed referral protocols between child protection/social welfare and other sectors (education, health, law enforcement, justice etc.) and (b) absence of a formal and nationally/sub-nationally adopted training and supervision system for case workers and supervisors.	Gender responsive and inclusive SOPs for child protection case management as well as multisectoral referral system have been established and formalized, and efforts are underway to train case workers and supervisors to increase the use of formal case management and referral systems across the country.	A formal child protection case management and referral system is fully implemented and integrated through national case information management systems.

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Intermediate Outcome	Subdomain	Criteria according to 4 phases of systems strengthening			
		System Building	System Enhancement	System Integration	System Maturity
4. Minimum standards and oversight mechanisms	**4.1** Availability of independent accountability and oversight mechanisms for child protection	Independent accountability and oversight mechanisms for child protection do not exist or do not cover child protection as part of their mandate.	Accountability mechanisms have been established in-house within the lead ministry/ agency responsible for child protection and are not independent.	Clear accountability and oversight systems have been established within the government, e.g., through hiring child protection experts, setting up inspection units, Management Information Systems and Quality Assurance Systems but lack independence.	In addition to accountability and oversight systems have been established within the similar mechanisms are also set up independently, e.g., by national human rights institutions/ombudsperson, etc., through hiring child protection experts, setting up inspection units, Management Information Systems and Quality Assurance Systems, and undertake independent reviews of implementation of minimum standards.
	4.2 Monitoring and oversight of minimum standards for child protection services	No minimum standards for child protection services are available, or minimum standards are available, including in humanitarian contexts, for some and not all child protection services.	Nationally adopted minimum standards for a range of prevention and response related child protection services are available, but there is an absence of formal mechanisms for monitoring and oversight of services.	Mechanism for monitoring and oversight of children's services based on nationally adopted minimum standards for a range of prevention and response related child protection services exists, but monitoring is ad-hoc and does not cover all services.	Regular monitoring and reporting of child protection services is carried out by national or local government to ensure national minimum standards are fully enforced.
5. Human, financial and infrastructure resources	**5.1** Availability of qualified social service workforce for child protection	In the absence of comprehensive strategies to plan, develop and support the social service workforce for child protection, majority of workers undergo ad-hoc trainings, often on the job, that are supported by partners. There is an absence of normative framework for social service work, and licencing and accreditation systems for social service workers do not exist. There is no formal system of supervision of workers, and human resource information is not collected and used at national/sub-national levels.	The normative framework for social service work is being defined. Efforts are underway to introduce/strengthen social service workforce education with focus on knowledge and skills related to child protection and select government institutions provide on the job certified child protection trainings. Worker recruitment doesn't require following licensing and accreditation standards and there is an absence/lack of formal systems of supportive supervision. Efforts are underway to improve the human resource information/worker data for social service workers.	Normative frameworks for the workforce are well-defined. Trainings are streamlined through improved accreditation processes for pre- and in-service courses and hiring processes mandate consideration of qualifications of workers. A formal system of supportive supervision is in place but not uniformly implemented across the country. Efforts are underway to strengthen and scale the supervision system. Efforts are underway to enhance the capacity of the social service workforce on gender responsive social and behavioural change communication. A human resource information system for social service workers for child protection has been established and is being increasingly used to gather human resource related information.	A well-planned,-developed, and-supported social service workforce in place. Licencing and accreditation systems as well as supportive supervision systems are fully functional. Information of human resources is regularly gathered, analysed and used to refine/revise social service workforce strategies.
	5.2 Financing of child protection services	Child protection services are mostly funded by donors or provided by NGOs with minimal government funding.	Significant number of child protection services are funded through public finance, but are mostly response oriented and infrastructure related, e.g., establishment, running costs of residential care facilities, etc. Efforts are underway to track and analyse child protection budgets (e.g., using budget briefs) but there is an absence of systematic analysis of public finance for child protection.	National/sub-national budgets increasingly support a wide range of prevention and response related child protection services and there is a shift in focus from moving investments from infrastructure to human resources. There is a yearly review of child protection expenditures and budget adjustments to child protection policy requirements. Host of public finance tools (e.g., budget briefs, costing models, expenditure analyses, financial benchmarking) are used to influence public financing for child protection in a gender responsive and inclusive manner.	All/a vast majority of tertiary child protection services and some secondary child protection services are funded through national/sub-national budgets. Budgets and expenditures are regularly/annually tracked.

