

Final Evaluation Report

Evaluation of the “Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023” in Montenegro

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All opinions and statements expressed in this report, and any mistakes, remain the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Montenegro and/or UNICEF Montenegro.

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Acronyms

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
IO	International Organization
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSSD	National Strategy for Sustainable Development
OECD/DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Co-operation Directorate
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children' Fund

Executive Summary

The “Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023 in Montenegro” (hereinafter referred to as “the Strategy”) was adopted by the Government of Montenegro in 2019, under the coordination of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and with technical assistance provided by UNICEF Montenegro. Building upon the work previously undertaken in the framework of sectoral strategies related to the realization of the rights of children in Montenegro, in terms of thematic scope the Strategy addressed the whole range of fundamental rights that individuals aged 0 to 18 are entitled to. The Strategy is a “comprehensive and inter-departmental document that deals with the improvement of conditions for exercising the rights of the child in all areas covered by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols.” (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 7.) In terms of geographical coverage, the Strategy is a national-level document, aimed to fulfil its goals on the entire territory of Montenegro. The total budget estimated for the implementation of the Strategy was of 4.000.000 Euros for the entire five-year period.

An Evaluation was commissioned to Lattanzio KIBS and was undertaken by two independent Evaluators – an international expert and a national expert - between November 2023 and August 2024. The Evaluation aimed at providing the Government of Montenegro, in particular the Council for the Rights of the Child, the other national counterparts, as well as UNICEF Montenegro, with an independent assessment of the results achieved through the Strategy.

In line with the Evaluation ToR, the Evaluation strived to attain the following objectives:

- To assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child, by paying particular attention to the differential results across vulnerable groups, and in terms of promoting gender equality;
- To identify factors that contributed to or hindered successful implementation of action plans, including factors such as: stakeholders’ engagement, resource allocation, leadership, management, data collection, monitoring mechanisms, public engagement, as well as relevant external factors (for example: the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this affected implementation);
- To assess the extent to which the Strategy implementation and monitoring have been inclusive of children and young people, their families and communities – especially those belonging to marginalized groups – as well as of other relevant stakeholders;
- To provide recommendations for future planning, that will inform the evidence-based development of the next five years high-level, cross-sectoral strategic policy document in the area of child rights.

(UNICEF, 2023a: 3.)

The intended **primary users** of the Evaluation were: the Government of Montenegro, in particular the Prime Minister’s Cabinet, the Council of the Rights of the Child, line ministries, all the other government and local-level institutions, and UNICEF Montenegro. The secondary audience of the Evaluation included: other national and local stakeholders (public institutions, Ombudsperson’s Institution, Parliament, judiciary, NGOs, CSOs, international agencies) involved in the implementation of the Strategy or otherwise dealing with children’s rights in Montenegro, children and young people, their families and communities, and the media.

The **geographical scope** of the Evaluation was Montenegro. While the Evaluation desk review and the interviews with national-level stakeholders focused on the whole national territory, the local-level data collection took place in a sample of three selected municipalities. The Evaluation methodology envisaged a non-experimental evaluation approach and a mixed-method design, combining qualitative analysis with some quantitative analysis elements. It comprised desk-research, semi-structured interviews involving key national and local stakeholders and a survey with a selected sample of children and young people living across the country. The Evaluation main findings, conclusions and recommendations have been analyzed and consolidated in the present Evaluation report, after being discussed with the Evaluation Reference Group members.

The OECD/DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability) have guided the Evaluation, and have been applied in order to review the extent to, and the approaches through which the Government of Montenegro and its main counterparts attained the Strategy’s objectives, achieved the expected results, and implemented the activities envisaged within the timeline. In compliance with the Evaluation terms of reference, and the UNEG guidelines and standards on Evaluation, the cross-

cutting themes of human rights, equity and gender equality have been applied jointly with the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria.

The **main limitation** of the Evaluation exercise concerned the dearth of monitoring data directly related to the implementation of the Strategy. In the absence of data collected by the different institutions in charge of the Strategy implementation, the main source of information to assess progress and outcomes in attaining the Strategy's objectives have been interviews with stakeholders and the survey with children and young people. Such circumstance has constrained the overall Strategy's evaluability to some extent - particularly in relation to assessing its effectiveness and efficiency.

Among the main findings, the Evaluation uncovered that the Strategy appears to have been **to a large extent relevant to the priority needs** and gaps in fulfilling children's rights in Montenegro. Its design appears to be based on a thorough child rights situation analysis. Regarding the process of designing the Strategy, the Evaluation found that this was **well-thought through, and in principle very participatory**. Noticeably, about 100 children were involved, from diverse backgrounds and age-groups, including children belonging to marginalized groups in Montenegro. A few limitations in the design process were identified, pointing to potential improvements in order to achieve fuller representation to the Strategy identification and design phase of civil society, local authorities, frontline professionals (teachers, psychologists, social workers etc.) as well as children's families and communities. The Evaluation also found that the **technical assistance provided by UNICEF Montenegro has been key** to the success of the Strategy design.

The Strategy's **overall logic appears sufficiently clear and well-structured**. However, some limitations were identified therein. First, strategic goals and operational objectives do not explicitly indicate expected changes in the lives of children, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the intervention. Second, the Strategy did not seem to be grounded in an either explicit, nor implicit, comprehensive Theory of Change. This is not presented in any Strategy-related document, and the Evaluation Team could not identify a shared vision among stakeholders about the articulated pathways through which changes were expected to happen.

In terms of internal coherence, the Strategy appears to be **very relevant to the Montenegrin Government's policies and priorities** – particularly those stemming from the Montenegrin National Strategy for Sustainable Development, and the European Union accession process -, and to have continued to be so throughout the entire implementation phase. In its design, the Strategy appeared to be overall consistent with a human rights-based approach. However, some dimensions could be further augmented in future. In particular, **child participation seems to have been largely confined to the design** stage of the Strategy; and in terms of gender equity, the Strategy does not appear to have sufficiently taken into account the different needs, situations and rights-violations of girls and boys in Montenegro.

The Evaluation framed the analysis related to external coherence primarily in terms of the Strategy's potential and success in providing a framework for effective coordination and synergies among stakeholders working on children's rights in the country. Regrettably, **inter-sectoral cooperation appears to have been among the weakest aspects of the Strategy**, and one of the main factors that hindered its implementation.

Several achievements that could be attributed to the Strategy were identified during the field phase of the Evaluation. These relate mostly to the following areas: the **alternative care system** for children deprived of parental care; **inclusive education measures** which have targeted children with disabilities; access to education for children belonging to discriminated-against groups, namely the Roma and Egyptian minorities; and **progress in addressing some specific forms of violence** against children (such as that perpetrated by peers). However, it appeared that the key issue regarding effectiveness has been the **limited implementation of the Strategy in practice**. The dearth of monitoring data, and the prevailing opinion among interviewed stakeholders, both corroborate this finding and conclusion.

Several factors hindering the Strategy implementation in practice were identified by the Evaluation. These revolve, primarily, around limited or sporadic inter- and intra-sectoral coordination, both at the national level, and between the national and the local level. **Lack of effective leadership** emerged as an additional key factor hindering the Strategy's implementation which, combined with **frequent political changes and loss of institutional memory**, made it very hard for institutions and individuals in charge to carry on the implementation of this intervention. Factors which, conversely, supported or could have supported the

Strategy's implementation include its timeliness, and a widely-shared belief, among most stakeholders, that an overarching child rights strategy is needed in Montenegro.

The Strategy design phase apparently did not entail the creation of an impact monitoring system. Baseline data were generated as part of the situation analysis and set of performance indicators to measure changes as a result of the Strategy were designed. However, **impact monitoring was apparently not subsequently operationalized**. Thus, it proved difficult to assess outcomes and impact in a systematic manner as part of the Evaluation exercise. Moreover, at the time in which the Evaluation took place, the intervention implementation period had just ended, fact which in itself constrained the possibility to identify the lasting changes produced by the Strategy in the personal and professional spheres of the intended beneficiaries.

In general, **stakeholders' perception of impact** of the Strategy mostly overlapped with achievements in implementation. The key areas in which it appears that this intervention might have contributed to long-term results include, in particular: **de-institutionalization**, which is likely to have brought about better care for children deprived of parental care; **access to education**, which allegedly resulted in higher chances of developing own potential, in particular for children belonging to the Roma and Egyptian minorities; and **inclusive education opportunities**, which seems to have benefited children with disabilities in the country by enhancing their access to quality formal education.

The most relevant finding in terms of efficiency was that the **Strategy did not rely upon sufficient financial resources**, earmarked for the specific interventions to be implemented. In terms of sustainability, the element which appears to be the most promising one, and potentially conducive to maintaining the level of achievements attained by the Strategy, and to realize further advancement in future, is the eagerness or at least **readiness to engage in the design of a new strategy** for realizing children's rights in Montenegro, expressed by virtually all stakeholders interviewed as part of the data collection.

The Evaluation concluded that the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023 in Montenegro was **to a large extent relevant to the priority needs and gaps in fulfilling children's rights** in the country. Its design was based on a thorough situation analysis, encompassing a systematic review of relevant legal and policy documents, available statistical data, as well as other relevant documents concerning the situation of children and young people in Montenegro. One of the key aspects of the Strategy's adherence to child rights priority issues appears to be its alignment with – and foundation in – recommendations issues by UN Treaty-based and charter-based human rights monitoring bodies. However, it appears that the Strategy was never formally revised during its life-cycle, and that stakeholders in charge did not prepare to do that at some point in time either.

The process of designing the Strategy appears to be **well-thought through and in principle very participatory**. Noticeably, about 100 children were involved, from diverse background and age-groups, including children belonging to marginalized groups in Montenegro. However, a few limitations were identified therein, pointing to **potential improvements** in terms of effective representation of civil society, local authorities, frontline professionals, as well as children's families and communities, to the Strategy design process. The technical assistance provided by UNICEF appears to have been quantitatively and qualitatively key to the success of the Strategy design.

The Strategy overall logic appears **sufficiently clear and well-structured**. However, strategic goals and operational objectives did not explicitly indicate **expected changes in the lives of children** who are the ultimate intended beneficiaries of the intervention. The Strategy's underlying Theory of Change was not presented explicitly as such in the Strategy-related document, nor could its important missing elements (especially: assumptions and intermediate outcomes) be reconstructed by the Evaluation Team during the data collection. It appears that there was no shared vision among stakeholders about the articulated pathways through which changes were expected to happen in relation to each thematic area and issue addressed by the Strategy. It appears, indeed, that the Strategy was really wanted by the majority of key stakeholders in the area of children's rights in Montenegro, but it was referred to as a guiding, operational tool, by few.

It appears that, common to several other strategic documents adopted in Montenegro, the key issue regarding effectiveness has been the **limited or very limited implementation of the Strategy in practice**. The dearth of monitoring data, and the prevailing opinion among interviewed stakeholders, both corroborate this conclusion. Regarding the reasons for what appears to be a major gap in practice, some factors were outlined

by the Evaluation. These concern, primarily, **limited or sporadic inter- and intra-sectoral coordination**, both at the national level, and between the national and the local level.

Lack of effective leadership emerged as an additional key factor hindering the Strategy's implementation which, combined with frequent political changes and loss of institutional memory, made it very hard for institutions and individuals in charge to carry on the implementation of this intervention.

Having **one whole strategy** dealing with children's rights in Montenegro appears to be a **sensitive approach** for the country to uphold to international, regional and national child rights standards in a comprehensive fashion. This view was strongly supported by the majority of the stakeholders involved in the Evaluation. At the same time, the feasibility of such a Strategy **needs to rely upon certain preconditions**, primarily: **effective intra- and inter-sectoral coordination at Governmental level; strong leadership**; and the **generation of monitoring data that can be transferred across institutions**, and handed over to new individuals in charge of implementing the different activities foreseen by the Strategy, and to monitor over its results. Whilst these issues cannot be resolved entirely by adopting one single strategy, there are some measures that can ameliorate the conditions under which a new strategy will be designed, as proposed below.

Due to a number of limitations highlighted in this Report, it proved difficult to assess the Strategy's efficiency in practice. However, probably the most relevant finding in this area is that, in **the absence of sufficient financial resources, earmarked for the specific intervention** to be implemented (in this case, the Strategy), there is no guarantee that the needed funds will be actually allocated to the activities planned.

The Evaluation issues the following **key recommendations**:

R.1. – high priority: It is recommended that the Government of Montenegro, and in particular its line ministries and the Council for the Rights of the Child, with the support of UNICEF, continue with the good practice of effectively consulting with children and young people in the process of designing policy documents (directly or indirectly) dealing with children's rights. It is recommended that the above-stakeholders ensure that the views and perspectives of all key actors dealing with children's rights in Montenegro are effectively taken into account in designing child rights strategies, including those of civil society, local authorities, children's parents and communities, as well as frontline professionals working with children (teachers; child psychologists; social workers; etc.) It is recommended to transparently set up structured mechanisms to ensure that the feedback from these key child rights actors is embedded in the design process.

R.2. – medium priority: In order to further increase ownership of a child rights-strategic document, it is recommended to the Council for the Rights of the Child, supported by UNICEF, to engage all relevant stakeholders in a structured process to develop a fully-fledged and solid ToC underlying the future strategy, encouraging all stakeholders to articulate change theories in a cooperative fashion. This process would, among other benefits, enhance the level of accuracy achieved when monitoring progress and impact reached by the Strategy, and evaluating its results, in future. Moreover, both goals and objectives should be formulated placing children at their core, to highlight the ultimate intended impact on them. Finally, a strategy should be considered a living document, which can and should be revised in light of changing circumstances and priorities affecting children's rights in the country. The envisioning of a formal mid-term review process could help in this regard.

R.3. – high priority: For an overarching child rights strategy to bring added value, it is recommended to the Council for the Rights of the Child, line ministries, and UNICEF Montenegro, that greater efforts be made in operationalizing the policy statements contained in the document, through regularly designing and updating detailed and comprehensive annual action plans.

R.4. – medium priority; It is recommended to all stakeholders participating in the identification and design phase that this exercise addresses, as a matter of priority, gender-specific needs, as well as forms of discrimination and violence based on gender, to which children and young people are subjected in Montenegro. It is also recommended that the above-stakeholders develop child-centered indicators, aimed to assess the quantitative as well as qualitative results obtained in the lives of children, and that they envisage means of verifications of the performance indicators that envision the active participation and contribution of children themselves. This way, child participation will be embedded across all phases of the future strategy from its start – and not limited to the design process.

R.5. – high priority: It is recommended to the Government of Montenegro, in particular to the Council of the Rights of the Child, line ministries and other institutions in charge of drafting a new Strategy on the rights of the child, to set up a solid and steady co-ordination mechanism among all institutions in charge of implementing the measures thereby envisaged. Such mechanism should clearly outline roles and responsibilities, and should be rolled out to the level of each ministry/institution, through the devising and adoption of terms of reference, detailing each institutions' responsibilities in relation to the above-mentioned strategy. It is recommended to line ministries and other institutions in charge of implementing a child rights strategy to dedicate adequate and qualified human resources to the implementation process, and that these individuals have the responsibilities and tasks stemming from such strategy clearly envisaged by their respective job descriptions.

R.6. – medium priority: It is recommended to UNICEF Montenegro to provide technical assistance to the Government of Montenegro in designing a new child rights strategy and, in addition to the support offered during the design of the Strategy that is the subject of this Evaluation, to help the various institutions in charge to design and implement a comprehensive progress and impact monitoring system, in order to measure results achieved against the objectives. This is regarded as a crucial step in improving management and enhancing accountability of the new strategy.

R.7. – high priority: It is recommended to the Council for the Rights of the Child to step up to the role of leadership and coordination of the child rights strategy that this institution was not in the position to fully exert until recently. There was a strong, shared hope, among many stakeholders, that with the reform of this institutional body occurred recently, future work on children's rights in the country will be much more effective. These expectations should be fulfilled by a proactive, focused and steady lead played by the above-said Council.

R.8. – high priority: It is therefore recommended to the Government of Montenegro, in particular the Ministry of Finance, to ensure that the process to earmark dedicated funds to the implementation and monitoring of a new child rights strategy is timely enacted. It is recommended that each ministry and institution come up with an accurate sufficiently detailed estimation of expenditures needed to that purpose for their institution.

1. Background

1.1 Introduction

Under the guidance and coordination of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of Montenegro, UNICEF Montenegro supported the preparation of the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023, published in May 2019. (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 9.)

As envisaged in the Strategy, the Government of Montenegro, namely the Council on the Rights of the Child, assisted by UNICEF Montenegro, undertook to carry out the country-led **Independent External Evaluation of the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019–2023**, during the last year of the Strategy implementation.

The final Evaluation has been commissioned to Lattanzio KIBS, a consultancy company providing high-quality monitoring and evaluation services in different sectors and countries worldwide. The Evaluation aimed at providing Montenegro, primarily the Government of Montenegro but also other relevant national and local stakeholders and UNICEF Montenegro – described further in this Report (sections 1.2. and 1.3.) - with an independent assessment of the results achieved through the Strategy.

The Evaluation was carried out by the team of experts from Lattanzio KIBS as follows: two independent consultants - an international expert and a local expert. The two above-experts have been supervised and supported by Lattanzio KIBS Monitoring & Evaluation Head of Business Unit and Junior Consultant. All these individuals are collectively referred to as the “Evaluation Team”. The Evaluation was carried out between November 2023 and June 2024.

The Evaluation Team’s main counterpart at UNICEF Montenegro has been the Child Rights Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist. During the inception phase, the Government of Montenegro has set up a Reference Group for the Evaluation, composed by the key stakeholders in the process, including primarily representatives of the Government, national human rights institutions, NGOs and CSOs, and other key stakeholders.

1.2 Profile of the Strategy evaluated

The Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023 was designed by a Working Group set up at the Council for the Rights of the Child – an inter-sector coordination body, at that time operating under the authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The Council is due to monitor the fulfillment of the State’s commitments arising from the UN CRC and other international legal instruments concerning the rights of children in Montenegro. (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 11.)

The Strategy is meant to build upon – and to be in continuity with - the work previously undertaken in the framework of sectoral strategies related to the realization of the rights of children in Montenegro. These include, primarily:

- the Strategy for the Development of the Social and Child Protection System 2018-2022;
- the Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence 2017-2021;
- the Montenegro Inclusive Education Strategy 2019-2025;
- the Strategy for the Social Inclusions of Roma and Egyptians 2016-2020;
- the Strategy for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities from Discrimination and the Promotion of Equality 2017-2021; and
- the Judicial Reform Strategy 2014-2018.

(Government of Montenegro, 2019: 8. References to the above documents are provided therein.)

The Strategy is a “comprehensive and inter-departmental document that deals with the improvement of conditions for exercising the rights of the child in all areas covered by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols.” (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 7.) In terms of thematic scope, therefore, the Strategy addresses the whole range of fundamental rights that individuals aged 0 to 18 are entitled to. Thus, the intended rights-holders in relation to this intervention appear to be all children, adolescents and young people in Montenegro. Indirect beneficiaries of the intervention appear to be their parents/caregivers and communities. In particular, the Strategy shows a strong focus on the non-discrimination principle, by

aiming to close existing equity gaps for specific groups of children, and for the whole child and youth population in Montenegro.

The Strategy allegedly attains – primarily, but not exclusively - the relevant priority themes of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development ('NSSD') by 2030 – which relies on sustainable development goals as defined by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 25, 2015. Links between SDGs and relevant targets and indicators for the Strategy have been further highlighted in the Evaluation Report (section 5.2.1.).

In terms of geographical coverage, the Strategy is a national document (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 8), which is expected to achieve its goals on the entire territory of Montenegro.

The implementation of the Strategy is the responsibility of all “line ministries and other institutions” who were represented at the Strategy Working Group. These are in charge of the following thematic sectors:

- Labour and Social Welfare;
- Education;
- Culture;
- Health;
- Justice;
- Internal Affairs,
- Defense;
- Human and Minority Rights;
- Trafficking in Human Beings;
- Finance;
- Sport;
- Culture;
- Youth;
- Public Administration.

And include:

- National Statistical Office (MONSTAT);
 - Overarching bodies such as the Council for the Rights of the Child.
- (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 72.)

The duty-bearers of the Strategy design, implementation and monitoring appear to be primarily the Government of Montenegro, line ministries and other national institutions having legal obligations to uphold and fulfil children’s rights in Montenegro. In particular, the Council for the Rights of the Child appears to be a key duty-bearer in relation to the implementation and monitoring of the Strategy.

Some of the responsibilities of the state and national institutions are delegated to others (local authorities, NGOs and CSOs, as well private companies) who are also duty-bearers. The international community as well has obligations to support the state and other institutions in meeting their responsibilities to fulfil children’s rights in Montenegro. Parents and other child carers can be regarded as secondary duty-bearers, in that they also hold specific responsibilities towards children.

The Strategy’s main goals were:

- “Enhance inter-departmental and inter-sector cooperation and other key conditions for exercising the rights of the child” (Strategic goal I);
- “Improve access and quality of social and health protection and education for all children” (Strategic goal II);
- “Prevent all forms of violence against children and improve the implementation of special child protection measures” (Strategic goal III).

(Government of Montenegro, 2019: 62-71.)

The total budget estimated for the implementation of the Strategy was of 4.000.000 Euros for the entire five-year period. According to the Strategy document, the financial resources for its implementation were to be provided “from the budget (around 70%) and from donations (around 30%)”. (Government of Montenegro,

2019: 72.) Additional information concerning budget allocation, and on how resources were to be mobilized during the implementation phase were not provided in the Strategy-related documents. During the data collection, the Evaluation Team did not find more detailed information regarding the budget, nor did they find evidence of the (expected and actual) specific contributions of the different institutions in charge of implementing the Strategy, or of other actors (e.g. UNICEF.)

1.3 Overview of the context

Montenegro is an upper-middle-income country in the Western Balkans with a population of 622,028: 307,634 (49%) men and 314,394 (51%) women. Children and adolescents aged 0-17 are 135,533 (21.8% of the total population).¹ Out of the total children and adolescents aged 0-17, approximately 51.9% are boys and 48.1% are girls (around 70,340 boys and 65,190 girls). The country faces demographic challenges such as an aging population and a relatively low fertility rate - for example, in 2021, there was a historic minimum of livebirths in the country (7,033) while deaths exceeded births by almost 2,100.² With the Human Development Index value of 0.832, Montenegro ranks 49th out of 189 countries. The 2023 Gender Equality Index stood at 59.3, below the EU average of 68.6.³

Montenegro, as a signatory to various international conventions and treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has made significant strides in recognizing and prioritizing the rights of children.⁴ Since regaining independence in mid-2006, Montenegro has been on a dynamic journey, actively pursuing international integration and steadily committing to upholding fundamental human rights. Another important moment in the political path of the country was becoming the 192nd member of the United Nations in the same year, symbolizing the nation's dedication to global cooperation and shared values. Subsequently, Montenegro hardened its international standing by joining the Council of Europe in 2007 and NATO in 2017.

In 2010, Montenegro became an accession country to the European Union, marking a crucial juncture in its commitment to aligning with European standards and values. Montenegro accepted the revised enlargement methodology focusing on fundamental reforms, stronger political steer, increased dynamism and predictability of the process. UNICEF places a strong focus on ensuring that Montenegro's children play a central role in the EU accession process, emphasizing that this is vital, as the children of Montenegro today will become the European Union citizens of tomorrow.

During the same period, Montenegro initiated a comprehensive reform of its social and child protection system, education, health, justice and others, as part of the pre-accession process to the EU. This reform aimed at adopting European standards in the area of fundamental human rights and aligning national laws with contemporary trends and developments in child protection.

In the realm of children's rights, Montenegro has demonstrated a solid dedication by succeeding in and ratifying thirteen international conventions, covering a broad spectrum of issues related to children. The UN CRC stands out as a cornerstone document guiding Montenegro in safeguarding the well-being of its children. Being a UN member, Montenegro fulfils reporting obligations, submitting detailed reports on conventions implementation to relevant UN committees.

A commendable progress has been made in its legal and strategic frameworks, laying the base for reforms aligned with the CRC and the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights. Notably, in 2013, Montenegro ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Communication Procedure,

¹ National Statistical Office MONSTAT 2019. Data provided by UNICEF Montenegro.

² National Statistical Office MONSTAT 2019. Data provided by UNICEF Montenegro.

³ Data provided by UNICEF Montenegro.

