



## Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (USP China)

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Type of Evaluation: Project

Evaluation timing: Final

Evaluation nature: Independent

Project countries: China

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SDG(s): SDG Targets 1.3 (No poverty), 3.8 (Good health and wellbeing), 5.4 (Gender equality), 8.5 (Decent work and economic growth), 10.4 (Reduced inequalities)

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**REPORT**

**(FINAL)**

**Independent Final Evaluation**

**Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (USP China)**

**July 2019 – December 2022 (42 months)**

**CHN/18/01/EUR**

**2023-05-01**

**Christoph David WEINMANN (lead)**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
ACTRAV	Bureau for Workers' Activities (ILO)
CALSS	Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security
CDPF	China Disabled Persons' Federation
CEC	China Enterprise Confederation
CO	country office (ILO)
Covid-19	coronavirus disease
CTA	Chief Technical Adviser
DWCP	decent work country program
DWT-Bangkok	Decent Work Technical Support Team for East, Southeast Asia and the Pacific
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
ILO	International Labour Organization
MOHRSS	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security
MoU	memorandum of understanding
MTE	mid-term evaluation
NHSA	National Healthcare Security Administration
NPO	National Program Officer
OECD/ DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee
PIMS	Partnership Instrument Monitoring System
PMC	Project Management Committee
ProDoc	project document
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PWD	persons (or people) with disability

ROAP	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
SARS	severe acute respiratory syndrome
SDG	sustainable development goal
SIA	Social Insurance Administration
TNA	training needs analysis
ToC	theory of change
TOR	terms of reference
UN	United Nations
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
USD	United States Dollar
USP	Universal social protection

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## **1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The EU-China Project “Improving China’s Institutional Capacity Towards Universal Social Protection” (USP China project), implemented by the ILO and funded by the European Union (EU) through its Partnership Instrument facility was implemented between July 2019 and December 2022 with a value of up to EUR 2.3 million. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) of the People’s Republic of China was the key counterpart and beneficiary and involved different national and sub-national stakeholders in implementation. The project envisioned ratification of Convention 102 of the ILO by the People’s Republic of China by the end of 2021.<sup>1</sup>

The project aimed at providing technical support to MOHRSS to promote the effective application of international labour standards as China pursues universal, adequate and sustainable social security coverage. The specific objectives (outcomes) of the project were to contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits, and to the extension of social security coverage in China. Implementation of the project coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic and forced the project to shift a significant number of activities online and reorganize itself for implementation.

This final evaluation was conducted between 14 November 2022 (start of inception) and 20 December 2022 (debriefing meeting), i.e. during the last weeks of project implementation. A direct continuation of this project was not foreseen, but a further cooperation between the European Commission and the ILO in a second phase has been agreed in December 2022.

### **Relevance and Validity of Design**

The relevance of the project was high and remained high throughout the whole implementation period, for the Chinese beneficiary institutions at all levels (national, sub-national; tripartite). The project was highly relevant. It fully aligned with national development plans. Government has taken the lead. Employers have identified social security as a new area to pursue. There was no opportunity to discuss with Workers, but it is both plausible and likely that project meets workers’ interests because they are the key beneficiaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Target of achievement in the EU-ILO contribution agreement of 2019.  
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The same degree of relevance was attributable to the EC and the ILO because of the joint interest in promoting international labour standards, in this case relating to social security.

Validity of Design of design was not up to technical standards. A discrepancy on assumptions automatically leads to an incomplete and/ or defective logical framework for the whole project, whereby the design is technically invalid.

However the „overall design“ with its different layers (Chinese/ ILO/ EC), not spelled out and not easily recognized -- but implemented in practice, was valid.

### Coherence

The project was fully coherent with Chinese, EC, and ILO policies.

### Effectiveness (including Effectiveness of Management Arrangements)

Selected indicators for measuring outcomes were neither meaningful nor realistically set, and measurement of effectiveness therefore was not possible. In the absence of better information, based on the experience of the evaluator with implementing projects at policy level in China, it was assessed that what could realistically be achieved in practice has effectively been achieved by the project.

Management arrangements were fully appropriate to project implementation and provided the enabling environment for good project management, the effectiveness of the project in general and the efficiency displayed during implementation.

Management arrangements did not include the National Healthcare Security Administration which would have been important to address maternity benefits and other insurances falling under Convention 102.

### Efficiency

When reviewing the mere number of quality outputs the project has delivered during the period of implementation with the size of the team in place, the project is to be rated as highly efficient. This assessment is also based on the practical experience of the evaluator with the implementation of policy level projects both in China and other locations.



## Impact

Similar to the measurement difficulties relating to effectiveness, and as a knock-on effect from that criterion, indicator selection for measuring impact was not meaningful. The achievement of intended impact (or even outcome) based on indicator selection is not foreseeable at time of project end.

## Sustainability

Because the project has a very comprehensive approach, it is somewhat limited with regard to achieving the depth required to establish patterns that have sufficient traction to be sustainable at end of project. While seeds have been planted, proper cultivation and watering will remain important to secure sustainability.

There project had no exit strategy in place despite its initially limited duration. Follow-up therefore is recommended and may be integrated with the next phase now agreed with the EU.

## Cross-cutting issues

Concerns raised initially by some interlocutors at the donor end about insufficient gender sensitivity of the project were unfounded. The project's approach was gender-sensitive and in line with good practice.

The project showed a good response to Covid-19 challenges and provided a specific contribution to UN activity/ ILO policy response to the pandemic.

## Summary of recommendations

Given the project has ended, recommendations revolve around two areas. The first is concerned with selected measures for more immediate follow-up in order to ensure a higher degree of sustainability of results. The second revolve around the question of how ILO can ensure that validity of design is up to standards so project implementation does not exclusively depend on the adaptability of very high-skilled staff, high relevance, high coherence and timeliness; and how discrepancies between the use of two basic project management tools (logframe, risk register) can be removed.

## **2 INTRODUCTION**

This report contains the main findings of the independent final evaluation of the China-EU project „Improving China’s institutional capacity towards universal social protection“ (USP China) as implemented by the International Labour Organization.

### **2.1 Background and context**

The establishment of a well-functioning labour market and welfare system is at the top of the Chinese political agenda as illustrated by its **13th Five Year Plan (2016-2020)**. The 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan aims at better livelihood and social benefits and full coverage of social protection system for its citizens. Promoting social cohesion and income security for all by facilitating access to jobs, quality social services and portable and adequate social security will be critical in reducing inequality, helping households manage employment, health and age related risks and increasing labour mobility. Another major task facing the social protection system in China, as outlined in the 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, is to adapt to the rapidly growing urban residents and ageing population. The priorities as outlined in the 13th Five-year plan for Human Resources and Social Security Development are as follows:

- Expand social protection coverage
- Improve the design of the social security system
- Provide appropriate-level protection (adequacy of benefits)
- Improve financial sustainability of the funds

Social protection is considered to be an important enhancer of economic transformation in a moment wherein China is going through a process of economic transition, reducing the dependence on an export led model and increasing the relevance of domestic consumption. Consumption can be substantially boosted by reducing the need for people to save for old-age security, health and education, by providing access to similar-quality public services nationwide, and by ensuring employment opportunities for workers who become redundant because of overcapacity adjustment.

The Chinese social security system can be described as legally unified but administratively fragmented. Low level of social pooling of social security funds<sup>1</sup> results in portability problems when workers move across provinces and further contributes to regional inequalities. A major concern is how to integrate the different social security schemes thus providing a universal protection system for rural and urban workers, especially for the migrant workers. According to the central government guidance, migrant workers should retain their rights to their accrued pension benefits when

moving. However, the actual transfer of the funds can still be cumbersome and difficult at the operational level.

After decades of massive and continuous expansion, the number of people covered by the state social insurance schemes kept growing in 2017. For example, the total number of insured persons (including beneficiaries and contributors) under the pension, unemployment, work injury and maternity insurance schemes all increased by at least 3 per cent. This was achieved at a time when pension and health insurances had already covered more than 80 per cent of the population of working age and more than 95 per cent of the entire population respectively.

China and the EU have long-term cooperation in the area of social protection, starting since 2006. During the period 2006-2011, China and the EU have cooperated through the EU-China Social Security Project (EUCSS). Implemented in Beijing, Hunan, Gansu, Shandong and Sichuan, the project aimed at supporting China's transition to a sustainable social security system, which guarantees accessible, adequate and affordable social security benefits to all Chinese citizens. Minister Yin Weimin of MOHRSS noted at the closure of the project that it "played a positive role in the cultivation of talent with a global vision, in the understanding and learning of EU experience and in the promotion of China's social security system construction." The research produced by the project provided important inputs to legislative, policy formulation and capacity building process, notably through the Social Insurance Law, the development of Health Insurance manual, an analysis of training needs, the best social insurance practice package, and standard procedures of social insurance services. An important contribution of the EUCSS is its support to the MOHRSS in the area of actuarial capacity-building. The project trained actuarial experts and also assisted in the development of actuarial models.

From 2014 to 2018, China and the EU co-funded the EU-China Social Protection Reform Project (SPRP). The SPRP responded to China's need to address the problems of its social insurance system, namely the gap between rural and urban areas, ageing population, weaknesses in the social protection system, and workers without employment contracts. The SPRP, therefore, aimed at supporting China in cultivating social equity in society. The SPRP contributed in developing policy recommendations and proposed models on parametric reform of the pension schemes, improving financial sustainability of the social security system, totalization and vesting of pension rights across regions, extension of social protection to informal employment, etc. As of

March 2018, the project has helped organize and facilitate interaction between the Chinese beneficiaries and over 180 experts and officials from European countries and international organizations.

This project has built on the achievements of its preceding EU-China social security projects, i.e., the EUCSS and the SPRP. The overall aim of this project is to contribute to the realization of improvements in China's employment, social affairs and inclusion, focusing on supporting China to strengthen its social protection system during and beyond the period 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. This project was aimed to be implemented for a duration of 36 months from July 2019 and received no cost extension for 6 months, thus the total duration of the project is 42 months. It aims to contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits in China and the expansion of the coverage of social security to workers in non-standard forms of employment, with special attention to migrant workers and women.

The expected high-level long-term results are:

- (i) Improved coverage, adequacy and financial sustainability of the social protection system;
- (ii) Promotion of regulatory convergence toward international standards in selected areas.

The project provided technical support to the MOHRSS to promote the effective application of relevant international labour standards in China's pursuit of universal social security coverage. The 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan on Human Resources and Social Security Development set national target indicators of coverage expansion by 2020 as follows:

- old-age pension coverage reaches 90%
- unemployment insurance covers 180 million people;
- employment injury insurance covers 220 million people

**Specific objective 1: Contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits**

**Specific objective 2: Contribute to the expansion of the coverage of social security to workers in non-standard forms of employment, with a special attention to migrant workers and women**

The EU-China Project "Improving China's Institutional Capacity Towards Universal Social Protection", implemented by the ILO and funded by the European Union through the Partnership Instrument (PI), has organized the independent final

evaluation in line with the agreement between the EU and the ILO and between the ILO and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) of the People's Republic of China, and as outlined in ILO evaluation policy.

## 2.2 Purpose, scope, and clients

The purpose and objectives of the evaluation are three-fold:<sup>2</sup>

A) Accountability: The evaluation is meant to help in understanding how the project has helped China's DWCP to

- 1) contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old age benefits
- 2) extend of the coverage of social security to workers in diverse forms of employment, with special attention to migrant workers and women

B) Improvement areas for technical advice to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security

C) Organizational learning, including better understanding of the social security environment in China and mechanisms to support it

The evaluation is meant to be used, both, for project accountability and project learning. Among other points the evaluation identifies what worked, what did not work at output, outcome and impact levels, what is sustainable, what is the legacy of the project and what are the recommendations for the future

The geographical scope of the project is limited to China. The evaluation is meant to cover the project implementation from 01 July 2019 to 31 December 2022.

The evaluation is meant to integrate ILO's cross-cutting issues, including norms and social dialog, gender equality, disability inclusion, other non-discrimination concerns, and medium and long-term effects of capacity development initiatives throughout the evaluation methodology and all deliverables, including this report.

The evaluation is meant to give specific attention to how the intervention is relevant to the ILO's Decent Work Country Program and policy frameworks at the national and global levels, UNSDCF and national sustainable development strategy (or its

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<sup>2</sup> Terms of reference, Section 4.  
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equivalent) or other relevant national development frameworks, including any relevant sectoral policies and program.

The primary users of the evaluation are global and national stakeholders, the project and other ILO staff, and the donors. The target groups are the tripartite constituents and other stakeholders at global and country levels.

Preliminary findings of the evaluation were presented to MOHRSS, the EC, the project team, and the evaluation manager following the field work. Feedback received to the presentation has been addressed in this report.

This evaluation report, as in any evaluation, focuses on the most important elements of the findings. Elements with low or declining marginal utility or importance for understanding the project may usually be discarded in the interest of time and space. If readers are missing any elements, they may assume the same were not of significance for the successful conclusion or continuation of the project.

## 2.3 Evaluation questions

The terms of reference for this evaluation included specific evaluation questions collected internally by ILO that evaluators were asked to seek answers for. For ease of reference, these questions are listed below according to the sections they were listed in the terms of reference. Given not all questions were listed under the most pertinent sections, this report addresses them in the appropriate section (indicated in the table below where applicable) to the extent that answers could be obtained.

<p><u>Relevance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent has the project aligned with, and supported national development plans and priorities of the ILO constituents? <a href="#">[see under coherence]</a></li> <li>• Has the project contributed to ILO’s Strategic Policy Outcome 3 on “creating and extending social protection floors”, including to informal and vulnerable workers, as part of comprehensive social security systems? <a href="#">[see under coherence]</a></li> <li>• To what extent is the project relevant to the UNSDFs, DWCPs of the project countries, and other national frameworks and to relevant Programme and Budget Outcomes of the ILO? <a href="#">[see under coherence]</a></li> <li>• How are the project objectives and implementation impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and to what extent has the project adapted its activities to the changing priorities Y</li> <li>• To what extent have the project activities helped protect the vulnerable segments of the populations against the pandemic? Y</li> </ul>
<p><u>Coherence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent are the project design (objectives, outcomes, outputs and activities) and its underlining theory of change logical and align with the requirements for delivery of the objectives of the project the expectations of the ILO and the Donor? <a href="#">[see under validity of design]</a></li> <li>• To what extent to which other interventions (particularly policies) support or undermine the project? Y</li> <li>• To what extent do the project activities develop synergies and interlinkages with other ILO interventions? Y</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent are the project activities complementary and coordinate with those of other actors in the area and add value without duplication of effort? Y</li> </ul>
<p><u>Validity of design</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did the Project objectives and interventions consider relevant SDG targets of no poverty, good health and wellbeing, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities and the related indicators? Y</li> <li>• To what extent has the project encouraged equal participation of men and women in the project activities? <a href="#">[see under cross-cutting issues]</a></li> </ul>
<p><u>Effectiveness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent have the project outcomes and outputs been achieved? Y</li> </ul> <p>Are the activities having the desired result? To what extent has there been an increase in coverage of old age pension, unemployment insurance and employment injury insurance increased due to the activities of the project? Y</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent has the project helped strengthen China’s institutional capacity to improve its social protection including in terms of adequacy and financial sustainability of pension schemes? Y</li> <li>• How has the project assisted ILO’s policy objectives to realise equality of opportunity and treatment for all and engage with world of works actors in its activities? <a href="#">[see under coherence]</a></li> </ul>
<p><u>Effectiveness of management arrangement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent has the project ensured regular consultations with workers and employment organisations, principles of social dialogue and tripartite consultation? Y</li> <li>• How effectively did the project monitor performance and results? What were the systems put in place to track progress and risks? Y</li> <li>• What were the main internal and external factors that influenced the achievement or nonachievement of results? Y</li> </ul>
<p><u>Efficiency</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent are the resources allocated strategically to provide the necessary support and to achieve the broader project objectives? Y</li> <li>• To what extent did the project budget factor-in the cost of specific activities, outputs and outcomes? Y</li> <li>• To what extent has cooperation among project partners been efficient? What is the value addition of the cooperation/ collaboration of the project? Was there a mechanism to facilitate coherence and synergy by the partners? How effective was it? Y</li> <li>• To what extent has the project leveraged new or repurposed existing financial resources to mitigate COVID-19 effects in a balanced manner? Y</li> </ul>
<p><u>Sustainability</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent would the Ministry be likely to continue with the training and the increase in coverage for the old age pension, employment injury insurance and other measures to reach the desired coverage levels? Y</li> <li>• To what extent are the findings obtained sustainable or can they be sustained? What are the conditions for this? Y</li> </ul>
<p><u>Impact</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent has the coverage of old age pension and employment injury insurance increased due to the activities of the project? Y</li> <li>• To what extent has the project increased the cooperation amongst governments employers and workers which is central to creating conditions of inclusive growth and decent work? Y</li> <li>• To what extent has the project assisted in development of a gender responsive Social Security system? <a href="#">[see under cross-cutting issues]</a></li> <li>• To what extent have the project activities made a difference to specific SDGs that are linked to the project? What is the different made to the five SDGs? Y</li> </ul>
<p><u>Cross cutting issues and COVID 19 responses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent has the project contributed to advance in areas of emerging concerns regarding, (i) promotion of international labour standards and social dialogue (ii) gender equality and non-discrimination, notably inclusion of people with disabilities? (iii) just transition to environmental sustainability? Y</li> <li>• To what extent did the project addressed the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and contributed to the ILO policy response? Y</li> </ul>

Given an evaluation is not a academic research exercise where questions may be selected according to the expected reliability of potential findings, it is normal practice to accept the questions and to see whether answers may be obtained during the evaluation process. Where answers are (not) found, they are (not) reported.

### **3. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS**

The terms of reference for this evaluation spell out that the ILO's Policy Guidelines for Results-based Evaluation<sup>3</sup> provide the basic framework for this evaluation and that the evaluation will be carried out according to ILO's standard policies and procedures, and comply with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards and the OECD/ DAC evaluation quality standards. This section describes the methodology selected by the evaluator and its limitations in order to conduct the evaluation within the given trime frame and the resources available in order to best respond to these policies and comply with the given standards, and based on what may be considered reasonable in the trade.

Given this final evaluation is an independent evaluation, the evaluator takes an independent view and is not merely guided by project documents and agreements. Other than in monitoring that by definition focuses on following agreed indicators, any evaluation, independent or not, by definition may, where necessary and useful, include looking at other indicators and/ or commenting on the indicators that were chosen for measurement or, if irrelevant, ignore them alltogether.

#### **Approach**

With the exception of the blanket request of a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods independent of purpose, the main procedural and methodological elements of this evaluation are in agreement those proposed in section 6 of the terms of reference for this evaluation.

The project as a policy-oriented intervention by definition does not lend itself to quantitative analysis (unless specific claims to increased outreach of policy or other changes in quantities as a result of policy change are made). Much of the information collected by the project or by the evaluation team was therefore likely to be of a qualitative nature -- even if the counting of participants and workshops as

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per agreed indicators is „quantitative“ (and unfortunately of little informational value).

Evaluators in practice essentially take any information they can obtain from the project and the stakeholder discussions and sieve the catch for those key elements that allow them to respond to the key evaluation criteria in the most appropriate form. Often they need to follow leads that only appear during the discussions they hold with the stakeholders. Such practice always involves the alternation between different methods and rarely can rely on single methods, typically in an iterative process.

On the whole, a nuts-and-bolts perspective will lead to valid evaluation results and academic approaches are to be avoided. That does not imply that references to theoretical concepts and standard frameworks and their rationale cannot be made.

By definition, all program and project evaluations are goal-based evaluations. They serve to determine to which extent goals have been attained, including whether specific quality criteria that are to be met have been adhered to. There is no reason for this evaluation to deviate from this approach.

Formative evaluations are used for improving a project. This being a final evaluation, the purpose therefore is not automatically formative. Given that a follow-up project is under preparation, it does take formative character. While no specific mechanism for feeding the results of the evaluation into the project has been devised, a normal debriefing sessions was foreseen, and involved parties have had an opportunity to take note of learning points raised by the evaluation.

Given the objective of ILO evaluations is to promote learning, the evaluation needs to remain open to analyzing processes and factors that explain the why goals were or were not attained and therefore, depending on the evaluation criteria concerned may take the shape of process-based evaluation, will also consider to which extent project clients benefited (outcome-based evaluation).

Similarly, as for all evaluations that do not involve large numbers (e.g. at least several hundreds or thousands) of direct or final (ultimate) beneficiaries which would justify application of quantitative methods, qualitative methods are the primary choice.

### **Specific elements of method**

In the light of the circumstances for this final evaluation, the method adopted and implemented remained pragmatic and flexible. It included

- reviewing existing documentation on the project in the form of project documents and reports against what is considered reasonable in the trade as

well as against key policies documented that the project is meant to contribute to

- requesting for additional information from stakeholders as necessary or useful for the purpose of judgement against the evaluation criteria (and depended on the timely provision of such information during the duration of the assignment)
- conveying the need for the evaluation and relieve interlocutors of any potential fears of the review by communicating a modern understanding of evaluation exercises, namely as joint learning exercises which serve the management of project quality
- exploring the views held by the different stakeholders concerning the implementation of the project, at different levels within ILO and the EU as well as in the People's Republic of China
- while being guided by the evaluation criteria and using semi-structured interview formats, giving a preference to open discussions so as to not to run the risk of overlooking any important aspects by narrowing in too early on the experts' (or ILO's or the EU's) potentially limited perspectives from the outset of the evaluation
- where relevant, seeking to eliminate any misunderstandings potentially resulting from interpretation during interviews by triangulation (e.g. by addressing questions from different angles during the same discussions, similar to taking cross bearings in order to determine a location)
- in an iterative procedure, triangulating views obtained in subsequent discussions and the debriefing meetings in order to obtain an unbiased (as can be) overview of the status of project implementation and to identify potential differences in opinion
- seeking to determine the reasons for diverging opinions (if any)
- assessing the overall picture emerging from the discussions and the documentation against the evaluation criteria and independently formulated a view on the situation of the project in this context
- proposing measures for improvement and recommendations where necessary or useful, and/ or drew conclusions for an intended future project (which turned out to already be in an advanced planning stage when the evaluation began)

This open and flexible approach usually leads to the „vaguely right“<sup>4</sup> portrait of a project's achievements evaluation results and has been successfully implemented many times. It is generally superior to the recently popular exercise of developing a matrix of evaluation questions and data sources which easily leads into the trap of being „exactly wrong“ by concluding about the importance of factors derived from document review. For one, in real life, some of the most important questions often arise during the evaluation process and are not anticipated because they do not emerge from the documents. Secondly, the matrix tends to suggest completeness once established and usually leads to box-ticking approaches or at least to suggest a level of precision which cannot be attained. The matrix begins to dominate the discussion as opposed to the project reality which should dominate.

For this particular evaluation,

- ILO Evaluation Management supported that openness is a positive element that should be retained and that open questions regarding the key evaluation criteria are not disallowed.
- ILO Evaluation Management requested a condensed/ summarized list of questions from those placed in the terms of reference, supplemented with additional questions (as bullet points) emanating from key project documents be provided to support the process of the evaluators. This was to provide a „reservoir“ of questions that can be pulled into the discussions when necessary or useful while providing the openness that is difficult to sustain with the recently popular format of an evaluation question matrix. It can be found in Annex A.3.

### Interlocutors

The evaluator relied on the project team to suggest the stakeholders respectively interlocutors to be selected for the evaluation. This would ensure that all stakeholders identified by the project would be fully covered, including that no important examples of success would be overlooked by the evaluation team. Interviews included discussions with implementors, direct beneficiaries, and significant others (key informants), including but not limited to the donor.

The following table summarizes the number of the informants interviewed, disaggregated by sex and type of organization. The overview presents how many persons were reached based on the meetings scheduled for the evaluation.

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<sup>4</sup> Term coined by Carveth Read.  
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T.01 Number of informants interviewed.		
		headcount
EMP	F	0
	M	0
ENT	F	1
	M	0
GOV	F	6
	M	2
ILO	F	1
	M	5
EC	F	2
	M	1
other	F	1
	M	1
subtotal	F	10
subtotal	M	10
totals		20

Observations:  
EMP ... employees/ workers, ENT ... employers/ business membership organizations, F ... female, GOV ... government, m ... male.  
"GOV" includes national and sub-national level staff. „ILO“ includes project staff and ROAP.  
„Other“ includes suppliers.  
Due to the pandemic including respective travel restrictions, interviews were conducted via internet (web-conference). Some meetings did not materialize due to sick leave of interlocutors.

A table with the timeline of the evaluation can be found in Annex 7 to this report.

Further elements relating to methodology can be found in Annex 8 to this report.

#### Limitations

The evaluator is confident that the findings of the evaluation are generally valid and potential limitations to the method therefore do not take an important role. The acceptance of the preliminary results on the occasion of the debriefing workshop indicates that there are no important divergences in opinion between the key stakeholders and the evaluator.

Unexpected requirement for restructuring of the division of labor between the evaluators during the first days of the work in the field resulted in a substantial shift of work load to the lead evaluator without compensation in time that limited the

amount of additional text that may have possibly been produced by exploring some potentially interesting leads for positive lessons learning, e.g. by follow-up with additional in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with selected participants of (perceived or factually) most significant changes to learn what were the key factors that brought them about. Generally, however, such leads are sufficiently captured in project progress reports (q.v.) and they may be picked up by ILO and the concerned stakeholders at any time.

Such additional learning does not change the results of the evaluation. The weight attributed to the different OECD-DAC criteria in this report is proportionate to the importance they had for making this project a success story.

A more significant limitation results from the fact that a small number of interviews did not materialize due to reasons of health and/ or the high pressure of end-of-year tasks is regrettable. Especially where numbers of interlocutors are few, usually every single interview counts. Thus proper representation of workers, important with for the ILO as a tripartite structure, could not be secured, and a few more useful interviews of local (province level or municipality level) as well as informants with third-party view (e.g. the All-China Women's Federation, or the National Healthcare Security Administration) could not be implemented.

Certainly, the conditions of the pandemic have prevented the evaluation from getting into face-to-face discussions in the field, and this may have limited the ability for the evaluator to get the full panoply of information that only on-site visits can deliver. This is particularly important for a better understanding aspects of local implementation of social policy and conditions of access to social security services. Given the project had to operate under the same restrictions, however, the online communication also enabled the evaluator to better understand what levels could be reached during the implementation of the project under pandemic conditions and therefore was not detrimental to evaluation results.

