



Project Title

ILO DC/SYMBOL:	CHN/22/02/EUR
Type of Evaluation:	Project
Evaluation timing:	Final
Evaluation nature:	Independent
Project countries:	China
P&B Outcome(s):	P&B Outcome 8, Outputs 8.1 and 8.2
SDG(s):	Project contributes to SDG Targets 1.3, 3.8, 5.4, 8.5 and 10.4
ILO Administrative Office:	ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia
ILO Technical Office(s):	DWT Bangkok
Joint evaluation agencies:	N/A
Project duration:	1 February 2023 - 31 January 2026
Donor and budget:	EU, US\$ 2,518,938
Name of consultants:	Ting Ying, National Consultant
Name of Evaluation Manager:	Nguyen Son Ngoc
Evaluation Office oversight:	Pamornrat Pringsulaka; Naomi Asukai
Evaluation budget:	US\$ 15,417

Key Words: social protection, China's social security regulations, universal social protection, EU-China Cooperation, Social Security reform

Table of Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	4
Acknowledgments.....	5
1. Executive Summary.....	6
1. Introduction.....	11
2. Project context and background.....	11
2.1 Project context and objectives.....	11
2.2 Project stakeholders.....	12
3. Evaluation approach and methodology.....	12
3.1 Conceptual framework and alignment with results-based management (RBM) system	12
3.2 Evaluation framework.....	14
3.3 Data collection.....	17
3.4 Analysis and reporting	17
3.5 Limitations and reflections	18
3.6 Ethical considerations.....	18
4. Findings.....	19
Relevance.....	19
Coherence.....	21
Efficiency.....	22
Effectiveness	24
Impact (progress/contribution towards impact).....	28
Sustainability.....	30
Cross-cutting issues (gender consideration).....	31
5. Conclusions.....	32
6. Lessons learned and good practices.....	33
7. Recommendations.....	35
Annexes.....	38
Annex 1 Lessons learned.....	38
Annex 3 Terms of references	43
Annex 4 List of documents reviewed	54
Annex 5 Interview guide.....	55
Annex 6 List of stakeholders interviewed.....	64
Annex 7 Project log frame.....	65

List of Tables

Table 1: Evaluation framework/matrix.....	14
Table 2: Six-point rating description	17
Table 3: Breakdown of expenditure by project year (as of 15 January 2026)	23
Table 4: Review of progress/results towards achieving set/planned objectives	24
Table 5: Extracted examples/evidence on gender consideration in project activities	31

List of Figures

Figure 1: Project Theory of change	14
Figure 2: Indication of total budget allocation and expenditure to date (as of 9 December 2025)	23
Figure 3: Theory of change (adapted)	28

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
AFD	French Development Agency
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CALSS	Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security
CEC	China Enterprise Confederation
DWCP	Decent Work Country Programme
EU	European Union
ICD	International Cooperation Department
ITC-ILO	International Training Centre of the ILO
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILS	International Labour Standards
MOHRSS	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NHSA	National Healthcare Security Administration
OECD-DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RBM	Results-Based Management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIA	Social Insurance Administration
SO	Specific Objectives
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
UN	United Nations
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

Acknowledgments

The smooth evaluation implementation process and the evaluation report would not be possible without the contributions and support of various individuals and organisations. I extend my sincere thanks to the International Labour Organization (ILO) staff for their consistent support and assistance throughout the evaluation process. In particular, I would like to thank Ngoc Nguyen Son and Pringsulaka, Pamornrat from the Eval team and Zhou Jie from the project team for their constant timely and professional support, coordination and inputs. I also express my appreciation to Changhee LEE, Ruben, Vicente Andrés and Zhang Buyuan at ILO Beijing office for their timely cooperation and assistance. I also acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of all key stakeholders, including those from Chinese partner organisations, social partners, as well as programme and technical staff from EU Headquarters and delegations to China.

Ting Yang
Independent evaluator

1. Executive Summary

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	
Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure	The project (phase 2 between 2023-2026) was funded by the EU and implemented by the ILO in response to the challenges remaining in ensuring adequacy, equity, and sustainability of benefits, particularly for vulnerable groups such as migrant workers, informal sector employees, and rural populations in China. Building on achievement of phase 1, the project aims to further build the technical capacity and support China's social protection system coverage extension towards achieving an effective universal coverage and enhancing the quality of benefits provided by the system. The project set up a project steering committee, composed of representatives of EU, ILO and Chinese stakeholders (government agencies, employers' and workers' organizations and other social partners) to facilitate the active engagement of all stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring process of the project.
Present situation of the project	Project phase 2 was completed and is proceeding to phase 3
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	The evaluation serves as a final and independent assessment and aims to ensure accountability and to foster organizational learning that can be used to improve future projects and programs related to social protection. Specifically, this evaluation 1) assesses against OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the project's outcomes; 2) looks at the project's adherence to the ILO's cross-cutting criteria and issue such as International Labour Standards, social dialogue, gender inclusion, and a just transition towards environmental sustainability; and 3) generates lessons learned, good practices and recommendations that can be applied to future action and initiatives. The evaluation covers the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the project from 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2026 and primarily focuses on the project's policy-level engagements at the national level (e.g., direct beneficiaries). The intended users of this evaluation include donor side (EU), ILO, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China, as well as other social partners who benefit from this project.
Methodology of evaluation	The evaluation adopts a theory-based evaluation design, utilizing the logical framework and theory of change as well as the logic of contribution analysis in facilitating the assessment of key evaluation criteria. At operational level, the evaluation applies an actor-centred and gender-sensitive mixed methods approach to gather evaluative data, including a mix of desk research and other data collection tools (e.g., key stakeholder interviews and participant observation). Insights and feedback were collected from representatives of all groups of key stakeholders as part of the systematic triangulation and validation of data from various sources for generating evaluation findings.
MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS	Overall, the project has performed well across all of the evaluation criteria. This overall assessment shall be understood and contextualised with these factors: 1) the long-term and gradual nature and process of policy/regulation-related changes and the capacity-building/strengthening instrument; 2) the transferability and adaptability of international experiences/learnings into local country context with varied political, social and economic situation as well as demographic features; 3) timescale and efforts taken for complying and fulfilling respective organizational procedures of three major tripartite partners/entities. Relevance (Relevance Rating: 5 Relevant) The project design was relevant. It demonstrated high level of alignment and

responsiveness to national priorities and strategic directions of tripartite partners, such as China national 14th Five-Year Plan 2021-2025, ILO's vision for universal social protection through renewed efforts to extend the coverage to all, as well as EU's continuous commitments to promote the decent work agenda globally and its international collaboration strategy. The project also linked directly to the priorities of DWCP, UNDCSF and contributed to the SDGs. The project adopted a demand-driven approach focusing on direct beneficiaries' needs for capacity building and strengthening. The design of the project was meantime considered relatively ambitious with comparatively broad scope (e.g., intended outcome and impact-level results) in a set timeframe given the gradual and complex nature and processes of targeted areas of policy-related change. The links among different levels of results (outputs, specific objectives and impact) could be strengthened to ensure more smooth and logical pathways and transition.

Coherence (Coherence Rating: 5 Coherent)

The project showed high level of strategic coherence with the tripartite core partnership among the ILO, China and the EU with continuous high level of interest and engagement among various groups of stakeholders. The project support for leveraging partnerships and stakeholder engagement at all levels was valued for fostering dialogue, synergies and collaborations. The project adapted its strategies to include platform workers-related social security issue and just transition orientation in response to emerging trend and policy priority in this regard. The tripartite partnership is recognized as a valuable model. Meanwhile, the involved tripartite processes demand considerable time and resources in communication, coordination and organization of various project activities, especially when engaging major development actors such as the three partners/entities in this project. This has implications for the project design in terms of factoring in these potential challenges and reality.

Efficiency (Efficiency Rating: 5 Efficient)

The project operation was efficient in terms of proper resource structure and usage complying to relevant organizational requirements and procedures; timely project delivery and communication showing temporal-efficiency.

Effectiveness (Effectiveness Rating: 5 Effective)

The project indicated evident signs of effectiveness in terms of progress and contribution made towards set objectives, as well as fulfilling contractual obligations in a timely manner; although some of the objectives may take longer time and process to show desired results given the relatively complex and non-linear pathways and multiple influencing factors involved. Resulting changes in project beneficiaries' technical capacity and knowledge, perception and improved work practice, achieved from capacity building/strengthening efforts are valuable. It would better capture this type of results by setting corresponding indicators. This has implications for the project design of a potential following phase. There exist logical links among different levels of results, from looking at the progress/results achieved so far and the original intervention model, the link between project activities and outputs appears logically stronger than that between outputs and specific objectives (outcomes). In another words, there remains room for extra 'middle or intermediary steps' between outputs and specific objectives. Or alternatively, a narrower scope and more concrete articulation of specific objectives may help strengthen the logical links and transition among results, especially between the output and specific objective level.

Impact and sustainability (Impact Rating: 5 Satisfactory; Sustainability Rating: 5 Sustainable)

The project contributed and progressed positively towards achieving impact and showed considerable potential for sustainability. It strengthened technical capacities and changed perceptions, well fostered and sustained tripartite partnerships, dialogue and good working relationships, as well as consolidated and disseminated policy-relevant research and knowledge products. On this basis, more nuanced articulation of operational-level and measurable impact indicators and exploration of more mutually supportive mode (e.g., information exchange and cost-sharing) would help better achieve impact and sustainability if the project continues.

Cross-cutting issues

The project indicated positive signs in integrating gender consideration through trying to pursue a relative gender-balanced representation among project participants and applying a gender length in analysis and reporting. While there are relatively small number of direct beneficiaries in this project phase, it would help to include more explicit gender-specific results in the next phase if involving larger number of ultimate beneficiaries (e.g., workers). The project also utilized the tripartite social dialogue mechanism involving government, employers' and workers' organizations, further enhanced adoption of this approach would help achieve larger extent of effectiveness and stakeholders' expectations of seeing more concrete and tangible results on the ground.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Recommendations

Recommendations are derived directly from the evaluation findings, particularly those related to relevance, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, and are intended to inform future programming, including the potential design of phase 3.

1. Build on the momentum and learnings from the current project and take a nuanced and tailored approach to the design of a follow-up project.

- Update and revise the logical framework and theory of change to introduce 1) clearer intermediary outcomes and more measurable indicators that better reflect the gradual nature of policy reform processes; and 2) tailored and measurable indicators that can facilitate learning and performance tracking, including those qualitative indicators on capacity/behaviour changes resulted from capacity building efforts (if it remains a key project element).
- Re-think and re-orient the range of targeted project beneficiaries and needs. Stakeholder interviews reflected strong inclination that extended and more diversified groups of actors should be factored in the project design (maximize constituents' participation at all levels to enhance relevance and ownership, leading to long-term sustainability). For example, enhanced participation of social partners such as enterprises (e.g., Meituan or other similar ones) and selected ultimate beneficiary representation (e.g., platform workers) in project activities with replication/scale-up potential.
- Corresponding target/goal setting reflecting the long-term project ambition and vision, as well as detailed, achievable and measurable milestones along the pathways towards this vision. Gender-specific goal may be more explicitly set, especially when the project may involve a larger number of ultimate beneficiaries (e.g., platform workers or workers in other forms of employment) in the following phase. Document review and stakeholder feedback revealed the need of a more nuanced approach in establishing logically stronger links between each level of results (adjusting intermediary-level results and indicators if necessary).

- Integrate exit strategies and follow-up mechanisms early to help ensure sustainability (e.g., plans about how achieved results will be maintained and utilized within partner institutions, as processes and methodologies internalized by institutions are most likely to be sustained).

Responsible unit/s	Time implication	Priority	Resource implication
Project team, donor agency	Short-term	High	Medium

2. Support pilot project or sub-projects with potential for both policy and project-level impacts in terms of replication and scale-up possibilities and enhancement of sector-specific evidence base.

- Support practical pilot project or sub-projects, combining the top-down (well-established macro policy-level support gained from this project) and bottom-up (pilot project-based and involving ultimate beneficiaries) approach to generate solid practical and in-depth evidence so as to feedback into policy making. For example, suggested possibilities for piloting include demand-driven pilot initiative with social partners such as platform enterprises (e.g., Meituan) and workers in the area of work injury-related social security benefits.
- Conduct feasibility and gap analysis in support of any piloting initiative.
- Equip piloting efforts with necessary technical support and regular monitoring to capture first-hand learning and experiences to be shared with other partners including EU and its member countries.

Responsible unit/s	Time implication	Priority	Resource implication
Project team, donor agency, national/local leading implementing agency	Long-term	Medium	High

3. Enhance mutual learning, benefits and influences in the project area

- Share China experiences (both achievement and challenges faced), especially given the fact that China has the largest number of workers engaging in new forms of employment, relevant initiatives and experiences in addressing social security benefits of these workers are of considerable value and interest to the international community. There is appetite from EU and its member countries to learn in this regard.
- Explore possibilities for shared contributions (in-kind or financial) towards achieving the project impact and wider influence.

Responsible unit/s	Time implication	Priority	Resource implication
Project team, line ministerial department and sub-units	Medium-term	Medium	Low

4. Continuous research, evidence generation and knowledge management

- Conduct feasibility studies on adaptability and transferability of international experiences and good practices in local context (e.g., via case studies).
- Capture timely monitoring and evaluation data and lessons learned on pilot project/s to accumulate evidence base and to inform future replication or scaling-up decision.
- Undertake independent complementary research, by ILO for example, if budget permits, to jointly reflect various facets of the reality in the project context that may impact on the project results.
- Keep track of dynamic policy changes and megatrends (e.g., sustainability of social security fund and ageing issue).

Responsible unit/s	Time implication	Priority	Resource implication
Project team, ILO Headquarters, line ministerial department and sub-units	Medium-term	Medium	Medium

Main lessons learned and good practices	Main lessons learned: Adaptation and transferability of new concepts, experiences and learnings. As mentioned in the Effectiveness section, there remain common challenges for all tripartite partners resulted from the evolving conditions and megatrends, such as the growth of the digital economy, platform employment, climate change and artificial intelligence (AI). Similar to other development actors and efforts, this project has started to explore solutions to respond to these conditions. The project showed flexibility and adapted strategies by including new focused policy areas such as social security benefits of platform workers, just transition concept and relevant technical expertise. Project beneficiaries gained valuable learnings from international (EU) experiences-sharing and exchanges, as well as improved technical capacities. It may then necessitate considerable efforts to adapt and transfer these benefits into locally-appliable actions (e.g., through further feasibility studies and piloting initiative) to maximize relevance and achieve concrete results with a pragmatic approach and perspective. Consideration of the complex, long-term and gradual nature & process of policy changes. It is fully understandable and legitimate that project stakeholders expect to see maximized project impact through tangible results and changes. In this connection, it is also critical to consider the inherent nature of the type of projects with the aim of achieving policy and regulation-level changes – non-linear, relatively slow and gradual process involved. There are also other influencing factors including constantly evolving conditions and emerging challenges in both immediate and wider context and environment. This project can be seen as an example facing all these scenarios. The pursuit of these types of changes may be transferred with further breakdown to concrete initiatives (e.g., case study/pilot project) with concrete and measurable short-term and long-term milestones and indicators. This will help build the evidence base eventually leading to confident evidence-based policy making. Main good practices: High level of relevance and strategic coherence and sustained interest and ownership among tripartite partners (EU delegation & member states, ILO offices, Chinese counterparts) and project beneficiaries. The two-pillar tripartite partnership and dialogue fostered and sustained high level of strategic coherence, interest and ownership among tripartite partners (EU delegation & member states, ILO offices, Chinese counterparts) on one hand; on another hand, it forged a unique space for tripartite collaboration among government agencies, employers' as well as worker's organizations. This led to their continuous commitment and engagement through meaningful dialogue and active participation in project activities throughout the project cycle, contributing to maximizing the effect of the tripartite partnership model. Demand-driven and needs-based approach. The project kept on track of emerging trends and policy focus (e.g., phase 2 included platform workers and maternity related social security topics). Capacity building/strengthening support were tailored to beneficiaries' needs such as the well-received actuarial training following needs assessment and stakeholder consultation. On one hand, policy brief, knowledge and research products showed clear focus on key topics relevant to the project context in China; on another hand, the project facilitated in consolidating and sharing relevant China experiences with the international community. For instance, since China has the largest number of workers engaged in new forms of employment, sharing experiences in this regard would benefit EU and other countries (there is appetite for such learning).

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the project "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)"¹ that was implemented between 2023 and 2026. The project was funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Country Office for China and Mongolia.

This evaluation serves as a final and independent assessment and aims to ensure accountability and to foster organizational learning that can be used to improve future projects and programs related to social protection. Specifically, this evaluation 1) assesses against OECD-DAC² evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the project's outcomes; 2) looks at the project's adherence to the ILO's cross-cutting criteria and issue such as International Labour Standards (ILS), social dialogue, gender inclusion, and a just transition³ towards environmental sustainability; and 3) generates lessons learned, good practices and recommendations that can be applied to future action and initiatives.

This evaluation covers the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the project from 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2026 and primarily focuses on the project's policy-level engagements at the national level (e.g., direct beneficiaries). The intended users of this evaluation include donor side (EU), ILO, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) of China, as well as other social partners who benefit from this project.

2. Project context and background

2.1 Project context and objectives

China has made significant progress in expanding social protection coverage over the past two decades, achieving near-universal coverage in basic pension and health insurance. However, challenges remain in ensuring adequacy, equity, and sustainability of benefits, particularly for vulnerable groups such as migrant workers, informal sector employees, and rural populations. The national 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) of China set the goal of improving the multi-tier social security system that covers everyone, coordinates between urban and rural areas, and is equitable, unified and sustainable. The EU/China collaboration in the area of social security has been a long-term and important contribution for the enhancement of social security in China and a privileged space for exchanges between China and EU experts and institutions⁴.

