**1.1. Context**

**Strategic Framework**

Anchored in the Convention of the Rights of the Child the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) strives to establish children’s rights as governing ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children. Guided by the UNICEF medium-term strategic plans (MTSP) for 2014-2017 and 2018-2021 and the Child Protection Strategy, UNICEF Tajikistan supports Government’s efforts in cooperation with the civil society to implement the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) . The 2017 Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Tajikistan draw attention to three most urgent measures within the sector of child protection and justice several areas such as corporal punishment (para. 22), family environment (para. 25), children with disabilities (para 29), and administration of juvenile justice as the main areas of concern in respect of which urgent measures must be taken. To implement these recommendations and to ensure protection of children the Government of Tajikistan adopted a national Plan of Action for 2018-2022 and other sectoral programmes (see Annex).

**Institutionalization/family environment**

Children in Tajikistan face a number of vulnerabilities that negatively affect their development. While there has been a significant decrease in the number of children in institutions in Tajikistan over the last decade, 8,818 children are living in institutions); one third of them are children with disabilities . 80% of these children are not orphans and have at least one living parent. Lack of appropriate child protection and social services for those families who are struggling to take care of their children (notably single parent families) plays a major role in long-term institutionalization of children . Perceived cleanliness of the institution and the provision of basic services (shelter, food) are deemed a sufficient argument for placing a child in residential care. Similarly, lack of ability to provide for, or ‘control’ a child can be a deciding factor. This is particularly true as it relates to children with disabilities, notably mental disabilities, with professional care in institutions deemed better equipped to manage a child’s behaviour and with home based care or facility based day care services not available. 66% of parents whose children are institutionalized cite financial reasons as the primary cause for their decision. However, only 20% of parents of institutionalized children with disabilities cite financial reasons as the primary reason for their choice, suggesting social norms and lack of family support services remains a more prominent issue. In addition to lack of home based services for families, there is no effective gatekeeping mechanism to prevent unnecessary separation of children from their families to institutions. All of this is further exacerbated by a lack of social workers who have necessary knowledge, skills and tools to support families and children facing extreme poverty and lack of access to services.

**Issues facing children with disabilities**

Despite government’s efforts to provide non-residential care services for children with disabilities, coverage and quality of services and benefits requires further attention. In 2018, there were an estimated 50,800 children with disabilities in Tajikistan, with just over half recipient to a social pension from the government. The latest available data shows 28,626 children were registered with disabilities by authorities. National Development Strategy 2016-2030 envisages an improvement in the educational infrastructure to enable greater access for vulnerable groups, still the introduction of inclusive education in Tajikistan is in its infancy stage: children with disabilities represent 80% of out-of-school children. Due to absence of qualified specialists in schools to work with children with disabilities, especially children with sensory impairments, they end up in institutions to receive education. More than 30% of the population still think that the best place for children with disabilities are specialised institutions . Government figures tend to be lower and only include children registered in public health or education systems and could potentially hide the reality of the situation. Stigma, social exclusion, institutionalization and marginalization are a common outlook for children with disabilities. Two out of three adolescents with disabilities are pessimistic about their future.

**Justice for children**

In 2018, there were 906 offences committed by children (755 boys/25 girls) and 919 child victims, an increase from 2016 and 2017. The age of criminal responsibility in Tajikistan is 16 (14 years old for grave crimes): children aged 10 and above are sent to special schools for committing an offence. No rehabilitation and reintegration services are provided within the institution or when child leaves the institution. Children institutionalized in ‘colonies’ for rehabilitation suffer particular challenges including separation from families, often for more extended periods among poorer boys because families tend to have less time and money to visit. After their release, adolescents’ return to normal life is hampered by possession of a criminal record: they often face exclusion by communities, cannot complete their school education, or enter university. There is a strong likelihood that they recommit crimes as adults. Providing protection and support to adolescent witnesses and victims of crime is a relatively new phenomenon in Tajikistan. The Criminal Code and Procedures provide no provision for victims and witnesses: legal representation and legal aid is not provided.