## **4. MAIN FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Relevance and Validity of Design**

#### **Relevance**

Relevance is the extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries , global, country, and partner/ institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.

## Context of project relevance

Social policy and social security are not constants anywhere in the world, and the development of the respective structures are not straightforward in developing countries where the trade-off between increasing national income and distributing the same often appears to be in conflict with targets of economic growth. Setting the priorities in this field is not easy. It used to be one of the areas of systemic competition between the former „capitalist“ and „socialist“ blocks, though even within planned socialist countries, including China, trade-offs were explicitly made between growth and distribution. Besides early discussion around „entitlement“, the „social question“ has come to the fore of international economic development discussions during the „redistribution with growth“ debates in the 1980s, the recognition of the importance of „poverty alleviation“ in the 1990s and is now a topic that is more firmly established.

China has undergone tremendous developments over the last decades in moving away from a low-income and tightly planned and managed economy that sought to secure an „iron rice bowl“ for the population to an economy that is allowing substantial space for private enterprises to develop and managed to use these developments to pull hundreds of millions of persons out of poverty and increasing living standards for the overall population while inequalities in income distribution are increasing as a result of the same changes. The country is still in a process of continuing to adjust its structures in line with its development needs.<sup>5</sup>

Given its size and its strategic capabilities, the country is increasingly able to also develop capacities that hitherto have been out of reach to low and middle income countries, including establishing itself in space, and therefore now increasingly seen as the strongest competitor by major economic powers. However, a social floor is not yet fully established in China and it is not without reason the MOHRSS is subscribing to the importance of ILO Convention 102, a convention which has not been ratified by numerous high-income as well as China’s neighboring countries.<sup>6</sup> This is a reflection of the fact that economic growth in China is not seen as an end in itself, but that matters of income distribution are of concern and have not gone

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<sup>5</sup> For the developments of social policy in China over the past decades from Chinese perspective cf., *inter alia*, Zhong and Zhang 2017, from an outside perspective Chan et al 2008 have drawn up an excellent general overview including links to labour, health, education, and housing policies. Hu 2021 and Shi 2021 also provide well informed overviews.

On pension reform, Salditt et al. 2007 give an overview from an OECD perspective, World Bank 2013 provides useful contributions to redesign, and Jin 2019 has delivered a very detailed and legally founded analysis with regard to sustainability.

<sup>6</sup> Besides numerous petroleum-rich economies, this includes OECD member countries like Canada, Chile, Colombia, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, New Zealand, South Korea, and the USA. Also, with the exception of Russia, none of China’s direct neighbors has ratified the convention.

overboard in during several decades of continuous reform and development.<sup>7</sup> The potentially conflicting goals of growth and distribution are meant to be addressed. The „social question“ continues to be highly relevant to the country. China could therefore play a pivotal role for the future development of social floors and social policy in Asia and the world when ratifying this important convention.

The European Union has an approach to social policy that is unique in the world and draws mainly on continental European traditions and understanding. The importance of social policy as a defining factor in Western Europe cannot be overstated, and as enlargement has included countries that used to implement socialist systems is also putting pressure on new members to ensure that social policy meets EU standards („acquis“). This makes the EU a highly relevant partner for China in further developing its own social policy. At the same time, dialog, exchanges, and cooperation with China on social policy matters objectively is highly relevant to the EU because, independent of many other differences that exist, both economic powerhouses share the understanding that a proper balance between growth and distribution needs to be secured and that nobody will be left behind. At the same time, both sides need to ensure as economic competitors (and cooperators) that their competition (and cooperation) in the international markets does not lead to any erosion or evasion of compliance with labour (or other social) standards.

The ILO is the custodian of Convention 102 and the relevance in this case therefore is self-explanatory.

### **Relevance for project stakeholders**

Stakeholders interviewed regarded the USP Project as relevant to their work. Institutions on the government side that essentially are in charge of social security considered the project to be highly relevant. Based on the stakeholders that could be reached, this goes for the level of MOHRSS, the Social Insurance Administration, as well as for the municipal level in Nanning.

Representatives of employers, according to the discussions held, discovered by participating in the project that social security was an area of interest -- which they

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Braun 2011 on „the end of cheap labour“ for China and the reminder by Quan 2021 that six identified drivers of growth in China include two that are of redistributive character: „Those who get rich first helping others get rich later“ and „pursuit of fairness and justice“, or the extended discussion, including of redistribution models and perspectives, by Cang 2022. Han 2011/ 2020 also provides a detailed discussion of the evolution of social welfare in „transitional“ China which differentiates between key target groups and also looks at social mobility.

previously had not considered to have any specific role in -- and have subsequently decided to reshape the profile for a new staff member to address this topic.

For workers, relevance can only be inferred because an interview with workers representatives did not materialize during the period of the evaluation due to sick leave with no prospects for return before the end of the year. Generally, workers are the major core group of beneficiaries of social security, and, though this discussion is not being held in China, with workers there usually is a preference for the specific promotion of Convention 102 rather than the mere promotion of establishing a social protection floor -- for fear, warranted or not, the floor could become a ceiling.<sup>8</sup> Therefore any project envisioning the ratification of the convention should be welcomed. Any benefits derived are likely to be relevant. Importantly, with the inclusion of platform workers a sub-set of the worker landscape is included that usually is not organized for industrial action and may also include self-employed individuals that have no specific representation.

Since the launch of activities around the project in 2019, relevance to beneficiaries has not changed. The Covid-19 pandemic slowed down economic activities for the whole period of project implementation, and declining job opportunities and economic conditions during the pandemic have rather increased the relevance of the project for disadvantaged and vulnerable persons.

Relevance of the project went unchanged for the European Commission as a donor as clearly evidenced during the interviews held. The donor, effectively, has taken a decision to support the continuation of the work implemented under this project using another facility than the Partnership Instrument already before this evaluation was being implemented.

Several modifications of the activities of the project have taken place since the start of the implementation. None of them are attributable to decreased relevance, and most related to the adjustments required during the pandemic or fine tuning of activities for best compatibility with recipient processes.

*Responses to specific questions sought in the terms of reference relating to relevance:*

- Project objectives were not impacted, but project implementation was strongly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The project has successfully adapted the

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<sup>8</sup> The general intent of social protection floors is to guarantee minimum protection for all workers, be they in formal employment or not, thereby facilitating formalization of work and creating a stepping stone toward ratification of Convention 102. Employers generally have not advocated for such floors and there is no evidence they would like to use them as ceilings.



format of its activities to the changing circumstances, and made several modifications to adjust, notably by successfully moving activities online.

- Project activities have not directly helped to protect vulnerable segments of the population against the pandemic, but a reasonable contribution has been made by technically leading and supporting the UN Policy Dialog on Social Protection beyond Covid-19 in 2020 (gathering 100 national and provincial government officials, representatives from social partners, civil society and UN agencies in China).

#### Validity of Design (Including Logical Framework Analysis)

This sub-section focuses on the technical validity of the design of the project. The measure for the validity in results-based planning is the extent to which the project has established a reasonable causal chain from the inputs via outputs to the outcome and impact levels. Although the designation for these levels varies between organizations, these four technical levels have come to be the accepted standard terminology for describing the logical hierarchy of any project. The standard tool for displaying the logic is the logframe (logical framework).

#### **Successfully designing for implementation in China**

The USP China project's design is fundamentally influenced by the process of its conception and the efforts of all parties involved, notably the MOHRSS and the EC, in accommodating to or incorporating the project into their respective administrative processes. The ILO has played a critical role in facilitating this process of „mutual alignment“ between donor and beneficiary procedures.

- On the one hand, a more general agreement between MOHRSS and the ILO was required to even be able to launch the project under the EC's Partnership Instrument facilities. In other words, the groundwork for manageable pathways of implementation within the Chinese administration had to be put in place during the design phase before there was certainty of project implementation. This has led to a concept of organizing the project according to one-yearly phases focusing on specific, generally agreed fields of activity that are relevant to MOHRSS' plans and processes during the inception phase and referenced in the MOU, all of which needed to be aligned with the DCWP and eligible or acceptable under the EC's facilities.
- Only once this MOU had been reached could a proposal (project document) be meaningfully drawn up and submitted, by ILO, for approval and financing under the Partnership Instrument facility which would be both in concordance with the MOU reached with MOHRSS and the criteria of the EC, including working with the EC's standard logframes and using the Partnership Instrument catalog of

reporting indicators that needed to be reported to. Fields of activity as agreed with MOHRSS now had to be shaped to meet the EC's framework.

These processes of alignment are not of a trivial nature because both the beneficiary and the donor need to be sure that the project will be feasible according to their own processes which are to a large extent pre-defined and cannot be altered at will. The process of alignment is also not easy because the jargon used internationally often does not directly correspond to Chinese usage where strands of technical discourse often are embedded in a completely different, unique landscape. Moreover, other than in countries where donors proportionally carry stronger weight and clout, successful implementation of projects in China -- where the financial weight of external donors is marginal -- will only be feasible where such alignment is carefully tailored and subsequently implemented with a good degree of flexibility.

From this perspective, even if not explicitly spelled out and explained, the project effectively operates with different layers of design: Chinese and European, and, for lack of options to fully merge them, actually needs to cater to both designs to be able to successfully achieve the desired results.

This is a tall order, and this project is one of the few that has succeeded in this. Many international cooperation projects in China fail or fall significantly short of expectations because they cannot properly cater to the needs of both sides at the same time and speak the language of both administrative systems. The issue is typically compounded by cultural differences which significantly affect the quality of communication processes as well as by the mutual ignorance of the administrative constraints (as well as opportunities) both sides are facing.

This section will nevertheless focus on the formally agreed project design as represented in the logical framework because it defines the limits within which the ILO project effectively can operate. It is also important to focus here because the whole project has been significantly enabled by the contribution of the EC and would have not reached any similar achievements in the absence of the generous contribution made by the donor.

That being said, in-kind contributions (particularly time beneficiary staff mobilized is dedicating to implementation) of a recipient should never be neglected and are fully recognized by this evaluator and the ILO project team. In EC project design, these contributions usually are specified, even if often not quantified, whereas it is not common ILO practice. The financing amount provided by the donor never represents the full cost of the project, but only the externally financed part.

### **Validity of project design: theory of change and logical framework**

The rationale of the project implemented by the ILO, as presented, in a very clear and organized way, in the theory of change of the inception report of 2019, is plausible and generally valid. What may not be fully valid or open to discussion is the timeframe, the resources required, and where the borderline between the project and its environment is located in relation to the enabling factors identified.

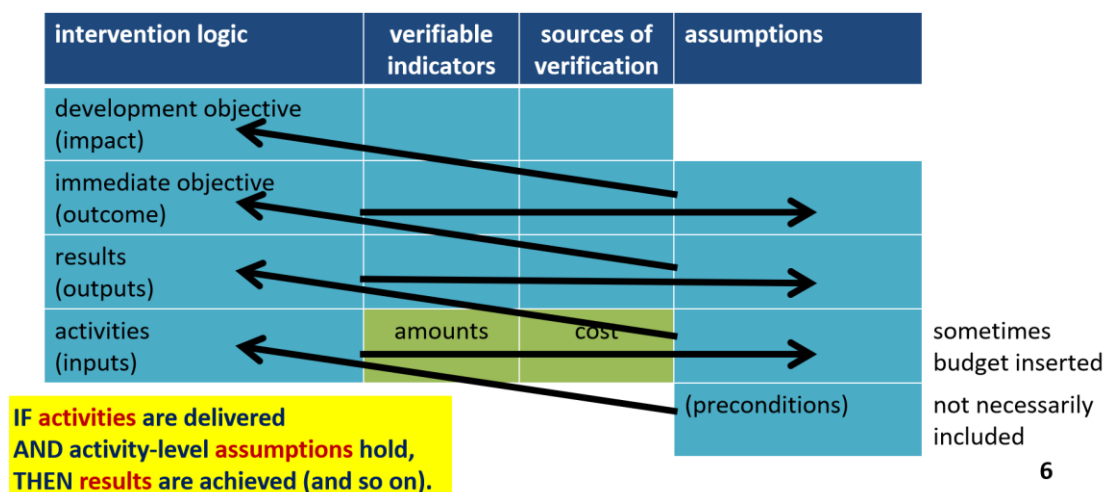
While theories of change are allowed in ILO project planning (and the terms of reference ask for those to be discussed), they typically lack the rigor that a (properly designed) logframe will provide. This is true independently of the question of the ownership of results through adequate balance between local definition of priorities and the project's logical framework that has been brought up in the inception report. As a matter of fact, good project planning would usually include (national and) local stakeholder participation *in designing the logical framework* in order to achieve the balance desired. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that in the prevailing administrative setting translating such participatory planning into practice after the project is already agreed and launched is difficult to implement and likely to create confusion. Such participatory logframe planning workshops are better implemented during project appraisal stages or prior to project extension.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the theory of change has been translated into a logframe that was agreed with the European Commission by the ILO. This logframe lacks the rigor that is usually required and its character has been significantly influenced by the need to report to EU PIMS indicators that are not directly related to the questions that are being addressed by the project outcome.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the European style logframe used is a logframe where the first row's assumption column is not to be filled in and therefore is in line with the time-tested traditional logframe setup (see graphic below) that respects both the horizontal and the vertical logics contained in a logframe, and its usage normally would be conducive to good logframe design.

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<sup>9</sup> This addresses the technical process of establishing a valid design. Though there were no specific logframe planning workshops, ILO, of course, has consulted with national partners several times during the establishment of the logframe. This is fine and essentially as good as it can be implemented in China, is thus accepted practice in this context.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. EC 2020.

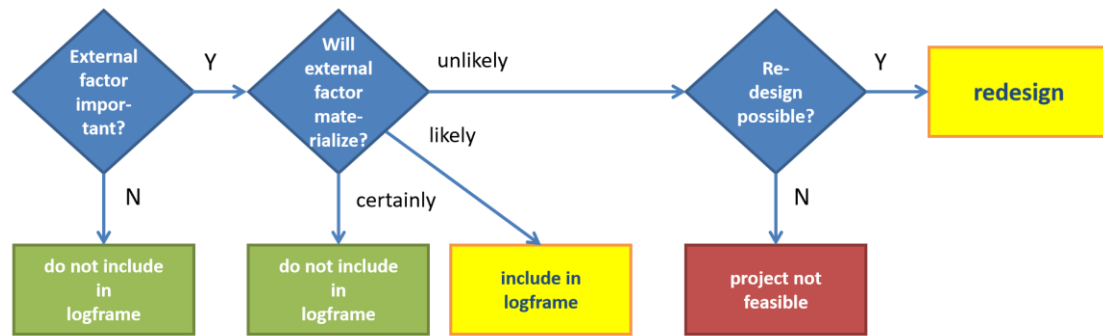


F.02 Logical framework („gold standard“): the vertical logic.  
Source: Own graphic.

The project has identified risks for implementation separately from the logical framework and created a respective risk register to monitor them. This separation of logframe preparation and management from risk management is an unfortunate practice that is increasingly widespread, including at ILO, due to the popularity the concept of risk management has gained in the 21<sup>st</sup> century since the assumptions column of the logframe has been altered by some large bilateral donors to include both „risks“ and „assumptions“ -- in an apparent misunderstanding: Because risks are exactly the flipside of the assumptions, there is no need to do so. If the assumptions made do not hold, then the risks associated with the same assumptions will come about. That is exactly why logframe planning is monitoring assumptions (with a separate list of mitigating measures for the eventuality that any of the key assumptions cease to hold true). If a separate risk register is maintained, it should therefore directly mirror the assumptions made. Yet, none of the risks mentioned in the risk register of the project can be traced to the logframe and vice versa.<sup>11</sup>

According to proper planning logic, any project that includes assumptions that are unlikely to hold runs the risk of not being able to reach its outcome and therefore requires redesign of project (e.g. changing the project strategy to accommodate for the increased risk, or revising the outcome) or abandonment of the project because the outcome cannot be reached (see graph below). Similarly, low risks (= assumptions quite likely to hold) are not necessarily included in a logframe in order not to distract from important assumptions that require more specific attention. This is why careful attention needs to be placed on ensuring alignment of project risk registers, if any, with project logframes.

<sup>11</sup> See the section on Effectiveness of Management Arrangements.  
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**Redesign to circumvent or influence external factor. Add or change activities and/ or outputs. If necessary, change outcome.**

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F.03 Algorithm for inclusion of assumptions into logframes. Source: Own graphic.

The following represents the goal structure of the project, the main goal to be directly achieved (the outcome) and the intended (knock-on) effects the achievement of the outcome is meant to contribute to (the impact) and which it cannot achieve on its own.

Overall Objectives [Impact]:

Strengthen China’s institutional capacity to improve its social protection in terms of expanded coverage and the adequacy and financial sustainability of the pension schemes in support of the realization of international standards and the EU 2020 strategy.

Specific objective [Outcome] 1:

Contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits

Specific objectives [Outcome] 2:

Contribute to the extension of social security coverage in China

Strictly speaking, the impact level is defective for a logical framework purpose because it includes 2 logical steps within 1 single level of the project logic, namely

- [capacity building] →
- [improved social protection] →
- [realization of international standards + realization of EU 2020 strategy]

The third of these sub-levels of the impact also is double barreled. In other words, the impact is not properly defined. At what sub-level is it effectively reached? The lowest level or the highest sub-level? And what if one barrel’s target was reached (e.g. international standards) and the other not (e.g. EU 2020 strategy)?

Normally, the impact level selected should be the closest to the project outcome, in this case China's institutional capacity to improve its social protection. In other words, the project, by working on the old-age and extension of social security, will significantly contribute (dimension could possibly be quantified) to building capacities in China's social protection system (i.e. enabling the counterparts to independently, without further external support, improve further areas of social protection (which could also be specified) based on the information, training, and experience gained during the three-year implementation. The other levels are useful references to policies and the future at large, but too distant to be sufficiently attributable to the project.

From the specifications drawn up in the project, it is also unclear and difficult to assess whether there are further attribution gaps between the cause-effect relationships here suggested. The vertical logic of any logical framework is only complete if the assumption column is filled in with pertinent assumptions (likely to hold, and important), here from outcome level to impact level. The assumptions entered refer merely to continued EU-China dialog and collaboration on employment, social affairs and inclusion as well as the continued support from the Chinese leadership for policy reforms and do in no way establish the required link between the outcome and the impact.

Effectively, these two assumptions are preconditions for implementing the project itself and would technically constitute killer assumptions, as they are called in the trade, because if either is not given (or unlikely), the project should be closed immediately because its impact is not achievable on the basis of the outcome. Such assumptions, however, can only be made before a project agreement is signed and they have no place in any logical framework (other than at the absolutely lowest level, before the first activity can be implemented). Assumptions at the outcome level would need to explain what needs to hold (what is required) in addition to the outcome achieved in order to reach the impact level.<sup>12</sup>

It may be argued that issues of sub-levels and different directions are not so important at impact level because impact of a project will be influenced by a multitude of external factors (other projects, other trends, etc.). The wider illustration of the potential impact may also help to highlight the broader strategy of the project in the project environment for fast readers. Effectively, in this case the impact formulas obviously serve to build the link to or remind of the justification for the project as financed under the overarching umbrella of the Partnership Instrument of the European Commission and integrating the overarching umbrella of

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<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, this mistake is not uncommon for widespread lack of training or loss of knowledge in crafting of logframes. That does not make it acceptable from a technical point of view.

international labour standards as promoted by the ILO. Technically speaking, though, these formulas do not conform to proper project design.

Last not least, it is interesting to note that the tense used in the formulation is not present perfect simple which is the standard for drafting the logic of a project in order to emphasize that the related actions will be completed by the end of the project duration. The use of the bare infinitive („strengthen“ -- instead of „strengthened“) indicates that the impact will not have been achieved by end of project duration. For the impact level this may be acceptable although professional practice would usually employ present perfect simple in order to indicate the intent that this impact is ultimately meant to be achieved and not just an arbitrary reference.

It should also be noted that the target column in the logical framework apparently explicates one of the basic rationales for the donor to support the project:

Stronger social protection system in China will lead to improved social equity, inclusive growth and higher consumption level which is beneficial for the EU. With improved social protection, China will compete with the EU on more equal level of social welfare and avoid social dumping.

These targets are completely detached from the intervention logic as such and therefore do not bear any relationship to the same. Arguably, these targets can, however, describe a genuine long-term impact and could have been shifted to the first column of the intervention logic itself. The impact logic would then read:

[social protection strengthened] →  
[social equity improved + inclusive growth + higher consumption] →  
[social welfare increased] →  
[social dumping reduced/ competition between CN and EU more balanced].

A long-term impact, by this wording, would seem to primarily reflect the donor's perspective and therefore may be incongruous for a joint cooperation project. But it is certainly not alien to the aspirations of the Chinese side and could have possibly been agreed with modifications to equally reflect the Chinese aspirations -- in the interest of the policy dialog between the two powerful socio-economic systems that the European Union and the People's Republic of China constitute.

In practice, the ILO has been a matchmaker in this project between the aspirations of both the Chinese side as represented by the MOHRSS and the European Commission. The very positive response to the implementation of the project by interlocutors of both sides testifies to the care the ILO has exercised to ensure

smooth relationships and mutual understanding at all the different levels important for implementation. Inconsistencies or deficiencies in the logical framework and the indicators at the high level cannot distract from the overall success of the project which has been carefully aligned with processes at the Chinese end while responding to and safeguarding the interests of the European Commission as a donor at the same time.

While the impact level often is more loosely defined and specified because it is not the direct result of the work undertaken in the project, the outcome level should usually not contain such weaknesses in formulation respectively design. Normally the outcome of any project is technically to be specified as a single outcome.

The tense used in the formulation of the outcome, like with the impact, is not present perfect simple which is the standard for drafting the logic of a project in order to emphasize that the related actions will be completed by the end of the project duration. The use of a bare and relatively unspecified infinitive („contribute“) could indicate that the outcome may not be achieved by end of project duration. At the same time it reflects a sincere view that the project alone is not able to achieve the desired change on its own, i.e. the outcome is not in the hand of the project.<sup>13</sup> This is not about semantics: By logframe procedure, this would require relocation of the current outcome to the impact level. Alternatively, had the outcome been specified more narrowly, the outcome might have been achievable.

In this project, two outcomes have been specified (specific objectives 1 and 2) which technically automatically amounts to a double-barreled outcome. The first of these two outcomes in itself is double-barreled by addressing both the adequacy and the sustainability of old-age benefits. Hence, the result is a triple-barreled outcome:

[adequacy of old-age benefits improved  
+ sustainability of old-age benefits improved  
+ social security coverage extended].

The proper way of dealing with such questions is to refer the different „barrels“ to the indicator column. This kind of a question is actually at the heart of the indicator discussion since logical frameworks were introduced in development projects (decades ago, but increasingly forgotten). Any complex goal is specified by using a mix of indicators that the parties specifying the goal agree represents the goal in an

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted in this context that the project by definition always comprises all entities: beneficiary, implementing agent, and donor. This is why mutual agreement of logical frameworks is an important element in project management. The reasons why this is difficult in a specific context may be manifold, but the principle, i.e. the proper demarcation of the boundaries of what is inside the project (outcome, intervention logic) and what is outside the project (impact, assumptions), needs to be observed when drawing up any logical framework.



adequate way. Though it is important to remember that indicators may never perfectly represent the outcome and therefore should not become the target to achieve, their specification does provide the basis for measurement of results, as indicative as they may be.

In long-established project implementation practice, the discussion about indicators usually is the forum where the real specification of outcome occurs, and the importance of this discussion cannot be underrated. Unfortunately, many projects are conceived without a more detailed planning workshop that should include an *agreement* of the indicators by all parties concerned (donor, implementor, and beneficiary) to the detriment of measurability of results and implementors are tasked of coming up with ideally quick solutions to fill the void. At the same time, the overbearing routine practice of writing reports and legislation in larger organizations usually leads to lumping and conflating all the information in the column of the intervention logic (the first column, unnamed in the case of this project) whereas the logframe is meant to exactly separate these aspects for the purpose of better project management.

Because indicator specification is essential for measuring the effectiveness of a project, i.e. beyond their versatility for the specification of a complex outcome, see the section on Effectiveness for more on the indicators selected.

## Outputs

The terms of reference ask for a look at the outputs of the project. Outputs, however, are normally not an object of an evaluation of a project because they are means to achieve an end (the desired outcome) and may be flexibly adjusted in line with any emerging knowledge and information -- if there be need. Listed below, they illustrate the strategy the project has selected to achieve the desired outcome. This strategy is plausible and responds to the theory of change.

### OP 1.1 [output]:

Policy recommendations on ratification and application of C102 and on improving the adequacy and financial sustainability of the Chinese pension schemes formulated in consultation with the government and social partner

### OP 1.2 [output]:

Actuarial capacity of the MOHRSS and its provincial branches strengthened

### OP 1.3 [output]:

National experts and policy makers have improved their knowledge on the relevance of C102 and long-term planning of pension schemes, including multi-pillar options

OP 1.4 [output]:

Social protection floors and international labour standards on social security advocated towards the public audience in China

OP 2.1 [output]:

Options for the revision of the design of social security schemes and the improvement of operational or administrative procedures in support of universal coverage are identified and validated by the government and social partners

OP 2.2 [output]:

Assessment of China's social security coverage and measures to close the coverage gaps and improve portability carried out in partnership with the government and social partners for submission to policy makers

OP 2.3 [output]:

Government and social partners exposed to international good practices and challenges in extending social protection coverage, especially for workers in non-standard forms of employment, rural migrant workers and women

OP 2.4 [output]:

Promotional materials on access to social security for workers in non-standard forms of employment, rural migrant workers and women made available to the stakeholders

The assumption linking the vertical logic from outputs to outcome, similar to the assumptions at the next higher level, is either a killer assumption or too unlikely to merit inclusion in the logical framework: „MOHRSS remains committed to implement the project jointly with the ILO.“

The project logframe has been modified (updated) only once, toward the end of the initial planning period (September 2021). The update essentially consisted of the elimination of the activity level (which like outputs usually can be adjusted when it is necessary or useful to achieve the outcome) as well as removal or adjustment of the values of some indicators. These changes had no consequences for achieving the outcome.