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Intermediate Outcome	Subdomain	Criteria according to 4 phases of systems strengthening			
		System Building	System Enhancement	System Integration	System Maturity
6. Mechanisms for child participation and community engagement	**6.1** Child-friendly and gender-responsive legal procedures for children's access to justice	There are no child-friendly and gender-responsive legal procedures for children to access justice.	There are specialized law enforcement and court personnel (including judges and magistrates) for children in conflict with the law and in contact with the law (but no specialist court) who operate in a child-friendly and gender-responsive manner (i.e. fully or mainly in compliance with international standards).	There are specialist courts (Juvenile Court / Family Court / Children's Court) for children in conflict with the law, operating with child-friendly and gender-responsive procedures that comply fully or mainly with international standards, but not for children in contact with the law or vice versa. In some instances, while specialist courts for children in conflict with the law and/or contact with the law are established, they are not present across the country.	There are specialist courts for children in conflict with the law and contact with the law and its procedures are child-friendly and gender-responsive (i.e., comply fully / largely with international standards).
	6.2 Independent complaint mechanisms exist for children	There are no complaint mechanisms (independent or otherwise) for children who are refused or receive child protection services.	Local service providers have a child complaint procedure in place to address complaints by or on behalf of children refused or receiving child protection services. Such procedures/ mechanisms are not independent.	There is an independent body/authority at local level that accepts complaints by or on behalf of children refused or receiving child protection services.	There is an independent complaint procedure that hears, reviews and responds to individual complaints from children about refusal to receive child protection services or about the child protection system or services received within a stipulated timeframe.
	6.3 Child and adolescent empowerment for child protection	Children who have received or are receiving prevention or response related child protection services have no access to forums (groups/ organizations) that work with them and enable them to express their views or experiences to service providers and government bodies.	Forums have been established at local level, largely through efforts of partners/NGOs, for children who have been/or are receiving prevention or response related child protection services to enable them to discuss issues and provide feedback to service providers; however, the establishment of such forums is not uniform across the country, and mechanisms to ensure children's views are effectively communicated to the government do not exist or are informal.	Government supports (in terms of human capacity and financially) such forums (e.g., children's groups established at local government/community level for children who have been/or are receiving prevention or response related child protection services) to enable them to discuss issues and provide feedback to service providers; or those receiving child protection services in a gender-responsive and inclusive manner. Efforts are underway to establish or strengthen existing mechanisms to ensure children's views are effectively communicated to the government at national/sub-national/local level.	Government supports (in terms of human capacity and financially) forums such as children's groups established at local government/community level. A formal mechanism is in use through which national/ sub-national/local government receives and responds to feedback from children and children's groups receiving or who have received child protection services.
	6.4 Existence of community-based mechanisms for child protection	Community-based mechanisms exist but only in select parts of the country and are largely supported by partners/NGOs. These mechanisms are often accountable only at community level or local level, but do not work with national or sub-national government bodies responsible for child protection.	Community-based mechanisms are more widely available but continue to be led and supported by partners and NGOs. These mechanisms frequently engage with actors in the formal child protection system including at national and sub-national level but continue to function in an ad-hoc manner and no formal structures for accountability/oversight exist.	Community-based mechanisms are formally recognized, either as part of, or through its linkages with the public child protection system, and function according to standard terms of reference or written procedures and protocols, and in a gender-responsive and inclusive manner. These mechanisms are increasingly supported by the Government, both financially and with technical support. While formal accountability structures may be defined through terms of reference or written procedures and protocols, implementation of accountability structures continues to be weak.	Community-based mechanisms are fully functional across the country where necessary, and as per their terms of reference/protocols/procedures and their applicability (urban/rural). Functioning of these mechanisms is monitored through fully functional accountability mechanisms.

