

UNDESA - ILO

Final independent evaluation of

**United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund
Project** “Accelerating universal social protection for
achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through
strengthened governance and digital transformation”
(2023-2026)”

Final Evaluation Report

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Table of Contents

Executive summary	viii
1. Introduction	2
2. Description of the Project	2
2.1 Background and Context	2
2.2 Project Objectives and Expected Results	3
2.3 Project Strategies and Key Activities	3
2.4 Target Countries and Beneficiaries	3
2.5 Key partners and other key stakeholders	4
2.6 Resources	4
2.7 Link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	4
3. Evaluation objectives, scope, and questions	5
3.1 Purpose and objectives	5
3.2 Evaluation scope, criteria and questions	6
4. Methodology	8
4.1 Data collection	9
4.2 Data analysis	9
4.3 Rating approach	9
4.4 Cross-cutting issues	10
4.5 Limitation and mitigation strategy	10
5. Findings	12
5.1 Relevance	12
5.1.1 Validity of the Theory of Change (EQ1)	12
5.1.2 Alignment with UNPDF priorities and SDGs and with the mandates and strategic priorities of UN DESA and ILO (EQ2)	15
5.1.3 Gender in project design (EQ3)	16
5.2.1 Mechanisms to ensure complementarity with national plans and development partners' initiatives (EQ 10)	18
5.2.2 Synergies (EQ 11)	19
5.3 Efficiency	21

5.3.1. Project implementation: financial, technical, and human resources (EQ8)	21
5.3.2 Joint project implementation model (EQ9).....	22
What does this UN DESA-ILO model imply for future joint UN programming on social protection? ..	22
5.4 Effectiveness	25
5.4.1 Achievement of planned outputs and outcomes (EQ4)	25
5.4.2 Factors affecting project results (EQ4)	27
5.4.3 Observable changes in social protection planning, coordination, and delivery due to strengthen institutional capacities, inter-agency coordination, and the use of digital tools (EQ5) ..	28
5.4.4 Unintended results (EQ4).....	29
5.4.5 Improved access to social protection for vulnerable women and persons with disability (EQ5).....	29
5.5 Sustainability.....	30
5.5.1 Embedding project supported mechanisms in national structures (EQ10)	30
5.5.2 Contribution to national resource mobilization (EQ11)	31
5.6 Progress toward impact	32
5.6.1 Adaptation and adoption (EQ12)	32
5.6.2 Uptake and use of the e-learning modules (EQ13).....	32
5.6.3 Measurable changes in legal or effective social protection coverage for vulnerable populations and governance (EQ14).....	33
5.6.4 Counterfactual: what would have happened without the project? (EQ15)	33
6. Conclusions	35
7. Recommendations	36
Lessons learned.....	43
Annexes	44
Annex i: Evaluation ToRs	45
Annex ii. Project results framework	65
Annex iii. Evaluation Matrix.....	70
Annex iv. – Rating system and Summary of Evaluation findings	79
Annex v. List of individuals interviewed.....	80
Annex vi: List of documents reviewed	81

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Infographic summarizing the evaluation process and results	1
Figure 2: Assessment scale	9
Figure 3: Evaluation limitations and mitigation measures.....	10
Figure 4: Alignment of the project with UNPDF priorities and SDGs and with the mandates and strategic priorities of UN DESA and ILO	16
Figure 5: Project's achievement against logframe objectives.....	26
Figure 6: Factors influencing the project implementation and results attainment	28
Figure 7: Main findings, conclusions, and recommendations matrix	38

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASIP	Agency of Social Insurance and Pensions
CCAs	Common Country Analyses
CDPMO	Capacity Development Programme Management Office
DCC	Development Coordination Council
DESA / UN DESA / UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DESA/CDPMO	Department of Economic and Social Affairs / Capacity Development Programme Management Office
DISD	Division for Inclusive Social Development
DWCP	Decent Work Country Programme
EMIS	Electronic / Employment Management Information System
EQ	Evaluation Question
EU	European Union
EVAL / ILO/EVAL	ILO Evaluation Office
GDI	Global Development Initiative
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
HQ	Headquarters
IA	Indicator of Achievement
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFI	International Financial Institution
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILO SOCPRO / SOCPRO	ILO Social Protection Department / Universal Social Protection Department
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
ITC-ILO	International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization
KAP	Knowledge, Awareness and Practice
KII	Key Informant Interview
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LFTU	Lao Federation of Trade Unions
LNCCI	Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
LNOB	Leaving No One Behind
LSSO	Lao Social Security Organization
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MHSP / MHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population
MIS	Management Information System
MLME / MOLME / MoLME	Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment
MOES	Ministry of Education and Science
MOFA / MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOHRSS	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security
MOLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MWF	Migrant Welfare Fund
NCE	No-Cost Extension
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

NHI	National Health Insurance
NSPC	National Social Protection Committee
NSPS	National Social Protection Strategy
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee
OpenIMIS	Open Insurance Management Information System
PAC	Project Advisory Committee
PMU	Project Management Unit
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
SCAC	Social and Cultural Affairs Commission
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSI	Social Security Inquiry
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPIAC-B	Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TORs	Terms of Reference
TOT / ToT	Training of Trainers
TSA	Targeted Social Assistance
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNPDF	United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WB	World Bank

Executive summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the final independent evaluation of the UNDESA–ILO project, funded by the 2030 Agenda Sub-Fund of the United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund (UNPDF). Implemented from June 2023 to February 2026 (including a nine-month no-cost extension), the project aimed to accelerate and expand universal social protection in Lao PDR and Tajikistan by strengthening governance, improving social security administration, and digitally transforming social protection systems. A global knowledge component complemented the two country-level components, developing practical training modules and resources on governance and digital transformation of social protection for use by countries worldwide. Total resources amounted to USD 1,282,412 from the UNPDF, with an additional USD 80,000 mobilized from ILO.

Methodology

The evaluation followed a theory-based, mixed-methods, and utilization-focused design and was conducted between February and May 2026. It covered the full implementation period and applied OECD/DAC criteria adapted to UNPDF requirements: relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and progress toward impact.

Data collection drew on document review (project documents, progress and final reports, technical outputs), 19 key informant interviews (12 women, 7 men), questionnaire responses, and a focus group with national stakeholders in Lao PDR. The evaluation applied contribution analysis to distinguish the project’s specific results from those of complementary partners. Several limitations affected the evaluation: interviews in Tajikistan were substantially constrained by counterpart unavailability; the planned stakeholder survey was not implemented due to insufficient trainee contacts; and the ex-post timing reduced access to firsthand evidence. Findings were triangulated across sources and qualified where evidence was limited.

Key Findings

The evaluation found that the UN DESA–ILO project was relevant, coherent, efficient, effective, and sustainable, delivering meaningful catalytic results by strengthening governance, coordination, institutional capacity, digital modernization readiness, and coverage-extension mechanisms in Lao PDR and Tajikistan, while also producing global knowledge products on digital social protection. The progress toward impact was assessed as moderately satisfactory, as project outputs are embedded in key reform processes and linked to follow-on investments, but longer-term coverage expansion, sustained uptake of global products, and gender-transformative results remain dependent on continued government action, financing, and partner coordination.

Relevance — Satisfactory

The project addressed genuine governance, coordination, digitalization, and coverage-extension gaps in both countries. The Theory of Change was robust and largely valid, with the strongest validation at the country level. In the Lao PDR, it effectively addressed governance and coordination needs under the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS). In Tajikistan, relevance was maintained through adaptive redesign, pivoting from a social assistance MIS to strengthening the social insurance and pension system administered by ASIP. Gender and disability inclusion were reflected in selected activities, notably maternity protection costing, which represented a gender-sensitive rather than gender-transformative approach.

Coherence — Satisfactory

Country-level coherence was strong: the project was well-aligned with national strategies, UN cooperation frameworks, and development partner activities. In Lao PDR, the Project Advisory Committee and national structures facilitated complementarity. In Tajikistan, project diagnostics fed into ADB and World Bank investments. At the inter-agency level, the UNDESA–ILO partnership generated complementarity where roles were clearly delineated, but the global component was insufficiently linked to country work.

Efficiency — Satisfactory

The project delivered good value for money by leveraging existing staff, partner contributions, and ILO technical backstopping. In Tajikistan, the shift from software development to diagnostics and costing was an efficient adaptation. However, the 24-month timeframe was too short for the project’s ambitions, necessitating a no-cost extension. Transaction costs in the joint implementation model were contained when components were separated but increased where the practical interpretation of roles diverged, or where communication gaps delayed alignment and decision-making.

Effectiveness — Satisfactory

Most planned outputs were achieved. In the Lao PDR, the project delivered strong institutional and operational results: 16 technical meetings and training events, two mechanisms to extend social security to uncovered workers, the establishment of the Social Security Law Revision Committee, and 19 investment governance recommendations endorsed by LSSO. More than 300 provincial and district officials were trained, and 28 master trainers were created. Mobile social security services were expanded to four additional provinces.

In Tajikistan, the project completed the ASIP MIS diagnostic and technical report, business process mapping, interoperability specifications, monitoring framework, maternity benefit costing, social pension costing, and a Migrant Welfare Fund feasibility study. The automated pension payment pilot via Amonatbank provided early evidence of service improvement. At the global level, three e-learning modules and two country case studies were produced and integrated into the Digital Social Protection Gateway.

Sustainability — Satisfactory

Sustainability pathways are credible but not yet fully secured. In Lao PDR, project outputs are embedded within national structures—the NSPC, LSSO, and the Law Revision Committee—and strategy review evidence is informing the NSPS 2026–2030. In Tajikistan, the ASIP diagnostic underpins domestically-financed modernization through ADB and World Bank loans. However, limited domestic fiscal space in Lao PDR, staff turnover, weak digital infrastructure in Tajikistan, and incomplete institutionalization remain risks. The work undertaken through UNDESA’s Digital Social Protection Gateway has the potential to contribute to the sustainability of the global component, provided it is actively used, followed up on, regularly updated, and adequately financed. However, it is still too early to assess the extent to which this potential will be realized.

Progress toward Impact —Moderately Satisfactory

It is too early to observe changes among social protection system users. However, results are catalytic and institutional. The project made significant contributions at the institutional, policy, and financing levels. It strengthened governance structures, supported legal and policy reform processes, enhanced readiness for digital transformation, and produced technical outputs that helped inform larger-scale investments by development finance institutions, particularly in Tajikistan. These achievements represent important impact pathways by improving the enabling environment for future social protection expansion. The project’s contribution to impact can be understood across four main dimensions: (i) institutional impact, through strengthened capacities and governance mechanisms; (ii) policy impact, through reform processes and policy options generated; (iii) catalytic impact, through its role in leveraging future investments and reforms; and (iv) beneficiary-level impact, where evidence remains limited and longer-term effects have yet to materialize.

Global uptake of knowledge products and e-learning is less clearly documented. Without the project, reforms would have progressed more slowly and with weaker technical foundations, particularly in Tajikistan, where the ASIP diagnostic provided a foundation for larger IFI investments.

Conclusions

The project delivered meaningful catalytic results within constrained resources and time, effectively strengthening the enabling conditions for social protection reform in Lao PDR and Tajikistan.

While it is too early to observe significant changes in social protection coverage or welfare outcomes among beneficiaries, the project has generated important institutional, policy, and catalytic effects. In Lao PDR, the project contributed to strengthening governance structures, supporting the Social Security Law revision process, improving investment governance, and informing the development of the next National Social Protection Strategy. In Tajikistan, the project established key technical foundations for digital transformation and social protection reform through diagnostics, costing exercises, interoperability specifications, and monitoring frameworks. These outputs have already informed planned investments by development partners and increased the readiness of national institutions to undertake future reforms. Although measurable impacts on coverage and access remain largely prospective, the project has strengthened the enabling conditions necessary for future expansion, improved governance, and more effective delivery of social protection systems. The realization of longer-term beneficiary-level impacts will depend on sustained government commitment, domestic financing, and the implementation of follow-on reforms and investments.

The joint UN programming approach demonstrated added value where mandates were complementary and roles were clear, and future initiatives could further enhance this value through stronger operational coordination and closer links between country-level implementation and global knowledge work, while recognizing the distinct institutional mandates and operating models of the two organizations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to UNPDF, UN DESA, and ILO for the design of future projects:

Recommendation 1: Gender, disability, migration status and informality should be embedded in the theory of change, logframe indicators and activity design for social protection projects from the outset, as applicable.

Addressed to: UNPDF, UN DESA, ILO

Budget implications: low. Clearer focusing and targeting during project design phase required.

Prioritization: High

Recommendation 2: Global knowledge and training products should be explicitly linked to country demand in the project countries and existing technical initiatives to add value as part of a coherent project approach.

Addressed to: UN DESA

Budget implications: low. Informed targeting of project countries with other UN partner agency.

Prioritization: High

Recommendation 3: Future interventions should include outcome-level indicators that track institutional uptake, policy adoption, service delivery changes and coverage effects.

For coverage tracking, indicators should be based on sex-, age-, disability-, and migration-disaggregated data from partner sources to substantiate inclusion results.

Addressed to: UNPDF, UN DESA, ILO

Budget implications: low. Requires more results-focused project design. However, disaggregated data will depend on its availability in partners institutions, as large scale data collection for social protection access and coverage would be beyond the timeframe and budgets available in UNDPDF projects.

Prioritization: High

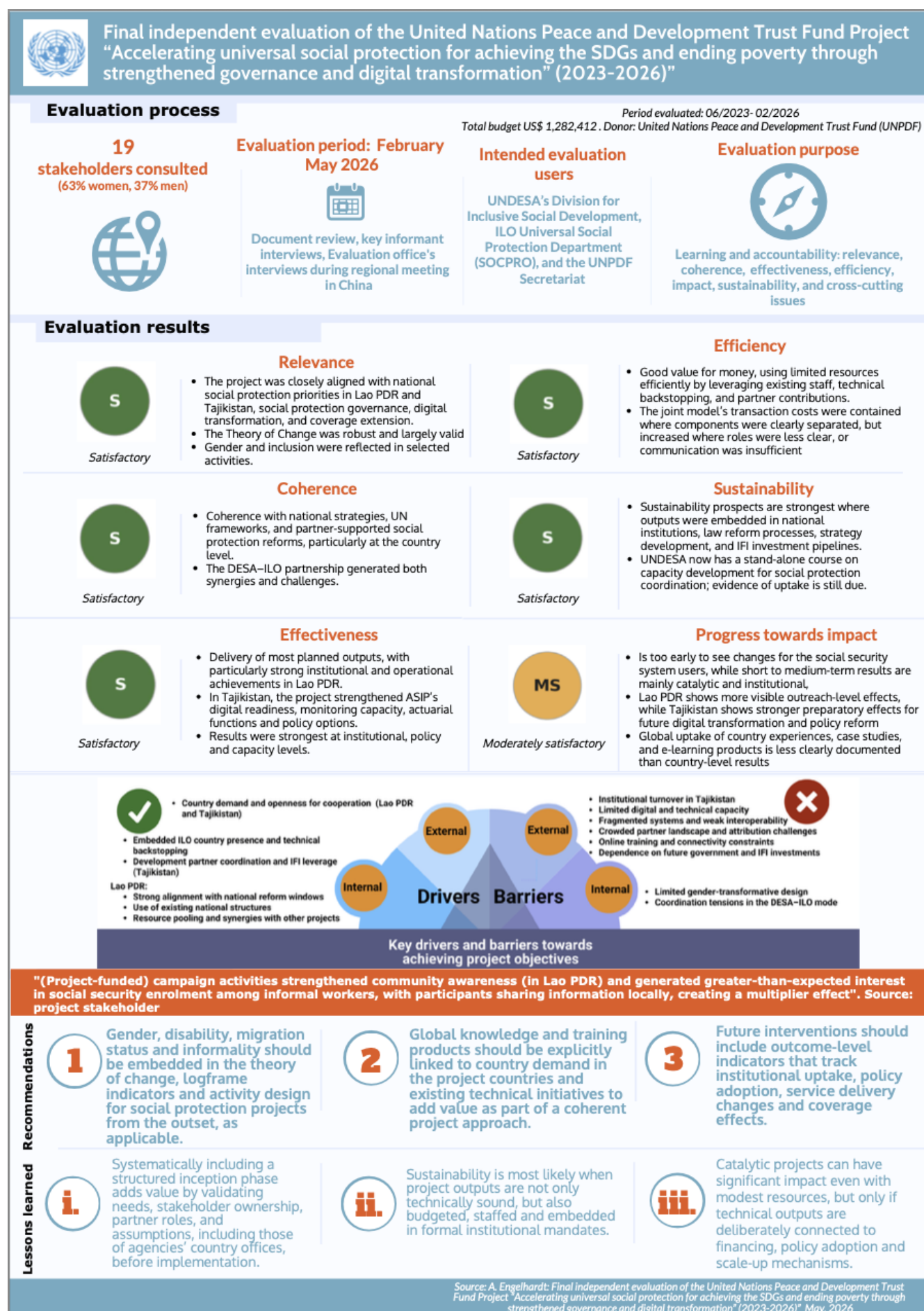
Lessons Learned

- Lesson 1: A structured inception phase adds value by validating needs, ownership, partner roles, and country-office assumptions before implementation begins.
- Lesson 2: Efficiency in small catalytic projects depends less on minimizing coordination and more on focusing coordination where it is essential for strategic decisions.
- Lesson 3: Joint projects benefit from clearly defining whether they are genuinely integrated programmes or coordinated parallel components; ambiguity creates both inefficiency and reputational risk.
- Lesson 4: Global knowledge work is most effective when positioned as a service to country learning and intergovernmental uptake, not as a parallel workstream disconnected from operational realities.
- Lesson 5: Sustainability is most likely when project outputs are not only technically sound, but also budgeted, staffed, and embedded in formal institutional mandates.
- Lesson 6: Catalytic projects can have a significant impact even with modest resources, but only if technical outputs are deliberately connected to financing, policy adoption, and scale-up mechanisms.

Emerging good practices

- Decentralized mobile social security service delivery for rural and informal workers.
In Lao PDR, the mobile social security model brought registration, contribution collection, membership card issuance, and information directly to villages, reducing travel time and enrolment costs for rural residents and informal workers. The model was expanded to four additional provinces and was later taken up by LSSO and local offices, suggesting practical replicability.
- Diagnostic-first digital transformation support before system implementation.
In Tajikistan, the project shifted from software development toward ASIP-focused diagnostics, business process mapping, interoperability specifications, and monitoring framework development. This created a technically grounded basis for future modernization without duplicating partner-supported MIS work.

Figure 1: Infographic summarizing the evaluation process and results



1. Introduction

This document serves as the evaluation report for the final independent evaluation of the United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund Project “Accelerating universal social protection for achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through strengthened governance and digital transformation” (2023-2026).

2. Description of the Project

2.1 Background and Context

This overview of the project’s background is based on the original project document, which outlines the main objectives and context. The project aims to help two countries, Lao PDR and Tajikistan, advance the 2030 Agenda by promoting universal social protection through better governance and digital transformation from 2023 to 2026. A global component complements the two country-level components.

According to the project document¹, “Today, more than half of the world’s population has no access to social protection at all. In Lao PDR and Tajikistan exclusion is even larger with, respectively, 87.9 and 73.4 percent of the population with no income security in cases of old age, maternity, unemployment and other life cycle and socioeconomic risks. Poor governance, lack of integrated policy responses, and insufficient and unsustainable financing of social protection are key issues for a number of countries including Lao PDR and Tajikistan in their efforts to extending the coverage of social protection to all. There is a growing need for awareness raising at the global and national levels as well as for the sharing of knowledge and good practices, and the development of practical guidance for the strengthened governance and digitalization of social security systems, identified as a key accelerator enabling to leapfrog some of the bottlenecks to close the social protection coverage gap.

Definitions:

“Digital transformation” refers to the integration of digital technologies, including management information systems and interoperability tools, into social protection systems to improve delivery, coordination, and monitoring.

“Governance strengthening” refers to improvements in the institutional, legal, and administrative frameworks for social protection, including multi-stakeholder coordination, financing, and accountability mechanisms.

Source: UNDESA/ILO, 2026: Terms of Reference. Final evaluation of the project titled: “Accelerating universal social protection for achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through strengthened governance and digital transformation”

The main goal of the project was to accelerate and expand universal social protection by strengthening policy design, administrative governance, and the digital transformation of social protection systems in Lao PDR and Tajikistan, while also sharing lessons learned to benefit other countries worldwide. The project adopted a two-pronged approach. In the two focus countries, Lao PDR and Tajikistan, technical support was provided through ILO country offices to improve governance, social security administration, service delivery, and the technical skills of institutions and practitioners, including promoting connectivity and digitalization. At the same time, the project built a knowledge base of best practices and developed practical training modules on the digital transformation of social protection

¹ UNDESA/ILO, 2023: Accelerating universal social protection for achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through strengthened governance and digital transformation. Project document, p.3.

planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. These knowledge products are meant to benefit all countries and are aimed to be widely shared.

Additionally, the project promoted continuous learning and South–South exchange on social security governance and digital transformation, drawing on good practices from China’s social protection system and lessons learned from the ILO–EU–China initiative that strengthened China’s institutional capacity to advance universal social protection. In this context, China’s experience—particularly in the digital transformation of social insurance administration and service delivery—provided valuable insights for countries seeking to strengthen the governance, administration, and delivery of social protection programmes. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China (MOHRSS) served as a key technical partner throughout the project.

2.2 Project Objectives and Expected Results

The main objective of the project was to accelerate and extend universal social protection through the strengthening of the policy design, administrative governance and the digital transformation of social protection systems in the Lao PDR and Tajikistan and globally in support of just transitions.