While the validity of the overall design of the USP project can be confirmed in a general way (useful outcome, useful focus, useful activities), the design of the project is not technically valid from a project management point of view where design serves to determine feasibility. Although ILO guidance also admits a theory-of-change concept as one option for designing meaningful interventions, the proof of

validity is technically only achieved if the logframe of the project is consistent and complete, or, as a minimum requirement, without major gaps.

The discrepancy described on assumptions automatically leads to incomplete and/ or defective logical frameworks for the whole project whereby clearly the design is not valid, but invalid. Specifying assumptions is not a box filling exercise, but a core element of testing the feasibility of any project strategy, and more attention would have normally been required to use them to test the feasibility of the project.

In other words, more attention could have been spent on improving the logic. Moreover, the indicators offered in the PIMS framework somehow limited the choice menu for using them to shape the project design. At the same time, a practical approach of implementation between the ILO and MOHRSS along specific topics over the implementation period as agreed already at the stage of the project MoU provided a useful common denominator that ensured the project was viable all along. From this perspective, the overall design with its different layers, not spelled out and not easily recognized -- but implemented in practice, was valid.

### Indicators

The indicators selected for measurement of achievements, based on an indicator catalog that caters to the EC Partnership Instrument reporting needs are not specified at the right level because they are effectively impact related.

[Indicator OC6, for specific objective 1]:

Number of approaches in China beneficial to the achievement of the Europe 2020 strategy which have been influenced.

Specification: "1 approach - Convention 102 ratified by China (OC6)"

[Indicator OC7, for specific objectives 1 and 2]:

Number of processes related to practices on social security in China influenced by international standards and hence beneficial to the achievement of Europe 2020 Strategy.

Specification: "At least one policy (guiding opinion, methods, notice, or other similar forms) on improving sustainability and adequacy of pension schemes adopted by the State Council or MOHRSS"

Using the standard SMART criteria,

- Indicator OC6 is measurable (ratified / not ratified), reliable (measurement can be repeated with same result), and timebound (as updated, respectively inferred „by end of project“). However, the indicator is neither specific to the purpose

(much higher level than required) nor is it achievable with the means at the hand of the project and during the period of project implementation foreseen.

- Indicator OC7 is specific to the purpose (appropriate level for a policy project because technical advice usually is processed and ends up in notices or similar forms), measurable (content used / not used), less reliable (measurement cannot always be repeated with same result, requires interpretation effort), and timebound (as updated, respectively inferred „by end of project“). However, the indicator cannot be expected to be achievable (State Council) or only difficult to secure (MOHRSS) with the means at the hand of the project and during the period of project implementation foreseen.

Quite obviously, these indicators, two of which identical (or one applied to both specific objectives), in no way describe a measurement that would adequately represent the triple-barreled outcome that has been proposed or agreed. Neither of these refer to the adequacy of old-age benefits, the sustainability of old-age benefits, or the coverage of social security. As a matter of fact, they introduce the assumption (that could legitimately be referred to the assumptions column) that approaches and processes that are influenced by international standards are beneficial to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and rely on a simple numbers count -- as if the number of approaches or processes of that kind played any role in determining adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits and the coverage of social security when actually only a technical analysis (e.g. of the adequacy or sustainability of old-age benefits; or a third-party validation of the relevance, practicality and level of adoption of the developed approaches or processes proposed) or a specific quantitative measurement (e.g. of coverage extension) may provide an answer to whether these three outcome elements are achieved. Alternatively, if the approaches and processes are considered to properly represent the outcome, only a qualitative analysis as to the effective level of influencing by international standards achieved would provide the answer.

The ratification of the ILO Convention 102 by China (in 2021), a major event by any standards, has been inserted into the logical framework as a mere target in the row of specific objective 1 which relates to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits. Here, the target is obviously much larger than the outcome and therefore cannot meaningfully serve as an indicator unless the ratification exclusively depended on the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits.

This does not mean the ratification needs to be abandoned, but it means that the ratification of that convention is a much larger process that should normally be located at the impact level. That is also necessary because the ratification of that

convention goes beyond the mandate of the key counterpart institution MOHRSS, even as MOHRSS represents the Chinese government at the ILO and the ILC, and therefore cannot be directly influenced by this project. Moreover, it is unrealistic to expect ratification of the convention during such a short timespan (36 months, later extended to 42), which is another reason it should be located at the impact level.<sup>14</sup>

In practice, according to probing in the different discussions held, the process of indicator selection has strongly been influenced by the available indicator set that has been foreseen under the Partnership Instrument procedures.<sup>15</sup> In other words, donor results aggregation needs dominated the indicator selection and did not fully allow for a variety of indicators reflecting the outcome in an adequate way. In such a situation, the productive process of agreeing indicators jointly with the beneficiary institutions obviously cannot be meaningfully implemented and therefore would only steal valuable time at the beneficiary end, and the implementing agent, in this case ILO, will seek to agree the indicators for measurement of results directly with the donor, as was the case. (This was pragmatic.)

Finally, the project quite clearly bears all the hallmarks of a process-oriented project, i.e. where the process is possibly more important than the the specific outcome to be achieved. China is a country of a large size with a unique administrative system, traditions, and practices that requires a tailored implementation that cannot depend on „influencing“ processes to be viable. The process itself of knowledge transfer, exchanges of opinion and experience, and the exploration of options for improving selected aspects of social security may enable the Chinese stakeholders to develop improved solutions that are fully adequate to extending coverage, adequacy, and sustainability in variegated Chinese realities. If treated as processes of change, one way of measuring success would be to develop process-related indicators whereby intermediate process targets are developed that describe stages and can be documented.

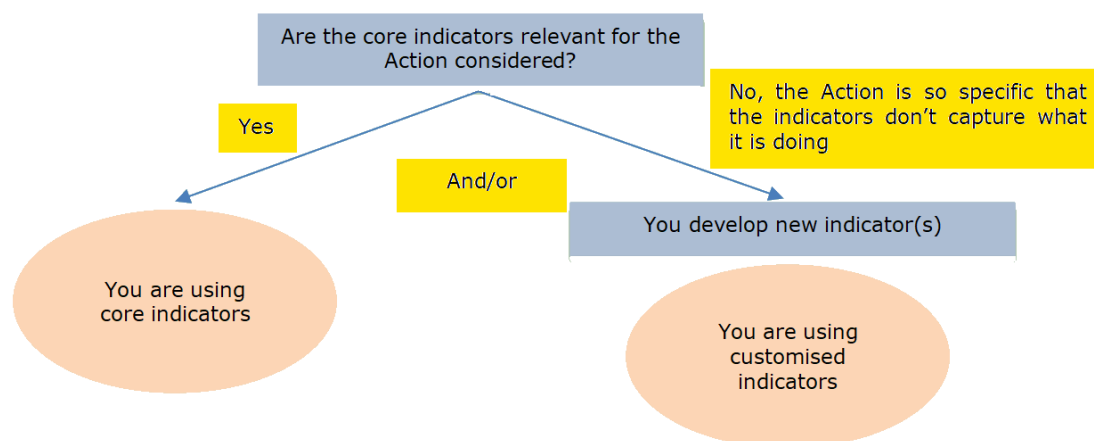
Does this mean the project is not effective? No. It means the indicators selected are technically not suitable or not realistically set.

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<sup>14</sup> In management, it is sometimes useful to select targets or indicators of achievement that require stretch and thereby motivate those tasked with implementation to exert strong efforts. The line is a fine one to walk, however, because it can also lead to frustration and resignation when order is too tall to achieve (overstretch). In a project of international cooperation, it will usually be better to set realistic targets and indicators, also to make sure that there are no major misunderstandings. From this perspective, ratification of convention 102 could be agreed as a medium-term (or long-term) goal between all parties concerned so as to ensure commitment over the full period of time required to see the ratification thru.

<sup>15</sup> EC 2020.

Essentially, this defective indicator specification is objectively traceable to the limited choice of the core indicators offered in the PI catalog. The PI core indicators are a set menu of standard indicator consistent with the PI objectives and are meant to show progress made at aggregate level toward achieving the PI objectives. While customized indicators are an option to capture results which core indicators do not, their usage is meant to be limited to exceptional circumstances.



F.04 Algorithm for selection of EC Partnership Instrument indicators.  
Source: EC 2020: 26, fig.07.

It is rather unlikely that the action of „influencing“ is considered to be „so specific“ in a particular country that it will justify a customized indicator because of the inescapable need at the EC, under this facility, to be able to aggregate the information collected. This, expectedly, leads to a focus collecting „numbers“, and therefore does not do justice to the intended processes because numbers usually are irrelevant in the context of influencing policy processes. One single placement of a two-page briefing note at the right time to the right person, or even a single discussion during a reception or over dinner, or possibly a well conceived manual developed that can underpin a technical note submitted to a decision maker prior to an urgent meeting, may have a stronger influence on outcome than numerous workshops conducted with numerous participants, no matter how disaggregated by sex, age, and/ or stakeholder group.

It needs to be acknowledged that the PI recognizes that measuring influence is challenging and it is important to collect the relevant information that justify the project has influenced a process. It also recognizes that a number „on its own“ is not sufficient to measure the achievement, but needs to be complemented by a narrative. However, that does not solve the problem of measurement of the effectiveness of a specific project because the desired narrative would need to be formulated in advance (as the indicator specification) against which the narrative reflecting the measurement would later need to be held.

On the whole, the indicator of „influencing“ that is prominent in the PIMS can be regarded as donor-centric. While this may be a useful indicator for internal monitoring purposes, it usually does not satisfy the expectations for a project built on cooperation and exchange. Recipient countries usually will turn a blind eye to this as long as the benefits of the project outweigh the cost. But this kind of indicator does leave a risk insofar as doubts may remain about the intentions of the cooperation.

*Responses to specific questions sought in the terms of reference relating to validity of design:*

- The project objectives and interventions aim to contribute to relevant SDG targets of no poverty, good health and wellbeing, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities and the related indicators indirectly. There is, like in many other upstream projects, a significant attribution gap between the project objectives and the SDG targets which is inevitable due to comparably long causal chains. The SDG targets are not being referred to in the logical framework. However, this is fully acceptable because of the length of the causal chain to achieve the SDG related impact. Therefore, the project design is valid despite the lack of explicit reference to this gap (at the impact level).
- Project design (objectives, outcomes, outputs and activities) and its underlying theory of change are plausible and align with the requirements for delivery and expectations of the ILO and the EU. However, the project is (rightly) focused on processes while targets are (effectively) focused on outputs, and indicators lack qualitative elements.

There are important fractures in the logic as per logframe design requirements, but the project needed to operate with different layers of design to be practical and not get tied down and blocked by formal planning while implementing across two (China/ EU) different management structures.

The suggestion that Convention 102 would even come close to becoming ratified as a result of the project was not realistic from the start. However, the aspiration created motivation on all sides to contribute to the project's success and therefore can be interpreted as an important vision to guide all stakeholders.

- The project was not able to achieve ratification of convention 102. However, this is a very tall order and was not likely to be achieved. Reaching ratification also requires deeper collaboration with the National Administration for Health Care because (as in many countries) social security goes beyond the responsibility of the key labor ministry. From this perspective, any project set up under MOHRSS

alone (without a higher level link, e.g. thru unification of efforts instructed by a vice-premier charged with the social policy portfolio) actually cannot be fully effective for reaching ratification of 102.

#### **4.2 Coherence**

Coherence, by OECD-DAC definition, is the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution. Coherence is important to ensure that projects dovetail with existing policies and strategies. This is both important for ensuring that projects do not undermine existing policies and strategies and for securing a maximum of thrust. Where the project aligns with policies and strategies it will be easier to achieve a successful outcome because it will encounter less or even no resistance during implementation.

The perspective in this section typically is guided by the assumption that existing policies and strategies are relevant to the problem the project wishes to address or solve. This need not necessarily be the case because policies and strategies are agreed in a process that is not necessarily of a technical nature, but essentially consists of bargaining between the concerned stakeholders. These bargaining processes may often lead to policies and strategies that contain multiple objectives which, moreover, may be in conflict with each other. This is particularly important around the field of social policy.

The final evaluation found the project to be generally coherent with other MOHRSS, EC, and ILO interventions and support policies and coherent with the agreed Decent Work Country Program (Outcome 2.1 on universal and adequate social protection). The coherence of the project with the existing policies and priorities has received full attention during the design process and is already amply demonstrated in the project document (q.v.).

There also were no high-level processes of change during the implementation period that would have required a readjustment as a result of new thrusts of interventions and support policies.

The only change in high-level priorities the project had to consider were those that relate to the accommodation for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here, the project productively aligned with the UN sister agencies in the UN Policy Dialog on Social Protection beyond Covid-19 in 2020 to ensure coherence without a need to change its design or approach.

The Covid-19 pandemic, if anything, reinforced the understanding regarding the importance of social protection floors around the world. The importance of the minimum standards convention (102) as well as the ILO recommendations on social



protection floors and transition from informal to formal economy (202 and 204) still hold, and the actions of the project are in coherence with ILO strategies.

The scope of work of the project is directly reflected in Output 2.3 of the UNSDCF 2021-2025 for China: „UN analytical inputs and technical assistance have helped to strengthen China’s capacity to provide access to adequate and high-quality social protection mechanisms and services for all people in China throughout the life-course.“

The importance of improving the social security system for China has been reaffirmed in the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China by the Chairperson -- in the section 9 of the report relating to improving the people’s wellbeing and raising quality of life, next to income distribution, employment promotion and healthy living. This section explicitly refers to a multi-tiered social security system that covers the entire population in urban and rural areas that is fair, unified, reliable, well-regulated, and sustainable. Expansion of coverage of social insurance programs, improvement of mechanisms for financing and a nationally unified public platform for social insurance services are planned to be part of this effort. Commitment to the national policy of gender equality and protect the lawful rights and interests of women and children and improvement of social security and service systems for people with disabilities are explicitly mentioned in this context.<sup>16</sup>

In its „cornerstone“ reference document of Elements for a new EU strategy on China,<sup>17</sup> and with continued commitment to EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation,<sup>18</sup> the EU’s China policy recognizes that it is in the EU's interest to support China's transition to a more sustainable and inclusive social and economic model by promoting core labour standards and decent work, welfare reform, and a shared commitment to responsible global supply chains. This is meant to ensure that relations with China as a strategic partner are set on a fair, balanced and mutually beneficial course. The more generally perceived decline in the relations between the EU and China since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and more recently about strategies for dealing with the war in the Ukraine have so far not affected that specific sphere of joint interest of both the EU and China to improve the level of social protection in China. In particular, high levels of labour (and environmental) standards continue to be a priority.<sup>19</sup> The fact that a continuation of the project under a different facility is currently being planned by the EC testifies that this area continues to be coherent with EU policies and strategies.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Xi 2022.

<sup>17</sup> EC 2016.

<sup>18</sup> EC 2013.

<sup>19</sup> EC 2019.

*Responses to specific questions sought in the terms of reference relating to coherence:*

- The project fully aligned with national development plans. Government has taken the lead. Employers have identified social security as a new area to pursue. There was no opportunity to discuss with workers, but it is both plausible and likely that project meets workers' interests, i.e. this interest can be inferred. Workers are the primary beneficiaries of the improvements in social protection that can be obtained as a result of the project's activities. In the case of this project, this would not only concern those workers who are in formal employment (and/ or organized in unions), but also those who are not in formal employment relationships.
- The project clearly contributed to ILO's Strategic Policy Outcome 3 on "creating and extending social protection floors" as notably evidenced by inclusion of platform workers. While the issues around platform workers were not unknown in China prior to the launch of the project, the project clearly was able to cater to the topic and supported deepening the technical discussion.
- The project is relevant to the UNSDCF and the DWCP because it was included as an outcome in the former and conceived on the basis of the latter.
- Other interventions (particularly policies) supported the project. There were no surprises here because national development plans were in place. The project's success is explained by its coherence with national policies and current developments.
- The extent of synergies and interlinkages of the project activities with other ILO interventions is limited for lack of related ILO interventions in China. Ample use has been made of actuarial capacities available at the level of the ROAP as evidenced in the discussions held and from project documentation.
- Project activities are not complementary and coordinated with those of other actors in the area for absence of those. There was no duplication of efforts.
- The project has assisted ILO's policy objectives to realize equality of opportunity and treatment for all and engage with world of work actors in its activities. For example, addressing the access to social protection for platform workers, many of them women, falls into this category. As typical in China as far as the world of actors is concerned, the Government takes the lead here. Exchanges with tripartite constituents in EU countries were not feasible, and some material of support from ILO ACTRAV relating to Convention 102 is under preparation and still to be delivered.

### 4.3 Effectiveness (Including Effectiveness of Management Arrangements)

Effectiveness is the criterion which responds to the question whether and/ or to which degree a project reaches its outcome. Effectiveness may be influenced by any number of factors internal or external to a project. The effectiveness of management arrangements is one important factor that can contribute to the effectiveness of a project, but it usually also influences performance along all other evaluation criteria. It primarily relates to internal factors (factors under the control of the project) and may include anything from relationship management between different parties and managing human resources to administrative arrangements, including reporting, risk management or even contract management. For better distinction, these criteria are discussed separately in this section.

#### Effectiveness

Effectiveness measures a project at the outcome level. Outcomes, by international definition, are about changing the perception, behavior or engagement of the target groups as the PIMS guidelines correctly specify. They materialize following the implementation or achievement of the outputs and are not under the full control of the implementing partner, in this case the ILO, but require, in evaluation jargon, a „beneficiary response“. Though following outputs, they are supposed to be achieved within the lifespan of the project.<sup>20</sup>

With reference to the Paris Declaration on the Effectiveness of Aid, one of the main lessons learned was that for donor financed projects to be successful, they need to be owned by the recipient stakeholders and by direct implication this would mean that country systems and country policies are the key elements in measuring the effectiveness of any assistance, and that it is only via these systems that projects should be implemented. As China is increasingly outgrowing the framework of development cooperation, these principles may formally not apply anymore, but they do effectively remain the most important factors for success.

This latter is what the ILO and in particular the project team visibly yet implicitly understood from the outset and was equally and implicitly accepted by the donor. This was a crucial factor in achieving a high degree of effectiveness more generally

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<sup>20</sup> Other than in critical path planning of the last century and still applied in technical production processes, the typical planning processes in development cooperation and similar projects usually do not allocate any time for delays, but assume that as soon as outputs are reached, the outcome comes about („instantaneously“). That is why the project outcome often cannot be measured properly at closure and only celebration of implementation of activities can take place, and it may also be one practical reason why indicators in projects are often hung too low. (Here, they were hung too high.)  
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speaking: What could realistically be achieved in practice has effectively been achieved. By strongly aligning with the original MoU signed with the MOHRSS and listening closely and responding to the needs of the structures under MOHRSS, the team successfully navigated implementation to be effective despite the different frameworks the project had to report to. It drew on the full toolbox that cooperation projects have at their disposal, and, with the exception imposed by the pandemic which did not allow for international travel, fed technical assistance into Chinese processes and provided opportunities for international exchange between China and the EU.

This particular effectiveness was reflected in the different discussions held with the diverse interlocutors met by the evaluator, was a thread that emerged during the discussion of different evaluation questions.

*Responses to specific questions sought in the terms of reference relating to effectiveness:*

- Project outcomes and outputs have been achieved to significant extent when corrected for mistakes in indicator setting. The indicators selected for measuring achievement are not meaningful because they are focusing on quantities and not on qualities, and so direct measurement of success is not possible.

The activities are having desired results. For example, increases in coverage of old age pension and employment injury insurance are not directly due to the activities of the project, but the project has built related capacities, contributed to deeper understanding, and opened up perspectives (e.g. on target groups and service concepts) as amply documented in the project reports. Such contributions have been picked up by beneficiaries and the project therefore should be rated or classified as effective as it can realistically be. The box below, reflecting the final progress report, provides a summary overview.

<b>Outcome achievement as per indicators as per final project progress report</b>	
Indicator	Status of Outcome achievement
<b>Outcome 1: Contribution to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits</b> Baseline (or base point): 0. Status at project end: achieved.	
OC6: Number of processes related to approaches in China beneficial to the achievement of the Europe 2020 strategy which have been influenced	<p>Target: Convention No. 102 ratified by China Actual: Although ratification was not realized during the Project life, the Project contributed to building a renewed and improved understanding on the compatibility of social security legislation in China with Convention No. 102 with a view to support China to make an informed decision on ratification.</p> <p>The Project carried out a comprehensive and in-depth analysis on the compatibility of social security legislation and practice in China with Convention No.102, with an assessment on the latest development in</p>

<b>Outcome achievement as per indicators as per final project progress report</b>	
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Status of Outcome achievement</b>
	<p>social security in China. The ILO report gives recommendations on the prospects for China's ratification of the Convention. It recommends China to consider ratification based on four contingencies, namely unemployment benefit, old-age benefit, maternity benefit and medical care. ILO's assessment indicates that these four contingencies are in general consistent with the Convention<sup>18</sup> and the ratification would provide a solid and sustainable basis for the improvement of social security in the medium and longer term.</p> <p>However, ratification relies on political will and action. It is too ambitious to be achieved directly through or completely influenced by a single Project. The significance of this work is to inform the Chinese government of the extent of the compatibility based on the latest legislative development and practice and provide them with support to understand the requirements of the Convention and the gaps to be closed towards the ratification. In this sense, this process itself is educational and crucial for China to make informed decision on ratification ultimately.</p>
<p>OC7: Number of processes related to practices on social security in China influenced by international standards and hence beneficial to the achievement of Europe 2020 Strategy</p>	<p>Target: At least one policy (guiding opinion, methods, notice, or other similar forms) on improving sustainability and adequacy of pension schemes adopted by the State Council or MOHRSS (OC7)</p> <p>Actual: A new mechanism of private pensions established and implemented.</p> <p>The Project contributed to the discussions about improving the multi-tier pension system in China and implementation of the newly established private pensions (3rd tier).</p> <p>Since April 2022, China started the implementation of private pensions<sup>19</sup>, key pillar of the 3rd tier<sup>20</sup>, marking a milestone in establishing a multi-tier pension system. The new mechanism is characterized by policy support from the government (tax incentives), voluntary participation and market-oriented operations. The mechanism is being piloted in 36 cities for one year.</p> <p>Concurrently, the Project started the technical discussions with MOHRSS on multi-tier pension reform in China since April 2022. It invited ILO and international experts to introduce ILO principles for designing and reforming pension systems, which are embodied in the international social security standards, and to share experience of pension reforms in other countries. ILO developed a technical note "ILO review of the multi-tier pension system in China" and presented it with MOHRSS. It assesses the performance of multi-tier pension system in China against those ILO principles and gives recommendations in particular on the coherence of the pension system as well as specific considerations for improving each tier.</p> <p>Those discussions, analysis and recommendations have provided the Chinese government with theoretic and practical support in their pension reform process. The need for such technical and policy dialogues will continue along this course and beyond the Project duration.</p>
<p><b>Outcome 2: Contribution to the extension of social security coverage in China</b>  <b>Baseline (or base point): 0. Status at project end: achieved.</b></p>	

Outcome achievement as per indicators as per final project progress report	
Indicator	Status of Outcome achievement
<p>OC7: Number of processes related to practices on social security in China influenced by international standards and hence beneficial to the achievement of Europe 2020 Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● MOHRSS adopts at least one initiative such as policy document, programme, measure or action to expand social security coverage to workers in traditional and new non-standard forms of employment</li> <li>● The Government and social partners have developed and implemented at least one initiative to extend social security towards universal coverage.</li> </ul>	<p>Target: One process (adoption of one policy such as guiding opinion, methods, notice, or implementation of one initiative) on expanding social protection coverage for people in non-standard forms of employment and other people who are not covered (OC7)</p> <p>Actual: At least two processes influenced by the Project interventions</p> <p>1.Occupational injury protection for workers in new forms of work started piloting in 7 provinces and 7 platform companies</p> <p>The Project carried out research on assessing social security coverage of workers in diverse forms of employment in China focusing on platform workers during 2020-21. A report<sup>21</sup> on this topic and a special technical note<sup>22</sup> on international practices in employment injury insurance for workers in digital platform employment were developed. During the research process, several seminars were organized with MOHRSS to share experience in this area of common interest for other countries.</p> <p>These took place along the fast policy development in this regard in China as well as globally. From 2020 to 2022, in particular since 2021, many policy initiatives started in China aiming to provide protection for platform workers and broadly flexible workers</p> <p>The Project studies, seminars and various discussions provided ample evidence that contributed to the policy formulation.</p> <p>2.Digital transformation of social security administration and services</p> <p>The Project supported the Information Centre of MOHRSS (the department in charge of informatization) in developing a digital transformation strategy and a data governance action plan for social insurance administration and services in China. As the national authority mandated with digitalization in social security, MOHRSS will implement and improve the strategy and the action plan to support better social insurance governance and realization of policy outcomes.</p>

- In comparison with what is usually achieved in policy projects implemented in China, the evaluator assesses that the project compares very favorably. Interlocutors from the EC side also indicated that the amount of outputs achieved significantly exceeds other projects on social policy in China previously implemented.
- The project has helped strengthen China’s institutional capacity to improve its social protection including in terms of adequacy and financial sustainability of pension schemes by numerous small and useful activities, *inter alia* by demonstrating European approaches to digitalization, by beginning to organize training for actuaries, and contributing research into platform workers but also by acting as a sounding board for Chinese counterparts, as expressed in interviews held, in reviewing and comparing their own ideas during different

workshops. But this work cannot be rated as “completed” because the adjustment of pension schemes is a complex process of reform that requires time, and requires building capacities for continuous adjustments in line with developments.

On the one hand, this work is not of “one-off” character and should not be. On the other, capacity building takes time and is not simple in a country where actuaries are in relatively short supply.

#### Effectiveness of management arrangements

The management arrangements for the project were fully appropriate and they provided the enabling environment for good project management, the effectiveness of the project in general and the efficiency displayed during implementation.

The project has been run by a dedicated project team out of the ILO Beijing Office, with a CTA and an NPO leading the implementation, supported by additional staff as necessary and useful. Technical backstopping to the team was provided out of the DWT of ROAP while country related backstopping was taken on by the ILO Beijing Office under the leadership of the respective Country Directors (which changed during the course of implementation).

The superstructure of the project involved two committees:

- A Project Steering Committee acted as the forum where the ILO discussed progress and strategies with the European Commission. This structure involved both representatives of the EC Headquarters as well as the Delegation of the EU in Beijing. On the side of the ILO, besides the project team, it included both the ILO Beijing Office and the ROAP.
- A Project Management Committee acted as the forum where the specific activities to be implemented were discussed by the ILO Beijing Office and the project team with the Chinese side led by the MOHRSS. These meetings involved not only participants from the central level of MOHRSS and the SIA, but also representatives of province-level units participating. They also saw the representatives of the employers, but no participation by workers.