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Intermediate Outcome	Subdomain	Criteria according to 4 phases of systems strengthening			
		System Building	System Enhancement	System Integration	System Maturity
7. Data collection and monitoring systems	**7.1** Administrative data systems that routinely generate quality child protection data	There is no system in place to gather routine data on child protection, or countries are still in the process of developing formalized systems in one or multiple sectors.	Core administrative data systems that capture child protection data exist at national level, with national coverage, but administrative data gathered by different sources are not based on a standard format/data collection tool. Training, resources, and capacity for those responsible for gathering data are limited and there is a lack of institutionalized quality assurance processes and procedures. Data on child protection are not consistently disaggregated by sex, age and other domains most relevant to the issue (e.g. types of care; types of violence).	There is effort to integrate administrative data as part of a broader national statistical system, for example, to develop national metadata standards (or data dictionary) that defines the format/ structure of key data fields shared across multiple core systems). All child protection data are disaggregated at least by sex, while other disaggregation remains limited. There are institutionalized mechanisms and processes to ensure quality assurance.	Administrative data is part of a broader national statistical system. Administrative data systems are inclusive; effectively monitoring that "no child is left behind", as well as providing the data needed for systems to effectively address disparities where they exist. Data are regularly analysed or used for planning purposes, programme and policy design and monitoring the adequacy and effectiveness of programmes and policies or improving access to essential services.
	7.2 Surveys	There are no data collection plans nor mechanisms in place to generate data on child protection.	Data collection plans and mechanisms are in place, but only a few child protection topics are covered, and data are collected irregularly.	Data on a range of child protection topics are collected at regular intervals, but inconsistent definitions and approaches are used to gather data. In addition to prevalence data, information is also collected on risk and protective factors, and data can be disaggregated by sex, age and other variables most relevant to the issue (e.g. types of care; family's characteristics).	Data collection happens at regular intervals, using definitions that are in line with international standards or national legislations. Detailed and comprehensive ethical protocols are adopted and used. Data on non-household population, including street-connected children and other children outside of household, are also generated. Data are regularly analysed or used for monitoring the impact of programmes and policies. In addition to data on prevalence and on risks and protective factors, data on social and behavioural change are collected periodically, according to internationally comparable tools and methodology.
	7.3 Data governance (coordination, oversight, and secure management)	There is no legislation on data collection, transfer or sharing of data, usage of data, or there is no accountability in terms of the roles and responsibilities of relevant actors on the generation of data. There are no policies and procedures to ensure safety of all those involved in data collection processes and management and there are no data protection and confidentiality protocols.	Ad-hoc approval processes are in place for data collection, access to data, data sharing, and researcher requirements. Record-keeping systems are generally weak. Data management systems are not regularly updated. Certain safeguards are available within limited ministries and agencies to regulate who has access to child protection information and for what purpose.	There is legislation that generally encompass data to be collected and by whom but does not cover essential elements and standards of quality data collection and record keeping. Efforts are also underway to pass legislation which stipulates how data is to be transferred from operational sources to a centralised storage system, and what the data may be used for. Efforts are underway to develop policies and procedures to ensure safety of all those involved at all stages of the data collection process and management to minimize the inherent risks, including data protection and confidentiality protocols.	There is legislation on data collection, transfer of data, quality record-keeping, usage of data, and the roles and responsibilities of relevant actors. Policies and procedures ensure safe and secure data management (includes data sharing protocols, which also cover sharing data securely to minimize potential harm to children). Financial resources and organizational and staff capacity are ensured to enable key data collection and analyses. There is a centralised coordination body to oversee the system and ensure effective coordination of sharing information and data between the different agencies, with the national statistical offices playing a critical role in the coordination of any data collection system.

3 High Priority CPSS Interventions

Contents

1. Priority Areas of Work and High Impact Interventions in CPSS

The 2018 evaluation of UNICEF's work on CPSS provided critical insights into which types of interventions yield high impact results and offers recommendations for which interventions and investments to prioritize. The evaluation recommended that UNICEF identify its niche and priorities in CPSS, develop a menu of interventions in priority areas across various contexts, and invest in the most impactful areas to strengthen child protection systems. The evaluation also called for UNICEF to "unapologetically embrace a focus on state leadership and accountability, for which it is well positioned". While UNICEF offices will be in the best position to determine which of the intermediate outcomes to focus on while strengthening child protection systems, in terms of priorities and sequencing of work, this section offers guidance to facilitate these decisions.

The UNICEF interventions that the 2018 evaluation identified as most impactful include social service workforce strengthening, investing in evidence and research, and leveraging public resources. In some settings, the evaluation highlighted standard-setting/quality control and coordination/partnerships as the most successful intervention strategies. UNICEF's contribution to CPSS has been particularly strong in terms of strengthening the legal and regulatory framework. UNICEF support was more successful in countries where UNICEF supported the government-led reform of existing child protection systems. The evaluation showed the critical importance of leveraging national financial resources for sustainable child protection systems and noted that most successful countries supported public finance and budget tracking reviews and used this to leverage public resources for CPSS.

The 2018 evaluation noted that, for highly functioning systems, a package of interventions that includes a mix of evidence and research, public financing for child protection, and policy advocacy, was found to have the greatest impact. The most successful strategies employed by UNICEF to strengthen child protection systems were those usually associated with sustainability, namely: advocacy/building political commitment, research and evidence-generation, leveraging resources and capacity building.

2. Developing Context Specific Strategies

On the ground, how UNICEF prioritizes investments in child protection and CPSS is significantly influenced by the overall socioeconomic and socio-political context and the extent to which child protection systems have been established and are functioning.

The availability of human and financial resources, and geographical reach and coverage of systems, the level of wealth inequality, fragility, deprivation and disadvantage, conflict and humanitarian situations all influence decisions about how and where to invest.