⁴ The situation in Montenegro involves two different laws that define the ages for children and young people:

- In relation to legal framework and definitions, as per Montenegro's **Law on Social and Child Protection**⁴, **a child is defined as an individual up to the age of 18, while young people are considered up to the age of 26.**
- In alignment with the **Law on Youth** ("Official Gazette of Montenegro," No. 025/19 dated 30.04.2019, 027/19 dated 17.05.2019), which governs the establishment and execution of youth policy, as well as the measures and activities aimed at enhancing the social standing of young individuals and facilitating the fulfillment of their needs across various areas of interest, according to Article 2, **young people are defined as individuals ranging from the age of 15 to the age of 30.** While having different age definitions provides flexibility, it also brings challenges in being consistent, and create confusions among some implementers.

reinforcing its commitment to ensuring children's rights are respected and protected. As Montenegro advances on its path towards EU accession, it recognizes the importance of enhancing alignment and has prioritized the goal of aligning with the EU Child Rights Strategy. This will in the future involve further integrating child rights into the country political agenda, policies, actions, and investments with a comprehensive, and rights-based approach.

At the national level, Montenegro established its first strategic framework for children in 2004, setting in motion a trajectory of continuous improvement. The National Plan of Action for Children ('NPA') for the period 2004-2010 has played a focal role in outlining specific goals and actions to promote and protect children's rights. The Government, recognizing the importance of coordination, established the Council for the Rights of the Child, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity by involving representatives from civil society organizations and, notably, children themselves.

Responding to evolving needs and perspectives, the Council for the Rights of the Child underwent a significant transformation, first in November 2018. This involved increasing the representation of children, including adolescents, in the working group responsible for preparing the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child. This transformation underscores Montenegro's dedication to ensuring that the voices of its youngest citizens actively shape the strategies that directly impact their lives. Despite the clear mandate of the Council for the Rights of the Child and elevating it to the Prime Minister/Deputy Prime Minister level, inter-sectoral coordination among child rights monitoring mechanisms is allegedly still limited. Latest EU Report on Montenegro states that Montenegro must step up its efforts to monitor the implementation of the national strategy on exercise of child rights (2019-2023), evaluate its impact.⁵

While considerable progress has been made in fulfilling children's rights in Montenegro, challenges still persist.

During the phase of implementation of the Strategy, the proper functioning of institutions was affected by political volatility and government instability, with the collapse of two fractious governments after no-confidence votes in 2022 and a new government elected only in October 2023, thus stalling at times decision-making processes and long-term reform implementation. According to the EU Progress Report on Montenegro, the country's commitment to European integration remains a key priority, but progress on EU accession reforms has stalled due to deep political polarization and instability. A caretaker government ruled, and Parliament lacked a consistent majority. The non-functional Constitutional Court led to uncertainties and legal issues, particularly in electoral processes. Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in April and June 2023, respectively, with the new parliament and government formed in late October 2023. Local elections took place in 14 municipalities. Parliament's legislative role was limited by a boycott, resulting in most laws being passed by a simple majority without opposition participation. Parliament often changed systemic laws via administrative procedures, sometimes against recommendations from the European Commission and the Venice Commission. Important legislation, like the Law on Government and the Law on Parliament, was not adopted. Communication between Parliament, the executive, and independent institutions was not fluid, with the government sometimes not providing opinions on MPs' legislative initiatives.

All these challenges have affected the implementation of national policies and the protection of child rights in general. According to interviewees and the EU report on Montenegro, ongoing staff changes within public administration have resulted in a loss of expertise and hindered reform progress, as well as implementation of national policies. The restructuring and managerial adjustments implemented in 2022 within ministries have affected the ministry's ability to enforce legal frameworks, draft legislation, and implement and monitor policies and strategies effectively. Montenegro still lacks a comprehensive monitoring and data collection system to evaluate the implementation of human rights legislation, policies, and strategies.⁶ These developments have significant implications for the protection and promotion of child rights in Montenegro.

During the last quarter of 2023, UNICEF's high-level and public advocacy contributed to securing the commitment and budget allocation for the universal child allowance in Montenegro. UNICEF provided technical

⁵ UNCT submission for the fourth Universal Periodic Review of Montenegro.

⁶ Montenegro 2023 Report

Accompanying the document: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement policy

https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/e09b27af-427a-440b-a47a-ed5254aec169_en?filename=SWD_2023_694%20Montenegro%20report.pdf

support to the Government of Montenegro in the reform of the strategic and legislative framework for the social and child protection (SCP), education sector, early childhood development, etc. The ongoing reform of the strategic and legislative framework is aligned with Montenegro EU accession priorities and EC Montenegro 2023 Report recommendations. The new Government included the reform of social and child protection system and development of sustainable social and child protection services in its Economic Reform Program (ERP) for 2024 – 2026. Montenegro is to implement the European Child Guarantee (CG), with a focus on Roma and Egyptian children, children with disabilities and children in precarious situations.

Still, challenges remain over the effective implementation of the CRC, primarily due to a weak accountability framework, lack of systematic monitoring of existing laws and strategies, insufficient administrative capacities, and adequate public funding to ensure enforcement of children's rights. Child poverty is a significant concern, with 28.4 percent of children and adolescents aged 0-18 are at risk of poverty (2022). 37.6% of households with 3 or more children and 47.9% of the population in single-parent households with at least one child are at risk of poverty (2022). 96% of children in Roma and Egyptian communities experience deprivation in at least one domain of wellbeing. The rate of severe material deprivation among those living in Roma and Egyptian communities is 78%. Housing deprivation affects 66% of population in Roma and Egyptian communities. Economic disparities between urban and rural areas contribute to varying child poverty rates. Poverty risk considerably varies by region (2022): 14.8% of the overall population are at risk of income poverty in the central region, compared to 9.8% in the south, and 37.6% in the north. Poverty risk is lower in urban areas (16.4%) compared to rural areas (27.3%).⁷

According to a recent UNICEF/The World Bank Report, "Montenegro has strengthened its social protection system in the last decade, but recent policy reforms raise concerns regarding their sustainability and effectiveness. Social assistance spending reaches only a limited share of the poor population." According to the above-report, while access to social assistance has recently been expanded further in the country, "the poverty-targeted material support has been shrinking in size, despite its ability to accurately reach the poorest." Further problems affecting children and their families relate to low financing of social and child protection services; as a consequence, a minimum level of services cannot be guaranteed. (UNICEF, The World Bank, 2023: 1). The Early Childhood Development with a Nurturing Child Care framework is in the initial phase of development in Montenegro with a Government having adopted the first ever Early Childhood Development Strategy in 2023. Although children and mothers have a right to free universal health care, there is inequity in the quality, effectiveness and use of health, nutrition and early childhood development services. Equitable access is also an issue for children who: live in rural areas; are poor; have developmental difficulties or disabilities; are from ethnic minorities; or have no parental care. There is a worrying downward trend in immunization rates, with marked regional disparities. Measles, mumps and rubella vaccine coverage during the second year of life fell to just 24 per cent in 2020 from 55 per cent in 2017; the rate was 89 per cent in 2008.⁸

Efforts towards improving access to preschool education resulted in an increase of 7% for primary school and 3% respectively for secondary school for overall population in comparison to the 2021/2022 school year. Also, Montenegro has made significant steps in integrating digital technologies in the education system through establishing a national Digital School Platform for teaching, learning, and collaboration. In addition to the long-standing issues related to inadequate and insufficient school infrastructure, quality, access and inclusion, the education system is also faced with the challenge of ensuring adequate support to the increasing number of migrant and refugee students who make about 10% of the total student population, with this figure reaching almost 30% in schools in some municipalities. All mentioned issues should be addressed through systemic and long-term solutions that will be developed through a new, comprehensive, and costed education reform strategy.⁹

Still, there are persistent gaps in access to education and health which disadvantage vulnerable groups in the Northern and rural areas. In the North there is inferior access to infrastructure and social services.¹⁰ Health services are less available in the North due to the sparser populations and people must travel further to get the healthcare that they need. The North had the highest completion rates and only 20 percent of children did not reach their expected level of early development when compared to the other regions. However, children

⁷ Data provided by UNICEF Montenegro.

⁸ Data Provided by UNICEF Montenegro.

⁹ Data provided by UNICEF Montenegro.

¹⁰ MONTENEGRO Social Protection Situational Analysis, 2022, UNICEF and the World Bank.

living in the north (as well as the south) had more functional difficulties¹² (11 percent and 14 percent, respectively) than their peers from the central region (3 percent).¹³ While the percentage of children attending preschool education in the North was around 16 percentage points lower than the national average – just over one-third of children in the North (37 percent) attend kindergartens, while every second child (53 percent) does so at the national level.

The alarming fall in students' achievements at PISA 2022 assessment marked the end of 2023, confirming that the COVID-19 pandemic led to further deepening of the already severe learning crisis. Students in Montenegro scored less than the OECD average, with a concerning percentage of students not achieving at least Level 2 proficiency in mathematics (60%), reading (53%) and science (55%). Students affected by poverty lag behind their OECD peers by almost three academic years. Data from the International Labour Organization showed that 21.1% of young people were not working, studying or in training.¹¹

¹¹ Data provided by UNICEF Montenegro.

2. Purpose, Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

2.1 Evaluation purpose and intended users

The Evaluation aimed at providing the Government of Montenegro, in particular, the Council for the Rights of the Child, the other national counterparts, as well as UNICEF Montenegro, with an independent assessment of the results achieved through the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child in Montenegro 2019-2023.

As stated in the Evaluation Terms of Reference (“ToR”), the Evaluation aimed to “identify best practices, draw lessons from significant and promising interventions, and provide forward-looking recommendations to guide the setting of priorities for the next five years.” Further, the Evaluation was intended to “also identify the existing gaps and bottlenecks, in particular for those left behind in developmental and humanitarian processes, and draw lessons learned from innovative interventions for accelerating and scaling up results.” (UNICEF, 2023: 3.)

The intended primary users of the Evaluation are: the Government of Montenegro, in particular the Prime Minister’s Cabinet, the Council of the Rights of the Child, line ministries, all the other government and local-level institutions (as per thematic sectors listed above, section 1.3.), and UNICEF Montenegro. The Evaluation has been undertaken at the end of the Strategy implementation period. Therefore, the recommendations stemming from the analysis come at a point in time when the Government of Montenegro – in cooperation with other relevant stakeholders – is expected to design a new child rights strategy, and/or other sectoral policies related to children’s rights. Moreover, the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations can be streamlined in other policy documents developed by the Government, even if not directly related to children’s rights.

The secondary audience of the Evaluation include: other national and local stakeholders (public institutions, Ombudsperson’s Institution, Parliament, judiciary, NGOs, CSOs, international agencies) involved in the implementation of the Strategy or otherwise dealing with children’s rights in Montenegro, children and young people, their families and communities, and the media. The Evaluation is intended to provide to these stakeholders the opportunity to make summative judgements about the overall effectiveness of the Strategy. The Evaluation will support Government’s accountability on the fulfilment of the rights of children towards other stakeholders working in this area in Montenegro and beyond.

2.2 Evaluation objectives and scope

In line with the Evaluation ToR, the Evaluation strived to attain the following objectives:

- To assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child, by paying particular attention to the differential results across vulnerable groups, and in terms of promoting gender equality;
- To identify factors that contributed to or hindered successful implementation of action plans, including factors such as: stakeholders’ engagement, resource allocation, leadership, management, data collection, monitoring mechanisms, public engagement, as well as relevant external factors (for example: the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this affected implementation);
- To assess the extent to which the Strategy implementation and monitoring have been inclusive of children and young people, their families and communities – especially those belonging to marginalized groups – as well as of other relevant stakeholders;
- To provide recommendations for future planning, that will inform the evidence-based development of the next five years high-level, cross-sectoral strategic policy document in the area of child rights.

(UNICEF, 2023a: 3.)

The temporal scope of the Evaluation encompassed the full Strategy timeline, from inception of activities in 2019, through to its end in December 2023. In assessing the intervention against the relevance criterion, the Evaluation did also consider the Strategy design phase.

The geographical scope of the Evaluation was Montenegro. While the Evaluation desk review and the interviews with national-level stakeholders focused on the whole national territory, the local-level data collection took place in a sample of three selected municipalities, including the capital city of Podgorica, one

Southern municipality (Bar) and one Northern municipality (Bijelo Polje), so as to obtain an adequate geographical representation.

In terms of thematic scope, due to the complexity of the Evaluation object against the available resources, and especially in light of a lack of data highlighted below (section 2.3.) and anticipated in the Inception Report, it has not been possible to evaluate every aspect of the Strategy against the evaluation criteria that were set out. Areas of research on which attention has been focused mostly concern: relevance; coherence (both internal and external); and effectiveness. Concerning this latest criterion, the analysis points out to – on the one hand – key achievements that interviewed stakeholders attribute to the Strategy; on the other hand, the main factors that have hindered (or, conversely, fostered) the Strategy implementation are reviewed, explored and explained in the Report.

Several respondents mentioned a number of outstanding issues regarding the fulfillment of children’s rights in Montenegro. However, since this exercise concerned the evaluation of the Strategy on children’s rights, and not an all-encompassing child rights situation analysis, such outstanding issues and gaps have been reported here only when they serve to explain or illustrate some aspects of the Evaluation.

Finally, less coverage has been achieved in the present Report to an analysis of the Strategy’s efficiency and impact. Given that monitoring and reporting have been weak, it was rather difficult for the evaluation team to assess efficiency and inefficiencies, and to point to positive, negative or unintended impact.

2.3 Evaluation limitation

The Evaluation brings a number of limitations.

The major limitation encountered during the Evaluation concerns the **overall Strategy’s evaluability, particularly in relation to assessing its effectiveness and efficiency**. The Strategy bears an overall action plan with performance indicators and related mid-term and final targets for the successful accomplishment of the operational objectives in relation to the overall implementation phase. The Strategy monitoring plan was sketched out in the Strategy document, which provided indications according to which reporting on the implementation of the Strategy was to be “based on monitoring the performance indicators from the Action Plan and on evidence that the Action Plan has implemented its operational objectives.” (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 14.)

According to the above-provisions, data on the implementation of activities would be collected continuously. At the end of each year, an annual review of the implementation would be carried out, and serve as the basis for the preparation of an annual report for the related time period, with the aim to answer “the following question: What has been done and how much has that contributed to achieving the operational objectives under the Strategy?” Finally, the Strategy envisaged that each implementation report would cover the period of one year. (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 14.)

Nevertheless, it appears that **a proper data collection mechanism and a process and impact monitoring system - in order to regularly provide data about implementation, outputs and outcomes - were not set up, or they did not function for most of the time period covered by the Strategy**. During the inception phase, upon request of the Evaluation Team, one report related to the implementation of the Strategy was kindly translated into English by UNICEF Montenegro. Apparently, this is the only report available, which covers the first year and a half of implementation.

The Evaluation Team reviewed to a reasonably feasible extent the available external documentation such as research, studies, evaluations, surveys, etc. and extrapolated and used existing data therein, which are to the extent possible comparable to the baseline values presented in the Strategy action plan at the beginning of the implementation phase. Reconstructing end-line data across the whole range of performance indicators was out of the scope and the resources of the evaluation.

In some cases, concise secondary data sources (analysis or evaluation reports) existed, and could be reviewed within the given time frame. However, only few objectives and operational indicators partly overlapped with the data analyzed in the above-documents. Moreover, some of the reviewed documents in

turn also highlight the scarcity of baseline and end-line data, which further limited the use of these secondary data sources for the current Evaluation as well.

In the absence of monitoring data directly related to the implementation of the Strategy, collected by the different institutions in charge of its implementation, the main source of information concerning progress and outcomes in attaining the Strategy's objectives have been interviews with stakeholders and the survey with children and young people.

Consequently, and concerning the methodological approach, in many instances, the primary means of verifying the validity of findings available to the Evaluation Team has been to compare the views and perceptions shared by interviewees. This circumstance has to some extent restrained the solidity and depth of data collected, on which the Evaluation findings had to be based, also in consideration that most interviewed respondents were not part of the Strategy's Working Group during the design and implementation phases – or for the biggest part of the latter. This limitation was partly overcome by sharing and discussing the Evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations with the Evaluation Reference Group, whose members validated and supported the contents of the Evaluation Report. The Evaluation Reference Group includes all key Government stakeholders, other institutions, as well as NGOs and CSOs working with and for children in Montenegro. It does not include representatives of local authorities, children and young people, their parents and communities.

As mentioned previously (section 1.3.), the Strategy document mentions the overall budget estimate for its implementation over the entire period 2019-2023. In addition, estimated funds for the implementation of the activities related to the first year are provided in the above-document. All figures are given as lump sums, with no breakdown per items. Therefore, **the budget appears not sufficiently detailed for the Evaluation to properly assess whether the Strategy was cost-effective** (efficiency). In order to partially overcome the dearth of budget-related data, the Evaluation Team has tackled budget-related aspects with the concerned stakeholders as part of the interview questions, in the attempt to ascertain whether the budget for the realization of the Strategy was proportionate, and how financial aspects may affect the sustainability of the intervention.

Further, **operational objectives are described in rather broad terms.**¹² Activities envisaged in the overall Strategy's Action Plan apparently refer only to the first year of implementation. These are also described in broad and general manner.¹³ While all aspects related to the Strategy's logic are assessed in greater depth and accounted for under the relevance criterion (section 5.1.), here it is important to highlight the limitations that the Strategy design posed to the evaluability of its different components. Indeed, the breadth of the objectives and activities (the latter anyways relating only to the first year of implementation) made it difficult to assess progress achieved during the implementation phase, and to relate such activities and progress to specific social outcomes.

Moreover, the **lack of a comprehensive ToC for the Strategy**, and of missing explicit connections among events, posed a challenge to the Evaluation exercise. As the articulation of the details of the logic model behind the Strategy is not explicit, it was difficult to take informed decisions about where it would be best to focus Evaluation resources. The comprehensive intended progression from inputs to outcomes could not be elucidated based on the available information, and the development of the Evaluation questions could not be informed by a Strategy ToC.

Finally, due to limited resources, the Evaluation **could not involve children other than through a survey**, which was very kindly administered by UNICEF via their partner NGOs in different areas of the country, and to children belonging to different age-groups and backgrounds. The Evaluators did not have the opportunity to directly engage with children through individual interviews, focus groups, or other methods, as this would have required an amount of time for preparation and implementation that was beyond the time allocated for field data collection. In light of the modalities of child participation to the Evaluation exercise, the questions in

¹² For instance, operational objective 2: "Improved application of the legislative, strategic and financial framework and the coordination of all stakeholders in exercising and monitoring the rights of the child". (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 79.)

¹³ For example, Activity 2.2: "Implementation of activities on the prevention of discrimination against children (full implementation of all laws prohibiting discrimination; campaigns on the tolerance of diversity and on equal value for both sexes, punishing perpetrators)". (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 79.)

the survey were formulated in rather general terms, fact which – whilst providing interesting insights into the lived realities of children and youth in Montenegro – did not allow to elicit more specific information on the issues addressed by the Strategy.

2.4 Ethical considerations and Evaluation principles

According to the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation,

“Evaluation must be conducted with the highest standards of integrity and respect for the beliefs, manners and customs of the social and cultural environment; for human rights and gender equality; and for the ‘do no harm’ principle for humanitarian assistance. Evaluators must respect the rights of institutions and individuals to provide information in confidence, must ensure that sensitive data is protected and that it cannot be traced to its source and must validate statements made in the report with those who provided the relevant information.

Evaluators should obtain informed consent for the use of private information from those who provide it. When evidence of wrongdoing is uncovered, it must be reported discretely to a competent body (such as the relevant office of audit or investigation).” (UNEG, 2017:11-12).

Ethical issues have been proactively and systematically considered throughout the whole Evaluation cycle, through ongoing reflection and dialogue within the Evaluation Team and with UNICEF Montenegro, in order to ensure that the Evaluators’ conduct was at all times guided by and aligned with ethical principles and professional standards. Building on the Evaluation ToR, the following documents have been the basis for the Evaluation Team’s work regarding ethics:

- UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis;
- UNICEF Procedure for Quality Assurance in Research;
- UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System;
- UNEG guide on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations;
- UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation;
- UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation.¹⁴

The Evaluation Team pledged to abide by the following core principles:

- **Integrity:** the active adherence to moral values and professional standards, which are essential for responsible evaluation practice;
- **Accountability:** the obligation to be answerable for all decisions made and actions taken; to be responsible for honoring commitments, without qualification or exception; and to report potential or actual harms observed through the appropriate channels;
- **Respect:** engaging with all stakeholders of the Evaluation in a way that honors their dignity, well-being and personal agency while being responsive to their sex, gender, race, language, country of origin, LGBTQIA+ status, age, background, religion, ethnicity and ability and to cultural, economic and physical environments;
- **Beneficence:** striving to do good for people and planet while minimizing harms arising from the Evaluation as an intervention.

(UNEG, 2020:7-10).

In light of the nature and context of the Strategy, and of the methodology that has been applied to the Evaluation, the ethical aspects that the Evaluation Team has especially considered were the following:

Confidentiality and data management. According to the Evaluation methodology, data collection instruments entailed individual interviews with adult key.

All respondents’ right to provide information in confidence has been respected, and they were made aware of the scope and limits of confidentiality. Evaluators made sure that – if disclosed - sensitive information cannot

¹⁴ Full reference to the above-documents is provided in the Bibliography. In addition, the Evaluators have undertaken UNICEF’s training on ethics in the framework of previous assignments with the Organization.

be traced back to its source so that relevant individuals are protected from any harm. Besides key informants, any other individual who may be indirectly affected by the disclosing of information (for example, children or other individuals from vulnerable communities, who have come into contact with the Strategy activities and/or with the interviewed stakeholders) have also been kept safe.

The identity of individuals involved in the data collection phase has been kept anonymous. Concerning the way in which information and quotes from the interview were attributed to them, respondents have been quoted based on the broader group they belong to (e.g. national authority; NGO; children and young people; etc.), followed by a number - based on a numbering system linking the two that has been retained only by the Evaluation Team. Any identifiable information (name and surname, position, organization or institution, geographical location etc.) has been omitted in the Evaluation Report and any other document produced as part of the evaluation process.

Only data that were actually needed and create value have been collected during the data collection phase. Data collected during interviews have been safely stored, and will be destroyed after the finalization of the Evaluation Report and the completion of the Evaluation process. Only the Evaluation Team members have access to primary data collected during the data collection phase.

Informed consent. Closely linked to confidentiality and data management (above), personal, informed consent has been gained from all participants to the data collection phase.

Each participant's participation was voluntary. They always had a choice as to whether to participate or not and to what extent. Consent was therefore an outcome of a genuine pondered choice. Respondents were given time to consider their involvement and to think about the implications of their participation.

Albeit some respondents may have been already familiar with the Evaluation ToR, the Evaluation Team always clearly explained who they are, why they were gathering this information (purpose), what would happen to the information gathered (how it would be used), who would have access to it and in what form, and how the Evaluation findings will be disseminated. In most cases, the above-information has also been shared before the interview with the respondent (by e-mail or phone.)

Evaluators clearly explained to each interviewee that s/he should have felt free to stop the interview at any point in time without any negative consequences; and to refuse answering some questions, without needing to explain the reason why. Before starting the interview, Evaluators strongly encouraged the respondent to ask for any clarifications, and to feel free to express any doubt or concern.

At the outset of each interview, Evaluators addressed consent and confidentiality issues. The consent form provided in Annex III to this Report were signed by each respondent before proceeding with questions on the Strategy. Since some interviews took place online, verbal consent declarations have been collected by Evaluators, who certify that the respondents fully understood the interview purpose and contents, the intended use of information collected, the scope and limit of confidentiality, and consented to participating in this interview.

In the case of children and young people below the age of 18, written, informed consent should be sought by their parents (or other legal caregiver) as well. However, children and young people were selected among the ones already actively involved in activities organized by various partner organizations of UNICEF from CSOs, DPOs, Ombudsperson, etc. Therefore, in most cases children's parents/caregivers had already agreed to their children being involved in consultative processes (such consent being periodically re-negotiated). Furthermore, due to the nature and contents of the consultation (for which the risk was assessed to be no more than discomfort), the Evaluation Team considered that children who are mature enough to fully understand the purpose and implication of the consultation could provide consent for themselves.

Informed consent forms are enclosed in Annex XI.

Meaningful engagement and fair treatment. The Methodology aimed to ensure equitable participation of all relevant stakeholders in the Evaluation exercise. Under the circumstances and with the available time and resources, the Evaluation strived to ensure an appropriate and inclusive representation of various stakeholders, with different background, stakes, and perspectives, including the less powerful.