The number of the participants in these meetings was substantial and increasing (2020: 35 of which 19 female, 16 male/ of which 19 central, 15 province level. 2021: 48 of which 23 female, 25 male/ of which 25 central, 19 province level). The large size of the structure was of concern to the project team.

The structure is unusual to the extent that usually a single project steering committee is established to guide and supervise a project. A project steering

committee would in earlier times normally only include a few representatives of the donor (EU Delegation), the beneficiary (MOHRSS), and the ILO Beijing Office as the implementing party. It could also include all tripartite constituents, i.e. also ACFTU and the CEC. Usually, meetings would only be attended by representatives in Beijing, although video attendance from abroad could be feasible.

This has fundamentally changed during the pandemic which has increased the technical options for including participants online. The essence here, however, is that a Project Steering Committee is operating *in situ*, is small and empowered to take all relevant decisions pertaining to project management, and thereby in a good position to closely and effectively steer the project.

In the case of the USP China project, however, the structure has been separated into one where the ILO is engaging with the EU (Project Steering Committee) and another where the ILO is engaging with MOHRSS (Project Management Committee). This seems to have generally worked well for the USP and therefore can be rated as an effective arrangement. It objectively facilitates project management across different administrative systems by communicating in the language of the donor to the donor and in the language of the beneficiary to the beneficiary.

The value of this arrangement in the context of China cannot be underrated because of the bridges that need to be built between the differences in technical jargon and policy discourse, and planning and administrative practices between the donor and the beneficiary systems. But it foregoes the possibility of bringing all parties relevant to decision making to the same table which may be important in case of unexpected changes that require restructuring or possibly frictions that need to be solved.

Certainly, running Project Steering Committees with the participation of more than thirty or forty participants of the Project Management Committee from different locations in China (while technically now feasible because of the development of online meeting capabilities), i.e. including all members of the province level, is not going to be as effective as running the meetings separately.

Running the Project Management Committee meetings with increasing participation has been recognized as a risk by the project team because it reduces the effectiveness of these meetings. At the same time, it is objectively an excellent mechanism to achieve participation of all the different elements of the social security or social policy system the project is cooperating with, thereby increasing ownership of the project and thus contributing to creating the conditions for sustainability. Solutions can probably be found for this by either reducing the number of representatives per unit or possibly separating the decision making



function from this more broad-based forum which is important for mobilizing stakeholders, generating ownership, and securing dedicated participation.

When it comes to the ratification of Convention 102, it is to be noted that there were no representatives of the National Healthcare Security Administration in the Project Management Committee. This is not consistent with the aim of achieving the ratification because medical insurance, including maternity benefits, clearly are an important component of a ratification. Moreover, it foregoes the potential benefit of synergies that could arise from mutual exchange between these important components of social security. Not only is the underlying concept similar and reflected in the choice of the designation „security“ (healthcare security and social security), but the National Healthcare Security Administration has also embarked on a process aiming at building a multilevel medical security system and has the same issues related to pooling of resources at the lower administrative levels as MOHRSS has. Both administrations would also have an interest in building the capacities of actuaries for the public sector, notably because demand for actuaries currently exceeds the supply in China.

So far cooperation in practice with the NHSA appears to be hampered by the silo mentality of the different administrations that also can be found in other countries, but that frequently is exacerbated in China due to the sheer size of the systems. It may also be that relationships need to be recultivated because the MORHSS branch of government used to be responsible for urban worker and urban resident basic health insurance schemes which are now under the NHSA and there may therefore be some sensitivities relating to overlaps of administrative territories of the two branches of government. Possibly, the prospects of jointly working toward Convention 102 could be a factor in streamlining processes across the board for the benefit of both administrations, but it would require dedicated input to be achieved.

The matter of cooperation with NHSA was raised directly by MOHRSS in the discussions, requesting assistance in achieving that to come about. It was therefore also discussed with ILO's Country Director and the solution may lie in involving higher ranked levels of administration than MOHRSS and the NHSA themselves in order to encourage cooperation of the two administrations with regard to Convention 102. Because health is under a different vice-premiership than social security, this may, however, require going rather far up the hierarchy. Given the importance attributed by China to both social security and healthcare security, this may still be achievable.

Possibly, this matter could also be picked up by the European Commission as a suggestion to be raised during higher level meetings with the Chinese side with reference to the existing cooperation. Given the neutral role of ILO conventions, the

suggestion for cooperation between the MOHRSS and NHTSA in the interest of systems development should not leave any room for misinterpretation (in the sense of external interference with government structures).

Finally, another option for enabling the cooperation between the two administrative structures would be to assign a specific part (or lot) of the project directly to the NHTSA, thereby improving incentives for the NHTSA to actively participate. This suggestion has been actively considered in the discussion with the MORHSS.

Freely thinking, this could even be taken a level further by conceiving of a project with two components that could mutually reinforce each other on the way to ratification of Convention 102. Discussions with the NHTSA to sound out their ideas, interest and perspectives unfortunately could not be organized during the time allocated to the field work.

*Responses to specific questions sought in the terms of reference relating to effectiveness of management arrangements:*

- The project involved workers and employers organizations in line with the prevailing capacities of these constituents. Employers have implemented one employer-related research activity. Activities with workers are pending, waiting for additional input by ILO ACTRAV and therefore have not come to fruition by project end and therefore will need to be picked up in a follow-up project.

Involvement of Employers in the project has increased awareness of the representatives of Employers and encouraged them to get more involved with issues of social security and the number of participants of the China Enterprise Confederation (CEC) in the Project Management Committee has increased over the 3-year period from 1 to 3.

A meeting with the representatives of workers did unfortunately not materialize due to health related issues. Workers (ACFTU) did not participate in the Project Management Committee.

- The project monitored performance and results in line with the established performance indicators.

These indicators were derived from a catalog the donor needed to report to and were quantitative and activity centered, and therefore do not reflect outcomes which are of qualitative nature. Their measurement therefore does not provide any meaningful information to assess the performance and results.

Process management indicators are more important in this type of project that is concerned with supporting change in institutional reform of social security, supplemented by qualitative indicators that are able to describe the changes intended so that factual performance can be held against them.<sup>21</sup>

- There were no specific „systems“ put in place to track progress and risks, i.e. the the regular working-level meetings respectively with MOHRSS and EU were the structure for monitoring progress and identifying risks. This is fully justifiable because the number of activities and risks were of manageable size. The simple, heat-map based risk register has been reviewed regularly by the project team as evidenced in the reporting and included the dropping of one risk and addition of another over time and it has also changed format in line with changes implemented at the ILO. However, the disconnect between planning („progress“) and risk management („risks“) should be avoided because it can lead to oversight and error. That disconnect is a consequence of the errors in the logical framework described in the section on validity of design (q.v.).

The project operated on the basis of the logical framework that the EU required for implementation, however did not spell out acceptable assumptions in that logical framework. Therefore, the logical framework could not be used for risk management (which it would encompass if it is properly designed).

Besides this, the project established a risk register according to more recent ILO standard which is based on a corporate risk grid that monitors 6 identified risks and classifies them using three generally equidistant risk levels (high/ medium/ low). Moving on from the inception report, the grid was enhanced by offering the possibility of calculating the value of the risk based on assumptions about likelihood and impact, a practice which is usually only meaningful for risk management where large sample populations are the basis for establishing the probabilities and estimations for the potential damages can be monetized. This, of course is not the case for the risks of this project, but it may be an interesting academic exercise to sharpen the mind for trying to roughly pinpoint the project

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<sup>21</sup> For example, programs of change will usually define the capacities required to implement a change, and these usually are multifaceted. Such capacities, say in the domain of the actuarial functions of social protection, could require changes in mindsets, changes in regulations, changes in capabilities (methods, knowhow), changes in procedures (e.g. recruitment, salary levels), possibly changes in funding mechanisms and organizational structure (e.g. long-term collaboration agreements with a specialized university or an actuarial association; centralization of certain functions in a nation wide system), or even in hard and softwares. In other words, the change will be represented by a set of different capacity indicators and not merely by a number of persons trained. (Even when trained, not the number of those trained counts, but the number who have achieved the required competency.) Processes for building the capacity will be defined and milestones set for measurement.

risk levels.

The risks identified while related to project implementation (and not to ILO corporate risk) are not directly linked to the logical framework and therefore do not immediately reveal the implications the risks may have for project (re-) design. This is substandard practice even if it is ILO procedure and also practiced elsewhere.

At the same time, the risks in the register are actually relevant to project implementation, and they therefore should be integrated with the logframe. There are a number of questions which could be asked in relation to the identified risks and their ratings. In particular, ratification delay should normally have been classified as „high“ because it corresponds to an indicator for outcome; and the risk of reform measures not being adopted with a rating of „high“ should normally lead to a rethink about project design. More could be said, but suffice it here to illustrate that project planning and risk management need to go hand in hand and should not be artificially disconnected by the use of different tools that do not fully relate to each other.

The impression the evaluation is left with is that both logframe planning and risk management have taken a back seat when compared with the energy that has gone into implementation which has occurred at very high level of which the project reports, activity reports, and the different products developed provide ample testimony. Given the need of the project to work to different structures (China/ EU/ ILO), it is understandable that the attention that can be paid to formal planning in parallel systems is limited. Additional training in the usage of the tools should ease that burden in the future.

T.05 Summary of project risk register.				
	Risks (abbreviated).	2019-11	2020-06	2021-06
1	Economic growth slows and reduces financing for social policy.	LOW	HIGH	
2	Process of ratification of Convention 102 delayed.	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
3	Policies on old age scheme adopted too soon.	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
4	Reform measures for of old-age scheme not adopted.	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
5	Revision of design of social insurance will take a longer time.	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM

T.05 Summary of project risk register.				
6	Implementation delays due to busy work schedule of MOHRSS.	HIGH	LOW	LOW
7	Continuation or increase of travel restrictions.			MEDIUM
Source: Project reports				

- The main internal factors that influenced the achievement were of results were excellent (client-oriented) listening skills that enabled the project to plug directly into the relevant Chinese discussions, very good and active project management (though not by the planning book), a very flexible approach to dealing with the pandemic including experimentation, and the technical and managerial qualification of the project team to meet the demand of the counterparts.
- The main external factors were complete relevance and coherence. The project was also timely, i.e. in fit with the needs emerging from good alignment.

#### 4.4 Efficiency

Efficiency, as opposed to effectiveness, is concerned with input-output or input-outcome ratios. It is a criterion which seeks to assess to which extent resources have been put to good use. Strategies to improve efficiency are therefore often focusing on increasing outputs or decreasing inputs in one way or another.

Generally, the projects structure is typical for projects of this kind as implemented by the ILO with one CTA and one NPO leading the processes and support staff being recruited to assist with administrative matters and technical expertise where necessary and useful. This also corresponds to the structure that is implemented by other projects of policy advice that work with a single partner administration, be they financed by other donors or the same and implemented by other agents or the ILO.

Normally, the MOHRSS as the beneficiary of the support provided by the EC is bound to provide office space for the project team under the normal EC conditions for project implementation. MOHRSS also has offered to host the project team and provide adequate space (via SIA) in line with such practices in EC projects.

The ILO has nevertheless decided to embed the project at its own office premises in the UN compound (and this status has been recorded in the contribution agreement

and therefore accepted by the EC). Technically, this increased overhead cost and thus led to reduction in efficiency. The main reason offered by the project team is that it freed up the team for fully concentrating on the project without potential distractions that would be bound to occur when the team is embedded at the counterpart premises. Objectively speaking, it also would allow the project to draw more directly on the available support structure of the ILO Beijing Office and thereby facilitate its work (e.g. direct link to ILO systems).

Given the ILO Beijing Office is not an unknown and inaccessible location for MOHRSS (and SIA) due to the long established working relationship, a location at the office would certainly not be perceived like a separation from MOHRSS.<sup>22</sup> This is a special situation only the ILO can afford to implement without detriment to the relationship.

Especially for policy related projects, however, embedding the team within the structure of the beneficiary normally is the preferred structure because the distraction by day-to-day issues that may arise at the beneficiary organization so often feared by implementors who need to work to achieve a specific task as agreed in a project document is actually an opportunity for delivering ideas and concepts when they are most needed, e.g. when urgent decisions need to be taken. (Educators would call such opportunities „teachable moments“). At the same time, it provides important opportunities for the project team to learn more about the current trends of discussion, the status of relevant processes, and the effective capacities available at the ministry and thereby enable the team to fine-tune their expert and organizational inputs.

Acknowledgedly, with the usual cultural and language barriers between foreign advisors and beneficiary staff in China, the efficiency gains may not be as strong as when direct communication is easier. But CTA and NPO would usually be able to act in unison in such situations, and NPOs are usually qualified not only technically but also culturally to smooth over any potential misunderstandings.

Whether efficiency has been gained for implementation by locating the project office at the ILO Beijing office instead of the MOHRSS is not possible to assess because of the lack of counterfactual. Neither can the efficiency of being located at the MOHRSS (SIA) meaningfully be established retrospectively for comparison, nor is it possible to

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<sup>22</sup> It is established good practice in international cooperation that for achieving sustainability projects need to be owned by the national counterpart organizations that are primary beneficiaries or instrumental in sustaining the project outcome in the long run. This is why cost sharing occurs, and external experts deployed under such projects therefore should ideally be embedded to amplify learning opportunities, independent of their own contractual affiliation which will not be reclassified due to the office arrangement. They remain external experts who are in closest touch with their counterparts and do not become counterpart staff by virtue of being hosted by the counterpart organization.

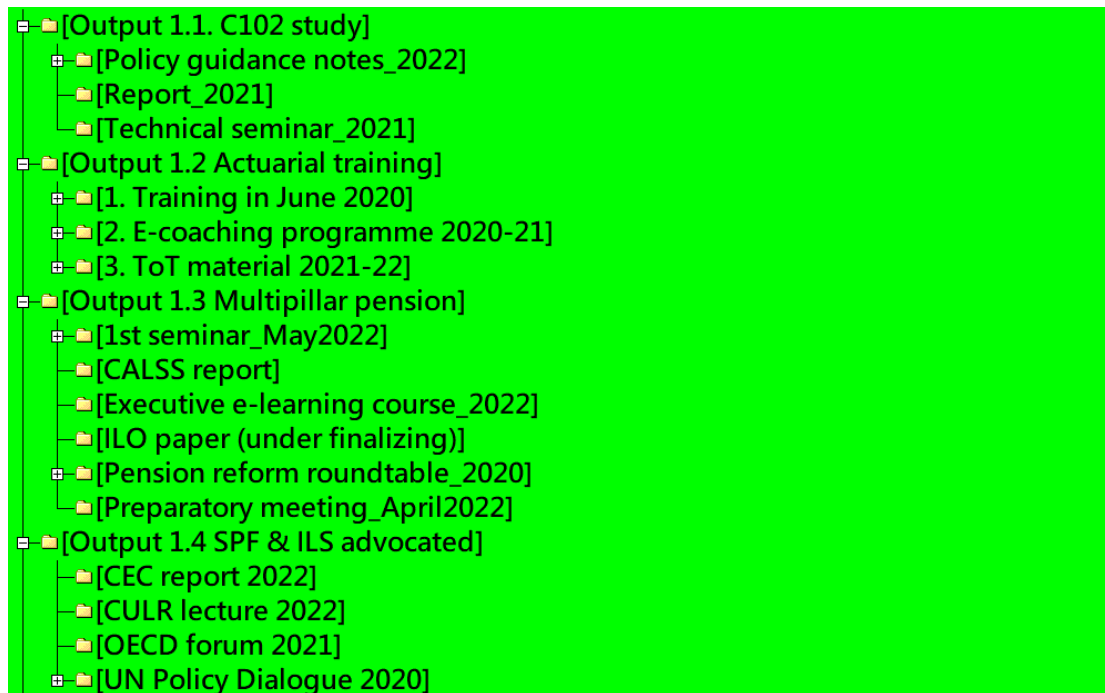
retrospectively assess the gains in efficiency that the project incurred from being located at the ILO Beijing Office.

When reviewing the mere number of quality outputs the project has delivered during the period of implementation with the size of the team in place, the project is to be rated as highly efficient. Because there are no objective benchmarks against which projects of policy advice can be measured, this assessment is based on the evaluator's personal experience with the implementation of projects and programs of policy advice in numerous countries, including China, both as independent or deployed expert, and his background as a former head of the department for economic and social policy advice in an established consultancy firm.

As it is neither possible to discuss the specific qualities of all of the inputs<sup>23</sup> delivered within the scope of the time accorded to this evaluation nor necessary because screening and selected reading (to determine quality) by the evaluator based on his experience is fully sufficient to establish this efficiency rating („high“), a screenshot of the related directories of project documentation that cover technical inputs to policy processes for different target groups (including the donor) and on different technical areas should suffice to illustrate the sheer numerical output from which experienced project managers even from non-policy areas will immediately understand the rating when comparing it with team size, funding, and project duration. Managers of policy projects will also understand the amount of time and effort that may go into the management and production of any of these inputs.

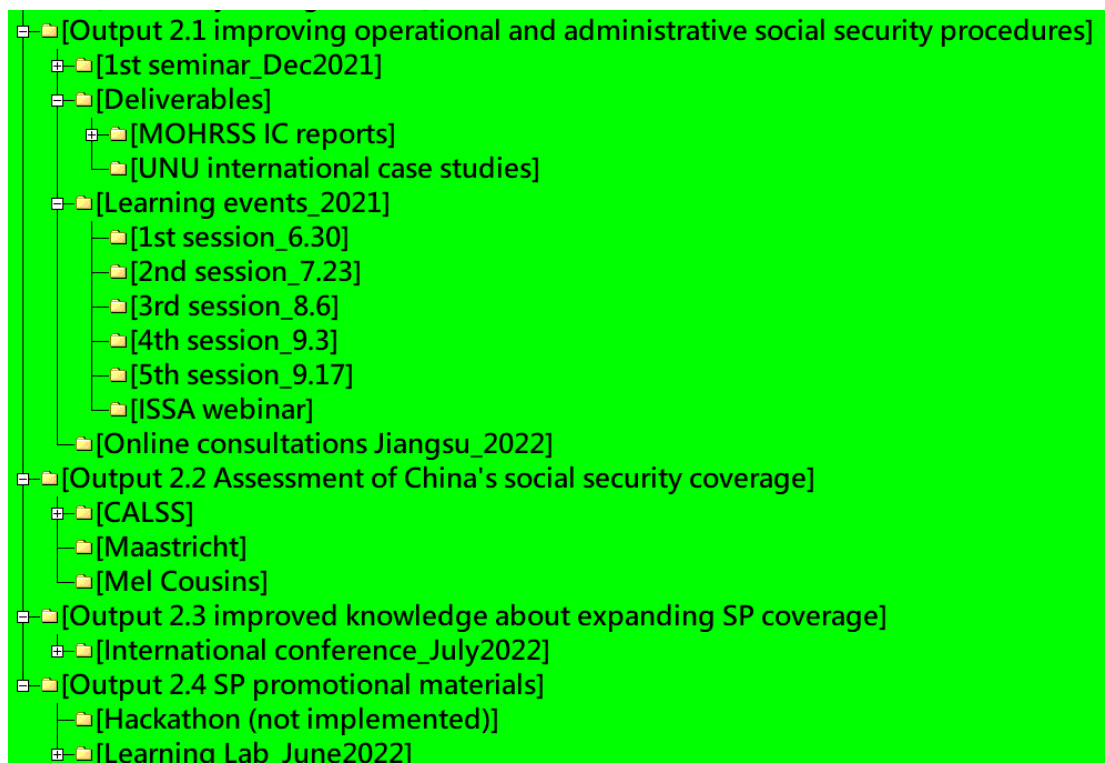
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<sup>23</sup> Technically speaking, with reference to the logical framework and project design more generally, all of these products are inputs (or activities) that are contributing to achieving project outputs (or results), even if some of these are directly labeled as „outputs“.



T.06a Directory of inputs delivered.

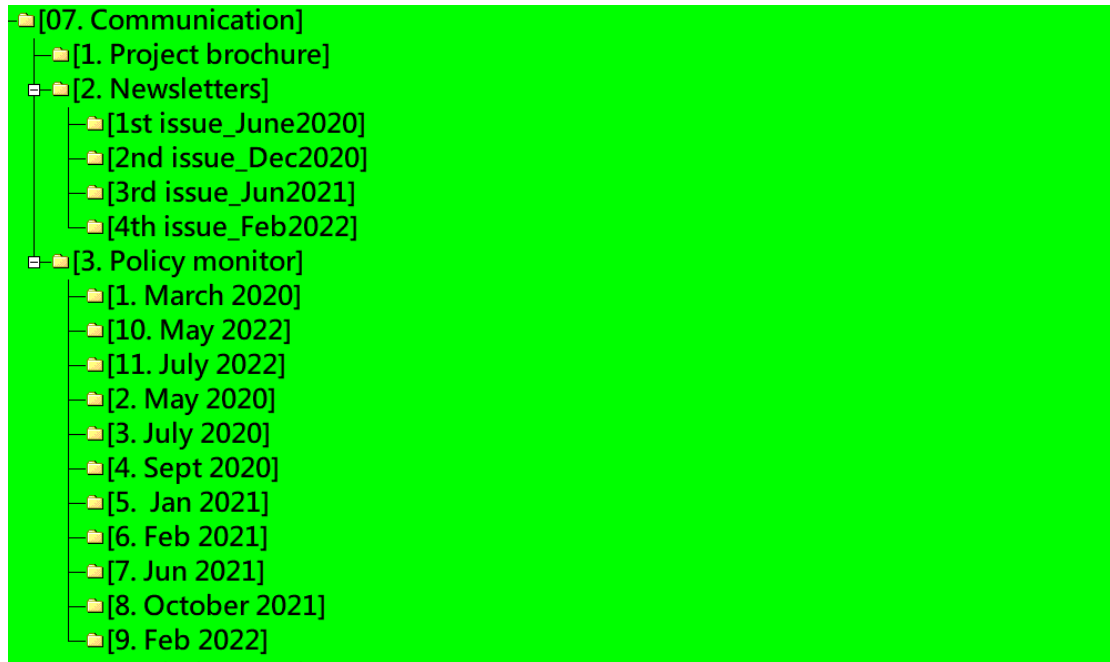
Source: Project documents.



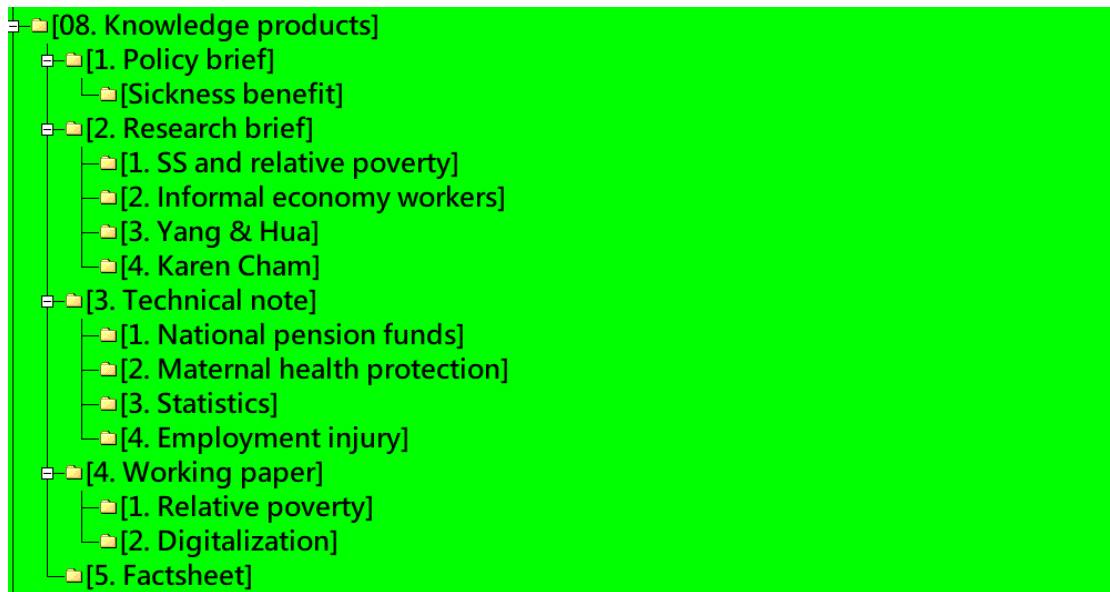
T.06b Directory of inputs delivered.

Source: Project documents.





T.06c Directory of inputs delivered.  
Source: Project documents.



T.06d Directory of inputs delivered.  
Source: Project documents.

These inputs do not include the project planning documents, project reporting, project meetings (PSC, PMC), or field mission reports.

The start of the project coincided with the beginning of the Covid-19-epidemic as China was confronted with an outbreak of a hitherto unknown new SARS-type virus

in the end of 2019. The question can therefore be asked how these circumstances affected the efficiency of the USP China project.

Generally, the project like most other projects needed to shift from face-to-face activities to online activities. This was enabled by significant leaps in the development of web-conferencing tools spurred by the pandemic and the worldwide demand for such services. These new technologies not only allowed the continuation of the project activities under the adverse circumstances of both international and domestic travel restrictions that, with local variations, essentially were put in place for the whole period of implementation of the project in China.

The measurement of the degree to which this shift to online implementation affected the efficiency of operations would require a plausible model of how efficient the project could have been in absence of the pandemic and specific measures of the factual efficiency held against that model. This, of course, is beyond the possibilities accorded within the framework of an evaluation. The following observations are meant to provide a view on possible effects on efficiency for consideration.

- The immediate effect of the pandemic was that travel restrictions delayed planned activities, thereby pushing both inputs and outputs down the timeline. In economic terms, this normally amounts to an increase in the payback period, and a reduced present value of costs and benefits because of discounting. Because the effects of discounting apply to both costs and benefits, they should have offset each other. However, delays always imply that the outcome may not be reached in the period foreseen. Here, however, no judgement can be made because the indicators for measuring outcome have not been meaningfully set.
- Digitalization of activities (or bringing them online) reduced travel cost and also put pressure on the project to digitalize contents and make use of the new opportunities arising from the pandemic. It allowed for meetings and training activities to be moved online. It allowed experimentation with new tools, including a „hackathon“. These shifts in implementation generally should have increased efficiency because they significantly reduced cost (elimination of travel expenses and staff time on duty travel) without detriment for the benefit.