FIGURE 1*: Understanding the context[29]

ECONOMY

- Low income
- Lower- middle income
- Upper- middle income
- High income

COUNTRY CONTEXT

- Emergency
- Fragility
- Political stability
- Vulnerability to natural disasters

NATIONAL CAPACITY

Low national capacity

- Insufficient fiscal resource
- Low levels of functioning of the government and infrastructure

Medium national capacity

- Limited fiscal resources
- Moderate/medium functioning of the governement and infrastructure
- Persisting equity concerns related to population groups

High national capacity

- Adequate fiscal resources
- High levels of functioning of the government and infrastructure
- May have persisting equity concerns related to population groups.

Adapted from the **UNICEF's Strategy for Health (2016-2030)*

As is evident in the figure above, a holistic understanding of the context is not just useful, but essential for identifying how and what UNICEF will prioritize in terms of CPSS interventions. A context is a sum of multiple factors, e.g., a low-income economy and a fragile country context with low national capacities calls for a significantly different focus of UNICEF's investments compared to an upper-middle income country with political stability and medium or high national capacity. Even in emergency contexts, in case of a natural disaster, UNICEF's interventions in a high-income country with high national capacities will be significantly different than in a lower-middle income country with low national capacities. Thus, at the national level, UNICEF offices will continue to determine which of the CPSS interventions to prioritize, depending on the local/national context.

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FIGURE 2: Illustrative Priority Interventions by Country Typology

The following table offers a list of potential high impact interventions to achieve the seven intermediate outcomes of CPSS. As mentioned earlier, the relevance of these interventions is influenced significantly by the local/national context.

Intermediate outcomes of CPSS	Priority High Impact Interventions	Country Context
1. Legal and policy framework	Advocate for and support child protection systems mapping and assessments	• Low/lower-middle income • Political stability • Low/medium national capacity
	Advocacy and support to develop child protection policy and legislation	• Low/lower-middle income/upper-middle income/high income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium national capacity
	Support to develop comprehensive CPSS strategies	• Lower middle/upper middle income/high income(emergency) • Political stability • Medium national capacity
	Advocacy for balanced investments in and adapting CP systems considering (changing) needs	• Lower middle/upper middle/high income • Fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacities
2. Governance and coordination structures	Support to set up national level coordination structures/mechanisms	• Low/lower-middle income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium national capacity
	Support to set up sub-national and local level coordination mechanisms	• Low/lower middle/upper middle income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium national capacity
	Support to strengthen horizontal and vertical coordination at national and sub-national levels, including cross-border coordination	• Low/lower-middle/upper-middle income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium national capacity
3. A Continuum of services	Fund child protection services	• Low income • Emergency/fragility • Low national capacity
	Support to model and test child protection services	• Lower-middle income/upper-middle income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium national capacity
	Support to develop SOPs for case management and referral systems	• Low/lower middle/upper middle income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium national capacity
	Support roll out of case management and referral systems and expanding services	• Low/lower-middle income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium national capacity
	Support to strengthen a continuum of services (welfare, health, education)	• Low/lower middle/upper middle income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium national capacity

Intermediate outcomes of CPSS	Priority High Impact Interventions	Country Context
4. Minimum standards and oversight mechanisms	Support to develop policy frameworks for minimum standards and oversight mechanisms	• Low/lower middle/upper middle/ high income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity
	Support implementation and monitoring of minimum standards and advocate for establishment of oversight mechanisms	• Low/lower middle/upper middle/high income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity
	Support implementation of independent oversight mechanisms	• Lower middle/upper middle/high income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity
5. Human, financial and infrastructure resources	Support training workshops for child protection service providers	• Low/lower middle income/upper middle income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low or medium national capacity
	Support to develop social service worker curriculum	• Low/lower middle/upper middle income • Political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity
	Support comprehensive workforce strengthening initiatives	• Low/lower middle/upper middle/high income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium national capacity
	Support monitoring of child protection budgets and development of budget briefs	• Low/lower middle/upper middle/high income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity
	Support costing and financing of child protection services	• Low/lower middle/upper middle/high income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity
6. Mechanisms for child participation and community engagement	Support and promote community engagement forums/platforms	• Low/lower middle income • Emergency/fragility/political stbility • Low/medium national capacity
	Advocate for and support integration of community engagement within CPS	• Low/lower middle income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium national capacity
	Support and promote platforms for children's and adolescents' empowerment through forums	• Low/lower middle/middle income • Emergency/political stability • Low/medium national capacity
	Advocate for and support establishment of complaints mechanisms for children	• Low/lower middle/upper middle/high income • Emergency/fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity

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Intermediate outcomes of CPSS	Priority High Impact Interventions	Country Context
7. Data collection and monitoring systems	Support strengthening of administrative data systems, including through development of diagnostic tools and tools to support data collection, analysis and dissemination	• Low/lower-middle/upper middle/high income • Emergency/ fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity
	Promote and support inclusion of survey modules on child protection in ongoing data collection plans and mechanisms, using standardized definitions that are in line with international standards or national legislations	• Low/lower-middle/upper middle income/ high income • Emergency/ fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity
	Support strengthening of data governance, including development and use of detailed and comprehensive data security and management protocols	• Low/lower-middle/upper middle/high income • Emergency/ fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity
	Support capacity building on data collection, management, analysis, dissemination, and use	• Low/lower-middle/upper middle/high income • Emergency/ fragility/political stability • Low/medium/high national capacity

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3. Identifying Key Interventions for CPSS

Child protection systems strengthening interventions are often long term, and results are achieved in a progressive, gradual manner; the benchmarking tool is reflective of this reality.