Children and young people have been directly involved in the Evaluation to a certain extent. Indeed, this was primarily due to resources availability to the Evaluation, which would not allow for the design and implementation of a meaningful participation framework for a larger sample of children and young people of different age-groups. The Evaluation Team's capacity thus only allowed the involvement of a limited sample of children and young persons, fact which may have limited the representation of a diverse range of

perspectives. However, to the extent possible, the Evaluators strived to reach out to children from vulnerable backgrounds, through the consultation channels that have been enacted and supported by UNICEF Montenegro and their partner organizations in the country. (An informative note sent to UNICEF partner organizations to support identifying the sample of children and young people, and to prepare for the survey, is enclosed in Annex XII.)

Child safeguarding. Children have been directly involved as part of this Evaluation. The Evaluation Team acknowledged that there are risks that individuals working with any organization can pose to children, young people, as well as adults that they work with and for.

Minded to prevent and address those risks as a matter of absolute priority, the Evaluators reiterated their commitment to safeguarding children and youth, their families and communities, as well as any other individual concerned, by fully abiding to UNICEF's child safeguarding policy, as well as other relevant documents.

In case of any safeguarding concerns that they come across, the Evaluation Team would have reported it timely by following UNICEF's existing procedures to file complaints and raise concerns about child safeguarding and harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse.

Impartiality. Some Evaluation Team members have been working in the past, or are currently working in the Montenegrin context, on child rights issues and related subjects. In order to remain impartial and not biased in relation to the Evaluation, and also to avoid conflict of interests, Evaluators avoided – to the extent possible – interviewing directly organizations or institutions that they have worked with, or had responsibilities for in the recent past, or to which they are presently applying of there is a significant possibility of being hired by in the near future. Field work tasks have been divided bearing also this criterion in mind.

Further, in order to mitigate the risk of impartiality, the Evaluation Team tried and stayed focused on their role as evaluators. The Evaluation Team have been very clear with all respondents and stakeholders about their role and mandate. They also ensured that prospective participants in the Evaluation know at any point in time what they are being consulted on and why; what the intended outputs are; and have sufficient and adequate information for informed consent (above).

Independence. According to the Evaluation ToR, this was a country-led Evaluation. Indeed, the Government of Montenegro, particularly through its Council for the Rights of the Child, bears primary responsibility for the Strategy implementation and hence evaluation. Different members of Governmental institutions have been represented at the Evaluation Reference Group currently set up by the Government of Montenegro.

While keeping an open and transparent communication throughout the whole evaluation process to ensure that all stakeholders were fully informed about its different stages and advancement, the Evaluation Team considered UNICEF Montenegro as their primary counterpart of the Evaluation. The Evaluation Team worked in abidance by the Evaluation Terms of Reference, the ethical principles and the norms and standards for Evaluation referred to therein.

In accordance with UNICEF's ethical guidelines referred to at the outset of this section, an ethical review of the Evaluation Inception Report was required. This was undertaken by an external ethics review board ("HML Institutional Review Board - IRB") between 26th December 2023 and 12th January 2024. A letter of approval of the human subject protection protocol was issued on 12th January 2024, along with a series of recommendations. The letter is enclosed in Annex IX to the present report.

3. Evaluation Framework

3.1 Evaluation criteria and Key Questions

In line with the Evaluation ToR, the **OECD/DAC evaluation criteria** (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability) have guided the Evaluation: this is a set of complementary criteria that have been considered in combination, in order to ensure that the Evaluation covers all areas of the intervention examined (OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019).

In compliance with the ToR and the UNEG guidelines and standards on Evaluation, the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria have been integrated with the cross-cutting themes of **human rights, equity and gender equality** (UNEG, 2014; UNEG, 2017).

The Evaluation criteria have been applied in order to review the extent to, and the approaches through which the Government of Montenegro, UNICEF Montenegro, and other partner organizations attained the Strategy's objectives and achieved the expected results. Each criterion is briefly described at the outset of the corresponding section in the Main findings (section 5).

A set of **key questions** structured the Evaluation and have been applied to compare findings against the criteria. These questions also guided the interviews and discussions with selected stakeholders during the data collection phase, the survey administered to children and young people, as well as the desk review of Strategy-related documents and relevant literature. A set of detailed sub-questions have been developed to further break down and specify the information needs related to each key Evaluation question. These are enclosed in the **Evaluation Matrix** (Annex IV).

4. Evaluation Methodology

4.1 Overall approach to the Evaluation

The Evaluation was intended to be a **summative** evaluation, as it aimed to determine the worth of the Strategy at the end of its implementation phase. The Evaluation was intended to understand to what extent the Strategy has been actually implemented, how it has been implemented, highlighting what worked and what did not.

In addition, the Evaluation did also adopt a **formative** approach, focusing on lessons learnt and good practices, in order to allow the Government of Montenegro, UNICEF, as well as other stakeholders, to capitalize on the recommendations that have been formulated based on the findings, in view of the drafting of future policies and laws on children's rights in the country.

In line with the Evaluation ToR, the methodology for the Evaluation envisaged a **non-experimental** evaluation design, and a **mixed-method design**, combining **qualitative** analysis with some **quantitative** analysis elements.

Quantitative data have been provided by the documents examined as part of the desk review, with the aim to assess the breadth of the Strategy implementation and scope, in order to both complement the qualitative data, and to situate these in the specific context in which the Strategy has been undertaken. In addition, a survey among a selected sample of children and young people has been administered, which generated largely quantitative data.

Qualitative data have been initially collected as part of the desk review, through the analysis of the documentation received by UNICEF, and further gathered during the data collection through a considerable number of interviews. Qualitative data analysis involved the identification of themes and sub-themes, coding, clustering similar data and drawing the most important points.

The evaluation methodology has been articulated around **three main phases**: inception phase; data collection; and analysis and report writing. These are briefly described below.

Inception phase

During the inception phase, the Evaluations' detailed approach and methods have been elaborated. A series of inception meetings with UNICEF Montenegro was carried out, with the aim to share all required documents, contact details, and other relevant information for the Evaluation process. A preparatory meeting with representatives from the Government (Council on the Rights of the Child and General Secretariat's Department for Policy Planning and Evaluation) was organized for and facilitated by UNICEF Montenegro, with the main aim to align expectations concerning the Evaluation's key-aspects, and to set out the basis for exchange and cooperation between the Evaluation Team and governmental institutions during the process. At the end of the inception phase, the Evaluation Team provided a presentation of the inception report to the Evaluation Reference Group (paragraph 1.1).

During the inception phase, a desk research was commenced, entailing a review of existing Strategy documents, as well as relevant reports, studies, news articles, policy and legal documents, and other available data regarding the realization of children's rights in Montenegro. The main aim of the desk-review was to set out the internal and external context in which the Strategy was implemented.

Important aspects related to the Evaluation have been clarified during this phase. These included, in particular: the limitations to the evaluability of the intervention; the number and typologies of stakeholders to be consulted during the field data collection phase; and the selection of the three municipalities to be visited by the Evaluation Team. The evaluation criteria, key-questions and tools have also been elaborated.

Activities and outputs of this phase included:

- **Desk-review** of documents provided by UNICEF Montenegro and of other relevant documents selected by the Evaluators;
- Finalization of the Evaluation **methodology** and related aspects;

- Refining of Evaluation **criteria, key-questions**, and elaboration of **sub-questions**;
- Elaboration of **data collection tools**;
- Identification of **key-respondents** (with the support of UNICEF Montenegro) and **establishing contact** with them in order to schedule individual interviews;
- **Inception briefings** with UNICEF Montenegro;
- **Introductory meetings** with relevant stakeholders from the Government of Montenegro;
- Production of an **Inception Report**.

Data collection

The Evaluation exercise aimed to actively involve key stakeholders for the Strategy at the national and local level. Based on information collected during the inception phase, these included:

- Council on the Rights of the Child (President and related staff)
- Line Ministries and other institutions that were represented at the Working Group in charge of drafting the Strategy;
- UNICEF Montenegro (current and former) Staff and Consultants who worked for the Strategy;
- Local authorities dealing with children's rights at municipal level;
- National and local NGOs and CSOs working in the field of children's rights in Montenegro;
- Children and young people living in Montenegro.

Individual interviews with key informants were absolutely central to the data collection phase. These were selected in close consultation with UNICEF Montenegro, based on a mapping of stakeholders that was prepared by the Evaluation Team during the inception phase. A non-probability sampling technique was adopted, with a combination of purposive and quota sampling methods. Purposive sampling aimed to ensure the involvement of stakeholders who could offer a unique or specific perspective on the Strategy, due to their knowledge and/or responsibility on the subject matter. Quota sampling aimed to guarantee a balanced representation of stakeholders to be selected among different affiliations, in order to avoid that any of the groups identified above was considerably under- or over-represented.

Regarding the selection of local-level respondents, based on initial discussion within the Evaluation Team and with UNICEF Montenegro, the following set of criteria have been prioritized for the selection of the municipalities, which were:

- **High-performing and under-performing municipalities**, in order to balance among locations with good track record of implementation capacity in the area of children's rights, and locations where capacity is more challenging. Due to the dearth of data relating to the implementation of the Strategy, the identification of municipalities in which a high or, conversely, low number and diversity of interventions that can be related to the Strategy took place during the period 2019-2023 (temporal scope of the Evaluation) had to be guided by consultation with UNICEF Montenegro, as part of the scoping interviews which took place during the inception phase;
- **Location/geographic level**, in order to provide contrasting examples of how the Strategy was implemented in different geographic areas and contexts, such as: urban vs rural; more homogeneous locations vs locations with higher presence of ethnic minorities; and significant differences in terms of socio-economic conditions of the population;
- **Logistics considerations**: the final selection had to take into account practical considerations, including accessibility of stakeholders, and possibility to complete the data collection with the available resources, in light of geographical distance and other practical considerations, including time constraints.

As a result, a total of 24 adult stakeholders from the national level, and 29 stakeholders from the municipal level in the Municipalities of Podgorica, Bar and Bijelo Polje, have been involved in individual interviews. Some respondents have been interviewed in pairs, mostly upon their preferences, as collectively they felt that they were in the position to answer all questions to be covered by the Evaluators. Interviews have been conducted mostly in-person and in a few cases online. The full list of respondents is included in Annex II.

In addition, a total of 75 children and young people have been consulted through the survey administered via UNICEF's partner NGOs. These have been identified and selected through a combined convenience and purposive sampling method, which were applied in order to recruit participants who were easily accessible to

UNICEF Montenegro or partner organizations, and those among them who could offer a unique or specific perspective on the situation of children's rights in the country. Specifically, child and young respondents have been selected among the ones who were already actively involved in local- or national-level activities regarding children's rights. While aware that the Strategy affected all children in Montenegro, the selection has been confined to the age group 13-18, due to the nature of the data collection tool utilized (as described in section 4.5. below) The selection fostered representation of children belonging to vulnerable groups of the population, since these are among the primary target-groups of UNICEF's partner NGOs who supported the consultation.

Activities and outputs of the data collection phase included:

- Performing **field visits and individual interviews** with selected respondents at the national and local level;
- Collating inputs from interviews, translating these (when needed) and producing **detailed transcripts in English**;
- Collating inputs from survey questionnaires and arranging them through **frequency** tables.

Analysis and report writing

Data gathered through desk-review, individual interviews and the survey have been analyzed and are presented in this Evaluation Report. The Strategy performance has been assessed against the criteria previously identified.

Activities and outputs of this phase included:

- **Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data** collected, identifying themes, coding and clustering data;
- Producing an **Evaluation Report**;
- Highlighting and describing evaluation **findings**, identifying promising practices and **achievements**, as well as **gaps** where margin of improvement exists;
- Providing **recommendations** for future policy initiatives, by the Government of Montenegro, their partners and other stakeholders, including UNICEF Montenegro;
- Preparing a **Power Point presentation** for the Evaluation Reference Group, summarizing the Evaluation key-findings and priority-recommendations;
- **Debriefing meetings** with UNICEF Montenegro and other key stakeholders.

Data collection instruments

The Evaluation has used mixed data collection methods involving:

- A desk review of existing relevant documentation;
- Key informant interviews with selected stakeholders at national and local level; and
- A survey with selected children and young people in different geographic locations.

Data collection instruments have been devised in adherence with UNICEF's Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection And Analysis (UNICEF, 2015a.) In addition, the planning, carrying out and transcription of individual interviews has been guided by existing best practice standards on ethics and on participation in research.

At the national level, a **desk review** of existing secondary sources of data has been carried out by the Evaluators during the inception phase, continuing during the period immediately prior to the field-data collection and – partly - throughout the field-phase and the analysis and writing up of the Evaluation Report.

Individual interviews have been semi-structured, open-ended and based on a set of questions drawn upon the Evaluation key questions and sub-questions presented in the Evaluation Matrix, with the possibility for new relevant questions and issues to be explored during the interview. Each individual interview has been fully transcribed in English. A set of questions has been prepared for each group of respondents, according to their role within/in relation to the Strategy. Questions have been selected based on the respondent's responsibilities and position in relation to the Strategy, and have been prioritized in light of the amount of data and information previously collected at that point of the data collection phase, in order to cover all Evaluation key questions and sub-questions. Guiding questions for individual interviews are enclosed in Annex V – divided on the basis of respondents' groups to be interviewed – along with guidance on how to conduct individual interviews.

The data collection phase envisaged a **survey**, carried out through the administration of a questionnaire to a selected group of children and young people aged 13 to 18. The questionnaire has focused on the following three components:

- Knowledge of, and involvement in, the Strategy on children's rights;
- Assessment of the child rights situation in Montenegro;
- Assessment of institutional response to the realization of children's rights in the country.

Questions included in the questionnaire have been structured, closed-ended and administered through UNICEF's partner NGOs to different groups of children and young people across Montenegro. The cooperation of UNICEF partner NGOs has been essential for the feasibility of this exercise. Otherwise, the implementation of the survey would not have been possible in light of the Evaluation Team's capacity in terms of resource availability.

The Questionnaire for children and young people is enclosed in Annex V.

In order to ensure that the participation of children in the data collection process was relevant to their experiences, the Evaluation Team shared additional written guidance with UNICEF's partners administering the questionnaires to children, which was intended to serve as an introduction to the consultation, in order to support UNICEF's partners in explaining the aims and scope of the consultation to child and youth respondents.

To the maximum extent possible, the validity and reliability of the information collected has been verified, mostly through data triangulation, which entailed review and corroboration of the findings identified through the desk review and interviews.

5. Main Findings

5.1 Relevance

5.1.1 Adherence of the Project to beneficiaries and partners' needs and priorities

Relevance is defined as 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. (OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019: 7.)

The Evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which the Strategy was in line with the needs and priorities of the local context, as captured in situation analysis on which the Strategy design was based, as well as in other key-documents (referred to in this section.)

Information about the planning process and its consistency with a rights-based approach, equity and gender equality principles were elicited. Under the relevance criterion, the Evaluation assessed the consistency of the overall Strategy design with the identified problems and needs it set out to address. The Evaluation also looked at the plausibility of the implicit ToC, and at whether - and to which extent - the Strategy implementing organizations shared understanding about how changes would happen and their own roles in bringing about such changes.

The design of the Strategy appears to have been **based on a thorough child rights situation analysis**. The process – which is also summarized in the Strategy document (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 11-12) - entailed the review of relevant previous sectoral strategies and other policy documents, all of which are referred to across the Strategy document. Recommendations by UN treaty-based and charter-based human rights monitoring bodies were reflected in the definition of the Strategy goals and objectives. While alignment with the above-mentioned strategies, policies, norms and standards is illustrated in greater depth under the coherence criterion (section 5.2.1. below), here it appears important to highlight that an in-depth analysis of policy priorities was conducted, and that the Strategy appears to be firmly grounded in such priorities. Allegedly, the Strategy also drew upon good or promising practices in the development of child rights strategic documents in other countries from the region - namely Serbia and North Macedonia.¹⁵

Under each theme (for example: civil rights and freedoms; violence against children; family environment and alternative care; etc.), the main obstacles to fulfilling children's rights are spelled out in the Strategy text ("Key Challenges"). Whilst the list of problems identified appears rather comprehensive, they are not ordered in a logic manner (one problem leading to/contributing to another), but just listed in sequence under each topic they belong. Hence, a more in-depth structuring of the cause-consequence nexus among the said problems is largely missing, circumstance which - as further analyzed below (section 5.1.2.) - limits the clarity of the logical links between problems prioritized and objectives set out in the Strategy.

As described above (section 1.2.), the Strategy was designed by a Working Group set up at the Council for the Rights of the Child – an inter-sector coordination body, at that time operating under the authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and encompassing all relevant line ministries and other national institutions, as well as one representative of the NGO sector, one representative of local authorities, and one child representative.¹⁶ An external consultant was hired by UNICEF Montenegro, in order to provide expert and technical assistance to the Working Group throughout the preparation of the Strategy. Importantly, the drafting process entailed the direct participation of children through a consultative process. (UNICEF, 2019: 8-9.) Furthermore, UNICEF was coordinating inputs to the Strategy from other UN agencies operating in the country.¹⁷

¹⁵ NAT INST/ORG 9.

¹⁶ The full list of the Working Group's members is provided in the Strategy document (UNICEF, 2019: 8-9.)

¹⁷ NAT INST/ORG 8.

In assessing the Strategy's relevance, the Evaluation aimed to also gauge whether the identification and design phase encompassed the effective participation of all key-stakeholders. The **process of preparing the Strategy appears to be well-thought through** and in principle very participatory. "We met many times. We were really trying to get as much as possible!", one respondent recalled.¹⁸

During the course of the interviews, however, it emerged that to some extent the **level of engagement of the different members of the Working Group for designing the Strategy varied considerably in practice**. Allegedly, some members of the group were far more active than others: "I can't say that the Working Group was so active as it was comprehensive", one respondent admitted. "Some members were very active. Some felt that their presence at the Group was just enough... Moreover, some representatives had just started to work at that institution; they could transfer information, but I am not sure about their power to take decisions. Part of the Group was discussing, but part of them were just listening."¹⁹ While a certain unevenness in engagement within a working group is usually expected, it is possible that significant differences among members' participation might have undermined the sense of ownership of the Strategy amongst the institutions in charge of implementing it.

As mentioned above, one representative of the NGO sector and one of municipalities were included in the Working Group in charge of drafting the Strategy. It appears, however, that **mechanisms to ensure that the above-two representatives collected inputs from – respectively – NGOs/CSOs and local authorities, were not formally established**.

Concerning local authorities, one stakeholder from the national level stated that "the member of the Working Group was representing the Association of Cities and Local Self-Government, so they definitely knew the issues at municipal level."²⁰ Another respondent was not sure, and answered: "I assume that the Union of Municipalities appointed one representative, but I am not sure."²¹ While more detailed information about the process for appointing a representative from the municipalities were not elicited, several representatives of local authorities shared their opinion about the extent of their involvement in the Strategy design process.

The absolute majority of local authorities' representatives (12 out of 13) declared that they were not involved in the Strategy development, nor did they know, or believe, that any of their colleagues had been involved.²² Some expressed criticism about this circumstance: "Neither I nor my colleagues had the opportunity to participate in the development and design of this strategy. Overall, I believe it is poor practice that during the design of such strategies, at least one city per region does not organize public consultations with a wide range of participants from different backgrounds. It is not enough for the relevant Ministry to simply post information on its website because employees in government agencies and organizations are overloaded with work and cannot follow the websites of all ministries on a daily basis."²³ Another respondent confirmed: "I believe that the opportunity for local authorities, especially social services, to give their opinion in the development of the strategy for the realization of children's rights should be a key component in ensuring an inclusive and effective process and is vital to ensuring that the strategy reflects the real needs and challenges that each local community may have in realizing children's rights."²⁴

As the respondent here above, others stressed that, in particular, the Strategy design should have involved frontline professionals working with children and young people at the local level. As one respondent stated: "Psychologists and other school professionals who are communicating with students should be heard too."²⁵ Similarly, another respondent stated: "We need to involve people who are working in practice with children. For example, when it comes to foster care, we need to consult with long-term foster parents. We need to consult with people who are dealing with these services specifically."²⁶

¹⁸ NAT INST/ORG 8.

¹⁹ NAT INST/ORG 9. Similarly: NAT INST/ORG 10.

²⁰ NAT INST/ORG 8.

²¹ NAT INST/ORG 4.

²² LOC INST 5; LOC INST 1; LOC INST 3; LOC INST 4; LOC INST 7; LOC INST 6; LOC INST 8; LOC INST 9; LOC INST 10; LOC INST 12; LOC INST 13; LOC INST 11.

²³ LOC INST 3.

²⁴ LOC INST 8.

²⁵ NAT INST/ORG 10.

²⁶ NAT INST/ORG 16.

Thus, while most likely the municipalities' representative at the Working Group was knowledgeable about local level issues and concerns when it comes to realizing children's rights, it appears that local authorities and service providers' involvement in the Strategy design was limited or non-existent.

The organization "Parents" was invited to participate to the Strategy design as member of the Working Group representing the NGO/CSO sector. Allegedly and as mentioned above, no formal mechanism was established to involve in the process the other civil society members working with and for children in Montenegro. However, other NGOs were consulted in the framework of individual meetings by the primary Strategy drafters.

Some NGO representatives interviewed as part of the Evaluation felt that the NGOs' perspective was sufficiently ensured at the Working Group. "We participated in the consultation process, but only one NGO was at the Working Group", one respondent recalled.²⁷ Another respondent similarly stated: "We have had a good and long cooperation with Parents, and we were familiar with the process of drafting the Strategy on children's rights."²⁸ Likewise, a respondent confirmed: "We believe that the process was both transparent and that many sectors were involved in the creation of this strategy."²⁹

However, the majority of the interviewed NGO representatives saw very little or no opportunity for them to effectively contribute to the design process. As one respondent explained: "We [NGOs] are not able to influence their decisions. Our proposals were met with resistance. They say that these were not compliant with the policy document on drafting strategies."³⁰ Other NGOs plainly stated that they had no opportunity to provide whatsoever input to the strategy design.³¹

Some NGOs were instead critical of the process applied to select and also involve representatives of this sector. As one respondent explained: "When it comes to the NGO sector, public calls are issued, you have one or two NGOs which are selected. The first criterion is the number of NGOs that support these NGO's representatives. As a consequence, NGOs are always voiced out at working groups. NGOs could just comment on already-prepared drafts, but it is difficult to change already prepared documents." And then added: "NGOs are not involved from an early stage. When we give our remarks on strategies later on, ministries say: 'Well, you had your representative!'"³² Finally, two among the interviewed NGOs were not yet established at the time of the Strategy design.³³

While it seems that a consultative process has been set up to involve civil society, this appears to bring some limitations, in that it was somewhat rigid in terms of selection procedure, and constraining the real possibility for NGOs and CSOs to really bring their inputs into the Strategy document.

Consultations held in preparation of the Strategy allegedly involved around 100 children from different age-groups, geographical areas and backgrounds – including children belonging to marginalized groups.³⁴ The situation analysis included in Strategy does reflect children's views extensively, as these "provided the basis on which to formulate the Strategy" itself. (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 98.) And indeed, children's views are explicitly referred to in several sections of the document.³⁵

While assessing the quality of child participation – i.e. the extent to which participatory processes were compliant to standards for ethical, safe and meaningful participation – goes beyond the reach of this Evaluation, the involvement of children achieved **during the design stage** of the Strategy is regarded as a **commendable effort in applying the child participation principle** in practice, in terms of scope and inclusivity of such participation.

²⁷ NGO 2.

²⁸ NGO 1.

²⁹ NGO 13. Similarly: NGO 16; NGO 20.

³⁰ NGO 7.

³¹ NGO 9; NGO 10; NGO 8; NGO 11; NGO 14; NGO 15; NGO 17; NGO 18; NGO 19; NGO 21.

³² NGO 4.

³³ NGO 12 and NGO 9.

³⁴ Government of Montenegro, 2019: 8; Confirmed during interviews, in particular: NAT INST/ORG 1; NAT INST/ORG 9; NAT INST/ORG 8; NGO 2.

³⁵ Namely: p.21 on non-discrimination; p.24 on participation; p.25 on violence against children; p.37 on children with disabilities; p.41 about secondary school students on adolescents' health; p.43 on standards of living; p-45 on education; p.49 on free time and cultural activities; p.52 on children living in the street – including consultation of Roma children.

Conversely, it seems that the role of the child ‘representative’ involved in the Working Group in charge of drafting the Strategy was somewhat unclear and not really effective. Allegedly, he did not actually represent other children, as there was no mechanism (e.g. advisory board) which would have enabled him to do so. His role at the Group’s meetings was described as rather passive. As one respondent recalls: “There was one boy in the Working Group, who was living in a residential care facility for children deprived of parental care. Sometimes they were asking what he thought, but he did not have much to contribute.”³⁶

The level of participation of children and young people throughout the different phases of the Strategy will be further discussed below, under the coherence criterion (section 5.2.1).