Outcomes established in the project:

Outcome 1 (Lao PDR): “Increased capacity of national stakeholders to plan, finance, implement and monitor the National Social Protection Strategy; expand coverage; and ensure sustainable financing in Lao PDR”. Increased capacity to plan, finance, implement, and monitor the NSPS; extend coverage; and ensure sustainable financing (e.g., NSPS mid-term review, legal reform inputs, actuarial capacity, investment governance, sub-national trainings, and mobile registration campaigns).

Outcome 2 (Tajikistan): “Increased capacity of the national entities responsible for social protection in Tajikistan to expand coverage, improve governance and enhance service quality to workers in the formal and informal economy, returning and migrant workers and refugees”. (e.g., database enhancements, data availability, increased capacity of national entities (ASIP and partners) to expand coverage, improve governance, and enhance service quality through digitalization/management improvements and policy options for inclusion, MIS diagnostics, M&E integration, maternity protection options, migrant support, social pension scenarios).

Outcome 3 (Global): “Increased available knowledge and resources for understanding of the vital role of governance and the potential of digital transformation in extending the coverage of social protection and achieving greater sustainability”. Increased knowledge and resources on governance and digitalization (e.g., development of a capacity-building training toolkit and pilot workshop; case studies; e-learning package and community of practice).

2.3 Project Strategies and Key Activities

Design and components: The design clustered activities into (i) capacity-building and policy processes (e.g., NSPS implementation support, parliamentary engagement, actuarial and legal reviews, sub-national training); (ii) digital transformation and administration (e.g., diagnostics, MIS scoping and monitoring modules, interoperability planning); (iii) coverage extension pilots and options (e.g., mobile registration, maternity benefits, migrant welfare mechanisms, social pension); and (iv) global knowledge and learning (e.g., training modules, pilot workshop, case studies, e-learning and a community of practice). The approach privileged country ownership, coordination with development partners, and evidence-based policy dialogue, underpinned by gender, disability inclusion and LNOB principles.

2.4 Target Countries and Beneficiaries

Target countries: Lao PDR and Tajikistan.

Primary beneficiaries included government institutions (e.g., MOLSW/LSSO in Lao PDR; MOHSPP/ASIP in Tajikistan as well as relevant agencies in China), parliamentarians, tripartite partners (employers' and workers' organizations), social protection practitioners and statistical focal points, and workers in the informal economy, migrant workers, women (maternity protection), and older persons. Through this South–South exchange, participating institutions in both Lao PDR and China acted as both knowledge providers and learners, strengthening their technical capacities, policy design, and implementation approaches. Geographic coverage was national in Lao PDR and Tajikistan, with global reach through the global knowledge component.

2.5 Key partners and other key stakeholders

Implementation arrangements and partners: The project was jointly carried out by UN DESA/Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) and ILO/SOCPRO, with UN DESA/CDPMO and ILO/EVAL responsible for evaluation oversight, and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS, China) serving as a technical partner. Responsibilities were divided based on outcomes, with outcome 1 and outcome 2 implemented by the ILO and outcome 3 by UN DESA.

National partners included Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MOLSW) and Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO) (Lao PDR), MOHSPP, Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment (MOLMEP) in terms of Preliminary costing exercise for policy design / Migrant Workers' Welfare Fund for Tajik Migrant Workers and ASIP (Tajikistan). Collaboration and complementarity had been maintained with UNICEF, the World Bank, ICMPD and ADB in Tajikistan; with MOHRSS (China) for South-South exchange with Lao PDR; and with UN DESA's Digital Learning Centre for the global training toolkit and e-learning platform. Additional resources were mobilized from GIZ and ILO to support digitalization in Tajikistan.

2.6 Resources

The total budget from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund of UNPDF was US\$1,282,411.77 (fully received), with additional mobilized resources from ILO of US\$80,000, which were not part of the core UNPDF budget. The approved duration was 1 June 2023 – 31 May 2025 (24 months), with a No-Cost Extension (NCE) from 1 June 2025 to 28 February 2026. As of 28 February, financial delivery was 100%.-matter contributors, including national experts producing sector/thematic papers.

2.7 Link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The project explicitly aimed to contribute to the achievement of SDGs 1, 2, 8 and 10 and indirectly 3, 4, 6 and 16, particularly focusing on the following SDGs:

- 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), SDG target 3.8 (Achieve universal health coverage)
- SDG 1.a (Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions).

- SDG10, through a better-managed and efficiently- administered social protection programmes supported by digitization, the project will help to improve social protection coverage and reduce inequality (responding to SDG10.4 target: Adapt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality).

The project also contributed to SDG target 16.6 (Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels).

3. Evaluation objectives, scope, and questions

3.1 Purpose and objectives

Purpose: This evaluation is a mandatory final independent review of the UNPDF project on expanding universal social protection through better governance and digital transformation, implemented by UN DESA and ILO.

It has two main purposes. First, accountability: it will assess how well the project achieved its outcomes, how efficiently resources were used, and how effective the partnerships were with UN DESA, ILO, national counterparts, and development partners in Lao PDR and Tajikistan. Second, learning: it will identify lessons and good practices to improve future technical assistance, capacity-building, and partnership efforts, including possible scale-up and replication through wider regional and global initiatives.

The evaluation will look not only at results, but also at how they were achieved, especially the added value of UN DESA–ILO collaboration, South–South and triangular cooperation, and the project’s support for integrated, evidence-based policymaking. The findings are expected to support both organizations in refining their joint approaches to country-level engagement, coordination with development partners, and the use of digital solutions for social protection governance.

Objectives: The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

1. Assess the relevance and coherence of the project’s design and implementation, and its alignment with national priorities, UNPDF objectives, and UN DESA/ILO mandates, including the integration of gender equality, human rights, and disability inclusion (Relevance; Coherence).
2. Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation, including the extent to which intended outputs and outcomes were achieved at national and global levels, and the added value of the joint UN DESA–ILO implementation model (compared to UN agencies undertaking such a project individually) in strengthening institutional capacities, coordination, and cost-effective delivery (Effectiveness; Efficiency; Coherence).
3. Examine the sustainability and impact orientation of project results, including the likelihood that institutional, policy, digital, and capacity development gains will be sustained beyond project completion, and the extent to which the project has contributed to longer-term improvements in governance, financing, and digital transformation of social protection systems (Sustainability; Impact).
4. Identify lessons learned, good practices, and operational challenges, and provide forward-looking recommendations for consolidation and scaling-up of successful

elements — including partnerships, digital tools, training modules, and country experiences — to inform future UN DESA and ILO programming and enhance long-term impact (Effectiveness; Sustainability; Impact).

Intended users: The Primary audiences of the evaluation include:

- DESA and ILO Universal Social Protection Department (SOCPRO) and global technical teams as the joint evaluation managers;
- DESA's Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) and ILO's SOCPRO, as implementing partners responsible for project execution and follow-up actions; and
- The UNPDF Secretariat, as funding entity.

Secondary audiences include:

- National counterparts in Lao PDR (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Lao Social Security Organization, and the National Social Protection Committee and Secretariat) and Tajikistan (Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population and the Agency for Social Insurance and Pensions);
- Partner UN agencies and development organizations (UNICEF, World Bank, ADB, GIZ, MOHRSS/China, and Oxfam); and
- Policy networks and practitioners engaged in the digitalization of social protection systems Globally;
- ILO's Evaluation Office (EVAL).

The evaluation was guided by the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria used by UN DESA and the ILO—relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact—and will explicitly integrate gender equality, human rights, and disability inclusion across all dimensions.

3.2 Evaluation scope, criteria and questions

The evaluation, undertaken between February and May 2026, covers the entire implementation period of the project, from 2023 to 2026, and addresses the following questions, framed according to the evaluation criteria set out in the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation²:

1. Relevance

Evaluation question: How relevant was the project's design to national priorities and UN DESA/ILO mandates?

Sub-questions:

- To what extent was the problem analysis underpinning the project design, specifically the framing of coverage gaps as primarily a governance and digital transformation problem, validated by national stakeholders?*
- Did it adequately account for political coordination barriers to reform in both countries?*
- To what extent was the project aligned with UNPDF priorities and SDGs and with the mandates and strategic priorities of UN DESA and ILO?
- To what extent did the project design distinguish between gender-neutral, gender-sensitive, and gender-transformative approaches to social protection governance, and was the framing appropriate given the specific exclusion patterns of women, for example, in informal*

² The UNEG Norms and Standards (2020) define and promote internationally recognised evaluation criteria, including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and the integration of cross-cutting issues such as human rights and gender equality. Evaluation questions modified from the ToR are presented in *italics*.

employment, returning female migrants, and men and women with disabilities in each country and globally? (gender/human rights/disability integration question)

2. Effectiveness

Evaluation question: To what extent did the project achieve its intended outcomes and outputs?³

Sub-questions:

- a) To what extent were the planned outcomes and outputs realized as intended in both countries and globally? How? If not, why?
- b) *To what extent did the project strengthen institutional capacities and inter-agency coordination (UN DESA-ILO) in observable changes in how national institutions plan, coordinate, and deliver social protection?*
- c) Were there any unintended positive or negative results?
- d) *For each country, what specific evidence exists that women, for example, in the informal economy, returning female migrants, and women with disabilities, as well as experienced improved access to social protection as a result of project activities, and where did gender-differentiated approaches fail to materialize? To what extent has the project contributed to strengthening the inclusion of persons with disabilities and human rights in social protection?*

3. Efficiency

Evaluation question: How well were resources used to achieve results?

Sub-questions:

- a) Were financial, technical, and human resources adequate and used economically and efficiently?
- b) *What were the actual transaction costs, in terms of coordination time, decision-making delays, and administrative issues, of the joint UN DESA-ILO implementation model? Did the division of responsibilities between normative/global (UN DESA) and technical/country (ILO) roles enhance or constrain delivery quality and speed?*

4. Coherence

Evaluation question: To what extent was the project consistent and complementary with other interventions?

Sub-questions:

- a) *What specific mechanisms — joint planning processes, shared results frameworks, formal coordination protocols — ensured genuine complementarity between this project and national plans and complementary initiatives of development partners such as World Bank, UNICEF, ADB and GIZ? Where did gaps, overlaps, or competitive dynamics emerge in practice?*
- b) *To what extent did the respective institutional roles of UN DESA (intergovernmental/normative) and ILO (tripartite/technical) create productive synergies or structural tensions in joint decision-making, and what does this model imply for future joint UN programming on social protection?*

5. Sustainability

Evaluation question: Are project results likely to continue beyond completion?

Sub-questions:

³ With reference to the overarching question: “To what extent has the DESA–ILO UNPDF project contributed to accelerating universal social protection through strengthened governance, financing, and digital transformation in Lao PDR, Tajikistan, and globally?”

- a) *To what extent is there evidence that project-supported mechanisms — specifically the EMIS monitoring framework in Tajikistan, the Social Security Law revision process in Lao PDR, and the National Social Protection Commission — have been embedded in institutional mandates, annual work plans, and domestic budget lines that do not depend on continued external funding?*
- b) *To what extent did the project contribute to a measurable shift in domestic resource mobilization arguments for social protection — specifically, did the fiscal space analysis and financing framework work in both countries generate uptake by Finance Ministries or development finance institutions? To what extent were there other means to build sustainability?*

6. Impact

Evaluation question: What longer-term effects has the project contributed to?

Sub-questions:

- a) *To what extent have the project's country experiences, case studies, or e-learning modules been explicitly cited, adopted, or adapted in ILO/ UN DESA normative guidance documents, Global Accelerator knowledge products, or preparations for the World Social Summit 2025 — and through what specific channels did country-level learning reach global policymaking arenas?*
- b) *What is the documented, or planned, uptake and use of the e-learning modules among target countries beyond Lao PDR and Tajikistan — specifically, how many countries have used the modules, how are they being adapted, and what barriers exist to adoption for policymakers in lower-income countries without stable digital infrastructure?*
- c) *What would be the status of social protection and digital governance in the project countries and globally without the project? (counterfactual, new question)*

4. Methodology

The evaluation followed a theory-based, mixed-methods, and utilization-focused design. Its analytical starting point was the reconstruction and refinement of the project's Theory of Change, covering the Lao PDR component, the Tajikistan component and the global knowledge component. The Theory of Change was used to test whether the project's inputs, activities and outputs plausibly contributed to intended outcomes in governance strengthening, digital transformation, institutional capacity development and expanded social protection coverage.

The methodology was structured around three complementary analytical pillars. The first pillar assessed the project's strategic logic, design and implementation, drawing on document review, stakeholder analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, surveys, case studies and secondary analysis of indicators. The second pillar tested the assumptions, risks and causal pathways underlying the project's intervention logic, including national ownership, institutional capacity, stakeholder engagement, coordination and the wider fiscal and policy environment. The third pillar validated the results chain, with particular attention to whether capacity-building, meetings, workshops, e-learning activities and knowledge products contributed to institutional capacity, stakeholder coordination and practical uptake of tools and knowledge.

The evaluation adopted an overall qualitative approach. It relied primarily on document analysis, key informant interviews, questionnaire responses and triangulation across available evidence. This was appropriate given the limited number of trainees in Lao PDR, gaps

in contact details for training participants in Zambia and Tanzania, and the reduced ability to reach project-country stakeholders after project completion.

4.1 Data collection

For data collection, the evaluation applied a mixed-methods approach to triangulate findings and draw on diverse data sources. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods allowed for a balanced and comprehensive understanding of different perspectives. Quantitative analysis included the project’s monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data contained in project reports, the final project report, and stakeholder interviews, including one focus group discussion with national stakeholders in Lao PDR.

Sampling was not required, as the evaluation aimed to cover all project countries and components covered by the evaluation. However, the two remaining key stakeholders in Tajikistan could not be reached and were complemented by two key stakeholders in Zambia, related to component 3. This imbalance was also mentioned under the evaluation limitations in the report’s methodology section. The evaluation reached 19 stakeholders, 12 women (63%) and 7 men (37%).

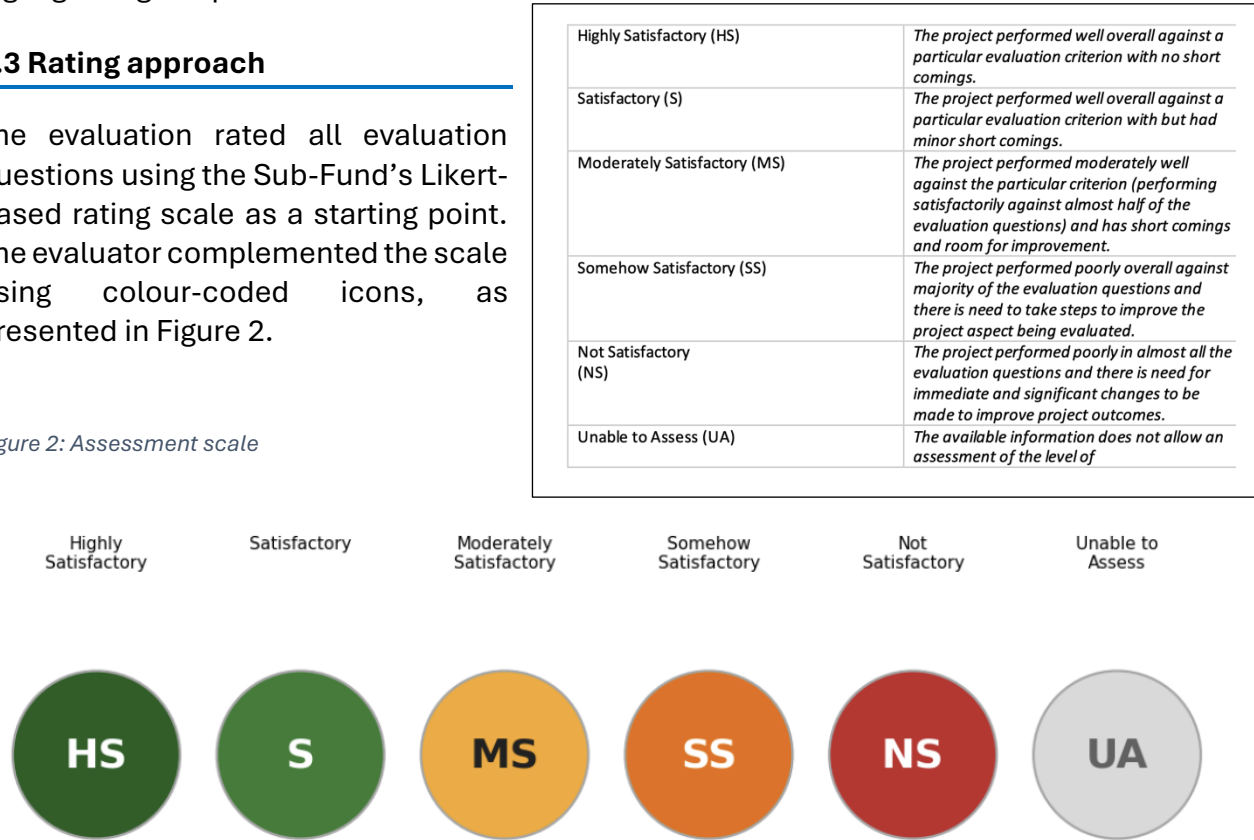
4.2 Data analysis

The data analysis, which integrated qualitative and quantitative data, provided the foundation for addressing the evaluation questions. By examining documents and interview notes, the evaluator identified common trends, divergent patterns, and inconclusive findings. Cross-source comparisons helped pinpoint the project’s key success factors and challenges in achieving its objectives. Additionally, the analysis uncovered valuable lessons learned and highlighted good practices.

4.3 Rating approach

The evaluation rated all evaluation questions using the Sub-Fund’s Likert-based rating scale as a starting point. The evaluator complemented the scale using colour-coded icons, as presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Assessment scale



4.4 Cross-cutting issues

Gender, human rights, LNOB, environmental sustainability, and disability perspectives were integrated into the data collection methods and tools through a specific evaluation criterion, a dedicated evaluation question, and data disaggregation during analysis.

4.5 Limitation and mitigation strategy

The evaluation faced several limitations related to timing, stakeholder access and the feasibility of quantitative data collection, as summarized in Figure 3. Since the evaluation was conducted ex-post, after the project had finalized, it was more difficult to reach project stakeholders in the project countries, and the availability of first-hand evidence was lower than anticipated. This limitation was particularly significant in Tajikistan, where two of the four main counterparts had left office and the other two could not be reached. The situation was further affected by the ILO focal point being on extended sick leave during the evaluation period. As a result, the evaluation had reduced ability to validate Tajikistan findings directly with the main national counterparts.

The envisaged stakeholder survey was not implemented because the number of trainees in Lao PDR was limited and contact details for participants in the piloted UNDESA trainings in Zambia and Tanzania were incomplete. This would have produced a small and uneven response base, limiting the validity and usefulness of quantitative results. Consequently, the evaluation adopted an overall qualitative approach, drawing primarily on document review, key informant interviews, questionnaire responses and triangulation of available evidence.

To partly compensate for the reduced access to project-country stakeholders, the evaluation placed greater emphasis on a thorough review of project documentation, progress reports, final reporting, technical outputs, and available evaluation evidence. In addition, stakeholders in Zambia were interviewed as representatives of the UNDESA global component, where the global training was piloted. Evidence from Zambia was used only to assess the global training and knowledge component, and not as a substitute for country-level validation in Lao PDR or Tajikistan. Findings were therefore qualified where evidence was limited, and stronger conclusions were drawn only where multiple sources converged.

Figure 3: Evaluation limitations and mitigation measures

Main limitation	Relevance for ToR delivery	Mitigation measures
The evaluation was conducted ex-post, after the project had finalized, reducing access to project stakeholders in the project countries.	Because the evaluation took place after project completion, some government counterparts, project staff and implementing partners were no longer available or were harder to reach. This reduced the evaluation's ability to collect first-hand evidence from all intended stakeholder groups and increased the risk of gaps in institutional memory.	The evaluation compensated by undertaking a more thorough document review, including the project document, progress reports, final report, training materials, technical outputs and available monitoring evidence. Interview evidence was triangulated with documentary evidence wherever possible, and findings were framed cautiously where direct stakeholder validation was limited.
Interviews in Tajikistan were substantially constrained by counterpart availability.	Two of the four main Tajikistan counterparts had left office, while the other two could not be reached. In addition, the ILO focal point was on extended sick leave during the evaluation period. This limited the evaluation's ability to validate results, assumptions and sustainability prospects	The evaluation relied more heavily on project documentation, progress reports, technical outputs and evidence from ILO and other available informants. The limitation was explicitly considered when assessing Tajikistan findings, especially those relating to ownership,

	directly with the main national stakeholders involved in the Tajikistan component.	uptake, institutionalization and sustainability. Claims about Tajikistan were triangulated where possible and qualified where direct national validation was not available.
Lower overall ability to reach project stakeholders reduced the breadth of primary evidence.	The ToR expected interviews and feedback across project countries and the global component. Limited stakeholder access meant that the primary data set was narrower than planned, especially for country-level perspectives after project closure.	The evaluation strengthened the depth of document analysis and used triangulation across available reports, interview notes, questionnaire responses and project evidence. The analysis distinguished between well-corroborated findings and findings based on fewer sources.
Stakeholders in Zambia were interviewed as representatives of the UNDESA global component, rather than as project-country stakeholders.	Because some intended country stakeholders could not be reached, the evaluation included stakeholders in Zambia, where the global UNDESA training component was piloted. Their evidence was relevant for assessing the global training and knowledge component, but not a substitute for country-level validation in Lao PDR or Tajikistan.	Zambia interviews were used specifically to assess the relevance, quality and usefulness of the UNDESA global training pilot. The evaluation avoided generalizing Zambia evidence to Lao PDR or Tajikistan, and clearly separated global-component findings from country-component findings.
The envisaged stakeholder survey was not applied.	The inception methodology had envisaged an online survey, particularly to collect quantitative evidence from participants in capacity-building activities. However, the number of trainees in Lao PDR was limited, and contact details for participants in the piloted trainings in Zambia and Tanzania were incomplete. As a result, the likely survey response base would have been too small and uneven to generate valid or representative quantitative findings.	The evaluation therefore adopted an overall qualitative approach, relying on document review, key informant interviews, questionnaire responses and triangulation of available evidence. Where training-related results were assessed, the evaluation focused on qualitative evidence of relevance, usefulness, uptake and application, rather than presenting weak quantitative findings with limited validity.
The short project duration limited the assessment of sustainability and impact.	The ToR required an assessment of sustainability and impact orientation, but the project duration was relatively short and implementation continued under a no-cost extension. Institutional, legal and digital reforms often require more than one project cycle to mature. This was already recognized in the inception report as a limitation.	The evaluation distinguished between completed outputs, early signs of institutionalization and longer-term sustainability prospects. Sustainability was assessed by examining whether outputs were embedded in mandates, systems, workplans, legal drafts, budgets or follow-up support, rather than only by measuring final outcomes.
Contribution was difficult to isolate in a crowded partner landscape.	The project operated alongside UNICEF, the World Bank, ADB, GIZ, and others. Therefore, observed changes in policy, governance, digitalization or capacity may reflect combined efforts rather than the project alone. The inception report identified this as a limitation and proposed contribution analysis rather than simple attribution.	The evaluation used contribution analysis. It traced the project's specific outputs and causal pathways, distinguishing between results directly supported by the project, results the project helped catalyse, and results that depended substantially on complementary partner support.