In this context and in response to identified challenges, the project "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)", a continuation of a successful previous ILO/EU/China partnership intervention, was launched. Building on the achievement of the first phase, this project aims to further build the technical capacity and support China's social protection system coverage extension towards achieving an effective universal coverage and enhancing the quality of benefits provided by the system. Under this overarching project goal, there are three specific objectives (SOs):

¹ Hereafter referred as 'the project'

² Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee's (OECD-DAC)

³ A just transition is a policy and operational framework designed to move to net zero, green and decent jobs, the eradication of poverty, the enjoyment of the human right to social protection and thriving and resilient communities. ILO and AFD (2019) *Social Protection for a Just Transition: A Global Strategy for Increasing Ambition in Climate Action*. International Labour Organization and French Development Agency (AFD).

⁴ Project document: CHN/22/02/EUR – Annex I – Description of the Action – Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2) (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)

- SO1: Improve the national social protection system in accordance with ILO and international standards, with a particular focus on developing a universal social security system.
- SO2: Support the reform process by providing information on the EU approach and sharing global expertise, especially from the EU, with national policymakers on social security, pensions, and issues related to platform workers.
- SO3: Promote China's ratification of relevant international conventions related to social protection.

The project log frame (see Annex 5) specifies project activities and various components including different levels of results with corresponding indicators, baseline situation, source of data and means of verification, as well as assumptions⁵.

2.2 Project stakeholders

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) is the leading Chinese counterpart in the project implementation. They are key members of the Project Steering Committee (PSC), composed of representatives of EU, ILO and Chinese stakeholders. In addition, China Enterprise Confederation (CEC), All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) and National Healthcare Security Administration (NHSA) are actively engaged in the design, implementation and monitoring process of the project. The project also collaborates with Chinese and international research and academic institutions in conducting specific research studies.

The direct project beneficiaries are above-mentioned policymakers, social security officials, and representatives of employers' and workers' organizations, as well as academics and other relevant organizations who engage in policy discussions, design, and implementation of social security in China. The ultimate beneficiaries are women and men, particularly those not adequately covered by social insurance in China, such as migrant workers, flexible workers, and the self-employed. They will benefit from improved social security systems with broader coverage and more adequate benefits. Employers will also benefit from new or revised regulatory measures that provide more legal certainty regarding their social security responsibilities⁶.

3. Evaluation approach and methodology

3.1 Conceptual framework and alignment with results-based management (RBM) system

The conceptual framework for this evaluation was built upon an assessment of the results-based approach, consistent with ILO's RBM system. The evaluation examines the project's design and progress/results achieved by linking the activities, outputs, and outcomes (specific objectives in this project) to the overarching project goal (at impact level). This approach helps verify the logical connections between different levels of results and how the desired changes contribute towards the project objectives and broader global development vision such as the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The conceptual framework is operationalized through the OECD-DAC criteria, the specific implications and definition at operational level are set out as follows⁷:

⁵ Assumed risk statements are specified in the comprehensive project document: CHN/22/02/EUR – Annex I – Description of the Action – Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2) (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)

⁶ Terms of Reference (ToR): Final Independent Evaluation of Project "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)"

⁷ Ibid

- **Relevance and Coherence:** Assesses the project's alignment with national priorities (14th Five-Year Plan (FYP), "common prosperity" agenda), ILO and EU policies (e.g., European Pillar of Social Rights), and external standards (ILS, particularly C102).
- **Efficiency:** Assesses the quality and timeliness of conversion of inputs into outputs and activities.
- **Effectiveness:** Assesses the extent of achievement of the three Specific Objectives and the immediate outcomes.
- **Impact and Sustainability:** Assesses the project's contribution (rather than sole attribution) towards the ultimate goal of improving China's social protection system (Impact) and the likelihood that benefits will continue after the project ends (Sustainability).

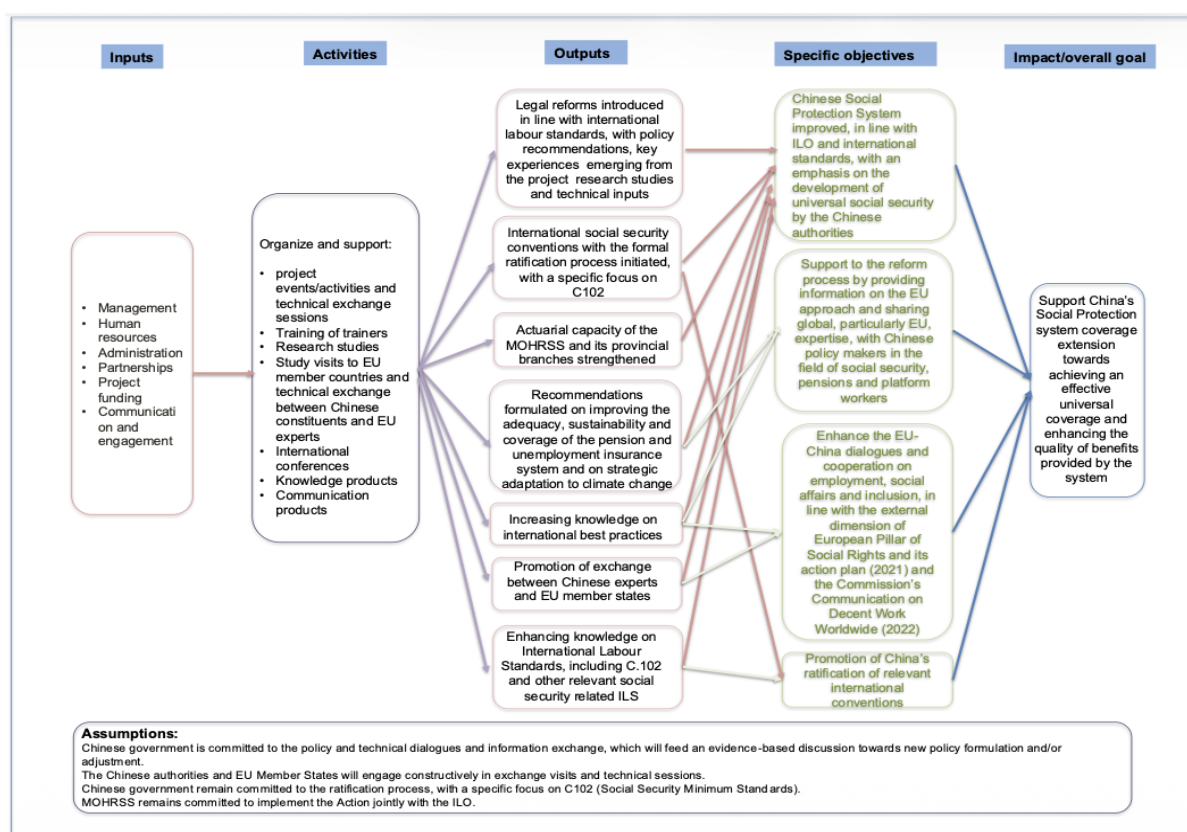
The evaluation also assesses some key cross-cutting issues relevant to this project and evaluation such as gender considerations, social dialogue, just transition aspect and etc.

Following a brief evaluability assessment considering the evaluation scope and priority, data quality and quantity, as well as the time and resource limits, the evaluation adopted a theory-based evaluation design⁸ and specifically some logic of contribution analysis⁹. The evaluation utilized the existing project log frame (see Annex 5) as a reference and reconstructed the Theory of Change (ToC, a simplified version as shown in below Figure 1). The ToC was developed to help frame and facilitate data collection, analysis and reporting of findings. The ToC illustrated (indicatively) the intervention logic with various elements along the results chain, as well as their logical connections.

⁸ Theory-based evaluation is based on or guided by the theory of how the initiative or intervention brings about results – showing causal process, influencing and contextual factors and mechanisms at work. Stern, E., Stame, N., Mayne J., Forss, K., Davies, R. and Befani, B. (2012) *Broadening the range of designs and methods for impact evaluations*. DFID Working Paper 38, London: Department for International Development (DFID)

⁹ Contribution analysis is one of the theory-based approaches, using theory of change as main instrument in evaluation and seeking to demonstrate a plausible association (instead of attribution) between an intervention and observed changes and compile a substantiated contribution story. Mayne, J. (2012a) Contribution analysis: Coming of age? *Evaluation*, 18(3): 270-280.

Figure 1: Project Theory of change



Source: Reconstructed by the evaluator with the original intervention logic model

3.2 Evaluation framework

In line with what is proposed in the ToR and with reference to the ILO evaluation policy and guidelines, the evaluation applied an actor-centred and gender-sensitive mixed methods approach, including a mix of desk research and other data collection tools (e.g., key stakeholder interviews and participant observation). More specifically, to operationalize the proposed evaluation design and methodology, below evaluation framework was formulated as a roadmap and guide for specific evaluation implementation process.

Table 1: Evaluation framework/matrix

Criteria	Evaluation questions	Indicator/evidence	Data sources	Data collection tools	Stakeholders/Informants
Relevance	1. How well has the project addressed the needs of the tripartite partners, and beneficiaries, especially in the context of the 14th Five-Year Plan and the “common prosperity” agenda?	Evidence on the alignment/consistency between the project objectives and national policy priorities.	Relevant policy documents and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and relevant agreement	- Document review - Key stakeholder interviews	MOHRSS, CEC, NHSA, ACFTU, ILO, EU

Criteria	Evaluation questions	Indicator/ evidence	Data sources	Data collection tools	Stakeholders/ Informants
	2. How did the project adapt its strategy to evolving conditions, such as the growth of the digital economy and platform employment?	Project activities respond to priorities (e.g., DWCP¹⁰, UNSDCF¹¹) Q2: Evidence of strategic adaptation in project documents or activities (e.g., research focus, technical inputs).	- Project planning document (e.g., log frame) - Project progress and annual reports - Project activities/events records - DWCP&UNSDCF documents	Participant observation (at key project meeting/events)	ILO, MOHRSS (CALSS/SIA), EU
Coherence	3. How does the project align with and complement the policies of the ILO and the EU, including the European Pillar of Social Rights and the ILO's global strategy on social protection floors?	Thematic/content analysis demonstrating policy complementarity; consistency with ILO global strategy and EU policy.	- Project documents - Relevant ILO policy documents - Relevant EU policy documents	- Document review - Key stakeholder interviews	ILO (Headquarters and Beijing), EU (delegation and HQ)
	4. How effectively did the project leverage partnerships with various stakeholders?	Q4: Evidence of collaborative activities and joint outputs. Feedback from partners on effectiveness of coordination.	- Progress reports, meeting minutes, MoU. - Project technical reports, policy recommendations		Tripartite constituents (MOHRSS, CEC, ACFTU), Project staff, Donor agency.
	5. How consistent were the project's interventions with International Labour Standards (ILS), especially the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)?	Q5: Evidence of adherence to ILS principles in project-supported policy advice or technical inputs.			MOHRSS (ICD), ILO Technical Specialists.
Efficiency	6. How efficiently have project resources (e.g., funds, human resources) been allocated and used?	- Referring to original indicators - Evidence from stakeholder feedback - Financial resource utilization rate - Stakeholder feedback/experiences on resource management.	- Project planning documents - Financial statements - Progress reports - Annual reports - Annual workplan - Financial analysis	- Document review - Key stakeholder interviews - Participant observation at project meetings/conference	ILO project staff, donor agency
	7. To what extent has the project delivered its planned activities according to the set timelines?	Q7: Percentage of activities completed on schedule and deviations from the original timeline.			ILO project staff, MOHRSS (ICD)
Effectiveness	8. To what extent has the project achieved its goal of improving Chinese Social Protection System, in line with ILO and international standards, with an emphasis on the development of universal social security?	- Evidence on number of legal reforms - Evidence on number of study visits and technical exchange occasions	- Legal decrees/diplomas approved/endorsed - Project progress report	- Document review - Key stakeholder interviews	MOHRSS (CALSS/SIA), Donor agency, ILO.

¹⁰ Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP)

¹¹ United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF)

Criteria	Evaluation questions	Indicator/ evidence	Data sources	Data collection tools	Stakeholders/ Informants
	9. To what extent has the project delivered the outcome of supporting the reform process by providing information on the EU approach and sharing global and EU expertise with Chinese policy makers in the field of social security, pensions and platform workers?	- Evidence on number of ILO international social security conventions with the formal ratification process initiated - Evidence from stakeholder feedback/experiences	- Activities/events records - Study visits reports - Research studies (e.g., technical inputs) - Progress reports - Annual reports	Participant observation (key project meeting/event, if applicable)	MOHRSS, EU representative, ILO.
	10. To what extent has the project delivered the outcome of enhancing the EU-China dialogues and cooperation on employment, social affairs and inclusion, in line with the external dimension of European Pillar of Social Rights and its action plan (2021) and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide (2022)?	Q10: Evidence of the frequency and quality of dialogue platforms (e.g., project conference).	Q10: Activities/events records, meeting minutes.		EU and Chinese government representative, ILO
	11. To what extent has the project achieved its goal of promoting China's ratification of relevant international conventions?	Q11: Evidence on number of ILO international social security conventions with the formal ratification process initiated.	Q11: Project progress report, MOHRSS (ICD) feedback.		MOHRSS (ICD), ILO
	12. What are the facilitators and barriers in the process of the project implementation towards achieving set objectives?	- Evidence reflecting challenges, good practices and lessons learned - Stakeholder feedback/experiences	- Project progress reports - Project annual reports - Meeting minutes	- Document review - Key stakeholder interviews	
Impact	13. To what extent has the project made contribution in supporting China's social protection system coverage extension towards achieving an effective universal coverage and enhancing the quality of benefits provided by the system?	Evidence in progress/contribution towards impact (e.g., new policy drafts, increased coverage data if available and attributable).	- Project progress reports - Annual reports - Statistical data (if feasible).	- Document review - Key stakeholder interviews	MOHRSS, NHSA, ILO, Tripartite partners.
Sustainability	14. Are the project results likely to be sustainable? What are the key drivers to ensure sustainability?	- Committed resources (financial, human) for follow-up - Planned follow-up initiatives. - Qualitative response/feedback	Potential concept notes/work plan for follow-up phase, Stakeholder commitment statements.	- Document review - Key stakeholder interviews	MOHRSS, Donor agency, ILO
Cross-cutting issues	15. To what extent did the project incorporate gender perspectives in the design and delivery of its activities?	Gender-disaggregated consideration in the project cycle (e.g., participation, analysis).	- Project strategic and planning documents - Progress reports - Annual reports	- Document review - Key stakeholder interviews	ILO, MOHRSS, EU, Beneficiaries

3.3 Data collection

To implement the evaluation plan and to build more comprehensive evidence chain for fulfilling the evaluation purpose and addressing evaluation questions, the evaluative data collection process involved two main stages: desk research and primary data collection. This approach used a mix of research tools such as document review during desk research and key informant interviews and participant observation (on site at project meetings) so as to gather data from various sources to ensure data triangulation and a balanced and insightful report.

Desk research covered review of existing secondary data from various available sources (e.g., project documents, progress and annual reports, financial reports, project steering committee meeting minutes, communication materials as well as relevant national strategies and policies, MoU and agreements and so on), and identification of further data needs and gap. A gender length was applied throughout this process (e.g., taking note of gender-disaggregated data).

Primary data collection and sampling were conducted through methods such as key stakeholder interviews (see list of key stakeholders interviewed in Annex 4) and participant observation at key project meetings and conferences. The list targeted a representative group of key actors/stakeholders as identified in the ToR, including tripartite partners (the donor side, the implementing agency and the recipient government) and a range of other project stakeholders and social partners. The rationale for this selection was to gather perspectives and feedback across the donor-implementer-beneficiary spectrum to ensure robust triangulation of findings. The evaluation did not undertake specific site visits, given the focus on national policy-level engagements, but key project event/activity was observed (e.g., EU-China international conference on social protection: protecting workers in the platform economy and new forms of employment). Key stakeholder interviews were semi-structured so as to generate practical insights, feedback and experiences of project stakeholders. The interview guide (see Annex 3) was tailored and developed with reference to the evaluation framework and questions, and list of key actors/stakeholders as identified in the ToR. The interviews also followed a gender-sensitive protocol and dimension.

Before starting each interview, the interviewer/evaluator clarified their commitments to relevant codes of conduct, notably its voluntary nature, non-attribution, anonymity and confidentiality requirements.

3.4 Analysis and reporting

At the data analysis stage, evaluative data collected from various sources were analysed and incorporated to address evaluation questions and link back to the evaluation criteria. This evaluation adopted the six-point scale rating (see below Table 2) based on the six OECD-DAC Criteria – *6 is highly satisfactory, 5 is satisfactory, 4 is moderately satisfactory, 3 is moderately unsatisfactory, 2 is unsatisfactory and 1 is highly unsatisfactory*.

Table 2: Six-point rating description

1= Highly unsatisfactory	2=Unsatisfactory	3=Somewhat unsatisfactory	4=Somewhat satisfactory	5=Satisfactory	6=Highly satisfactory
Findings related to the evaluation criterion shows that expected results have not been attained, and there have been important	Findings related to the evaluation criterion show that the objectives have not been attained, and the level of performance shows major shortcomings	Findings related to the evaluation criterion shows that the objectives have been partially attained, and the level of performance shows minor	Findings related to the evaluation criterion shows that the objectives have been partially attained and that the expected level of performance	Findings related to the evaluation criterion show that the objectives have been mostly attained, and the expected level of performance can be considered	Findings related to the evaluation criterion show that ILO performance related to that criterion has produced Outcomes which go beyond

shortcomings, and the resources have not been utilized effectively and/or efficiently	and are not fully considered acceptable in the view of the ILO national tripartite constituents, partners and beneficiaries.	shortcomings and are not fully considered acceptable in the view of the ILO national tripartite constituents, partners and beneficiaries	could be for the most part considered coherent with the expectations of the national tripartite constituents, beneficiaries and of the ILO itself	coherent with the expectations of the national tripartite constituents, beneficiaries and of the ILO itself	expectation, expressed specific comparative advantages and added value, and produced good practices
---	--	--	---	---	---

These ratings (e.g., Relevance = 5) were determined through a theory-based assessment and systematic triangulation of three main sources of evidence: (i) documentary analysis of project documentation, policy texts, and annual & progress reports; (ii) semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders representing the donor, implementing agency, and beneficiary groups; and (iii) participant observation at selected project meetings and events. Each evaluation criterion was assessed against predefined benchmarks derived from the Evaluation Question Matrix presented in the inception report, meantime keeping room for gathering emerging or unintended results/changes. In cases where evidence across sources was mixed or divergent, evaluative judgments were refined through stakeholder validation and debriefing discussions to ensure balance, credibility, and transparency.