Finally, children and young people’s **parents, families and communities were apparently not consulted** during the process of design of the Strategy. This appears to be a gap in the consultative process, leaving out very important stakeholders in children’s lives.

There was a **general consensus among interviewed stakeholders about the relevance** of the Strategy’s goals and objectives to the target population’s priority needs in Montenegro at the time when the document was designed. The overwhelming majority of respondents (nearly 80%, or 36 out of 33) who spoke about relevance resolutely stated that they thought the Strategy “reflected the priority needs regarding the realization of children’s rights in Montenegro at the time it was created.”³⁷ Several respondent stressed that the Strategy was designed based on the guidance and recommendations provided by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and that they regarded this as the right approach.

A few respondents provided a more nuanced answer. While they believed that the Strategy reflected the priority needs concerning children’s rights in Montenegro in general terms, they felt that some issues were partially left out of the Strategy design. Among such issues, the above-respondents mentioned: de-institutionalization; mental health care; gender-based discrimination; and learning disabilities.³⁸

Also, some respondents doubted that the Strategy design fully tackled the needs of the most marginalized groups of children in Montenegro, namely: children who are victims of violence; children living in poverty; migrant children; and children hard to reach, in general.³⁹ As one respondent phrased it, “my question is whether that one strategy, no matter how extensive it is, can truly [...] contribute to reaching the most difficult to access and at the same time the most vulnerable categories of children.”⁴⁰

The situation of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups among children and young persons is recalled at different places in the Strategy document. In some cases, the analysis of the problems and rights violations they face presents some gaps; for example, this is the case for unaccompanied and separated children who are not seeking international protection; further, the situation of child victims of trafficking is analyzed shortly, and only focuses on trafficking for sexual exploitation.

In sum, albeit some room for improvement exists, it appears that the Strategy design was sensitive to the needs of the most marginalized children in the country. The extent to which such needs were catered for in practice, during the implementation phase, is reviewed further below (section 5.2.1).

During the data collection, the Evaluators consulted respondents about whether having **one whole child rights Strategy** on the top of several sectoral strategies in the area of children’s rights, was regarded as of **added value**, and why. Most respondents (around ¾, or 30 out of 41)⁴¹ stated that indeed, having one Strategy dealing with children’s rights in a comprehensive and holistic way was very important. Different reasons backed up this belief. Several stakeholders felt that the Strategy was “a reminder” of the recommendations

³⁶ NAT INST/ORG 9.

³⁷ LOC INST 1. Similarly: LOC INST 5; LOC INST 2; LOC INST 3; NGO 8; NGO 9; NGO 11; LOC INST 6; LOC INST 7; NGO 12; NGO 13; LOC INST 8; LOC INST 9; LOC INST 10; LOC INST 12; NGO 17; NGO 18; LOC INST 13; NAT INST/ORG 18; NGO 2; NGO 4; NAT INST/ORG 11; NAT INST/ORG 14; NAT INST/ORG 15; NAT INST/ORG 16; NGO 1.

³⁸ NAT INST/ORG 10; NGO 15; NAT INST/ORG 16.

³⁹ LOC INST 3; NGO 11; LOC INST 10; LOC INST 12.

⁴⁰ LOC INST 10.

⁴¹ NAT INST/ORG 4; NAT INST/ORG 6; NAT INST/ORG 1; NGO 1; NAT INST/ORG 8;

issued by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that Montenegro is due to implement, in order to comply with the UN CRC and its Optional Protocols.⁴²

Other respondents stressed that the Strategy was, in principle, an effective tool to foster child rights mainstreaming across institutions: “it made stakeholders look at different issues and access to services through the lenses of the rights of the child.”⁴³ Other stakeholders believed that one whole strategy on children’s rights was a fundamental requirement to enable inter-sectoral cooperation at all levels. As one respondent stated, “the Strategy brought a comprehensive, inter-sectoral, and multi-sectoral approach to realizing children’s rights and their best interests. It is essential for all sectors to act, play roles, and tasks in a unified response to the challenges faced by children, creating protocols and procedures in specific areas.”⁴⁴ Similarly, another respondent declared: “I believe this should be the overarching strategy that mandates all Government bodies at the national and local levels to clearly define measures and activities aimed at children within their respective strategies and action plans, according to their areas of responsibility.”⁴⁵ These words were echoed across several interviews. As a respondent stated: “The unique strategy provides transparency in the creation of goals and the division of responsibilities in relation to the participants in the process and the institutions in charge.”⁴⁶ Similarly, another respondent stressed that “instead of treating children’s problems and needs in isolation within individual sectors, there is now a unique framework that addresses a wider spectrum of children’s rights – from education, health, protection from violence to children’s participation.”⁴⁷

Another reason why the Strategy was regarded as of value in addition to sectoral strategies was that – according to some respondents – it provided for a useful advocacy tool. As one NGO representative observed, “for us NGOs, we were lobbying for better policies, and always saying ‘This is in the Strategy’. It is an important tool for advocating for better policies for children and youth.”⁴⁸ Along a similar line of thinking, another respondent stressed that the child rights Strategy represented an instrument for raising awareness on children’s rights among both the institutions and the general public in Montenegro.⁴⁹

Some respondents, however, were more critical about the usefulness of having one whole child rights strategy overarching sectoral strategies. According to some, the child rights Strategy was not reflected nor in line with sectoral strategies’ goals and provisions, fact which made it somehow redundant in practice.⁵⁰ Moreover, there was the concern that “by creating this one strategy, the effectiveness has been diminished because [...] institutions not directly responsible for its implementation are avoiding their responsibilities and are not prioritizing the needs of children in their plans and programs.”⁵¹

Other stakeholders regarded the Strategy as too general to be implemented in practice. As one respondent put it, “the strategy is broadly set up. I do not remember the strategy in details. Since the COVID, we forgot about the strategy. I have been following more the strategy on violence against children, and the child protection strategy.”⁵² From the data collected throughout interviews, it does not seem that the many stakeholders truly looked at the Strategy as a guiding document when it comes to the implementation of measures to protect and fulfil children’s rights. Only a couple of respondents pointed to the compliance of the child rights Strategy with other sectoral strategies adopted by the Government.⁵³

Perhaps the most recurring argumentation among those who were doubtful about the usefulness of an overarching child rights strategy in Montenegro was that such Strategy was, in fact, not sufficiently implemented nor monitored. As one respondent said: “Looking back at the period when the Strategy was designed I can say that it reflected the priority needs of the realization of child rights, but I cannot agree that the implementation followed totally the plan of the Strategy.” The same respondent added: “Even if I consider

⁴² NAT INST/ORG 16; NAT INST/ORG 1; NGO 6;

⁴³ NAT INST/ORG 6.

⁴⁴ LOC INST 2.

⁴⁵ LOC INST 3.

⁴⁶ LOC INST 6.

⁴⁷ NGO 13.

⁴⁸ NGO 1.

⁴⁹ NAT INST/ORG 10.

⁵⁰ NGO 6; NAT INST/ORG 7.

⁵¹ LOC INST 1.

⁵² NGO 7. Similarly: NGO 16.

⁵³ NAT INST/ORG 13; NAT INST/ORG 11.

that the Strategy was very well done, and the process involved all parties, the monitoring aspect failed again, as there are no set mechanisms that monitor it.”⁵⁴

As we will further review below in this Report (section 5.3.), when looking at the Strategy’s effectiveness, the added value of having one whole Strategy on children’s rights is closely related with considerations stemming from an assessment of the factors which prevented its full implementation in practice – namely, the lack of a steady leadership coordinating its implementation, and of action plans and a monitoring system to operationalize the document and to keep track of its results.

In sum, whilst it appears that most relevant stakeholders do value the importance of having a comprehensive child rights Strategy, they seem to mostly regard it as an advocacy and awareness-raising tool, and as a good policy practice compliant with international standards, and in line with a consolidated practice in the country. It is worth highlighting that the views and opinions illustrated in this Report concerning the relevance of the Strategy were rather equally distributed across the different kind of respondents interviewed – NGOs, national institutions/organizations, and local authorities.

5.1.2 Strategy logic

The Strategy **logic appears generally clear, albeit some aspects could be improved**. The three strategic goals state the change that the Strategy aspires to contribute to in the long term. However, they do not clearly express what is expected to change *in the lives* of children and young people. Similar considerations hold for the objectives.

Both goals and objectives are not time-bound, nor geographically defined (one might assume that they are expected to affect all children and youth in Montenegro, and to be fulfilled by the end of the Strategy implementation period, or beyond.)

Whilst strategic goals and operational objectives do not specify from where to where progress is intended to take place, as they include words such as “enhance”, “improve”, “reduce” etc., the accompanying action plan does set out baseline value, half-way and final target value for each objective.

In terms of making explicit links between problems and objectives, the Strategy design, overall, did not achieve a sufficient level of clarity. While the identification of problems in the contexts where the intervention was planned is sufficiently comprehensive, the links between the problems that the intervention is trying to address and its objectives could have been defined more explicitly.

The activities envisaged in the action plan appear relevant to and consistent with the respective objectives. Performance indicators are provided at the objectives level: these appear to be well thought-through. However, these are mostly quantitative in nature.

Some stakeholders pointed to the fact that the Strategy could have been more focused, in order to be realistically attainable. The wide-ranging nature of the activities was regarded by some⁵⁵ as too ambitious to be achieved in light of existing capacities and available financial resources. One respondent who was closely involved in the Strategy design process firmly stated: “I would have insisted more on the Strategy not to be so comprehensive.”⁵⁶ Another stakeholder similarly highlighted: “The goal of this Strategy was that *everything* that exists in laws, protocols, needs to be implemented in practice.”⁵⁷ Similarly, a respondent admitted: “We assumed from the very beginning in the Working Group [in charge of drafting the Strategy] that it would not be feasible.”⁵⁸ Another stakeholders stated: “There are activities that were not realistic. Even when they are realistic, we do not know about results, because we had no qualitative indicators to measure.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ NGO 8.

⁵⁵ Five respondents expressly stated that.

⁵⁶ NAT INST/ORG 9.

⁵⁷ NGO 7.

⁵⁸ NGO 6.

⁵⁹ NAT INST/ORG 13.

The Strategy's underlying **Theory of Change ('ToC')** is not presented explicitly in the Strategy-related document. However, some of the constituting elements of a ToC are described in the Strategy text, namely:

- Strategic goals: three strategic goals are identified and included in the Strategy document (above);
- Long-term outcomes: named "operational objectives", these are included in the Strategy document under the different strategic goals (above), and numbered from one to 10;
- Activities that are expected to "have an effect on the implementation of operative objective[s]" are included in the Action Plan accompanying the Strategy. (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 76-97.)

Elements of the ToC not explicitly envisaged in the Strategy include:

- Intermediate outcomes (preconditions) that were expected to lead to the long-term outcomes and strategic goals;
- A list of (key) outputs, and how these are linked to the expected results - for example, with arrows pointing to (multiple) causal links;
- Linking of activities to expected outputs;
- Assumptions;
- Justifications.

As part of the data collection, the Evaluation Team strived to reconstruct the Strategy's ToC retrospectively, in order to fully explain the intervention's logic and rationale, and to highlight the key strategies and outcomes that were identified in order to contribute to achieving the Strategy's goal (figure 1 below). The ToC reconstruction was intended to also serve the purpose to evaluate progress towards the stated goals (impact), and to assess the effectiveness of the intervention in producing outputs and outcomes. The Evaluation Team tried in particular to identify the key implicit change theories and related action theories that – in the view of the Strategy designers and implementers – were to bring about the intended changes as part of the Strategy, as well as to scrutinize how valid were the implicit assumptions, and relevant to the context.

Overall, the Strategy did not seem to be grounded in an either explicit, nor implicit, comprehensive ToC. From discussions held with the different stakeholders, it appeared that there was no articulate ToC guiding the implementation of the Strategy, and providing a common understanding and reference as for what the intervention was aiming to change and how.

Regarding the reasons that might have prevented an all-encompassing ToC from being developed, one respondent explained that the Strategy design was done in close compliance with the Methodology for policy development, preparation and monitoring of implementation of strategic documents, issued by the Government of Montenegro. As one respondent recalled: "We were following the methodology issued by the Government. We also consulted with the General Secretariat of the Government, who needed to agree on the structure of the document."⁶⁰ Therefore, it might have been that – since the above-Methodology did not expressly require the development of a ToC – that was not included in the Strategy document.

Moreover, the fact that only some members of the Working Group in charge of drafting the Strategy were active, while other ones were contributing less to the process – as highlighted above in this paragraph – might explain the limited opportunities that were made available to brainstorm in depth about all elements of the intervention's ToC.

The lack of a comprehensive ToC therefore appears to be a gap in the Strategy identification and design.

⁶⁰ NAT INST/ORG 8. Similarly: NAT INST/ORG 19.

Figure 1. Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023. Reconstructed Theory of Change - Overview.

The diagrams below represent an overview of the logical model of the Strategy, as reconstructed by the Evaluation Team during the inception phase, on the basis of the available documentation. This is an overview outcomes hierarchy diagram, intended to:

- show the sequence of intended results, from short-term to long-term (activities are not included in this diagram);
- illustrate the causal pathways in terms of intermediate outcomes.



5.1.3 Adjustment throughout implementation

The Evaluation tried to understand whether and to what extent the Strategy was adjusted throughout the implementation phase, in light of changing circumstances faced by children in Montenegro, especially considering the needs of the most vulnerable children, and gender-differentiated needs.

Stakeholders who reflected on these questions over the course of the interviews showed understanding about the fact that new priorities may arise during a relatively long time-span of implementation. As one respondent stated: “Five years is a significant period, [...] within which new challenges may be brought about by time.”⁶¹ Another respondent echoed: “Some realities could have not been foreseen but have drastically influenced the exercise of the rights not just of children but adults as well, like COVID 19 and the war in Ukraine”.⁶² Thus, respondents recognized that “over the past five years, it was inevitable for changes to occur both in the challenges and needs of children”.⁶³

Likewise, respondents expressed that while the Strategy “foresees the priority needs of children in the exercise of their rights”, it is nevertheless “necessary to adapt” to new issues that have emerged during the five years of implementation.⁶⁴ “You design a five-year document but unfortunately, challenges may come up in the meantime, and you need to adapt it.”⁶⁵ Despite this shared understanding, the Strategy was never formally revised, allegedly.⁶⁶

Among the new issues that emerged (or became more urgent) after the Strategy had been designed and formally adopted, interviewed stakeholders mentioned: cyber violence;⁶⁷ mental health;⁶⁸ gender identity questioning;⁶⁹ peer violence;⁷⁰ protection of children on the move from Ukraine and Russia;⁷¹ and poverty.⁷² Some stakeholders also pointed to the need to provide parents with knowledge about positive parenting practices.⁷³

Since it was sometimes difficult to clearly distinguish – in the course of interviews – whether an issue was, in the respondent’s view, a new problem, or a problem not sufficiently addressed in practice, findings around adaptation (or lack of) are intertwined with the assessment of the Strategy’s effectiveness (section 5.3.)

5.2 Coherence

Coherence is defined as the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution. (OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019: 8.)

In terms of internal coherence, the Evaluation also assessed the extent to which the fundamental child rights principles (in particular: right to participation and to non-discrimination) have underpinned the Strategy’s design and its implementation and monitoring practices. The analysis related to external coherence has been framed in terms of the Strategy’s potential and success in providing a framework for effective coordination and synergies among stakeholders working on children’s rights in the country.

⁶¹ LOC INST 1.

⁶² NGO 9.

⁶³ NGO 17.

⁶⁴ LOC INST 9.

⁶⁵ NGO 2.

⁶⁶ NAT INST/ORG 1; NGO 2; NAT INST/ORG 10.

⁶⁷ NGO 2; LOC INST 10.

⁶⁸ NGO 2.

⁶⁹ LOC INST 6.

⁷⁰ LOC INST 6.

⁷¹ NGO 9.

⁷² NGO 2.

⁷³ NGO 2; NAT INST/ORG 16.

5.2.1 Internal coherence

In terms of internal coherence, the Strategy appears to be **very relevant to the Montenegrin Government's policies and priorities**, and to have continued to be so throughout the entire implementation phase.

The Strategy allegedly attains the relevant priority themes of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development ('NSSD') by 2030 – which relies on sustainable development goals as defined by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 25, 2015. In particular, the Strategy contributes to pursuing the following priority themes and strategic goals of the NSSD:

- Priority theme 4.1. - Improvement of the state of human resources and strengthening of social inclusion.
 - Strategic goal 4.1.2. - Improvement of the health of citizens of all ages and reduction of inequalities in health;
 - Strategic goal 4.1.3. - Providing inclusive and quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for everybody.
- Priority theme 4.2. - Support to values, norms and behavior patterns significant for the sustainability of the society.
 - Strategic goal 4.2.1. - Active attitude of key actors towards development sustainability.

(Montenegrin Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, 2016: 167-177; UNICEF, 2019: 7)⁷⁴

The Strategy appears also in line with Montenegro's commitments in the framework of the EU accession process. The 2019 European Commission's Montenegro Report highlighted that, concerning the rights of the child, "better coordination and monitoring of policies concerning children [was] needed", and that the institutional response to outstanding challenges "should be accompanied by harmonized data collection" on children's rights and issues. The above-report also stressed that further efforts were required in the country to address "forced child marriages and child begging, which affects mostly the Roma community, as well as overall violence against children." Moreover, the report pointed to the need to speed up the de-institutionalization process, and the development of foster care. Finally, the need to improve "overall access and quality of child and social protection services and of inclusive education for children with disabilities." (European Commission, 2019: 29-30). All of the above issues were addressed by the Strategy document.

In its design, the Strategy appears **generally coherent with the obligations stemming from the international conventions** ratified by Montenegro that directly or indirectly deal with the rights of children.

In particular, the Strategy's goals and objectives appear to be in line with several recommendations offered to the Government of Montenegro by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its Concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Montenegro (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2018.) This concerns especially the following areas: the need to adopt a comprehensive policy document on children's rights; child rights coordination-the Council, data collection; violence against children; children deprived of parental care; children with disabilities; education; and special protection measures. As illustrated above (section 5.1.1.), several stakeholders stated that the Strategy was indeed *built* primarily on the recommendations put forward by the UN Committee.

Concerning **child participation** (both a provision and an underpinning principle enshrined in the CRC), the process of drafting the Strategy appears coherent with the pursue of meaningful child participation. Regarding the level of engagement, children's participation in this phase appears to have been consultative.⁷⁵ As it is also mentioned above (section 5.1.1), the assessment of the quality of child participation against best practice standards goes beyond the scope of this Evaluation, also due to the lack of written documentation describing the participation process undertaken during the above-consultations.

Regarding the inclusiveness of child participation during the design phase, it appears that the consultations undertaken also involved children belonging to the most marginalized and excluded groups of the society in Montenegro, including: Roma children; children with disabilities; and children in alternative care. Interviewed stakeholders did recognize the inclusiveness of child consultations. Some of them, however, stated that there would be still room for improvement in this regard, in terms of children who should be reached. In particular, a larger number of children, representing a broader geographical variety and overall diversity, should be involved

⁷⁴ Other relevant priority themes include: 1, 2, 4, 5, 10 and 16. (NAT INST/ORG 1).

⁷⁵ As opposed to collaborative or child-led participation.

in future.⁷⁶ Furthermore, children on the move, child victims of trafficking and exploitation, and children who have experienced violence and abuse, do not seem to purposefully feature across the consultations held. Also, as one stakeholder highlighted, children from LGBTQIA+ could have been involved more consistently in the Strategy preparation.⁷⁷

As highlighted above, the involvement of children achieved during the design stage of the Strategy is regarded as a commendable effort in applying the child participation principle in practice, in terms of scope and inclusivity of such participation. However, child participation seems to have been largely confined to the design stage of the Strategy (i.e. situation analysis, and design and planning phases.) While it is possible that some of the projects and initiatives undertaken by different actors in the framework of the Strategy did involve children, in the dearth of monitoring reports documenting such involvement, it was hard to assess whether such participation occurred in practice, and how. The same applies to monitoring over the Strategy implementation. However, it is shared view among respondents interviewed about this aspect that children and young people's involvement was confined to the design stage.⁷⁸ As one respondent stated: "The majority of children involved in the survey [for the present Evaluation] did not know anything about the Strategy, nor did they participate in implementing it. But they are interested. They want to participate."⁷⁹ Nor were the Strategy's performance indicators apparently operationalized to actively include children, families and communities, as well as other stakeholders at the local level, in impact monitoring.

The above-findings are consistent with children's answers to the survey conducted as part of this Evaluation. When asked whether they believe that children and young people in Montenegro are involved, by relevant institutions and organizations, in decisions affecting them, the large majority of children considered this not to be the case. Thirty-eight per cent out of 75 respondents selected "never or almost never", 31% answered "seldom", and 11% "sometimes", while only 13% of respondents felt that they and their peers are being consulted "always or almost always". Speaking about the Strategy in particular, the **absolute majority of child respondents (58%) stated that, as far as they know, they have never been involved in any activities** to implement it, whereas 29% of respondents "did not know". Only 12% of them answered positively to such a question.

In terms of compliance with the principle of **non-discrimination** (as enshrined in relevant human rights conventions, primarily the UN CRC), the Evaluation aimed to ascertain whether activities implemented in the framework of the Strategy reached out to the most vulnerable and socially excluded children, and were responsive to their specific needs and situations. In the dearth of monitoring data, the analysis relies upon stakeholders' views on the matter.

It seems to be a shared opinion among the majority of the interviewed stakeholders who spoke about the topic that the Strategy design did cover to a considerable extent the specific needs of the most vulnerable groups of children; and that probably some results were attained in practice, but to a limited extent. "In the time of its creation it did cover them, but not sure if they were reached during implementation", one respondent stated.⁸⁰ Similarly, another respondent affirmed that "the position of marginalized categories of children has not fundamentally changed."⁸¹ Further, another respondent acknowledged: "The identification of major groups of children that have been marginalized is the first step towards any valuable results; we are not sure, though, about the follow-up interventions."⁸² And again, "attention was drawn on children from marginalized populations, in a way that more and more is said in the public space about children living in unfavorable life circumstances", one stakeholder added. "However, not all of the set goals were met", s/he concluded.⁸³

Several stakeholders pointed to groups of vulnerable children in relation to whom some results were attained, in their views (also) thanks to the Strategy. Many of them spoke about children from ethnic minorities (namely Roma and Egyptian), in relation to whom – in their views – there has been some progress, especially regarding inclusion in formal education, but discrimination still exists, and a lot of work needs to be done to especially

⁷⁶ NAT INST/ORG 10. NGO 2; NGO 7.

⁷⁷ NGO 1.

⁷⁸ NAT INST/ORG 8; NGO 2; NGO 4; NAT INST/ORG 10; NAT INST/ORG 16.

⁷⁹ NGO 2.

⁸⁰ NGO 9.

⁸¹ LOC INST 6.

⁸² NGO 12.

⁸³ LOC INST 9.

prevent these children from being trafficked and exploited, being married, and ending up in street situations.⁸⁴ Moreover, these children appear to be increasingly over-represented in the country's child care facilities for children deprived of parental care.⁸⁵

Interviewed stakeholders also spoke about children deprived of parental care more broadly, and the progress brought about in the process of de-institutionalization: far from being complete, this has been noticeable, also thanks to the Strategy, in their views.⁸⁶

A few respondents were positive about progress achieved in relation to children with disabilities, both in terms of improved support services through training of professionals, and of school inclusion.⁸⁷

Other children belonging to at-risk groups appear to have received little or no focus in the Strategy. These include, in particular: LGBTQIA+ children; children with mental health issues; children with behavioral problems; and refugee and asylum-seeking children. Reportedly, there is a dearth of plans to specifically cater to the needs of the above-groups of children in Montenegro, and services are mostly not yet suited to reach out to and assist them.⁸⁸ Some stakeholders also mentioned children living in rural areas,⁸⁹ who – according to some – “are often inaccessible for any activities, uninformed about their rights, lack access to internet, and so on.”⁹⁰

In terms of **gender equity**, the Strategy does not appear to have sufficiently taken into account the different needs, situations and rights-violations of girls and boys in Montenegro. Although gender-disaggregated data are provided in the situation analysis, specific actions targeting children's differences along gender are not prominent in the document. This gap has been highlighted by several stakeholders working in different fields relating to children's rights in the country.