The important exceptions to this general effect, however, are likely to be the following:

- Where training activities are concerned, by rule of thumb developed from numerous evaluations conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic and from conducting training courses online, the effectiveness of the trainings are

often reduced by 30-50% compared to when they are implemented in face-to-face mode, e.g. live classroom training or workshop formats. It is therefore rather likely that the benefits of training have been significantly reduced compared to face-to-face training formats.

From observing the „2nd Seminar on Research on Digital Transformation“ that was implemented, the evaluator is inclined to conclude that the effectiveness compared to a face-to-face event is reduced, and efficiency thereby decreased. Although the participants were quite obviously used and happy to participate in the online seminar, the presentation formats were not adjusted to online format which usually requires more „wake-up calls“ for participants to ensure their active participation and presentation styles that are less „crowded“ to be more easily absorbed and processed by the participants.

This is not to diminish the quality of the seminar itself which, on the whole, has been in line with what usually is the best that is being achieved in this kind of a setting. It points to the need to more generally ensure that training events are specifically tailored to online implementation and that structure and styles are accordingly adapted. This is not easy in a cross-cultural environment that includes interpretation and that furthermore needs to involve practitioners of all walks of life, most of whom never have been trained to present in workshops to begin with, let alone in online formats. But there is still significant room for improvement in order to increase effectiveness and thereby efficiency of implementation.

- Study tours or exchange visits, be they domestic or abroad, cannot be replaced by online activities. These activities absolutely thrive upon the face-to-face contact. They are important in projects with China because, as the adage goes, „seeing is believing“. Because of the very different contexts in which social policy is being implemented, it is usually difficult for Chinese stakeholders to sufficiently grasp suggestions that are being made by persons who have had exposure to the workings of other systems. Therefore, despite their relatively high cost, they are usually good value for money.

Some of the stakeholders interviewed have explicitly regretted that these exchanges could not take place, and this is quite understandable for the above reason. For such visits, it is also important to ensure that all tripartite constituents participate because it will allow for unique opportunities of joint learning about different roles the constituents can take or have in the

collaborative organization and implementation of social security.

From this perspective, efficiency may have suffered due to the cancellation of these activities because the potentially large net benefits these exchanges may provide if well organized cannot be reaped.

Finally, the project has made good use of the availability of a regional project at the ROAP that is concerned with building capacities in the actuarial profession. Drawing on these resources is a very efficient option for bringing high quality training to the Chinese stakeholders.

*Responses to specific questions sought in the terms of reference relating to efficiency:*

- The project allocated resources strategically to provide the necessary support and to achieve the broader project objectives. It has been exceptionally efficient when comparing the number of activities with the resources and time frame available and considering the potentially detrimental effects of the pandemic.
- There is no information, indication or evidence that emerged which would call into question that the project was cost conscious. It followed normal ILO procurement rules and specified them beforehand to the EC during the process of negotiation and agreement of the project document. Verifying expenditures and procurement processes is not part of the evaluation procedure.
- Cooperation among project partners has been efficient. The project based collaboration on established and time-tested patterns of collaboration in China, thereby ensuring best-possible value addition. There was no specific mechanism to facilitate coherence and synergy by the partners other than regular discussion -- which was effective. More synergy needs to be built with the health care sector to achieve ratification of convention 102. This was not fully achievable under the conditions of the pandemic, and may become more feasible once face-to-face meetings are possible to negotiate the cooperation between MOHRSS and the NHSA.
- The project has not significantly leveraged new or repurposed existing financial resources to mitigate Covid-19 effects in a balanced manner. It has worked with adequate contingency plans to adjust its operations to the limitations imposed by the pandemic, but this did not entail any major repurposing of activities and shifts in weight or focus. Certainly, the cancellation of study tours was regrettable. But the surge in availability and developments of digital communication tools triggered by the pandemic compensated to substantial extent for face-to-face activities so that the thrust of the project could be maintained.

## 4.5 Impact

Impact orientation of a project usually refers to the contribution of a project to higher-level objectives, i.e. beyond the objective of the project itself. In traditional ILO terminology, expected impact is often recorded in the formulation of a "development objective" to the achievement of which the objective of the project itself (the "immediate objective" in ILO terminology) contributes. The impact is not under the control of the project whereas the project outcome is (i.e. must or should be). Impact is usually achieved in conjunction with other developments or contributions.

More generally, impact orientation usually implies and refers to the effect that a project has on improving the situation for ultimate or final beneficiaries. In the field of social security, these beneficiaries are usually those who are not yet covered or do not have access to diverse social security schemes, and notably the vulnerable populations that need to be reached in line with the overarching sustainable development agenda and its quest to eliminate poverty.

Projects at the policy level can have fundamental impact because changes in policy may affect the lives of the majority of stakeholders or individuals concerned. However, this is not a must. As a matter of fact, many policy level projects are tasked with assisting a beneficiary country or any other territorial unit that is endowed with policy making powers in identifying and formulating problems, analyzing them properly, and developing policies that could help to solve these problems, and drawing up strategies for obtaining their approval and communicating the policies. They may also assist with the evaluation of policies and their impact. And they usually assist with building the capacities so that these policy processes may be internalized by the beneficiary country's institutions. In other words, impact of policy projects can be very significant, but it may not necessarily be immediate.

The USP China project is tasked, at the outcome level, with contributing to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits as well as to the extension of social security coverage in China. Targets set in this context are the influencing of 1 approach, namely, the ratification of Convention 102 by China, and 1 policy practice (guiding opinion, methods, notice, or other similar forms) on improving sustainability and adequacy of pension schemes adopted by the State Council or MOHRSS.

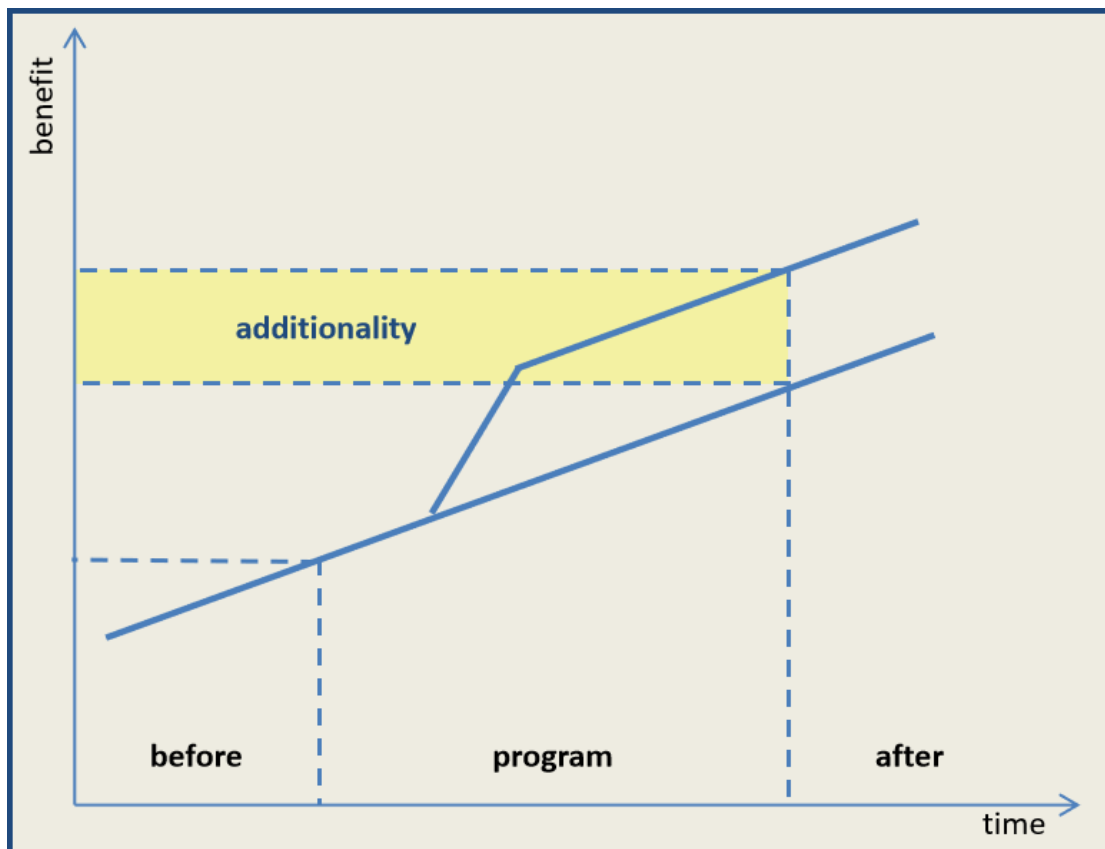
At the impact level, the USP China project is meant to strengthen China's institutional capacity to improve its social protection in terms of expanded coverage and the adequacy and financial sustainability of the pension schemes in support of the realization of international standards and the EU 2020 strategy. The respective

target is set at 1 approach and/or practice beneficial to the achievement of the EU 2020 Strategy which have been taken up in China.

The quality of the formulas found for impact and outcome and the respective indicators have already been discussed in the section on validity of design (q.v.).

If, as alternative impact indicators, the outcome indicators of contribution to ratification of Convention 102 and one policy practice adopted by the State Council or MOHRSS are selected, such impact is not foreseeable at time of project end.<sup>24</sup> This does not mean it will not occur, but it means that currently there are no grounds for assuming such a level of impact.

This once more illustrates that realistic and proper logframe planning and indicator selection and gauging is important in order to enable an evaluation that leads to results that reflect the reality of a project and thereby does justice to those who have been working hard to implement it. With the framework in place and the indicators selected, no realistic assessment can be made.



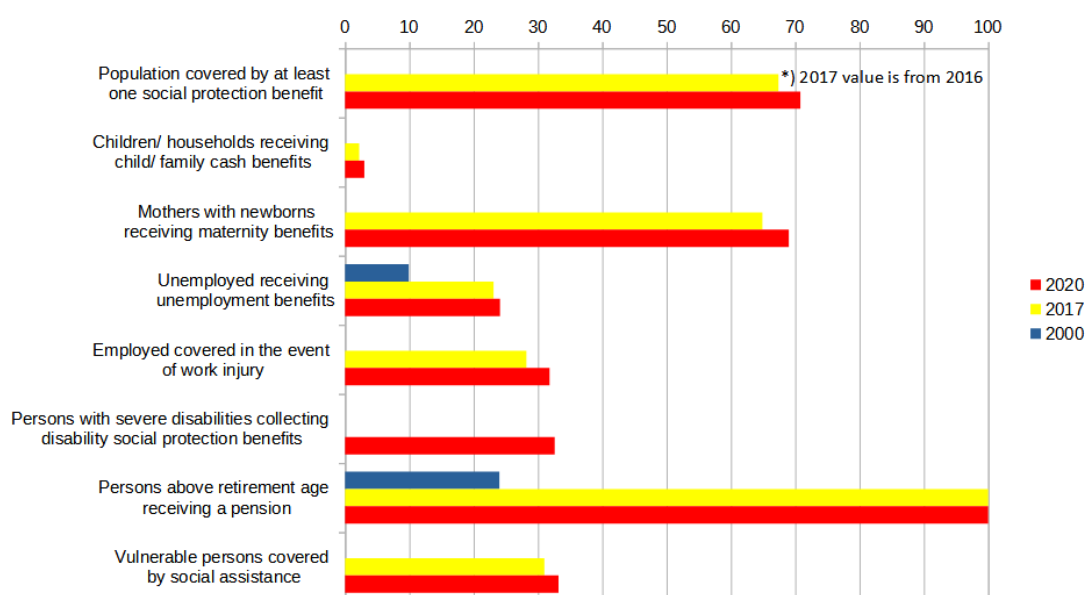
F.07 Measuring project additionality with rising trend.  
Source: Own graph.

<sup>24</sup> Only when the impact is foreseeable, may the impact be acknowledged (based on assumption) at the time of an evaluation. In the absence of any specific evidence, it cannot be taken for granted.

Normally, impact can only be measured if baselines (status and prevailing trend) have been measured for all important benefits expected in due course. Particularly for impact measurement, it may be required to implement ex-post evaluations because impact by definition usually occurs after project closure. The graph above illustrates the basic rationale for impact attribution and why baselines are needed.

Projects of cooperation do not operate in isolation. There are usually national processes that are in progress, and the project is meant to contribute to such progress (or sometimes contributing to averting stagnation or deterioration). The measurement of the impact of the project therefore can only correctly reflect reality when isolated from the prevailing trends.

If we, just for example, went by the potential contribution of the project to achieving SDG indicator 1.3.1 which is referenced in the project document wanted to claim any impact by a project supporting mothers with newborn babies receiving maternity benefits or vulnerable persons covered by social assistance, we would see that the shares are currently increasing in the absence of our project. A mere measurement of where these shares were before the project began and where they stand once the project ends would not reveal anything about the specific impact our project had because it could just reflect a pre-existing trend.



F.08 Overview of China's progress on different sub-indicators toward reaching SDG indicator 1.3.1. Source: World Social Protection Database (ILO), own graphic.

For the USP China project, impact indicators, similar to the outcome indicators, should have been specified closer to the effective reach of the project. They have been hung too high, thereby eluding plausible attribution. They could have reflected processes triggered or supported and capacities built, and they could have been of a

qualitative nature where the contributions cannot be adequately captured by quantitative indicators or indicator mixes.

*Responses to specific questions sought in the terms of reference relating to impact:*

- Coverage of old age pension and employment injury insurance is inferred to have increased or increasing by broadening to other target groups. The activities of the project have been conducive and important in this context, as acknowledged by stakeholders on the Chinese side, but the project cannot claim to originate changes it has accompanied and supported. There is a lack of indicators and respective measurements that can would provide proof of attribution.
- The project has not significantly increased the cooperation amongst governments, employers, and workers as such. Whether such increased cooperation is central to creating the conditions for inclusive growth and decent work in China would require a separate in-depth analysis and possibly extensive debate. China is known to have its own inclusive approach to development. The causal chains and respective assumptions, intensity of causal effects, delays in transmission of effects, and the role of feedback loops in the different models would need to be assessed before formulating any related educated guess.
- Given the attribution gaps between project activities and reaching specific SDGs that are linked to the project, it is not meaningful to discuss the difference the project made to the five SDGs.

As illustrated in the discussion of SDG indicator 1.3.1 above, even if it were possible for the project to influence SDG indicators via a short causal chain, it would still be important to establish the respective baselines so that attribution can be properly measured or at least inferred without exclusively relying on assumptions. Reaching the SDGs is work in progress, and cannot be achieved by a single project or within a single project phase.

#### **4.6 Sustainability**

Sustainability by established OECD/ DAC criteria is essentially concerned with establishing patterns that are able to ensure a lasting success of a given project or the continuous presence or activity of processes, institutions, or organizations created to address specific issues on a permanent or regular basis. It is not concerned with environmental or ecological sustainability although the term is similar in the sense that it asks about the „ecology“ (relationships existing between any complex system and its surroundings or environment) of the patterns created by



the project. It asks whether the outcome of a project will subsist (survive) beyond the project implementation period. The general challenge for all projects is to build processes, institutions, or organizations by which project benefits can be sustained following the withdrawal of support by EC and the ILO as the key implementing agent.

One of the important ingredients if not preconditions for achieving sustainability is ownership by in-country institutions that have direct interests in maintaining the processes, institutions, or organizations created during the implementation period. From the discussions held with the different stakeholders, clearly, appreciation and ownership of project inputs and outputs was visible.

The practice of ILO project staff conducting joint field studies jointly with MOHRSS staff has been highly appreciated and has been instrumental in forging a relationship of mutual trust and provided the foundation for further technical discussions as well the understanding that the project team intended to address social security topics as comprehensively as required. Visits to frontline services and users documented the practicality of the ILO team and the direct exchange of experience reinforced the relationships between the partners involved at national, province, and municipal levels. The implementation of Project Management Committee with a large number of stakeholders also reinforced this relationship between the ILO team and the Chinese structures. The availability of the CTA to continue to actively participate in events from abroad following his departure after the end of his contract confirmed that relationship building has been as successful as it needs to be in order to be able to generate the engagement required for ownership in China.

The ability of the project to technically respond to the ambitious ongoing processes of digitalization across public services in China was very important for generating ownership because improving services based on technical solutions is a rather uncontentious element in system reform, even if technical solutions in practice may have many contentious effects. It also is an area where China is able to demonstrate capacity at par with ILO and European expertise and therefore lends itself to deepening exchanges. It offered a unique opportunity to introduce European approaches to digitalization including the importance attributed to interoperability of systems which is of similar importance for China where structures can be as fragmented as in Europe.

Because the project has a very comprehensive approach, it is somewhat limited with regard to achieving the depth required to establish patterns that have sufficient traction to be sustainable at end of project. The breadth of topics addressed by the project can be taken from the overview of inputs given into the Chinese processes in the section on efficiency (table 06). Many of the topics addressed would merit their

own projects of support. For a project that caters to a vision of ratifying Convention 102, however, this is exactly the right approach because Convention 102 itself is somewhat more comprehensive and covering more areas of intervention than the project evaluated here.

Under such conditions and with the knowledge that the project will end after three years or 42 months including extension, the requirement for any project is to develop and implement an exit strategy at its earliest convenience. Usually exit strategies would need to be drawn up by the end of the first year of implementation and latest by mid term so they may be implemented timely in order to ensure that no „loose ends“ will remain after project closure. Where adverse events have slowed implementation or where it is discovered that the timeline is insufficient to complete important activities, an exit strategy can also include „piggybacking“ of project activities with other projects and/ or mobilizing additional funds respectively developing specific partnerships for finalization.

As learned during the discussions held, a follow-up project is in the process of being negotiated. If it picks up where this project has ended, then sustainability may be enhanced as long as measures are targeted according to the sustainability needs.

*Responses to specific questions sought in the terms of reference relating to sustainability:*

- The Ministry and its subordinated administration is likely to continue with the training and the increase in coverage for the old age pension, employment injury insurance and other measures to reach the desired coverage levels.

However, a proper training needs analysis (TNA) should normally be implemented ideally throughout the whole public social security insurance system to estimate continuous demand more accurately and calculate specific training needs across the country.<sup>25</sup> At the time of this evaluation, for example, it is unclear to which extent the delivered internal Training of Trainers for actuaries is sufficient for achieving long-term capacity building.

This needs to be seen in the context of scarcity of actuaries in China. Density of actuarial practitioners per value of premium is estimated at only 43% of the USA. The shortfall in supply has been estimated at 5,000 actuaries in 2019 and demand is expected to reach 50,000 actuaries by the end of the decade.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The report by He 2021 provided separately following the submission of the draft report provides a basic rationale for the needs of training, but does not specify and quantify them to the extent that a proper TNA as an actionable document usually would.

<sup>26</sup> Actuaries Digital 2019.

Given that China will not only develop social security but also further develop the commercial insurance market,<sup>27</sup> developing actuaries for and retaining them in the sphere of social security needs to be given sufficient attention and priority. It will require a training strategy, human resource development plans, and attractive social security career models that can be implemented across different public sector insurance schemes at national, province, and also municipal levels in order to be competitive with expected future job offers by commercial insurance providers.

It will most likely also require developing a solid training partnership with a training institution like a university<sup>28</sup> or possibly the China Association of Actuaries because it is unlikely that the number of actuaries required in the social security system will justify the creation of training institutes or specific facilities for this specific purpose.

- Generally, most areas of intervention of the project could benefit from further resources and support to boost sustainability of results. This is only natural given the large scope of tasks that need to be addressed in order to enable China to prepare for ratification of Convention 102. Priorities for such support should be jointly identified during the follow-up project in order to ensure that while the overall scope needs to be comprehensive, sufficient depth will be achieved in important fields so that sustainability of the results is foreseeable.

#### **4.7 Cross-Cutting Issues**

Cross-cutting issues that have emerged as the focus of this final evaluation revolve around tripartite participation and gender. The absence of worker participation in this project has manifested itself in the lack of an opportunity to hold a discussion with the representative of ACFTU during the period of field interviews. As far as gender is concerned, questions placed in the terms of reference for this evaluation are indicated a specific interest in respective evaluation findings.

Cross-cutting issues normally also should take into account issues of environmental sustainability and climate change as overriding concerns for humanity and with

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Xi 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Nankai University was the first in China to introduce actuarial studies in the end of the 1980s. Currently the project is cooperating with Zhejiang University. This just to point out that some training capabilities in China do exist, but they are unlikely to have projects that reflect the ILO-ISSA Guidelines on actuarial work for social security and may not commit unless a specific agreement is reached.

direct impact on the world of work. In this generic field of social security and with a view of ratification of Convention 102, these specific cross-cutting issues are not easily addressed. Therefore, it is both plausible and acceptable that respective activities have not been planned.

*Responses to specific questions sought in the terms of reference relating to cross-cutting issues:*

- The project is not directly encouraging equal participation of men and women in the project activities. This does not correspond to a flaw in project design, however. It is concerned with equal participation of men and women at the final beneficiary level and therefore needs to prioritize building capacities for existing staff independent of their sex and exclusively based on their technical qualifications. This approach is technically effective and does no harm. Female interlocutors representing different beneficiary levels agree with this practice.

Some female interlocutors also conveyed the view that Chinese females would make sure on their own that gender balance is secured -- independent from project design and where and whenever warranted. It could be noted in this context and without prejudice that other than for the ILO, the majority of the interlocutors on the Chinese side during this evaluation were females.<sup>29</sup>

- The project has significantly contributed to (i) promotion of international labour standards (Convention 102) and contributed to social dialog. Contribution to ratification of Convention 102 has been an original purpose of the project and has been included as a target in the logical framework. Contribution to social dialog was limited.

The project had the technical capacity to engage with the key stakeholders MOHRSS and SIA at both national and sub-national levels across a wide range of topics and generated contributions in different formats (expert studies, workshops, trainings, etc.) that were very much relevant and aligned with current needs of beneficiary institutions and therefore significant to them. All stakeholders without exception have positively commented on the benefits they have received. A statistical measure of significance cannot be provided for lack of respective data and would probably also not accurately represent significance for what are essentially are qualitative contributions.

The contribution to social dialog in the project has been limited. This is partially explained by improvements in social security not being a contentious issue that

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. table T.01.  
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would require social dialog in order to find solutions to conflict and the relatively high likelihood that any improvements are bound to be welcomed by workers. From this perspective and assuming limited human resources as a constraint, it would make sense for workers to concentrate on topics in social dialog where benefits are less easily secured and conflicts need to be resolved.

That being said, the lack of engagement of workers with the project is unusual given the importance that social security normally takes in workers' lives (incomes). In this context, it may be noted that at the time of the evaluation there was also a delay on one activity related to the production of materials tailored to workers to be provided by ACTRAV at ILO headquarters. However, it does not explain why there is no participation of ACFTU in Project Management Committee meetings. The reasons for this could not be determined during the field interview phase because an interview did not materialize.

The project attributes the reduced participation level of ACFTU to the nature of their organization, ACFTU having a more stringent management system and their engagement needing to follow more formal procedures involving their international liaison department, including a clear institutional setup including their roles in project implementation from the very beginning. Although the project defined the roles of social partners during project implementation and specific outputs for engaging social partners, the project was basically led by MOHRSS, and MOHRSS was the implementing partner. In such a setup, if ACFTU did not see themselves as one of the implementation partners, they would be reluctant to be involved.<sup>30</sup> The project also pointed out the positive feedback ACFTU provided to the project regarding activities they did participate in.

Employers, on the other hand, have learned from participating in the project's activities and Project Management Committee that they have a role in the field of social security and have significantly responded to the project by assigning a new staff member to this topic which they did not have on their agenda.

- The project indirectly contributes to (ii) gender equality (equity) and non-discrimination. Inclusion of people with disabilities is not a specific aim of the project.

The final evaluation concurs with the findings of the mid-term evaluation that

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<sup>30</sup> Managing the tripartite relationship in China, acknowledgedly, is not an easy exercise. However, it could be argued that ILO Beijing is well aware of the ACFTU's formal requirements and could therefore have anticipated involvement and participation of ACFTU at an earlier stage, i.e. at a time when organizational setup was agreed could still be shaped.

the project is mainstreaming gender in all of its activities. It has adjusted its reporting to disaggregate participants or beneficiaries of activities by sex so as to enable to demonstrate equitable participation of women and men following the recommendation made in the mid-term evaluation.

Given the final evaluation question relating to gender is being characterized as an area of „emerging concern“ (despite the above mentioned positive findings of the mid-term evaluation), the final evaluation explicitly asked about female participation in a majority of the discussions and notably where females were the interlocutors. These discussions confirmed that gender is mainstreamed in the thinking of the stakeholders and that, where the share of male participants exceeded that of the female participants (for example, in a specific training or workshop), there were, according to the female leaderships who were involved in the selection of participants in different organizations, technical grounds such as required qualification that justified the selection.

The final evaluation also specifically probed into an incident where one of the studies conducted with the assistance of the Chinese Academy of Labor and Social Security (CALSS) on workers in the platform economy suffered from an accidental deletion of the question related to the sex of the respondents during the finalization process of the questionnaires leading to results that could not be disaggregated according to sex.

After viewing the related questionnaire files and obtaining credible explanation by the responsible staff, including the presentation of the result of the follow-up with CALSS and survey contractors that managed to secure the respective information on the sex for 1,299 of the respondents, the final evaluation concludes that there is no reason to infer from this mishap that there is any ground to assume that the project or any of those involved in the implementation were either blind or negligent with regard to questions of gender equality and equity and/ or attempted to skirt disaggregation of information collected by sex.

It may be noted in the context of the emerging concern about gender that the activities implemented to strengthen the capacities of the actuarial profession in the Social Insurance Administration are of fundamental importance to ensure that technically and financially sound solutions can be developed to specifically address gaps that exist between the sexes, in consideration of full life cycles, when it comes to shaping social insurance. Moreover, the actuarial profession is definitely one where gender equality is easily achieved even on the basis of

equal opportunities of employment because there is no difference between females and males with regard to their capabilities in performing in actuarial practice. The actuarial profession is important for identifying specific gender gaps and for developing gender responsive social security.

The inclusion of people with disabilities is not an explicit aim of the project and is fairly difficult to organize under the institutional setting selected for the implementation of this project because it does not include the China Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) which is the long established primary channel to this target group. It is therefore unrealistic to expect for the project to become active in this area.