Evidence gathered through the evaluation were triangulated across the various data sources to generate the ratings. This got validated at validation and debriefing workshop with key stakeholders (e.g., tripartite partners including MOHRSS, NHSA, CEC, ACFTU and the donor) to ensure a comprehensive perspective and to discuss the preliminary findings and lessons learned.

3.5 Limitations and reflections

Some of the criteria as applied in this evaluation can be broad in scope and by definition, priorities and even trade-off are needed given set timeline and resources in a real-time evaluation. For instance, largely rigorous assessment of the criterion ‘coherence’ may necessitate access to a large volume of policy documents, data and information¹² from both internal and external organizations related to the evaluation in the same policy context. This may be challenging in this evaluation, so priority was made to focus on main lines of inquiry.

Moreover, the concept and definition of ‘impact’ may vary in different evaluation contexts and with different stakeholders and users of evaluation, and that there are often multiple development actors working in the same context and policy space, sole attribution may remain a challenge. This evaluation therefore sought to identify contribution and progress towards impact rather than claiming attribution of achieving impact directly, consistent with the theory-based evaluation approach outlined in the inception report.

While endeavouring to make the most of the available resources in a real-time evaluation, as a project-level evaluation, this evaluation may be limited in its scope (with short timeframe and a single evaluator) relative to other more complex evaluations (e.g., at programme or strategic level) due to necessary prioritization of focus.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The evaluation complied with ILO’s evaluation norms and standards and followed ethical safeguards as specified in the ILO’s evaluation procedures – the ILO adheres to the United Nations (UN) system of evaluation norms and standards as well as to the OECD-DAC Evaluation Quality Standards.

¹² OECD (2021) *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

As mentioned in previous section, ethical standards and codes of conduct were followed throughout the empirical research stage including assuring respondents of voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. In addition, United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Code of Conduct for Evaluation and Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation served as good sources for references and guidance.

4. Findings

Findings are structured around the OECD criteria and link directly to the evaluation questions outlined in the evaluation question matrix. Ratings are generated following the aforementioned six-point rating and triangulation of multiple sources of evidence and means of validation and de-briefing consultations.

Relevance

Relevance Rating: 5 Relevant

The assessment of relevance focused on the project's alignment with China national priorities (14th Five-Year Plan, "common prosperity" agenda), and relevant ILO and EU policies and strategic direction. In general, during the project cycle, the project combined and linked closely with the principles and policies shared by China, the EU and the ILO.

Alignment with national priorities and needs of beneficiaries. Specifically, the rationale and the design of the project were highly relevant to the national social security policy priorities of the Chinese government. The national 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) set the goal of improving the multi-tier social security system that covers everyone, coordinates between urban and rural areas, and is equitable, unified and sustainable. MOHRSS further elaborated the specific measures and priorities in terms of five components: 1) Universal social security coverage; 2) Improved social security system; 3) Improve adjustment mechanisms of social security benefits; 4) Establish supervision mechanisms, improve fund management, risk prevention system, and maintain actuarial balance; 5) Enhance social security administration and services¹³. For instance, during phase 2, the project diverts more attention and resources to social security issues related to platform workers, in line with the updated national priorities. Following a demand-driven approach, the actuarial 'training of trainers' (TOT) responded to the beneficiaries' need for technical capacity strengthening in establishing sound projections and early warning systems through improved actuarial capabilities of the Social Insurance Administration department. This high level of alignment can be attributed to the appropriate identification of collaborating partners and constituents during the project design.

Alignment with the SDGs. The project objectives set out to contribute to SDG 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). It also helps address SDG 10.1 (income growth to those on the bottom 40%), SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-being (including SDG 3.8 on universal health coverage), SDG 5 on Gender Equality, as well as SDG 17 (Partnerships - contributing to strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development) through the tripartite partnerships among the ILO, EU and China¹⁴.

Alignment with the ILO, DWCP and UNSDCF priorities. The overall goal of the project links directly to the ILO vision for universal social protection – it calls for renewed efforts to extend social protection coverage to all, including workers in temporary, part-time and self-employment, as a key element of policies to promote the human right to social security, decent work and sustainable development. Desk review and stakeholder feedback both confirmed the high level of alignment of the project with the China DWCP 2023-2025 and the UNSDCF

¹³ CHN/22/02/EUR – Annex I – Description of the Action – Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2) (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)

¹⁴ Ibid

2021-2025. As the ILO's main instrument for engagement at the national level, the DWCP 2023-2025 itself is fully aligned and designed to support the implementation of decent work elements of China's 14th FYP and relevant national laws, policies, strategies and plans/priorities of relevant government agencies and constituents (e.g., MOHRSS, ACFTU and CEC). For instance, the project directly connects to the DWCP Country Priority 2 – promoting and extending social and labour protection in and out of the workplace. In addition, the DWCP is an integral part of the wider UNSDCF 2021-2025 in China which covers three strategic priorities of 1) People and Prosperity; 2) Planet; 3) Partnerships. The DWCP particularly responds to priorities 1) and 3). The overall goal and three specific objectives of the project correspond to these policies with its tripartite partnership model¹⁵¹⁶.

Links to relevant EU commitment and strategic direction. The project responds to the EU's continuous commitments to promote the decent work agenda globally, as indicated in its strategic documents such as the European Pillar of Social Rights' action plan (2021)¹⁷, the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide (2022)¹⁸ and the Communication on "The power of trade partnerships: together for green and just economic growth" (2022). This project also exemplifies the strong cooperation in the field of employment and social issues between China and the EU. This corresponds to the EU global strategy on international collaboration that calls on the EU support to partner countries to strengthen inclusive growth, for instance, through skills development, creation of decent jobs, social protection, and economic empowerment of disadvantaged groups.

During interviews, project beneficiaries stressed the high level of relevance of the project and valued the practical support provided, especially in terms of targeting specific capacity building needs, for instance, the conduct of the actuarial-related technical training and research studies.

"We initially expected to improve our actuarial capacity when joining the project, the project indeed provided such opportunity and supported a three-day actuarial training (and also others) conducted by international experts. Such trainings helped broaden our vision and strengthen our capacity through learning about the latest development and techniques in actuarial application in social security, this experience is much valued." (from key stakeholder interviews)

Despite the high level of alignment and relevance of the rationale and overall goal of the project, the links among different levels of results (outputs, specific objectives and impact) could be strengthened to ensure more smooth and logical pathways and transition. For example, one of the specific objectives and its indicator are respectively set as 'Promotion of China's ratification of relevant international conventions' and 'Number of ILO international social security conventions with the formal ratification process initiated during the project lifecycle, with a specific focus on C102'¹⁹. Desk research (considering both project phase 1 and 2) and stakeholder consultation/feedback revealed that this could be relatively broad in scope and less easy-to-measure result. This has implications for the project design in terms of taking a more nuanced and pragmatic approach in this regard.

¹⁵ ILO (2023) *Decent Work Country Programme for China 2023-2025*

¹⁶ United Nations (2020) *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the People's Republic of China 2021-2025*

¹⁷ https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-pillar-social-rights-building-fairer-and-more-inclusive-european-union/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1187

¹⁹ CHN/22/02/EUR – Revised LogFrame_1Nov_V4

Coherence

Coherence Rating: 5 Coherent

The assessment of this criterion is Coherent, given the high level of interest and engagement among stakeholders, the value addition of the tripartite partnership through complementarity and synergy forged, as well as the effective leveraging and coordination of partnerships. The project also indicated flexibility in terms of adaptation to evolving context and priorities.

The ILO is well integrated within the UN system and in the meantime collaborates and coordinates externally with other development partners to promote labour standards and social dialogue with its long-established tripartite model and instruments. Under such working mode, effectively coordinating and leveraging partnerships among national and regional partners, various constituents and other international institutions is key to fulfil the set objectives and maximize the potential for impact of interventions. In this project, the tripartite core partnership among the ILO, China and the EU has been highly valued by all stakeholders. Given the high level of relevance and alignments to the priorities and strategic direction of the tripartite partners, the project generated continuous high level of interest and engagement among various groups of stakeholders²⁰. There was consensus that this partnership model is key for achieving the project goal and adds considerable value with its complementarity and synergy through trilateral dialogue, learning and exchanges of technical expertise, experiences and best practices. Stakeholders generally perceived leveraging and coordination of partnerships as effective with high level of commitment and professionalism of project staff – being responsive and capable in project delivery and communication. The inclusive and participatory mechanisms (e.g., sustained dialogue, regular project and PSC meetings, seminars, study visits) of involving various stakeholders and fostering ownership were also valued.

In terms of adaptation to the external challenges, though the COVID-19 (faced in phase 1) did not affect this project cycle, there have been evolving challenges possibly impacting social security systems, including those arising from the growth of the digital economy and platform employment, as well as from climate change. The digital economy has become a crucial driving force for economic development in China and digital transformation is seen as a critical strategy for future development. New forms of employment including platform employment have become a key source of job opportunities and contribute to keeping overall employment stable²¹. Under this context and building on phase 1, the project ensured continuity and meantime sought to adapt some of its project strategies in line with updated policy priority such as on platform workers-related social security benefits. This is evident from the statement of the project Specific Objective 2, and accordingly, relevant resources were allocated to support specific project activities contributing to this objective.

In addition, climate change has been a key topic of global concern and a key factor impacting on all development endeavours. In response, and in ILO context, the ILO adopted a set of guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all²². The realization of a just transition requires quality employment, adequate social protection and undiminished fundamental rights at work. In this project, ILO provided technical support by bringing in a technical officer specialised on the nexus of social protection and

²⁰ Here refers to a wider range of stakeholders involved in the partnership: participants from the ILO, the EU (EU delegation and member countries), China national-level and social partners (e.g., policy makers, implementing agencies, workers' and employers' organizations, research and academic institutions and etc.)

²¹ CHN/22/02/EUR – Annex I – Description of the Action – Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2) (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)

²² ILO (2015) *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all*. Geneva.

climate change to facilitate the just transition element of the project²³. In the social protection field in China, just transition is a relatively new concept, the project invested in orienting stakeholders through workshop (first ever on just transition & social protection in China), research/case studies as well as publicised policy brief on just transition. During interviews, stakeholders reflected that these efforts helped update/renew their knowledge base and bridge their working area and norm with prevalent international practice and discourse outside the local context. These evidence indicate ILO's capacity in adapting to the evolving contexts.

'The project work on this topic (just transition) provides a unique opportunity to engage wider stakeholders, including other ministries and academics, to build a common understanding among project partners and beyond.' (cited from year 1 Annual Report, showing timely recognition of emerging themes or trends)

The tripartite partnership is recognized as a valuable model. Meanwhile, the involved tripartite processes demand considerable time and resources in communication, coordination and organization of various project activities, especially when engaging major development actors such as the three partners/entities in this project. This has implications not only for assessing the project efficiency and effectiveness, but also for the project design in terms of factoring in these potential challenges and reality.

Efficiency

Efficiency Rating: 5 Efficient

The assessment of this criterion (Efficient) shows overall efficiency, both in terms of the use of financial resources to deliver planned project activities towards achieving set objectives and maintaining essential daily operation, and in the dimension of the use of time. This assessment covers financial data between February 2023 to January 2026.

The Project operated in an efficient manner. There were general positive observations among stakeholders that the project operation and management processes were efficient. Resources were properly structured, allocated and disbursed in a timely manner and in line with the strategic planning and project priorities. This helped ensure the stable and confident operation of the project in various aspects. The communication among project team and project stakeholders was smooth and responsive. There had been no (major) delays occurred during the project implementation cycle; though the recruitment process of the project manager took certain time, project activities got conducted as planned, indicating temporal-efficiency of the resources.

The evaluator conducted participant observation at one of the key project conferences titled 'EU-China International Conference on Social Protection: Protecting Workers in the Platform Economy and New Forms of Employment' (19 November 2025). It exemplified the efficient coordination of key project events and usage of resources – compact venue, limited human resources involved, comprehensive meeting agenda in a relatively short timeframe, diversified groups of participants (e.g., from EU Headquarters, EU delegation in China and member states, ILO, Chinese line ministerial officials, relevant implementing agencies, employers' and workers' organizations, research and academic institutions and etc.).

It is evident that the financial and budget-related records and information were well-documented following relevant ILO and EU policies, requirements and procedures. Financial documentation and records cover detailed description of purpose, allocation and usage by year and by budget categories and sub-categories, with detailed justifications for the budgeting

²³ Project activity 1.3 is specifically related to social protection & climate change: Recommendations on the adaptation of social protection in order to make it responsive to climate change.

basis and rationale. During project implementation, annual certified financial statements were produced with details on 1) project activity-specific budget and expenditure, as well as corresponding outputs; 2) cost in relation to project management and technical support (covering personnel, travel, office operation, PSC meetings, monitoring & evaluation (M&E expenses)²⁴²⁵.

Project budget was used efficiently in line with budget categories. Financial flows look smooth and organized. The initial budget allocation has been expended gradually over the project period. The expenditure as of the time of the evaluation (9 December 2025) was \$1746,763, 81% of the total allocated amount (as indicated in Figure 2). The breakdown of expenditure by year is shown in below Table 3 (as of 15 January 2026). No major budget adjustment occurred during the project cycle. Project expenditure was in line with budget categories and was used efficiently.

Figure 2: Indication of total budget allocation and expenditure to date (as of 9 December 2025)



Source: <https://webapps.ilo.org/DevelopmentCooperationDashboard/#btk5eeb> (as of 9 December 2025)

Table 3: Breakdown of expenditure by project year (as of 15 January 2026)

Total allocation	2,156,431.12 USD
Expenditure 2023	355,631.02 USD
Expenditure 2024	734,671.26 USD
Expenditure 2025	827,052.74 USD
Total expenditure (01/02/2023 to 31/12/2025)	1,917,355.02 USD (89% of the allocation)

Source: Updated project document (year 3 project summary, as of 15 January)

In addition to the main source of funding, the project also received in-kind or financial support from Chinese partners, such as sponsoring the event venues and facilities for the 1st and 2nd PSC meetings and the CALSS validation workshop, as well as sponsoring the participation of two CALSS researchers during the study visit to Europe.

²⁴ CHN/22/02/EUR – Financial Statement for Income and Expenditure for the period February 2023 - January 2024 (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)

²⁵ CHN/22/02/EUR – Financial Statement for Income and Expenditure for the period February 2023 - January 2025 (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)

Effectiveness

Effectiveness Rating: 5 Effective

Evidence show project activities were conducted as planned and yielded results that fulfilled the contractual obligations and output-level indicators, contributing towards specific objectives, regardless of external challenges arising from the megatrends.

This evaluation adopted a theory-based evaluation approach (with some logic of contribution analysis), utilizing the project theory of change and logical framework to facilitate the assessment of the effectiveness criterion. It meantime kept room for accommodating and gathering emerging changes resulted from the project endeavour. Below Table 4 presents a summary review of progress/results achieved so far towards planned objectives (at Output & Specific Objective level).

Table 4: Review of progress/results towards achieving set/planned objectives²⁶

Specific objectives (SO)	Indicators at SO level & output (OP) level	Progress/results (accumulative) at output and SO level (as of the time of evaluation)
Specific objective 1: <i>Chinese Social Protection System improved, in line with ILO and international standards, with an emphasis on the development of universal social security by the Chinese authorities.</i>	Number of legal reforms ²⁷ introduced in China in the field of social security aligned with the ILS during the lifecycle of the project, as a result of policy recommendations emerging from the project-supported research pieces on social security.	2023: 0; 2024: 1; 2025: 2. Total: 2 China is actively advancing social security reform to extend the social security coverage in particular for workers in new forms of employment. In September 2024, MOHRSS introduced measures to improve access to social insurance schemes and benefits, including enabling flexible workers to participate in basic urban employee pension insurance at their workplace. In July 2025, MOHRSS announced the expansion of the occupational injury insurance pilot programme for platform workers, from seven platform companies across seven provinces to an additional ten provinces. By 2026, the programme will be rolled out nationwide, covering all platform enterprises in three sectors: ride-hailing, rapid delivery, and intra-city freight. The initiative is expected to extend to platform companies in other industries by 2027. The Project has supported the development of two technical studies (Activity 1.2), requested by MOHRSS, aimed at enhancing social security for workers in new forms of employment. These studies focus on extending unemployment protection and improving the adequacy of pension benefits. They address the policy concern in China regarding the enhancement of social security for over 200 million workers engaged in flexible employment, particularly platform workers. Drawing on international best practices, especially from EU member states through technical exchanges, the studies provide in-depth policy analysis and actionable recommendations to inform evidence-based policymaking.
Activity 1.1: <i>Actuarial capacity of the MOHRSS and its</i>	OP2 - Number of participants in the events	Target (accumulative): 2023: 20 (OP2); 80% (OP3); 1 (OP8)

²⁶ Evidence gathered from the project log frame, annual and progress reports and etc.