The absolute majority (82%, that is 28 out of 44 respondents) considers that the Strategy fell short of addressing gender issues, including gender-based violence, discrimination based on gender, and gender stereotypes.⁹¹ Some of them pointed to specific and concrete examples in this regard. One respondent explained: “In the field of health, especially in preserving reproductive health, there are significant differences in the needs of girls, which are not adequately highlighted, although it is particularly important for the healthy development and well-being of girls.” This respondent went on explaining: “That is noticed even in the specific indicators related to the health field, the importance of data classified and analyzed by gender is not emphasized.”⁹²

Another example relates to the education sector. One respondent stated: “It seems to me that the impact of school violence on the lives of boys and girls has not been taken into account”. S/he continued: “I don't see defined concrete measures and activities. In schools, instead of reducing stereotypes and prejudices, they seem to be increasing. I talk to children every day [...] but boys increasingly express the opinion that a man is the head of the household, and a woman should raise children. Unfortunately, this topic is not recognized in school curricula, so I can conclude that the Strategy has had a very limited impact on the education system in this regard.”⁹³

The lack of differentiation among forms of trafficking and exploitation based on gender, and among other gender-diverse forms of violence against children (for example, corporal punishment, peer violence, or sexual

⁸⁴ LOC INST 12; NGO 1; LOC INST 11; NGO 16; NAT INST/ORG 14; NGO 13.

⁸⁵ NGO 16.

⁸⁶ NGO 1; LOC INST 7.

⁸⁷ LOC INST 2; LOC INST 7, NGO 1; NAT INST/ORG 14; NAT INST/ORG 15.

⁸⁸ NGO 15; LOC INST 8; NGO 1; .

⁸⁹ LOC INST 3; NGO 13.

⁹⁰ LOC INST 3.

⁹¹ LOC INST 5; LOC INST 1; LOC INST 3; LOC INST 4; NGO 8; NGO 9; NGO 10; LOC INST 6; LOC INST 7; NGO 12; LOC INST 8; LOC INST 9; NGO 15; LOC INST 10; LOC INST 11; NGO 17; NGO 18; NGO 19; NGO 21; NGO 20; LOC INST 13; NAT INST/ORG 18; NAT INST/ORG 19.

⁹² This respondent pointed – as an example - to the fact that specific reference is made in those indicators to the rate of vaccinated children, which refers to different types of vaccines, but not to the HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine, which is extremely important for girls in preventing cervical cancer (although it also protects boys from other diseases). LOC INST 5.

⁹³ LOC INST 1.

violence in the family and community settings, and so on.) is also noticeable in the Strategy design. Possibly, a gender-specific impact of the measures envisaged by the Strategy could have been better pursued and measured through the development of annual plans of action and of an impact monitoring system, both of which are largely missing. (See below, section 5.5.)

5.2.2 External coherence

The Evaluation framed the analysis related to external coherence primarily in terms of the Strategy's potential and success in providing a framework for effective coordination and synergies among stakeholders working on children's rights in the country.

According to the Strategy document, the Strategy "has an emphasis on intersectoral cooperation". (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 8.) As mentioned above in this Report (section 5.1.1), a Working Group was set up in order to draft the Strategy, comprising one representative of each relevant national institutions, one representative of the municipal level, one representative from the NGO sector, and one child participant. As one respondent emphasized, the Strategy itself "was adopted at a very high level, and it was cross-sectoral in nature."⁹⁴

Concerning implementation, the Strategy envisaged an articulated coordination mechanism. Under the lead of the Council for the Rights of the Child of Montenegro, line ministries and other institutions whose representatives were members of the Working Group in charge of drafting the Strategy were meant to remain in charge of implementation, as well as of inter-department and inter-sectoral cooperation, including with NGOs and international agencies. During the implementation process, all ministries were expected to involve institutions that fall within their sector – such as education institutions, centers for social work, health centers etc. – and to also cooperate with institutions that collect and process various data on children in Montenegro (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 72).

Regarding the process of monitoring and reporting, the whole above-said Working Group was expected to monitor the implementation of the Strategy, whereas the reporting should have been performed on a rotation basis, based on annual plans, by the following ministries: Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Interior; and Ministry of Justice (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 74).

Coordination at all levels was one of the most recurring topics emerging during data collection in Montenegro, especially at the national level – but it was also brought up a lot by local authorities and NGOs. Virtually all respondents agreed that **inter-sectoral cooperation had been among the weakest aspects** of the Strategy, and one of the main factors that hindered its implementation.

Among the reasons that caused this limited inter-sectoral cooperation among institutions, stakeholders pointed to a combination of internal and external factors. As one respondent put it: "During the five years of the Strategy, there were lots of political turbulences in Montenegro. Too frequent changes in government, in ministries, in departments. Even changes in the structures and competences' division among ministries. The COVID-19 affected all the world, also Montenegro, and this was another factor. But putting that aside, institutions need to be more open for cooperation with different sectors."⁹⁵

On this last point, another stakeholder echoed: "Ministries do not understand that cooperation with different stakeholders would make better qualitative implementation. Institutions don't understand the importance of cooperation."⁹⁶ While most likely the situation is more nuanced and complex than one statement could capture, it is however significant that some representatives of the civil society shared these impressions. Another respondent concluded: "Cross-sectoral cooperation was and still is the biggest challenge."⁹⁷

Moreover, it allegedly took a long time for the Council for the Rights of the Child to be transformed into an inter-ministerial body positioned at the Prime Minister's level. According to several interviewees, this reform

⁹⁴ NAT INST/ORG 1. Similarly: NAT INST/ORG 8.

⁹⁵ NGO 1.

⁹⁶ NGO1.

⁹⁷ NAT INST/ORG 8. Similarly: NAT INST/ORG 6; NAT INST/ORG 10; NAT INST/ORG 1.

was long overdue, and finally enabled the above-Council to play its role of coordinating among different ministries and other institutions dealing with children's rights. As one respondent explained: "If it is cross-sectoral, the job of the Council will always stay within the same Ministry who hosts the Council",⁹⁸ meaning that no other institutions will effectively cooperate.

Unfortunately, this transformation took place only at the end of 2023, that is, when the Strategy implementation period was about to end.⁹⁹ However, there is shared hope among stakeholders that the new Council will be well-placed to exert leadership and play a driving role in coordinating a joint action to fulfil children's rights in the country.

Some NGOs also stressed that national institutions should cooperate with NGOs more proactively: "I want to have cooperation with institutions, and not just wait for them to send me reports. We should be in constant communication."¹⁰⁰

Regarding the rotation system envisaged by the Strategy for monitoring and reporting, stakeholders expressed mixed views. Some stakeholders highlighted that this system "gives chance also to other ministries to coordinate activities".¹⁰¹ Other ones, instead, had reservations about this approach. As one respondent simply stated: "The rotation in coordination was not a good idea."¹⁰² Another respondent further articulated: "Every time each year we have somebody else in the group. And people who are no longer in the group, do not hand over. We need a constant working group. Rotation is not good. The group needs to be steady."¹⁰³ Other respondents simply assessed retrospectively that "the implementation did not go as planned"¹⁰⁴ and that "the imagined system of reporting based on the principle of rotation did not give the final results."¹⁰⁵

Albeit it was conceived with the intention to promote and enhance inter-institutional coordination and cooperation in fulfilling children's rights, the rotation system apparently did not hold the hoped-for results. On the opposite, it seems to have further hampered implementation and monitoring of the Strategy. This situation also reverberated at the local level.

Only three among the interviewees from the municipal level who spoke about coordination knew that a coordination mechanism for the Strategy was in place.¹⁰⁶ While a few respondents "assumed" or "guessed" that a coordination mechanism must exist at the national level,¹⁰⁷ most of them (two thirds) plainly stated that they did not have information concerning a coordination system for the Strategy implementation and monitoring, and that – in any case – they did not see much (improved) coordination between the national and local levels as a result of the Strategy. As one respondent summarized: "At the local level, there is no team monitoring the implementation of this Strategy, and I don't have information about the Government coordination team."¹⁰⁸ Some stakeholders, however, acknowledged that, despite lack of cooperation with the central level, the Strategy "served as the basis and guidance for designing and implementing local ones that cater to the needs of the local population."¹⁰⁹

Overall, it appears that coordination but also communication between the national and local level about the Strategy was somewhat missing, especially around how this policy document would be implemented and rolled out in practice.

Limited inter-sectoral coordination at both horizontal (national) and vertical (national-local) levels appears to also be one key factor hindering the effectiveness of the Strategy. This will be discussed in the following paragraph.

⁹⁸ NAT INST/ORG 8.

⁹⁹ NAT INST/ORG 9; NAT INST/ORG 1; NAT INST/ORG 8.

¹⁰⁰ NGO 1.

¹⁰¹ NAT INST/ORG 8.

¹⁰² NAT INST/ORG 1.

¹⁰³ NAT INST/ORG 13.

¹⁰⁴ NAT INST/ORG 11.

¹⁰⁵ NAT INST/ORG 17.

¹⁰⁶ NGO 10; NGO 17; NGO 18.

¹⁰⁷ LOC INST 2; NGO 11; LOC INST 7; LOC INST 13.

¹⁰⁸ LOC INST 5. Similar answers were provided by: LOC INST 1; NGO 8; NGO 9; LOC INST 6; NGO 12; NGO 14; LOC INST 8; LOC INST 9; NGO 16; LOC INST 10; LOC INST 11; NGO 19; NGO 21; LOC INST 13.

¹⁰⁹ LOC INST 12.

5.3 Effectiveness

Effectiveness is defined as the extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups. (OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019: 9.)

The above applies to areas of the Strategy in relation to which, during the data collection phase, relevant data were obtained, and compared against the objectives contained in the Strategy document.

5.3.1 The Strategy's main achievements

As already explained in this Report (section 2.3.), the dearth of monitoring data considerably hindered the evaluability of the Strategy, especially under the effectiveness criterion. Through a combination of primary and secondary data, this sub-paragraph aims to offer an account of what could be considered as the main achievements of the Strategy. Whenever possible, the analysis is related to the objectives' level, whilst sometimes it is possible to only highlight stated achievements with no specific reference to the Strategy's objectives. In all cases, it is very hard to attribute certain results to the Strategy with a sufficient level of confidence, nor to assess their quantitative or qualitative aspects in greater depth.

Operational objective 1, under strategic goal I, set out to achieve "improved implementation of all processes related to the **data on children**, including the inter-departmental and inter-sector exchange on such data." (UNICEF, 2019: 76-77.)

The Violence against Children Strategy Evaluation notes that "national monitoring of violence against children is poorly developed, with the [...] problems of the official data collected by different institutions not being comparable and disaggregated according to various groups of children, which hinders efforts in developing social policy measures that would be in line with children's needs." (Sekol et al., forthcoming: 52.)

Similarly, in 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material noted that "the real magnitude of the problem is difficult to determine, due to the unavailability of centralized and disaggregated data on the different forms of sexual abuse and exploitation of children and on the number of cases identified, investigated and prosecuted." (Human Rights Council, 2022: 4.) Further, the Rapporteur noted that "there is a lack of adequate and systematically collected reliable, centralized and disaggregated data on the phenomena of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation", and that generally "data collection continues to be a challenge due to the lack of a unified centralized database", highlighting that "much information in the child protection sector is dispersed among the different institutions responsible for various child-related policies, and data sharing between child protection services, the police and the judiciary remains weak." (Human Rights Council, 2022: 9.)

Among its key achievements under operational objective 1, the first annual implementation report of the Strategy states that "data from six areas were collected and sent to the Council of Europe – Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF)." It also states that "data has also been provided indicating that the collection and sharing of information activities are conducted continuously: health records of the chosen doctors for children, dentists, and gynecologists, and e-records at the National Health Fund." Further, the above-report states that "electronic scheduling has been improved through the central networking of all healthcare institutions", and that "conditions have been fully created for the exercise of the rights to universal birth registration for all children without exception." (Montenegro Ministry of Finance and Social Welfare, 2021).

Whilst the above-information suggest an improvement in the regularity, frequency and comprehensiveness of the collection of child-focused data in some sectors, it appears difficult to compare them about the performance indicators set out to achieve operational objective 1. Moreover, and as mentioned earlier, the first report accounts only for the period 2019-2020.

Some interviewed stakeholder spoke about data in relation to operational objective 1. One respondent said that the Strategy had allegedly advanced institutional capacity to monitor policies and programs for children.¹¹⁰ Referring to child protection, another respondent stated that the fact that “the system is now more efficient in collecting and exchanging data between relevant services of importance for child protection and the conduct of procedures. This means that relevant information about their needs, experiences, and rights now circulates better between different institutions and sectors.”¹¹¹

Concerning the Strategy’s operational objective 2 (“Improved implementation of **legislative, strategic and financial frameworks** and of the **coordination of all stakeholders** in exercising and monitoring the rights of the child” – Government of Montenegro, 2019: 78-79), some stakeholders generally referred to the fact that, in their views, the primary achievements of the Strategy related to the improvements in developing the legal framework on children’s rights, and in aligning this with international standards.¹¹²

As it concerns the coordination of all stakeholders in implementing and monitoring children’s rights, this does not seem to have improved noticeably thanks to the Strategy. This aspect has been reviewed under the coherence criterion (paragraph 5.2.2.)

Several respondents spoke about achievements obtained, and outstanding challenges, under operational objective 3: “An **effective alternative care system** for children without parental care is provided.” (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 80-81.) They believed that there has been progress in this area, with less children in institutional care facilities (90 instead of 100, at least a decrease in numbers).¹¹³ Also, different kinds of licensed services aimed to prevent institutionalization were enacted during the Strategy implementation period, such as services aimed to support parents of children at risk of ending up in institutions. For children who are still in institutional facilities, life skills programs have been undertaken,¹¹⁴ as well as counselling services when they leave institutional care. Still, the number of foster families, especially non-kinship ones, is deemed to be too low.¹¹⁵

Operational objective 4 envisaged that “support for **children with disabilities and other children from vulnerable groups** and **adolescents** to make use of free and timely **healthcare** and adequate **social protection** is enhanced.” (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 83.) Stakeholders’ opinions about achievements under this objective point to some progress, while highlighting outstanding gaps. Some respondents welcomed the design and implementation of “a large number of trainings for professionals on the topic of child protection”¹¹⁶, aimed at “strengthening the capacities of professionals to work with many marginalized groups of children”.¹¹⁷ One respondent expressed concern about the fact that there are not yet clear numbers for children with disabilities, which was an expected result of the Strategy.¹¹⁸

On the positive side, a respondent referred to a “center for children with special needs” established in Bijelo Polje, which provides specialized health services that are unique in Montenegro – for children with disabilities, including autism condition, as well as counselling services in the field of reproductive health, alcohol, tobacco and drug use for adolescents.¹¹⁹ Finally, another stakeholder pointed to the fact that there is still a significant percentage of non-vaccinated children in the country, and that more work should be done to sensitize parents about the importance of vaccinations.¹²⁰

As part of the survey carried out in the framework of this Evaluation, children were asked whether, in their opinion, children and young people in Montenegro have access to quality physical and mental healthcare. Out of 75 respondents, 13% declared that this occurs “never or almost never”; 23% thought that this happens “seldom”; 42% stated that this is “sometimes” the case; and only 13% of child respondents felt that this is

¹¹⁰ LOC INST 2.

¹¹¹ NAT INST/ORG 19.

¹¹² NGO 17; NGO 18; LOC INST 13.

¹¹³ NGO 1; NGO 6; LOC INST 3.

¹¹⁴ NGO 1.

¹¹⁵ NGO 6.

¹¹⁶ LOC INST 9.

¹¹⁷ NAT INST/ORG 18.

¹¹⁸ NGO 6.

¹¹⁹ LOC INST 5.

¹²⁰ NGO 2.

granted “always or almost always”. These data point to a relatively low level of satisfaction concerning healthcare services among children and young people in the country.

Objective 5 of the Strategy aimed to “reduce material **poverty** of children” (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 85-86.)

A report published by UNICEF in February 2021 analyzing multidimensional child poverty in Montenegro stated that more than 80 per cent of children experience deprivation in at least one domain of their well-being. (UNICEF, 2021: 54.) While this statement would suggest a worsening of the situation regarding child poverty compared to the time when the Strategy was adopted, the above-analysis is based on “data from household surveys conducted in Montenegro in 2018 as the basis for calculating the extent of multidimensional child poverty in the country.” (UNICEF, 2021: 10.) Therefore, these data apparently refer to a preceding period of time than the one during which the Strategy was implemented.

Concerning the key-achievements reported under operational objective 5, the Strategy implementation report 2019-2020 mostly refers to measures to enhance access to education for vulnerable children. The report does not refer to other poverty dimensions, such as nutrition, child labour, neglect and discipline (child protection). Also, it does not offer monitoring data explicitly related to children at risk of poverty, material deprivation rate among children, therefore hindering the possibility to measure progress achieved during year 1 of implementation against the performance indicators set out by the Strategy.

The Strategy’s operational objective 6 aims to reach “**improved access to education** for vulnerable children, the quality of education for all children and access to quality cultural and media content.” (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 86-89.) When asked what were, in their views, the main achievements of the Strategy, a number of stakeholders pointed to results that could relate to this objective.

Increased enrollment in formal education for children from Roma communities was brought up in conversations. “Concerning Roma children and youth, who are the most disadvantaged group in Montenegro, it was done a lot regarding their education”, one respondent affirmed.¹²¹ Another respondent confirmed that, through the Strategy, “support to Roma communities in raising awareness on the importance of education, as well as training programs for teachers and social workers on the specific needs and rights of these groups of children”, were undertaken.¹²² Further, one respondent stressed progress achieved in inclusive education: “There is an increased number of children with disabilities who attend kindergarten. There are teaching assistants, albeit still in inadequate number.”¹²³

Children were consulted, in general, about education opportunities currently provided to them, and whether these meet their capacities, skills and desires. About one third of the survey respondents declared that this is “always or almost always” the case, while the largest share of respondents (37%) stated that this happens “sometimes”. Twenty-four per cent of respondents stated that this happens “seldom”, while only around 7% declared that they are “never or almost never” provided with such opportunities.

Operational objective 7 aims to achieve “enhanced support for **early child development**.” (UNICEF, 2019: 89-90.) Concerning this objective, the only improvement referred to by a number of respondents was that the Early Development Strategy was adopted in 2023.¹²⁴ Apparently, this is the first strategy on this topic adopted in Montenegro.¹²⁵ Allegedly, the objectives included in this strategy were taken from the child rights Strategy.¹²⁶ One respondent pointed to the fact that the Early Development Strategy might have better chances of being implemented in practice, because dedicated funds have been allocated to its realization: “With the Early Development Strategy, 1.2 million Euros have been earmarked. Everything is easier. We need to have a dedicated budget for each strategy.”¹²⁷

¹²¹ NGO 1.

¹²² NGO 13.

¹²³ NGO 4.

¹²⁴ NGO 4.

¹²⁵ NAT INST/ORG 10.

¹²⁶ NAT INST/ORG 13.

¹²⁷ NAT INST/ORG 13.

Operational objective 8 is dedicated to the “improved prevention of **all types of violence against children** and support to children victims.” (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 91.)

Concerning the number of officially reported cases of violence against children, according to the Violence Against Children Strategy Evaluation, such number had increased from 2017 to 2019, fact which may suggest a positive change in attitudes among the population, in particular on their readiness to report cases to authorities. However, “here was a significant decrease of 26.4% in the number of reported cases of violence against children in 2020 compared to 2019”, which – according to the authors – could be explained by several factors, including the constrained capacity to identify child victims by school teachers and professionals from Centers for Social Work, as a consequence of the interruptions in schooling and home visitations due the COVID-19 pandemic. (Sekol et al., forthcoming: 37-38.) In any case, these data do not cover the entire period of the Strategy implementation (2019-2023). Regarding the number of child victims of violence who received support services, the Evaluation of the Strategy on Violence Against Children portrayed as one of the main successes achieved to be the increasing accessibility of the service of family outreach, which has, “apart from a small dip in 2018 compared to 2017, been steadily increasing the number of families, children, and counties it serves.” No information however is available beyond 2020 in the above report. The above-evaluation also highlights as this measure of the Violence Against Children Strategy brought support to children in very vulnerable conditions, including Roma children, children with disabilities, child victims of abuse, children placed in foster families, and very young children. (Sekol et al., forthcoming: 39.) Additionally and in relation to services, the evaluation report notes that there is not a sufficient number of places at shelters for children and women who are victims of domestic violence, “which seriously hinders the protection efforts when they are needed the most.” (Sekol et al., forthcoming: 52)

Whether the above can be attributed to the child rights Strategy, or solely to the Violence Against Children Strategy, or whether it would have happened independently from one or either policy documents, it is however hard to establish.

During interviews undertaken in the framework of the present Evaluation, several stakeholders referred to achievements in relation to violence against children in Montenegro. One respondent welcomed the fact that the child rights Strategy “contained specific measures for the prevention of violence against children and for strengthening the child protection system”.¹²⁸ Concerning achievements, in some stakeholders’ views the Strategy had supported progress on combating peer violence, in particular: “Progress can be seen in the area of public promotion and media campaigns that condemn peer violence and neglect of children”, one respondent stated.¹²⁹ “We have been using the Strategy to define certain steps to be taken” another respondent added, referring to peer violence in particular.¹³⁰ Similarly, another respondent noted: “I see that the issue of bullying and other forms of violence against children are on the table now and are becoming priorities that should be further addressed. This is the benefit of this Strategy.”¹³¹

Children consulted on the topic of violence in the framework of this Evaluation answered, in the largest majority of cases, that in their opinion, children and young people of different age-groups in Montenegro are “not at all” (nearly 20%) or just “a little bit” (49% of answers) protected from violence, and only 16% of them thought that this protection is provided to a sufficient extent.

Child **victims of trafficking** are included in the Strategy primarily under operational objective 9, “enhanced support for children to whom special protection measures apply.” (UNICEF, 2019: 94-96)

The 2022 Report issued by the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children stated that, according to the information she received, “in 2020 the operational team [for the formal identification of victims of trafficking] conducted a formal identification process and granted the status of a victim of trafficking to 52 persons, including 10 children. The children were victims of forced begging or child marriage.” (Human Rights Council of the United Nations General Assembly, 2002: 13.) While these data point to an increase of the actual number of child victims of trafficking formally identified in Montenegro compared to the baseline data in 2018 (3 child victims identified), it is hard to tell what this figure represents in relation to the actual number of victims in the country.

¹²⁸ LOC INST 2.

¹²⁹ LOC INST 6.

¹³⁰ NAT INST/ORG 16.

¹³¹ NGO 14.

According to the USA Trafficking in Persons 2023 Country Report for Montenegro, in 2023 the Government identified four child victims of trafficking for the purpose of child labour in the country, two boys and two girls. However, the above-report found that the Government decreased victim protection efforts, compared to the previous year. (US Department of State.) Once again, in the absence of monitoring data, it is hard to establish whether any of these variations could be related to the Strategy, and/or to other policy documents or programs implemented in the country. Moreover, performance indicators relating to this objective do not point to data concerning the outcomes of the protection measures implemented on the well-being of the children concerned.

Some stakeholders spoke about trafficking in children during the course of the interviews. One respondent stated that “the Criminal Code was amended, and further amendments are being drafted, bringing the definition of trafficking in children in line with international legal standards.” The respondent then added: “Another strategy is defining that more precisely, but relying on the Child Rights Strategy to amend the Code.”¹³² Speaking about trafficking in children but also other issues more generally, another stakeholder stated that “the Strategy has achieved results mainly in the legislative framework and accompanying policies, but there are still shortcomings in practice, i.e. in the implementation of adopted laws and policies.”¹³³

Operational objective 9 envisaged protection measures also for other groups of children, namely asylum-seeking children, and children in contact with the law. However, signs of progress (or lack of) in relation to the protection of these groups of children was not identified in the course of the Evaluation.

Operational objective 10 aimed to attain “improved protection of children from sale, child pornography and involvement in armed conflicts.” (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 97)

The only performance indicator envisaged to measure achievements against this objective refers to the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child related to the UN CRC Optional Protocols on – respectively - the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts. The target value at the end of the Strategy implementation period is that all such recommendations be implemented.

Among its recommendations, the above-UN Committee recommended to “establish mechanisms and procedures to protect the rights of child victims”, and to “develop and implement programmes aimed at the protection, physical and psychological rehabilitation and social integration of child victims”. (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2018: 14)

Data concerning the protection of children from sale and child pornography could be partly extrapolated from the 2022 report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material. The above-report notes the “limited number of experts, services and institutions for the treatment and support of sexually abused children”, and that “this is an obstacle to ensuring holistic interventions, the provision of long-term care, rehabilitation, accessible and sustainable counselling and follow-up of children victims of sexual abuse.” (Human Rights Council of the United Nations General Assembly, 2002: 9).