- The project has not directly assisted or focused on the development of a gender responsive social security system. It has assisted with broadening target groups and enabled the identification of differences in conditions of access and participation in social security and thereby is part of an enabling process to enhance gender responsiveness of social security. Other important activities such as actuarial training are particularly important contributions that will enable analyses that identify practical opportunities or can underpin specific strategies to increase gender responsiveness.

The process is not complete, and much more can be done.<sup>31</sup> There may also be different strategies for improving gender responsiveness. In this context, it should be mentioned that Chinese stakeholders generally are more competent in dealing with gender related differences than usually is expected by stakeholders outside of China and that selected female interlocutors were fairly direct in conveying this message to the evaluation. A meeting requested with the All China Women's Federation to obtain a Chinese third-party view unfortunately could not be realized due to end-of-year time constraints.

- There were no efforts made by the project to contribute to (iii) just transition to environmental sustainability.

Just transition is unlikely to be achieved by a project that is mainly concerned with improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits and the extension of social security coverage in China with a view of proceeding along a path leading to ratification of Convention 102. This does not imply that measures or facilities of social security should not be made use of in order to protect (or cushion) people from the adverse effects a transition to an economic

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. *inter alia* the discussion by Li 2014.  
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pattern that is sustainable may have on their wellbeing, including, for example, early retirement from industries or sectors that need to be phased out because they accelerate climate change. However, it is more important to get the basic structures, including sustainable financing and extended coverage, right before tailoring the system to a more specific role (still to be defined) in the just transition process.

The mid-term evaluation recommended the project should more forcefully consider environmental sustainability issues when addressing the issue of social security administration and technological changes. In the view of the final evaluation, this would most likely have led to overstretch or distraction in the light of the available resources and time for a project that is already attending to a rather broad scope, and therefore would not have been conducive to reaching the outcome as specified.

- The project addressed the impact of the Covid-19 crisis by participating in a UN-related activity and therefore contributed to the ILO policy response. More importantly, though, it did not lose focus and managed to pursue its original objectives by flexibly adjusting its own activities in line with the requirements imposed by the pandemic.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The project needs to be congratulated for its achievements. It has shown a very subtle understanding of the needs it had to cater to and the opportunities that it could seize for contributing to the development of universal social protection in China during the time period it was implemented. It has achieved what possibly could be achieved displaying a high degree of creativity, effectiveness, and efficiency in the adverse circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic which directly coincided with the implementation period.

The conclusions of the final evaluation are presented in order of priority for a project that has come to an end. Therefore, aspects that merit immediate aftercare and follow-up before the books are closed or not too late after closure are mentioned first. Other conclusions that cannot further influence the project itself but may be worthwhile to consider for future projects follow in priority.

① If the overall aim of the project was to work toward the ratification of Convention 102, even when this was an impact not easily achieved close to the period of implementation, one important stakeholder could not be mobilized to



participate in this endeavor: The National Healthcare Security Administration is an important partner on a path to achieving ratification and therefore must be involved as early as can be in order to move forward in a concerted effort.

② For increasing the capacity of the whole public sector social security system, actuarial capacity building is a cornerstone and needs continued strengthening. This is particularly important in view of the shortfall of actuaries in China compared with demand. A sustainable training mechanism, adequate to the specific need of public sector social security, ideally equitably staffed with members of both sexes, is very important for continuously addressing the varied needs of different target groups, including developing responsively differentiated social security products, for example differentiated by sex or other relevant demographic criteria.

③ Although they are the primary beneficiaries, workers have not found their way into this project. This is particularly tragic because one of the key elements of improvement of the system is client (user) focus. Additional efforts to involve ACFTU in social security discussions and respective activities are important. Provision of materials that were to be provided by ACTRAV also needs to be accelerated.

④ One of the downsides of the pandemic were travel restrictions, and they eliminated the possibilities associated with exchanges of peers in other countries, in this case European stakeholders in social security institutions. As travel restrictions appear to be successively reduced or lifted, it would be useful to identify ways of securing funds to be able to catch up on the originally planned direct exchanges between social security administrations and tripartite constituents of the EU and China to maximize the benefits that may accrue to the Chinese social security system from exposure to successful European practices.

⑤ Indicators available in the PIMS catalog were not useful to measure progress in policy projects where content is more important than quantity and only qualitative assessments of progress may provide a meaningful basis for evaluating the effectiveness of such projects. Process indicators are also legitimate indicators for such projects, particularly where outcomes are not easily specified in advance.

⑥ For sound project management it is important that project risk registers directly align with the logical framework of the project. Otherwise the risk registers are not enabling management of specific project risk.

⑦ Projects that are conceived for a single phase of, for example, three years need to make sure that they draw up exit strategies by end of year 1 or latest by mid term of their duration in order to be able to ensure that no loose ends are remaining after closure. Only early anticipation of the exit and planning for it will ensure that

mechanisms for knowledge transfer and delivery of outcome will come about in due course.

⑧ Impact measurement is useful where impact is not too remote from project implementation. For example, if aspects like extension of social security coverage or inclusion of new target groups are likely not to come about by closure but within the following years, then impact measurement may meaningfully be organized in order to assess the successfulness of the measures implemented. Correct measuring of results, however, requires that trends for baselines be established during the project implementation period against which post-project impact measurement will be held.

⑨ Logframe analysis, project planning, and project management including risk management knowledge are all central to successful project implementation. The fact that the USP China project was successful despite an invalid project design was rooted in an early general agreement achieved on topics to be the focus of the different years of implementation between the ILO and MOHRSS, a good degree of flexibility granted by the EC, and the deployment of a highly qualified team that possessed of the listening skills required to develop and provide tailored policy advice to project beneficiaries. This cannot always be assured and it is also not practical to work and report against a logical framework that does not fit or to indicators that are not meaningful, but distracts from delivery of substance.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Responsible Unit	Priority	Time Implication	Resource Implication	Recommendation
<b>EC and ILO (China)</b>	high	immediate	none	1) Find a management mechanism to better enable the collaboration between the labour and social security administration and the healthcare security administration. [With a view of preparing ratification of Convention 102.]
<b>EC and ILO (China)</b>	high	immediate	moderate	2) Continue to support actuarial capacity building and develop a sustainable training mechanism, adequate to the specific need of public sector social security. [Important for continuously addressing the varied needs of different target groups (including developing responsively differentiated social security products).]
<b>ILO ACTRAV</b>	high	immediate	low	3) Accelerate provision of materials to be provided by ACTRAV.

Responsible Unit	Priority	Time Implication	Resource Implication	Recommendation
<b>ILO and EC (all levels)</b>	high	immediate	moderate	4) Catch up on promoting direct exchanges between social security administrations and tripartite constituents between the EU and China as the pandemic situation improves and allows for safer travels.
<b>EC and ILO (all levels)</b>	high	short term (for long-term use)	low	5) In future policy projects, define outcome indicators that measure quality of outcome, and consider process indicators which are important when outcomes are not easily specified in advance.
<b>ILO (all levels)</b>	high	short term (for long-term use)	low	6) Ensure risk management registers in future projects are based on and align with project logframe to enable managing specific project risk.
<b>ILO (all levels)</b>	high	short term (for long-term use)	low	7) Draw up exit strategies by end of year 1 or latest by mid term for future projects that are likely not to have a perspective for extension.
<b>EC and ILO (all levels)</b>	high	short term (for long-term use)	low	8) For impact measurement, establish trends for baselines against which impact measurement will be held (no before-and-after measurement, but measurement of additionality).
<b>ILO (all levels)</b>	high	short term (for long-term use)	low	9) Ensure all project managers, CTAs and key NPO staff, as a general good practice and on a regular basis across the organization, undergo professional training in logframe analysis and planning and project management including risk management prior to deployment, including refresher training after several years of work away from project implementation, also in the interest of further deepening ILO project staff's resourcefulness in dealing with varying models and donor fashions of project design and management.

## **7. LESSON LEARNED**

ILO emphasizes the importance of learning lessons from evaluation exercises. Lessons can usually be learned both from positive and negative experiences, but the question of what effectively qualifies as a lesson and what does not has not been specified sufficiently to serve as guidance to evaluators expected to identify them. What may be a lesson for a newcomer will usually not be a lesson for an expert, and what may be a lesson for an individual may not necessarily be a lesson for an organization which ideally can draw on the much broader range of experiences than

individuals ever may. Failing on project design cannot be excused, and there is nothing to learn here except that any negligence in this field needs to be addressed.

The USP China Project has performed very well against significant odds: the need to bridge the gap between significantly different administrative cultures (EU and China) and the onset of the pandemic at the time when the project was launched. The project began with the beginning of the pandemic and ended with the end of the pandemic. However, it was not up to expected standards as far as project planning and validity of design is concerned, and it is therefore unfortunately difficult to measure (and fully appreciate) its factual success.<sup>32</sup> This does not need to be the case and respectively should not be, is entirely avoidable. It is therefore the major lesson to learn from the otherwise well implemented project.

For an international organization like the ILO that implements a multitude of projects and programs that are extrabudgetary, i.e. financed with donor monies, it should normally be assumed that all project planning skills are available in abundance. However, the opposite seems to be the case.

- Project staff (apparently) has never been trained in project planning techniques and project design and may therefore treat planning tools like mere application forms to fill in without understanding the purpose and the correct procedure.
- The project theory of change was not submitted to a rigorous logframe analysis. This led to numerous gaps in project design (notably regarding outcomes and impact) which in combination with the selection of irrelevant indicators from a limited donor catalog under a specific facility effectively disallowed formally according the project positive marks because its success could not be measured using the indicators selected. Also, risk register and logframe were not aligned which could lead to monitoring the wrong risks.

This is unacceptable and there is no justification for it. The fact that this situation can also be seen in other ILO projects also does not justify the practice.

It is therefore imperative to ensure that project managers and ILO staff involved in the technical preparation of project documents are sufficiently trained (including regular refresher trainings) in project design, logical framework analysis (including indicator formulation and gauging), project planning, and risk management and the

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<sup>32</sup> The terms of reference of the ILO included the wish for the evaluators to assess the project's performance on outputs besides the assessment on outcome where project performance is by definition measured. A substitution between different levels of an intervention logic, however, is technically erroneous and therefore, in case of doubt, at best unseemly. The list of outputs as per final project report added in annex # is included at the request of ILO evaluation management.

linkages between them because these skills are indispensable for drawing up project designs that work.

It is also good practice to develop these project designs jointly with the stakeholder institutions to achieve sustainable results. The rolling planning that the USP China project has implemented with MOHRSS on the one side and the EU on the other shows that the ILO team was cognizant of the practical needs of managing implementation, and this saved the project respectively ensured its success. The highly competent and versatile ILO team made up for the planning deficit. Another team, however, might have failed because of deficient intervention strategy.

Project design and project management, including logframe design, selecting and gauging of indicators, risk management, etc. are skills that need to be acquired. Technical qualification for a specific area of intervention does not qualify for project design and management. Regular training goes a long way in solving the problem and is less costly than mistakes resulting from deficient project design.

Managers at ILO should not assume that they themselves, CTAs, or NPOs possess project management skills. Managers at ILO should also not assume that donor staff will find and correct any mistakes. Donors will rightfully expect that the ILO as their technical implementing partner is able to deliver on project design.

In the present case, indicator selection unnecessarily was erroneous, outcome was unnecessarily by definition unachievable, and the logframe was defective. This creates effective limitations or obstacles for evaluators to recognize success -- namely when they need to invent the „appropriate“ indicators for the project (conflict of interest) at the time of the evaluation and then speculate about their values because the project would not have collected indicator values based on the hitherto erroneous planning, or, what may be worse, when they are being asked to „reconstruct“ a logic that did not exist in the first place (conflict of interest).

ILO needs to get up to speed about project design and planning (as well as proper monitoring and evaluation) and should systematically train those involved in order to be able to meet basic expectations.

## **8. ANNEXES**

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A.01 Summary table of findings by ILO evaluation criteria

T.09 Overview of Findings of the Final Evaluation	
Criterion or aspect	Finding
Relevance and Validity of Design	Relevance: high at all levels (national, sub-national; tripartite).
	Validity of Design: The discrepancy on assumptions automatically leads to an incomplete and/ or defective logical framework for the whole project, whereby clearly the design is not valid, but invalid. The overall design with its different layers (Chinese/ ILO/ EC), not spelled out and not easily recognized -- but implemented in practice, was valid.
Coherence	Coherent with Chinese, EC, and ILO policies.
Effectiveness (including Effectiveness of Management Arrangements)	Effectiveness: Selected indicators were neither meaningful nor realistically set, and measurement of effectiveness therefore is not possible. What could realistically be achieved in practice has effectively been achieved.
	Management Arrangements: Management arrangements were fully appropriate and provided the enabling environment for good project management, the effectiveness of the project in general and the efficiency displayed during implementation. They did not include the National Healthcare Security Administration which would have been important to address maternity benefits and other insurances falling under Convention 102.
Efficiency	When reviewing the mere number of quality outputs the project has delivered during the period of implementation with the size of the team in place, the project is to be rated as highly efficient.
Impact	Knock-on effect from effectiveness: indicator selection not meaningful. Achievement of intended impact or outcome based on indicator selection is not foreseeable at time of project end.
Sustainability	Because the project has a very comprehensive approach, it is somewhat limited with regard to achieving the depth required to establish patterns that have sufficient traction to be sustainable at end of project. There is no exit strategy in place. Follow-up recommended.

T.09 Overview of Findings of the Final Evaluation	
Criterion or aspect	Finding
Cross-cutting issues	Concerns about insufficient gender sensitivity of the project were unfounded. Good response to Covid-19 challenges and contribution to UN activity/ ILO policy response.



## A.02 Draft participant briefs and evaluation questions (non-ILO)

**Independent final evaluation**  
**Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection**  
**(CHN/18/01/EUR)**  
**Participants Brief (GOV-EMP-ENT)**

### Background and context

- The ILO has its own routines of evaluating the implementation of any of the programs the ILO is implementing. One of these evaluation routines is an independent evaluation where persons who have not been involved in the implementation but possess sufficient experience are being asked to help the ILO to develop an objective and well-rounded picture of our collective performance during implementation.
- The motivation for conducting evaluations is based on the idea of continuous improvement, similar to quality management in industry. We would like to be able to learn from our joint experiences in order to become even better in the future.
- Conducting evaluations is a learning exercise. It does not imply that anything has gone wrong or that we need to inspect the project because we fear that something has gone wrong. All projects are being evaluated.
- When we evaluate, we are guided by the standard criteria that are being applied to the implementation of international cooperation projects (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of the project<sup>33</sup>) as well as the criteria of the ILO as a specialized organization of the United Nations with its own international standards, including based on international conventions and the concept of decent work.

### Program Objective

One key question for any evaluation is to determine whether we have been able to reach the goals we have set for ourselves in 2019.

The project „Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection“ was meant to reach the following key objectives:

- to contribute to the extension of the coverage of social security to workers in non-standard forms of employment, with a special attention to [rural] migrant workers and women [workers]
- to contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/revise-evaluation-criteria-chinese-2020.pdf>  
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The themes that were agreed to be covered during the cooperation over the 3-year period were universal social protection, digital transformation of social security, and adequacy and sustainability of social security.

### **Evaluation questions (GOV-EMP-ENT)**

Please respond to the evaluation questions below from your organization's perspective. If you feel that you cannot respond to some of these questions for any reason, this is fine. There is no requirement to answer questions you feel you cannot or should not respond to.

1. What were highlights of project implementation?
2. Have the project activities been implemented to your satisfaction?
3. To what extent have the project outcomes and outputs been achieved? In which way was the project successful in achieving the two key objectives?
4. Are the activities having the desired result? Are there already visible results on extending coverage to migrant workers and women and/ or on improved adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits and/ or on helping China to preparing for ratification of ILO convention 102?
5. To what extent has the project encouraged equal participation of men and women in the project activities?
6. What were the main internal and external factors that influenced the achievement or nonachievement of results? Did policies or interventions not part of this project have any influence on achievements?
7. To what extent are results obtained sustainable or can they be sustained? Are there any prerequisites for sustainability that still need to be achieved?
8. To what extent has cooperation among project partners been efficient? Was there a mechanism facilitating coherence and synergy by the different partners? How effective was it?
9. Was impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on project achievements significant? If so, how successful was the project in adapting its activities to deal with these effects?
10. If there were any opportunity to continue or to expand on the project after it has come to an end, what would you like to suggest?
11. To what extent is the project aligned with and supports national development plans and priorities of the ILO constituents?
12. To what extent did the project assist in developing a gender-responsive social security system?
13. To what extent has there been any increase or improvement in coverage of old age pension, unemployment insurance and employment injury insurance due to the activities of the project?
14. To what extent has the project helped strengthen China's institutional capacity to improve its social protection, including in terms of adequacy and financial sustainability of pension schemes?
15. After end of project, will the Government continue with the training and the increase in coverage for the old age pension, employment injury insurance and other measures?

16. Did the project increase the cooperation between Government, Employers, and Workers?  
Did the project ensure regular consultation with Workers and Employers organisations, principles of social dialog, and tripartite consultation?
17. Did the project make any contribution to (i) promotion of international labour standards and social dialog, (ii) inclusion of people with disabilities, (iii) just transition to environmental sustainability?
18. To what extent, if any, have project activities helped protect the vulnerable segments of the populations against the pandemic?

### **Evaluation questions (GOV-SUBN)**

Please respond to the evaluation questions below from your organization's perspective. If you feel that you cannot respond to some of these questions for any reason, this is fine. There is no requirement to answer questions you feel you cannot or should not respond to.

1-10 as above, and:

1. To what extent is the project aligned with and supports sub-national (e.g. province, city, townships) plans and priorities of the ILO constituents (Government, Employers, Workers)?
2. To what extent are the project activities complementary and coordinated with those of other actors at sub-national (e.g. province, city, townships) level and add value without duplication of effort?
3. To what extent has the project assisted in developing a gender-responsive social security system?
4. To what extent has there been any increase or improvement in coverage of old age pension, unemployment insurance and employment injury insurance due to the activities of the project, particularly for rural migrant workers and women workers?
5. Did the project make any contribution to (i) promotion of international labour standards and social dialog, (ii) inclusion of people with disabilities, (iii) just transition to environmental sustainability?
6. To what extent, if any, have project activities helped protect the vulnerable segments of the populations against the pandemic?

### **Evaluation questions (INSUR)**

Please respond to the evaluation questions below from your organization's perspective. If you feel that you cannot respond to some of these questions for any reason, this is fine. There is no requirement to answer questions you feel you cannot or should not respond to.

1-10 as above, and:

1. To what extent did the project assist in developing a gender-responsive social security system, in particular with regard to insurance aspects?

2. To what extent has the project helped strengthen China's institutional capacity to improve its social protection including in terms of adequacy and financial sustainability of pension schemes?
3. To what extent has there been any increase or improvement in coverage of old age pension, unemployment insurance and employment injury insurance due to the activities of the project?
4. After end of project, will the training and the increase in coverage for the old age pension, employment injury insurance and other measures be continued?
5. To what extent are the project activities complementary and/ or coordinated with those of other actors, and add value without duplication of effort?

### **Evaluation questions (EU)**

Please respond to the evaluation questions below from your organization's perspective. If you feel that you cannot respond to some of these questions for any reason, this is fine. There is no requirement to answer questions you feel you cannot or should not respond to.

1-10 as above, and:

1. To what extent are the project design and its underlining theory of change aligned with the expectations of the EU?
2. To what extent are the project activities complementary and/ or coordinated with those of other actors (including donors), and add value without duplication of effort?
3. To what extent has the project leveraged new or repurposed existing financial resources to mitigate COVID-19 effects?

A.03 Matrix of TOR evaluation questions and additional questions with references to project logframe, inception report, and activities

Project key objectives

- to contribute to the extension of the coverage of social security to workers in non-standard forms of employment, with a special attention to [rural] migrant workers and women [workers]
- to contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits

Project themes

universal social protection | digital transformation of social security | adequacy and sustainability of social security

<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Additional questions: comments/ to further explore...</b>	<b>documents</b>	<b>stakeholder</b>
1.What were highlights of project implementation?		n.a.	all
2.Have the project activities been implemented to your satisfaction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Why yearly themes from start? (Arguably not adequate time for either theme, all large barrels and constantly in evolution.)</li> <li>● Additionality: check -- digital transformation possibly more advanced in CN than in EU</li> </ul>	PRODOC	all
3.To what extent have the project outcomes and outputs been achieved? In which way was the project successful in achieving the two key objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Indicators selected for LF are simplistic, PIMS based; check for quality not quantity</li> <li>● Have target groups changed?</li> <li>● Assumptions are either killer or assumptions or given: ignore them; identify the real assumptions &lt;-&gt; sustainability</li> </ul>	INCR-LF	all

Evaluation questions	Additional questions: comments/ to further explore...	documents	stakeholder
<p>4.Are the activities having the desired result? Are there already visible results on extending coverage to migrant workers and women and/ or on improved adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits and/ or on helping China to preparing for ratification of ILO conventtion 102?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Unlikely that project would have direct impact on coverage within the short implementation period: probe; same for 102; ask about motivation and perspicives for ratification (after project end; what else is required?)</li> <li>● Why not redesign?</li> <li>● Women: &lt;-&gt; ACWF?</li> <li>● Study CALSS Compatibility - Convention, 1952 (No. 102) [worldwide-agreed minimum standards for all nine branches of social security]. Moving forward in specific branches: what are the plans? (UE, OA, matB, medical -- other?)</li> <li>● Recommendations for social protection coverage of flexible and platform workers ZJ SC GD BJ Gender dimension implications?</li> </ul>	<p>actually recognized in INCR 5.1</p> <p>sum2022 OP1.1 20-21</p> <p>sum2022 OP 2.2 20-21</p>	<p>all</p>
<p>5.To what extent has the project encouraged equal participation of men and women in the project activities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Request monitoring data</li> <li>● Usefulness of ‚equal participation‘ for direct beneficiaries? Final beneficiaries and adequacy, here, are more important than direct beneficiaries. Probe why gender should be an issue in participation</li> </ul>	<p>INCR par.18/19</p>	<p>all</p>
<p>6.What were the main internal and external factors that influenced the achievement or nonachievement of results? Did policies or interventions not part of this project have any influence on achievements?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Check: difference between national and local levels: probe: request policy documents</li> </ul>		<p>all</p>

<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Additional questions: comments/ to further explore...</b>	<b>documents</b>	<b>stakeholder</b>
7.To what extent are results obtained sustainable or can they be sustained? Are there any prerequisites for sustainability that still need to be achieved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● &lt;-&gt; assumptions</li> </ul>		all
8.To what extent has cooperation among project partners been efficient? Was there a mechanism facilitating coherence and synergy by the different partners? How effective was it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● PSC and PMC (better one only)</li> </ul>	INCR 10.3/4	all
9.Was impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on project achievements significant? If so, how successful was the project in adapting its activities to deal with these effects?	<i>[Note: Project <u>launch</u> coincided with emergence of Covid-19.]</i>	cf. date in INCR par.69	all
10.If there were any opportunity to continue or to expand on the project after it has come to an end, what would you like to suggest?			all
a.To what extent are the project design and its underlining theory of change aligned with the expectations of the EU?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Request relevant EU strategy documents</li> <li>● Previous EU-CN projects: request files/ connect</li> <li>● Building on previous EU-CN projects: specific examples?</li> <li>● Continuous exchange of best practices in policy, legislation and admin of social security; SocSec Monitor 11 issues + briefs: Reciprocity in benefit EU/CN? Readership / users tracked?</li> </ul>	INCR par.19-20  INCR par.20  sum2022 OP 2.3	EU INS
b.To what extent are the project activities complementary and/ or coordinated with those of other actors (including donors), and add value without duplication of effort?	<i>[Check also UN]</i>		EU, other donors(?) INS

<u>Evaluation questions</u>	<u>Additional questions: comments/ to further explore...</u>	<u>documents</u>	<u>stakeholder</u>
c.To what extent has the project leveraged new or repurposed existing financial resources to mitigate COVID-19 effects?			EU
a.To what extent is the project aligned with and supports national development plans and priorities of the ILO constituents?		-> DWCP	GOV EMP ENT
b.To what extent did the project assist in developing a gender-responsive social security system?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ‚gender responsive‘ vs ‚gender perspective‘ (only 3 mentions of ‚gender‘)</li> <li>● [Seek views by ACWF]</li> </ul>	INCR par.18/20	GOV EMP ENT SUB- GOV INS
c.To what extent has there been any increase or improvement in coverage of old age pension, unemployment insurance and employment injury insurance due to the activities of the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ask for coverage status data and trends</li> <li>● Particularly for rural migrant workers and women workers?</li> <li>● Unrealistic within such a short period; check also which improvements, if any, directly attributable to project</li> <li>● Construction of multi-tier pension systems discussion (examples); pension reform multi-tier/ Key options -&gt; 17 5yp: examples, evidence?</li> <li>● Hard-to reach people in pensions and EII (examples)</li> <li>● National social insurance digital transformation strategy and a data governance plan: Are there already examples of outputs used?</li> </ul>	sum2022 OP 1.3 22  sum2022 OP 2.1 ##:	GOV (EMP ENT) SUB- GOV INS
d.To what extent has the project helped strengthen China’s institutional capacity to improve its social protection, including in terms of adequacy and financial sustainability of pension schemes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Differentiate by SP areas</li> <li>● How to measure institutional capacity?</li> <li>● Contribution to total? Shares?</li> </ul>		GOV EMP ENT INS



Evaluation questions	Additional questions: comments/ to further explore...	documents	stakeholder
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● [Update: current role of rural tenure in determining benefits for rural migrants?]</li> <li>● Ask for capacities at different tier levels/ regional differences</li> <li>● Actuarial capacities in CN &lt;-&gt; increasingly CN journal articles: ask for numbers; probe for additionality; Actuarial TOT [province, national] How many active trainers? Knock-on effects from training?</li> <li>● Int. Conf. Future of SocSec for New Forms of Work: Any impact or follow-up from this?</li> </ul>	<p>sum2022 OP 1.2 20-21</p> <p>sum2022 OP 2.3</p>	
<p>e.After end of project, will the Government continue with the training and the increase in coverage for the old age pension, employment injury insurance and other measures?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Plans? Budgets? Targets? Measures?</li> <li>● Differentiate by measure</li> </ul>		<p>GOV INS</p>
<p>f.Did the project increase the cooperation between Government, Employers, and Workers? Did the project ensure regular consultation with Workers and Employers organisations, principles of social dialog, and tripartite consultation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CEC/ sustainability of SP in a changing WoW: Follow-up to bridge the identified gaps?</li> </ul>	<p>sum2022 OP 1.4 ##</p>	<p>GOV ENT EMP</p>
<p>g.Did the project make any contribution to (i) promotion of international labour standards and social dialog, (ii) inclusion of people with disabilities, (iii) just transition to environmental sustainability?</p>			<p>GOV ENT EMP SUB- GOV</p>

<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Additional questions: comments/ to further explore...</b>	<b>documents</b>	<b>stakeholder</b>
h.To what extent, if any, have project activities helped protect the vulnerable segments of the populations against the pandemic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ,Covid learning'. Do we need contact w/ UNICEF UNDP y/n ??</li> </ul>	sum2022 OP 1.4 20	GOV ENT EMP SUB-GOV
a.To what extent is the project aligned with and supports sub-national (e.g. province, city, townships) plans and priorities of the ILO constituents (Government, Employers, Workers)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Check for variations between provinces in insurance schemes</li> </ul>	INCR par.08	SUB-GOV
b.To what extent are the project activities complementary and coordinated with those of other actors at sub-national (e.g. province, city, townships) level and add value without duplication of effort?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Learning Lab on human centric socsec and administration (11 provinces, 20 certificates, &gt;100 participants): Any impact or follow-up from this?</li> </ul>	sum2022 OP 2.4 22	SUB-GOV
<b><i>To be answered mainly by analysis and document study:</i></b>			
- How effectively did the project monitor performance and results? What were the systems put in place to track progress and risks?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Why activity-based indicators/ targets? (do not measure the desired change)</li> </ul>	INCR 5.1	PROJ
- To what extent are the resources allocated strategically to provide the necessary support and to achieve the broader project objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ,Broader objectives' = ,overall objectives'? What about the risks themselves? (several H): probe (H = reason to redesign)</li> <li>● &lt;-&gt; visibility plan: encourage take-up unrealistic (leave to GOV, double check w/ ACFTU and CEC)</li> </ul>	INCR 7	PROJ
- To what extent did the project budget factor-in the cost of specific activities, outputs and outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Normally use of space provided by CN side required because lower cost to donor and demonstration of committment;</li> </ul>	PRODOC	PROJ

<u>Evaluation questions</u>	<u>Additional questions: comments/ to further explore...</u>	<u>documents</u>	<u>stakeholder</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Verify reasons offered for separate office at ILO-CO -&gt; probe also with MOHRSS</li> </ul>		
- Due considerations should be given to the necessary dimension of evaluating the extent to which the project delivered on the project's objectives, indicators and expected results, as set out in the logical framework.		LF  INCR 10.5	PROJ

INCR ... inception report, INS ... insurance, LF ... logframe, PROJ ... project, SUB-GOV ... sub-national government, sum2022 ... summary of progress until 2022.