²⁷ In the project context, "legal reforms" might refer to statutory reforms, introduction of new mechanism to enhance efficiency in implementation of social security benefits or introduction of new definition for target groups resulting in expanded social security system's coverage and etc.

provincial branches strengthened	organised/supported (disaggregated by sex) OP3 - Percentage of participants in the events who report having benefited from the events organised/supported OP8 - Number of knowledge-based products developed	2024: 20 (OP2); 80% (OP3); 1 (OP8) 2025: 20 (OP2); 80% (OP3); 1 (OP8) Achievement: Total: 70 (OP2); 100% (OP3); 2 (OP8) 70 participants got trained (31 women and 39 men) and 2 training material packages validated and ready for future use
Activity 1.2: Recommendations on improving the adequacy, sustainability and coverage of the pension and unemployment insurance system in China formulated in consultation with the government and social partners and benefiting from EU experience	OP1-Number of events organized or supported OP8 - Number of knowledge-based products developed	Target (accumulative): 2023: 0 (OP1); 0 (OP8) 2024: 1 (OP1); 1 (OP8) 2025: 2 (OP1); 2 (OP8) Achievement: Total: 2 (OP1); 2 (OP8) At least 2 technical studies and 2 technical discussions/seminars.
Activity 1.3: Recommendations on the adaptation of social protection in order to make it responsive to climate change	OP1-Number of events organized or supported OP2 - Number of participants in the events organised/supported (disaggregated by sex) OP8 - Number of knowledge-based products developed OP10 - Number of communication products developed	Target (accumulative): 2023: 0 (OP1); 0 (OP2); 0 (OP8); 0 (OP10) 2024: 1 (OP1); 50 (OP2); 1 (OP8); 4 (OP10) 2025: 1 (OP1); 50 (OP2); 1 (OP8); 4 (OP10) Achievement: Total: 1 (OP1); 29 (OP2); 4 (OP8); 4 (OP10) At least 1 consolidated report published and available online in English and Chinese and 4 podcasts; 1 workshop with 29 participants (12 women and 17 men)
Specific objectives 2: Support to the reform process by providing information on the EU approach and sharing global, particularly EU, expertise, with Chinese policy makers in the field of social security, pensions and platform workers; enhance the EU-China dialogues and cooperation on employment, social affairs and inclusion, in line with the external dimension of European Pillar of Social Rights and its action plan (2021) and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide (2022).	Number of study visits to EU member countries and technical exchange sessions between Chinese Constituents and EU experts, including international conferences, materialized during the lifecycle of the project. Key experiences gathered, documented, and incorporated as technical inputs on aspects related to the intended policy reforms on the field of social security in China.	2023: 0; 2024: 1; 2025: 3. Total: 3 The Project supported technical exchanges between China, the EU, and its member states on extending social security to platform workers. The project organized a study visit to Belgium and Spain in June 2024 and an online technical meeting with Portugal in May 2024. Experiences and learnings gathered from these activities contributed to the development of the two technical studies and relevant policy recommendations. In 2025, the project further supported technical exchanges through a study visit to Poland and Germany, focusing on social protection strategies that support a just transition for workers in coal-dependent communities affected by the gradual phase-out of coal-related activities. The insights and information gained during the visit informed the development of a technical study on this emerging topic in China and contributed to preliminary policy recommendations aimed at ensuring adequate protection for affected workers
Activity 2.1: Increasing knowledge on international best practices on key themes affecting the future of social security, with a particular focus on the EU experiences	OP1-Number of events organized or supported OP2 - Number of participants in the events organised/supported (disaggregated by sex)	Target (accumulative): 2023: 1 (OP1); 30 (OP2); 0 (OP3); 2 (OP8) 2024: 2 (OP1); 60 (OP2); 70% (OP3); 5 (OP8) 2025: 2 (OP1); 60 (OP2); 70% (OP3); 5 (OP8)

	OP3 - Percentage of participants in the events who report having benefited from the events organised/supported OP8 - Number of knowledge-based products developed	Achievement: Total: 5 (OP1); 28 (OP2)²⁸; 100% (OP3); 3 (OP8) 5 sessions (including trainings, technical sessions, exchange dialogues) and additionally supported stakeholder participation in relevant regional and international events. 3 case studies on good practices produced
Activity 2.2: <i>Promotion of exchange between Chinese experts and EU member states</i>	OP1-Number of events organized or supported OP2 - Number of participants in the events organised/supported (disaggregated by sex) OP3 - Percentage of participants in the events who report having benefited from the events organised/supported	Target (accumulative): 2023: 0 (OP1); 0 (OP2); 0 (OP3) 2024: 1 (OP1); 10 (OP2); 80% (OP3) 2025: 2 (OP1); 100 (OP2); 80% (OP3) Achievement: Total: 4 (OP1); 117 (OP2); N/A 4 events including 2 study visits to EU countries, 1 technical meeting and 1 international conference; 117 participants supported in project events (including 60 women and 57 men)
Activity 2.3: <i>Support capacity building on the use of tax-benefit microsimulation model for China, using EUROMOD model as an example (NEW)²⁹</i>	Specific capacity-building effort	In April 2025, the project organized a technical training on EUROMOD tax-benefit microsimulation model (first such training) in China, benefiting 12 participants.
Specific objectives 3: <i>Promotion of China's ratification of relevant international conventions.</i>	Number of ILO international social security conventions with the formal ratification process initiated during the project lifecycle, with a specific focus on C102 (Social Security Minimum Standards).	2023: 0; 2024: 0; 2025: 1. Total: 1 There are evident signs that the project has contributed to building the platform and opportunities for stakeholders to learn about relevant international conventions (e.g., C102). However, it is also recognised that there remain challenges in this regard. For example, one of the main barriers identified for the ratification of C102 is the prevalent practice of out-of-pocket expenses for maternal medical care in China. To address this, the project supported Chinese participation in the ITC-ILO³⁰ training on universal health protection and facilitated the development of a technical report on extending social health protection in China, as well as the ILO Brief "Good Practices in Enhancing Maternity Protection in China," which documented progress in closing existing gaps. Two technical seminars held in 2024 and 2025 sustained momentum among Chinese tripartite partners, fostering a deeper understanding of C102 requirements and discussions on necessary policy adjustments to align with ILS. These efforts contribute towards promoting the understanding of relevant ILS and identifying policy areas for improvement in China. They have laid a solid foundation for further technical dialogue with the Chinese government, not only towards the potential ratification of C102, but more

²⁸ It shall be noted that instead of organizing large-scale events (initial targets of 30 participants by Year 1 and 60 by Year 2), the project revised the approach to benefit more targeted audience to facilitate in-depth learning and exchanges.

²⁹ Adjustment made to address emerging needs under the original project framework.

³⁰ International Training Centre of the ILO (ITC-ILO)

		importantly, towards advancing China's social security system as the ultimate goal.
Activity 3.1: <i>Enhancing knowledge on International Labour Standards, including C.102 and other relevant social security related ILS</i>	OP8 - Number of knowledge-based products developed	Target (accumulative): 2023: 1 (OP8); 2024: 2 (OP8); 2025: 2 (OP8). Achievement: Total: 3 The project produced Chinese version of the Toolkit on ILO Social Security Standards (Year 1), Publication on "China's experience in pursuing universal health coverage" (Year 2), ILO Brief "Good practices in enhancing maternity protection in China" (Year 3)

As the above Table shows, project activities were conducted as planned and yielded results that fulfilled the output-level indicators, which then contributed considerably towards specific objectives³¹. Document review and stakeholder interviews revealed positive feedback about the results being achieved in fulfilling the contractual obligations and set targets, especially with a small team of three staff working primarily on the project at ILO Beijing office. It is considered effective 1) particularly from the project delivery and management perspective; and 2) given the nature of the project with a strong focus/element on capacity-building and strengthening³². Stakeholders (from the direct beneficiary group in particular) rated highly about the support received from the project and resulting changes in their technical capacity and knowledge, perception and improved work practice. These achieved results are highly valued in capacity building-focused projects.

While there exist logical links among different levels of results, from looking at the progress/results achieved so far and the original intervention model, the link between project activities and outputs appears logically stronger than that between outputs and specific objectives (outcomes). In another words, there remains room for extra 'middle or intermediary steps' between outputs and specific objectives. Or alternatively, a narrower scope and more concrete articulation of specific objectives may help strengthen the logical links and transition among results, especially between the output and SO level. This observation corresponds to what was mentioned in the Relevance section – the construction and setup of SOs as intermediary results are critical for directing the project resources and efforts towards maximizing the potential impact of the project in a realistic manner. This has implications for not only project design but also the assessment of progress/achievements. For example, SO1 indicators point to the 'number of legal reforms introduced in China in the field of social security aligned with the ILS during the lifecycle of the project'; SO3 aims at promoting the ratification of relevant international conventions and corresponding indicator was set as 'number of ILO international social security conventions with the formal ratification process initiated during the project lifecycle'. Realizing legal reforms and formal ratification of relevant international convention can be both gradual, long and complex process. It involves many different actors and factors such as political will and status quo in various aspects (e.g., social, economic and political situation, emerging trends and challenges) in local context, as well as a gradual evidence-generating process leading to evidence-based policy change. Showing direct significant and tangible results in this regard may be challenging in certain timeframe. This was taken into consideration when looking at the progress/contribution made so far towards these preset objectives and indicators.

³¹ There were agreed adjustments as noted in Table 4, addressing emerging needs with room of flexibility.

³² Here mentioning both capacity building and strengthening indicates both new and continued learnings following phase 1.

Desk research, stakeholder feedback and participant observation found several facilitating and success factors such as high level of relevance, sustained interest and ownership among project partners, effective project management and coordination, as well as a demand-driven approach in responding to specific beneficiary needs. This will be further elaborated in the Lessons Learned and Good Practices section.

There also remain common challenges for all tripartite partners resulted from the evolving conditions, such as the growth of the digital economy, platform employment, climate change and artificial intelligence (AI). These are megatrends and can be tough and persistent challenges, there have not been adequate experiences accumulated as references, particularly in the social security sector as in this project context. Further in-depth exploration of responsive and effective measures will take considerable time and resources to generate sufficient evidence through front-line practice and follow-up research. Looking forward, these main challenges may possibly lead to further shift in policy focus and corresponding adjustment of resources and inputs.

In relation and looking retrospectively at the assumed risks³³ during the project planning stage, no major risks occurred thus not impacting on the project implementation and its outcomes. Initial assumptions and conditions³⁴ turned out to remain valid and no major unexpected changes or adjustment had been made. However, though there had been smooth continuity between project phase 1 & 2, and the pandemic no longer affected the project delivery, it might impact on the quantity and quality/depth of international case studies and references available (those from the duration of pandemic) for research purpose.

Impact (progress/contribution towards impact)

Impact Rating: 5 Satisfactory

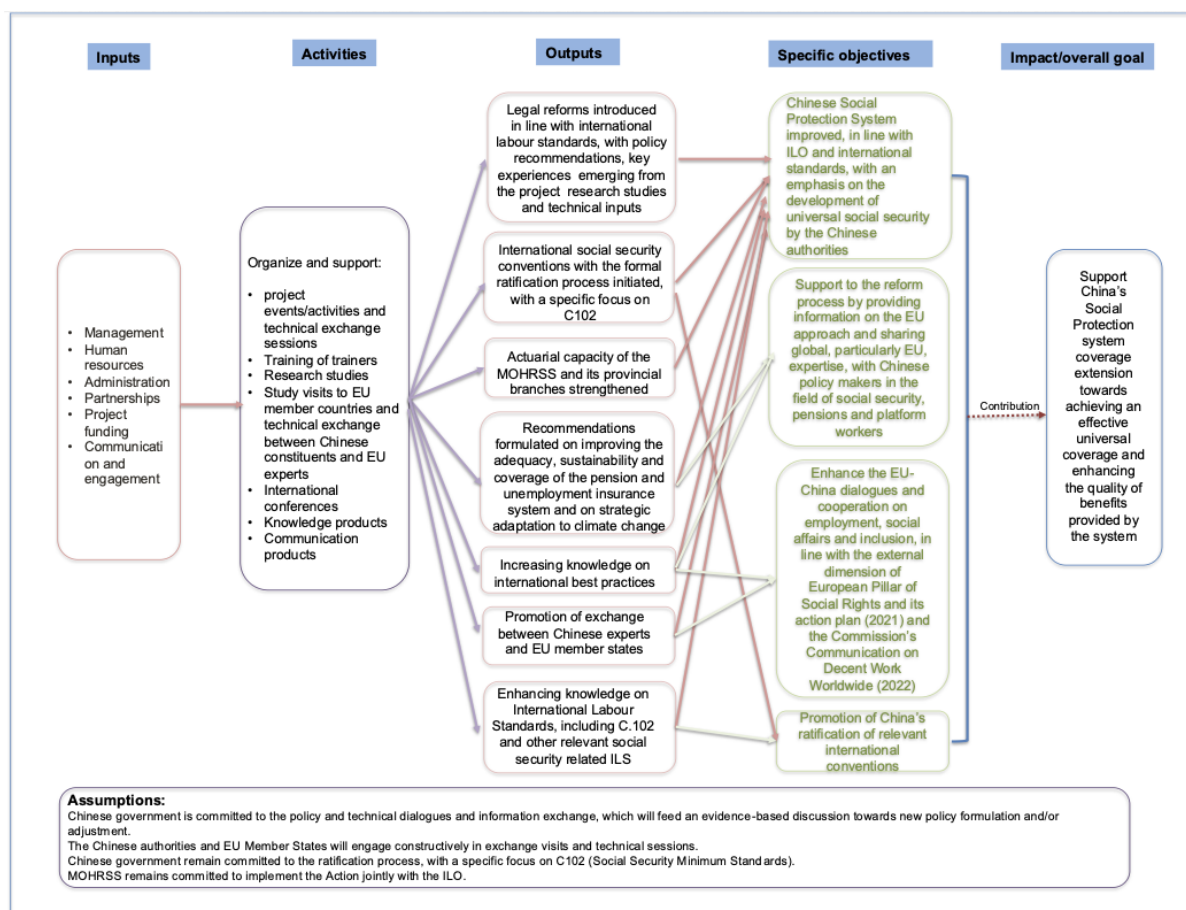
The assessment of this criterion, as the Section title indicates, looks at contribution towards impact. With various evidence and signs showing contributions and pathways leaning towards impact and given the nature of this type of project and its specific context and inherent challenges, it is rated Satisfactory (5).

The overarching goal and impact of this project was set out to support China's social protection system coverage extension towards achieving an effective universal coverage and enhancing the quality of benefits provided by the system. The theory of change (reconstructed with the original intervention logic) helped facilitate the assessment of this criterion. As briefly mentioned in previous sections, achieving this overarching goal entails synergies, collective and coherent actions among a wide range of institutions and development actors (e.g., at international, national and local level); and there are many contextual factors influencing the pathways of change. It therefore remains challenging to attribute changes or achievements in the social protection system solely to a single project or to seek direct causal relations. This evaluation thus applied a 'contribution' rather than 'attribution' length to evidence progress and contributions made towards achieving the expected ultimate project goal/impact, as illustrated by the dotted line between specific objectives and impact in the ToC (see below Figure 3).

Figure 3: Theory of change (adapted)

³³ CHN/22/02/EUR – Annex I – Description of the Action – Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2) (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701); CHN/22/02/EUR – Revised LogFrame_1Nov_V4

³⁴ Ibid



Source: reconstructed by the evaluator with the original intervention logic

Progress and contribution towards achieving impact is evident. As the ToC shows, there are logical connections along the results chain and among project activities, outputs and specific objectives, these then collectively effected changes towards the intended impact. Desk research and stakeholder feedback revealed that the project has contributed towards intended impact in terms of: 1) improved technical capacity of direct beneficiaries, broadened vision and perception, and improved work practice following project capacity building activities, learnings from EU experiences/practices, and relevant ILO international standards; 2) fostering sustained tripartite partnership, dialogue and highly positive working relationships among partners; 3) consolidation and dissemination of research and knowledge products, policy-relevant publications (bilingual) – contributing to building the evidence base towards evidence-based policy making and for wider influence among audiences beyond the project. For example, according to the updated project website information and statistics report³⁵, there had amounted to 36,341 downloads of project publications as of 1 December 2025 (e.g., quarterly social security policy monitor, policy briefs on just transition and good practices/experiences on China social security extension and universal health coverage³⁶). This also indicates the efforts made towards mutual learning by sharing relevant experiences and practices in China. There is opportunity for increased impact through further dissemination of the documents developed, both at national and international level. It is also worth mentioning that the project made a positive step by bringing in policy dialogues on maternity medical benefit, this has positive gender implications for achieving gender-sensitive impact in a longer term if the project continues.

³⁵ CHN/22/02/EUR – Website Information Statistics Report (as of 7 December 2025)

³⁶ <https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/collection-eu-china-project-quarterly-social-security-policy-monitors>

Document review and stakeholder interviews also indicated a certain degree of policy influence achieved by this project. For instance, new measures were announced by MOHRSS in September 2024 to promote the protection of the rights and interests of workers in flexible employment and new forms of employment. This had integrated policy analysis and recommendations from two technical studies conducted in the project which focused on new forms of employment and platform workers and drew on international best practices, especially from the EU. Overall, stakeholders considered positively about the contributions made towards the overarching goal, especially given the long-term and gradual nature and process of policy/regulation related changes and the capacity building instrument, and relatively longer timespan taken for complying and fulfilling respective organizational procedures of tripartite partners/entities. There is also an influencing factor of transferability and adaptability of international experiences/learnings into local context, plus the timescale it may take. In this regard, the project certainly contributed to fostering constructive policy environment and building valuable knowledge base – laying solid foundation informing further evidence-based research and policy making, and more concrete actions on the ground. For example, specific piloting initiatives with social partners (e.g., enterprises) may likely lead to more tangible and rapid results in each timeframe.

Sustainability

Sustainability Rating: 5 Sustainable

The assessment of sustainability focused on the level of likelihood of sustainability and sought evidence and indications that have potentials leading to sustainability. It is rated Sustainable as the project endeavour and its achieved results so far are considered highly likely sustainable and have built solid foundation for further follow-up and continuity. The rationale and observations are as follows:

- **Strengthened technical capacity, perception and knowledge base at both institutional and individual level are sustainable assets** and will impact on improving social security-related work practice and capabilities for a long term. This can be seen from stakeholder feedback that they (training participants) benefited largely from trainings such as on actuarial practice and the just transition workshop and expected such activities will continue to reach wider groups of beneficiaries.
- **Established platform and mechanism for tripartite dialogue and good working relationship and networks are sustainable.** This helped build solid foundation for pursuing further open dialogue and collaboration with new phase of the same project or in other multilateral or bilateral forms. Beyond this project, the exemplary tripartite partnership model is worth being replicated elsewhere in other development projects and contexts.
- **Accumulated experiences & learnings** (both tangible through documentations/knowledge products and publications, and less tangible in terms of mindset, perception and buy-in) **are sustainable building blocks** for evidence generation eventually leading to evidence-based policy making.

According to stakeholder feedback, results achieved from this project are most likely to be sustained when they get transferred to the introduction of a pilot/demonstration project, while meantime sustaining policy-level commitment and support. There are sustained appetite and interest in seeing more concrete and direct actions with extended groups of beneficiaries such as social partners (e.g., enterprises) and front-line practitioners. In relation to this, some stakeholders contributed tentative follow-up ideas of piloting initiatives or case studies on platform workers-related social security benefits (e.g., work injury insurance and pension).