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in his 2018 Concluding Observations had recommended that Montenegro provided in domestic legislation an explicit definition of the crime of the sale of children, according to articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2018: 14).

About four years after, when the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material analyzed the domestic legal framework in Montenegro, she noted that there were “several relevant provisions to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the Criminal Code, which was in the process of being amended at the time of the visit of the Special Rapporteur.” Such provisions relate, in particular, to the definition of the crime of trafficking in human beings, and its aggravating circumstances if the victims is a child. (Human Rights Council of the United Nations General Assembly, 2022: 10-11.) However, some progress was still needed in Montenegro in this area. The Special Rapporteur recommended, in particular, that Montenegro criminalized the sale of children as defined in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, as this crime was addressed by the Criminal Code in the context of

¹³² NAT INST/ORG 16.

¹³³ NGO 17-18.

child trafficking. The Special Rapporteur also recommended to strengthen the national legislation concerning online child sexual offences, in particular by including reference to online grooming (Human Rights Council of the United Nations General Assembly, 2022: 11).

Virtually no stakeholder interviewed as part of the Evaluation spoke about the issue of sale of children, child pornography and children's involvement in armed conflicts in Montenegro. Thus, it appears difficult to further substantiate discourses on achievements under this operational objective.

5.3.2 Key-factors that determined or constrained the Strategy's success

Political instability appears to have been one of the most important factors hindering the Strategy implementation. As mentioned above in this Report (section 1.3.), since 2020 Montenegro has been affected by political volatility, government instability and tensions, conditions which have significantly hampered the proper functioning of Montenegrin institutions and consequently stalling decision-making processes. Many stakeholders interviewed as part of the Evaluation referred to "political challenges" and "political turbulences" as a key obstacle to implementing the Strategy.¹³⁴ Respondents were very vocal about the need for the Evaluation to take into account this major obstacle in implementation. As one respondent explained: "There was a change in the Government in August 2020, after we had had the same Government for three decades. Then the Government re-grouped again twice. I believe it is important for you to keep this in mind when evaluating the Strategy."¹³⁵ Similarly, a respondent stressed: "We had three Governments in place since 2020!"¹³⁶ Another respondent observed that for the Strategy to be effective, "the political situation needs to be stable. [...] During the Strategy, the Government changed. Every time a new era begins."¹³⁷

The most noticeable consequences of the overall political instability in Montenegro on the Strategy implementation concerned the **frequent changes** that occurred, on the one hand, in the very structure of some ministries and other institutions in charge, and on the other hand, in the job positions of the individuals who were to contribute to such implementation. This situation appears to have negatively affected the Strategy in many ways. First of all, it was difficult for external counterparts (NGOs, CSOs, and other stakeholders) to locate the exact ministry, department, office and person who were responsible for the implementation of a given range of measures falling under the Strategy's domain. As one respondent stated: "Decision-makers have been changing. We were losing a lot of time to identify who will be in charge next."¹³⁸ Secondly, as one respondent pointed, "every six months people changed. Some people had good will, but did not have knowledge".¹³⁹ Besides, in a situation of almost ongoing change and lack of institutional stability, it is understandable that some of the individuals who were temporarily placed to attend to the Strategy implementation might not have focused on what they probably perceived as a task assigned to them just temporarily.¹⁴⁰

A problem closely related to what has just been discussed, but to some extent independent from the political instability, is what several stakeholders referred to as "**loss of institutional memory**."¹⁴¹ Allegedly, the Strategy could not rely on a proper system for recording data, progress, and for handing over tasks and responsibilities every time an individual changes in a given job position related to the Strategy implementation, and/or a task is transferred from one office, department or institution to a different one. As one respondent put it: "When the Government changes, there are no records of what has been done by the persons previously working there. There is no learning. Maybe the documents they produced were good, but there is no institutional memory."¹⁴²

The **COVID-19** pandemic was referred to by some respondents a "huge hindrance" which "influenced greatly the implementation"¹⁴³ of the Strategy, since "everything slowed down" because of the pandemic,¹⁴⁴ which

¹³⁴ NAT INST/ORG 1; NAT INST/ORG 6; NGO 1; NAT INST/ORG 10; NGO 7; LOC INST 4; NGO 1; NAT INST/ORG 14.

¹³⁵ NAT INST/ORG 8.

¹³⁶ NGO 4.

¹³⁷ NGO 2.

¹³⁸ NGO 1. Similarly: NAT INST/ORG 16; LOC INST 4; NAT INST/ORG 10; NGO 16.

¹³⁹ NAT INST/ORG 10.

¹⁴⁰ As inferred by also one respondent (NAT INST/ORG 11.)

¹⁴¹ LOC INST 4; NGO 2; NGO 1; NAT INST/ORG 9.

¹⁴² NAT INST/ORG 9.

¹⁴³ NGO 12.

¹⁴⁴ NGO 7; LOC INST 4. Similarly: LOC INST 2; NGO 9; NGO 11; NAT INST/ORG 1; NAT INST/ORG 6; NGO 1; NGO 6.

also exacerbated inequalities in the realization of children's rights.¹⁴⁵ However, discussions around this topic during the data collection phase did not go into the details about which measures to counter the pandemic have in particular affected the Strategy's implementation,¹⁴⁶ and how.

Limited cross-sectoral cooperation appears to have been another major factor hindering the Strategy implementation. As mentioned above (section 5.2.2.), the Strategy does not seem to have augmented inter-sectoral coordination and cooperation at any level when it comes to the realization of children's rights in Montenegro. This issue was highlighted by representatives of the diverse groups of stakeholders. Some respondents were rather blatant when expressing their views on the problem: "The very concept of child rights entails the work of different services in the child's best interest. They do not know how to work together. We are facing it in daily cases, and it concerns all sectors."¹⁴⁷ Indeed, such cooperation appears to be limited at virtually all levels: across national-level institutions; between local and national actors; among municipal-level actors and service providers; within ministries and even departments.

Over-reliance on external donors and international agencies – and on UNICEF in particular, in the area of children's rights – was also brought up by some respondent as a factor limiting the Strategy implementation. As one respondent expressed, "Ministries expect a lot from UNICEF. When the Strategy was finalized, they were very happy with the document. But they expected a lot from UNICEF."¹⁴⁸ Similarly, another stakeholder stated: "We did not monitor whether the Strategy was being implemented. The State should implement. UNICEF, UN, if they do not push, things do not move; we did not reach yet a level that a certain Ministry is accountable."¹⁴⁹

As several stakeholders highlighted, though, the factors mentioned above appear to have negatively affected the implementation not only of this Strategy, but also of all (or most of) other sectoral strategies dealing with children's rights adopted in Montenegro during the same period of time.¹⁵⁰ However, the negative impact of such factors (or at least some of them) on the sectoral strategies might have been more limited. As one respondent explained: "There is better cross-sectoral participation when there are sectoral strategies. The Ministry in charge asks for inputs from other ministries that are to contribute to implementation."¹⁵¹

The above observation relates to another hindering factor, which seems to be rather specific to this Strategy, which is the **lack of leadership** in implementing it. As previously mentioned (section 5.2.2.), the coordination of the Strategy implementation should have been fostered by the Council for the Rights of the Child; unfortunately, though, it appears that this inter-institutional body did not enjoy the right conditions in order to actively and effectively play its leading role in regard to the Strategy.

One factor that could have supported the Strategy's implementation was its **timeliness**. Referring to an evaluation exercise carried out prior to the design phase, one stakeholder remembered: "The evaluation of the child rights monitoring system helped bring together different institutions." Apparently, this joint work had created momentum and cohesion. Therefore, the different ministries and other relevant institutions were already mobilized at the time of the Strategy design.

Closely related to the above, another factor that facilitated the Strategy, albeit mostly in the design phase, appears to be the **shared belief, among most stakeholders, that an overarching child rights strategy is needed** in Montenegro. (Also: section 5.1.1) Montenegrin child rights stakeholders are apparently used to have such type of overarching document, previously framed as "national action plan" on children's rights, and virtually all interviewed stakeholders were supporting the idea of such a Strategy – and often already looking forward to designing the next one.

These factors, which could have been facilitated the Strategy implementation, however, do not seem to have been sufficiently utilized to that purpose beyond the design phase.

¹⁴⁵ NGO 14.

¹⁴⁶ NAT INST/ORG 16.

¹⁴⁷ NAT INST/ORG 16.

¹⁴⁸ NAT INST/ORG 9.

¹⁴⁹ NGO 4.

¹⁵⁰ NAT INST 1; NAT INST 6; NGO 1; NAT INST/ORG 8; NGO 4; NAT INST/ORG 7; NGO 2.

¹⁵¹ NAT INST/ORG 7.

5.4 Efficiency

Efficiency is defined as the extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way. (OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019: 10.)

This criterion has been used to measure the outputs – qualitative and quantitative – achieved as a result of inputs, and to assesses whether the most efficient approach has been used, in light of feasible alternatives in the given context.

The Strategy’s budget was overall **not sufficiently accurate**. The total funds of the Strategy were estimated to be 4.000.000 Euros, of which around 70% was to be provided “from the budget” and the remaining 30% “from donations” (Government of Montenegro, 2019: 72). The action plan for the period 2019-2020, enclosed in the Strategy document, foresees total expenditures (1.063.000 Euros), and some costs per activities. Expenditures appear to have been envisaged as lump sums. During the data collection, the Evaluation Team did not find more detailed information regarding the budget, nor did they find evidence of the (expected and actual) specific contributions of the different institutions in charge of implementing the Strategy, or of other actors (e.g. UNICEF.)

Several respondent also were of the opinion that the Strategy’s budget was not sufficiently accurate, and that more efforts should have been made to address this fundamental aspect of the Strategy design and planning. As one respondent stated: “Although we know that due to unforeseen circumstances you can never be too precise, I still believe that things should be more precisely defined, funds should be allocated more precisely.”¹⁵² Consulted about the budget, another respondent answered: “I don’t know. I believe that it was at best a guesstimate. This is all too common also to sectoral strategies – even the best ones.”¹⁵³ Thus, lack of sufficiently accurate budget seems to be a problem affecting not only this Strategy. “Frequently, budgets are not precise enough”, another respondent complained.¹⁵⁴

Another aspect that some respondents highlighted during the interview concerns the **lack of a shared plan to raise funds** that were supposed to come “from donations” (above), supposedly due to a rather passive attitude about this aspect among institutions. “State institutions are often counting on donors, but have no precise plans on how to get those donations.”¹⁵⁵ Another respondent echoed: “No, there was no shared plan for fundraising. Except when there was some already ongoing project.”¹⁵⁶ Similarly, another interviewee questioned: “1.000.000 Euros for the first two years. Where from?”¹⁵⁷

Due to the lack of further breakdown of costs, it is generally hard to assess whether the budget envisaged for implementation was appropriate. However, it is a shared opinion among several interviewed stakeholders that the overall budget was **too low** to achieve the Strategy’s results, and that costs to fulfil the activities envisaged therein were underestimated.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, some respondents explained that, when funds are not earmarked, and are supposed to come “from regular funding”, it is nearly certain from the outset that the related activities will not be prioritized.¹⁵⁹

It is noticeable to observe that several stakeholders¹⁶⁰, mostly working at the municipal level, were not able to tell whether the Strategy’s budget was adequate, too low or too high, and expressed dissatisfaction with the **lack of transparency on budget-related information** regarding the Strategy (and strategies dealing with children’s rights in general) that was provided to them.

Since there is general agreement about the fact that the Strategy was not implemented to a considerable extent, it is even harder to assess whether financial resources would have been sufficient to cover the costs

¹⁵² NAT INST/ORG 14.

¹⁵³ NAT INST/ORG 7.

¹⁵⁴ NAT INST/ORG 10.

¹⁵⁵ NGO 1. Similarly: NAT INST/ORG 7; NAT INST/ORG 2.

¹⁵⁶ NAT INST/ORG 9.

¹⁵⁷ NGO 4.

¹⁵⁸ NAT INST/ORG 2; NGO 10; NGO 11; NGO 12; LOC INST 11; NGO 17; NGO 18; NGO 20; NAT INST/ORG 18; NAT INST/ORG 8.

¹⁵⁹ NAT INST/ORG 13; NGO 4; NGO 8; NGO 7.

¹⁶⁰ LOC INST 5; LOC INST 6; LOC INST 7; NGO 14; LOC INST 9; LOC INST 12; NGO 19; NGO 21.

related to all objectives and activities. In the lack of detailed implementation plans, it is unclear how much of the total estimate has been spent, and to which activities envisaged by the Strategy. As one stakeholder put it, “resources were not adequately used in any case. Planned things did not happen.”¹⁶¹

When looking at resources other than financial ones available to implement the Strategy, several stakeholders – especially from the local level – highlighted the **lack of sufficient and sufficiently trained human resources**, especially among frontline service providers. Respondent referred to several areas, including physical and mental health services, social care, child protection, and services accessible to marginalized groups of children. Reportedly, professionals working for these services are overloaded with cases, and lack opportunities for training and capacity building. Interviewed stakeholders were very vocal about this aspect. As one respondent declared: “One of the key factors of inefficiency was the burden on professional staff.”¹⁶² “There are not enough qualified specialists”, another respondent stated, referring to professionals working with children.¹⁶³ As one respondent reckoned, “considering the lack of state funding for key services for children, we conclude that the resources were not adequate.”¹⁶⁴

Not only are they too low in numbers, but professionals working with children – according to some respondents – also lack access to adequate training opportunities. As one stakeholder stated: “There is a lack of personnel needed to work with children. There is a shortage of specialized training for psychologists, social workers, and especially foster families, all of whom could provide adequate support to children.”¹⁶⁵ Another respondent confirmed: “What is crucial in the implementation phase from the perspective of strengthening the capacities of professionals to work with children is that despite the large number of accredited programs and trainings conducted, it was not sufficient. I can freely say that most of the training was conducted thanks to programs and projects of non-governmental organizations.”¹⁶⁶

Limited human capacities (mainly in terms of number of professionals, but also of professional training) seems to have considerably contributed to inefficiencies in relation to the Strategy, and is regarded as a key structural factor that needs to be addressed for any strategy to be fully realized in practice.

Limited coordination among the different actors and organizations in charge of implementing the Strategy was identified as another cause of inefficiency. As respondents confirmed, when speaking specifically about inefficiencies, “weak inter-sectoral cooperation is always a barrier to achieving set goals.”¹⁶⁷ Another stakeholder confirmed: “Cooperation with different stakeholders would make better qualitative implementation.”¹⁶⁸ While this aspect has been already analyzed in different sections of this Report (namely: 5.2.2. and 5.3.2.), it is important to highlight that limited coordination across and within sectors, and among the national and local levels, appears to have negatively reverberated on budget and resource planning, and on the Strategy’s efficiency overall.

Finally, the **COVID-19** pandemic was regarded by some respondents as a factor which created inefficiencies in the Strategy’s implementation, mostly because funds were diverted to deal with the emergency and its consequences.¹⁶⁹ This factor likely affected the implementation of many policies and programmes in the country – and beyond – and therefore does not appear to be specific in relation to the Strategy.

5.5 Impact

Impact is defined as the extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects (OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019: 11).

¹⁶¹ NAT INST/ORG 11.

¹⁶² LOC INST 9.

¹⁶³ LOC INST 11. Similarly: LOC INST 13; NAT INST/ORG 18; NAT INST/ORG 19; NGO 15; LOC INST 3; NAT INST/ORG 16.

¹⁶⁴ NGO 17-18.

¹⁶⁵ LOC INST 3.

¹⁶⁶ NAT INST/ORG 18.

¹⁶⁷ LOC INST 4.

¹⁶⁸ NGO 1. Similar observations were made by: LOC INST 3; NGO 10; NGO 7.

¹⁶⁹ NGO 8; NGO 14; NGO 4.

As impact refers to the broader or long-term change, it is usually not relevant for evaluations carried out before or immediately after an intervention has ended. To the extent possible, the Evaluation however strived to highlight contributions to impact, early signs of impact, and evidence of perceptions of future impact shared by relevant stakeholders.

The Strategy design phase apparently did not entail the creation of an impact monitoring system. Baseline data were generated as part of the situation analysis in which the Strategy is grounded. A set of performance indicators to measure changes as a result of the Strategy were designed, along with mid-term and final targets the intervention should have been aiming to. However, impact monitoring was apparently not subsequently operationalized. Clear plans to regularly and periodically collect data in order to compare progress achieved against baseline (including: means of verification; protocols to measure indicators; plans to collect, analyze and report on data; etc.) were not located as part of the Evaluation data collection, nor was any respondent aware of their existence. Intermediate outcomes were not provided in the logic model of the Strategy. Indeed, as mentioned earlier (section 5.3.1), monitoring in relation to the Strategy appears to have been generally lacking, fact which virtually all stakeholders interviewed about that agreed upon.

In the absence of the above-elements, it proved difficult to assess outcomes and impact in a systematic manner as part of the Evaluation exercise. Moreover, at the time in which the data collection took place for the purpose of the Evaluation, the intervention implementation period had just ended, fact which in itself constraints the possibility to identify the lasting changes produced by the Strategy in the personal and professional spheres of the intended beneficiaries.

Throughout the data collection, the Evaluation Team strived to identify some early signs of impact, and perception of potential future impact by concerned stakeholders. The related account is, therefore, necessarily anecdotal in nature.

In general, stakeholders' perception of impact of the Strategy mostly overlapped with achievements in implementation. The key areas in which it appears that this intervention might have contributed to long-term results include, in particular: de-institutionalization, which is likely to have brought about better care for children deprived of parental care; access to education, which allegedly resulted in higher chances of developing own potential, in particular for children belonging to the Roma and Egyptian minorities; and inclusive education opportunities, which seems to have benefited children with disabilities in the country by enhancing their access to quality formal education.

The Evaluation did not uncover any signs of unintended positive or negative impact of the Strategy.

5.6 Sustainability

Sustainability is defined as the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue (OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019: 12).

The Evaluation, in particular, assessed political commitment by relevant stakeholders to build on the Strategy's provisions and achievements, and the partnerships build up or mobilized around the implementation of the Strategy. The Evaluation also tried to ascertain whether financial capacity of institutions in charge was likely to affect sustainability of the efforts undertaken in the framework of the Strategy, and the extent to which obstacles and bottlenecks identified in regard to implementation have impacted the sustainability of the intervention.

Nearly all stakeholders interviewed as part of this Evaluation appeared **eager or at least ready to engage in the design of a new strategy for realizing children's rights in Montenegro**. Expectations that, thanks to the new positioning of the Council for Children's Rights, renewed impetus and leadership will be impressed to policy development, implementation and monitoring in the area, were largely shared among relevant stakeholders. This situation appears promising and potentially conducive to maintaining the level of achievements attained by the Strategy, and to realize further advancement in future.

In terms of what is required by the different stakeholders to ensure that the progress achieved by the Strategy – or in any case, progress in fulfilling children’s rights in Montenegro – will continue in future, some measures were identified as crucial as part of this Evaluation. These relate, primarily, to **providing steady and adequate resources to services for children**, their families and communities, in all sectors (child protection, social care, education, healthcare) and at all levels (central and local.) Closely related to the above-measure, adequate support to frontline professionals working with and for children emerged as a key aspect for the sustainability of any intervention in the child rights sphere.

Collecting and sharing **regular, reliable and comprehensive information about progress and impact** is regarded as crucial in order to be able to develop successful interventions in continuity with ongoing ones in the area of children’s rights, thus making the achieved results sustainable.

Dedicated and adequate budget allocations resulted to be another key factor when it comes to sustainability of future policy measures in the area of children’s rights. As noted above (section 5.4), the lack of earmarked and sufficient funds for implementing the Strategy was regarded as a weakness of this intervention, which also understandably affected sustainability during implementation and beyond.

Balanced and equal involvement of all stakeholders responsible for implementing the Strategy and monitoring over its implementation, as well as **cooperation across all sectors and at all levels**, is also regarded as a key element that should be required in order to ensure sustainability over time.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Strategy logic and design process

The Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023 in Montenegro appears to have been to a large extent relevant to the priority needs and gaps in fulfilling children's rights in the country. Its design was based on a thorough situation analysis, encompassing a systematic review of relevant legal and policy documents, available statistical data, as well as other relevant documents concerning the situation of children and young people in Montenegro. One of the key aspects of the Strategy's adherence to child rights priority issues appears to be its alignment with – and foundation in – recommendations issued by UN Treaty-based and charter-based human rights monitoring bodies. However, it appears that the Strategy was never formally revised during its life-cycle, and that stakeholders in charge did not prepare to do that at some point in time either.

The process of designing the Strategy appears to be well-thought through and in principle very participatory. Noticeably, about 100 children were involved, from diverse background and age-groups, including children belonging to marginalized groups in Montenegro. However, a few limitations were identified therein, pointing to potential improvements in terms of effective representation of civil society, local authorities, frontline professionals, as well as children's families and communities, to the Strategy design process. The technical assistance provided by UNICEF appears to have been quantitatively and qualitatively key to the success of the Strategy design.

The Strategy overall logic appears sufficiently clear and well-structured. However, strategic goals and operational objectives did not explicitly indicate expected changes in the lives of children who are the ultimate intended beneficiaries of the intervention. The Strategy's underlying Theory of Change was not presented explicitly in full in the Strategy-related document, where only some of its constituting elements were included. Nor could such missing elements (especially: assumptions and intermediate outcomes) be reconstructed by the Evaluation Team during the data collection. It appears that there was no shared vision among stakeholders about the articulated pathways through which changes were expected to happen in relation to each thematic area and issue addressed by the Strategy. It appears, indeed, that the Strategy was really wanted by the majority of key stakeholders in the area of children's rights in Montenegro, but it was referred to as a guiding, operational tool, by few.

R.1. – high priority: It is recommended that the Government of Montenegro, and in particular its line ministries and the Council for the Rights of the Child, with the support of UNICEF, continue with the good practice of effectively consulting with children and young people in the process of designing policy documents (directly or indirectly) dealing with children's rights. It is recommended that the above-stakeholders ensure that the views and perspectives of all key actors dealing with children's rights in Montenegro are effectively taken into account in designing child rights strategies, including those of civil society, local authorities, children's parents and communities, as well as frontline professionals working with children (teachers; child psychologists; social workers; etc.) It is recommended to transparently set up structured mechanisms to ensure that the feedback from these key child rights actors is embedded in the design process.

R.2. – medium priority: In order to further increase ownership of a child rights-strategic document, it is recommended to the Council for the Rights of the Child, supported by UNICEF, to engage all relevant stakeholders in a structured process to develop a fully-fledged and solid ToC underlying the future strategy, encouraging all stakeholders to articulate change theories in a cooperative fashion. This process would, among other benefits, enhance the level of accuracy achieved when monitoring progress and impact reached by the Strategy, and evaluating its results, in future. Moreover, both goals and objectives should be formulated placing children at their core, to highlight the ultimate intended impact on them. Finally, a strategy should be considered a living document, which can and should be revised in light of changing circumstances and priorities affecting children's rights in the country. The envisioning of a formal mid-term review process could help in this regard.

R.3. – high priority: For an overarching child rights strategy to bring added value, it is recommended to the Council for the Rights of the Child, line ministries, and UNICEF Montenegro, that greater efforts be made in

operationalizing the policy statements contained in the document, through regularly designing and updating detailed and comprehensive annual action plans.

In its design, the Strategy appeared to be overall consistent with a human rights-based approach. However, some dimensions could be further augmented in future. These revolve, in particular, around gender sensitivity, gender equity, and child participation. Further, it appears that child and youth participation was not expressly envisaged in the implementation phase, nor was their active contribution foreseen in the monitoring phase either.

R.4. – medium priority; It is recommended to all stakeholders participating in the identification and design phase that this exercise addresses, as a matter of priority, gender-specific needs, as well as forms of discrimination and violence based on gender, to which children and young people are subjected in Montenegro. It is also recommended that the above-stakeholders develop child-centered indicators, aimed to assess the quantitative as well as qualitative results obtained in the lives of children, and that they envisage means of verifications of the performance indicators that envision the active participation and contribution of children themselves. This way, child participation will be embedded across all phases of the future strategy from its start – and not limited to the design process. It is also recommended that the findings, conclusions and recommendations stemming from the present Evaluation be shared with children and young people in the country, through the production and dissemination of child-friendly versions of the Evaluation Report.