5. Findings

The following section presents the evaluation findings. The findings are grouped by evaluation criteria and address each evaluation question listed in the evaluation matrix (see Annex 3).

5.1 Relevance

Key findings: The project was relevant and well aligned with national social protection priorities in project countries, addressing real governance, coordination, digitalization, and coverage-extension gaps. Gender and inclusion were relevant but not consistently translated into a clearly gender-transformative design.

- The project was closely aligned with national social protection priorities in Lao PDR and Tajikistan, including SDG 1.3, social protection governance, digital transformation, and coverage extension. The Theory of Change was robust and largely valid, with some disconnect identified between the project components.
- In Lao PDR, the project responded particularly well to governance, coordination, law reform, and outreach needs under the National Social Protection Strategy.
- In Tajikistan, the project's relevance was high at the outcome level and benefited from adaptive design for two activities, as initial assumptions needed to be adjusted to changing government priorities and partner activities.
- Gender and inclusion were reflected in selected activities, especially maternity protection costing, reflecting, overall, a gender-relevant and gender-sensitive approach to social protection governance.



According to the evaluation matrix, the sub-criteria for assessing the project's relevance are as follows: i) validity of the project's implicit Theory of Change; ii) alignment with the UNPDF priorities and UN DESA and ILO mandates; and iii) gender considerations in the project design.

The evaluation finds evidence that the project was designed and implemented within the mandates of the UNPDF, UN DESA, and ILO while advancing 2030 Agenda priorities in participating countries, resulting in a **satisfactory rating** based on the evaluator's use of the UNPDF rating system⁴.

5.1.1 Validity of the Theory of Change (EQ1)

The project's theory of change (ToC) is that universal social protection can be accelerated when its main systemic barriers - weak governance, fragmented administration, low digital capacity, and limited financing evidence - are tackled in a coordinated and mutually reinforcing way. The project document frames three main enablers: strengthened social partners, digital transformation of national social protection systems, and strengthened statistical capacities. These are expected to support in-country technical assistance, thematic knowledge work, and strategic partnerships, leading to integrated social protection and employment policies, integrated financing, and stronger multilateral cooperation. The intended medium-term outcome is expanded legal and effective coverage for excluded

⁴ Validity of the ToC: HS, S, S (scores 4,3,3); Alignment: HS (score 4); Gender in project design: S (score 3) = 17 out of a maximum of 20. (17/20) * 4 = 3.4

groups, especially informal economy workers, migrants, returning workers and refugees, contributing ultimately to the human right to social security for all.

Project's key problem analysis

 The ToC's problem diagnosis is sound. It is strongest for Lao PDR and Tajikistan, where country-level needs are clearly validated. It is weaker for the global component, where the need existed but the distinct added value and connection to country implementation were less consistently demonstrated. Instead, different countries were selected for piloting global-level outputs (Tanzania and Zambia).

In the **Lao PDR**, the ToC's problem analysis is strongly validated. The problem was not simply that many people remained uncovered, but that the National Social Protection Strategy 2021–25 needed to be operationalized through stronger coordination, monitoring, legislative reform, investment governance and outreach to informal and rural workers. Questionnaire responses confirm that the project was seen as responsive to governance-related needs, especially national coordination, tripartite engagement, civil society participation, development partner coordination, M&E and oversight functions. However, the evidence also qualifies the ToC: digital transformation was less central in Lao PDR than governance strengthening and coverage outreach, with respondents noting that digitalization remained at a basic stage.

In **Tajikistan**, the ToC's problem analysis is also validated, but the focus was different. The main bottleneck was the weakly digitalized and under-supported contributory social insurance and pension system. Questionnaire evidence confirms that the social insurance and pension system was “left behind,” not yet digitalized, and less supported by other development partners than other areas of social protection. The project's pivot toward ASIP therefore strengthened the validity of the ToC by aligning the intervention with a more pressing institutional gap than the original social assistance MIS focus.

At the **global level**, the problem analysis is only partly validated. The ToC correctly identifies a need for practical knowledge products and training on the digital transformation of social protection systems. However, questionnaire evidence suggests that the global component was less clearly anchored in country-level work⁵ and that its niche vis-à-vis ILO's existing technical expertise and other digital social protection initiatives was not always sufficiently defined.

Results chain

 The evaluation finds that the results chain is credible but unevenly advanced. The project combined UNDESA–ILO funding and technical expertise, ILO country-level implementation, DESA global knowledge work, South–South cooperation, supplementary development partner and ILO resources, and engagement with governments, social partners, UN agencies, IFIs, and civil society. This corresponds well to the project's actual delivery model. In Lao PDR, it moves from outputs to early institutional and people-level outcomes. In Tajikistan, it moves convincingly from outputs to reform readiness, with system-wide transformation in the more distant future,

⁵ The project team commented that there was a project decision not to engage the global component with the implementing ILO agenda in Lao PDR and Tajikistan.

the latter, however, being beyond the scope of the project. At the global level, it is strongest at the output level and weaker at the demonstrated outcome level.

In the **Lao PDR**, the evidence strongly validates the output-to-outcome pathway. The final report records the establishment and operationalization of the Project Advisory Committee; use of national structures such as the NSPC, Social Security Law Revision Committee and Social Security Fund Investment Committee; mid-term and final reviews of the NSPS; expansion of mobile social security services to four additional provinces; training of more than 300 provincial and district officials; creation of 28 master trainers; and endorsement of 19 recommendations on investment governance and diversification. These results substantiate the ToC's claim that coordination platforms, evidence, capacity building and governance support can strengthen institutional capacity and create more accessible social protection delivery.

The Lao PDR results chain also shows a credible people-level pathway. Mobile social security services brought registration, contribution collection and membership card issuance directly to villages, reducing travel time and enrolment costs for rural residents and informal workers. This is one of the strongest examples where the ToC moves beyond institutional strengthening and shows plausible early effects for intended beneficiaries, linking also to the sustainability of results.

In **Tajikistan**, the results chain is validated mainly as a reform-readiness pathway. The final report confirms delivery of the ASIP MIS diagnostic and technical report, business process mapping, interoperability specifications, M&E framework, expenditure analysis, capacity building, maternity benefit costing, social pension costing and Migrant Welfare Fund feasibility work. These outputs are directly aligned with the ToC's intermediate outcome of increased digital modernization readiness and stronger evidence for policy reform.

However, Tajikistan also demonstrates the limits of the results chain. The project produced the technical foundations for change, but full MIS implementation, legal adoption and national-scale coverage expansion remain dependent on future government action and IFI-supported investments. The automated pension payment pilot via Amonatbank provides early evidence of service improvement, but most other people-level benefits remain prospective.

At the **global level**, the results chain is validated mainly at the output level: the ToC identifies two country case studies⁶, three digitalization modules, and the Digital Social Protection Gateway as outputs. The evidence is less conclusive on whether these outputs produced sustained knowledge uptake, institutional behaviour change, or broader policy influence.

Assumptions



The project's assumptions are generally plausible but should have been made more explicit and conditional. The strongest validated assumptions concern national demand, use of technical products and catalytic partner coordination. The weakest concern the automatic translation from capacity building to

⁶ The global component developed two pilots: one in Zambia and one in Tanzania. It should be noted, however, that the Tanzania pilot was not financed with UNPDF resources. Instead, other resources were used to fund the workshop in Tanzania, with a view to engaging early with countries expressing demand for this product while it was still in beta mode.

institutional behaviour change, and from system strengthening to gender-transformative outcomes.

The ToC rests on a first major assumption: **national institutions would participate actively, provide data, validate technical products and allow the project to work through existing systems** rather than parallel structures. This assumption was largely validated in Lao PDR, where the project was embedded in the PAC, NSPC, Law Revision Committee, and Social Security Fund Investment Committee. It was sufficiently validated in Tajikistan to complete the ASIP diagnostic and related policy analyses, but with more fragility due to institutional turnover and capacity constraints.

A second assumption is that **technical assistance, diagnostics, training, and knowledge products would be practical enough for officials' use**. This is substantially validated for the Lao PDR and Tajikistan. In the Lao PDR, review findings are being used to draft the new NSPS 2026–30, and technical reports are informing law reform. In Tajikistan, the ASIP diagnostic was acknowledged as a basis for future digitalization with IFI support, and questionnaire evidence indicates that ADB used the ILO report in preparing larger modernization support.

A third assumption is that **partner coordination would avoid duplication and increase catalytic value**. This assumption was validated, but only after adaptation. In Tajikistan, the original focus on the social assistance MIS risked overlap with World Bank support; the pivot toward ASIP preserved relevance and increased the project's added value. This strengthens the ToC's adaptive logic and indicates that the original design would have benefited from a stronger inception phase and more up-to-date partner mapping⁷.

A fourth assumption is that **institutional capacity and evidence would translate into changed institutional behaviour**. This is partly validated. In Lao PDR, the assumption is credible because outputs were embedded in national planning, law reform, outreach, and investment governance processes. In Tajikistan, it is more conditional because digital transformation depends on follow-on financing, staffing, infrastructure, and sustained government ownership.

A fifth assumption concerns **inclusion and gender**. The ToC assumes that strengthened governance and expanded coverage pathways would benefit excluded groups, including women, informal workers, migrants, older persons, and persons with disabilities. This assumption is only partly validated. Tajikistan's maternity benefit costing directly addressed vulnerable and informally employed women, and Lao PDR's mobile outreach reached rural and informal workers. However, questionnaire responses indicate that the project did not contain a strong stand-alone operational focus.

5.1.2 Alignment with UNPDF priorities and SDGs and with the mandates and strategic priorities of UN DESA and ILO (EQ2)

⁷ The evaluation acknowledges that the social protection national policy was only developed by the government after the project was approved and implementation started. The project proposal should have more clearly indicated that this process was ongoing and that adjustments might need to take place depending on the outcomes of the consultations around the national work plan.

The evaluation finds that alignment was clearer at the design and country-output level than in the operational integration of the global UN DESA component with ILO's country-level technical work.



The project was **very strongly aligned** with UNPDF priorities, the SDGs, and the mandates of UN DESA and ILO, as presented in Figure 4. Its focus on universal social protection, governance, digital transformation, South–South cooperation, and Leaving No One Behind directly reflected the UNPDF/2030 Agenda orientation and contributed particularly to SDG 1.3, while also linking to SDGs 3, 5, 8, 10 and 16. The design also matched the comparative advantages

of both agencies: UN DESA's intergovernmental, normative and capacity-development role, and ILO's technical mandate on social protection floors, social dialogue, international labour standards and country-level advisory support. The main limitation was not alignment itself, but the need for clearer operational integration between DESA's global/normative work and ILO's country-level technical delivery, which is addressed in more detail in the efficiency section and not rated here.

Figure 4: Alignment of the project with UNPDF priorities and SDGs and with the mandates and strategic priorities of UN DESA and ILO

Alignment area	Assessment	Evidence / analytical judgement
UNPDF / 2030 Agenda priorities	Strong	The project directly supported the 2030 Agenda through universal social protection, inclusive development, sustainability, human rights, South–South cooperation and Delivering as One. It built on prior UNPDF support and was designed as a platform for multilateral cooperation and practical action.
SDG alignment	Strong	The project explicitly targeted SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13 and 16, with the strongest operational link to SDG 1.3 on nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all.
Global Accelerator alignment	Strong	The design was anchored in the Global Accelerator's three pillars: integrated employment and social protection policies, integrated financing, and enhanced multilateral cooperation.
UN DESA mandate	Strong, with operational qualification	The global component reflected DESA's role in policy analysis, intergovernmental support, capacity development, evidence-based policymaking and linking global policy guidance with country experience. However, evaluation evidence suggests the global component was not always sufficiently connected to country-level implementation.
ILO mandate and strategy	Strong	The project aligned with ILO's Global Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All, ILO Recommendation No. 202, and ILO Programme and Budget priorities on creating and extending social protection floors and supporting decent work transitions.
Country-level strategic alignment	Strong	In Lao PDR, the project aligned with the NSPS, national development planning, UNSDCF priorities and ILO country programme outcomes. In Tajikistan, it aligned with the National Social Protection Action Plan, the digital transformation agenda and social protection priorities under the UN cooperation framework.

5.1.3 Gender in project design (EQ3)



The project design demonstrated a **broadly gender-relevant and gender-sensitive approach to social protection governance**, while its gender-transformative potential varied across countries and thematic areas. Overall, the project primarily addressed exclusion through system-level governance reforms, coverage expansion, and improved access to social protection, rather than through stand-alone gender-transformative interventions. This framing was generally appropriate given the project’s institutional and policy-level focus, although the extent to which specific gendered exclusion patterns were operationalized differed by country.

In **Lao PDR**, gender and vulnerability considerations were reflected through the National Social Protection Strategy, outreach to rural and informal workers, mobile social security services, and references to programmes supporting mothers, newborn children, and the first 1,000 days of life. These elements indicate a gender-sensitive and inclusive orientation, particularly in relation to women’s access to social protection and maternal and child welfare. The project also contributed to expanding access for rural populations and informal workers, with outreach activities involving both women and men. While the design did not systematically differentiate all activities according to specific gendered exclusion patterns, it provided an appropriate foundation for more inclusive social protection governance.

In **Tajikistan**, the gender dimension was more explicit, especially through policy work on maternity protection for informal workers. The development of costing scenarios for different categories of workers and vulnerable women represented a relevant contribution to addressing women’s exclusion from social protection, particularly in informal employment. This work was appropriately framed as a policy and feasibility contribution and has potential to inform future reforms. The migration-related component was also relevant to household vulnerability and to the situation of returning migrants, although further sex- and age-disaggregated data would strengthen the assessment of differentiated effects on women and men.

5.2 Coherence

Key findings: Country-level coherence was strongest where the project built on existing national structures, UN frameworks, and development partner platforms. At the inter-agency level, coordination between DESA and ILO provided complementary expertise, while some areas—particularly digital transformation and global knowledge products—offered opportunities for clearer role definition and stronger alignment.

- The project was coherent with national strategies, UN frameworks, and partner-supported social protection reforms, particularly at the country level.
- Complementarity with development partners was strongest where project outputs fed into broader reform processes, including IFI-supported digitalization and national policy processes.
- The DESA–ILO partnership generated both synergies and tensions; complementarity worked where roles were clear, but coordination weakened where global, normative, and technical roles were less clear in the project implementation.

S

This section assesses the project’s coherence based on the following sub-criteria of the evaluation matrix: i) Mechanisms to ensure complementarity with national plans and development partners’ initiatives; and ii) Synergies concerning the respective institutional roles of UN DESA and ILO.

The evaluation finds evidence that the project’s country-level coherence was strong and the UN DESA–ILO partnership generated both synergies and structural challenges, resulting in a **satisfactory rating** based on the evaluator’s use of the UNPDF rating system⁸.

5.2.1 Mechanisms to ensure complementarity with national plans and development partners’ initiatives (EQ 10)

S

The evaluation finds that the project’s country-level coherence was strong, as presented on the next page in **Error! Reference source not found..** The project was coherent with national plans and broadly complementary to the work of development partners, especially at the country level, while global-level coherence depended heavily on formal coordination but could have benefited from clearer joint planning mechanisms, shared results architecture, and explicit protocols for engaging country offices and development partner platforms.

In the **Lao PDR**, complementarity was facilitated through alignment with national strategies, engagement with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, LSSO, the National Social Protection Committee, the National Assembly, UN agencies, development partners and civil society. Mechanisms included the Project Advisory Committee, participation in national and subnational consultations, social protection symposiums, validation meetings, technical workshops and collaboration with other ILO and partner-supported initiatives. The project

⁸ Mechanisms to ensure complementarity: S (score 3); Synergies: MS (score 2) = 5 out of a maximum of 8. $(5/8) * 4 = 3.3$

complemented work by partners active in health insurance, non-contributory social protection, social welfare, digitalization, and social protection financing.

In **Tajikistan**, coherence was achieved through regular exchanges with development partners, including the World Bank, ADB and UNICEF, and through the use of project diagnostics and technical outputs as inputs into larger investments. The ASIP diagnostic and MIS blueprint were particularly catalytic, informing planned or ongoing partner-financed modernization efforts. The Migrant Welfare Fund component involved not only a preliminary costing exercise, but also institutional design analysis, coordination with ICMPD and national migration stakeholders, and assessment of governance and implementation arrangements involving MOLMEP and ASIP. However, complementarity in Tajikistan was also more dynamic and difficult to manage, as partner priorities and government requests shifted during implementation. Some planned areas were reallocated to other partners or redefined, requiring reprogramming.

The **global component** was broadly aligned with the growing global interest in the digital transformation of social protection and engaged with several relevant stakeholders and initiatives working at this intersection. A framework was developed in collaboration with the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI), which brings substantial experience in social protection. The component also engaged with the Digital Convergence Initiative (DCI), a global network that seeks to advance the digitalization of social protection and includes organizations such as ILO, GIZ, the World Bank and others. Under this umbrella, DESA and DCI co-organized a solutions session, as a side event, during the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha in November 2025.

These engagements indicate that the global component was connected to broader initiatives on the digitalization of social protection. They also helped the component identify a relatively underdeveloped niche in blended capacity development programmes, particularly through interactions with the ILO International Training Centre in Turin: supporting least developed countries that are at the early stages of developing a digitalization strategy for social protection. In this sense, the framework served as a foundational tool for countries requiring an initial, guided overview to help them plan and structure their social protection digitalization journey.

At the same time, the evidence suggests that coordination with existing global initiatives and country-level ILO capacities was not always sufficiently formalized. In some cases, stakeholders perceived duplication or late communication rather than integrated planning. As a result, while the global component demonstrated relevant complementarities and strategic positioning, its coherence was weakened by gaps in coordination and communication.

5.2.2 Synergies (EQ 11)



The UN DESA–ILO partnership generated both synergies and structural challenges. The intended complementarity was clear: DESA brought intergovernmental, normative, and global convening capacity, while ILO brought tripartite, technical, and country-level social protection expertise, as well as country presence. **In the Lao PDR, this division appears to have worked reasonably well, with DESA participation in national symposiums complementing the ILO’s deeper country-level governance and social security work.** Where the project was

embedded in ongoing ILO engagement and managed through established national relationships, implementation benefited from continuity and technical credibility.

In Tajikistan and at the global level, the evidence is more mixed. Some stakeholders reported limited engagement with UN DESA at the country level, while others noted communication challenges, mixed messages to national counterparts, and insufficient strategic dialogue between agencies. Concerns were also raised about overlap between UN DESA digital transformation training activities and existing ILO-led or partner-supported digital social protection initiatives in the UN DESA component's pilot countries in Africa. This suggests that the partnership did not always operate as an integrated joint programme; in practice, it often functioned as a set of distinct components under a shared project umbrella.

The main pattern is that clearly delineated components reduced transaction costs and enabled delivery but also limited substantive integration and cross-fertilization. Conversely, areas requiring joint positioning—especially digital transformation and global knowledge products—were more vulnerable to role ambiguity. Future joint programming would benefit from a formalized partnership protocol defining technical leadership, country-office engagement, communication with national counterparts, use of existing global initiatives, quality assurance roles and decision-making procedures.

5.3 Efficiency

Key findings: The project leveraged existing resources and synergies with other initiatives. Efficiency was constrained by the short implementation period at country level, limited budgets – including insufficient human resource allocation - , government staff turnover and coordination transaction costs.

- **Project implementation:** The project used limited resources efficiently by leveraging existing staff, technical backstopping, partner contributions and synergies with other initiatives. However, the ambition of joint programming and digital transformation exceeded the time and resource envelope
- In Tajikistan, the shift from software rollout to diagnostics, technical specifications and costing work was an efficient adaptation to the emerging financing landscape
- **Joint implementation model:** The joint model's transaction costs were contained where components were clearly separated, but increased where roles overlapped, or communication was insufficient. Joint programming in small, short-term projects works best when one agency has a clear operational lead at the country level, roles are delineated from the outset, and global-level products are directly linked to country demand and existing technical platforms.

This section of the evaluation report analyses the efficiency of the project's implementation, including the use of financial, technical, and human resources. It also assesses the efficiency of the joint implementation model. The evaluation finds largely positive results concerning the project's efficiency, with a **satisfactory rating**, based on the evaluator's use of the UNPDF rating system⁹.