Moreover, to maximize the potential for sustaining the project results, it is critical to fully utilize the core strength of the ILO approach – the tripartite dialogue and social dialogue mechanism

– through constantly and effectively engaging government, employers and workers, in addition to the well-established tripartite pillar of the EU, ILO and China partnership. Another common determining factor for sustainability is the availability of financial resources, further exploration of any potential or possibilities for co-sharing such support is underway.

Cross-cutting issues (gender consideration)

In a broader sense, in this specific project context in China, social security-related policies have taken an inclusive approach and pursue the universal coverage – ‘leaving no one behind’ – principle, as reflected in various relevant policy statements and the overarching goal of this project³⁷. Specifically in this project, **there are evident signs that the project endeavoured to embed and reflect a gender perspective** where possible^{38,39,40,41}. For example, the project maintained a gender inclusion and analytical length in its project activities as well as outputs and specific objectives, as respectively demonstrated by relevant examples in below Table 5 and gender-disaggregated results in Table 4.

Table 5: Extracted examples/evidence on gender consideration in project activities

Illustrative examples on gender-disaggregated data & analysis				
Project activities	Number of female participants	Participation rate by gender	Number of male participants	Participation rate by gender
ToT on actuarial practice in social security pension (May 2023)	12	43%	16	57%
Actuarial training (April 2025)	17	44%	22	56%
EUROMOD Training (April 2025) and the subsequent survey for feedback	9	75%	3	25%
Technical seminar titled “Social protection responsive to climate change in China” (April 2024)	12	41%	17	58%
Technical seminar on international social security standards (C102) (May 2024)	11	46%	13	54%

These examples indicate a tendency towards gender-balanced representation in specific project activities, when applicable and feasible. In addition, annual reports explicitly included a ‘gender equality’ section and presented gender-disaggregated results. Other training reports, knowledge and research products also presented gender consideration when relevant data may be available. Moreover, during phase 2, with the progress made on promoting C102 ratification, the project explicitly supported and brought in discussions and dialogue focused on maternity medical benefit. This helps contribute to improving gender equality in social

³⁷ CHN/22/02/EUR – Annex I – Description of the Action – Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2) (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701); CHN/22/02/EUR – Revised LogFrame_1Nov_V4

³⁸ CHN/22/02/EUR – ILO, 2024, Progress Report – Improving China's Institutional Capacity towards Universal Social Protection (Phase 2), 1 February 2023 - 31 January 2024

³⁹ CHN/22/02/EUR – ILO, 2025, Progress Report – Improving China's Institutional Capacity towards Universal Social Protection (Phase 2), 1 February 2024 – 31 January 2025

⁴⁰ CHN/22/02/EUR – ILO, 2025, Actuarial Training Report – Training for Actuarial Work in Social Security, 22-25 April 2025, Beijing

⁴¹ CHN/22/02/EUR – ILO, 2025, Training Report – EUROMOD Training, 28-30 April 2025, Beijing

security. Interview informants confirmed their observation that the project adopted a gender dimension in activities and events.

It is also worth noting that in this project phase, the direct beneficiaries are mainly a relatively small number of national policy-level stakeholders, and as mentioned in the Impact Section, there remains challenge in attributing impact-level results (including those gender-specific impact) among larger populations to this project directly. It would be more applicable and feasible then to incorporate gender-related impact-level results in the next phase if the project continues and if the project extends the chain of actors to a larger number of direct beneficiaries from wider groups of actors (e.g., ultimate beneficiaries such as workers).

The project also embedded ILO's tripartite social dialogue mechanism, involving stakeholders from government agencies/departments (MOHRSS and its affiliated departments), employers' (CEC) as well as worker's organizations (ACFTU). CEC and ACFTU are also key members of the PSC. This unique mechanism in local project context helped ensure that voices from different groups of stakeholders got heard during various stages of the project cycle. It is also key to take an adaptive approach to look at these cross-cutting issues in specific project context.

5. Conclusions

Overall, the project has performed well across all the evaluation criteria. This overall assessment shall be understood and contextualised with these factors: 1) the long-term and gradual nature and process of policy/regulation-related changes and the capacity-building/strengthening instrument; 2) the transferability and adaptability of international experiences/learnings into local country context with varied political, social and economic situation as well as demographic features; 3) timescale and efforts taken for complying and fulfilling respective organizational procedures of three major tripartite partners/entities.

The project design was relevant. It demonstrated high level of alignment and responsiveness to national priorities and strategic directions of tripartite partners, such as China national 14th Five-Year Plan 2021-2025, ILO's vision for universal social protection through renewed efforts to extend the coverage to all, as well as EU's continuous commitments to promote the decent work agenda globally and its international collaboration strategy. The project also linked directly to the priorities of DWCP, UNDCSF and contributed to the SDGs.

The project adopted a demand-driven approach focusing on direct beneficiaries' needs for capacity building and strengthening. The design of the project was meantime considered relatively ambitious with comparatively broad scope (e.g., intended outcome and impact-level results) in a set timeframe given the gradual and complex nature and processes of targeted areas of policy-related change. The links among different levels of results (outputs, specific objectives and impact) could be strengthened to ensure more smooth and logical pathways and transition.

The project showed high level of strategic coherence with the tripartite core partnership among the ILO, China and the EU with continuous high level of interest and engagement among various groups of stakeholders. The project support for leveraging partnerships and stakeholder engagement at all levels was valued for fostering dialogue, synergies and collaborations. The project adapted its strategies to include platform workers-related social security issue and just transition orientation in response to emerging trend and policy priority in this regard.

The tripartite partnership is recognized as a valuable model. Meanwhile, the involved tripartite processes demand considerable time and resources in communication, coordination and organization of various project activities, especially when engaging major development actors

such as the three partners/entities in this project. This has implications for the project design in terms of factoring in these potential challenges and reality.

The project operation was efficient in terms of proper resource structure and usage complying to relevant organizational requirements and procedures; timely project delivery and communication showing temporal-efficiency.

The project indicated evident signs of effectiveness in terms of progress and contribution made towards set objectives, as well as fulfilling contractual obligations in a timely manner; although some of the objectives may take longer time and process to show desired results given the relatively complex and non-linear pathways and multiple influencing factors involved.

Resulting changes in project beneficiaries' technical capacity and knowledge, perception and improved work practice, achieved from capacity building/strengthening efforts are valuable. It would better capture this type of results by setting corresponding indicators. This has implications for the project design of a potential following phase.

There exist logical links among different levels of results, from looking at the progress/results achieved so far and the original intervention model, the link between project activities and outputs appears logically stronger than that between outputs and specific objectives (outcomes). In another words, there remains room for extra 'middle or intermediary steps' between outputs and specific objectives. Or alternatively, a narrower scope and more concrete articulation of specific objectives may help strengthen the logical links and transition among results, especially between the output and SO level.

The project contributed and progressed positively towards achieving impact and showed considerable potential for sustainability. It strengthened technical capacities and changed perceptions, well fostered and sustained tripartite partnerships, dialogue and good working relationships, as well as consolidated and disseminated policy-relevant research and knowledge products. On this basis, more nuanced articulation of operational-level and measurable impact indicators and exploration of more mutually supportive mode (e.g., information exchange and cost-sharing) would help better achieve impact and sustainability if the project continues.

The project indicated positive signs in integrating gender consideration through trying to pursue a relative gender-balanced representation among project participants and applying a gender length in analysis and reporting. While there are relatively small number of direct beneficiaries in this project phase, it would help to include more explicit gender-specific results in the next phase if involving larger number of ultimate beneficiaries (e.g., workers). The project also utilized the tripartite social dialogue mechanism involving government, employers' and workers' organizations, further enhanced adoption of this approach would help achieve larger extent of effectiveness and stakeholders' expectations of seeing more concrete and tangible results on the ground.

6. Lessons learned and good practices

This section summarizes key lessons learned and good practices during the project cycle. Based on documentations in relation to project delivery and implementation as well as stakeholder experiences and feedback, this section highlights the facilitators/success factors and other positive or negative conditions/scenarios that may have affected or contributed to both successful results and challenges.

Lessons learned

Adaptation and transferability of new concepts, experiences and learnings. As mentioned in the Effectiveness section, there remain common challenges for all tripartite partners resulted from the evolving conditions and megatrends, such as the growth of the digital economy, platform employment, climate change and artificial intelligence (AI). Like other development actors and efforts, this project has started to explore solutions to respond to these conditions. The project showed flexibility and adapted strategies by including new focused policy areas such as social security benefits of platform workers, just transition concept and relevant technical expertise. Project beneficiaries gained valuable learnings from international (EU) experiences-sharing and exchanges, as well as improved technical capacities. It may then necessitate considerable efforts to adapt and transfer these benefits into locally-appliable actions (e.g., through further feasibility studies and piloting initiative) to maximize relevance and achieve concrete results with a pragmatic approach and perspective.

Consideration of the complex, long-term and gradual nature & process of policy changes. It is fully understandable and legitimate that project stakeholders expect to see maximized project impact through tangible results and changes. In this connection, it is also critical to consider the inherent nature of the type of projects with the aim of achieving policy and regulation-level changes – non-linear, relatively slow and gradual process involved. There are also other influencing factors including constantly evolving conditions and emerging challenges in both immediate and wider context and environment. This project can be seen as an example facing all these scenarios. The pursuit of these types of changes may be transferred with further breakdown to concrete initiatives (e.g., case study/pilot project) with concrete and measurable short-term and long-term milestones and indicators. This will help build the evidence base eventually leading to confident evidence-based policy making.

Good practices

Desk research, stakeholder interviews and participant observation found the following good practices and success factors:

1. High level of relevance and strategic coherence and sustained interest and ownership among tripartite partners (EU delegation & member states, ILO offices, Chinese counterparts) and project beneficiaries. This led to their continuous commitment and engagement through meaningful dialogue and active participation in project activities throughout the project cycle, contributing to maximizing the effect of the tripartite partnership model.

2. Effective project management and facilitation. Stakeholder interviews reflected that there were generally positive perceptions about: the project management efficiency (e.g., timely coordination and organization of various project events and activities); professionalism and capabilities of project staff; good working relationship being fostered; and inclusive and organized governance structure (e.g., the PSC includes stakeholders from the social partner group and holds meetings regularly for feedback).

3. Demand-driven and needs-based approach. The project kept on track of emerging trends and policy focus (e.g., phase 2 included platform workers and maternity related social security topics). Capacity building/strengthening support were tailored to beneficiaries' needs such as the well-received actuarial training following needs assessment and stakeholder consultation. On one hand, policy brief, knowledge and research products showed clear focus on key topics relevant to the project context in China; on another hand, the project facilitated in consolidating and sharing relevant China experiences with the international community. For instance, since China has the largest number of workers engaged in new forms of employment⁴², sharing

⁴² CHN/22/02/EUR – ILO, 2025, Progress Report – Improving China's Institutional Capacity towards Universal Social Protection (Phase 2), 1 February 2024 – 31 January 2025

experiences in this regard would benefit EU and other countries (there is appetite for such learning).

4. Strategic approach in terms of identifying the project entry point at national policy level. Drawing on ILO's unique tripartite partnership model and mechanisms, it helps activate national prioritization and coordination, consequently leading to higher level of coherence and synergy. Following this top-down approach, it helped obtain senior policy-level support through long policy dialogue and discussions, building solid foundation for proceeding to project-level piloting initiatives on the ground and construction of evidence base with practical first-hand data.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived directly from the evaluation findings, particularly those related to relevance, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, and are intended to inform future programming, including the potential design of phase 3.

1. Build on the momentum and learnings from the current project and take a nuanced and tailored approach to the design of a follow-up project.

- Update and revise the logical framework and theory of change to introduce 1) clearer intermediary outcomes and more measurable indicators that better reflect the gradual nature of policy reform processes; and 2) tailored and measurable indicators that can facilitate learning and performance tracking, including those qualitative indicators on capacity/behaviour changes resulted from capacity building efforts (if it remains a key project element).
- Re-think and re-orient the range of targeted project beneficiaries and needs. Stakeholder interviews reflected strong inclination that extended and more diversified groups of actors should be factored in the project design (maximize constituents' participation at all levels to enhance relevance and ownership, leading to long-term sustainability). For example, enhanced participation of social partners such as enterprises (e.g., Meituan or other similar ones) and selected ultimate beneficiary representation (e.g., platform workers) in project activities with replication/scale-up potential.
- Corresponding target/goal setting reflecting the long-term project ambition and vision, as well as detailed, achievable and measurable milestones along the pathways towards this vision. Gender-specific goal may be more explicitly set, especially when the project may involve a larger number of ultimate beneficiaries (e.g., platform workers or workers in other forms of employment) in the following phase. Document review and stakeholder feedback revealed the need of a more nuanced approach in establishing logically stronger links between each level of results (adjusting intermediary-level results and indicators if necessary).
- Integrate exit strategies and follow-up mechanisms early to help ensure sustainability (e.g., plans about how achieved results will be maintained and utilized within partner institutions, as processes and methodologies internalized by institutions are most likely to be sustained).

Responsible unit/s	Time implication	Priority	Resource implication
Project team, donor agency	Short-term	High	Medium

2. Support pilot project or sub-projects with potential for both policy and project-level impacts in terms of replication and scale-up possibilities and enhancement of sector-specific evidence base.

- Support practical pilot project or sub-projects, combining the top-down (well-established macro policy-level support gained from this project) and bottom-up (pilot project-based and involving ultimate beneficiaries) approach to generate solid practical and in-depth evidence to feedback into policy making. For example, suggested possibilities for piloting include demand-driven pilot initiative with social partners such as platform enterprises (e.g., Meituan) and workers in work injury-related social security benefits.
- Conduct feasibility and gap analysis in support of any piloting initiative.
- Equip piloting efforts with necessary technical support and regular monitoring to capture first-hand learning and experiences to be shared with other partners including EU and its member countries.

Responsible unit/s	Time implication	Priority	Resource implication
Project team, donor agency, national/local leading implementing agency	Long-term	Medium	High

3. Enhance mutual learning, benefits and influences in the project area

- Share China experiences (both achievement and challenges faced), especially given the fact that China has the largest number of workers engaging in new forms of employment, relevant initiatives and experiences in addressing social security benefits of these workers are of considerable value and interest to the international community. There is appetite from EU and its member countries to learn in this regard.
- Explore possibilities for shared contributions (in-kind or financial) towards achieving the project impact and wider influence.

Responsible unit/s	Time implication	Priority	Resource implication
Project team, line ministerial department and sub-units	Medium-term	Medium	Low

4. Continuous research, evidence generation and knowledge management

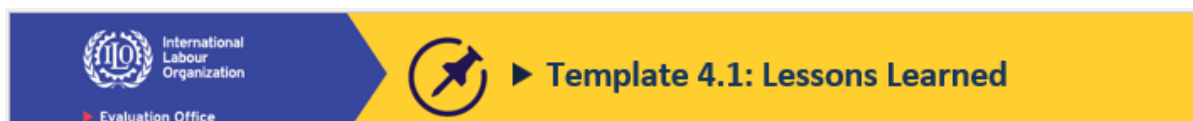
- Conduct feasibility studies on adaptability and transferability of international experiences and good practices in local context (e.g., via case studies).
- Capture timely monitoring and evaluation data and lessons learned on pilot project/s to accumulate evidence base and to inform future replication or scaling-up decision.
- Undertake independent complementary research, by ILO for example, if budget permits, to jointly reflect various facets of the reality in the project context that may impact on the project results.
- Keep track of dynamic policy changes and megatrends (e.g., sustainability of social security fund and ageing issue).

Responsible unit/s	Time implication	Priority	Resource implication
--------------------	------------------	----------	----------------------

Project team, ILO Headquarters, line ministerial department and sub-units	Medium-term	Medium	Medium
---	-------------	--------	--------

Annexes

Annex 1 Lessons learned



Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)

Final independent evaluation

Project DC/SYMBOL: CHN/22/02/EUR

Name of Evaluator: Ting Yang

Date: 10 January 2026

The following lesson learned has been identified during the evaluation. Further text explaining the lesson may be included in the full evaluation report.

LESSON LEARNED ELEMENT	TEXT
Brief description of lessons learned (link to specific action or task)	Adaptation and transferability of new concepts, experiences and learnings from EU and its member countries to local context
Context and any related preconditions	The demographic and political economy context of China is largely different from partner countries
Targeted users /Beneficiaries	Project team, donor agencies, and national policy-level stakeholders (social security-related department and research institutions)
Challenges /negative lessons - Causal factors	Different local context plus external megatrends of the growth of the digital economy, platform employment, climate change and artificial intelligence. It necessitates considerable efforts to adapt and transfer those capacity building and learning benefits into locally-appliable actions (e.g., through further feasibility studies and piloting initiative) to maximize relevance and achieve concrete results
Success / Positive Issues - Causal factors	The project showed flexibility and adapted strategies by including new focused policy areas such as social security benefits of platform workers, just transition concept and relevant technical expertise. Project beneficiaries gained valuable learnings from international (EU) experiences-sharing and exchanges, as well as improved technical capacities
ILO Administrative Issues (staff, resources, design, implementation)	This has implications for the project design and planning (e.g., resource allocation) to factor in these challenges and needs



Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)

Final independent evaluation

Project DC/SYMBOL: CHN/22/02/EUR

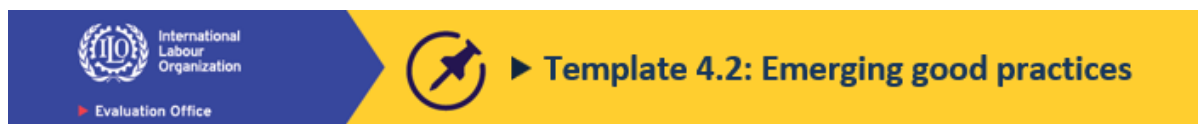
Name of Evaluator: Ting Yang

Date: 10 January 2026

The following lesson learned has been identified during the evaluation. Further text explaining the lesson may be included in the full evaluation report.