UNICEF's role and priorities in supporting national governments in CPSS see a notable change as the system continues to mature, as can be seen in an illustrative table below.

Intermediate outcomes of CPSS	Interventions and results	System Building	System Enhancement	System Integration	System Maturity
1. Legal and policy framework	Advocate for and support child protection systems mapping and assessments	●	●		
	Advocacy and support to develop child protection policy and legislation	●	●	●	●
	Support to develop comprehensive and inclusive CPS strategies		●	●	●
	Advocacy for balanced investments in and adapting CPS considering (changing) needs			●	●
2. Governance and coordination structures	Support to set up national level coordination structures/ mechanisms	●	●		
	Support to set up sub-national and local level coordination mechanisms		●	●	
	Support to strengthen horizontal and vertical coordination at national and sub-national levels			●	●

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Intermediate outcomes of CPSS	Interventions and results	System Building	System Enhancement	System Integration	System Maturity
3. A continuum of services	Fund child protection services	●			
	Support to model and test child protection services	●	●	●	
	Support to develop SOPs for case management and referral systems		●	●	
	Support roll out of case management and referral systems and expanding services			●	
	Support to develop policy frameworks for minimum standards and oversight mechanisms			●	●
4. Minimum standards and oversight mechanisms	Support to develop policy frameworks for minimum standards and oversight mechanisms		●	●	
	Support implementation of minimum standards and advocate for establishment of oversight mechanisms		●	●	
	Support implementation of independent oversight mechanisms				●
5. Human, financial and infrastructure resources	Support training workshops for child protection service providers	●			
	Support to develop social service workforce curriculum		●	●	
	Support comprehensive workforce strengthening initiatives			●	●
	Support monitoring of child protection budgets and development of budget briefs		●	●	●
	Support costing and financing of child protection services			●	●

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Intermediate outcomes of CPSS	Interventions and results	System Building	System Enhancement	System Integration	System Maturity
6. Mechanisms for child participation and community engagement	Support and promote community engagement forums/ platforms	●	●		
	Advocate for and support integration of community engagement within CPS		●	●	
	Support and promote platforms for child and adolescent empowerment through forums	●	●		
	Advocate for and support establishment of complaint mechanisms for children			●	●
7. Data collection and monitoring systems	Support strengthening of administrative data systems, including through development of diagnostic tools and tools to support data collection, analysis and dissemination	●	●	●	●
	Promote and support inclusion of survey modules on child protection in ongoing data collection plans and mechanisms, using standardized definitions that are in line with international standards or national legislation			●	●
	Support strengthening of data governance (coordination, oversight and secure management; for example, the development, adoption and use of detailed and comprehensive ethical protocols and data security/ management)	●	●	●	●
	Support capacity building on data collection, management, analysis, dissemination, and use	●	●	●	●

Annex The State of Play – Systems Building to Systems Maturity

The following paragraphs offer a comprehensive description of the "state of play" of child protection systems in each of the four phases, namely, 'system building'; 'system enhancement'; 'system integration'; and 'system maturity'.

This state of play for each of the four phases is broadly organized around the seven intermediate outcomes and the various subdomains of systems strengthening under each of these intermediate outcomes.

Phase 1: System Building

This phase is characterized by a limited understanding of child protection systems among policymakers. Child protection interventions (both prevention and response) are issue-based and addressed as standalone interventions or ad-hoc responses. A comprehensive normative framework (policies and laws) that articulates the scope of the national child protection system does not exist. There are no lead ministries/agencies at national government level in charge of child protection. There is neither a public sector led national, multi-sector coordination mechanism that steers/directs child protection work and functioning of the child protection systems, nor is there a public sector entity that provides oversight. In the absence of formal SOPs, informal coordination exists amongst service providers at the implementation level, but it is largely voluntary, driven by individual initiatives, including by civil society.