5.3.1. Project implementation: financial, technical, and human resources (EQ8)

The evaluation finds that the project achieved good value for money for the donor, partly by relying on leveraging existing staff and staff commitment often beyond expectations, in-kind technical support, and synergies with other projects. This produced strong outputs but **raises questions about replicability unless future projects provide adequate staffing, longer timelines, and clearer operational support**¹⁰.



⁹ Project implementation S (score 2); implementation model: MS (score 2); = 4 out of a maximum of 6. $(4/6) * 4 = 2.7$

¹⁰ The staffing constraints required the adoption of mitigation measures that were less than optimal. For example, when funding was no longer available to maintain the National Project Coordinator position in Tajikistan, the incumbent was retained as a consultant rather than as a staff member, resulting in a loss of employment benefits and a less stable contractual arrangement. A similar approach was adopted in Lao PDR during the no-cost extension period. While these measures enabled continuity of implementation, they were not aligned with the ILO's preferred operational model of providing technical assistance through dedicated staff positions and should not be considered good practice for future programming.

In this regard, the project cannot be considered fully efficient. The level of human resources allocated was insufficient relative to the scope, and complexity of the interventions. Although the project team demonstrated considerable flexibility and commitment in mitigating these constraints, the results achieved relied heavily on extraordinary efforts and workarounds that would be difficult to sustain or replicate in future projects.

The project made efficient use of limited resources, particularly through leveraging existing technical expertise, partner contributions, and other projects. In the **Lao PDR**, efficiency was strengthened by pooling staff and resources with other ILO social protection initiatives, using existing national structures, engaging local implementing partners, and combining project activities with broader policy and outreach processes. This allowed a relatively small project to support strategy reviews, law reform inputs, outreach pilots, trainings, symposiums, and investment governance work.

In **Tajikistan**, the project used resources strategically by focusing on diagnostics, technical specifications, costing analyses, and capacity building rather than creating parallel systems. The decision to reorient from direct MIS software development to technical foundations was efficient in light of emerging World Bank and ADB investments. The project also leveraged additional resources from GIZ and ILO technical backstopping, increasing technical quality without significantly expanding the core budget.

Overall, the project timeframe of 24 months seemed too short to achieve the project's ambitious objectives and a nine month non-cost extension was required to finalize its execution. It also introduced new activities in Lao PDR and a budget revision from unspent funds in Tajikistan to Lao PDR. The evaluation finds that the project's efficiency was constrained by several factors. In Tajikistan, leadership changes, limited ASIP staffing, weak institutional capacity, delays in government approvals, and changing partner dynamics increased transaction costs. In the Lao PDR, the short implementation period and limited financial envelope constrained the depth and pace of institutionalization. Across the project, respondents noted that the ambition of joint programming and digital transformation exceeded the time and resource envelope.

5.3.2 Joint project implementation model (EQ9)



The transaction costs of the joint model were contained where components were clearly separated, but increased where roles were less clear or communication was insufficient. In the Lao PDR, decentralized implementation and separate components reduced the need for frequent coordination at headquarters and helped maintain delivery speed. Annual planning and reporting procedures were manageable, even where templates and administrative systems differed.

What does this UN DESA-ILO model imply for future joint UN programming on social protection?

The model confirms the value of joint UN programming where agencies bring genuinely complementary mandates and capacities, but it also illustrates the risks of small, short-duration projects carrying heavy coordination expectations. The evidence suggests that joint programming in small, short-term projects (24 months) works best when one agency has a clear operational lead at country level, roles are delineated from the outset, and global-level products are directly linked to country demand and existing technical platforms. For relatively small projects, light but disciplined coordination may be more appropriate than fully integrated management structures, provided that communication with country offices and national counterparts is systematic.

For future programming, the model points to three lessons.

- First, project design should include a realistic inception phase to validate needs, partner mapping and ownership.
- Second, joint projects should define whether they are genuinely integrated programmes or coordinated parallel components; ambiguity creates both inefficiency and reputational risk.
- Third, global knowledge work should be positioned as a service to country learning and intergovernmental uptake, not as a parallel workstream disconnected from operational realities.

At the global level, the picture is more uneven. Evidence points to insufficient strategic dialogue, parallel agency workstreams, and, at times, unclear communication with country-level actors. The division between DESA's global/normative role and ILO's country/technical role was not always perceived as enhancing delivery. Further strengthening the joint management mechanism would likely support clearer alignment of expectations.

In Tajikistan, the evaluation found that UN DESA's efforts to mobilize existing networks in support of project implementation were well-intentioned but initially contributed to some ambiguity in communication with national counterparts. The evaluation noted early challenges in ensuring that ILO and UN DESA were consistently "speaking with one voice," particularly around reprogramming and engagement with the Government, although these issues were subsequently resolved through improved coordination.

Figure 5: Assessment of the joint project implementation model based on stakeholder perceptions



5.4 Effectiveness

Key findings: The project achieved most planned outputs. Lao PDR showed strong institutional and operational results, while Tajikistan generated important diagnostic, monitoring, actuarial and policy foundations. Effective coverage changes were beyond the project's intended timeframe, budget, and results framework, while gender-differentiated results remain less well evidenced.

- The project delivered most planned outputs, with particularly strong institutional and operational achievements in Lao PDR.
- In Tajikistan, the project strengthened ASIP's digital readiness, monitoring capacity, actuarial functions and policy options
- At the global level, the project produced knowledge and training-related outputs, including country case studies and training modules.
- Results were strongest at institutional, policy and capacity levels, while effective coverage changes were beyond the project's intended timeframe, budget, and results framework.
- Gender-differentiated results were not systematically measured, and available data do not fully show effects for women, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees.
- Most factors affecting project implementation positively were linked to the project implementation, while negative factors were largely outside the direct control of the project.
- Strengthened planning and coordination capacity, but institutional fragmentation and limited human resources continued to constrain implementation.
- The evaluation identified positive adaptive results (Tajikistan with shifting project activities and resource reallocation to Lao PDR for additional work), accompanied by unintended effects due to the less inclusive approach taken for the country-level



For the evaluation criterion of effectiveness, the report used the following sub-criteria listed in the evaluation matrix: i) achievement of planned outputs and outcomes; ii) factors affecting project results; iii) Observable changes in social protection planning, coordination, and delivery; iv) unintended results; and v) Improved access to social protection for vulnerable women and persons with disability.

The evaluation finds that the project was successful in producing most of its outputs, with examples of uptake at the country level, resulting in a **satisfactory rating**, based on the evaluator's use of the UNPDF rating system¹¹.

5.4.1 Achievement of planned outputs and outcomes (EQ4)

¹¹ Achievement of planned outputs and outcomes: HS (score 4); Factors affecting project results: S (score 3); Observable changes in social protection planning, coordination, and delivery : S (score 3); Unintended results: MS (score 2); Improved access to social protection for vulnerable women and persons with disability: UA (no scoring) = 12 out of a maximum of 16. (12/16) *4 =3



The project achieved most planned outputs and made meaningful progress toward outcomes, though the depth of outcome achievement varies by country and result area, as presented in Figure 6.

In **Lao PDR**, the project **achieved strong institutional and operational results**.

It supported 16 technical meetings and training-related events linked to the National Social Protection Strategy, piloted two mechanisms for extending social security to uncovered workers, contributed to the establishment and work of the Social Security Law Revision Committee, supported five law-related consultative or technical processes, and produced 19 recommendations on investment governance and diversification for the Social Security Fund. The project also supported mobile social security services, district-level capacity building, social protection symposiums, strategy reviews and law reform inputs. These outputs **plausibly contributed to stronger governance, increased awareness, improved outreach capacity and continued momentum** around the 2026–2030 strategy.

In **Tajikistan**, the project **delivered key institutional outputs**: ASIP business process diagnostic and MIS technical report; technical specifications for digitalization and interoperability; capacity building for ASIP staff; monitoring and expenditure analysis; indicators linked to the National Social Protection Strategy; maternity benefit costing; social pension costing; feasibility work on a Migrant Welfare Fund; and training on actuarial, fiscal space and formalization issues. In addition, the project produced substantial technical outputs related to SDG 1.3.1 monitoring, maternity protection extension, old-age social pension reform scenarios, migrant worker protection mechanisms, and actuarial/fiscal analysis. These outputs contributed not only to reform readiness and future partner investments, but also to strengthening national analytical capacity, policy dialogue, inter-agency coordination, and social protection governance frameworks. These **outputs are likely to support future reforms and partner investments, even though full digital rollout and coverage expansion remain pending**.

At the **global level**, the project produced **knowledge and training-related outputs, including country case studies and training modules**, but the evidence of uptake and systematic application beyond project activities is less conclusive. Some respondents considered the global products useful for awareness raising and capacity development, while others questioned their technical depth and connection to existing initiatives.

Figure 6: Project's achievement against logframe objectives

Logframe outcome / output	Related results	
Outcome 1: Increased capacity of national stakeholders to plan, finance, implement and monitor the National Social Protection Strategy; expand coverage; and ensure sustainable financing in Lao PDR.	Outcome largely achieved. The project strengthened coordination, strategy implementation, law reform, social security outreach and investment governance in Lao PDR. Reported achievements include 16 technical meetings, two innovative mechanisms to extend social security, establishment of the Social Security Law Revision Committee, five law-reform consultative meetings, and 19 investment governance recommendations.	
Output 1.1: Integrated support to the government, social partners and civil society to plan, finance, implement and monitor the National Social Protection Strategy is provided.	Mid-term and final reviews of the NSPS 2021–25 completed and used to inform the NSPS 2026–30. More than 300 provincial and district officials trained; National Social Protection Symposiums held; 28 master trainers created.	
Output 1.2: Innovative approaches to extend social security to uncovered workers are explored and piloted.	Mobile social security services expanded to four additional provinces; on-site registration, contribution collection and membership card issuance brought services closer to rural and informal workers. District-level	

	Labour and Social Welfare officers were also used as a mechanism for service extension.	
Output 1.3: Capacity building and technical assistance provided to the amendment of the Social Security Law of Lao PDR.	Social Security Law Revision Committee established by ministerial decree; legal, actuarial and technical inputs provided; consultations and high-level policy dialogue supported with government, National Assembly and social partners.	
Output 1.4: Capacity building and technical assistance provided for sustainable financing and investment of the National Social Security Fund.	19 actionable recommendations endorsed by LSSO to guide investment governance and diversification; training supported on risk management, investment principles and financial oversight.	
Outcome 2: Increased capacity of national entities responsible for social protection in Tajikistan to expand coverage, improve governance and enhance service quality to workers in the formal and informal economy, returning and migrant workers and refugees.	Outcome achieved mainly at institutional and reform-readiness level. ASIP diagnostic and MIS technical work completed; monitoring and expenditure analysis developed; maternity, social pension and migrant welfare policy options prepared; automated pension payments piloted through Amonatbank.	
Output 2.1: EMIS/MIS improved, includes social protection schemes, and enables monitoring of policy implementation.	ASIP MIS diagnostic and technical report completed and officially submitted; business processes mapped for pensions, survivors', invalidity and unemployment benefits; technical specifications for digitalization and interoperability prepared; three ASIP staff trained on interoperable MIS.	
Output 2.2: Social protection schemes are inclusive of informal, returning and migrant workers and refugees and address their particular situations.	Maternity benefit costing analysis prepared for informal economy workers; feasibility study and actuarial costing for a Migrant Welfare Fund completed; social pension costing options developed; training delivered on costing, fiscal space, actuarial calculations, pension systems and formalization.	
Outcome 3: Increased available knowledge and resources for understanding the role of governance and digital transformation in extending social protection coverage and achieving greater sustainability.	Outcome partly achieved. Knowledge and training products were developed, but evidence of broader uptake beyond the project is more limited than for country-level outputs. Reported products include two case studies, three modules and the Digital Social Protection Gateway.	
Output 3.1: Technical support is provided to countries through the Technical Support Facility of the ILO.	TSF provided support in the following areas: 2 work months for an actuarial specialist to support with the costing of maternity benefits in Tajikistan and the backstopping of the consultants. 1 work months of an actuarial specialist for the backstopping of the support in Lao PDR and work months for legal support.	
Output 3.2: Country case studies and analytical briefs are developed and published.	Two country case studies, Zambia and Tanzania, were finalized and incorporated into the learning package as core inputs for the training toolkit.	
Output 3.3: An e-learning package on social protection governance and digital transformation is produced and launched.	Three training modules developed: Foundations of Digitalization of Social Protection; Roadmap for a Digitalization Process; and Key Performance Indicators for Monitoring Digitalization Strategies. The modules were integrated into the Digital Social Protection Gateway.	

5.4.2 Factors affecting project results (EQ4)

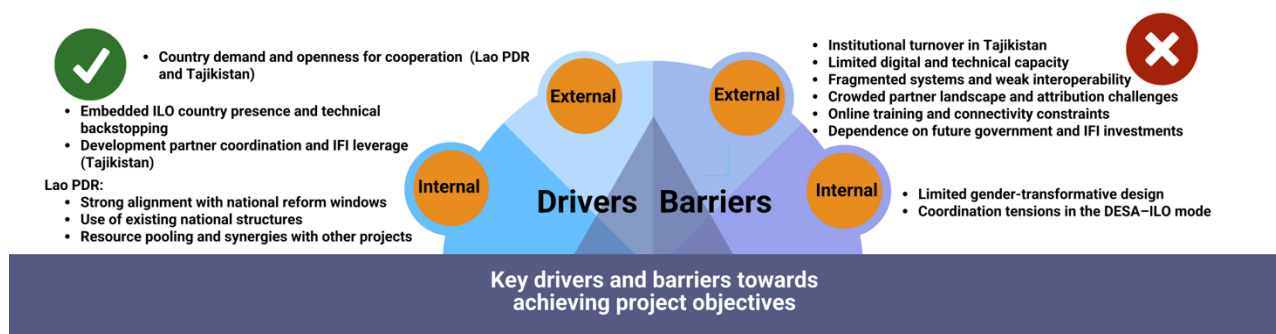


Most factors affecting project implementation positively were linked to the project implementation, while negative factors were largely outside the direct control of the project.

The main factor explaining achievement was the project's ability to **insert targeted technical assistance into active reform processes**. This was particularly effective in Lao PDR, where institutional structures, national strategy review, law reform and outreach pilots created a strong pathway from outputs to early outcomes. In Tajikistan, the project was effective because it adapted to the partner landscape and shifted toward ASIP.

The main factors constraining results were not weak technical quality, but **systemic and institutional conditions**: short duration, limited resources, government staff turnover, fragmented data systems, low digital capacity and uneven joint-programme coordination. Therefore, the project's results should be understood as **strong institutional and catalytic achievements**.

Figure 7: Factors influencing the project implementation and results attainment



5.4.3 Observable changes in social protection planning, coordination, and delivery due to strengthen institutional capacities, inter-agency coordination, and the use of digital tools (EQ5)

The project **strengthened institutional capacities and coordination**. In **Lao PDR**, institutional capacity was strengthened through support to the National Social Protection Committee and Secretariat, training of officials, creation of master trainers, subnational capacity building, law reform processes, investment governance work and social protection symposiums. **Observable changes include greater momentum around strategy implementation**, increased use of review evidence for the next social protection strategy, expanded provincial and district engagement, and piloting of outreach models through LSSO and labour and social welfare officers.

In **Tajikistan**, capacity strengthening was concentrated in ASIP and related institutions. The project improved understanding of business processes, MIS requirements, interoperability and actuarial functions. It contributed to stronger evidence for policy dialogue and helped position ASIP for larger-scale modernization. The automated pension payment pilot suggests early operational improvements, but system-wide transformation remains dependent on subsequent investments and is beyond the scope of the project. Besides, the project's SDG 1.3.1 technical work contributed to strengthening national social protection monitoring systems, harmonization of administrative data, and institutional M&E capacities linked to the national social protection strategy.

Inter-agency coordination improved where the project created or used national platforms and development partner consultations. However, coordination remained vulnerable where mandates of development partners overlapped, government data systems were fragmented or partners pursued parallel investments. The project, therefore, **strengthened planning and**

coordination capacity, but the fragmentation of development actors and limited human resources continued to affect implementation.

5.4.4 Unintended results (EQ4)

The evaluation identified unintended or adaptive results. In Tajikistan, the project moved away from its initial focus for two activities because other partners were already active in social assistance MIS and because national priorities shifted. Migration-related work on portability with the Russian Federation did not materialize due to political and geopolitical constraints, leading to a shift toward Migrant Welfare Fund analysis. In Lao PDR, additional activities were made possible through resource reallocation and the no-cost extension.



Not all unintended effects were positive. Some evidence points to confusion arising from parallel global and country-level digital transformation activities, diverging perceptions about communication between HQ with ILO country offices, and limited cross-country learning between Lao PDR and Tajikistan due to differences in context, which raises questions about strategic decision making and country-level involvement of relevant stakeholders during the country selection approach.

5.4.5 Improved access to social protection for vulnerable women and persons with disability (EQ5)

Evidence of improved access is strongest for **informal and rural workers in Lao PDR**, where mobile social security services and district-level outreach reduced access barriers by bringing registration, contribution collection and information closer to communities. The final report provides evidence of first-time registration and increased awareness among rural residents and informal workers. However, the **data available do not allow for a robust gender-disaggregated assessment of who benefited** or whether women, persons with disabilities or other groups experienced differential improvements.



In **Tajikistan**, the project produced policy options that could improve access for informally employed women, older persons without contributory histories, and migrant workers or their families. However, these changes remain largely prospective. Maternity protection costing, social pension costing and the Migrant Welfare Fund feasibility work are important steps, but they have not yet resulted in adopted benefits or measurable access facilitation. For persons with disabilities, the evidence is limited and mainly relates to improved data and administrative systems rather than direct access changes.

Gender-differentiated approaches struggled to materialize fully because: i) the project primarily took a governance and systems-strengthening approach; and ii) some digitalization activities were viewed as technically focused rather than gender-specific; As a result, the project has plausible inclusion benefits, but limited evidence of measurable gender-differentiated outcomes.

5.5 Sustainability

Key findings: The project's sustainability is satisfactory. It is boosted by IFI support in Tajikistan and constrained by limited fiscal space and dependence on ongoing partner support in Lao PDR.

- Sustainability prospects are strongest where outputs were embedded in national institutions, law reform processes, strategy development, and IFI investment pipelines.
- Lao PDR has promising sustainability pathways through government structures, LSSO uptake, master trainers, and use of strategy review evidence, but domestic financing remains uncertain
- In Tajikistan, the sustainability of project results is strong for the World Bank/ADB-funded outcome, while it depends on whether ASIP and development partners translate diagnostics and policy options into financed implementation
- Across both countries, limited fiscal space, staff turnover, weak data systems, and incomplete institutionalization remain key risks.
- Following the development of the global component, UNDESA now has a stand-alone course on capacity development for social protection coordination, planning, and implementation: its Digital Social Protection gateway.



The evaluative evidence shows that the sustainability of the project is satisfactory, with project-supported mechanisms embedded in existing national structures in the Lao PDR and ASIP ownership and integration into larger World Bank and ADB-supported modernization programmes in Tajikistan. At the same time, institutional embedding is not yet fully backed by predictable domestic financing in Lao PDR. This led to a “satisfactory” rating,

based on the evaluator’s use of the UNPDF system¹².

5.5.1 Embedding project supported mechanisms in national structures (EQ10)



Sustainability prospects are satisfactory, with important country differences and remaining risks. In **Lao PDR**, project-supported mechanisms were embedded in existing national structures, including the National Social Protection Committee and Secretariat, LSSO, the Social Security Law Revision Committee and the Social Security Fund Investment Committee. The use of strategy reviews in preparing the next National Social Protection Strategy and

the continued law revision process suggest institutional uptake. The mobile service model has also been taken up by LSSO and local offices, although continued scaling depends on domestic budget allocations and local implementation capacity.

At the same time, sustainability in Lao PDR remains constrained by limited fiscal space, dependence on partner support for some coordination meetings, and the fact that the Social

¹² Embedding project-supported mechanisms in national structures: S (score 3); Contribution to national resource mobilization MS (score 3)) = 6 out of a maximum of 8. (6/8) *4 = 3.

Security Law revision was still ongoing. The evidence suggests that institutional embedding is real, but not yet fully backed by predictable domestic financing.

In **Tajikistan**, the sustainability of the EMIS/MIS-related work is linked to ASIP ownership and integration into larger World Bank and ADB-supported modernization programmes, funded through loans. Those loans are an important milestone, as they represent a government-backed financing pathway, while recurrent staffing, technological, and budget risks remain. The ASIP diagnostic and technical specifications were acknowledged and used as a basis for future investment, which is a strong sustainability pathway. However, sustainability remains dependent on staffing, ICT infrastructure, recurrent budgets, government approvals and partner coordination. Limited in-house digital capacity remains a significant risk.

5.5.2 Contribution to national resource mobilization (EQ11)



The project contributed to resource mobilization mainly **by producing credible technical evidence, costing analyses and investment-ready diagnostics**. In Tajikistan, the ASIP diagnostic and technical outputs helped position the social insurance and pension system for larger ADB and World Bank support. The project also supported fiscal space and costing analyses for social protection options, including maternity benefits, social pensions and migrant-related support. This evidence strengthened the basis for policy dialogue and external financing, though uptake by domestic finance ministries is less clearly documented.

In Lao PDR, sustainability was supported through legal and policy processes, investment governance recommendations, National Assembly engagement, master trainer development, subnational capacity building, and integration with other ILO, UN and civil society initiatives. The project also leveraged co-funding and in-kind contributions for specific activities. However, evidence of a measurable shift in domestic resource mobilization remains limited; fiscal constraints continue to affect institutionalization.