LESSONS LEARNED ELEMENT	TEXT
Brief description of lessons learned (link to specific action or task)	Balance between stakeholders' expectations of seeing maximized project impact through tangible results/changes and the long-term and gradual nature of policy reform process
Context and any related preconditions	Set project objectives include policy-related reform or changes and policy-level engagement
Targeted users /Beneficiaries	Project team, donor agency, national leading counterpart
Challenges /negative lessons - Causal factors	The inherent nature of this type of projects with the aim of achieving policy and regulation-level changes – non-linear, relatively slow and gradual process involved. There are also other influencing factors including constantly evolving conditions and emerging challenges in both immediate and wider context and environment
Success / Positive Issues - Causal factors	The project has adopted capacity building and tripartite partnership & dialogue instruments
ILO Administrative Issues (staff, resources, design, implementation)	This has implications for project design (seeking more concrete steps/initiatives such as case study/pilot sub-project with concrete and measurable short-term and long-term milestones and indicators), budgeting and implementation (generating monitoring and evaluative data towards building evidence base)

Annex 2 Good practices



Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)

Final independent evaluation

Project DC/SYMBOL: CHN/22/02/EUR

Name of Evaluator: Ting Yang

Date: 10 January 2026

The following emerging good practice has been identified during the evaluation. Further text can be found in the full evaluation report.

GOOD PRACTICE ELEMENT	TEXT
Brief summary of the good practice (link to project goal or specific deliverable, background, purpose, etc.)	The two-pillar tripartite partnership and dialogue fostered and sustained high level of strategic coherence, interest and ownership among tripartite partners (EU delegation & member states, ILO offices, Chinese counterparts) on one hand; on another hand, it forged a unique space for tripartite collaboration among government agencies, employers' as well as worker's organizations.
Relevant conditions and Context: limitations or advice in terms of applicability and replicability	High level of engagement and commitment from trilateral partners (EU, ILO, China) with joint interest in working in the field of social security.
Establish a clear cause- effect relationship	This element is key for achieving set project objectives both as means (an effective mechanism) and ends (strengthened collaboration and dialogue among partners)
Indicate measurable impact and targeted beneficiaries	This good practice serves as one of the building blocks among many other elements towards making contributions to the set objectives (include impact). It involves nearly all key stakeholders in this project with its two-pillar model.
Potential for replication and by whom	Potentially replicable in similar type of projects (in social protection area) and when there are high and stable policy-level interest and engagement
Upward links to higher ILO Goals (DWCPs, Country Programme Outcomes or ILO's Strategic Programme Framework)	This links to the DWCP, UNDCSF and the SDGs in this project context

Other documents or relevant comments	
--------------------------------------	--



International
Labour
Organization

► Evaluation Office



► **Template 4.2: Emerging good practices**

Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)

Final independent evaluation

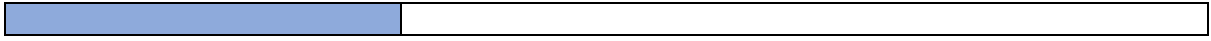
Project DC/SYMBOL: CHN/22/02/EUR

Name of Evaluator: Ting Yang

Date: 10 January 2026

The following emerging good practice has been identified during the course of the evaluation. Further text can be found in the full evaluation report.

GOOD PRACTICE ELEMENT	TEXT
Brief summary of the good practice (link to project goal or specific deliverable, background, purpose, etc.)	The demand-driven and needs-based approach helped ensure its relevance and sustain interest and ownership of project stakeholders/beneficiaries.
Relevant conditions and Context: limitations or advice in terms of applicability and replicability	The project kept on track of emerging trends and policy focus (e.g., phase 2 included platform workers and maternity-related social security topics). Capacity building/strengthening support were tailored to beneficiaries' needs such as the well-received actuarial training following needs assessment and stakeholder consultation. The project facilitated in consolidating and sharing relevant China experiences (e.g., those on platform workers-related social security benefits) with the international community as there is appetite for learning in this regard.
Establish a clear cause- effect relationship	This practice is key for achieving high level of relevance and for tailoring resources to practical capacity building needs, eventually contributing to relevant project objective (e.g., SO1)
Indicate measurable impact and targeted beneficiaries	This element sustained high interest of participants, and a series of trainings were held with project beneficiaries (e.g., staff from social security administration department, relevant research institutions and etc.).
Potential for replication and by whom	This approach is highly replicable in most project contexts (e.g., by project staff at planning stage), as long as relevant time and resources get allocated.
Upward links to higher ILO Goals (DWCPs, Country Programme Outcomes or ILO's Strategic Programme Framework)	This links and contributes to the overall country programme outcomes, DWCP China and SDGs through its pragmatic focus and response to emerging policy trend, needs of immediate project beneficiaries and wider audience.
Other documents or relevant comments	





Terms of Reference
Final Independent Evaluation of Project
"Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection
(Phase 2)"

1. Key facts

Title of project being evaluated	Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)
Project DC Code	CHN/22/02/EUR
Type of evaluation (e.g., independent, internal)	Independent Evaluation
Timing of evaluation (e.g. midterm, final)	Final Evaluation
Donor	European Union
Administrative Unit in the ILO responsible for administrating the project	ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia
Technical Unit(s) in the ILO responsible for backstopping the project	DWT-Bangkok
P&B outcome (s) under evaluation	P&B Outcome 8, Outputs 8.1 and 8.2
SDG(s) under evaluation	SDG Targets 1.3, 3.8, 5.4, 8.5 and 10.4
Budget	US\$ 2,518,938

2. Background information

Project Background Information and Context

China has made significant strides in expanding social protection coverage over the past two decades, achieving near-universal coverage in basic pension and health insurance. However, challenges remain in ensuring adequacy, equity, and sustainability of benefits, particularly for vulnerable groups such as migrant workers, informal sector employees, and rural populations. In response, the International Labour Organization (ILO), in collaboration with national counterparts, launched the project "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)" to support the country's efforts in strengthening its social protection system.

The project, "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)," is a continuation of a successful previous ILO/EU/China partnership project. The initial phase focused on building technical capacity to achieve a universal, adequate, and sustainable social security system. A key achievement of this phase was the ILO's comprehensive analysis on the compatibility of China's social security regulations with the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), which was submitted to Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) in December 2021.

Building on the foundation of the first phase, new gaps were identified, leading to this new action. These gaps include the need to improve the social security system for new forms of employment, enhance its sustainability and equity, and further advance the ratification of the ILO C102 convention.

The project is aligned with China's national policies, particularly the 14th Five-Year Plan (FYP 2021-25) and the overarching vision of "common prosperity." The 14th FYP sets a clear goal to improve the multi-tier social security system. The project supports this priority by providing policy dialogues, technical studies, training, and knowledge sharing, specifically by engaging EU expertise.

The context also highlights several critical social and economic megatrends in China that impact the labour market and social protection system. These include demographic changes (declining fertility and rapid aging), climate change, and rapid technological transformation. The rise of the digital economy and new forms of employment, such as platform work, is a key challenge. While these jobs provide new opportunities, they also create a growing population of over 200 million flexible workers who often lack a stable employment relationship and adequate access to social security benefits. The project's background acknowledges China's significant achievements in extending basic pension and medical insurance coverage, but highlights the lower coverage for unemployment, work injury, and maternity benefits, particularly for these flexible workers. The project also explores how digital administration can help overcome the fragmentation of the social security system, which is a barrier to increased coverage and portability of benefits.

Key components of the project include:

- Strengthening the legal and policy framework for social protection.
- Enhancing coordination among national and sub-national institutions.
- Promoting evidence-based policymaking through research and data analysis.
- Supporting capacity development of stakeholders through training and knowledge exchange.
- Facilitating South-South cooperation and sharing of good practices.

The project has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including government ministries, academic institutions, social partners. It has produced policy recommendations, technical guidelines, and capacity-building tools that have informed national reforms and contributed to the development of more inclusive social protection strategies.

As the project approaches its conclusion on 31 January 2026, the final independent evaluation will assess its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact. The evaluation will provide strategic insights and lessons learned to inform future programming and support China's continued progress toward universal social protection.

Project Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

Project Goal

The overall goal of the project is to support the reform of China's national policies on social standards. This includes strengthening the social protection system and aligning it with international standards. The project also aims to enhance the EU-China dialogue and cooperation on employment and social affairs, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide.

Specific Objectives

The project has three specific objectives:

- **Objective 1 (SO1):** To improve the National Social Protection System in accordance with ILO and international standards, with a particular focus on developing a universal social security system.

- **Objective 2 (SO2):** To support the reform process by providing information on the EU approach and sharing global expertise, especially from the EU, with national policymakers on social security, pensions, and issues related to platform workers.
- **Objective 3 (SO3):** To promote China's ratification of relevant international conventions related to social protection.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the project are:

- **Outcome 1:** Strengthened capacity of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) and other National stakeholders in social protection policy-making, planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- **Outcome 2:** A more robust dialogue and a greater exchange of knowledge and experience on social protection policy between National and international partners, particularly with the European Union.
- **Outcome 3:** Increased awareness and understanding among national policymakers and social partners regarding the content and implications of ILO international labour standards, particularly the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), for a multi-pillar social security system.

Project Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries are policymakers, social security officials, and representatives of employers' and workers' organizations, as well as academics and other relevant organizations who are involved in policy discussions, design, and implementation of social security in China.

Key stakeholders include:

- The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS)
- The China Enterprise Confederation (CEC)
- The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU)
- EU stakeholders, including the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, and experts from EU Member States
- Provincial and local branches of the MOHRSS
- National Healthcare Security Administration (NHSA) and other ministries like the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOC) and the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)
- UN agencies and other international organizations
- The private sector

The ultimate beneficiaries are women and men, particularly those not adequately covered by social insurance, such as migrant workers, flexible workers, and the self-employed. They will benefit from improved social security systems with broader coverage and more adequate benefits. Employers will also benefit from new or revised regulatory measures that provide more legal certainty regarding their social security responsibilities.

3. Purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

Purpose and Objectives of the Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to ensure accountability and to foster organizational learning that can be used to improve future projects and programs related to social protection. This evaluation serves as a final, independent assessment of the project "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)".

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Assess the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the project's outcomes.
- Assess the project's adherence to the ILO's cross-cutting criteria, including International Labour Standards (ILS), social dialogue, gender and non-discrimination, disability inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Special attention will be given to evaluating how gender equality considerations were integrated into the project's design, monitoring and evaluation framework, and implementation.
- Document lessons learned and good practices that can be applied to future initiatives.

Additionally, a key focus will be to assess the sustainability of the project's results. Recommendations will be made to ensure the longevity of project outcomes and the extension of the project into the next phase, highlighting the importance of continued ILO interventions to achieve the desired long-term impacts.

Scope of Evaluation

This evaluation covers the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the project from 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2026. It will assess all planned outputs and outcomes to determine their contribution to the overall goal of the project: improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection.

The evaluation will primarily focus on the project's policy-level engagements at the national level. A significant part of the assessment will be dedicated to the sustainability of the project's results, with the goal of providing recommendations to ensure their lasting impact and the potential continuation of the project into the next phase.

The evaluation will also assess the project's integration of the ILO's cross-cutting issues, including:

- International Labour Standards (ILS) and social dialogue
- Gender equality and other non-discrimination concerns
- Just transition

The evaluation's methodology will be gender-sensitive, applying gender analysis and involving both men and women in consultations. This includes the inclusion of sex-disaggregated data, gender-specific strategies and indicators, and a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The analysis of gender-related concerns will be guided by the ILO's official guidance notes on integrating gender equality into monitoring and evaluation. The entire evaluation will adhere to UN evaluation standards and norms.

Finally, the scope includes assessing the project's relevance to the ILO's national and global program and policy frameworks, as well as its alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and relevant national development strategies.

4. Evaluation criteria and questions (including cross-cutting issues/ issues of special interest to the ILO)

The evaluation should address key ILO evaluation criteria laid out in the 4th edition of the ILO's "Policy Guidelines for Evaluation (2020)" ⁴³. These include relevance, coherence, effectiveness including management arrangements, efficiency of resource use, impact, and sustainability.

The core ILO cross-cutting priorities, such as gender equality and non-discrimination, promotion of international labour standards, tripartite processes, constituent capacity development, and a just

⁴³ https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_mas/@eval/documents/publication/wcms_571339.pdf

transition towards environmental sustainability should be considered in this evaluation. As such they must be considered as a cross-cutting concern throughout the methodology, deliverables, and final report of the evaluation. To the extent possible, data collection and analysis should be disaggregated by sex as described in the ILO Evaluation Policy Guidelines and relevant Guidance Notes.

It is expected that the evaluation will address all of the questions detailed below to the extent possible. The consultant may adapt the evaluation criteria and questions, but any fundamental changes must be agreed upon in advance between the ILO and the consultant. The evaluation instruments (to be summarised by the consultant in the inception report) must identify the general areas of focus listed here as well as other priority aspects to be addressed in the evaluation.

Suggested questions are summarised below:

Relevance

- How well has the project addressed the needs of the tripartite partners, and beneficiaries, especially in the context of the 14th Five-Year Plan and the "common prosperity" agenda?
- What is the project's contribution to advancing the EU's cooperation framework with China, and how can its continued relevance be maximized in light of current and future EU policies?
- What is the strategic value of this type of project in advancing the EU's cooperation with China, and how do its outcomes justify continued or similar investments?
- How did the project adapt its strategy to evolving conditions, such as the growth of the digital economy and platform employment?
- To what extent did the project successfully integrate cross-cutting themes like gender equality and non-discrimination, and just transition?

Coherence

- How does the project align with and complement the policies of the ILO and the EU, including the European Pillar of Social Rights and the ILO's global strategy on social protection floors?
- How effectively did the project leverage partnerships with various stakeholders?
- How consistent were the project's interventions with International Labour Standards (ILS), especially the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)?

Effectiveness

- To what extent did the project achieve its three specific objectives (SO1, SO2, SO3)?
- To what extent did the project effectively deliver against the targets and expected results as defined in cooperation with the European Union (EU)?
- What factors hindered or contributed to this progress?
- How effective were interventions such as policy dialogues, study visits and training in building the capacity of stakeholders?
- How well did the project's governance and management mechanisms facilitate effective implementation?

Efficiency

- Were project resources (funds, human resources, time, expertise) used efficiently?
- How does the cost structure, particularly the proportion of resources allocated to human resources versus other project activities, align with the overall goals and expected outcomes of the project?
- How could the project's efficiency be improved?
- How well was the project coordinated among partners?

Impact

- To what extent did the project contribute to the development and implementation of more adequate public policies and mechanisms for social protection in China, particularly those outlined in its Five-Year Plans?
- To what extent have the project's activities contributed to shaping more effective social protection policies and mechanisms in China?
- How well do these contributions align with the social protection priorities outlined in China's current Five-Year Plan, while ensuring broad consultation with diverse Chinese stakeholders at both national and local levels?
- What is the project's impact on the knowledge and capacity of National policymakers and social partners regarding international labour standards and best practices from the EU?

Sustainability

- What new avenues and topics for future cooperation between the EU and China has the project created or opened?
- To what extent have opportunities been explored for securing additional funding and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the project's outcomes beyond the current phase?
- How has the project's demonstrated value and impact influenced the beneficiary country's readiness to explore future co-financing? What key lessons can inform the design of a potential Phase 3?

Cross-cutting issues (Gender equality, non-discrimination, disability inclusion, International Labour Standards, social dialogue and tripartism, and just transition)

- To what extent did the project design identify and integrate specific targets and indicators to capture, for example, gender equality and non-discrimination concerns?
- What are the key achievements of the project on gender equality and just transition so far?
- How has the project been able to leverage the ILO's contributions, through its comparative advantages including ILS, in social dialogue and tripartism?

Project's responsiveness to SDGs

- To what extent did the project consider relevant SDG targets and indicators?
- To what extent did the project contribute to SDG targets, and indicators relevant to the Decent Work Agenda (explicitly or implicitly)?
- To what extent did the project leverage partnerships (with constituents, national institutions and other UN/development agencies) that enhanced the project's relevance and contribution to priority SDG targets and indicators (explicitly or implicitly)?

5. Methodology

The evaluation has to comply with ILO's evaluation norms and standards and will follow ethical safeguards as specified in the ILO's evaluation procedures. For reference, the ILO adheres to the United Nations (UN) system of evaluation norms and standards as well as to the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards.

A mixed-method (both qualitative and quantitative evaluation approaches) should be used for this evaluation. Secondary data such as the ILO DC dashboard of the project can serve as good data sources. Quantitative surveys may be conducted. Qualitative information will be obtained from key informant interviews and/or focus group discussions as appropriate. Attempts should be made to collect data from different sources by different methods for each evaluation question and findings be triangulated to draw valid and reliable conclusions. Data shall be disaggregated by sex where possible and appropriate.

The gender, non-discrimination and environmental sustainability dimension should be considered as a cross-cutting concern throughout the methodologies, deliverables, and final report of the

evaluation. In terms of this evaluation, this implies involving men and women in the consultation, evaluation analysis and evaluation consultant. Moreover, the consultant should review data and information that is disaggregated by sex and assess the relevance and effectiveness of gender-related strategies and outcomes to improve the lives of children, men and women. All this information should be accurately included in the inception report and evaluation report.

The evaluation shall be conducted using the following methodological approach. The methodology will need to be revised and adapted by the consultant in consultation with the ILO. The agreed detailed approach and methodology, including the workplan, should be part of the inception report.

- Desk review of project documents, progress reports, internal review, meeting minutes, and communication materials as well as relevant national strategies and policies, including China's 14th Five-Year Plan and policies related to the "common prosperity" initiative.
- Meetings with the project staff: the consultant will meet with the project staff, backstopping units from the ILO Social Protection Department, and the donor (EU) to reach a common understanding for the evaluation process and the technical and financial status of the project.
- Key informant interviews with relevant project stakeholders and beneficiary groups of the project. This will specifically include the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS), the National Healthcare Security Administration (NHSA), the China Enterprise Confederation (CEC), the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), as well as academics and experts. If necessary, a survey questionnaire may be used in addition to interviews and/or focus group discussions.
- Validation and Debriefing Meetings with key stakeholders to collect information and validate the draft findings. This should include the tripartite partners (MOHRSS, NHSA, CEC, ACFTU) and the donor to ensure a comprehensive perspective and to present and discuss the preliminary findings and the lessons learned.