6.2 Effectiveness, efficiency and impact

Several achievements that could be attributed to the Strategy were identified. These relate, mostly, to: the alternative care system for children deprived of parental care; inclusive education measures targeting children with disabilities; access to education for children belonging to the Roma and Egyptian ethnic minorities; and some specific forms of violence against children (such as that perpetrated by peers.)¹⁷⁰

It appears that, common to several other strategic documents adopted in Montenegro, the key issue regarding effectiveness has been the limited or very limited implementation of the Strategy in practice. The dearth of monitoring data, and the prevailing opinion among interviewed stakeholders, both corroborate this conclusion. Regarding the reasons for what appears to be a major gap in practice, some factors were outlined by the Evaluation. These concern, primarily, limited or sporadic inter- and intra-sectoral coordination, both at the national level, and between the national and the local level.

Lack of effective leadership emerged as an additional key factor hindering the Strategy's implementation which, combined with frequent political changes and loss of institutional memory, made it very hard for institutions and individuals in charge to carry on the implementation of this intervention. As one respondent put it: "This one was everyone's and no one's strategy."¹⁷¹

Having one whole strategy dealing with children's rights in Montenegro appears to be a sensitive approach for the country to uphold to international, regional and national child rights standards in a comprehensive fashion. This view was strongly supported by the majority of the stakeholders involved in the Evaluation. At the same time, the feasibility of such a Strategy needs to rely upon certain preconditions, primarily: effective intra- and inter-sectoral coordination at Governmental level; strong leadership; and the generation of monitoring data that can be transferred across institutions, and handed over to new individuals in charge of implementing the different activities foreseen by the Strategy, and to monitor over its results. Whilst these issues cannot be resolved entirely by adopting one single strategy, there are some measures that can ameliorate the conditions under which a new strategy will be designed, as proposed below.

¹⁷⁰ Alongside with progress, respondents also identified some emerging child rights violations that became priorities after the Strategy had been adopted, or – in a few cases – were not (sufficiently) encompassed by the Strategy itself. However, as the Evaluation exercise did not (and could not) aim to undertake a child rights situation analysis in Montenegro, this Report will refrain from issuing recommendations on issues that should, in the Evaluators' understanding, be addressed by any future child rights strategy. It is hoped that, through a very participatory design process (which this Report is recommending), all concerned and knowledgeable stakeholders will have the opportunity to voice all their concerns and to see them reflected in a new strategy's design.

¹⁷¹ NAT ORG/INST 4.

R.5. – high priority: It is recommended to the Government of Montenegro, in particular to the Council of the Rights of the Child, line ministries and other institutions in charge of drafting a new Strategy on the rights of the child, to set up a solid and steady co-ordination mechanism among all institutions in charge of implementing the measures thereby envisaged. Such mechanism should clearly outline roles and responsibilities, and should be rolled out to the level of each ministry/institution, through the devising and adoption of terms of reference, detailing each institutions' responsibilities in relation to the above-mentioned strategy. It is recommended to line ministries and other institutions in charge of implementing a child rights strategy to dedicate adequate and qualified human resources to the implementation process, and that these individuals have the responsibilities and tasks stemming from such strategy clearly envisaged by their respective job descriptions.

R.6. – medium priority: It is recommended to UNICEF Montenegro to provide technical assistance to the Government of Montenegro in designing a new child rights strategy and, in addition to the support offered during the design of the Strategy that is the subject of this Evaluation, to help the various institutions in charge to design and implement a comprehensive progress and impact monitoring system, in order to measure results achieved against the objectives. This is regarded as a crucial step in improving management and enhancing accountability of the new strategy.

R.7. – high priority: It is recommended to the Council for the Rights of the Child to step up to the role of leadership and coordination of the child rights strategy that this institution was not in the position to fully exert until recently. There was a strong, shared hope, among many stakeholders, that with the reform of this institutional body occurred recently, future work on children's rights in the country will be much more effective. These expectations should be fulfilled by a proactive, focused and steady lead played by the above-said Council.

Due to a number of limitations highlighted in this Report, it proved difficult to assess the Strategy's efficiency in practice. However, probably the most relevant finding in this area is that, in the absence of sufficient financial resources, earmarked for the specific intervention to be implemented (in this case, the Strategy), there is no guarantee that the needed funds will be actually allocated to the activities planned.

R.8. – high priority: It is therefore recommended to the Government of Montenegro, in particular the Ministry of Finance, to ensure that the process to earmark dedicated funds to the implementation and monitoring of a new child rights strategy is timely enacted. It is recommended that each ministry and institution come up with an accurate sufficiently detailed estimation of expenditures needed to that purpose for their institution.

Annexes

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Annex II – List of participants in individual interviews and FGDs

- Dragoslav Šcekić, Council on the Rights of the Child

- Tijana Ivancevic, Council on the Rights of the Child
- Jelena Grdinić, Ministry of Justice
- Svetlana Sovilj, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
- Milica Markovic, Ministry of Health
- Anita Maric, Bureau of Education
- Duska Šljivančanin, Institution of the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms in Montenegro
- Savo Knezevic, National Association of Parents, Children and Youth with Disabilities in Montenegro – NARDOS
- Ajsela Madzgalj, Gimnasium “Miloje Dobrasinovic”, Bijelo Polje
- Alma Hot, Inspector for peer violence and domestic violence (inspector for juvenile delinquency and violence), Police administration, Security Center (Police Station) Bar
- Amra Grbovic, Judge, High Misdemeanor Court of Montenegro
- Ana Jaredic, Psychologist and Coordinator of the Support Program for persons who have suffered domestic violence, Women’s Rights Centre
- Biljana Sovilj, NGO Centre for Child Rights of Montenegro
- Biljana Tvrdiscic Pajovic, Centre for Social Work, Bar
- Biljana Zeković, Executive Director, NGO SOS Podgorica
- Branka Calasan, NGO Portret, Bar
- Branka Pavlovic, Independent Consultant
- Brankica Delibašić, Independent Advisor for Social and Child Protection, The Municipality of Bar - Secretariat for Local Self-Government
- Damir Kalić, president, NGO "Sports School Agoge", Bijelo Polje
- Dusan Stanovic, Youth Service – Youth Centre, Podgorica
- Goran Janković, NGO Gradionica, Bar
- Ida Marković, Psychologist at the Youth Counseling Center, Health Center Bar (Dom zdravlja Bar)
- Jelena Gluščević, NGO Center for Child Rights of Montenegro
- Jelena Vuković, NGO Mravinjak, Bar
- Katarina Vucinic Markovic, Primary school “Vuk Karadzic”, Podgorica
- Kristina Mihajlovic, Parents Association
- Lana Ljeskovic, NGO Union of Secondary School Students
- Lepa Zunjic, Parents Association
- Marija (Ružić) Stajović, NGO Juventas
- Nada Ristanovic, SOS Telephone for Woman and Children Victims of Violence, Bijelo Polje
- Natasa Vukovic, Health Centre, Bijelo Polje
- Nela Dukic, Head of the Department for Combating Juvenile Delinquency, Police Department of Podgorica
- Nikoleta Lacic, Independent Advisor, Institute for Social and Child Protection
- Nikolina Boljevic, Psychologist, NGO SOS Podgorica

- Olivera Markovic, Primary school "Pavle Zizic", Bijelo Polije
- Olivera Micevski, Montenegrin Association of Pedagogues
- Olja Fatic, Zuka – Network of local CSOs, Bar
- Rada Deric, Centre for Support of Children and Families
- Rasema Hekalo, Association of Parents of Children and Youth with Developmental Disabilities "OAZA"
- Sabra Decevic, NGO Children of Montenegro
- Svetlana Dujovic, National Association of Parents, Children and Youth with Disabilities in Montenegro – NARDOS
- Tanja Nedovic, High School of Electrical and Economic Sciences, Bijelo Polije
- Vesna Jukic, Centre for Social Work, Municipality of Bar
- Vesna Minic, Center for Social Work, Municipality of Bijelo Polije
- Juan Santander, UNICEF Montenegro
- Nela Krnic, UNICEF Montenegro
- Nada Djurovic Martinovic, UNICEF Montenegro
- Zeljka Popovic, UNICEF Montenegro
- Ana Dautovic, UNICEF Zagreb
- Milena Karisik, UNICEF Montenegro
- Irena Jokić Božović, UNICEF Montenegro
- Ivana Ceković, UNICEF Montenegro

Annex III – Detailed Evaluation timeline

Phases and main activities	Dates
INCEPTION PHASE	
Award and contract signature	31/10
Kick off meeting (remote)	07/11
Initial Desk review and inception interviews	07/11-21/11
Data collection tools elaboration	07/11-21/11
Development of the EVA matrix and revised EQs	13/11-21/11
Drafting of Inception Report (IR)	07/11-01/12
Submission of 1st Draft IR	December 1st
<i>UNICEF Comments</i>	<i>01/12-12/12</i>
<i>Ethics Review</i>	<i>12/12-03/01</i>
<i>UNICEF External Quality Review</i>	<i>03/01-18/01</i>
Revision of draft IR	18/01-26/01
Finalisation and submission of final IR	January 26th
DATA COLLECTION PHASE	
Fieldwork preparation and in-depth desk review	29/01-16/02
Remote data collection	05/02-16/02
TL in-country presence for data collection	13/03-15/03
In-country data collection	26/02-12/04
Debriefing (remote)	21/03
REPORTING PHASE	
Drafting of the draft evaluation report + PPT	11/04-30/05
Submission of 1st Draft evaluation report	May 31st
<i>UNICEF comments</i>	<i>31/05-12/06</i>
Revision of the 1 st draft	13/06-27/06
Submission of revised 1st Draft evaluation report	June 28th
<i>UNICEF revision</i>	<i>28/06-08/07</i>
ERG meeting – presentation of Draft evaluation report	11/07
<i>Evaluation Reference Group feedback</i>	<i>11/07-19/07</i>
<i>External Quality Assurance revision</i>	<i>26/07-02/08</i>
Revision of the revised draft evaluation report	05/08-16/08
Finalisation and submission of the Final Evaluation Report	August 16th
<i>Validation by UNICEF and finalization of the contract</i>	<i>16/08-31/08</i>

Annex IV – Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
Relevance	1. To what extent did the Strategy goals and objectives respond to the beneficiaries' needs and priorities in terms of fulfilling children's rights?	<p>1.1. Was there a clear child rights situation analysis carried out systematically and analytically with the participation of all key-stakeholders (including children) to ensure a firm basis for the Strategy design?</p> <p>1.2. Did the Strategy design process also draw upon recognized good or promising practices from other countries or sectors?</p> <p>1.3. Did the Strategy design clearly show what was expected to change for children?</p> <p>1.4. Did the Strategy reflect the target population's priority needs?</p>	Existence of child rights situation analysis and needs assessment document(s), and/or country context analysis (at the stage of the Strategy design), having child rights lenses (identifying the specifics for different groups of beneficiaries –	<p>Stakeholders involved in the Strategy design; Strategy document.</p> <p>Stakeholders involved in the Strategy design.</p> <p>Strategy document.</p>	<p>Desk review; individual interviews.</p> <p>Individual interviews.</p> <p>Desk review.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information from documents will be compared against views and perceptions shared by interviewed stakeholders. • Views and perceptions shared by interviewees will be compared. • Review of documents against existing standards for best practice in project management. • Information from documents will be compared against views and perceptions shared by interviewed stakeholders.

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
		<p>1.5. Was the Strategy design (i.e. approach, delivery methods) sensitive to the beneficiaries' varying needs based on their age, gender, belonging to marginalized communities, and any other diversity aspects?</p> <p>1.6. Were objectives 'SMART'? Were they formulated in a way that allowed stakeholders to track if the Strategy was being successful?</p>	<p>including gender and age), which appears to take into account good or promising practices.</p> <p>Strategy document presents SMART objectives, which key stakeholders regarded as a</p>	<p>Strategy document; Reports from human rights monitoring bodies addressing the situation of the rights of the child in Montenegro; stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; local authorities; NGOs and CSOs; UNICEF).</p> <p>Strategy document.</p> <p>Strategy document.</p>	<p>Desk review; individual interviews.</p> <p>Desk review.</p> <p>Desk review.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of documents against existing standards for best practice in child rights programming. • Review of documents against existing standards for best practice in project management. • Information from documents will be compared against views and perceptions shared by interviewed stakeholders. • Views and perceptions shared by interviewees will be compared.

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
		1.7. Was the Strategy (implicit or explicit) ToC plausible and feasible? Does the logic of the identified causal pathway among problems, goals, objectives, activities and outcomes make sense?	reference to track changes and achievements. The Strategy or related document outlines a ToC clearly explaining the intervention logic and causal pathways among its different components and levels. Degree to which the ToC has guided implementation and monitoring of the Strategy.	Stakeholders involved in the Strategy design; Strategy document.	Individual interviews; desk review.	
	2. To what extent was the Strategy adjusted throughout the implementation phase, in light of changing circumstances faced by children in Montenegro	2.1. To what extent and through what means were the (changing) needs of beneficiaries, especially the most vulnerable ones, as well as gender-differentiated needs, assessed throughout the Strategy implementation?	Degree to which the Strategy implementers took into account at all stages of implementation (onset and adjustment milestones) the diversity of	Stakeholders in charge of implementing the Strategy (Ministries and other institutions).	Individual interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information from documents will be compared against views and perceptions shared by interviewed stakeholders. Extent to which stakeholders closest to the issues feel that

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
	(COVID-19 outbreak; socio-economic challenges; feedback from beneficiaries; collective reflections of stakeholders; etc.)?	2.2. To what extent were the Strategy's approaches and interventions adjusted throughout the implementation?	beneficiaries' needs - with a special focus on gender dimension, country context, and the COVID-19 pandemic.	Stakeholders in charge of implementing the Strategy (Ministries and other institutions).		progress has been made.
Coherence	3. To what extent is the Strategy building synergies and interlinkages with national strategies and policies implemented by the Government of Montenegro and with relevant international norms and standards to which Montenegro adheres (particularly the UN CRC and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child)?	3.1. To what extent are the Strategy's goals and objective interlinked and consistent with other relevant interventions carried out by the Montenegrin Government?	Degree to which there are clear linkages indicating that the Strategy objectives are aligned with, and supportive of the Montenegrin Government's priority commitments on children's rights – especially as prioritized by relevant human rights monitoring bodies – and international development .	Strategy document; Reports from human rights monitoring bodies addressing the situation of the rights of the child in Montenegro; stakeholders (Council on the Rights of the Child; UNICEF).	Desk review; individual interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information from documents will be compared against views and perceptions shared by interviewed stakeholders.

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
		<p>3.2. Were the most marginalized and socially excluded groups of children and young persons reached by the Strategy?</p> <p>3.3. Were activities implemented gender-sensitive, i.e. did they take into account the different needs and wishes of women and man, boys and girls? How?</p> <p>3.4. Did children participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and/or evaluation of the Strategy? What was the level of their participation in each of these phases (consultative; collaborative; child-led; none)?</p>	<p>Evidence of meaningful inclusion of children and young people from marginalized groups at the different stages of the Strategy life cycle (design; implementation; and monitoring).</p> <p>Evidence that implementation was planned with the different needs of boys and girls in mind.</p> <p>Compliance of child participation practices in the framework of the Strategy (design, implementation and monitoring) with child participation</p>	<p>Local authorities; NGOs and CSOs.</p> <p>Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; local authorities; NGOs and CSOs; UNICEF); children and young people.</p> <p>Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions)</p>	<p>Individual interviews.</p> <p>Individual interviews.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views and perceptions shared by interviewees will be compared. • Investigators triangulation. • Views and perceptions shared by interviewees/survey respondents will be compared. • Investigators triangulation. • be compared.

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
			good practice standards.		interviews.	
	4. To what extent is the Strategy enabling and fostering complementarity, harmonization and coordination of efforts to fulfil children's rights in Montenegro?	4.1. To which extent did national and international stakeholders leverage their comparative advantages in relation to the committed actions for the Strategy implementation? 4.2. Did the Strategy set up (an) effective mechanism(s) to coordinate actions for realizing children's rights in Montenegro?	Degree to which the Montenegrin Government and other stakeholders have taken steps to create synergies and align with respective policies and programmes on children's rights, during the Strategy life cycle. Degree to which this can be attributed to the existence of the Strategy.	Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; UNICEF and other international agencies; NGOs and CSOs).	Individual interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Views and perceptions shared by interviewees will be compared.
Effectiveness	5. To what extent did the Strategy achieve, or is expected to achieve, its objectives and results, including	5.1. To what extent did the Strategy deliver on its objectives? What is the progress in achieving the planned (quantitative and qualitative) results?	Degree to which the Strategy has or is expected to deliver on its objectives and	Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; UNICEF); Strategy year one report.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Views and perceptions shared by

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
	any differential results across groups of beneficiaries, especially the most vulnerable ones?	<p>5.2. Have activities been carried out according to the Action Plans?</p> <p>5.3. Which activities have been changed and for what purpose? Has this helped in achieving the Strategy's objectives and intended results?</p> <p>5.4. Did changes work out differently for different groups of girls and boys? In what way and why?</p>	<p>(quantitative and qualitative) results.</p> <p>Degree to which the Strategy activities have been carried out according to the work plan(s).</p> <p>Degree to which and reasons for activities to have been changed.</p> <p>Extent to which changes helped in achieving the Strategy's objectives and intended results – including any differential results across various groups of beneficiaries.</p>	<p>Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; UNICEF); children and young people; Strategy year one report.</p> <p>Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; UNICEF and other international agencies; NGOs and CSOs); Strategy year one report.</p>	<p>Individual interviews; Desk review; survey.</p>	<p>interviewees/survey respondents will be compared.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To some extent (most likely only concerning year 1 of implementation), information from documents will be compared against views and perceptions shared by interviewed stakeholders.
	6. To what extent did internal or external factors influence the achievement or	6.1. What were the main internal and external factors that contributed or hindered the achievement of the				

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
	non-achievement of the Strategy's objectives and expected results?	<p>Strategy objectives and intended results?</p> <p>6.2. To which extent and how have the facilitating factors been utilized in advantage of reaching the Strategy's results?</p> <p>6.3. What measures have been taken to cope with the challenges, and how did they help to overcome the situation?</p>	Degree to which and reasons why the achievement or non-achievement of the Strategy objectives and intended results can be attributed to other reasons or external factors.	Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; UNICEF).	Individual interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Views and perceptions shared by interviewees will be compared.
Efficiency	7. To what extent the resources allocated for the Strategy were adequate?	<p>7.1. To what extent the financial and human resources available to implement the Strategy appear to be adequate and proportionate to the goals and objectives it set out to achieve?</p> <p>7.2. Are costs affecting the sustainability of the Strategy?</p>	<p>Degree to which a rationale has been applied to allocation of resources, relating costs to needs in achieving the Strategy objectives.</p> <p>Implications of applying (or lack of) the rationale and degree to which it has influenced sustainability.</p>	Strategy document; Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; UNICEF).	Desk review; individual interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information from documents will be compared against views and perceptions shared by interviewed stakeholders.

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
	8. Which factors (political instability; COVID-19 pandemic; lack of coordination among institutions in charge; etc.) have affected resource allocation to the Strategy, and to which extent?	<p>8.1. Was the implementation of the Strategy (including monitoring and evaluation) accurately reflected in the budget? If not, which factors prevented that from happening?</p> <p>8.2. To what extent did lack of coordination among stakeholders create inefficiencies in the realization of the Strategy? Which other factors create inefficiencies?</p>	<p>Degree to which the allocation of available resources took into account the Strategy's different components and lines of intervention.</p> <p>Reasons that supported or, conversely, hindered an efficient implementation and monitoring of the Strategy. Degree to which each factor influenced efficiency.</p>	<p>Strategy document; Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; UNICEF).</p> <p>Strategy document; Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; UNICEF; local authorities; NGOs and CSOs).</p>	<p>Desk review; individual interviews.</p> <p>Desk review; individual interviews.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information from documents will be compared against and integrated with the views and perceptions shared by interviewed stakeholders. Investigators triangulation.
Impact	9. To what extent the Strategy generated significant positive and/or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects in the lives of children and young	9.1. Has appropriate attention been given to developing robust evidence and involving reliable impact monitoring, and reporting procedures based on a solid impact monitoring system and plan? If not, what	Existence of an impact monitoring system (including: indicators, means of verification, protocols for measuring indicators) and plan.	Strategy document; other available documentation (impact monitoring system); stakeholders (Ministries and other institution;	Desk review; individual interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information from documents will be compared against views and perceptions shared by interviewed stakeholders.

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
	people in Montenegro?	<p>prevented this from happening?</p> <p>9.2. Do institutions in charge of implementing the Strategy, as well as other stakeholders, perceive that (positive or negative) changes were achieved as a result of the Strategy, in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • realization of children's rights in Montenegro? • Recognized good practices and models that could be replicated or transferred? <p>What do they base the above-perception on?</p>	<p>Impact monitoring reports availability.</p> <p>Evidence of positive, negative or unintended impact achieved as a result of the Strategy, and/or of perception of future impact by relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>UNICEF; NGOs and CSOs).</p> <p>Stakeholders (Ministries and other institution; UNICEF; local institutions, NGOs and CSOs).</p>	Individual interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which stakeholders closest to the issues feel that progress has been made. • Investigators triangulation.
Sustainability	10. Are the benefits brought about by the Strategy likely to continue in future?	10.1. Are the institutions in charge to realize children's rights in Montenegro planning to develop and undertake further policy measures to build on the benefits achieved by the Strategy? Which ones?	Evidence that the practices brought about by the Strategy are likely to continue beyond its end, and to which degree.	Stakeholders (Ministries and other institutions; reports on policy measures recently being undertaken in Montenegro.		

Evaluation Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Means of Triangulation
		<p>10.2. What is required by the different stakeholders to ensure that the progress achieved by the Strategy in the fulfilment of children's rights will continue?</p> <p>10.3. What are the main factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the Strategy?</p>	<p>Evidence that different stakeholders have taken ownership of the Strategy concept and approaches.</p> <p>Degree to which there are measures linked to policy areas relevant to the Strategy that are under development.</p> <p>Degree to which potential risks and opportunities in sustaining the results beyond the current Strategy have been identified are being – respectively – mitigated or exploited.</p>	<p>Stakeholders (Ministries and other institution; UNICEF; NGOs and CSOs; local authorities; other international agencies).</p> <p>Stakeholders (Ministries and other institution; UNICEF; local authorities).</p>	<p>Individual interviews.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views and perceptions shared by interviewees will be compared. • Investigators triangulation.

Annex V – Main Evaluation Tools

Interview Protocol

Introduction

At the outset of the interview, the Evaluator will clearly introduce herself (and other members of the Evaluation Team if any attending), the purpose and scope of the Evaluation, and the format and contents of the interview.

Standard introduction scheme includes:

- Good morning/afternoon, my name is [Evaluator's name and surname] and I am working as independent consultant hired by UNICEF Montenegro Country Office through the company Lattanzio KIBS;
- I am conducting this interview in the context of the external end-of-programme Evaluation of the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023;
- The aims of the Evaluation are:
 1. To assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child.
 2. To identify factors that contributed to or hindered successful implementation (for example: the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this affected implementation).
 3. To assess the extent to which the Strategy implementation and monitoring have been inclusive of children and young people, their families and communities.
 4. To provide recommendations for future planning in the area of child rights.
- The Evaluation will analyze Strategy-related documents and interview a list of selected key informants at the national and local level in Montenegro. The main output of this exercise will be an Evaluation Report, summarizing main findings;
- The interview is estimated to take about an hour to an hour and a half;
- You do not need to answer all questions if you are not comfortable doing so, for any reason;
- You can stop the interview at any time, or ask for a break;
- Our conversation is confidential: no information will be shared with anyone outside the Evaluation Team. We would like to present quotes and examples in the Evaluation Report, but these will be anonymized: our respondents will be solely referred to according to the broad group they belong to - national authorities; local authorities; NGOs or CSOs; children and youth; followed by a number, whose corresponding names and other details are known only to the Evaluation Team. Do you have any concerns or questions regarding the interview that we have not addressed yet?
- Do you still agree with the interview? I would like to remind you that if, for any reason that you do not need to explain, you want to leave the discussion, you can do so at any point in time.