Child protection services are available but are ad-hoc and do not address all child protection concerns. Government funded programmes primarily or largely focus on response services for specific "groups" of children addressing some, but not all, child protection issues. Some "pilot" prevention focused services exist, but are largely donor funded, and limited in geographic/programmatic scope. SOPs or protocols that set out child protection roles, referral processes and procedures to be followed do not exist or are limited to a certain "category" of children developed by individual agencies for their own personnel and are not fully compliant with relevant national legislation and international standards. Case workers are often trained on agency-specific SOPs related to specific "categories" of children and referrals, and case management approach to service delivery is practised in an ad-hoc manner. Independent accountability and oversight mechanisms for child protection do not exist or only partially cover child protection as part of their mandate. No minimum standards for child protection services are available, or minimum standards are available for some and not all child protection services. The same applies to data security and privacy standards, which are managed in a largely ad-hoc manner in most programming contexts.

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In the absence of comprehensive strategies to plan, develop and support the social service workforce for child protection, most workers undergo ad-hoc trainings, often on the job, and supported by development partners. There is no comprehensive normative framework for social service work, and licencing and accreditation systems for social service workers do not exist. There is no formal system of supervision of workers, and human resource information is not collected and used at national/sub-national levels.

There are no child-friendly and gender-sensitive legal procedures for children to access justice. There are no complaints mechanisms (independent or otherwise) for children who are refused or receive child protection services. Children who have received or are receiving prevention or response related child protection services have no access to forums (groups/organizations) that work with them and enable them to express their views or experiences to service providers and government bodies. Community-based mechanisms exist but only in select parts of the country and are largely supported by development partners/NGOs. These mechanisms are often accountable only at community level or local level, but do not work with national or sub-national government bodies responsible for child protection.

There is no system in place to gather routine data on child protection, or countries are still in the process of developing systems in one or multiple sectors. Data collection plans and mechanisms to generate data on child protection do not exist. There are no policies and procedures to ensure safety of all those involved in data collection processes and management and there are no data protection and confidentiality protocols. There is no legislation on data collection, transfer or sharing of data, usage of data, or there is no accountability in terms of the roles and responsibilities of relevant actors on the generation of data.

Phase 2: System Enhancement

During this phase, increased attention to understanding and responding to child protection concerns in a systematic manner results in analysis of the existing systems. Mapping and assessment of existing child protection system is undertaken/completed, but interventions and response continue to be issue-based/standalone. Normative framework/legislation outlining the national child protection systems exists, but may not include all children in a country, and implementation structures/mechanisms do not exist or are weak/ad-hoc. There is a lead ministry/agency at the national government level in charge of child protection systems, but it is weak due to limited authority, human capacity, financial resources, and limited mandate. Multiple national, multi-sector child protection coordination mechanisms have been established; however, all or most of such mechanisms are issue-based (e.g., child labour task force, anti-trafficking coordination committee), and often work in silos/in isolation from one another due to the lack/absence of mandate with the lead ministry/agency or the child protection authority to unify such mechanisms. Formal coordination mechanisms across select agencies/departments at local level exist but such mechanisms are ad-hoc and primarily related to service provision.

Systematic modelling and testing of a host of prevention and response related child protection services is underway in this phase, mostly funded by development partners and donors. Governments continue to focus on response related services, which see expansion across the country. Comprehensive SOPs/protocols largely compliant with national legislation and international standards are being developed or are in place but implementation of these SOPs/protocols is ad-hoc at best, often constrained by lack of adequate financial or human resources and limited capacities. Implementation of SOPs is weak/ad-hoc due to (a) absence of commonly agreed referral protocols between child protection/social welfare and other sectors (education, health, law enforcement, immigration authorities, justice etc.) and across borders; and (b) absence of a formal and nationally/sub-nationally adopted training and supervision system for case workers and supervisors. Accountability mechanisms have been established in-house within the lead ministry/agency responsible for child protection but are not independent. Nationally adopted minimum standards for a range of prevention and response related child protection services are available, but there is an absence of formal mechanisms for monitoring and oversight of services.

During this second phase, the normative framework for social service work is being defined. Efforts are underway to introduce/strengthen social work education with focus on knowledge and skills related to child protection and select government institutions provide on the job certified child protection trainings. Worker recruitment doesn't require following licensing and accreditation standards and there is an absence/lack of formal systems of supportive supervision. Efforts are underway to improve the human resource information/worker data for social service workers. Significant number of child protection services are funded through public finance, but are mostly response oriented and infrastructure related, e.g., establishment, running costs of residential care facilities. Efforts are underway to track and analyse child protection budgets (e.g., using budget briefs) but there is an absence of systematic analysis of public finance for child protection.