A detailed methodology, tools, and data analysis will be elaborated by the independent consultant on the basis of this ToR. The detailed methodology should include key and sub-question(s), detailed methods, data collection instruments, and data analysis plans and data presentation techniques to be presented as a key element in the inception report. The methodology should be designed to effectively generate the actionable recommendations and key lessons learned needed to inform the design of potential continuation into the next phase of the project (Phase 3).

6. Key Deliverables

The consultant will be responsible for the following key deliverables and tasks to ensure a comprehensive and impactful evaluation.

Deliverables

Deliverable 1: Inception Report

The inception report will detail the evaluation approach, including specific questions, data collection methodologies, and analytical techniques. It will incorporate a comparative analysis framework, and all necessary evaluation tools (e.g., interview guides, self-administered questionnaires). The report will follow the ILO's Checklist 4.8: Writing the Inception Report and the draft inception report will be submitted after at least two rounds of revision. The inception report (not exceeding 20 pages, excluding the annexes) will be finalized after the revision based on the feedback from key stakeholders.

Deliverable 2: Data Collection and Analysis

The consultant will gather comprehensive, accurate, and relevant data to inform the evaluation's findings and recommendations. The consultant will develop and implement a robust data collection plan that includes both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture a holistic view of the project in the response to the evaluation criteria and questions above. The data collection methods and tools should have been validated during the inception workshop to ensure their appropriateness and effectiveness as well as data triangulation to enhance reliability and validity. The data collection will be conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality, informed consent, and cultural sensitivity.

Deliverable 3: Validation and Debriefing Meeting

A validation and debriefing meeting will be conducted with key stakeholders, including the tripartite partners, to present and validate preliminary findings, conclusions, and lessons learned.

Deliverable 4: First Draft Evaluation Report

The first draft of the evaluation report will include detailed, actionable, and practical recommendations tailored to the identified audiences and implementers. The draft will follow the ILO Checklist 4.2: Preparing the Evaluation Report, covering all evaluation questions and presenting data through appropriate visualization techniques. Feedback from the evaluation manager and stakeholders will be incorporated to refine the report. The draft evaluation report will be submitted for review and comment for at least two rounds before the finalization.

Deliverable 5: Final Evaluation Report with Executive Summary

The final report will integrate all feedback from the ILO and other key stakeholders. It will be concise, not exceeding 40 pages, and adhere to the ILO Checklist 4.2: Preparing the Evaluation Report. The report will include an evaluation summary written in the template accessible through this link: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_746811.pdf. Lessons learnt and good practices will be sent, together with the final report, to the Evaluation Manager following ILO template. Template for lessons learned is accessible through this link https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_746820.pdf; and Template for good practices can be found in https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_746821.pdf. The final evaluation report will ensure full rigor in the method, quality of the data, credible evaluation findings and valid evaluation conclusions as specified in the ILO Evaluation Management Handbook – 3rd Edition 2021.

All data collection instruments used in the evaluation (interview guides, survey questionnaires, etc.) will be developed, tested, and finalized. These instruments will be designed to collect data that is disaggregated by gender and other relevant demographic factors, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the project's impact on different beneficiary groups.

The reports and all other outputs of the evaluation must be produced in English and in compliance with [ILO House Style Manual: Sixth Edition](#). All draft and final reports including other supporting documents, analytical reports, and raw data should be provided in electronic version compatible with WORD for windows.

7. Management arrangements and work plan

Management Arrangements

Evaluation Manager

The evaluation manager is responsible for executing the evaluation processes in accordance with the ILO Policy for Evaluation, the ILO Evaluation Policy Guidelines for Evaluation and the UNEG Norms and Standards.

The evaluation manager has the role and function as specified in the [Guidance Note 4.1: The Evaluation Manager: Role and Function Date: June 2020, v. 4 \(v.1 – 2012\)](#), including:

- Planning the evaluation and drafting and finalizing the TOR
- Selecting and contracting consultant
- Managing the consultant
- Approve inception report
- Support and facilitate in finalizing the evaluation

The evaluation manager has no prior involvement in the project. He/she will manage this evaluation with oversight and guidance provided by the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, RO-Asia and the Pacific.

Project Team

The Project Manager and the project staff facilitate and support the implementation of the evaluation at the national level, including:

- Provide inputs to draft TOR, draft evaluation reports and final reports.
- Assist in providing data and information within the purview of the project team to facilitate the smooth and effective conduct of the evaluation.
- Coordinate and arrange validation meeting.
- Provide transport for the Consultant only for outstation missions and pay a daily subsistence allowance to cover food and lodging, if applicable and necessary.
- Introduce the Consultant to partners/Key Informants for meetings and exchanges between the Consultant and partners.
- Provide additional information and comments to the evaluation manager and consultant.
- Co-ordinate follow-up plans.

After the evaluation, the Project Manager is responsible for developing management response, preparing a plan for follow-up, taking appropriate action, and disseminating the evaluation outcomes together with the ILO responsible official.

Evaluation Focal Point in the region

As the Evaluation Focal Point in the region, the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, RO-Asia and the Pacific provide support in evaluation oversight, guidance and approves the final version of the TOR for independent evaluations and the choice of consultant. The Evaluation Focal Point may also provide methodological inputs to the evaluation process. At the end of an independent evaluation, the evaluation focal point reviews the final evaluation report prior to submission to EVAL for approval.

Evaluation Consultant

An Evaluation Consultant will be recruited to work on the evaluation.

Role and Responsibilities of the Consultant

The Consultant is responsible for all the management, quality, and delivery of the final products. The tasks include the development and application of the evaluation's entire methodology, from defining the approach and evaluation questions to creating the data collection instruments and analysis plan. The Consultant drafts and finalizes all key deliverables, including the inception report, draft reports, and the final evaluation report and their findings. The consultant conducts the qualitative and

quantitative analysis of all collected information to formulate clear findings, conclusions, and recommendations, ultimately ensuring the final report adheres to all professional, ethical, and organizational standards set by the ILO and UNEG. The consultant reports to the Evaluation Manager.

Expected Expertise and Qualifications of the Consultant

The ideal candidate must possess a comprehensive set of qualifications to successfully manage this evaluation, including:

- **Education:** An advanced university degree in a relevant field, such as economics, social sciences, or business management.
- **Experience:** A minimum of 15 years of experience as a consultant or in a similar capacity on projects and programs, with a proven track record focused on social protection, institutional capacity building, and experience in a UN context.
- **Methodology:** Extensive knowledge of and practical experience in applying both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, including the Theory of Change approach.
- **Reporting:** A proven ability to produce high-quality, analytical reports with an excellent command of the English language.
- **Knowledge:** In depth knowledge of China's political, social, and economic situation, with a specific understanding of its social protection system is preferable.
- **Language skills:** Excellent communication and writing skills in both English and Chinese to facilitate seamless collaboration and reporting are an advantage.

Work Plan and Indicative Timeframe

The evaluation will follow an indicative timeframe as outlined below:

Tasks	Indicative Timeframe
Inception phase: briefing with the Evaluation Manager, Project Manager on the ILO policy and other relevant internal documents to ensure a smooth evaluation process, documents review and development and approval of the inception report	21 October 2025
Data collection phase (fieldwork as per agreed itinerary, interviews)	7 November 2025
Validation and Debriefing Meeting	11 November 2025
First draft report	Third week of November 2025
Review and comments on first draft report	Fourth week of November 2025
Final report	06 December 2025

8. Legal and ethical matters

The evaluation will be conducted in full alignment with ethics, respect for human rights and cultural sensitivity as written in accordance with the International Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation UNEG, 2020.

The consultant will abide by the EVAL's Code of Conduct for conducting the evaluations, should not have any links to project management, or any other conflict of interest that would interfere with the independence of the evaluation.

Ownership of data from the evaluation rests exclusively with the ILO. All raw data files, consent forms and relevant documentation must be returned to ILO before the release of final payment. The copyright of the evaluation report will rest exclusively with the ILO. Use of the data for publication and other presentations can only be made with the written agreement of the ILO. All deliverables will be paid for on satisfactory completion and certification by ILO evaluation manager and in line with the ILO Evaluation report checklist.

ANNEX I: Relevant ILO policies and guidelines

1. [Code of conduct form \(To be signed by the consultants\)](#)
2. [Guidance Note 1.3: Procedure and Tools for Evaluability](#)
3. [Checklist 4.8 Writing the inception report](#)
4. [Guidance Note 4.3. Data collection methods](#)
5. [Checklist 4.2 Preparing the evaluation report](#)
6. [Checklist 4.9 Rating the quality of evaluation report](#)
7. [Protocol on collecting evaluative evidence on the ILO's Covid-19 response measures through project and programme evaluations](#)
8. [Guidance Note 4.5 Stakeholders participation in the ILO evaluation](#)
9. [Guidance Note 3.1. Integrating gender equality in M&E](#)
10. [Guidance Note 3.2: Adapting evaluation methods to the ILO's normative and tripartite mandate](#)
11. [Guidance Note 5.5 Dissemination of lessons learned and good practices](#)
12. [UNEG integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in evaluations](#)
13. [United Nations Evaluation Group. 2008. Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation in the UN System](#)
14. [United Nations Evaluation Group. 2014. Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations](#)
15. [United Nations Evaluation Group. 2016. Norms and Standards for Evaluation](#)
16. [United Nations Evaluation Group. 2018. UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator - Technical Note and Scorecard](#)
17. [ILO policy guidelines for results-based evaluation: Principles, rationale, planning and managing for evaluations, 4th ed., \(Nov 2020\)](#)

Annex 4 List of documents reviewed

CHN/22/02/EUR – European Union Contribution Agreement (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)
CHN/22/02/EUR – Annex I – Description of the Action – Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2) (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)
CHN/22/02/EUR – Annex II – General Conditions for Contribution Agreements (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)
CHN/22/02/EUR – Annex III – Budget NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701
CHN/22/02/EUR – Annex IV -VI – Financial arrangement NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701
CHN/22/02/EUR – ILO-MOHRSS Memorandum of Understanding
CHN/22/02/EUR – ILO, 2024, Progress Report – Improving China's Institutional Capacity towards Universal Social Protection (Phase 2), 1 February 2023 - 31 January 2024
CHN/22/02/EUR – Annual Workplan 2024
CHN/22/02/EUR – Annual Workplan and financial forecast Year 2 (2024)
CHN/22/02/EUR – Financial Statement for Income and Expenditure for the period February 2023 - January 2024 (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)
CHN/22/02/EUR – ILO, 2025, Progress Report – Improving China's Institutional Capacity towards Universal Social Protection (Phase 2), 1 February 2024 – 31 January 2025
CHN/22/02/EUR – Financial Statement for Income and Expenditure for the period February 2023 - January 2025 (NDICI ASIA/2022/440-701)
CHN/22/02/EUR – Financial forecast Year 3 (1st February 2025 to 31st January 2026)
CHN/22/02/EUR – ILO, 2025, Actuarial Training Report – Training for Actuarial Work in Social Security, 22-25 April 2025, Beijing
CHN/22/02/EUR – ILO, 2025, Training Report – EUROMOD Training, 28-30 April 2025, Beijing
CHN/22/02/EUR – Revised LogFrame_1Nov_V4
CHN/22/02/EUR – List of stakeholders_FinalEva_Phase 2 updated
CHN/22/02/EUR – Research Studies on promoting pension schemes for platform workers in China, February 2025, Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security
CHN/22/02/EUR – Website Information Statistics Report (As of 7 November 2025)
CHN/22/02/EUR – Year 3 progress update summary
ILO and AFD (2019) *Social Protection for a Just Transition: A Global Strategy for Increasing Ambition in Climate Action*.
ILO (2015) *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all*. Geneva.
ILO (2020) *Policy guidelines for results-based evaluation: Principles, rationale, planning and managing for evaluations*, 4th ed.
ILO (2023) *Decent Work Country Programme for China 2023-2025*
OECD (2021) *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, OECD Publishing, Paris
United Nations (2020) *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the People's Republic of China 2021-2025*
United Nations Evaluation Group (2016) *Norms and Standards for Evaluation*

Interview guide

Final Independent Evaluation of Project "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)"

Introduction

The project, "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)," is a continuation of a successful previous ILO/EU/China partnership project, aiming at building technical capacity to achieve a universal, adequate and sustainable social security system in China. Building on the achievement of the first phase, this project seeks to support the reform of China's national policies on social standards. This includes strengthening the social protection system and aligning it with international standards, as well as enhancing the EU-China dialogue and cooperation on employment and social affairs, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide.

This evaluation aims to ensure accountability and to foster organizational learning (best practices and lessons learned) that can be used to improve future projects and programs related to social protection. The evaluator is currently undertaking key stakeholder interviews to generate feedback, insights and suggestions so as to help address evaluation questions and fulfil the evaluation objectives.

This interview is semi-structured and shall ensure anonymity and confidentiality in the whole process. Information gathered from this interview will be securely stored and deleted afterwards. The interview shall obtain informed consent from participants when recordings are becoming necessary.

Interview questions (government agencies)

1. From your department's perspective, how well has the project addressed the needs of the tripartite partners, and beneficiaries, especially in the context of the 14th Five-Year Plan and the "common prosperity" agenda?
2. How did the project adapt its strategy to evolving challenges to social protection systems, such as those arising from the growth of the digital economy and platform employment, as well as from climate change?
3. From your perspective and observation, how effectively did the project leverage and coordinate partnerships with various stakeholders?
 - 1) Can you provide examples of successful collaboration with national institutions, EU experts, or other international organizations?
 - 2) How did these partnerships contribute to policy dialogue or capacity building?
4. According to your knowledge, how consistent were the project's interventions with International Labour Standards (ILS), especially the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)? Alternatively, if you are not familiar with C102, has your involvement in the project improved your understanding of ILS and their relevance to China's social protection reforms?

5. To what extent has the project delivered its planned activities according to the set timelines? Were there any delays or accelerations in implementation? What were the contributing factors?
6. From your perspective to what extent has the project achieved its goal of improving Chinese Social Protection System, in line with ILO and international standards, with an emphasis on the development of universal social security? Can you please give specific example of specific improvements or reforms that can be attributed to the project's influence?
7. In your experience, to what extent has the project delivered the outcome of supporting the reform process by providing information on the EU approach and sharing EU expertise related to social security, pensions and platform workers? And how relevant and applicable was the EU expertise to China's context?
8. How well has the project helped enhance the EU-China dialogues and cooperation on employment, social affairs and inclusion, in line with the external dimension of European Pillar of Social Rights and its action plan (2021) and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide (2022)? What mechanisms or platforms facilitated this dialogue? Were they effective?
9. To what extent has the project achieved its goal of promoting China's ratification of relevant international conventions? Or in another words, what progress has been made toward ratification of ILO Convention No. 102 or other relevant conventions?
10. What do you think are the facilitators (success factors) and barriers (challenges) in the process of the project implementation towards achieving set objectives?
11. Does the project endeavour to incorporate gender perspectives in the design and delivery of its activities? And how? Can you provide examples of gender-specific strategies, indicators, or outcomes, according to your knowledge?
12. Looking forward, are the project results likely to be sustainable beyond this project cycle? What may be the key drivers and obstacles to ensure sustainability? Has there been any discussion or planning for Phase 3 or future co-financing opportunities?
13. Overall, in your view, what are the major contributions of the project to the ultimate project goal of supporting China's social protection system coverage extension towards achieving an effective universal coverage and enhancing the quality of benefits provided by the system? Please summarize. And can you please elaborate on how do these contributions align with national priorities and international standards?
14. Do you have any suggestions on lessons learned or recommendations for future improvement? For instance, what should be prioritized in future phases of the project if it continues?
15. Any best practices that you may want to highlight? How can these be replicated or scaled up nationally or internationally?

Interview guide

Final Independent Evaluation of Project "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)"

Introduction

The project, "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)," is a continuation of a successful previous ILO/EU/China partnership project, aiming at building technical capacity to achieve a universal, adequate and sustainable social security system in China. Building on the achievement of the first phase, this project seeks to support the reform of China's national policies on social standards. This includes strengthening the social protection system and aligning it with international standards, as well as enhancing the EU-China dialogue and cooperation on employment and social affairs, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide.

This evaluation aims to ensure accountability and to foster organizational learning (best practices and lessons learned) that can be used to improve future projects and programs related to social protection. The evaluator is currently undertaking key stakeholder interviews to generate feedback, insights and suggestions so as to help address evaluation questions and fulfil the evaluation objectives.

This interview is semi-structured and shall ensure anonymity and confidentiality in the whole process. Information gathered from this interview will be securely stored and deleted afterwards. The interview shall obtain Informed consent from participants when recordings are becoming necessary.

This guide is structured to deeply assess the project's policy influence, technical contribution (especially on C102 and platform workers), and alignment with China's 14th Five-Year Plan and "common prosperity" goals.

Interview questions (Social partners)

1. From your observation, how well has the project addressed the needs of the tripartite partners, and beneficiaries, especially in the context of the 14th Five-Year Plan and the "common prosperity" agenda?
2. How did the project adapt its strategy to evolving challenges to social protection systems, such as those arising from the growth of the digital economy and platform employment, as well as from climate change? For example,
3. From your perspective and observation, how effectively did the project leverage and coordinate partnerships with various stakeholders?
4. According to your knowledge, how consistent were the project's interventions with International Labour Standards (ILS), especially the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)? Alternatively, if you are not familiar with C102, has your involvement in the project improved your understanding of ILS and their relevance to China's social protection reforms?
5. In your view, how efficiently have project resources (e.g., funds, human resources) been allocated and used?

6. To what extent has the project delivered its planned activities according to the set timelines?

Have project-developed training materials or technical guidelines been integrated into the MOHRSS's own official training curriculum or standard operating procedures?