Other **sustainability mechanisms** included use of existing government structures, technical capacity development, South–South exchanges, development partner coordination, open-source and interoperable technology principles in Tajikistan, and alignment with national planning cycles.

Following the development of the global component, UNDESA now have stand-alone course on capacity development for social protection coordination, planning and implementation: its Digital Social Protection gateway. The development of the course represents a useful sustainability asset and an important step toward knowledge transfer. However, its longer-term contribution to capacity development will depend on the extent to which it is institutionalized, regularly used, updated, and linked to practical application.

5.6 Progress toward impact

Key findings: Impact is expected in the long term, and it is too early to see changes for the social security system users

- The project's impact is expected in the long term, and it is too early to see changes for the social security system users, while short to medium-term results are mainly catalytic and institutional, including strengthened governance structures, outreach models, technical diagnostics, and reform-ready policy options.
- Lao PDR shows more visible outreach-level effects, while Tajikistan shows stronger preparatory effects for future digital transformation and policy reform.
- Global uptake of country experiences, case studies, and e-learning products is less clearly documented than country-level results.
- Without the project, social protection governance and digital transformation would likely have progressed, but more slowly and with weaker technical foundations.

MS

The evaluation finds that the project's progress toward impact is mixed, with a “moderately satisfactory” rating¹³. It is too early to see changes for the social security system users at this stage, and the change pathways still seem uncertain, as presented in Figure 7 at the end of this section.

5.6.1 Adaptation and adoption (EQ12)

The evaluation finds that the project had potential global learning value, but the pathway from country experience to global policymaking was not sufficiently structured or evidenced. The project's global component would have benefited from defining a knowledge uptake strategy from the outset, including target platforms, intended users, dissemination channels, and tracking of adoption.

MS

Global normative uptake is not sufficiently documented in the evidence reviewed. Country experiences were used in project-supported exchanges, training and knowledge products, and the project contributed to broader learning on social protection governance and digital transformation. Lao PDR experience appears to have remained primarily national and subnational, with some South–South learning and visibility through symposiums and exchanges. The global component created materials, but the extent of their uptake in global policy arenas remains insufficiently documented.

5.6.2 Uptake and use of the e-learning modules (EQ13)

MS

The documentation provides limited evidence on uptake of e-learning modules beyond the immediate project context. There is evidence of training modules, online or modular capacity-building approaches, and workshops in additional countries, including Zambia and Tanzania, but the number of countries using the modules, adaptation modalities and user outcomes are not systematically documented in the available evidence.

¹³ Adaptation and adoption MS (score 2); Uptake and use of e-learning modules: MS (score 2); Measurable changes: UA (no score); Counterfactual: MS (score 2) = 6 out of a maximum of 12. $(6/12) * 4 = 2$

Barriers identified include limited digital infrastructure, connectivity challenges, reduced interaction in online learning formats, lower motivation compared with face-to-face training, and the need for sustained technical accompaniment rather than one-off training. Stakeholders noted that digital transformation of social protection is complex and cannot be reduced to short training events, particularly in low-capacity settings. E-learning may increase reach and reduce cost, but its effectiveness depends on blended support, certification incentives, practical tools, country adaptation and follow-up technical assistance.

5.6.3 Measurable changes in legal or effective social protection coverage for vulnerable populations and governance (EQ14)



It is too early to assess the results of this sub-criterion, as the project operated in the context of wider reforms and programmes related to social protection access and coverage at the country level, which are still ongoing.

Plausible likely changes are strongest in governance and administrative readiness, rather than effective coverage across all target groups. In Lao PDR, project-supported mobile services and district-level outreach plausibly are likely to contribute to increased registration and awareness among informal and rural workers. Governance changes include strengthened strategy implementation processes, law revision work, investment governance recommendations, social protection monitoring capacity and greater inter-institutional coordination.

In Tajikistan, measurable changes include completion of diagnostics, technical specifications, monitoring products and costing analyses. The automated pension payment pilot suggests the likelihood of an early service-delivery improvement for pensioners. Policy options for maternity protection, social pensions and migrant welfare create pathways to future coverage expansion, but coverage increases have not yet been realized at scale.

Effective coverage gaps persisted for informal workers, returning migrants, refugees, women and persons with disabilities. In Lao PDR, informal and rural workers remain difficult to reach, and effective social security uptake depends on trust, affordability and service quality. In Tajikistan, reforms remain constrained by fragmented systems, limited data, and incomplete digitalization. Across both countries, the lack of robust disaggregated data limits measurement of changes for women, persons with disabilities and migrant groups.

5.6.4 Counterfactual: what would have happened without the project? (EQ15)

Without the project, social protection governance and digital transformation would likely have progressed, but more slowly and with weaker technical foundations.



In Lao PDR, the National Social Protection Strategy review process, Social Security Law revision inputs, investment governance work, mobile outreach pilots and subnational capacity-building efforts would likely have been less advanced, despite other work of the ILO country office in social protection under SOLAR I¹⁴, or

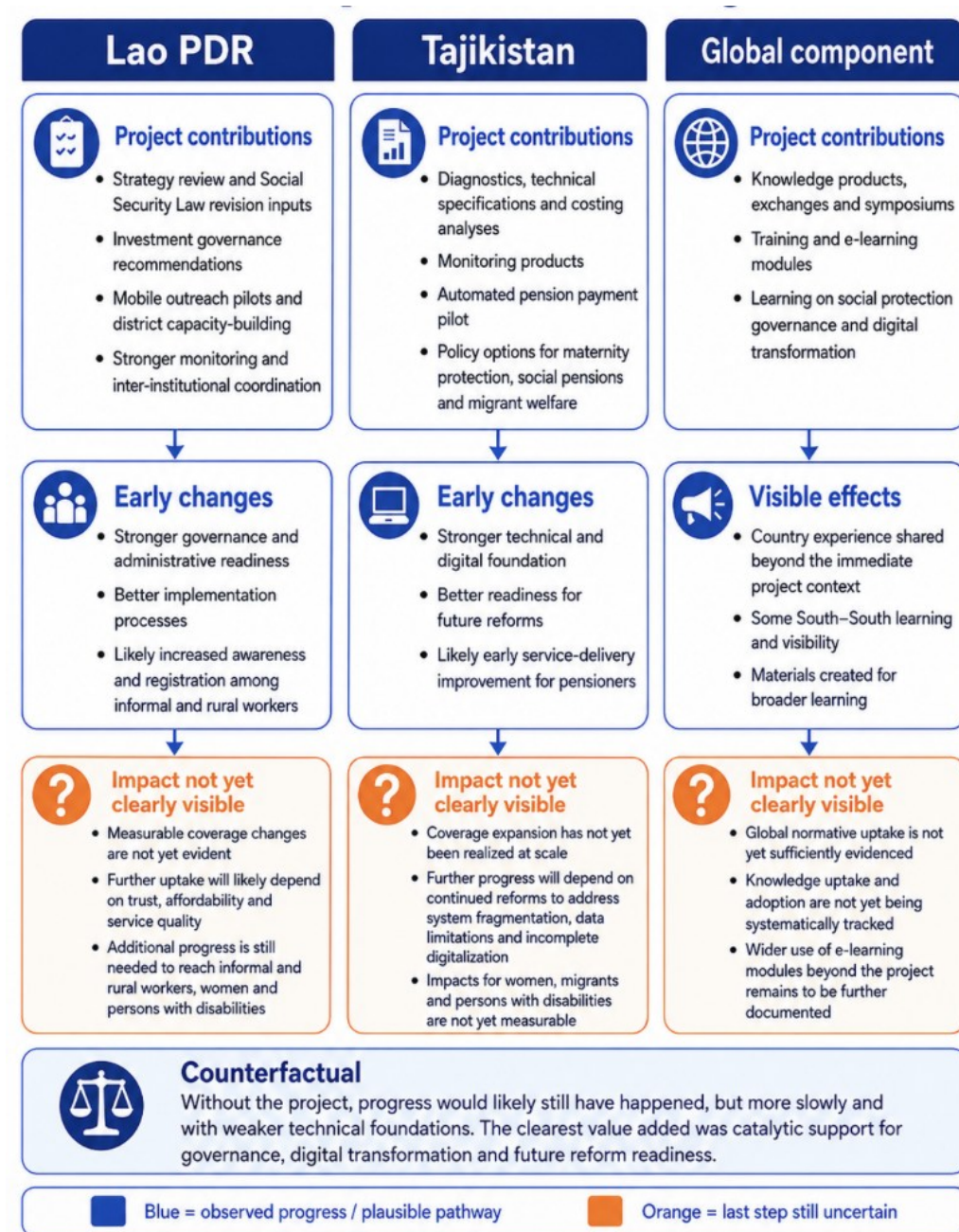
¹⁴ <https://www.ilo.org/publications/stories-solar-project>

more fragmented. The project helped maintain momentum after earlier joint UN programming and contributed to institutional trust, coordination and evidence-based planning.

In Tajikistan, without the project, development partners would likely still have invested in social protection digitalization, but with less preparatory analysis and weaker alignment to ASIP business processes and interoperability needs. The project helped create a technical foundation that reduced the risk of future investments starting from scratch. It also generated policy evidence on maternity, old-age and migrant-related protection that would otherwise have been weaker or delayed.

At the global level, the counterfactual is less clear. The project contributed to knowledge and training resources, but given the existence of other global initiatives, its unique contribution depends on how far those products are used, adapted and integrated into future programming. The global impact would therefore benefit from stronger documentation and uptake tracking.

Figure 8: Summary of the project's progress toward impact



6. Conclusions

The conclusions logically follow from the key findings presented at the beginning of each subsection of the report's previous section and address all evaluation questions. They are evidence-based, grouped by evaluation criteria, and reference the evaluation questions (EQ), thereby answering the "so what" question. Figure 9 clearly shows the robust mapping from key evaluation findings to conclusions and recommendations.

Relevance

The evaluation concludes that the project addressed genuine institutional needs and had a credible basis for ownership. However, a more structured validation at the inception stage, involving ILO country offices and drawing on existing on-the-ground intelligence, would have improved design precision by confirming country priorities, partner roles, and specific exclusion patterns. (EQ1)

The project was well-positioned in Lao PDR to support systemic reform rather than isolated activities, increasing the likelihood that results influence national policy processes. In Tajikistan, relevance was maintained through adaptive implementation, as the project adjusted its focus to better match emerging institutional priorities and partner activities. This experience underscores the importance of designing future interventions with sufficient flexibility to respond to evolving country contexts, while ensuring from the outset that country-level roles, reform entry points, and partner complementarities are clearly understood. (EQ2)

The project created pathways for inclusion, particularly related to gender. (EQ3)

Coherence

The project benefited from alignment with national and partner reform agendas, but the joint UN model did not always function as an integrated partnership. Alignment with existing systems and reform agendas enhanced credibility and reduced the risk of parallel or stand-alone interventions. The project's catalytic value was significant: relatively small technical inputs helped position national institutions for larger-scale support. (EQ10)

The evaluation concludes that Joint UN programming can add value, but only if comparative advantages, country-office engagement, and decision-making protocols are clarified from the outset. (EQ11)

Efficiency

The project delivered good value for money, but this depended heavily on resource pooling and staff commitment rather than a fully adequate stand-alone resource envelope. (EQ8)

A light coordination model can be efficient for small projects, but it must still include structured joint decision points for issues affecting positioning, messaging, and technical quality. (EQ9)

Effectiveness

The project was effective at output and institutional capacity levels, being credible in its contribution to strengthened governance, outreach and policy reform capacity but intended outcomes remain dependent on follow-up reforms, financing and policy adoption.

The evaluation concludes that the project should be understood as enabling future effective coverage expansion. (EQ4,5, and 6)

The project's inclusion claims remain plausible but under-evidenced; future monitoring would benefit from including disaggregated indicators and targeted pathways for excluded groups. (EQ7)

Sustainability

The project created credible sustainability pathways, but continuation is not automatic; it depends on domestic budgets, institutional capacity and coordinated partner follow-through. (EQ12)

Institutional embedding increases the likelihood of continuation, especially where project products are already being used in national planning and budget allocation, partner-financed reforms or, in the case of the global component, in UN Secretariat platforms under the regular budget and countries' uptake. (EQ13)

Progress toward impact

The project was valuable to catalyze progress on social protection governance and digital transformation based on existing support efforts in Lao PDR and Tajikistan, rather than kick-starting or finalizing processes at the country level. (EQ17) The project changed the enabling conditions for future social protection expansion, but large-scale impact depends on whether national actors and partners carry reforms forward. The project's impact pathways differ by country and should not be assessed through a single uniform standard. (EQ16)

The project's global learning potential was not fully converted into traceable influence on normative guidance or global policy processes. (EQ14 and 15)

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are specific, relevant, actionable, targeted, and prioritized. Figure 9 clearly shows the robust mapping from key evaluation findings to conclusions and recommendations. The recommendations are grouped by evaluation criteria, and all relate to the design of future UNPDF projects.

Recommendation 1: Gender, disability, migration status and informality should be embedded in the theory of change, logframe indicators and activity design for social protection projects from the outset, as applicable.

Addressed to: UNPDF, UN DESA, ILO

Budget implications: low. Clearer focusing and targeting during project design phase required.

Prioritization: High

Recommendation 2: Global knowledge and training products should be explicitly linked to country demand in the project countries and existing technical initiatives to add value as part of a coherent project approach.

Addressed to: UN DESA

Budget implications: low. Informed targeting of project countries with other UN partner agency.

Prioritization: High

Recommendation 3: Future interventions should include outcome-level indicators that track institutional uptake, policy adoption, service delivery changes and coverage effects.

For coverage tracking, indicators should be based on sex-, age-, disability-, and migration-disaggregated data from partner sources to substantiate inclusion results.

Addressed to: UNPDF, UN DESA, ILO

Budget implications: low. Requires more results-focused project design. However, disaggregated data will depend on its availability in partners institutions, as large scale data collection for social protection access and coverage would be beyond the timeframe and budgets available in UNPDF projects.

Prioritization: High

Figure 9: Main findings, conclusions, and recommendations matrix

	Main findings	Conclusions	Recommendations for future projects, lessons learned and good practices
Relevance	The project was closely aligned with national social protection priorities in Lao PDR and Tajikistan, including SDG 1.3, social protection governance, digital transformation and coverage extension. The Theory of Change was robust and largely valid, with some disconnect identified between the project components.	The project addressed genuine institutional needs and had a credible basis for ownership. However, a more structured validation at the inception stage, involving ILO country offices and drawing on existing on-the-ground intelligence, would have improved design precision by confirming country priorities, partner roles, and specific exclusion patterns.	Lesson learned 1: Systematically including a structured inception phase adds value by validating needs, stakeholder ownership, partner roles, and assumptions, including those of agencies' country offices, before implementation.
	In Lao PDR, the project responded particularly well to governance, coordination, law reform and outreach needs under the National Social Protection Strategy. In Tajikistan, the project's relevance depended partly on adaptive redesign, as initial assumptions needed to be adjusted to changing government priorities and partner activities.	The project was well positioned in Lao PDR to support systemic reform rather than isolated activities, increasing the likelihood that results influence national policy processes. In Tajikistan, relevance was maintained through adaptive implementation, as the project adjusted its focus to better match emerging institutional priorities and partner activities. This experience underscores the importance of designing future interventions with sufficient flexibility to respond to evolving country contexts, while ensuring from the outset that country-level roles, reform entry points, and partner complementarities are clearly understood.	
	Gender and inclusion were reflected in selected activities, especially maternity protection costing, but were not consistently embedded as a gender-transformative design feature.	The project created pathways for inclusion but did not generate a sufficiently strong basis to claim systematic gender-transformative effects.	Recommendation 1: Gender, disability, migration status and informality should be embedded in the theory of change, logframe indicators and activity design for social protection projects from the outset, as applicable. Addressed to: UNPDF, UN DESA, ILO Budget implications: low. Clearer focusing and targeting during project design phase required. Prioritization: High

	Main findings	Conclusions	Recommendations for future projects, lessons learned and good practices
Coherence	The project was coherent with national strategies, UN frameworks and partner-supported social protection reforms, particularly at country level.	The project benefited from alignment with national and partner reform agendas, but the joint UN model did not always function as an integrated partnership. Alignment with existing systems and reform agendas enhanced credibility and reduced the risk of parallel or stand-alone interventions.	See lesson learned 1. Recommendation 2. Global knowledge and training products should be explicitly linked to country demand in the project countries and existing technical initiatives to add value as part of a coherent project approach. Addressed to: UN DESA Budget implications: low. Informed targeting of project countries with other UN partner agency. Prioritization: High
	Complementarity with development partners was strongest where project outputs fed into broader reform processes, including IFI-supported digitalization and national policy processes.	The project's catalytic value was significant: relatively small technical inputs helped position national institutions for larger-scale support.	
	The DESA-ILO partnership generated both synergies and challenges; complementarity worked where roles were clear. Coordination was more challenging where global knowledge work and country-level implementation were not operationally linked.	Joint UN programming can add value, but only if comparative advantages, country-office engagement, and decision-making protocols are clarified from the outset.	
	Main findings	Conclusions	Recommendations for future projects, lessons learned and good practices
Efficiency	Project implementation: The project achieved good value for money, using limited resources efficiently by leveraging existing staff, technical backstopping, partner contributions and synergies with other initiatives. However, the ambition of joint programming and digital transformation exceeded the time and resource envelope. In Tajikistan, the shift from software rollout to diagnostics, technical specifications and costing work was an efficient adaptation to the emerging financing landscape	The project delivered good value for money, but this depended heavily on resource pooling and staff commitment rather than a fully adequate stand-alone resource envelope.	Lesson learned 2: Efficiency in small catalytic projects depends less on minimizing coordination and more on focusing coordination where it is essential for strategic decisions. Lesson learned 3: Joint projects benefit from defining whether they are genuinely integrated programmes or coordinated parallel components; ambiguity creates both inefficiency and reputational risk.

	Joint implementation model: The joint model's transaction costs were contained where components were clearly separated, but increased where roles overlapped, or communication was insufficient. Joint programming in small, short-term projects works best when one agency has a clear operational lead at the country level, roles are delineated from the outset, and global-level products are directly linked to country demand and existing technical platforms.	A light coordination model can be efficient for small projects, but it must still include structured joint decision points for issues affecting positioning, messaging, and technical quality.	Lesson learned 4: global knowledge work operate best when positioned as a service to country learning and intergovernmental uptake, not as a parallel workstream disconnected from operational realities.
	Main findings	Conclusions	Recommendations for future projects, lessons learned and good practices
Effectiveness	The project delivered most planned outputs, with particularly strong institutional and operational achievements in Lao PDR. In Tajikistan, the project strengthened ASIP's digital readiness, monitoring capacity, actuarial functions and policy options. At the global level, the project produced knowledge and training-related outputs, including country case studies and training modules	The project was effective at output and institutional capacity levels, being credible in its contribution to strengthened governance, outreach and policy reform capacity but intended outcomes remain dependent on follow-up reforms, financing and policy adoption.	Recommendation 3: Future interventions should include outcome-level indicators that track institutional uptake, policy adoption, service delivery changes and coverage effects. For coverage tracking, indicators should be based on sex-, age-, disability- and migration-disaggregated data from partner sources to substantiate inclusion results.
	Results were strongest at institutional, policy and capacity levels. Effective coverage changes were beyond the project's intended timeframe, budget, and results framework. Gender-differentiated results were not systematically measured, and available data do not fully show effects for women, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees.	The project should be understood as enabling future coverage expansion. The project's inclusion claims remain plausible but under-evidenced; future monitoring would benefit from including disaggregated indicators and targeted pathways for excluded groups.	Addressed to: UNPDF, UN DESA, ILO Budget implications: low. Requires more results-focused project design. However, disaggregated data will depend on its availability in partners institutions, as large scale data collection for social protection access and coverage would be beyond

	Most factors affecting project implementation positively were linked to the project implementation, while negative factors were largely outside the direct control of the project. Strengthened planning and coordination capacity, but institutional fragmentation and limited human resources continued to constrain implementation.		the timeframe and budgets available in UNDPDF projects. Prioritization: High
	The evaluation identified positive adaptive results (Tajikistan with shifting project activities and resource reallocation to Lao PDR for additional work), accompanied by unintended effects due to the less inclusive approach taken for the country-level involvement of relevant stakeholders during the country selection.		
	Main findings	Conclusions	Recommendations for future projects, lessons learned and good practices
Sustainability	Sustainability prospects are strongest where outputs were embedded in national institutions, law reform processes, strategy development and IFI investment pipelines. Lao PDR has promising sustainability pathways through government structures, LSSO uptake, master trainers and use of strategy review evidence, but domestic financing remains uncertain Tajikistan's sustainability depends on whether ASIP and development partners translate diagnostics and policy options into financed implementation Across both countries, limited fiscal space, staff turnover, weak data systems and incomplete institutionalization remain key risks.	The project created credible sustainability pathways, but continuation is not automatic; it depends on domestic budgets, institutional capacity and coordinated partner follow-through. Institutional embedding increases the likelihood of continuation, especially where project products are already being used in national planning and budget allocation, partner-financed reforms or, in the case of the global component, in UN Secretariat platforms under the regular budget.	Lesson learned 5: Sustainability is most likely when project outputs are not only technically sound, but also budgeted, staffed and embedded in formal institutional mandates.