There are specialized law enforcement and court personnel (including judges and magistrates) for children in conflict with the law and in contact with the law, but specialized courts that operate in a child-friendly and gender-responsive manner, i.e., fully or mainly in compliance with international standards, have yet to be established. Local service providers have a child complaint procedure in place to address complaints by or on behalf of children refused or receiving child protection services; however, such procedures/mechanisms are not independent. Forums have been established at local level, largely through efforts of development partners/NGOs, for children who have been/or are receiving prevention or response related child protection services to enable them to discuss issues and provide feedback to service providers; however, the establishment of such forums is not uniform across the country, and mechanisms to ensure children's views are effectively communicated to the government do not exist or are informal. Community-based mechanisms are more widely available but continue to be led and supported by development partners and NGOs. These mechanisms frequently engage with actors in the more formal child protection system including at national and sub-national level but continue to function in an ad-hoc manner and no formal structures for accountability/oversight exist.

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Data collection plans and mechanisms are in place, but only a few child protection topics are covered, and data are collected irregularly. Data gathered by different sources are not based on standard definitions. Data on child protection are not consistently disaggregated by sex, age, migration status and other domains most relevant to the issue (e.g. types of care; types of violence). Ad-hoc approval processes are in place for data collection, access to data, and data sharing. Certain safeguards are available within limited ministries and agencies to regulate who has access to child protection information and for what purpose. Resources and capacity for collecting and analysing data are limited and there is lack of institutionalized quality assurance processes and procedures.

Phase 3: System Integration

In this phase of system integration, the national child protection system and its key elements are clearly defined and agreed upon in evidence-based national policy and plans. The definition of child protection systems includes a clear articulation of its boundaries and relation to other/allied systems (i.e., health, justice, education, social protection, immigration, etc.). Specific issues may be identified and addressed, but the responses designed are system-wide and are gender responsive and inclusive of all children. Implementation structures and mechanisms for the normative framework/legislation outlining the national child protection system is in progress but not uniform across the country and across agencies. The lead ministry/agency in charge of child protection systems is functional and adequately resourced (human and financial resources). Its mandate and authority related to child protection has been established, well-articulated, and formally communicated and recognized across government at national and state levels, as well as outside of the government. Work is underway to improve/strengthen its links with other national/sub-national bodies with responsibility for child protection. A national, multi-sector child protection coordination mechanism has been established under the aegis of the lead ministry responsible for child protection, with specific terms of reference, high-level authority/leadership to convene different sectors/ministries and is currently working towards strengthening coordination across sectors. Gender responsive and inclusive SOPs/regulations for formal coordination mechanisms that focus holistically on planning, programme implementation, monitoring and review across agencies and departments have been established but implementation of these mechanisms is not uniform across the country.

During this phase, increased investments are made by the government in replicating proven gender-responsive and inclusive models of prevention and response related child protection services in various parts of the country. Development partners increasingly limit their investments to technical assistance for policy advocacy. Investments in capacity building shift from trainings to systematic institutional capacity building.

Significant focus is on routine and regular monitoring of child protection services, but majority or all such monitoring is undertaken through internal monitoring systems and mechanisms. Comprehensive gender responsive and inclusive SOPs/protocols largely compliant with national legislation and international standards are available and are widely disseminated and effectively implemented in practice by most/all agencies/organizations while delivering child protection services, and efforts are underway to train case workers and supervisors to increase the use of formal case management and referral systems across the country.

Clear accountability and oversight systems for child protection have been established within the government, e.g., through hiring child protection experts, setting up inspection units, Management Information Systems and Quality Assurance Systems exist. A mechanism for monitoring and oversight of child protection services based on nationally adopted minimum standards for child protection services exists, but monitoring is ad-hoc and does not cover all services.

Normative frameworks for the workforce are well-defined. Trainings are streamlined through improved accreditation processes for pre- and in-service courses and hiring processes mandate consideration of qualifications of workers. A formal system of supportive supervision is in place but lacks uniform nationwide implementation. Efforts are underway to strengthen and scale the supervision system.

A human resource information system for social service workers for child protection has been established and is increasingly used to gather human resource related information. Efforts are underway to enhance the capacity of the social service workforce on gender responsive social and behavioural change communication. National/sub-national budgets increasingly support a wide range of prevention and response related child protection services and there is a shift in focus from moving investments from infrastructure to human resources. There is an annual increase in government budgets allocated for child protection. A host of public finance tools (e.g., budget briefs, costing models, expenditure analyses, financial benchmarking) are used to influence public financing for child protection.