7. From your perspective to what extent has the project achieved its goal of improving Chinese Social Protection System, in line with ILO and international standards, with an emphasis on the development of universal social security?
8. In your experience, to what extent has the project delivered the outcome of supporting the reform process by providing information on the EU approach and sharing EU expertise related to social security, pensions and platform workers?
9. How well has the project helped enhance the EU-China dialogues and cooperation on employment, social affairs and inclusion, in line with the external dimension of European Pillar of Social Rights and its action plan (2021) and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide (2022)?
10. To what extent has the project achieved its goal of promoting China's ratification of relevant international conventions?
11. What do you think are the facilitators (success factors) and barriers (challenges) in the process of the project implementation towards achieving set objectives?
12. From your observation, does the project endeavour to incorporate gender perspectives in the design and delivery of its activities? And how?
13. Looking forward, are the project results likely to be sustainable beyond this project cycle? What may be the key drivers and obstacles to ensure sustainability?
14. Overall, in your view, what are the major contributions of the project in terms of supporting China's social protection system coverage extension towards achieving an effective universal coverage and enhancing the quality of benefits provided by the system?
15. Do you have any suggestions on lessons learned or recommendations for future improvement or if this project continues to the next phase?
16. Any best practices that you may want to highlight?

Interview guide

Final Independent Evaluation of Project "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)"

Introduction

The project, "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)," is a continuation of a successful previous ILO/EU/China partnership project, aiming at building technical capacity to achieve a universal, adequate and sustainable social security system in China. Building on the achievement of the first phase, this project seeks to support the reform of China's national policies on social standards. This includes

strengthening the social protection system and aligning it with international standards, as well as enhancing the EU-China dialogue and cooperation on employment and social affairs, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide.

This evaluation aims to ensure accountability and to foster organizational learning (best practices and lessons learned) that can be used to improve future projects and programs related to social protection. The evaluator is currently undertaking key stakeholder interviews to generate feedback, insights and suggestions so as to help address evaluation questions and fulfil the evaluation objectives.

This interview is semi-structured and shall ensure anonymity and confidentiality in the whole process. Information gathered from this interview will be securely stored and deleted afterwards. The interview shall obtain Informed consent from participants when recordings are becoming necessary.

Interview questions (ILO)

1. From your perspective and observation, how well has the project addressed the needs of the tripartite partners, and beneficiaries, especially in the context of the 14th Five-Year Plan and the "common prosperity" agenda? What specific policy or legal changes were influenced by the project in this regard?
2. How did the project adapt its strategy to evolving conditions, such as the growth of the digital economy, platform employment and climate change? Specifically, what technical assistance or policy dialogues were provided to address social security coverage for the informal workers, and how did this compare to the project's original plan?
3. How does the project align with and complement the policies of the ILO, such as the ILO's global strategy on social protection floors? Please respond from ILO's perspective. To what extent were the ILO's cross-cutting issues (e.g., gender equality, non-discrimination, or tripartism) integrated into the project's policy recommendations and capacity-building tools?
4. From your perspective and observation, how effectively has the project leveraged partnerships with various stakeholders? Can you provide a specific example of how the knowledge exchange with EU stakeholders contributed to a concrete project output, such as a policy recommendation or technical guideline?
5. According to your knowledge, how consistent were the project's interventions with International Labour Standards (ILS), especially the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)? Specifically, what actions did the project take to address the identified gaps in China's regulations compared to C102, as revealed by the ILO's comprehensive analysis submitted to MOHRSS in 2021?
6. In your view, how efficiently have project resources (e.g., funds, human resources, time, and expertise) been allocated and used? How does the cost structure, particularly the proportion of resources allocated to human resources versus other project activities, align with achieving the expected outcomes?
7. To what extent has the project delivered its planned activities according to the set timelines? Are there any major activities that were significantly delayed or adapted, and what were the primary factors that hindered or contributed to the timely progress?

8. From your perspective to what extent has the project achieved its goal of improving Chinese Social Protection System, in line with ILO and international standards, with an emphasis on the development of universal social security? What evidence exists (e.g., new policy drafts, legislation proposed, or technical guidelines adopted) that demonstrates MOHRSS's strengthened capacity in policy-making, planning, or implementation as a result of the project?
9. In your experience, to what extent has the project delivered the outcome of supporting the reform process by providing information on the EU approach and sharing EU expertise related to social security, pensions and platform workers? How effective were interventions such as policy dialogues, study visits, and training in building the knowledge and capacity of the national policymakers and social partners on the EU approach?
10. How well has the project helped enhance the EU-China dialogues and cooperation on employment, social affairs and inclusion, in line with the external dimension of European Pillar of Social Rights and its action plan (2021) and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide (2022)? What new avenues and topics for future cooperation between the EU and China has the project created or opened to ensure sustainability and potential for a Phase 3?
11. To what extent has the project achieved its goal of promoting China's ratification of relevant international conventions? Specifically, what progress was made on the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), and what concrete next steps were recommended to national policymakers?
12. What do you think are the facilitators (success factors) and barriers (challenges) in the process of the project implementation towards achieving set objectives? How well did the project's governance and management mechanisms facilitate effective implementation and coordination among the tripartite partners and the EU donor?
13. Does the project endeavour to incorporate gender perspectives in the design and delivery of its activities? And how? What are the key achievements of the project on gender equality so far, particularly regarding the ultimate beneficiaries like flexible workers and migrant workers?
14. Looking forward, are the project results likely to be sustainable beyond this project cycle? What may be the key drivers and obstacles to ensure sustainability? What key lessons can inform the design of a potential Phase 3? To what extent has the project's demonstrated value influenced the beneficiary country's readiness to explore future co-financing?
15. Overall, in your view, what are the major contributions of the project in terms of supporting China's social protection system coverage extension towards achieving an effective universal coverage and enhancing the quality of benefits provided by the system?
16. What is the project's impact on the knowledge and capacity of national policymakers and social partners regarding international labour standards and best practices from the EU?

To what extent did the project's activities contribute to shaping more effective social protection policies, particularly those aimed at improving coverage, adequacy, and equity for informal workers?

17. Do you have any suggestions on lessons learned or recommendations for future improvement or if this project continues to the next phase?

Based on your experience, what are the three most important key lessons learned or good practices that should inform the design and implementation of future social protection projects in China, including a potential Phase 3? Please focus on lessons related to leveraging the tripartite mechanism and EU expertise.

18. Any best practices that you may want to highlight (e.g., in policy dialogue, capacity building, or utilizing digital administration)?

Interview guide

Final Independent Evaluation of Project "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)"

Introduction

The project, "Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (Phase 2)," is a continuation of a successful previous ILO/EU/China partnership project, aiming at building technical capacity to achieve a universal, adequate and sustainable social security system in China. Building on the achievement of the first phase, this project seeks to support the reform of China's national policies on social standards. This includes strengthening the social protection system and aligning it with international standards, as well as enhancing the EU-China dialogue and cooperation on employment and social affairs, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide.

This evaluation aims to ensure accountability and to foster organizational learning (best practices and lessons learned) that can be used to improve future projects and programs related to social protection. The evaluator is currently undertaking key stakeholder interviews to generate feedback, insights and suggestions so as to help address evaluation questions and fulfil the evaluation objectives.

This interview is semi-structured and shall ensure anonymity and confidentiality in the whole process. Information gathered from this interview will be securely stored and deleted afterwards. The interview shall obtain Informed consent from participants when recordings are becoming necessary.

Interview questions (EU)

1. From your perspective and observation, how well has the project addressed the needs of the tripartite partners, and beneficiaries, and how does this align with the EU's development cooperation goals in China, especially in the context of the 14th Five-Year Plan and the "common prosperity" agenda?
2. How did the project adapt its strategy to evolving conditions, such as the growth of the digital economy, platform employment and climate change? and how were EU expertise or policy approaches leveraged in this adaptation?
3. How does the project align with and complement the policies of the ILO, such as the ILO's global strategy on social protection floors? Please respond from EU's perspective.

4. Considering the project's goal to enhance EU-China dialogue, how well does the project align with and complement the policies of the ILO, such as the ILO's global strategy on social protection floors, and the policies of the EU, including the European Pillar of Social Rights?
5. From your perspective and observation, how effectively did the project leverage partnerships with various stakeholders, especially EU stakeholders (e.g., EU delegation, EU Member State experts), and what role did the ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia play in this coordination??
6. According to your knowledge, how consistent were the project's interventions with International Labour Standards (ILS), especially the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)? and how did the project's consistency with ILS reinforce the EU-China policy dialogue?
7. In your view, how efficiently have project resources (e.g., funds, human resources) been allocated and used? particularly in relation to the financial contributions of the European Union?
8. To what extent has the project delivered its planned activities according to the set timelines? and how did the project management respond to any delays or external factors that impacted the schedule?
9. From your perspective to what extent has the project achieved its goal of improving Chinese Social Protection System, in line with ILO and international standards, with an emphasis on the development of universal social security? Can you provide a specific example of an EU policy approach shared that influenced a national discussion?
10. In your experience, to what extent has the project delivered the outcome of supporting the reform process by providing information on the EU approach and sharing EU expertise related to social security, pensions and platform workers? How did this transfer of knowledge compare to your expectations?
11. How well has the project helped enhance the EU-China dialogues and cooperation on employment, social affairs and inclusion, in line with the external dimension of European Pillar of Social Rights and its action plan (2021) and the Commission's Communication on Decent Work Worldwide (2022)? Has this dialogue created new strategic avenues for future EU-China cooperation, as envisioned by the project goal?
12. To what extent has the project achieved its goal of promoting China's ratification of relevant international conventions? and how significant is this progress for the EU-China relationship?
13. What do you think are the facilitators (success factors) and barriers (challenges) in the process of the project implementation towards achieving set objectives? Can you please elaborate what factors within the ILO-EU partnership particularly supported or hindered progress?
14. Does the project endeavour to incorporate gender perspectives in the design and delivery of its activities? And how? Specifically, how well were gender equality and non-discrimination integrated into the policy recommendations and studies supported by the project, as per the evaluation's special attention to this area?

15. Looking forward, are the project results likely to be sustainable beyond this project cycle? What may be the key drivers and obstacles to ensure sustainability? and what role should the EU play in supporting the continuity of these outcomes, potentially through a Phase 3?
16. Overall, in your view, what are the major contributions of the project in terms of supporting China's social protection system coverage extension towards achieving an effective universal coverage and enhancing the quality of benefits provided by the system? and how do these contributions justify continued EU funding for similar future interventions?
17. Do you have any suggestions on lessons learned or recommendations for future improvement or if this project continues to the next phase? For example, any suggestions on the ILO's implementation approach and the EU's partnership/coordination role?
18. Any best practices that you may want to highlight? What specific best practices for EU-China cooperation on social affairs can be drawn from the partnership in this project?

Annex 6 List of stakeholders interviewed

Categories /Organizations	Name	Title/Division
EU (EU headquarter and its delegation in China)	Alessandra LEPORE	Cooperation Officer, Cooperation Section, Delegation of the EU to China
	Enikő CSONTOS	International Relations Officer, Director-General for Employment, European Commission (since September 2025)
	Martin ORTH	International Relations Officer, Director-General for Employment, European Commission (until August 2025)
ILO	Changhee LEE	Director, ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia
	Ruben VICENTE ANDRES	Project manager, ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia
	ZHOU Jie	National Project Coordinator, ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia
	ZHANG Buyuan	Project Assistant, ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia
	Jana BISCHLER	Technical Officer, Social Protection and Climate Change, Social Protection Department, ILO Headquarters
MOHRSS	GAO Si	Director, Division of Technical Cooperation, International Cooperation Department
	WANG Jianyu	Director, Division of Technical Cooperation, International Cooperation Department
	HU Shuang	Deputy Director of Actuarial Division, Social Insurance Administration
	HAN Meng	Staff, Social Insurance Administration
	YUAN Liangdong	Researcher, Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security
	YANG Yang	Researcher, Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security
	ZHANG Yanting	Researcher, Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security
Social partners	CHEN Jia	Deputy Director, Wage and Insurance Division, Rights Protection Department, All-China Federation of Trade Unions
	LIU Jiayue	Director, International Cooperation Division, General Office, National Healthcare Security Administration
	XUE Ying	Assistant Researcher, Employers' Department, China Enterprise Confederation

Annex 7 Project log frame

		Indicators	Baselines (including reference year)	Targets accumulative (including reference year)	Source of data and means of verification	Assumptions
Overall	Overall Objective: Support China's Social Protection system coverage extension towards achieving an effective universal coverage and enhancing the quality of benefits provided by the system.	SDG indicator 1.3.1 – Population covered by at least one social protection benefit (excluding health)	70.8% (2022)	2023: 75% 2024: 77.5% 2025: 80%	ILO World Social Protection Report, MOHRSS Yearbook	
	Specific objective 1: Chinese Social Protection System improved, in line with ILO and international standards, with an emphasis on the development of universal social security by the Chinese authorities.	Number of legal reforms ⁴⁴ introduced in China in the field of social security aligned with international labour standards (ILS) during the lifecycle of the project, as a result of policy recommendations emerging from the project-supported research pieces on social security.	0 (2022)	2023: 0 2024: 1 2025: 2 Total: 2	Legal decrees/diplomas approved/endorsed by Chinese government.	Chinese government is committed to the policy and technical dialogues and information exchange, which will feed an evidence-based discussion towards new policy formulation and/or adjustment.
	Specific objectives 2: Support to the reform process by providing information on the EU approach and sharing global, particularly EU, expertise, with Chinese policy makers in the field of social security, pensions and platform workers. This will also enhance the EU-China dialogues and cooperation on employment, social affairs and inclusion, in line with the external dimension of European Pillar of Social Rights and its action plan (2021) and the Commission's	Number of study visits to EU member countries and technical exchange sessions between Chinese Constituents and EU experts, including international conferences, materialized during the lifecycle of the project. Key experiences gathered, documented, and incorporated as technical inputs on aspects related to the intended policy reforms on the field of social security in China.	0 (2022)	2023: 0 2024: 1 2025: 3 Total: 3	Study Visits' Reports by the government Technical inputs considered for the research studies done under Specific Objective 1	The Chinese authorities and EU Member States will engage constructively in exchange visits and technical sessions.

⁴⁴ "Legal reforms" might refer to statutory reforms, introduction of new mechanism to enhance efficiency in implementation of social security benefits or introduction of new definition for target groups resulting in expanded social security system's coverage, for example.

	Communication on Decent Work Worldwide (2022).					
	Specific objectives 3: Promotion of China's ratification of relevant international conventions.	Number of ILO international social security conventions with the formal ratification process initiated during the project lifecycle, with a specific focus on C102 (Social Security Minimum Standards).	0 (2022)	2023: 0 2024: 0 2025: 1 Total: 1	ILO conventions which ratification process has formally started during the lifecycle of the project	Chinese government remain committed to the ratification process, with a specific focus on C102 (Social Security Minimum Standards).
Activities	Activity 1.1: Actuarial capacity of the MOHRSS and its provincial branches strengthened	OP2 - Number of participants in the events organised/supported (disaggregated by sex) OP3 - Percentage of participants in the events who report having benefited from the events organised/supported OP8 - Number of knowledge-based products developed	0 (2022)	2023: 20 (OP2); 80% (OP3); 1 (OP8) 2024: 20 (OP2); 80% (OP3); 1 (OP8) 2025: 20 (OP2); 80% (OP3); 1 (OP8) Total: 20 (OP2); 80% (OP3); 1 (OP8) At least 20 trainers trained and 1 training material package validated and ready for future use	Desk-based review, mission reports, etc. Project webpage Project reports Internal and external evaluations Records of events	MOHRSS remains committed to implement the Action jointly with the ILO.
	Activity 1.2: Recommendations on improving the adequacy, sustainability and coverage of the pension and unemployment insurance system in China formulated in consultation with the government and social partners and benefiting from EU experience	OP1-Number of events organized or supported OP8 - Number of knowledge-based products developed	0 (2022)	2023: 0 (OP1); 0 (OP8) 2024: 1 (OP1); 1 (OP8) 2025: 2 (OP1); 2 (OP8) Total: 2 (OP1); 2 (OP8) At least 2 technical studies and 2 technical discussions.	Studies and reports	

	Activity 1.3: Recommendations on the adaptation of social protection in order to make it responsive to climate change	OP1-Number of events organized or supported OP2 - Number of participants in the events organised/supported (disaggregated by sex) OP8 - Number of knowledge-based products developed OP10 - Number of communication products developed	0 (2022)	2023: 0 (OP1); 0 (OP2); 0 (OP8); 0 (OP10) 2024: 1 (OP1); 50 (OP2); 1 (OP8); 4 (OP10) 2025: 1 (OP1); 50 (OP2); 1 (OP8); 4 (OP10) Total: 1 (OP1); 50 (OP2); 1 (OP8) ; 4 (OP10) At least 1 consolidated report published and available online in English and Chinese and 4 podcasts; at least 1 workshop with 50 participants.		
	Activity 2.1: Increasing knowledge on international best practices on key themes affecting the future of social security, with a particular focus on the EU experiences	OP1-Number of events organized or supported OP2 - Number of participants in the events organised/supported (disaggregated by sex) OP3 - Percentage of participants in the events who report having benefited from the events organised/supported OP8 - Number of knowledge-based products developed	0 (2022)	2023: 1 (OP1); 30 (OP2); 0 (OP3); 2 (OP8) 2024: 2 (OP1); 60 (OP2); 70% (OP3); 5 (OP8) 2025: 2 (OP1); 60 (OP2); 70% (OP3); 5 (OP8) Total: : 2 (OP1); 60 (OP2); 70% (OP3); 5 (OP8) At least 2 workshops with 30 participants each; at least 5 papers.		
	Activity 2.2: Promotion of exchange between Chinese experts and EU member states	OP1-Number of events organized or supported	0 (2022)	2023: 0 (OP1); 0 (OP2); 0 (OP3) 2024: 1 (OP1); 10 (OP2); 80% (OP3)		

		OP2 - Number of participants in the events organised/supported (disaggregated by sex) OP3 - Percentage of participants in the events who report having benefited from the events organised/supported		2025: 2 (OP1); 100 (OP2); 80% (OP3) Total: 2 (OP1); 100 (OP2); 80% (OP3) 1 study tour for 10 Chinese officials; 1 international conference with 90 participants		
	Activity 3.1: Enhancing knowledge on International Labour Standards, including C.102 and other relevant social security related ILS	OP8 - Number of knowledge-based products developed	0 (2022)	2023: 1 (OP8) 2024: 2 (OP8) 2025: 2 (OP8) Total: 2 2 promotional material on selected ILS.		