**Violence against children/Sexual and gender-based violence against girls**

Violence against women and girls has been noted as a growing problem in Tajikistan . The data from DHS 2017 shows that 69% of children aged 1-14 experienced some type of violent discipline. In rural areas, 47% of children have been punished by teachers and 44% have been punished or bullied by their peers. 25.5% of adolescents (11-17) lived in a household with a history of violence. Restrictive gender norms and conservative societal practices prevent girls from continuing secondary education and taking active part in society. Enrolment rates start falling significantly beyond primary grades and, starting from Grade six, girls start dropping out at higher rates than boys , while the regional differences are stark with the highest transition rate among girls in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (95.5%) and the lowest among girls in the Districts of Republican Subordination (56.2%). Consequently, early marriage, combined with illiteracy, unavailability of set of skills and mothering young children puts young women at high risk of falling into extreme poverty if they divorce or are abandoned by their husbands. This gender inequality fuels the high levels of violence against women and girls (VAWG), which remains one of the most widespread human rights abuses in Tajikistan. Although domestic violence existed before independence, the Soviet system provided some social and legal mechanisms to mitigate the problem. Domestic violence emerged as a major issue in Tajikistan following the dissolution of the Soviet Union . In general, analysing the situation of violence against children and women is complicated by the fact that this type of violence is grossly underreported and is commonly accepted as normal behaviour. There is not a uniform system to register and compile data resulting in limited quality and quantity of evidence.

**Birth registration**

The vast majority of children (96%) under five years are registered with civil authorities, and most young children (91.4%) have a birth certificate . However, over 12,880 children without birth certificate have been identified in 15 districts of Tajikistan during period of January – August 2019. It composes 33% of all identified people at risk of statelessness or with undetermined nationality. Children without a birth certificate are more deprived in nutrition, health, education, social protection and housing dimensions and are more likely to have at least two simultaneous deprivations than children with a birth certificate. In some areas, there is relatively low awareness of the importance of civil registration and the administrative procedures required. Parents from lower income families, where the father has migrated, and those in remote areas are least likely to register a birth. The cost of the birth certificate, fines for delayed applications and the distance, linked to the time and cost of travel, further disincentives parents.

**Children affected by migration**

Tajikistan is one of the world’s largest labour migrant sending countries and remittances sent to Tajikistan are the second most important income at household level after wages. One in every two households has at least one labour migrant in the family. For children, labour migration results in separation from key caregivers and a subsequent denial of education opportunities, inadequate substitute care or forced displacement from their home. Children’s emotional and psychological well-being can suffer as a result of the migration exodus, notably where there is increased financial constraints. Families left behind often face economic insecurity, notably where husbands do not maintain contact or fail to send adequate remittances. Such abandonment creates significant economic hardship on families left behind. 78% of families affected by migration do not have adequate income to cover the costs of living, with the unmet need for food affecting 93% of them. Lack of economic security, notably relating to the lack of basic access to food, shelter and medical care are significant challenges. Education quickly becomes a challenge, particularly for girls who rapidly take on domestic roles: 47% of girls in abandoned migrant families were enrolled in grades 10-11, versus 89% of boys. Evidence suggests girls fare worse than boys owing to the increase in household tasks assumed on the departure of an adult member of the household. 13.1% of children left behind aged 12-17 are engaged in labour. The psychological impact of an absence parent on adolescents can give rise to increased rates of depression and aggression, as well as higher likelihood of bullying or teasing at school.

**Child labour**

The results of the child labor survey in Tajikistan (2012) showed that 23.4% of children at the age of 5 and 17 years work. This indicator increases to 45.5% among children in the age group of 15-17 years. The majority of employed children are engaged in agriculture with other members of their families in their household or in the immediate vicinity. The share of hired workers is limited - 4.1 percent, even among older children (15-17 years old), this figure remains low - 6.3 percent. Out of 522 thousand of employed children, 503 thousand fall into the category of underage workers. The latter indicator corresponds to 22.6% of the total number of children at the age of 5 to 17 years. Only a small proportion (2.8%) of employed children is engaged in hazardous economic activities and 5.6% work under hazardous conditions. As per Labour Force Survey of 2016, in total about 17,000 children (age 12 to 17) reported that they had negative health effects associated with work. These children constitute 3.1% of the total number of children who were employed according to available data for 12 months before the survey. Most often (almost in half of the cases there were complaints about negative health effects), children reported about extreme fatigue.