Specialised courts (Juvenile Court / Family Court / Children's Court) for children in conflict and/or contact with the law, operating with child-friendly and gender-responsive procedures that comply fully or mainly with international standards exist, but not for children in contact with the law or vice versa. There is an independent body/authority at local level that accepts complaints by or on behalf of children refused or receiving child protection services. Efforts are made to make complaint mechanism equally accessible for internally displaced, refugee and migrant children, as well as children with disabilities. Government financially supports such forums (e.g., children's groups established at local government/community level for children who have been/or are receiving prevention or response related child protection services) to enable them to discuss issues and provide feedback to service providers; or those receiving child protection services. Efforts are underway to establish or strengthen existing mechanisms to ensure children's views are effectively communicated to the government at national/sub-national/local level. Community-based mechanisms are formally recognized, through its linkages with the formal child protection system, and function according to standard terms of reference or written procedures and protocols. These mechanisms are increasingly supported by the government, both financially and with technical support. While formal accountability structures may be defined through terms of reference or written procedures and protocols, implementation of accountability structures continues to be weak.

Data on a range of child protection topics are collected at regular intervals, but inconsistent definitions and approaches are used to gather data. There is legislation that generally include data to be collected and by whom but does not cover essential elements and standards of quality data collection and record keeping. Efforts are underway to pass legislation which stipulates how data are to be transferred and stored, and what the data may be used for. Efforts are also underway to develop policies and procedures to ensure safety of all those involved at all stages of the data collection process and management to minimize the inherent risks, including data protection and confidentiality and consent protocols.

Phase 4: System Maturity

There is formal high-level political commitment to CPSS, including adequate allocation of financial and human resources and its relationships with other/allied systems. All child protection interventions (prevention and response) including the broader multisectoral responses are led/coordinated by the recognized national/sub-national child protection systems. Implementation structures/mechanisms for the normative framework/legislation outlining the national child protection system are mostly/fully in place. Regular reviews, evaluations, and audits of functioning of the national child protection system are undertaken, and recommendations are made for revision to legislation and regulations that govern the child protection system. The lead ministry/agency responsible for child protection at central government level is linked to sub-national bodies (either ministerial departments or local government authority) with responsibility for child protection and is active and effective in fulfilling its child protection responsibilities across the country. The national, multi-sector child protection coordination mechanism is formalized and fully functional, its role is known to stakeholders and its working is reviewed against the terms of reference and disseminated regularly. The terms of reference are revised as needed and the lead ministry/agency has oversight of the functioning of the mechanism. Intra- and inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms for planning, programme implementation, monitoring and reviews have been formalized and the functioning of these mechanisms is reviewed against SOPs/regulations and disseminated regularly.

Government managed and funded national level scale-up of prevention and response related child protection services is underway during this phase through national programmes. All child protection services are subject to periodic/annual audits and external evaluations, and services often see changes based on evidence, including research, findings of audits and external evaluations.

Implementation of SOPs/protocols is institutionalized through formal case management systems and these SOPs/protocols are regularly reviewed and revised to adapt to emerging situations. Fully functional national human rights institutions such as national ombudsperson, human rights/child rights tribunals empowered to hold government accountable to child protection concerns have been established and are functional. Regular monitoring and reporting of child protection services is carried out by national or local government to ensure national minimum standards are fully enforced.

A well-planned,-developed, and-supported social service workforce is in place. Licencing and accreditation systems as well as supportive supervision systems are fully functional. Human resources information is regularly gathered, analysed and used to refine/revise social service workforce strategies. All/a vast majority of tertiary child protection services are funded through national/sub-national budgets. Budgets and expenditures are regularly/annually tracked.

There is a specialised court/s for children in conflict with the law and contact with the law and its procedures are child-friendly and gender-responsive (i.e., comply fully/largely with international standards). There is an independent child complaints procedure with an ability to hear, review and enforce individual complaints from children about refusal to receive child protection services or about the child protection system or services received. Government supports forums such as children's groups established at local government/community level. A formal mechanism is in use through which national/sub-national/local government receives and responds to feedback from children and children's groups who are receiving or have received child protection services. Community-based mechanisms are fully functional across the country per their applicability - urban/rural, and where necessary and as per their protocols/procedures. Functioning of these mechanisms is monitored through fully functional accountability mechanisms.

Data collection takes place at regular intervals, using definitions that are in line with international standards or national legislations. Detailed and comprehensive ethical protocols are adopted and used. Data on hard-to-reach populations, including children in street situations, are also generated at regular intervals. In addition to prevalence data, information is collected on risk and protective factors, and data can be disaggregated by sex, age, migration status and other variables most relevant to the issue (e.g., types of care; family's characteristics). There is legislation on data collection, transfer of data, quality record-keeping, usage of data, and the roles and responsibilities of relevant actors. Policies and procedures ensure safe and secure data management. Financial resources and organizational and staff capacity are guaranteed to enable data collection and analyses. There is a centralised coordination body to oversee the system and ensure effective coordination and data sharing between the different agencies. Data, including research and evaluation reports, are regularly analysed, or used for planning purposes, programme and policy design and monitoring the adequacy and effectiveness of programmes and policies, and improving access to essential services.

Endnotes

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