A.04 Lesson learned**ILO Lesson Learned Template**

**Project Title: Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (USP China)**

**Project TC/SYMBOL: CHN/18/01/EUR**

**Name of Evaluator: Christoph David Weinmann**

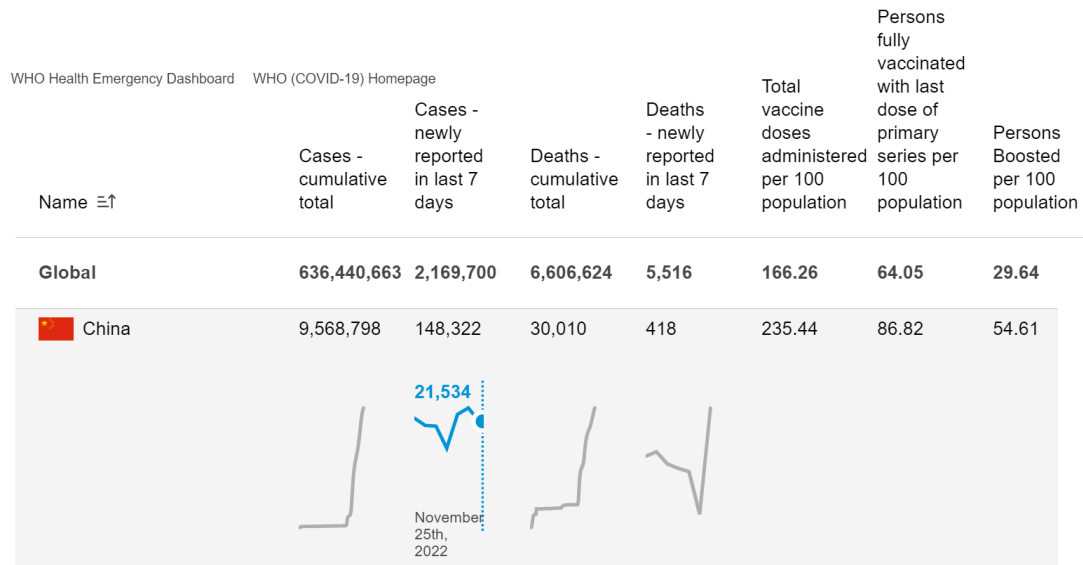
**Date: 12/2022**

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

LL Element	Text
<p><b>Brief description of lesson learned (link to specific action or task)</b></p>	<p>Project design and project management, including logframe design, selecting and gauging of indicators, risk management, etc. are skills that need to be acquired. Technical qualification for a specific area of intervention does not qualify for project design and management. Managers should not assume that they themselves, CTAs, or NPOs possess project management skills. Managers should also not assume that donor staff will find and correct any mistakes.</p> <p>A very successful project could formally not be rated as successful because indicator selection unnecessarily was erroneous, outcome was unnecessarily by definition unachievable, and logframe defective. There are effective limitations for evaluators to recognize success -- namely when they need to invent the appropriate indicators for the project at the time of the evaluation and then speculate about their values because the project would not have collected them based on erroneous planning.</p>
<p><b>Context and any related preconditions</b></p>	<p>Project staff (apparently) has never been trained in project planning techniques and project design and may therefore treat planning tools like mere application forms to fill in without understanding the purpose and the correct procedure.</p>
<p><b>Targeted users / Beneficiaries</b></p>	<p>PARDEV, country directors, project designers, project managers, project officers</p>

<b>Challenges /negative lessons - Causal factors</b>	The project theory of change was not submitted to a rigorous logframe analysis. This led to numerous gaps in project design (notably regarding outcomes and impact) which in combination with the selection of irrelevant indicators from a limited donor catalog under a specific facility effectively disallowed formally according the project positive marks because its success could not be measured using the indicators selected. Also, risk register and logframe were not aligned which could lead to monitoring the wrong risks.
<b>Success / Positive Issues - Causal factors</b>	n.a.
<b>ILO Administrative Issues (staff, resources, design, implementation)</b>	It is imperative to ensure that project managers and ILO staff involved in the technical preparation of project documents are sufficiently trained (including regular refresher trainings) in project design, logical framework analysis (including indicator formulation and gauging), project planning, and risk management and the linkages between them because these skills are indispensable for drawing up project designs that work. It is also good practice to develop these project designs jointly with the stakeholder institutions to achieve sustainable results.

**A.05 WHO Covid-19 Dashboard Data Table 2022-11-25 1624 hrs. CET**



While generally, China has been successful in containing Covid-19, lockdowns are still required and are not easily phased out due to the lower emergency room capacities of the country compared with high-income countries and the sheer number of casualties that this could lead to. For an explanation of the dynamic zero-Covid approach implemented see sources in the reference section.

Recent Covid-19 spikes are displayed in the graph above and easily can run out of control. Therefore, this evaluation will essentially need to refrain from face-to-face meetings and travel.

A.06 Timeline

T.10 Timeline of final evaluation.	
Inception	2022-11-14 [via internet / document review]
Submission of Inception Report (final version)	2022-12-15
Information collection („field work“)	2022-11-28 - 2022-12-02 2022-12-12 - 2022-12-16 [via internet]
Presentation of findings from the field	2022-12-20 [web-conference]
Submission of draft report	2023-01-08
Receipt of feedback	2023-02-27
Submission of final draft report	2023-03-26
Observations: Delays incurred due to overlap with other assignments after receipt of feedback.	

## A.07 Additional information on methodology

### Understanding how evaluations work

Evaluations are snapshot exercises. They assess a project at a specific point in time and during a restricted time frame. They are based on the information that can be obtained during the time slot accorded and the resources made available. They are not research exercises that are meant to achieve scientific proof or even completeness for any or all of the questions commissioning parties may like to see discussed in the report.<sup>34</sup>

Sometimes, evaluators are required to „guesstimate“ missing information, use „rules of thumb“, and draw on their broader experience with project implementation, their technical expertise of the subject matter, as well of knowledge of good practices in order to find answers for pertinent questions. Therefore, evaluations are much more informed by important aspects or facets of project implementation *as they are emerging during the evaluation process*, and that bear relevance and are important for meeting the key evaluation criteria, than anything else.

### Understanding of the purpose

Evaluation is a standard procedure for ILO projects, the main functions being

- to inform stakeholders (ILO constituents, partners in implementation, donors) about the quality of progress of a project
- to ensure that a collective learning exercise takes place
  - both from successes and from failures
  - from different perspectives
- to identify opportunities for improvement (continuous improvement processes - as in quality management)
- to identify needs/ demand for follow-up

### Key challenges

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<sup>34</sup> The general elements of the method(s) used and the limitations are sketched in following section 2 of the report (q.v.).



The amount of preparatory and background research that can be undertaken within the framework of such an evaluation is always limited by the period of notice between signature of contract and the planned deployment of the experts, the coordination with other assignments, the budget for the evaluation, the time available in the field and the availability of interlocutors at these times.

The key challenge for any evaluation therefore is to ensure that information collection during the time granted to the evaluators while in the field is sufficiently reliable to enable the evaluators to reach valid conclusions about the project's implementation which in turn provide the basis upon which recommendations for the future may be developed. The underlying assumption in drawing up the methodology for the evaluation processes is that information is freely shared with the evaluation team and that no significant information is being withheld.

ILO evaluations neither are inspections nor are they investigations, but they rely on the cooperation of the implementing teams with the evaluators and the joint interest of all stakeholders to achieve the project objectives agreed between them. Presented information is not audited, though selected probing was made, as, for example, in relation to gender disaggregation in a specific study.

### Sources of information

The evaluator drew on collected information (sometimes referred to as „data“).<sup>35</sup> The overwhelming part of this collected information consists of project documentation or information organized by the project's simple yet entirely adequate reporting system. Time accorded did not allow for more expansive data exploration (beyond project documentation), but that also was not required to understand the workings of the project.

Other sources than the available documentation were also used to collect information. In the China USP project, these other sources, notably the interviews and discussions, were of particular importance because information reported by the USP project reporting system is strongly based on input (though labeled „output“) monitoring (based on the standard EU's Partnership Instrument evaluation rosters, though also frequently encountered in other projects implemented by the ILO) -- which is the least important element when it comes to learning about project achievements and guiding project implementation.

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<sup>35</sup> Other than stipulated in ILO 2020, evaluation teams, like the projects they evaluate, usually do not collect data, but information. Data is a given without any meaning attached whereas information is data with a meaning attached. This is an established and important distinction made in all information systems, of which monitoring and evaluation systems are a subset.

The evaluator furthermore made use of the opportunity of the „2nd Seminar on Research on Digital Transformation“ organized by the project being held during the period of the evaluation in order to acquaint himself, as an observer, with the format, conduct, quality of content, level of discussion and the interaction of the different stakeholders.

### **Covid-19 pandemic**

Due to the uncertainties related to the need to contain outbreaks in China,<sup>36</sup> the conditions in the field could not be fully predicted from the outset. In order to ensure safety and health of all concerned, a „digital first“ approach was used during this evaluation, supplemented by an option of face-to-face meetings and site visits only if the situation so permits. Such face-to-face meetings would only occur in Beijing because traveling to other locations was still fraught with too many uncertainties and created the risk of trapping evaluators in unpredictable lockdowns. Lockdowns of specific areas did also occur in Beijing, and therefore movement was considered to be an exception where the potential pros and cons must be carefully weighed.

During the course of the evaluation, as of 07 December 2022, previous restrictions were lifted,<sup>37</sup> this came to late to make any adjustments to implementing the evaluation schedule. Because infections made themselves noticed even during the interviews (with one interlocutor needing to rearrange workspace setup in the beginning of the meeting because of a covid infection of a second person in the same place) and the general assumption prevailing that lifting of restrictions would lead to a spike of infections, it also would not have been prudent to switch to face-to-face meetings. Therefore, the interaction occurred exclusively online.

### **Online communication and confidentiality**

Fully aware of the downsides of digital meetings compared to face-to-face meetings, it was originally foreseen to minimize the potential loss of accuracy, validity, and effectiveness associated with them by using specific procedures during digital meetings to establish a maximum of trust with the interlocutors. Such procedures usually include a reminder by the evaluators that such meetings cannot be perfectly shielded from interception. During the course of the first meetings it immediately

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Annex 6.

<sup>37</sup> Based on the Notice on further optimization of the implementation of preventive and control measures for the new corona disease epidemic of 2022-12-07 issued by the Integrated Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism of the National Health Commission.

emerged that interlocutors, however, were so used to this format of communication that any such technically valid and explicit reminder would have been counterproductive to establishing the flow of discussion, and therefore discarded.

The general feeling is that interlocutors spoke freely and that the information given in the interviews was not restricted. The lists of questions provided also gave most of them sufficient foreknowledge on what kind of questions the discussions could be interested in discussing.<sup>38</sup>

Requests made by the ILO during the reporting process (no doubt with positive intent, for learning purposes only) to report what different stakeholders said could not be attended to as a matter of good evaluation practice, including those specified by UNEG.<sup>39</sup>

### **Caveat cards**

The evaluator reserved the right to get in touch with stakeholders and key informants that have not been mentioned in the terms of reference and/ or not yet identified at the inception stage if it will serve the purpose of this final evaluation. Similarly, where there are conflicts of time, the team of evaluators reserved the right to prioritize meetings in line with the needs of achieving the purpose of this final evaluation. However, these cards had not to be called because it was not easy to mobilize interlocutors during the busy period at year-end and the cancellation of specific interviews for reasons of health.

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<sup>38</sup> Annex 2 presents the briefs and questions that have been prepared for non-ILO stakeholders and translated to Chinese by the project so stakeholders could prepare for the meetings.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Inter alia UNEG 2020: 10ff.

A.08 List of persons met

Name		Organization	Function	Type of meeting
JIA Jie	M	MOHRSS	Director, Division of International Organizations, ICD	videoconference (Zoom™)
ZHANG Wentao (张文涛)	F	CEC	Director, Employers' Department	videoconference (腾讯会议™)
REN Xiuli (任秀丽)	F	MOHRSS	Director, Division of Technical Cooperation, ICD	videoconference (Zoom™)
WANG Jianyu (王建宇)	F	MOHRSS	Deputy Director, Division of Technical Cooperation, ICD	videoconference (Zoom™)
QIN Jingyi (秦靖沂)	F	MOHRSS	Deputy Director, Social Security System Management Division, IC	videoconference (Zoom™)
Martin ORTH	M	EC	EC, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL)	videoconference (Zoom™)
FEI Ping (费平)	F	CALSS	Researcher	videoconference (MS Teams™)
Margaux VERHAEGHE	F	EC	EU Delegation to China (until 09/2021)	videoconference (Zoom™)
FENG Limin (冯利民)	F	SIA	Director of International Cooperation Division	videoconference (Zoom™)
YU Cong (于丛)	F	SIA	Director, Actuarial Division	videoconference (Zoom™)
HU Shuang (胡爽)	F	SIA	Deputy Director, Actuarial Division	videoconference (Zoom™)
Nuno Meira SIMÕES DA CUNHA	M	ILO ROAP	Senior Social Protection Specialist	videoconference (Zoom™)
LEE Changhee	M	ILO Beijing	Country Director ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia	videoconference (Zoom™)
Simon BRIMBLECOMBE	M	ILO ROAP	Chief Technical Advisor Regional Actuarial Services, Senior Actuary	videoconference (Zoom™)
Adrian BAZAVAN	M	EC	EU Delegation to China (as of 10/2021),	videoconference (Zoom™)
Morten MEYERHOFF	M	UNU-EGOV	Advisor, Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance of United Nations University	videoconference (Zoom™)
LIU Dening (___)	M	Municipality of Nanning	Director, Nanning Municipal Bureau of Human Resource and Social Security	videoconference (Zoom™)
ZHOU Jie (周洁)	F	ILO Beijing	National Project Coordinator	videoconference (Zoom™)
Luis FROTA	M	ILO Beijing	Chief Technical Advisor/ Project Manager	videoconference (Zoom™)
Pranav PRASHAD	M	ILO Geneva	Evaluation Manager	videoconference (MS Teams™)

## A.09 References

[Surnames in CAPITALS]

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- and numerous project documents ---

**A.10 TOR****Terms of Reference**

International consultant for the final independent evaluation of  
EU-China Project “Improving China’s institutional capacity towards  
universal social protection”

**1. Key facts**

Title of project being evaluated	Improving China’s institutional capacity towards universal social protection
Project DC Code	CHN/18/01/EUR
Type of evaluation	Independent
Timing of evaluation	Final
Donor	European Union
Administrative Unit in the ILO responsible for administrating the project	Administrative management: CO-Beijing
Technical Unit(s) in the ILO responsible for backstopping the project	Technical backstopping: DWT/CO-Bangkok SOCPRO
P&B outcome (s) (2018)	Outcome 3 – Creating and extending social protection floors (China DWCP 2016-2022): Outcome 2.1- Govt and social partners have taken measures to end poverty in all its forms by realizing universal and adequate social protection)
SDG(s) under evaluation (Overarching SDG in brackets)	SDG Targets 1.3 (No poverty), 3.8 (Good health and wellbeing), 5.4 (Gender Equality), 8.5 (Decent work and Economic Growth), 10.4 (Reduced inequalities)
Budget	Euro 2,300,000 ((US\$ 2,558,290 approx.)

**2. Introduction and Rationale for the Final Independent Evaluation**

This Terms of Reference (TORs) concerns the final independent evaluation of the project “Improving China’s institutional capacity towards universal social protection”. The project is funded by the EU.

The propose of this final independent evaluation is to promote accountability and project learning. The overall objective of the final evaluation is to assess the effectiveness (achievements vis-à-vis the intended objectives/outcomes and the outputs), effectiveness of management arrangement, relevance, validity of design, coherence, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and ILO cross-cutting themes and COVID 19 response. Furthermore, it will identify what worked, what did not work at output, outcome and objective levels, what is sustainable, what is the legacy of the project and what are the recommendations for the future project.



The final evaluation will be carried out between November and December 2022. It will be conducted in compliance with the UNEG Evaluation's Norms and Standards and with the principle for project evaluation set forth in the ILO Policy Guidelines for Evaluation: Principles, Rationale, Planning and Managing for Evaluations, 4th edition (Aug 2020).

The final evaluation will be managed by an independent evaluation manager and will be conducted by an evaluation team composed of an international evaluator and a national evaluator. Key stakeholders will be consulted throughout the evaluation process.

The evaluation will also need to address all relevant cross-cutting drivers for ILO's work which includes gender equality and non-discrimination, disability inclusion, promotion of international labour standards, tripartism, social dialogue, as well as the just transition to environmentally sustainable economies.

### **3. Background information**

The European Union China 2020 strategic agenda for cooperation governs EU relations with China. In particular Section VIII (social progress) of chapter III sustainable development envisages reinforcing dialogue on social policies promoting Social Security and cohesion, full and quality employment, occupational health and safety and decent work so as to address a number of challenges such as youth employment, demographic ageing, as well as migration flows and cross-country mobility. Further, the joint communication on elements of a new EU strategy on China calls for the EU to actively support and encourage economic, environmental, and social reforms in China towards a more open, sustainable and inclusive growth model.

China and the EU have long term cooperation in the area of social protection. An earlier project- the EU China Social Security project (EUCSS) aimed at supporting China's transition to a sustainable social security system, which guarantees accessible adequate and affordable social security benefits to all Chinese citizens. Another project, the EU Co funded EU China Social Protection Reform Project (SPRP) responded to China's need to address the problems of its social insurance system, namely the gap between rural and urban areas, ageing population, weaknesses in the social protection system, and workers without employment contracts.

Building up on the achievements of these earlier projects, the current project- Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection, which is implemented between 1 July 2019 and 31 December 2022 (including a no cost extension between July and December 2022), aims to contribute to the improvement of adequacy and sustainability of old age benefits in China and the expansion of the coverage of Social Security to workers in non-standard forms of employment, with special attention to migrant workers and women.

The overall aim of this project is to support China to strengthen its social protection system during the period of the 13th and beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> 5-year plans.

The 13th 5-year plan aims at better livelihood and social benefits and full coverage of social protection systems for all citizens. Promoting social cohesion and income security for all by facilitating access to jobs, quality social services and portable and adequate Social Security will be critical in reducing inequality, helping households manage employment, health and age-related risks and increasing labour mobility. Another major task facing the social protection system in China is to adapt to the rapidly growing urban residents and ageing population. The priorities as outlined in the 13th 5 year plan for human resources and Social Security development are as follows

- Expand social protection coverage
- Improve the design of Social Security system

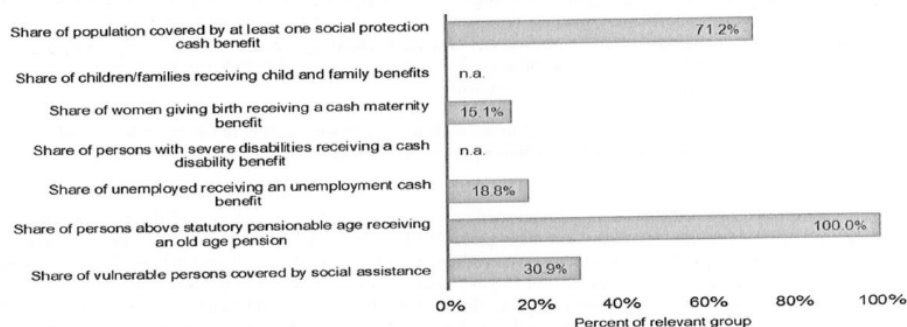


- Provide appropriate level protection (adequacy of benefits)
- Improve financial sustainability of the funds

Social protection is considered an important enhancer of economic transformation as China is going through a process of economic transition by increasing the relevance of domestic consumption.

The social security system can be described as legally unified but administratively fragmented.

Figure 1: Beneficiaries of social protection cash benefits by groups of population (SDG 1.3.1), 2015<sup>2</sup>



Sources: ILO (2017c), based on the ILO World Social Protection Database, including the ILO Social Security Inquiry.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS ) has specific key areas for which the ILO’s technical assistance and EU support was required:

1. Coverage expansion: To extend the coverage to non-covered populations, the MOHRSS implemented a universal social insurance participation plan by focusing on closing the gaps for the population groups. Nevertheless, China faced a number of obstacles
  - Practical obstacles preventing men and women working in traditional and diverse forms of employment from joining social insurance schemes
  - Portability of social protection benefits between different regions. Some rural migrant workers still risked losing their accrued social benefits during the process of internal migration
  - Women were in a less favourable situation to uptake social insurance benefits. Only 15% of women giving birth received a periodic cash maternity benefit in 2015 and they tended to have fewer opportunities to accumulate pension benefits since the statutory retirement age is lower than men.
2. Adequacy and sustainability- The government wants to improve long term planning of the pensions schemes through integrating actuarial analysis into the policy making process. Technical support was needed to improve the actuarial capacity of the MOHRSS which could help policy makers understand and utilize the results of actuarial analysis.

[Link to ILO P&B, DWCP and CPO](#)

The project contributes to ILO Programme & Budget for 2028-2019’s Strategic Policy outcome 3 on “Creating and extending social protection floors”, including to informal and vulnerable workers, as part of a comprehensive social security system.

It also contributes directly to the implementation of the ILO’s China Decent Work Country Programme 2016-2020, in which constituents recognised social protection as a priority to achieve decent work and the Sustainable Development Goals.

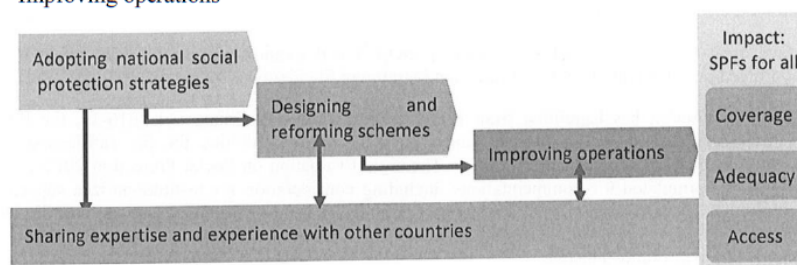
Such priority is reflected in ILO’s country programme outcomes:

<b>Outcome 2.1</b> Government and social partners have taken measures to end poverty in all its forms by realizing universal and adequate social protection	
<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Targets</b>
Indicator 2.1.1 Number of policies adopted by the government to improve the coverage, benefits level and sustainability of social insurance programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the technical assistance of the ILO, preparatory activities for ratification of C102 completed.</li> <li>• 2-4 policies adopted after tripartite consultations and with ILO assistance in line with the principles of C.102.</li> </ul>
Indicator 2.1.2 Number of measures taken by the government and social partners to improve social protection for women, rural migrant workers and those in non-standard employment.	2-4 measures taken by the government and social partners to improve social protection for women, rural migrant workers and those in non-standard employment implemented.
Indicator 2.1.3 Number of incidents of knowledge shared in the context of national dialogue and South-South cooperation enhanced.	Once a year

The project further contributes to the ILO’s Flagship Programme on building Social Protection Floors (SPF) for all that provides a coherent framework for ILO’s support on the SPF in target countries. Social Protection is recognised as the key to the achievement of the SDG targets 1.3, 3.8, 5.4, 8.5 and 10.4.

The establishment of SPFs can broadly be done through three steps

- Adopting national social protection strategies
- Designing and reforming schemes
- Improving operations



The project focuses on the first two steps to assist in developing the Social Protection Floors

Objectives of the Project, Outcomes and Delivery modalities

Overall objective is to strengthen China’s institutional capacity to improve its social protection in terms of extended coverage and adequacy and financial sustainability of pension schemes, in support of the realisation of international standards and the EU 2020 strategy.