Table 1. Interview cover sheet template

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Number of interview: [For example: No.1]

(Confidential)

Name and surname of the interviewee:

Organization:

Position:

Date of the interview:

Duration:

Preferences regarding attribution of quotes:

Other information:

Closing

At the end of the individual interview, the following points will be covered:

- Thank you very much for taking your time, and for sharing your opinion with me/us. This is very valuable for us and for UNICEF Montenegro, and will bring significant value to the Evaluation efforts;
- For any further questions or doubts, you may contact me at: [share Evaluator's contact details];
- The Evaluation will result in a written report. This will be shared with you:
 - 1) For members of the Evaluation Reference Group: in draft form, for you to provide inputs and comments, and as final Evaluation Report;
 - 2) For all other interviewees: as final Evaluation Report.

Guiding questions for National Authorities

(Relevance)

- Who designed/contributed to the design of the Strategy? In the Strategy document (p.8-9) it is written that a Working Group was set up, supported by UNICEF Consultant who provided technical assistance. Could you tell us a bit more about this process?
- According to the Strategy document, there was a representative of a Municipality at the above-Working Group: was there only one? Was there a mechanism in place to collect inputs from local authorities across the country?

- According to the Strategy document, there was a representative of the NGO sector as well: was there only one? Was there a mechanism to collect inputs from the NGO sector? (If yes, which one? How did it work?)
- About 100 children were allegedly consulted during the identification and design stage (p.98 Strategy) – Who were they? How were they selected and involved, at which point and to which extent? What were the age-ranges represented? Was gender diversity achieved? Were children from marginalized groups involved in the consultation process? Thus, children were involved in consultations, but then one (two) child representative(s) was (were) also member of the drafting Working Group? How were they selected?
- Were children involved in consultations informed about the outcomes of their inputs (the Strategy document)? If yes, how (e.g. child friendly version of the Strategy; feedback workshops; etc.)?
- How was the Strategy designed? Would you please take a moment to focus and go back to the identification and design phase, and walk us through the steps that you and the other stakeholders involved in the design undertook – from start through to the Strategy finalization and publication?
 - Did you have a real opportunity to brainstorm, to explore in-depth, to look at the bigger picture, to share and challenge assumptions about how change takes place etc.? How did you do that (one or several formal meetings? drawing together? other?)
 - Situation analysis: What did this cover? (E.g.: a) stakeholders' analysis; b) power analysis; c) gender analysis?)
 - It is true that the Strategy is comprehensive, in that it addresses the whole range of fundamental rights for all children in Montenegro. However, you could not fix all the problems, nor achieve all desired changes, in a given period of time (five years), with a given amount of resources. Therefore, how did you identify what were the priority issues and domains on which the Strategy should focus?
 - Was the Strategy ever formally revised? (Why yes/not?)
 - Did you look at child rights strategies (on children rights, or for instance on combating violence against children and so on) from other countries for inspiration? If yes, which ones?
 - There is not a (visually represented) Theory of Change as such in the Strategy document. May I ask you whether you thought at some point to develop a Strategy TOC, and what prevented you from doing so in case?
 - What were the assumptions you made about the context, actors and factors at play? What are the assumptions you made related to the pathways of change?
 - In the Strategy document, there are: a) Three Strategic Goals; b) 10 Operational Objectives; c) 44 Performance Indicators for the different operational objectives (with baseline value, half-way target, and final target – very articulate!); and then d) a series of Activities under each objective. How about intermediate outcomes?

(Coherence – internal)

- Did the Strategy reach out to the most marginalized children in Montenegro? How?
- What results did the Strategy achieve in relation to marginalized groups of children?
- How did the Strategy account for the different needs of boys and girls?
- How did the Strategy challenge existing gender stereotypes, gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence?
- Did children participate in the implementation phase? How?
- Did children participate in monitoring progress and outcomes achieved by the Strategy? How?

(Coherence – external)

- Prior to the 2019-2023 Child Rights Strategy, you had several sectoral strategies – including: on inclusive education; on early and pre-school education; on child protection; etc. What did change by having one whole Strategy addressing children’s rights in Montenegro?
- How did the implementation of the Strategy function? Did national authorities and other stakeholders cooperate? If yes, how?
- Did the implementation of the Strategy have a coordination mechanism? If yes, how often did the Group meet? How would you assess the coordination of the different actions envisaged by the Strategy?
- Monitoring and reporting: how was this performed? How often? What could be improved in future?

(Effectiveness)

- Are there other monitoring data/reports relating to progress and outcomes achieved by the Strategy, besides the report referring to year 1 (2019-2020)? If not, why?
- Was an impact monitoring system and plan established? If not, why?
- What are, in your view, the Strategy’s key achievements?
- Did these achievements work out differently for girls and boys and for different groups of the population?
- [Further, specific questions, depending on the institution’s main responsibility in relation to the Strategy implementation]
- What were, in your view, the main factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the Strategy’s objectives?

(Efficiency)

- How did the Strategy resource allocation work?
- The budget is not detailed; are there more detailed budgets for implementation?
- Would you be able to provide an account of the resources that, overall, were allocated to implement the Strategy? Did you report on the expenditures related to the Strategy implementation? (How/to whom?)
- Do you believe that the resources (human; financial) allocated to implement the Strategy were adequate? Too low/high?
- Were there inefficiencies in the implementation phase, related – in particular – to lack of coordination? Other factors?

(Impact)

- (How) do you think that the Strategy has advanced the realization of children’s rights in Montenegro? What makes you believe that?
- Are there any interventions delivered as part of the Strategy that you would recognize as good or promising practices, and that could be in your view replicated or transferred? If yes, why (based on which criteria do you recognize such good or promising practices)?

(Sustainability)

- What is your institution planning to do in order to further attain children's rights in Montenegro?
- What should the different actors in charge to fulfil children's rights in Montenegro do in order to ensure that the progress achieved by the Strategy will be maintained in future, and that further advancements will be built on the Strategy's results?
- What are the main factors affecting the Strategy's sustainability, and how?

Guiding questions for UNICEF Staff

(Relevance)

- Who designed/contributed to the design of the Strategy? In the Strategy document (p.8-9) it is written that a Working Group was set up, supported by UNICEF Consultant who provided technical assistance. Could you tell us a bit more about this process?
- According to the Strategy document, there was a representative of a Municipality at the above-Working Group: was there only one? Was there a mechanism in place to collect inputs from local authorities across the country?
- According to the Strategy document, there was a representative of the NGO sector as well: was there only one? Was there a mechanism to collect inputs from the NGO sector? (If yes, which one? How did it work?)
- About 100 children were allegedly consulted during the identification and design stage (p.98 Strategy) – Who were they? How were they selected and involved, at which point and to which extent? What were the age-ranges represented? Was gender diversity achieved? Were children from marginalized groups involved in the consultation process? Thus, children were involved in consultations, but then one (two) child representative(s) was (were) also member of the drafting Working Group? How were they selected?
- Were children involved in consultations informed about the outcomes of their inputs (the Strategy document)? If yes, how (e.g. child friendly version of the Strategy; feedback workshops; etc.)?
- How was the Strategy designed? Would you please take a moment to focus and go back to the identification and design phase, and walk us through the steps that you and the other stakeholders involved in the design undertook – from start through to the Strategy finalization and publication?
 - Did you have a real opportunity to brainstorm, to explore in-depth, to look at the bigger picture, to share and challenge assumptions about how change takes place etc.? How did you do that (one or several formal meetings? drawing together? other?)
 - Situation analysis: What did this cover? (E.g.: a) stakeholders' analysis; b) power analysis; c) gender analysis?)
 - It is true that the Strategy is comprehensive, in that it addresses the whole range of fundamental rights for all children in Montenegro. However, you could not fix all the problems, nor achieve all desired changes, in a given period of time (five years), with a given amount of resources. Therefore, how did you identify what were the priority issues and domains on which the Strategy should focus?
 - Was the Strategy ever formally revised? (Why yes/not?)
 - Did you look at child rights strategies (on children rights, or for instance on combating violence against children and so on) from other countries for inspiration? If yes, which ones?
 - There is not a (visually represented) Theory of Change as such in the Strategy document. May I ask you whether you thought at some point to develop a Strategy TOC, and what prevented you from doing so in case?

- What were the assumptions you made about the context, actors and factors at play? What are the assumptions you made related to the pathways of change?
- In the Strategy document, there are: a) Three Strategic Goals; b) 10 Operational Objectives; c) 44 Performance Indicators for the different operational objectives (with baseline value, half-way target, and final target – very articulate!); and then d) a series of Activities under each objective. How about intermediate outcomes?

(Coherence – internal)

- Did the Strategy reach out to the most marginalized children in Montenegro? How?
- What results did the Strategy achieve in relation to marginalized groups of children?
- How did the Strategy account for the different needs of boys and girls?
- How did the Strategy challenge existing gender stereotypes, gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence?
- Did children participate in the implementation phase? How?
- Did children participate in monitoring progress and outcomes achieved by the Strategy? How?

(Coherence – external)

- How did the implementation of the Strategy function? Did national authorities and other stakeholders cooperate? If yes, how?
- Did the implementation of the Strategy have a coordination mechanism? If yes, how often did the Group meet? How would you assess the coordination of the different actions envisaged by the Strategy?
- Monitoring and reporting: how was this performed? How often? What could be improved in future?

(Effectiveness)

- Are there other monitoring data/reports relating to progress and outcomes achieved by the Strategy, besides the report referring to year 1 (2019-2020)? If not, why?
- Was an impact monitoring system and plan established? If not, why?
- What were, in your view, the Strategy's key achievements?
- Did these achievements work out differently for girls and boys and for different groups of the population?
- What was UNICEF's role in relation to the Strategy, across all its phases?
- What are, in your view, the main factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the Strategy's objectives?

(Efficiency)

- How did the Strategy resource allocation work?
- The budget is not detailed, are there more detailed budgets for implementation? If not, why wasn't the implementation phase more accurately reflected in the budget?

- Do you believe that the resources (human; financial) allocated to implement the Strategy were adequate? Too low/high?
- Were there inefficiencies in the implementation phase, related – in particular – to lack of coordination? Other factors?

(Impact)

- (How) do you think that the Strategy has advanced the realization of children's rights in Montenegro? What makes you believe that?
- What are the main priority issues in the area of children's rights that have not been addressed by the Strategy, that require most attention in the near future?
- Are there any interventions delivered as part of the Strategy that you would recognize as good or promising practices, and that could be in your view replicated or transferred? If yes, why (based on which criteria do you recognize such good or promising practices)?

(Sustainability)

- What should the different actors in charge to fulfil children's rights in Montenegro do in order to ensure that the progress achieved by the Strategy will be maintained in future, and that further advancements will be built on the Strategy's results?
- What are the main factors affecting the Strategy's sustainability, and how?

Guiding questions for Local Authorities

(Relevance)

- In your view, does the Strategy design reflect the priority needs in terms of realization of children's rights in Montenegro – at the time when it was designed, and throughout the five years of implementation?
- Did you and other local authorities have a say in the design of the Strategy? If yes, how? Are you satisfied with the degree of participation of local authorities to the design stage?

(Coherence – internal)

- Did the Strategy reach out to the most marginalized children in Montenegro? How?
- Are there groups of children that have not benefited from the Strategy?
- What results did the Strategy achieve in relation to marginalized groups of children?
- How did the Strategy account for the different needs of boys and girls?
- How did the Strategy challenge existing gender stereotypes, gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence?

(Coherence – external)

- Prior to the 2019-2023 Child Rights Strategy, you had several sectoral strategies – including: on inclusive education; on early and pre-school education; on child protection; etc. What did change by having one whole Strategy addressing children’s rights in Montenegro?
- How did the implementation of the Strategy function? Did national authorities and local authorities cooperate? If yes, how?
- Did the implementation of the Strategy have a coordination mechanism? If yes, how often did the Group meet? How would you assess the coordination of the different actions envisaged by the Strategy?

(Efficiency)

- Do you believe that the resources (human; financial) allocated to implement the Strategy were adequate? Too low/high?
- In your views, were there inefficiencies in the Strategy implementation phase? If yes, what factors created such inefficiencies?

(Impact)

- (How) do you think that the Strategy has advanced the realization of children’s rights in Montenegro? What makes you believe that?
- Are there any interventions delivered as part of the Strategy that you would recognize as good or promising practices, and that could be in your view replicated or transferred? If yes, why (based on which criteria do you recognize such good or promising practices)?

(Sustainability)

- What should the different actors in charge to fulfil children’s rights in Montenegro do in order to ensure that the progress achieved by the Strategy will be maintained in future, and that further advancements will be built on the Strategy’s results?
- What are the main factors affecting the Strategy’s sustainability, and how?

Guiding questions for NGOs and CSOs

(Relevance)

- In your view, does the Strategy design reflect the priority needs in terms of realization of children’s rights in Montenegro – at the time when it was designed, and throughout the five years of implementation?
- Did you and other NGOs/CSOs have a say in the design of the Strategy? If yes, how? Are you satisfied with the degree of participation of local authorities to the design stage?

(Coherence – internal)

- Did the Strategy reach out to the most marginalized children in Montenegro? How?
- Are there groups of children that have not benefited from the Strategy?
- What results did the Strategy achieve in relation to marginalized groups of children?

- How did the Strategy account for the different needs of boys and girls?
- How did the Strategy challenge existing gender stereotypes, gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence?

(Coherence – external)

- Prior to the 2019-2023 Child Rights Strategy, you had several sectoral strategies – including: on inclusive education; on early and pre-school education; on child protection; etc. What did change by having one whole Strategy addressing children’s rights in Montenegro?
- How did the implementation of the Strategy function? Did national authorities, other stakeholders and NGOs/CSOs cooperate? If yes, how?
- Did the implementation of the Strategy have a coordination mechanism? If yes, how often did the Group meet? How would you assess the coordination of the different actions envisaged by the Strategy?

(Efficiency)

- Do you believe that the resources (human; financial) allocated to implement the Strategy were adequate? Too low/high?
- In your views, were there inefficiencies in the Strategy implementation phase? If yes, what factors created such inefficiencies?

(Impact)

- (How) do you think that the Strategy has advanced the realization of children’s rights in Montenegro? What makes you believe that?
- Are there any interventions delivered as part of the Strategy that you would recognize as good or promising practices, and that could be in your view replicated or transferred? If yes, why (based on which criteria do you recognize such good or promising practices)?

(Sustainability)

- What should the different actors in charge to fulfil children’s rights in Montenegro do in order to ensure that the progress achieved by the Strategy will be maintained in future, and that further advancements will be built on the Strategy’s results?

Questionnaire for children and young people

Hello!

*We invite you to fill in this Questionnaire because the **Government of Montenegro** together with UNICEF want to find out about your opinion on the situation of children’s rights in Montenegro. In 2019, the Government of Montenegro adopted a **Strategy for exercising the rights of the child** in the country. The Strategy is*

coming to an end, and an Evaluation Team (that is, a team of four independent evaluators) has been asked to find out **what worked and what did not work** about it.

Therefore, **we kindly invite you to answer to the questions below**. Answering the whole questionnaire should take **about 10-15 minutes**.

With the data gathered from you and all the other child and youth respondents, we will produce a report, named **“Evaluation Report”** of the child rights strategy, that should be used by all decision-makers to follow up on what you recommend us today.

All data collected will be treated confidentially: this means that no identifying information (that is, information about your age, place where you live etc.) will be included in any document, nor will it be disclosed with anyone outside the members of the Evaluation Team.

Your views and perspectives will be extremely useful for the successful accomplishment of our Evaluation. We **thank you very much** in advance for your time and dedication! We will make sure that we share with you what we found out!

1. Involvement in the Strategy on children’s rights in Montenegro

1. As far as you know, have you ever been involved in activities to implement the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child in Montenegro (2019-2023)?

Yes

No

Don’t know/remember

Prefer not to answer

2. If yes, where did that occur?

School

Association

Other (please, describe)

Don’t know/remember

Prefer not to answer

3. If yes, how often were you involved in the above activities?

Only once

Sometimes

Often

Very often

Don’t know/remember

Prefer not to answer

4. How much do you think you know about children’s rights – in general, and in Montenegro?

Almost nothing

A little bit

- Quite a bit
- A lot

- Don't know/remember
- Prefer not to answer

2. Assessment of the situation of children's rights in Montenegro

5. Do you think that children of different age-groups and living in different situations are protected from violence in Montenegro (occurring in the society, community, family or at home)?

- Not at all
- A little bit
- Sufficiently
- A lot

- Don't know/remember
- Prefer not to answer

6. Do you believe that children and young people have access to education opportunities that meet their capacities, skills and desires in Montenegro?

- Never or almost never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Always or almost always

- Don't know/remember
- Prefer not to answer

7. Do you believe that children and young people in Montenegro have access to physical and mental health care according to good quality standards?

- Never or almost never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Always or almost always

- Don't know/remember
- Prefer not to answer

8. Do you think that you and your peers are involved, by relevant institutions and organizations, in decisions affecting you?

- Never or almost never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Always or almost always

- Don't know/remember

Prefer not to answer

3. Assessment of the response by decision-makers

5. How much do you think you know about the institutions in charge of fulfilling children's rights in Montenegro, and what they concretely do?

Almost nothing

A little bit

Quite a bit

A lot

Don't know/remember

Prefer not to answer

6. What are in your view – if any – the obstacles in fulfilling children's rights in Montenegro?

Lack of financial resources

Limited capacity and knowledge among decision-makers

Lack of political will by decision-makers

A combination of the above

Other (please, specify):

Don't know/remember

Prefer not to answer

Annex VI – Evaluation Term of References



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Annex VII – Key Terms and Definitions

For the purpose of this Evaluation, the following definitions are adopted. For easier reading, definitions of criteria applied to the Evaluation have been included in the section on main findings (section 5).

Activities are all the specific actions that make up an intervention. (Taplin, D.H., 2012: 6).

Adolescence is defined as the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. (WHO, no date).

Assumptions are hypotheses about factors or risks which could affect the progress or success of a development intervention. (OECD, 2002:16).¹⁷² Unlike a precondition, an assumption is a condition or resource that is already in place and does not need to be brought about. (Center for Theory of Change, no date).

Baseline-study is an analysis describing the situation prior to a development intervention, against which progress can be assessed or comparisons made. (OECD, 2002:18).

Beneficiaries are defined as the individuals, groups, or organizations, whether targeted or not, that benefit directly or indirectly, from the development intervention. (OECD/DAC Evaluation Network, 2019:7).

A **child** is any person under the age of 18 years.¹⁷³

Child protection refers to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children, including sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labor and harmful traditional practices. (UNICEF, 2006).

Confidentiality is the process of protecting an individual's privacy. It pertains to the treatment of information that an individual has disclosed in a relationship of trust, with the expectation that this information will not be divulged to others without permission. (UNICEF, 2015a:2).

Ethics is defined as the right or agreed principles and values that govern the behavior of an individual within the specific, culturally defined context within which an evaluation is commissioned or undertaken. (United Nations Evaluation Group, 2020:4).

An **evaluation** is an assessment, conducted as systematically and impartially as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance. It analyses the level of achievement of both expected and unexpected results by examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality using appropriate criteria [...]. An evaluation should provide credible, useful evidence-based information that enables the timely incorporation of its findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making processes of organizations and stakeholders. (United Nations Evaluation Group, 2017:10).

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between them. (UN WOMEN, 2014:46).

Gender equality entails the concept that all human beings, both women and men, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles or prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. (UN WOMEN, 2014:46).

¹⁷² Assumptions are in turn based in belief systems: notions and ideas that are so familiar or internalized that we take them for granted. These can be personal, but can also be collective convictions of a specific organization or group. (Hivos, 2015: 22).

¹⁷³ Art.1, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

A **human rights-based approach** is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress. (UN OHCHR, 2006:15).

Impact refers to the positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effect produced by an intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. (OECD, 2002:24).

An **indicator** is a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect the changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor. (OECD, 2002:25).

Intervention refers to the subject of the Evaluation. (OECD/DAC Evaluation Network, 2019:5).

Justifications are statements about why it is expected that one set of outcomes will lead to another. Justifications are often based on research, but may also come from past experience, common sense, or knowledge of the specific context. (Center for Theory of Change, no date).

Monitoring is a continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds. (OECD, 2002:27-28).

Outcomes are the likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs. (OECD, 2002:28).

Outputs are the products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes. (OECD, 2002:28).

A **pathway** is the sequence in which outcomes must occur to reach the intervention's long-term goal. They represent a causal logic, since each level along the pathway depicts the chain of outcomes that must come into being for the next outcome up the chain to be achieved. (Taplin, D.H. et al., 2012: 3).

Preconditions refer to all [outcomes](#), except the [long-term outcome](#). These are called preconditions because they are conditions that must exist in order for the next outcome in the pathway to be achieved. (Center for Theory of Change, no date).

Primary data are new data created via first-hand collection. (UNICEF, 2015a:4). A source of primary data can be a document written, or an interview/focus group discussion recorded during the field work; or a document obtained as raw data (i.e. which has not been analyzed, assessed or published) directly from the individual or organization that produced it (such as: statistics on victims of trafficking; eye-witness testimonies; legislative drafts: etc.)

Rationales in a theory of change explain the logical connections behind each causal relationship on the pathway between the outcomes and why one outcome is needed to achieve another. (Taplin, D.H. et al., 2012: 1, 5).

Secondary data is information gathered from pre-existing sources or databases. (UNICEF, 2015a:4).

A **stakeholder** is considered as anyone who has the responsibility, capacity or opportunity to work on children's rights in Montenegro. While it is indeed acknowledged that children, adolescents and young persons – as well as their families and communities – do have a stake in child rights policies and practices, the term

“stakeholder” (also referred to as “informant” or “respondent” in the context of data collection) here indicates adult representatives of institutions or organizations, as well as independent experts.¹⁷⁴

Theories of change are the ideas and hypotheses (‘theories’) people and organisations have about how change happens. These theories can be conscious or unconscious and are based on personal beliefs, assumptions and a necessarily limited, personal perception of reality. (Hivos, 2015: 12). In other words, a theory of change explains how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impact. (UNICEF, 2014: 1). A theory of change as an approach is *a guiding framework for all stages of thinking, action and sense-making* when we intervene intentionally in social change processes. (Hivos, 2015: 12). In terms of product, a theory of change is intended as a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context (UNFPA, 2017:2).

Trafficking in persons is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (IOM, 2019:217).¹⁷⁵

Youth/young persons are those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. While recognizing that the definition of youth is more fluid than other definitions (as it essentially refers to the period of transition from the childhood to adulthood) and may change with circumstances - especially with the changes in demographic, financial, economic and socio-cultural settings - for the purpose of this Report, the definition that uses 15- 24 age cohort as youth is maintained. (UNESCO, no date; UNDESA, no date).

¹⁷⁴ For the purpose of this Report, the term “stakeholder” refers to a person or entity that has a concern in the initiative being evaluated or the change process and an interest in its success. Instead, the term “actor” is more generally used to refer to a person or entity that has an influence on the initiative and related change process, but may be indifferent to its success, or even ignorant of the change initiative or process. (Hivos, 2015: 11).

¹⁷⁵ The definition is based on Article 3 of the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*.

Annex VIII – Informative note to UNICEF’s partner organizations



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Annex IX – Ethics Review Approval Letter

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Research Ethics Approval

12 January 2024

Maria Antonia Di Maio, Team Leader
Lattanzio KIBS
Via Domenico Cimarosa, 4 (20144)
Milan, Italy

RE: Ethics Review Board findings for: *Evaluation of the "Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023" in Montenegro* (HML IRB Review #830MONT23)

Dear Maria Antonia Di Maio,

Protocols for the protection of human subjects in the above study were assessed through a research ethics review by HML Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 26 December 2023 – 12 January 2024. This study's human subjects' protection protocols, as stated in the materials submitted, received ethics review approval.

You and your project staff remain responsible for ensuring compliance with HML IRB's determinations. Those responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- ensuring prompt reporting to HML IRB of proposed changes in this study's design, risks, consent, or other human protection protocols and providing copies of any revised materials;
- conducting the research activity in accordance with the terms of the IRB approval until any proposed changes have been reviewed and approved by the IRB, except when necessary to mitigate hazards to subjects;
- promptly reporting any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others in the course of this study;
- notifying HML IRB when your study is completed.

HML IRB is authorized by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Research Protections (IRB #1211, IORG #850, FWA #1102).

Sincerely,



D. Michael Anderson, Ph.D., MPH
Chair & Human Subjects Protections Director, HML IRB

cc: Zeljka Popovic; Nela Krnic; Jadranka Vucinic; Penelope Lantz, JD

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Annex X – Evaluation Reference Group Members



Referentna grupa -
Savjet za prava djeteta

Annex XI – Informed consent Forms



Informed Consent
Forms.docx

Annex XII – Informative note to UNICEF’s partner organizations



Informative note to
UNICEF partners.doc