	Following the development of the global component, UNDESA now have stand-alone course on capacity development for social protection coordination, planning and implementation: its Digital Social Protection gateway.		
	Main findings	Conclusions	Recommendations for future projects, lessons learned and good practices
Progress towards impact	The project's impact is expected in the long term, and it is too early to see changes for the social security system users. Longer-term results are likely to be mainly catalytic and institutional, including strengthened governance structures, outreach models, technical diagnostics, and reform-ready policy options.	The project changed the enabling conditions for future social protection expansion, but large-scale impact depends on whether national actors and partners carry reforms forward. The project's impact pathways differ by country and should not be assessed through a single uniform standard.	Lesson learned 6: Catalytic projects can have significant impact even with modest resources, but only if technical outputs are deliberately connected to financing, policy adoption and scale-up mechanisms.
	Lao PDR shows more visible outreach-level effects, while Tajikistan shows stronger preparatory effects for future digital transformation and policy reform.		
	Global uptake of country experiences, case studies, and e-learning products is less clearly documented than country-level results.	The project's global learning potential was not fully converted into traceable influence on normative guidance or global policy processes.	
	Without the project, social protection governance and digital transformation would likely have progressed, but more slowly and with weaker technical foundations	The project was required to catalyze progress on social protection governance and digital transformation, rather than kick-starting or finalizing processes at country level.	

Lessons learned

Lesson learned 1: Systematically including a structured inception phase adds value by validating needs, stakeholder ownership, partner roles, and assumptions, including those of agencies' country offices, before implementation.

Lesson learned 2: Efficiency in small catalytic projects depends less on minimizing coordination and more on focusing coordination where it is essential for strategic decisions.

Lesson learned 3: Joint projects benefit from defining whether they are genuinely integrated programmes or coordinated parallel components; ambiguity creates both inefficiency and reputational risk.

Lesson learned 4: Global knowledge work operate best when positioned as a service to country learning and intergovernmental uptake, not as a parallel workstream disconnected from operational realities.

Lesson learned 5: Sustainability is most likely when project outputs are not only technically sound, but also budgeted, staffed and embedded in formal institutional mandates.

Lesson learned 6: Catalytic projects can have significant impact even with modest resources, but only if technical outputs are deliberately connected to financing, policy adoption and scale-up mechanisms.

Emerging good practices

Two emerging good practices can be identified.

First, the use of **decentralized mobile social security services** in Lao PDR proved to be a practical approach for reducing access barriers among rural residents and informal workers by bringing registration, contribution collection, membership card issuance, and information closer to communities. This model combined service delivery with awareness raising and showed potential for replication through LSSO and local offices.

Second, the **diagnostic-first approach to digital transformation** in Tajikistan represents an emerging good practice. By prioritizing ASIP-focused diagnostics, business process mapping, interoperability specifications, and monitoring framework development before moving to system implementation, the project helped create a technically sound foundation for future digital modernization while avoiding duplication with other partner-supported initiatives.

Annexes

A. Background

This evaluation covers the joint DESA–ILO project “Accelerating universal social protection for achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through strengthened governance and digital transformation”, implemented in Lao PDR, Tajikistan, and through a global knowledge component (implementation period from 1 June 2023 to 28 February 2026). The project sits within a broader policy drive to expand coverage, strengthen governance and financing, and leverage digital transformation to make social protection more efficient and inclusive—especially in contexts where systems are fragmented and under-digitalized. It aligns with multiple SDGs (notably SDGs 1, 2, 8 and 10) and responds to country-led reform agendas (e.g., Lao PDR’s National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) and Tajikistan’s National Strategy on Social Protection 2040), while contributing to international platforms such as the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection. The project was undertaken to address persistent coverage gaps—particularly among informal workers, rural populations and migrants—and to strengthen institutions and data systems so that policies can be better designed, financed, implemented and monitored. Institutional and programmatic context. In Lao PDR, the work is embedded in an active reform process that includes a mid-term review and an end-term review of the NSPS, nationwide sub-national trainings on NSPS implementation and SDG 1.3.1 monitoring, legal reforms to the Social Security Law and national social dialogue, strengthening the Social Security Fund’s investment governance and related capacity building, high-level policy advocacy, and outreach/registration drives that extend coverage via mobile social security services. A Project Advisory Committee (PAC) was established, and South-South cooperation with China’s MOHRSS has supported knowledge exchange and study visits. These activities reflect a strong national demand for evidence, capacity-building, and legal/financial reforms to improve sustainability and coverage. In Tajikistan, initial plans to support the social assistance Management Information System were refocused—following government guidance and coordination with UNICEF and the World Bank—toward the Agency of Social Insurance and Pensions (ASIP), where the ILO led a comprehensive diagnostic of business processes and laid groundwork for digitalization (including options leveraging OpenIMIS). Work has included developing a contributory-side monitoring module for the national strategy’s M&E framework, strengthening the National Tripartite Commission, exploring maternity benefit expansion options (including for informal workers), assessing a Migrant Welfare Fund in lieu of stalled portability negotiations with the Russian Federation, and scoping social pension options for vulnerable older persons. Coordination with the forthcoming ADB investment aims to ensure complementarity and sustainability of the digital transformation agenda. Project objective, outcomes, beneficiaries and coverage.

The main objective of the project is to accelerate and extend universal social protection through the strengthening of the policy design, administrative governance and the digital transformation of social protection systems in the Lao and Tajikistan and in the Global South in support of just transitions.

Outcomes established in the project:

The project aims to accelerate and extend universal social protection by strengthening policy design, administrative governance, and the digital transformation of social protection systems, while building capacities and producing knowledge goods of value to other countries. Outcomes are organized as: Outcome 1 (Lao PDR): “Increased capacity of national stakeholders to plan, finance, implement and monitor the National Social Protection Strategy; expand coverage; and ensure sustainable financing in Lao PDR”. Increased capacity to plan, finance, implement, and monitor the NSPS; extend coverage; and ensure sustainable financing (e.g., NSPS mid-term review, legal reform inputs, actuarial capacity, investment governance, sub-national trainings, and mobile registration campaigns). Outcome 2 (Tajikistan): “Increased capacity of the national entities responsible for social protection in Tajikistan to expand coverage, improve governance and enhance service quality to workers in the formal and informal economy, returning and migrant workers and refugees”. Increased capacity of national entities (ASIP and partners) to expand coverage, improve governance, and enhance service quality through digitalization/management improvements and policy options for inclusion (e.g., MIS diagnostics, M&E integration, maternity protection options, migrant support, social pension scenarios). Outcome 3 (Global): “Increased available knowledge and resources for understanding of the vital role of governance and the potential of digital transformation in extending the coverage of social protection and achieving greater sustainability”. Increased knowledge and resources on governance and digitalization (e.g., development of a capacity-building training toolkit and pilot workshop; case studies; e-learning package and community of practice). Primary beneficiaries include government institutions (e.g., MOLSW/LSSO in Lao PDR; MOHSPP/ASIP in Tajikistan), parliamentarians, tripartite partners (employers’ and workers’ organizations), social protection practitioners and statistical focal points, and workers in the informal economy, migrant workers, women (maternity protection), and older persons. Geographic coverage is national in Lao PDR and Tajikistan, with global reach through the knowledge component. Implementation arrangements and partners. As established in the approved Project Document (ProDoc), the Executing Entity with lead responsibility is UN DESA, Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD). The International Labour Organization (ILO), through its Social Protection Department (SOCPRO), serves as co-implementing entity at global and country levels. Project implementation has been carried out jointly by DISD and ILO/SOCPRO, including through ILO country and regional offices in Lao PDR and Tajikistan, in coordination with national counterparts. In Lao PDR, implementation has been undertaken in agreement with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MOLSW) and the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSSO). In Tajikistan, activities have

been implemented in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population (MOHSPP) and the Agency on Social Insurance and Pensions (ASIP). Evaluation oversight and quality assurance are ensured independently from project implementation. Within UN DESA, this function is carried out by the Capacity Development Programme Management Office (CDPMO), while within ILO it is undertaken by the ILO Evaluation Office (EVAL). Detailed roles and responsibilities related to evaluation management and oversight are specified in Section (c.4). Collaboration and complementarity have been maintained with UNICEF, the World Bank, and (prospectively) ADB in Tajikistan; with MOHRSS (China) in the context of South-South exchange with Lao PDR; and with EPRI and DESA's Digital Learning Centre for development of the global training toolkit and e-learning platform. Additional resources were mobilized from GIZ and ILO to support digitalization activities in Tajikistan.

Design and components. The design clusters activities into (i) capacity-building and policy processes (e.g., NSPS implementation support, parliamentary engagement, actuarial and legal reviews, sub-national training); (ii) digital transformation and administration (e.g., diagnostics, MIS scoping and monitoring modules, interoperability planning); (iii) coverage extension pilots and options (e.g., mobile registration, maternity benefits, migrant welfare mechanisms, social pension); and (iv) global knowledge and learning (e.g., training modules, pilot workshop, case studies, e-learning and a community of practice). The approach privileges country ownership, coordination with development partners, and evidence-based policy dialogue, underpinned by gender, disability inclusion and LNOB principles. Budget, funding sources, duration and status. The total budget from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund of UNPDF is US\$1,282,411.77 (fully received), with additional mobilized resources from ILO of US\$80,000, which are not part of the core UNPDF budget. The approved duration is 1 June 2023 – 31 May 2025 (24 months), with a No-Cost Extension (NCE) from 1 June 2025 to 28 February 2026. As of 30 September 2025, total expenditures were US\$1,036,237.46 (80.9% utilization). The project remains under implementation within the NCE period to complete high-value activities and consolidate sustainability, particularly in Lao PDR and the global component, while ensuring Tajikistan investments align with forthcoming ADB support.

B. Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

As required under UNPDF/2030 Agenda Sub-Fund funding conditions and in accordance with DESA guidelines for the evaluation of capacity development projects and ILO evaluation policies, this evaluation will serve a dual purpose of accountability and learning. It is being undertaken as a mandatory final independent evaluation of the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund (UNPDF) project “Accelerating universal social protection for achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through strengthened governance and digital transformation”, jointly implemented by UN DESA and the International Labour Organization (ILO). For accountability, the evaluation will provide independent evidence of the project's performance in achieving its stated outcomes, the efficiency of resource use, and the effectiveness of the partnership arrangements between DESA and ILO, as well as with national counterparts and development partners in Lao PDR and Tajikistan. It will assess whether the project has delivered on its objectives and

contributed to strengthening national and institutional capacities to design, finance, administer, and monitor inclusive and digitalized social protection systems. For learning, the evaluation will generate lessons and good practices to inform the design of future technical assistance, capacity-development and partnership initiatives under DESA and ILO, including possible replication and scaling-up through follow-up phases or integration within regional and global initiatives such as the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, the World Social Summit, and the UN system's digital transformation of public administration agenda. The findings are expected to support both organizations in refining their joint approaches to country-level engagement, coordination with development partners, and the use of digital solutions for social protection governance. The evaluation will therefore assess not only what was achieved, but also how it was achieved — particularly in terms of the value added of DESA–ILO collaboration, the role of South–South and triangular cooperation, and the project's contribution to integrated, evidence-based policymaking at the national and global levels.

Primary audiences of the evaluation include:

- DESA and ILO Social Protection Department (SOCPRO) and global technical teams as the joint evaluation managers;
- DESA's Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) and ILO's SOCPRO, as implementing partners responsible for project execution and follow-up actions; and
- the UNPDF Secretariat, as funding entity.

Secondary audiences include:

- National counterparts in Lao PDR (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Lao Social Security

Organization, and the National Social Protection Committee and Secretariat) and Tajikistan (Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population and the Agency for Social Insurance and Pensions);

- Partner UN agencies and development organizations (UNICEF, World Bank, ADB, GIZ,

MOHRSS/China, Oxfam and EPRI); and

- Policy networks and practitioners engaged in the digitalization of social protection systems

globally.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

1. 1. Assess the relevance and coherence of the project's design and implementation, and its

alignment with national priorities, UNPDF objectives, and DESA/ILO mandates, including the integration of gender equality, human rights, and disability inclusion (Relevance; Coherence).

2. 2. Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation, including the extent to

which intended outputs and outcomes were achieved at national and global levels, and the

value added of the joint DESA–ILO implementation model in strengthening institutional capacities, coordination, and cost-effective delivery (Effectiveness; Efficiency; Coherence).

3. 3. Examine the sustainability and impact orientation of project results, including the likelihood that

institutional, policy, digital, and capacity development gains will be sustained beyond project completion, and the extent to which the project has contributed to longer-term improvements in governance, financing, and digital transformation of social protection systems (Sustainability; Impact).

4. 4. Identify lessons learned, good practices, and operational challenges, and provide forward-looking

recommendations for consolidation and scaling-up of successful elements — including partnerships, digital tools, training modules, and country experiences — to inform future DESA and ILO programming and enhance long-term impact (Effectiveness; Sustainability; Impact). The evaluation will be guided by the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria—relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact—and will explicitly integrate gender equality, human rights, and disability inclusion across all dimensions. In line with the requirements of the 2030 Agenda Sub-Fund (UNPDF), the evaluation will rate the

performance of each criterion based on the following rating system:

Rating Description

Highly Satisfactory (HS) The project performed well overall against a particular evaluation criterion with no short comings. Satisfactory (S) The project performed well overall against a particular evaluation criterion with but had minor short comings. Moderately Satisfactory (MS) The project performed moderately well against the particular criterion (performing satisfactorily against almost half of the evaluation questions) and has short comings and room for improvement. Somehow Satisfactory (SS) The project performed poorly overall against majority of the evaluation questions and there is need to take steps to improve the project aspect being evaluated. Not Satisfactory The project performed poorly in almost all the (NS) evaluation questions and there is need for immediate and significant changes to be made to improve project outcomes. Unable to Assess (UA) The available information does not allow an assessment of the level of results.

To the extent possible, evaluators should summarize the findings in logical fashion using the enclosed Excel template (“Annex 7 Evaluation Findings”).

C. Work assignment

(c.1) Scope of work

The evaluation will cover the entire duration and scope of the joint DESA–ILO UNPDF project “Accelerating Universal Social Protection for Achieving the SDGs and Ending Poverty through Strengthened Governance and Digital Transformation” implemented from June 2023 to May 2025, including activities under the No-Cost Extension (June 2025 – February 2026). The evaluation will assess all activities implemented by UN DESA’s Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) and the ILO’s Social Protection Department (SOCPRO), in partnership with national institutions in Lao PDR and Tajikistan, as well as the project’s global knowledge component. It will focus on the project’s contributions to strengthening policy design,

governance, financing, and digital transformation of social protection systems and to advancing South–South cooperation and global learning (this project did not implement a mid-term internal evaluation).

Geographic and thematic coverage:

Lao PDR: Activities supporting the implementation and mid-term and end-term reviews of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS); the review and national dialogue on the Social Security Law; actuarial and investment governance work with the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO); sub-national training and monitoring of SDG 1.3.1; and innovations such as mobile registration campaigns and South–South exchanges with China’s MOHRSS and other ASEAN countries. Tajikistan: Support to the Agency for Social Insurance and Pensions (ASIP) for business process diagnostics and digitalization design; integration of monitoring indicators into the National Social Protection Strategy 2040; development of options for maternity benefits, migrant welfare mechanisms, and social pensions; and coordination with World Bank, UNICEF, and ADB projects. Global component: Development of training modules and a capacity-building toolkit on digitalization of social protection, preparation of case studies, and piloting of the training course through DESA’s Digital Learning Centre, along with the creation of a community of practice for participating countries. The evaluation will analyze design, implementation, results, efficiency, coordination, and sustainability, as well as the added value of DESA–ILO collaboration. For that matter, the evaluation will cover all results and activities as stated in the Project Document’s (ProDoc) logical framework matrix and related changes informed in approved progress reports. Exclusions: The evaluation will not cover activities of other UN agencies or projects related to social protection in Lao PDR and Tajikistan that were not financed or technically supported by the UNPDF project, nor interventions beyond the approved work plan and budget. However, given that this was a joint UN implementation project, the evaluator is expected to assess how the UN implementing partners designed and implemented the project in relation to existing social protection initiatives in the two beneficiary countries. This assessment should remain at a strategic and contextual level and aim to derive lessons learned and good practices for future joint programming.

Definitions:

“Digital transformation” refers to the integration of digital technologies, including management information systems and interoperability tools, into social protection systems to improve delivery, coordination, and monitoring. “Governance strengthening” refers to improvements in the institutional, legal, and administrative frameworks for social protection, including multi-stakeholder coordination, financing, and accountability mechanisms.

(c.2) Evaluation questions

The evaluation will address the following overarching question:

To what extent has the DESA–ILO UNPDF project contributed to accelerating universal social protection through strengthened governance, financing, and digital transformation in Lao PDR, Tajikistan, and globally? This overarching question will be guided by the OECD/DAC and UNEG evaluation criteria, detailed

below:

Evaluation Question Sub-Questions Criteria

a) To what extent did the project respond to the social protection and digital governance needs of

5. 1. Relevance: How relevant was Lao PDR and Tajikistan?

the project's design to national b) Was the project aligned with UNPDF priorities and Relevance priorities and DESA/ILO SDGs and with the mandates and strategic priorities mandates? of UN DESA and ILO? c) Did the project design appropriately integrate gender, human rights, and disability inclusion? a) Were the planned outcomes and outputs realized as intended in both countries and globally? b) Did the project strengthen institutional capacities?

6. 2. Effectiveness: To what extent

inter-agency coordination, and the use of digital did the project achieve its Effectiveness tools? intended outcomes and outputs? c) Were there any unintended positive or negative results? d) To what extent has the project contributed to strengthening gender equality, inclusion of persons

Evaluation Question Sub-Questions Criteria

with disabilities, and human rights in social protection governance and digital transformation? a) Were financial, technical, and human resources

7. 3. Efficiency: How well were

used economically and efficiently? resources used to achieve Efficiency b) Did joint implementation between DESA and ILO results? contribute to cost-effectiveness and timely delivery? a) How coherent were DESA and ILO's strategies

8. 4. Coherence: To what extent

with national plans and other donor-supported was the project consistent and initiatives (e.g., World Bank, UNICEF, ADB, GIZ)? Coherence complementary with other b) How effective was the coordination between interventions? DESA and ILO across their respective roles? a) Have national partners (LSSO, ASIP) institutionalized practices, policies, or digital tools

9. 5. Sustainability: Are project

introduced by the project? results likely to continue beyond Sustainability b) What are the prospects for sustaining financing completion? and technical capacity after the project ends? c) How did the project build sustainability? a) How has the project contributed to expanding social protection coverage and improving governance?

10. 6. Impact: What longer-term

b) Has it influenced national policies or global Impact effects have the project frameworks on social protection digitalization? orientation contributed to? c) To what extent does the knowledge product (e- learning platform) provide a sustainable global public good contributing to informed policymaking? The evaluation consultant will refine and finalize the evaluation methodology in the Inception Report, based on the preliminary document review and consultations with the key stakeholders, based on the verified availability of the project-related documentation and data. This will include, among others, conducting a thorough stakeholder analysis, confirming the exact focus and approach for the exercise, refining the evaluation

questions and identifying the sources and methods for data collection (in the format of an evaluation matrix), developing the sampling strategy for the case studies, and developing tailor-made questions that target different stakeholders (based on a stakeholder analysis). The evaluation consultant is to ensure a wide representation of stakeholders.

The evaluation will be conducted in line with the UN DESA capacity development Evaluation Guidelines, and the additional requirements of the 2030 Agenda Sub-Fund. It will strive to employ development best practices regarding promoting gender equality and a human rights-based approach, including the rights of persons with disabilities. The evaluation consultant will explicitly explain how human rights, gender, and disability inclusion will be considered during the evaluation.

(c.3) Methodology

The evaluation will apply a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, designed to ensure triangulation of evidence and robustness of findings. The proposed mixed-methods approach is indicative and will be refined and detailed in the inception report by the consultant in consultation with DESA and ILO/EVAL.

Indicative methods:

- Desk review of project documents, progress reports (to provide the track changes and commented version from the Sub-Fund), training materials, case studies, financial data, and related policy documents.
- Semi-structured interviews with DESA and ILO staff, national counterparts, tripartite partners, development partners (World Bank, UNICEF, ADB, GIZ), and regional experts.
- Focus group discussions with beneficiaries and trainees from capacity-building activities, including interpretation when required.
- Online surveys of participants and stakeholders engaged in workshops or e-learning activities, including translation when required.
- Secondary analysis of quantitative indicators (e.g., training participation, coverage expansion, financial utilization), including the required annexes accompanying the biannual progress reports.
- Virtual observation of events and knowledge-sharing sessions, where feasible.
- Case study analysis to identify enabling and constraining factors in project delivery.

The evaluation will adopt a theory-of-change approach, assessing causal linkages between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. It will also examine contextual factors influencing performance (e.g., COVID-19 aftermath, fiscal constraints, political commitment).

Limitations:

- The evaluation will rely on secondary data and virtual consultations, which may limit access to direct beneficiary perspectives.

- Contribution challenges may arise where project outcomes depend on complementary

initiatives or external factors.

- Language barriers may constrain the depth of local stakeholder engagement; mitigation will

include translation support and collaboration with ILO national offices. All data collection and analysis will adhere to UNEG ethical standards, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity.

(c.4) Tasks

The Evaluation Consultant will undertake the following tasks:

11. 1. Desk Review: Examine project documentation, progress reports (to provide track changes and commented version from the Sub-Fund), financial statements, training materials, and partner reports.

12. 2. Inception Phase:

- Develop and finalize the Inception Report, including evaluation matrix, refined

methodology, data collection tools, and work plan.

- Present the inception findings to DESA and ILO evaluation managers for validation.

13. 3. Data Collection: Conduct interviews, focus groups, and surveys with project stakeholders in Lao PDR, Tajikistan, and globally (virtually and with interpretation from English to local languages when required).

14. 4. Analysis and Drafting: Analyze evidence using evaluation criteria, identify findings and lessons learned, and draft the Evaluation Report.