It provides technical assistance to the Government of China for the following specific objectives:

Specific Objective 1- Contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old age benefits

1. Outcome 1: the government makes informed decisions to ratify Convention 102 and pursues reforms to promote more equitable and adequate old age benefits for rural population in line with international labour standards.

The outcome will be achieved through the following

- 1.1 Policy recommendations on ratification and application of Convention 102 and on improving adequacy and financial sustainability of the Chinese pension schemes formulated in consultation with government and social partners
- 1.2 actuarial capacity of the MOHRSS and its provision branches strengthened
- 1.3 National experts and policymakers have improved their knowledge on relevance of Convention 102 and long-term planning of pension schemes including multi pillar options

1.4 Advocacy on social protection floor and international labour standards

Specific Objective 2- Contribute to the extension of the coverage of social security to workers in nonstandard forms of employment, with special attention to migrant workers and women

2. Outcome 2: the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security adopts at least one initiative (like policy document programme measure or action at national level) to expand Social Security coverage, especially for the migrant and our women in traditional and non-standard forms of employment.

The outcome will be achieved through the following:

- 2.1 Options for the revision of the design of Social Security schemes and the improvement of operational and administrative procedures in support of universal coverage are identified and validated by the government and social partners
- 3.2 Assessment of China's Social Security coverage and measures to close coverage gaps and improve portability of benefits are formulated in partnership with the government and social partners for submission to policymakers
- 3.3 government and social partners are exposed to international good practises and challenges related to the extension of social protection coverage, especially to workers in non-standard forms of employment, rural migrant workers and women
- 3.4 Promotional material on Social Security for workers in non-standard forms of employment, rural migrant workers and women are made available to stakeholders

The following modalities are used to assist with delivery of the outcomes

1. Technical assistance to MOHRSS technical departments
2. National technical dialogues
3. training workshops
4. international high-level policy dialogues and international seminars
5. development of policy technical notes
6. research combining international good practices particularly from the EU member states, with national specific research elements
7. study visits to increase the knowledge of EU member states' experience

Key inputs for research and the development of training activities come from the experiences of European Union member states. For the Chinese elements of the research, the Chinese Academy of labour and Social Security is the main partner of the project.

Beneficiaries / Stakeholders

Direct recipients: Policy makers, managers, technical staff, and representatives of the employers' and workers' organisations, academics and other relevant organisations who are involved in the design, policy, dialogue and implementation of the social security in China.

Primary direct beneficiaries and implementation partners:

Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, particularly the Department of International Cooperation; Department of Policy research; Department of Old Age Insurance; Department of Rural Social Insurance; Social Insurance Administration Centre, the Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security.

Other stakeholders and institutional beneficiaries:

National Healthcare Security Administration

Workers and employers' organisations

Other ministries such as the National Development and reforms Commission (NDRC), the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoC)



Ultimate Beneficiaries:

Women and men with irregular social protection coverage, especially workers in new forms of employment, migrant workers and women. They benefit from improved social protection measures.

Residents of other countries who benefit from the knowledge developed through the project to improve the social and financial sustainability of their social security systems.

Expected Results and use

The high-level long-term results are

- (i) Improved coverage, adequacy, and financial sustainability of the social protection system (ii) Promotion of regulatory convergence towards international standards

The project provides Technical Support to the MOHRSS to promote the effective application of relevant international labour standards in China's pursuit of universal Social Security coverage. The 13th 5-year plan on human resources and Social Security development set national target indicators of coverage expansion as follows old age pension coverage reaches 90% unemployment insurance covers 150 million people employment injury insurance covers 220 million people

These national targets are the impact indicators of the reforms resulting from the project.

Cross cutting issues

The project is implemented in line with the ILO's policy objectives to realise equality of opportunity and treatment for all

The data looks at collection of information on the situation of women and other socially and economically disadvantaged groups so as to enable gender and vulnerability analysis and evidenced based policy recommendations. Special attention will be given to the situation of women and to the potential impact of measures in the promotion of more gender responsive Social Security systems. Efforts are made to ensure visibility of women and disadvantaged social groups in publications and other products produced by the project equal participation of men and women is encouraged in meetings and study visits. The project also looks at cooperation among governments employers and workers to ensure conditions for inclusive growth and decent work and adheres to the principles of social dialogue and tripartite consultation.

Management responsibility

The ILO country office for China and Mongolia has the overall responsibility for the project including ensuring effective collaboration with the ILO Decent Work Team for Southeast and East Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok (DWT- Bangkok), the ILO Social Protection branch in Geneva SOCPRO and the Bureau of workers and employers' activities ACTRAV and ACTEMP in the implementation of the project. The Senior Social Protection Technical Specialist in DWT Bangkok provides technical backstopping and supervision. Technical inputs and support are provided by relevant units of Social Protection Department SOCPRO in Geneva. In addition, the project closely coordinates the activities with the Workers' activities and Employers' activity specialists of the ILO DWT in Bangkok, particularly in activities related with capacity building of social partners.

The project team is based in the ILO's country office for China and Mongolia. An international expert on Social Security is the Project Manager who is responsible for the project management, the coordination of the technical assistance activities, and the provision of highly qualified Technical Support to the Chinese counterparts as well as the research. The project manager is supported by the National Project Coordinator and a project assistant who are responsible for coordination with national partners project management and administrative and financial services. Actuarial services provided with support of the Regional Actuarial Services Unit.

#### 4. Purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

The purpose and objectives of the evaluation is three-fold:

- Accountability: The evaluation will help in understanding how the project has helped China's DWCP to
  1. contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old age benefits
  2. extend of the coverage of social security to workers in diverse forms of employment, with special attention to migrant workers and women
- Improvement areas for technical advice to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security
- Organisational learning- better understanding of the social security environment in China and mechanisms to support it

The evaluation will be used, both, for project accountability and project learning.

Among other points the evaluation identifies what worked, what did not work at output, outcome and impact levels, what is sustainable, what is the legacy of the project and what are the recommendations for the future

The geographical scope of the project is limited to China. The evaluation will cover the project implementation from 01 July 2019 to 31 December 2022.

Further, the evaluation will integrate ILO's cross-cutting issues, including norms and social dialogue, gender equality, disability inclusion, other non-discrimination concerns, and medium and long-term effects of capacity development initiatives throughout the evaluation methodology and all deliverables, including the final report.

The evaluation will give specific attention to how the intervention is relevant to the ILO's programme and policy frameworks at the national and global levels, UNDAF/UNSDCF and national sustainable development strategy (or its equivalent) or other relevant national development frameworks, including any relevant sectoral policies and programme.

The primary users of the evaluation are global and national stakeholders, the programme and other ILO staff, and the donors. The target groups are the tripartite constituents and other stakeholders at global and in country levels.

#### 5. Evaluation criteria and questions (including Cross-cutting issues/ issues of special interest to the ILO)

This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria (e.g., relevance, validity of design, coherence, effectiveness, effectiveness of management arrangement, efficiency, impact and sustainability) and the ILO cross cutting themes.

Gender concerns should be addressed in line with EVAL guidance note no. 3.1, and EVAL Guidance Note no. 4.5 should be taken into consideration to ensure stakeholder participation. The evaluation will also address disability inclusion as a cross-cutting concern throughout its deliverables and processes, including in the final report. Furthermore, it should pay attention to ILO cross-cutting policy issues related to tripartism, social dialogue and international labour standards, as well as the just transition to environmentally sustainable economies.

The evaluation Criteria and questions are included below. The independent evaluator will start from these proposed set of questions and develop a more detailed analytical structure of questions and sub-questions as part of inception phase. **Due considerations should be given to the necessary dimension of evaluating the extent to which the project delivered on the project's objectives, indicators and expected**

results, as set out in the logical framework. If applicable, evaluations findings and lessons learned from the previous phase of the project should also be considered when finalising the analytical framework. The evaluator may adapt the evaluation criteria and questions, but any fundamental changes should be agreed between the evaluation manager and the evaluator and reflected in the inception report.

Relevance-

- To what extent has the project aligned with, and supported national development plans and priorities of the ILO constituents?
- Has the project contributed to ILO's Strategic Policy Outcome 3 on "creating and extending social protection floors", including to informal and vulnerable workers, as part of comprehensive social security systems?
- To what extent is the project relevant to the UNSDFs, DWCPs of the project countries, and other national frameworks and to relevant Programme and Budget Outcomes of the ILO?
- How are the project objectives and implementation impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and to what extent has the project adapted its activities to the changing priorities
- To what extent have the project activities helped protect the vulnerable segments of the populations against the pandemic?

Coherence -

- To what extent are the project design (objectives, outcomes, outputs and activities) and its underlining theory of change logical and align with the requirements for delivery of the objectives of the project the expectations of the ILO and the Donor?
- To what extent to which other interventions (particularly policies) support or undermine the project?
- To what extent do the project activities develop synergies and interlinkages with other ILO interventions?
- To what extent are the project activities complementary and coordinate with those of other actors in the area and add value without duplication of effort?

Validity of the design-

- How did the Project objectives and interventions consider relevant SDG targets of no poverty, good health and wellbeing, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities and the related indicators?
- To what extent has the project encouraged equal participation of men and women in the project activities?

Effectiveness-

- To what extent have the project outcomes and outputs been achieved?  
Are the activities having the desired result? To what extent has there been an increase in coverage of old age pension, unemployment insurance and employment injury insurance increased due to the activities of the project?
- To what extent has the project helped strengthen China's institutional capacity to improve its social protection including in terms of adequacy and financial sustainability of pension schemes?
- How has the project assisted ILO's policy objectives to realise equality of opportunity and treatment for all and engage with world of works actors in its activities

Effectiveness of management arrangement-

- To what extent has the project ensured regular consultations with workers and employment organisations, principles of social dialogue and tripartite consultation?
- How effectively did the project monitor performance and results? What were the systems put in place to track progress and risks?
- What were the main internal and external factors that influenced the achievement or nonachievement of results?

Efficiency-

- To what extent are the resources allocated strategically to provide the necessary support and to achieve the broader project objectives?
- To what extent did the project budget factor-in the cost of specific activities, outputs and outcomes
- To what extent has cooperation among project partners been efficient? What is the value addition of the cooperation/ collaboration of the project? Was there a mechanism to facilitate coherence and synergy by the partners? How effective was it?
- To what extent has the project leveraged new or repurposed existing financial resources to mitigate COVID-19 effects in a balanced manner?

Sustainability –

- To what extent would the Ministry be likely to continue with the training and the increase in coverage for the old age pension, employment injury insurance and other measures to reach the desired coverage levels?
- To what extent are the findings obtained sustainable or can they be sustained? What are the conditions for this?

Impact-

- To what extent has the coverage of old age pension and employment injury insurance increased due to the activities of the project?
- To what extent has the project increased the cooperation amongst governments employers and workers which is central to creating conditions of inclusive growth and decent work
- To what extent has the project assisted in development of a gender responsive Social Security system?
- To what extent have the project activities made a difference to specific SDGs that are linked to the project? What is the different made to the five SDGs?

Cross cutting issues and COVID 19 responses

- To what extent has the project contributed to advance in areas of emerging concerns regarding, (i) promotion of international labour standards and social dialogue (ii) gender equality and non-discrimination, notably inclusion of people with disabilities? (iii) just transition to environmental sustainability?
- To what extent did the project address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and contributed to the ILO policy response?

## 6. Methodology

The evaluation will comply with evaluation norms and standards and follow ethical safeguards, all as specified in ILO's evaluation procedures. The ILO adheres to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) evaluation norms and standards as well as to the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards. The evaluation is an independent evaluation, and the final methodology and evaluation



questions will be determined by the consultant in consultation with the Evaluation Manager. These will be described in the inception report. The inception report will also include the work plan.

The methodology should include examining the intervention's Theory of Change - the evaluator is requested to reconstruct one if it is not in place. Particular attention needs to be paid to the identification of assumptions, risk and mitigation strategies, and the logical connect between levels of results and their alignment with ILO's strategic objectives and outcomes at the global and national levels, as well as with the relevant SDGs and related targets.

The evaluation will apply a mix method approach with analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, including triangulation to increase the validity and rigor of the evaluation findings, engaging with tripartite constituents, stakeholders and partners of the project, as much as feasible, at all levels during the data collection and reporting phases. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies need to be used. While quantitative methods can help understand the impact of the activities, qualitative methods will help understand how the activities were undertaken. These should help capture the projects contribution to the achievement of expected and unexpected outcomes. The data and information should be collected, presented, and analysed with appropriate gender disaggregation even if project design did not take gender into account. To the extent possible, the data collection, analysis and presentation should be responsive to and include issues relating to ILO's normative work, social dialogue, diversity and non-discrimination, including disability issues.

The evaluation methodology will include:

- Desk review: desk review of all relevant documents: project document and its logical framework, funding agreement, relevant minute sheets, implementation plan, performance evaluation plan, progress reports, other relevant documents, and studies. Along with the logical framework, it should include examining the project's Theory of change, as applicable, with particular attention to the assumptions, risks and mitigation strategies. The logical connection between the levels of results and their alignment with the ILO's strategic objectives and outcomes at global and national levels as well as with the relevant SDGs will also be highlighted.

The mid-term evaluation and its results will be included in the review and the inception report will include how these will be included in the final evaluation.

- Meetings with the project staff: the evaluators will meet the project staff to reach a common understanding for the evaluation process in the ILO country office in Beijing. These will include the project manager, the national project coordinator and the project assistant.
- Meetings with backstopping units and the donor: the evaluator will meet with the technical backstopping in the DWT Bangkok and ILO Social Protection team in HQ Geneva (SOCPRO), and other relevant departments through remote calls. These meetings aim to reach a common understanding in relation of the technical and financial status of the project. The evaluator will meet with the EU Delegation to China and EC in Brussels.
- Collection of data, and interview with stakeholders: the evaluators will meet virtually, in addition to the project staff, with the key partners of the project. Whenever needed and possible, focus group discussions with national beneficiaries and stakeholders will be organized.

The data and information will be collected, presented, and analysed with appropriate gender disaggregation. The data collection analysis and presentation will be responsive to and



include issues relating to the ILO's normative work social dialogue diversity and non-discrimination including disability issues.

- Debriefing phase: at the end of the fieldwork the evaluator will organize a debriefing meeting for the key national partners and relevant stakeholders, ILO and the donor to present and discuss the preliminary findings and the lessons learned. The meeting will be in Mandarin Chinese and English with interpretation, if possible, and virtual participation is to be enabled.
- Submission of the draft of the report: the evaluator will submit the first draft of the report to the evaluation manager, who will circulate it to the project manager, country team backstopping units, the donor, the key national partners, and relevant stakeholders for comment.
- Collection of feedback on the draft report: the evaluation manager will collect the feedback on the first draft, consolidate and submit it to the evaluator.
- Submission of the final report: the evaluator will incorporate the feedback as appropriate and send the final report to the evaluation manager.
- Quality of the report: the evaluation manager and ILO Evaluation Office will ensure the quality of the report.
- Dissemination: the evaluation report will be submitted to the key stakeholders by the CO and uploaded in the EVAL public repository of evaluation reports (e-discovery)

The evaluation team should develop the final evaluation methodology in consultation with the evaluation manager. The methods should be selected for their rigor and their ability to produce empirical evidence to meet the evaluation criteria, answer the evaluation questions and meet the objectives of the evaluation. The methodology will clearly state the limitations of the chosen evaluation methods including those related to representation of specific group of stakeholders.

During the data collection process, the evaluation team will compare and cross-validate data from different sources (project staff, project partners and beneficiaries) to verify their accuracy, and different methodologies (review documentary, field visits and interviews) that will complement each other.

The evaluation team will ensure that women's views and perceptions are also reflected in databases, interviews, and that gender-specific questions are included in the questionnaires.

The evaluator may adapt the methodology, but any changes should be agreed between the evaluation manager and the evaluator and reflected in the inception report.

An indicative list of persons to be interviewed will be prepared by the project in consultation with the Evaluation Manager. The project will provide logistical support in the organization of these interviews.

These include

Primary direct beneficiaries and implementation partners:

Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS), particularly the department of international cooperation; department of old age insurance; department of rural social insurance;

the social insurance administration centre; informatization department; the Chinese Academy of labour and Social Security.

Other stakeholders and institutional beneficiaries:

National healthcare Security Administration

Workers and employers' organisations

Other interested ministries such as national development and reform Commission the Ministry of Finance

Ultimate beneficiaries

Women and men with irregular social protection coverage especially workers in new forms of employment migrant workers and women who will benefit from improved social protection measures during and beyond the project duration

## 7. Main deliverables

The evaluation team leader will be responsible for:

- The design, planning and implementation of the evaluation and the write-up of the evaluation report, using an approach agreed with ILO, and for delivering in accordance with the ILO's specifications and timeline.
- Consulting and liaising, as required, with ILO and any partners to ensure satisfactory delivery of all deliverables.
- Leading the interviews with project stakeholders
- Taking part in briefings and discussions, on dates to be agreed, in line with the work outlined in these ToRs

The following will be delivered by the evaluation team:

a) **Inception report** with methodology and work plan (incl. methodological note) (refer to Checklist 4.8 "Writing the Inception Report"<sup>1</sup>) upon the review of available documents and an initial discussion with the project management and the donor will be developed. The inception report will:

- Describe the conceptual framework that will be used to undertake the evaluation.
- Elaborate the methodology proposed in the TOR with changes as required.
- Set out in some detail the data required to answer the evaluation questions, data sources by specific evaluation questions, (emphasizing triangulation as much as possible) data collection methods, and purposive sampling
- Selection criteria for individuals for interviews (Including both women and men).
- Detail the work plan for the evaluation, indicating the phases in the evaluation, their key deliverables and milestones.
- Set out the list of key stakeholders to be interviewed and the tools to be used for interviews and discussions.
- Set out the agenda for the stakeholder's workshop/ meeting.
- Set out outline for the final evaluation report.
- Interview guides and other data collection tools

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed\\_mas/--eval/documents/publication/wcms\\_746817.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_mas/--eval/documents/publication/wcms_746817.pdf)

- b) **Preliminary findings to be shared in a Stakeholder's workshop** with the key stakeholders after data collection is completed. This is a virtual workshop. The evaluator will set the agenda for the meeting. The workshop will be technically organized by the evaluation team with the logistic support of the project team.
- c) **A first draft of the evaluation report** that will have to be written in English, answers the questions related to the evaluation criteria, including the recommendations, lessons learned, good practices, technical recommendations for the key stakeholders. It will follow the structure presented below. The report will be sent to the evaluation manager (refer to [wcms\\_746808.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#) for guidance on the structure and content. This draft should include
- Cover page with key project and evaluation data (using EVAL's template)
  - Executive Summary
  - Acronyms and abbreviations
  - Background on the project and its logic
  - Purpose, scope and clients of evaluation
  - Methodology and limitations
  - Findings (this section's content should be organized around evaluation criterion and questions), including a table showing output and outcome level results through indicators and targets planned and achieved and comments on each one.
  - Conclusions
  - Recommendations (i.e. for the different key stakeholders and project partners), indicating per each one priority, timeframe and level of resources required. Suggested: maximum 8 recommendations in total).
  - Lessons learned and good practices Template for lessons learned is [wcms\\_746820.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#) and for good practices [wcms\\_746821.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#). The guidance template can be found at [wcms\\_746730.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#)
  - Annexes:
    - TOR
    - Evaluation matrix (questions and indicators)
    - List of persons consulted
    - Schedule of work (briefings, data collection, interviews, field visits, workshop/s)
    - Documents consulted
    - Evaluation matrix
    - Data collection tools
    - Logical framework analysis matrix
    - Lessons learned
    - Emerging good practices
- d) **The final evaluation report**, which must be written in English, be about 35 pages maximum (excluding annexes and executive summary), follow the structure presented in preliminary report and include a cover page. Appendices should include the questions matrix, the interview and focus groups guides, field work schedule, a list of interviewees, and a list of documents analysed, a PowerPoint summary in English. Kindly peruse [wcms\\_746808.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#)
- e) **A summary of the final evaluation report** (ILO/EVAL template) will be sent, together with the final report, in English and in Chinese to the evaluation manager based on the executive summary of the evaluation report. Please see [wcms\\_746811.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#)

## 8. Management arrangements

Evaluation Manager: The evaluation will be managed by Mr. Pranav Prashad ([prashad@ilo.org](mailto:prashad@ilo.org)), ILO officer in process of certification by EVAL as evaluation manager, who has no prior involvement in the project, and oversight by Pamornrat Pringsulaka, Regional Evaluation Officer, RO Asia and the Pacific.

The evaluation manager is responsible for completing the following specific tasks:

- Draft and finalize the evaluation TOR with inputs from key stakeholders.
- Develop the Call for expression of interest / select from roster and select the independent evaluator in coordination with EVAL.
- Brief the evaluator(s) on ILO evaluation policies and procedures.
- Initial coordination with the project team on the development of the data collection process and the preliminary results workshop.
- Circulate the first draft of the evaluation report to the key stakeholders requesting written comments within specified timelines.
- Consolidate the received written comments received into a master evaluation report to send the evaluation team.
- Liaise with the project staff whenever their engagement is needed to fulfil the above requirements; and
- Ensure the final version of the evaluation report addresses the stakeholders' comments (or an explanation why any has not been addressed) and meets ILO requirements.

The project team- project manager and national project manager and others- will have the following responsibilities:

- Provide all necessary information, documents and contact lists available.
- Facilitate the scheduling of meetings with key stakeholders when necessary.
- Attend evaluation meetings and provide clarifications and feedback as required.

## 9. Responsibilities of the evaluation team

The evaluation will be conducted by an evaluation team of 2 consultants, an international team leader and a national consultant. The evaluation team leader will be responsible for the report.

The Lead Evaluation Consultant has the responsibility to undertake the evaluation and deliver all the required deliverables as per this TOR. The international evaluator will be conducting evaluation online, supported by a national consultant.

The selection of the national consultant went through a public bidding process with a call for expression of interest published online, including on the ILO webpage [https://www.ilo.org/beijing/information-resources/WCMS\\_859029/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/beijing/information-resources/WCMS_859029/lang--en/index.htm). After assessment of applications by ILO EVAL, two consultants were selected to jointly carry out the evaluation:

**Mr. Christoph David WEINMANN**, Lead Evaluation Consultant

**Ms. YANG Ting**, National Consultant

The table below describes desired competencies and responsibilities for the evaluation team leader and the national consultant.



Lead Evaluation Consultant	National Consultant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Designing, planning and conducting the evaluation and the evaluation report, in accordance with the ILO's guidelines, specifications and timeline</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identifying lessons learned and good practices which will be annexed to the report</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conduct evaluation and deliver all deliverables under this TOR</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Desk review of project documents and other related documents</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Develop evaluation instrument and draft inception report</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Organize and schedule all necessary stakeholder consultations, in coordination / consultation with ILO and partners</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participate in briefings and discussions in line with the work outlined in the TOR</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate stakeholders' workshop/ debriefing with the project and key stakeholders</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Draft evaluation report</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Finalize evaluation report</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Draft stand-alone evaluation summary as per standard ILO format</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Supervising the national consultant (to be contracted separately by the ILO) and ensure quality assurance for the deliverables</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Desk review of project documents and other related documents</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assist the team leader in developing evaluation instrument and drafting inception report</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Take part in the interviews with key stakeholders and note taking during interviews</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assist the team leader in facilitating stakeholders' workshop/ debriefing with the project and key stakeholders</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Contribute to the drafting of the evaluation report prepared by the team leader</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Might be requested to write certain sections in the draft report as requested by the team leader</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide verbal interpretation for the team leader during the evaluation data collection as required</li> </ul>

## 10. Proposed work plan

The evaluation is expected to be carried out during the period of November 2022 to February 2023 (about ten weeks). The number of workdays needed for the completion of the work is estimated to be 28 for the lead international consultant and 16 for the national consultant.

Task	Responsible	Number of working days TL (consultant)	Number of working days NC (national consultant)	Tentative dates
TOR advertisement	Evaluation Manager	-	-	10-23 Oct 2022
Selection of consultant				25 Oct 2022
Contract signature	CO-Beijing			14 Nov 2022

1	Briefing of evaluation consultant with the evaluation manager, and project manager	Evaluation Manager, Project Manager, Consultant	1	1	18 Nov 2022
2	Desk review and documents review, preparation of inception report	Consultant	6		30 Nov 2022
3	Comments on inception report, approval and finalisation	Evaluation Manager Consultant	2		4 Dec 2022
4	Data collection phase (fieldwork as per agreed itinerary, interviews)	Consultant	8	8	17 Dec 2022
5	Post-fieldwork debrief call and stakeholder meeting	Consultant Evaluation Manager	1 (includes preparation time)	1	20 Dec 2022
6	Preparation for workshop and preliminary findings at Stakeholders workshop				
7	Report writing (full draft with annexes) submitted to the evaluation manager for review;	Consultant	8	4	5 Jan 2023
8	Circulating the draft report for comments from stakeholders	Evaluation Manager			6 Jan 2023
9	Consolidate feedback from stakeholders and send feedback to the consultant.	Evaluation Manager			20 Jan 2023
10	Consultant prepares Final Evaluation Report and separate Evaluation Summary and submits to ILO	Consultant	2	2	26 Jan 2023
11	Evaluation manager approves the evaluation report at its level and submit to the Regional SMEO	Evaluation manager			31 Jan 2023
12	EVAL provides final approval	Evaluation Manager			7 Feb 2023
	TOTAL		28	16	

## 11. Legal and ethical matters

The [ILO Code of Conduct](#) for independent evaluators applies to all evaluation team members. The principles behind the Code of Conduct are fully consistent with the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service to which all UN staff is bound. UN staff is also subject to any UNEG member specific staff rules and procedures for the procurement of services.

The selected consultant evaluators and team members shall sign and return a copy of the code of conduct with their contract.

The evaluation will comply with the UN norms and Standards.

The consultant(s) should not have any links to project management, or any other conflict of interest that would interfere with the independence of the evaluation.

All data and information received from the ILO for the purpose of this assignment will be treated confidentially and are only to be used in connection with the execution of these Terms of Reference. All intellectual property rights arising from the execution of these Terms of Reference are assigned to the ILO. Use of the data for publication and other presentation can only be made with the agreement of ILO. Key stakeholders can make appropriate use of the evaluation report in line with the original purpose and with appropriate acknowledgement.