**Child protection in emergencies**

Tajikistan is highly prone to various types of disasters including floods, mudflows and landslides. It is also situated in a seismically high-risk zone. According to the Tajik Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence (CoES), between 1997 and 2012, approximately 190 natural disaster occurred each year. These disasters resulted in significant damage to the livelihoods and the economy, as well as act as a break on developmental outcomes.

The updated Tajikistan IACP considers two different potential disaster scenarios, prioritized according to disaster seriousness (potential impact multiplied by likelihood). Both scenarios at small-medium scale and large-scale are sudden onset natural disasters. Priority needs for child protection during a disaster include: “Separation prevention, identification, documentation, family tracing and reunification: and psychosocial support for affected population, including building the capacity of the local staff and direct support to affected population”.

**Social services**

The role of the social services workforce is significant in the developing the child protection system that is able to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable people and especially children. Though, social work as profession is relatively new in Tajikistan. As of 2020, there are only 34,8 professionally trained social workers, but exact number of the graduates employed in the social protection sector is unknown. Additionally, there are 83,0 staff who provide range of practical social care services to vulnerable people throughout the facilities of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population. However, the level of professional training and qualification of these staff remains unclear due to inexistence of an educational establishment that prepares qualified mid-level para-professionals.

**1.2. Object of the evaluation: Protective Environment for All Children Programme**

UNICEF Tajikistan promotes the rights of children to live and grow in safe and protected environment. Protective environment (PE) as an overarching UNICEF programme component aims to build child protection and social protection systems to address needs of poor and marginalised children, children in residential care and at risk of family separation, children with disabilities, and children in contact with law. The 2016-2021 country programme recognizes the need to build a protective environment that prevents and responds to deprivation, violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, especially for the most vulnerable, at all stages of their childhood. In doing so, the PE programme aims to contribute to fulfilling children’s rights to a supportive and caring family environment, access to justice and adequate social protection.

The PE programme works both at the national and sub-national levels. At the national level, PE programme component contributes to strengthening the systems and legal framework for child protection and social protection, providing technical assistance to basing the development and implementation of relevant laws, policies and strategies firmly on evidence and bringing them in line with international standards. At the sub-national level, UNICEF contributes to efforts to design an integrated social protection system and demonstrate its feasibility and relevance in selected target districts . This includes revision of existing services and benefits, as well as the introduction of new evidence-based and equity-focused models of services.

As a result of the Strategic Moment of Reflection (SMR) in 2018 the PE programme has undergone structural and programmatic changes . Along with other CP components it moved from the conceptual stage of a more integrated programming approach to a more hands-on implementation. It aims to address the vulnerabilities and bottlenecks that the most vulnerable children face over their lifecycle in an integrated manner through linkages with interventions in health, nutrition, education, and life skills development to ensure their needs are met and they have an opportunity to thrive. According to the latest results framework the Protection Environment programme includes the following outputs:

1. By 2022 , the most vulnerable girls and boys have increased inclusive access to social benefits and quality social work services.

Major components under this output include: 1. Communication for social change to promote the rights of persons with disabilities; 2. Child protection in emergencies; 3. Repatriation of children.

1. By 2022, girls and boys, including children with disabilities, in institutions and children at risk of family separation have increased access to family and community-based alternative care.

Major components under this output include: 1. Alternative family care; 2. Transformation of the Baby Homes into Family and Child Support Centers (FCSC).

1. By 2022, boys and girls, including those in contact with the law, benefit from programmes that prevent and respond to VAC and a strengthened child-friendly justice system.

Major components under this output include: 1. Justice for children, 2. Violence against children.

The funds for the PE programme component of the 2016-2022 country programme amounted to US$4,736,791 against a planned budget of US$10,273,198. Additional $2,047,435 are in the pipeline with different levels of likelihood. Majority of the funds are UNICEF regular resources while the major donors include the European Union, DFID, United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Beckham Fund.

The PE Programme contributes to four out of six UNDAF 2016-2022 outcomes:

* Democratic governance, rule of law and human rights;
* Social development (Health, education and social protection);
* Inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable groups;
* Resilience and environmental sustainability .