15. 5. Validation and Presentation: Present preliminary findings in a virtual briefing for DESA, ILO, and national partners.

16. 6. Finalization: Integrate feedback from DESA evaluation manager and ILO/EVAL and produce the

Final Evaluation Report and an Executive Summary suitable for publication on both organizations' websites. If travel becomes necessary, it will be pre-approved and arranged according to UN rules and funded separately. In line with institutional requirements, UN DESA's Capacity Development Programme Management Office (CDPMO) and the ILO Evaluation Office (EVAL) will exercise evaluation oversight and quality assurance functions. Their role is to ensure that the Evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR), methodology, and overall process conform to DESA and ILO evaluation standards and quality requirements. They do not act as implementing entities and are not involved in project execution. ILO/EVAL will serve as the formal clearance authority for key evaluation deliverables in accordance with ILO evaluation procedures.

The Consultant will report technically to the designated co-supervisors of the evaluation (one from DESA/DISD and one from ILO/SOCPRO), who are independent from day-to-day implementation management. The co-supervisors, jointly with the focal point for this project of the leading agency (Claudio Santibanez) will provide technical guidance throughout the evaluation process and hold final approval authority over evaluation deliverables, in consultation with CDPMO and ILO/EVAL as per their respective quality assurance mandates.

D. Human rights, disability and gender perspectives

The evaluation will be guided by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards and the DESA Evaluation Policy, which require systematic integration of human rights, gender equality, and disability inclusion throughout all stages of the evaluation process — from design to data collection, analysis, and reporting. The Evaluation Consultant will ensure that the evaluation framework, including the theory of change and evaluation matrix, explicitly reflects these cross-cutting dimensions. This entails identifying how project interventions have promoted rights-based approaches to social protection, gender-sensitive policy design, and inclusive access to social protection benefits and services for vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities, migrant workers, women, older persons, and informal workers.

Specifically, the consultant will:

- Integrate human rights and gender equality as guiding principles in the evaluation methodology,

ensuring that all questions, indicators, and analytical dimensions reflect inclusiveness and equity.

- Collect and analyze sex-disaggregated and disability-disaggregated data, where available, and

identify differences in participation, outcomes, and perceived benefits among men, women, and persons with disabilities. Where such data are not available, the consultant should assess institutional capacity for collecting disaggregated data and identify gaps.

- Assess the extent to which project activities — such as legal reforms, capacity-building, and

digital transformation — incorporated gender and human rights considerations, including accessibility of digital tools and outreach mechanisms for marginalized groups.

- Review institutional capacity-building efforts to determine whether they strengthened

government partners' ability to design and implement inclusive, rights-based social protection policies and systems aligned with international standards (e.g., ILO Convention No. 102, Recommendation No. 202, and CRPD).

- Examine the project's contribution (within the limits of its approved results framework and

without implying attribution to broader national SDG outcomes) to SDG-related commitments, particularly SDG 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems), SDG 5.4

(recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work), SDG 8.5 (productive employment and decent work for all), and SDG 10.2 (social, economic and political inclusion for all). The evaluation will include a dedicated assessment question under the effectiveness and impact criteria: “To what extent has the project contributed to strengthening gender equality, inclusion of persons with disabilities, and human rights in social protection governance and digital transformation?” In the data collection phase, the consultant will adopt participatory and inclusive approaches, ensuring that women and marginalized groups’ voices are represented in interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Where possible, the evaluation will identify good practices and innovations that promote inclusive and accessible social protection design, including use of digital technologies to reach previously excluded populations. The evaluation report will present findings on these issues in dedicated sections and highlight actionable recommendations to enhance gender equality, disability inclusion, and rights-based programming in future DESA–ILO initiatives and related UNPDF projects.

E. Expected outputs and delivery dates

The Evaluation Consultant will be solely responsible for conducting the final independent evaluation of the UNPDF project “Accelerating Universal Social Protection for Achieving the SDGs and Ending Poverty through Strengthened Governance and Digital Transformation.” The consultant will deliver a series of outputs corresponding to key stages of the evaluation process, in close consultation with DESA/ and ILO/EVAL. All deliverables will be submitted electronically in Microsoft Word and PDF formats, using standard UN DESA formatting (Calibri, 11-point font, 1.15 spacing). Reports will include an executive summary, main text with findings and recommendations, tables, charts, and bibliography as per the DESA evaluation report template. The evaluation report will need to follow the outline in annex 3 of the DESA guidelines for evaluations of capacity development projects.

Expected Outputs

17. 1. Inception Report

- Outlines the evaluation’s conceptual framework, refined theory of change,

methodology, detailed evaluation matrix, sampling strategy, and data collection instruments (interview guides, survey questionnaire templates, etc.).

- Incorporates comments from DESA and ILO/EVAL.
- Approx. length: 10–12 pages.

18. 2. Completion of Data Collection

- Includes desk review of documents, virtual interviews, focus group discussions, and stakeholder surveys.

- Consultant to provide a brief progress note summarizing data collected and any methodological adjustments required.

19. 3. Preliminary Findings and Debriefing Session

- Presentation of initial findings and emerging recommendations to DESA and ILO project teams and evaluation managers.
 - Conducted virtually (via MS Teams/Zoom).
 - PowerPoint presentation and summary note to be shared prior to the meeting.

20. 4. Draft Evaluation Report (Annex 3 of DESA CD evaluation guidelines)

- Full report following DESA's evaluation template, including:
 - Executive Summary (3–4 pages)
 - Introduction and background
 - Description of project design and implementation
 - Methodology and limitations
 - Findings (by evaluation criterion)
 - Conclusions and recommendations
 - Lessons learned and good practices
 - Annexes: TOR, ToC, evaluation matrix, list of interviews, documents reviewed, and data collection tools
- Approx. length: 25–30 pages excluding annexes.

21. 5. Final Evaluation Report

- Incorporates consolidated feedback from DESA, ILO/EVAL, and project focal points.
- Includes finalized findings, conclusions, and actionable recommendations for follow-up.
- Prepared for dissemination on DESA and ILO websites, and submission to the UNPDF

Secretariat.

22. 6. Presentation of Final Report and Recommendations

- PowerPoint presentation summarizing evaluation findings, lessons, and recommendations.
 - Delivered virtually to DESA, ILO, national counterparts, and UNPDF stakeholders.

Delivery Schedule

Target Due

Deliverables Description

Date

23. 1. Inception Report (including revised Submitted for review and approval by DESA and 16 March ToC and evaluation matrix) ILO/EVAL 2026
24. 2. Completion of Data Collection and Summary of interviews, focus groups, and survey 31 March Brief Progress Note data 2026 Virtual presentation and discussion with evaluation 10 April
25. 3. Preliminary Findings and Debriefing managers 2026 Submitted for joint review and consolidated 15 April
26. 4. Draft Evaluation Report comments 2026 Incorporates feedback and cleared by DESA and 30 April
27. 5. Final Evaluation Report ILO/EVAL 2026 Presentation of results to stakeholders (DESA, ILO,
28. 6. Final Presentation May 2026 national counterparts, UNPDF Secretariat) All outputs will be submitted electronically to the designated Evaluation Managers at DESA/CDPMO and ILO/EVAL. No hard copies are required.

F. Evaluation ethics

The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) “Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation”. The Evaluation Consultant will demonstrate independence, impartiality, credibility, honesty, integrity, and accountability throughout all phases of the evaluation to ensure objectivity and avoid any form of bias. The consultant will adhere to UN ethical standards and DESA’s Evaluation Policy, ensuring that the evaluation process respects the dignity, rights, and welfare of all participants and stakeholders involved. All evaluation activities — including data collection, analysis, and reporting — must be carried out with full respect for confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent. Ethical Principles and Procedures

29. 1. Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

- All interviewees and survey respondents will be informed of the purpose, scope, and use of the evaluation before their participation.

- Participation will be voluntary, and respondents will have the right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

30. 2. Confidentiality and Anonymity

- The consultant must ensure that all personal and institutional information obtained through interviews, surveys, and focus groups is treated confidentially.
- Respondent identities and data will not be disclosed without explicit permission. Any quotations or references to individuals in the report will remain anonymous unless formal consent is obtained.

31. 3. Data Protection and Security

- All collected data (notes, recordings, survey responses, and electronic files) must be stored securely on password-protected devices and destroyed after submission of the final report.
- The consultant will comply with UN data protection and privacy standards and any national regulations applicable in the countries where data are collected.

32. 4. Avoidance of Harm and Cultural Sensitivity

- The evaluation will be designed to minimize any risk or discomfort to participants and to respect cultural norms and sensitivities.
- Questions and discussions will be framed in a respectful and non-discriminatory manner, particularly regarding gender, disability, and social status.

33. 5. Intellectual Property Rights

- All materials produced under this consultancy, including drafts, data, and final reports, will remain the property of the United Nations.
- The consultant will respect copyright laws and properly reference any secondary data or published sources.

34. 6. Children and Vulnerable Populations

- Although no direct engagement with children or minors is anticipated, should such engagement arise, the consultant must obtain prior authorization and follow UN child safeguarding protocols, ensuring appropriate consent and presence of guardians.

35. 7. Transparency and Validation

- The consultant will ensure transparency by sharing preliminary findings with DESA and

ILO for factual verification and validation, while maintaining the independence of evaluative judgments (which remain the sole responsibility of the consultant).

36. 8. Conflict of Interest

- The consultant must declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest

before or during the assignment. Any situation that could compromise independence or impartiality must be immediately disclosed to DESA and ILO/EVAL. By adhering to these standards, the evaluation will uphold the highest ethical and professional integrity, ensuring credible, balanced, and respectful results that can be confidently used by stakeholders and the public.

G. Duration of contract

The duration of consultancy is for the equivalent of 35 work days within the period of 27 February - 8 May 2026, subject to the approval of the UNPDF Secretariat and the extension of the project's operational period beyond its current closure date of 28 February 2026. This timeline will allow the evaluation to be conducted immediately following the project's completion, ensuring access to final implementation data, outputs, and financial information. The consultancy to be carried out on a part-time and intermittent basis with adequate time between deliverables for internal review and quality assurance by DESA/CDPMO and ILO/EVAL.

The consultancy will proceed through four main phases:

Indicative Estimated Evaluation Phase Key Activities Period Working Days Desk review of project documentation, 27 February–16

Phase 1 – Inception 8 days development of inception report, evaluation

March 2026 matrix, and data collection tools Virtual interviews, focus group discussions, and

Phase 2 – Data 16 March – 15

12 days stakeholder surveys with DESA, ILO, national Collection April 2026 counterparts, and partners

Phase 3 – Analysis 16–30 April Data analysis, synthesis of findings, and

10 days and Drafting 2026 preparation of draft evaluation report

Phase 4 –

1 May–8 May Incorporation of feedback, finalization of report, Finalization and 5 days 2026 and presentation of results Presentation The assignment will be home-based, with all coordination and consultations held virtually. This schedule ensures that the evaluation is carried out immediately after project closure—maximizing the relevance, data availability, and timeliness of findings—while complying with United Nations consultancy and evaluation standards.

H. Duty station or location of assignment

The assignment will be home-based (remote), with no requirement for the consultant to be physically located at UN premises. The Evaluation Consultant will work from their own office and use their personal computer and communication equipment to perform all tasks. All coordination and communication will be conducted virtually, primarily through email, MS Teams, and Zoom, with regular check-ins with DESA and ILO/EVAL for progress updates, review of deliverables, and validation of findings. The consultant will also participate in online meetings with DESA/DISD, ILO/SOCPRO, and national counterparts in Lao PDR and Tajikistan, as required.

DESA and ILO will provide the consultant with:

- Access to relevant project documentation, progress and financial reports, and data sources necessary for the evaluation;
- Support in scheduling interviews and focus group discussions with project stakeholders; and
- Administrative guidance and liaison through the designated Evaluation Managers from

DESA/CDPMO and ILO/EVAL. No office space or equipment will be provided by the United Nations, and no physical presence is required during the assignment.

I. Travel

The consultant is not expected to travel in the performance of this assignment. All data collection, interviews, and consultations will be conducted remotely. As currently planned, however, the evaluation will be fully virtual, relying on digital communication tools to ensure efficient and timely delivery of outputs while maintaining inclusivity and participation of all relevant stakeholders.

J. Fees and payment schedule

The total fee for this assignment is US\$22,750. The final fee will be established and agreed upon in the individual contract at the time of appointment. The consultancy fee will be paid in three installments, corresponding to the satisfactory delivery and

formal acceptance of key deliverables by DESA/CDPMO and ILO/EVAL, as follows:

Percentage of Target

Payment Deliverable(s)

Total Fee Date Upon submission and approval of the Inception Report, First 16 March including the revised Theory of Change, evaluation matrix, 30% payment 2026 and data collection tools Upon submission and acceptance of the Draft Evaluation Second 30 April Report, following data collection and preliminary 40% payment 2026 presentation of findings Upon submission and approval of the Final Evaluation Report Final 8 May and presentation of findings to DESA, ILO, and national 30% payment 2026 partners All payments will be made upon certification by the supervising officers that the outputs have been satisfactorily delivered and accepted according to the standards set in these Terms of Reference. The consultancy fee will be inclusive of all costs, including communications, internet connectivity, and other

incidental expenses required to carry out the assignment. No additional allowances will be provided.

K. Performance Indicators

The successful completion of this consultancy will be assessed against clear performance standards aligned with DESA and ILO's quality assurance procedures for evaluations. These indicators will serve as the basis for the acceptance of deliverables, determination of satisfactory performance, and authorization of payments. The Evaluation Consultant is expected to demonstrate professionalism, methodological rigor, and adherence to the UNEG Norms and Standards throughout the assignment.

Key Performance Indicators

37. 1. Compliance with the Terms of Reference

- All tasks and deliverables are completed in accordance with the scope, objectives, and methodology outlined in these TORs.
- The consultant follows UNEG ethical principles and DESA evaluation policies during all stages of the assignment.

38. 2. Quality of Methodology and Data Collection

- The inception report clearly articulates a sound evaluation design, a coherent theory of change, and a robust methodology with appropriate tools for data collection and analysis.
- The range and depth of data collected (documents, interviews, focus groups, surveys) adequately support the evaluation criteria and questions.
- Triangulation of multiple data sources ensures credible and evidence-based findings.

39. 3. Analytical Depth and Accuracy of Findings

- The evaluation report provides clear, balanced, and well-substantiated analysis aligned with OECD/DAC and UNEG criteria.
- Findings are supported by verifiable evidence and presented in a logical and coherent structure.
- Limitations, assumptions, and contextual factors are transparently discussed.

40. 4. Quality and Feasibility of Conclusions and Recommendations

- Conclusions are logically derived from the analysis and address the key evaluation questions.
- Recommendations are practical, actionable, and tailored to the roles of DESA, ILO, and

national partners.

- Lessons learned and good practices are clearly articulated to support future

programming.

41. 5. Clarity, Structure, and Presentation of Reports

- Deliverables are written in clear, concise English, following UNDESA formatting and

editorial standards.

- The report structure (executive summary, findings, conclusions, recommendations)

adheres to the DESA evaluation report template and integrates relevant annexes.

42. 6. Timeliness and Responsiveness

- Deliverables are submitted according to the agreed timeline (Section E) and incorporate

feedback from DESA and ILO/EVAL in a timely and constructive manner.

- The consultant remains responsive to queries and flexible in scheduling virtual meetings

or follow-up discussions.

43. 7. Stakeholder Engagement and Ethical Conduct

- The consultant demonstrates professionalism, neutrality, and sensitivity in engaging

with stakeholders.

- All ethical guidelines related to confidentiality, data protection, and informed consent

are fully respected.

Successful performance will be determined based on:

- Approval of each deliverable by DESA and ILO;
- Verification that outputs meet expected standards of analytical quality, utility, and presentation;

and

- Confirmation that the evaluation has been conducted independently, ethically, and in full

compliance with UN evaluation standards.

L. Qualifications of the consultants

The assignment will be undertaken by an Evaluation Consultant with a strong background in programme evaluation, social policy, and capacity development in developing country contexts. The consultant must possess the academic credentials, technical expertise, and professional experience necessary to conduct a high-quality, independent evaluation in line with UNEG Norms and Standards and DESA's Evaluation Policy.

Minimum Required Qualifications

44. 1. Academic Qualifications

- Advanced university degree (Master's or higher) in Economics, Public Policy, Social

Development, International Development, Evaluation, or a related field.

45. 2. Professional Experience

- At least 7 years of progressively responsible experience conducting independent

evaluations of international development programmes or projects, including the United Nations system or other multilateral organizations.

- Demonstrated expertise in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social

protection systems, including policy governance, financing mechanisms, and digital transformation processes.

- Proven experience applying OECD/DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence,

effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact) and managing evaluations with mixed-methods approaches.

- Solid understanding of capacity development methodologies, institutional

strengthening, and knowledge management in public administration or social sectors.

- Familiarity with rights-based and gender-responsive evaluation approaches, including

integration of gender equality, disability inclusion, and human rights considerations.

- Experience in report writing, data analysis, and formulation of evidence-based

conclusions and actionable recommendations.

46. 3. Knowledge of Context and Subject Matter

- Knowledge of the Asia-Pacific and Central Asia regions, particularly with regard to social

protection policy, governance reforms, and digitalization of administrative systems.

- Awareness of cross-sectoral issues related to poverty eradication, decent work, and the

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

47. 4. Technical and Analytical Skills

- Strong capacity for qualitative and quantitative analysis, including survey and interview

design, data validation, and triangulation of evidence.

- Proficiency in synthesizing complex information and presenting findings in clear, well-

structured reports and presentations.

48. 5. Language Skills

- Excellent command of English (written and oral) is essential.
- Working knowledge of Russian and/or Lao is desirable and would be an asset for

engaging national stakeholders and reviewing relevant documents.

49. 6. Personal Attributes

- Demonstrated independence, objectivity, and integrity in evaluation practice.
- Excellent interpersonal, communication, and organizational skills.
- Ability to manage time effectively and meet tight deadlines under limited supervision.

The consultant's qualifications and experience must collectively ensure that the evaluation is conducted with technical rigor, ethical integrity, and contextual understanding, delivering high-quality, evidence-based findings and recommendations to support DESA, ILO, and partner institutions.

M. Supervisor

The evaluation will be jointly supervised by UN DESA and the International Labour Organization (ILO), reflecting the collaborative implementation and joint management structure of the UNPDF project. Each organization will designate a focal point responsible for technical oversight, review of deliverables, and overall quality assurance throughout the evaluation process. To ensure impartiality and independence, the designated focal points from UN DESA and ILO will not be directly involved in project implementation and will not report to staff responsible for the implementation of the project. This arrangement safeguards the objectivity and credibility of the evaluation findings. The consultant will

report directly to the following co-supervisors:

50. 1. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

- Name: Robert Venne
- Title: Social Affairs Officer
- Office: UN DESA, Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD), New York
- Email: venne@un.org

51. 2. International Labour Organization (ILO)

- Name: Karuna Pal
- Title: Head of Programming, Partnerships and Knowledge Sharing Unit
- Office: International Labour Organization (ILO), Geneva
- Email: pal@ilo.org

Annex ii. Project results framework

Logic Intervention	Indicators	Means of Verification
Objective: To accelerate and extend universal social protection through the strengthening of the policy design, administrative governance and the digital transformation of social protection systems in the Lao and Tajikistan and in the Global South in support of just transitions.		
Outcome 1 Increased capacity of national stakeholders to plan, finance, implement and monitor the National Social Protection Strategy; expand coverage; and ensure sustainable financing in Lao PDR.	IA 1.1.1 Number of independent technical meetings held by the Government to plan and implement the National Social Protection Strategy	- Ministry's activity reports - LSSO's activity reports
	IA 1.2.1 Number of new or innovative mechanism to extend social security to uncovered workers that are piloted.	LSSO's activity reports
	IA 1.3.1 National Law Revision Committee for amendment of the Social Security Law established. IA 1.3.2 Number of independent consultative meetings at central and local levels organised by the Law Revision Committee	- Law Revision Committee's reports - Official Gazette - LSSO website

	IA 1.4.1 Number of proposals/options to improve financial management and investment governance of the Social Security Fund prepared by LSSO.	- LSSO's activity reports - Technical reports produced under the project
Output 1.1: Integrated support to the government, social partners and civil society to plan, finance, implement and monitor the National Social Protection Strategy is provided. Activity 1.1.1: Trainings on planning, designing, financing, implementing and monitoring social protection programmes at the national and subnational levels is conducted. Activity 1.1.2: Technical meetings and preparatory work to plan and take decisions on the Strategy, including in the high-level Commission, are held. Activity 1.1.3: TOT on social protection for government staff, social partners and civil society is held. Activity 1.1.4: Awareness raising among the general public is done.		
Output 1.2: Innovative approaches to extend social security to uncovered workers are explored and piloted. Activity 1.2.1: Consultations with national and local stakeholders, including representatives of informal workers, are held. Activity 1.2.2: New, innovative approaches to extend social security to informal workers and non-registered enterprises are identified. Activity 1.2.3: At least 1 approach is piloted and lessons for future adaptation or scale-up documented.		
Output 1.3: Capacity building and technical assistance provided to the amendment of the Social Security Law of Lao PDR. Activity 1.3.1: Consultations and training for government officials, social partners and National Assembly members are held. Activity 1.3.2: Technical and/or background papers on legal, financial and other social security related aspects prepared. Activity 1.3.3: Study visit to a country (e.g., China) to learn from good practices in designing and implementing social protection programmes organised.		
Output 1.4: Capacity building and technical assistance provided for sustainable financing and investment of the National Social Security Fund. Activity 1.4.1: Technical study on social security investment governance and fund management is conducted. Activity 1.4.2: Training provided to LSSO officials to enhance their knowledge and planning capacities.		

Outcome 2 Increased capacity of the national entities responsible for social protection in Tajikistan to expand coverage, improve governance and enhance service quality to workers in the formal and informal economy, returning and migrant workers and refugees	IA 2.1 Existing data base/EMIS held by MHSP includes data about a) all non-contributory social protection programmes; b) data about returning migrant workers accessing social protection programmes; c) data about informal workers applying and receiving benefits Baseline: TSA programme only; MHSP EMIS interacts with data base held by Ministry of Labour and by Pension Fund (Baseline: data exchange not possible across databases) EMIS contains functions, indicators and electronic capabilities to monitor implementation of all social protection programmes	Meeting and annual reports of Working Group comprised of line ministries, agencies and social partners that have responsibility for social protection programmes design, delivery, financing and monitoring officially produces annual reports on Social Protection Strategy Action Plan using indicators supplied via EMIS Technical report on EMIS functionality and options to improve/extend its content; list of indicators to be included; assessment of interoperability with other data bases, produced by project and validated by national partners Periodic (semi-annual reports) from MHSP about step by step extension of EMIS content and functionality (baseline data about TSA programme management and recipients) and data/indicators available Periodic reports from the MHSP about a) assessment of interoperability between MHSP EMIS and data base on employment programmes held by Ministry of Labour and Pension Fund; and b) actions to improve interoperability Pre and post trainings reports of key staff (ToT) measuring capability -
	IA 2.2 Action Plan intended to monitor implementation of National Social Protection Strategy uses outcome indicators from EMIS to measure progress Baseline – draft Action Plan with no outcome level	Action Plan validated by the Working Group in charge to coordinate implementation of National Social Protection Strategy Project technical paper/guidance on data collection for indicators/ their presentation and use for reporting purposes (Including under international reporting obligations) validated by the Working Group

	IA 2.3 Two options to progressively extend maternity protection to informal workers prepared Two options (benefits and services) inclusive of (returning) migrant workers proposed One option to improve pension/benefit coverage/adequacy proposed	Actuarial report for maternity benefits validated by constituents Technical report and guidance for implementation of two options detailing the progressive extension of maternity protection to informal workers validated Technical report and guidelines for two options inclusive of returning migrant workers adopted Technical note with step-by-step guide to improve pension/benefit coverage/adequacy validated and prepared for mainstreaming
2.1 EMIS improved, includes all social protection schemes, enables monitoring of policy implementation Activity 2.1.1 Technical assistance to improve existing EMIS Activity 2.1.2 Trainings of national and staff in local offices to use improved EMIS Activity 2.1.4 Design of social protection strategy monitoring framework and its alignment with EMIS Activity 2.1.5 Capacity building of National Tripartite Commission to monitor implementation of Social Protection strategy		
2.2 Social protection schemes are inclusive of informal, returning and migrant workers and refugees and address their particular situations Activity 2.2.1 Technical assistance for actuarial assessment of maternity benefits scheme inclusive of informal workers Activity 2.2.3 Technical assistance to redesign schemes so they are inclusive of returning migrant worker Activity 2.2.4. Develop options for inclusion of vulnerable older persons or refugees into existing social protection schemes and/or propose tailor made schemes		
Outcome 3 Increased available knowledge and resources for understanding of the vital role of governance and the potential of digital transformation in extending the coverage of	IA 3.1 Number of technical support interventions provided to national constituents. IA 3.2 Number of country case studies produced	The project workspace on socialprotection.org will highlight the country case studies produced as well as the e-learning package and all tools and knowledge and communication products developed as part of the project. ILO-DESA will provide methodology for case studies with focus on the “how to”.

social protection and achieving greater sustainability

IA 3.3 Number of modules developed

Output 3.1 Technical support is provided to Countries through the Technical Support Facility of the ILO.
Output 3.2. Three (3) country case studies and analytical briefs are developed and published to feed into the 2025
Output 3.3. An e-learning package on social protection governance and the digital transformation adapted to developing countries is produced and launched in a regional workshop.
Output 3.4: A proto-type model is developed to measure impact on achievement of SDGs using project country information and ILO monitoring indicators which feeds into and helps inform future priorities of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions

Annex iii. Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Questions	Criteria	Key Issue	Judgement Criteria	Means of Verification (source/method)
1.1 To what extent was the problem analysis underpinning the project design, specifically the framing of coverage gaps as primarily a governance and digital transformation problem, validated by national stakeholders, and did it adequately account for political coordination barriers to reform in both countries?	Relevance	Matching needs and priorities	- Project objectives and outputs are consistent with national development priorities and sector strategies. - Beneficiary countries and stakeholders recognize the project as relevant and responsive to their needs. - Evidence of alignment is found in national strategies, plans, and stakeholder feedback.	Document review Key informant interviews Online survey
1.2 To what extent was the project aligned with UNPDF priorities and SDGs and with the mandates and strategic priorities of UN DESA and ILO?	Relevance	Alignment of project design	- The project objectives and activities are explicitly and logically linked to relevant UNPDF principles and SDG targets. - The project design reflects UNDESA's and ILO's mandates and leverages their comparative advantages in policy analysis and capacity development - Strategic alignment is clearly documented and evident in project documentation and stakeholder perceptions.	Document review

1.3 To what extent did the project design distinguish between gender-neutral, gender-sensitive, and gender-transformative approaches to social protection governance, and was the framing appropriate given the specific exclusion patterns of women, for example, in informal employment, returning female migrants, and men and women with disabilities in each country?	Relevance	Gender/human rights/disability integration	The project design reflects gender/human rights/disability integration and targeted approaches to LNOB	Document review Key informant interviews Online survey
2.1 To what extent were the planned outcomes and outputs realized as intended in both countries and globally? How? If not, why?	Effectiveness	Project short, medium, and long-term results	- There is demonstrable progress toward short-, medium-, and long-term results. - Outputs are of high quality and have contributed to expected outcomes. - Evidence exists of positive unintended outcomes or early signs of impact.	Document review Key informant interviews Online survey
2.2 To what extent did the project strengthen institutional capacities, inter-agency coordination, and the use of digital tools result in observable changes in how national institutions plan, coordinate, and deliver social protection?	Effectiveness	Project short, medium, and long-term results	- There is demonstrable progress toward short-, medium-, and long-term results. - Outputs are of high quality and have contributed to expected outcomes.	Document review Key informant interviews Online survey
2.3 Were there any unintended positive or negative results?	Effectiveness	Project short, medium, and long-term results	Evidence exists of positive unintended outcomes or early signs of impact.	Document review Key informant interviews Online survey

2.4 For each country, what specific evidence exists that women, for example, in the informal economy, returning female migrants, and both women and men with disabilities experienced improved access to social protection as a result of project activities, and where did gender-differentiated approaches fail to materialize?	Effectiveness	Project short, medium, and long-term results concerning gender/human rights/disability	There is demonstrable progress toward short-, medium-, and long-term results with focus on LNOB	Document review Key informant interviews Online survey
3.1 To what extent were financial, technical, and human resources used economically and efficiently?	Efficiency	Project planning; Human and financial resources	- Activities were delivered as planned, within budget, and according to the established timeline. - Any deviations were well-justified and effectively managed. - Implementation mechanisms were cost-efficient and adaptive.	Document review Key informant interviews
3.2 What were the actual transaction costs, in terms of coordination time, decision-making delays, and administrative issues, of the joint DESA-ILO implementation model? Did the division of responsibilities between normative/global (DESA) and technical/country (ILO) roles enhance or constrain delivery quality and speed?	Efficiency	Project governance and changes over time	- Governance structures and management processes were functional, responsive, and adapted effectively to changing circumstances. - Decision-making was timely, inclusive, and facilitated effective problem-solving. - Roles and responsibilities were clear and efficiently executed.	Document review Key informant interviews
4.1 What specific mechanisms — joint planning processes, shared results frameworks, formal coordination protocols — ensured genuine complementarity between this project and national plans and complementary initiatives of development partners such as World Bank, UNICEF, ADB and GIZ? Where did gaps, overlaps, or competitive dynamics emerge in practice?	Coherence	Project fit; Validity of stakeholder analysis	- The project design demonstrates clear complementarity with UN system strategies and avoids duplication. - Synergies with other national, regional, and international initiatives are evident. - Stakeholder mapping and engagement strategies are appropriate and comprehensive, involving relevant actors at national and regional levels.	Document review Key informant interviews

4.2 To what extent did the respective institutional roles of DESA (intergovernmental/ normative) and ILO (tripartite/ technical) create productive synergies or structural tensions in joint decision-making, and what does this model imply for future joint UN programming on social protection?	Coherence	Project fit	The project design demonstrates clear complementarity with UNDESA and ILO strategies and avoids duplication.	Document review Key informant interviews
5.1 To what extent is there evidence that project-supported mechanisms — specifically the EMIS monitoring framework in Tajikistan, the Social Security Law revision process in Lao PDR, and the National Social Protection Commission — have been embedded in institutional mandates, annual work plans, and domestic budget lines that do not depend on continued external funding?	Sustainability	Uptake, institutionalization	- Sustainability strategies were embedded in project design and implementation. - Evidence exists of institutionalization of results, policy uptake, or continued use of tools and knowledge products. - Capacities built are likely to endure post-project.	Document review Key informant interviews Online survey
5.2 To what extent did the project contribute to a measurable shift in domestic resource mobilization arguments for social protection — specifically, did the fiscal space analysis and financing framework work in both countries generate uptake by Finance Ministries or development finance institutions? To what extent were there other means to build sustainability?	Sustainability	Uptake	- Sustainability strategies were embedded in project design and implementation. - Evidence exists of institutionalization of results, policy uptake, or continued use of tools and knowledge products. - Capacities built are likely to endure post-project.	Document review Key informant interviews

6.1 To what extent have the project's country experiences, case studies, or e-learning modules been explicitly cited, adopted, or adapted in ILO/DESA normative guidance documents, Global Accelerator knowledge products, or preparations for the World Social Summit 2025 — and through what specific channels did country-level learning reach global policymaking arenas?	Impact	Scaling	There is demonstrable progress toward long-term results.	Document review Key informant interviews
6.2 What is the documented uptake and use of the e-learning modules among target countries beyond Lao PDR and Tajikistan — specifically, how many countries have used the modules, how are they being adapted, and what barriers exist to adoption for policymakers in lower-income countries without stable digital infrastructure?	Impact	Scaling	There is demonstrable progress toward long-term results.	Document review Key informant interviews Online survey
6.3 For specific population groups identified in the project design — informal economy workers, returning migrants, refugees, women, and persons with disabilities — what measurable changes in legal or effective social protection coverage and governance can be plausibly linked to project-supported institutional changes, and where did coverage gaps persist despite project activities?	Impact	Changes in coverage	There is demonstrable progress toward long-term results focusing on gender, human rights, disability, LNOB	Document review Key informant interviews Online survey
6.4 What would be the status of social protection and digital governance in the project countries and globally without the project?	Impact	Scaling Uptake Changes in coverage	Counterfactual, assessing a situation without the project's benefits	Key informant interviews

Annex iv. Evaluation questionnaire

For the project team and implementing partners

Name (to be anonymized for data analysis)	Sex	Position	Type of organization	Date

Relevance

1.1 How well did the project respond to your country's needs and development priorities by addressing shortcomings in social protection systems through strengthening governance and digital transformation? (EQ1.1)

1.2.1 How well did the project design distinguish between gender-neutral, gender-sensitive, and gender-transformative approaches to social protection governance? (project team only, EQ 1.3)

1.2.2 To what extent did the project's gender differentiation reflect the specific exclusion patterns affecting different groups in your country, such as women in informal employment, returning female migrants, and women and men with disabilities? (EQ 1.3)

	Highly relevant	Relevant	Moderately relevant	Moderately irrelevant	Irrelevant	Highly irrelevant	Don't know/ not applicable
Overall relevance							

Coherence

2.1 What specific mechanisms (e.g., joint planning processes, shared results frameworks, formal coordination protocols) ensured genuine complementarity between this project and national plans and complementary initiatives of development partners such as the World Bank, UNICEF, ADB, and GIZ? (EQ 4.1)

2.2 To what extent did the respective institutional roles of DESA (intergovernmental/ normative) and ILO (tripartite/ technical) create productive synergies or structural tensions in joint decision-making? (EQ 4.2)

2.3 What does this model imply for future joint UN programming on social protection? (EQ 4.2)

	Highly coherent	Coherent	Moderately coherent	Moderately incoherent	Incoherent	Highly incoherent	Don't know/ not applicable
Overall coherence							

Efficiency

3.1 To what extent were financial, technical, and human resources used economically and efficiently and timely? (EQ 3.1)

1.2.1 What were the actual transaction costs, in terms of coordination time, decision-making delays, and administrative issues, of the joint DESA-ILO implementation model? (project team only, EQ 3.2)

- 1.2.2 Did the division of responsibilities between normative/global (DESA) and technical/country (ILO) roles enhance or constrain delivery quality and speed? (project team only, EQ 3.2)

	Highly efficient	Efficient	Moderately efficient	Moderately inefficient	Inefficient	Highly inefficient	Don't know/ not applicable
Overall efficiency							

Effectiveness

- 4.1 Have the activities achieved, or are likely to achieve, planned objectives: (EQ 2.1)

	Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Moderately satisfactory	Moderately unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Highly unsatisfactory	Don't know/not applicable
Outcome 1 Increased capacity of national stakeholders to plan, finance, implement and monitor the National Social Protection Strategy; expand coverage; and ensure sustainable financing in Lao PDR.							
Independent technical meetings held by the Government to plan and implement the National Social Protection Strategy							
New or innovative mechanisms to extend social security to uncovered workers piloted.							
National Law Revision Committee for amendment of the Social Security Law established							
Independent consultative meetings at central and local levels organised by the Law Revision Committee							
Proposals/options to improve financial management and investment governance of the Social Security Fund prepared by LSSO.							
Outcome 2 - Increased capacity of the national entities responsible for social protection in Tajikistan to expand coverage, improve governance and enhance service quality to workers in the formal and informal economy, returning and migrant workers and refugees							
Existing data base/MIS held by ASIP includes data about a) all contributory social protection programmes; b) data about returning migrant workers accessing social protection programmes; c) data about informal workers applying and receiving benefits							
ASIP MIS interacts with data base held by Ministry of Labour and by Tax Committee and Amonatbank							
MIS contains functions, indicators and electronic capabilities to monitor implementation of all social protection programmes							
Action Plan intended to monitor implementation of National Social Protection Strategy uses outcome indicators from EMIS to measure progress							
Two options to progressively extend maternity protection to informal workers prepared							

(Benefits and services inclusive of (returning) migrant workers; Option to improve pension/benefit coverage/adequacy proposed)							
Outcome 3: Increased available knowledge and resources for understanding of the vital role of governance and the potential of digital transformation in extending the coverage of social protection and achieving greater sustainability							
Country case studies produced							
Training modules developed							

4.1.1 What are key enabling and limiting factors affecting the achievement of the project's results? (EQ 2.1)

4.2 To what extent did the project strengthen institutional capacities, inter-agency coordination, and the use of digital tools result in observable changes in how national institutions plan, coordinate, and deliver social protection? (EQ 2.2)

4.3 Is there any evidence of (intended? or unintended) outcomes? (EQ 2.3)

4.4.1 For each country, what specific evidence exists that women, for example, in the informal economy, returning female migrants, and both women and men with disabilities experienced improved access to social protection as a result of project activities? EQ 2.4)

4.4.2 Where and why did gender-differentiated approaches fail to materialize? (EQ 2.4)

4.5 How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the project implementation?

	Highly effective	Effective	Moderately effective	Moderately ineffective	Ineffective	Highly ineffective	Don't know/ not applicable
Overall effectiveness							

Sustainability

5.1 To what extent is there evidence that project-supported mechanisms — specifically the EMIS monitoring framework in Tajikistan, the Social Security Law revision process in Lao PDR, and the National Social Protection Commission — have been embedded in institutional mandates, annual work plans, and domestic budget lines that do not depend on continued external funding? (EQ 5.1)

5.2 To what extent did the project contribute to a measurable shift in domestic resource mobilization arguments for social protection — specifically, did the fiscal space analysis and financing framework work in both countries generate uptake by Finance Ministries or development finance institutions? To what extent were there other means to build sustainability? (EQ 5.2)

5.3 To what extent were there other means to build sustainability? (EQ 5.2)

	Highly sustainable	Sustainable	Moderately efficient	Moderately unsustainable	Unsustainable	Highly unsustainable	Don't know/ not applicable
Overall sustainability							

Impact

- 6.1 To what extent have the project's country experiences, case studies, or e-learning modules been explicitly cited, adopted, or adapted in ILO/DESA normative guidance documents, Global Accelerator knowledge products, or preparations for the World Social Summit 2025 — and through what specific channels did country-level learning reach global policymaking arenas? (EQ 6.1)
- 6.2 What is the documented uptake and use of the e-learning modules among target countries beyond Lao PDR and Tajikistan — specifically, how many countries have used the modules, how are they being adapted, and what barriers exist to adoption for policymakers in lower-income countries without stable digital infrastructure? (EQ 6.2)
- 6.3 For specific population groups identified in the project design — informal economy workers, returning migrants, refugees, women, and persons with disabilities — what measurable changes in legal or effective social protection coverage and governance can be plausibly linked to project-supported institutional changes, and where did coverage gaps persist despite project activities? (EQ 6.3)
- 6.4 What would be the status of social protection and digital governance in the project countries and globally without the project? (EQ 6.4)

	Highly sustainable	Sustainable	Moderately efficient	Moderately unsustainable	Unsustainable	Highly unsustainable	Don't know/ not applicable
Overall impact							

Annex v. – Rating system and Summary of Evaluation findings

The evaluator should score each evaluation criterion [i.e. relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness (including impact), sustainability, and the mainstreaming of UN cross-cutting issues] using the below rating system.

Rating	Description
Highly Satisfactory (HS)	<i>The project performed well overall against a particular evaluation criterion with no short comings.</i>
Satisfactory (S)	<i>The project performed well overall against a particular evaluation criterion with but had minor short comings.</i>
Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	<i>The project performed moderately well against the particular criterion (performing satisfactorily against almost half of the evaluation questions) and has short comings and room for improvement.</i>
Somehow Satisfactory (SS)	<i>The project performed poorly overall against majority of the evaluation questions and there is need to take steps to improve the project aspect being evaluated.</i>
Not Satisfactory (NS)	<i>The project performed poorly in almost all the evaluation questions and there is need for immediate and significant changes to be made to improve project outcomes.</i>
Unable to Assess (UA)	<i>The available information does not allow an assessment of the level of outcome achievements.</i>

Criterion	Rating
Relevance	S
Coherence	S
Efficiency	S
Effectiveness	S
Sustainability	MS
Mainstreaming cross-cutting issues	UA

Annex v. List of individuals interviewed

The evaluation involved 19 stakeholders, including 12 women and 7 men. In line with UNEG ethical standards and to protect participant confidentiality, their names are not disclosed in this report.

Annex vi: List of documents reviewed

- UNDESA/ILO. Accelerating universal social protection for achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through strengthened governance and digital transformation. Project document. April 2023.
- UNDESA/ILO. Accelerating universal social protection for achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through strengthened governance and digital transformation. Progress Report 1. October 2023; reporting period 1 June 2023-30 September 2023.
- UNDESA/ILO. Accelerating universal social protection for achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through strengthened governance and digital transformation. Progress Report 2. April 2024; reporting period 1 October 2023-31 March 2024.
- UNDESA/ILO. Accelerating universal social protection for achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through strengthened governance and digital transformation. Progress Report 3. November 2024; reporting period 1 October 2023-30 November 2024.
- UNDESA/ILO. Accelerating universal social protection for achieving the SDGs and ending poverty through strengthened governance and digital transformation. Progress Report 5. Reporting period 1 April 2025-30 September 2025.
- UNDESA/ILO. ILO-UNDESA Project “Accelerating Universal Social Protection for Achieving the SDGs and Ending Poverty through Strengthened Governance and Digital Transformation.” Final Progress Report. 26 February 2026; reporting period 1 April 2025-28 February 2026. ILO Project Code GLO/23/02/UNS.

National strategies, plans, frameworks, and related policy documents mentioned in final evaluation/progress reports

Lao PDR

- Government of Lao PDR. National Social Protection Strategy: Vision 2030, Goal 2025. Adopted April 2020.
- Government of Lao PDR. National Social Protection Strategy 2021-2025 / NSPS 2021-25.
- Government of Lao PDR. National Social Protection Strategy 2026-2030.
- Government of Lao PDR. 9th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan / National Socioeconomic Development Plan 2021-2025.
- Government of Lao PDR. Lao PDR LDC Graduation Smooth Transition Strategy. Referenced in the project document as a strategy in which social protection is a priority action.
- Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MOLSW) and Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO).
- United Nations Lao PDR. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF)
- International Labour Organization (ILO). Decent Work Country Programme for Lao PDR 2022-2026
- ILO / National Social Protection Committee Secretariat. Report of the mid-term review of the National Social Protection Strategy, full report and summary brief, English and Lao. Published in 2024.

Tajikistan

- Government of Tajikistan. National Development Strategy.
- Government of Tajikistan. National Social Protection Strategy / National Strategy on Social Protection 2040.
- Government of Tajikistan. Action Plan of the National Strategy on Social Protection 2040 / National Social Protection Action Plan.

- Government of Tajikistan. National social protection strategy workplan.
- United Nations Tajikistan. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2026
- Government of Tajikistan and International Labour Organization (ILO). Decent Work Country Programme 2020-2024
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Additional documents

- United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation. 2020.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). Stories from the solar project. n.d. Footnoted as background to the counterfactual discussion of earlier ILO country-office work in social protection under SOLAR I.