

**EVALUABILITY
ASSESSMENT REPORT**

Evaluability Assessment of UNICEF Iran Cash Plus Schemes for Children in Street Situation and Female Headed Households

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Abbreviations

AYEC - Adolescent and Youth Empowerment Centre

CiSS – Children in Street Situation

CO – Country Office

CWD – Children with disabilities

FHH – Female headed households

MCLSW – Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare

M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation

NBCRC - National Body on the Convention on the Rights of the Child

NGO – Nongovernmental organizations

SP – Social Protection

SSWF – Social Service Workforce

SWO – State Welfare Organization

UNICEF – United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

USD – United States Dollar

Executive Summary

Children in Street Situations (CiSS)

Children in Street Situations (CiSS) in Tehran face complex challenges including poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, malnutrition, and protection concerns. In addition, most of these children are either refugees or on-the-move children. These challenges are exacerbated by factors such as cultural stigma, limited social protection systems, and economic disparities. Against this background, UNICEF (in conjunction with national partners) has developed a Cash Plus Scheme as a multi-faceted intervention designed to address the interconnected challenges faced by CiSS in Tehran. The program combines direct financial assistance with wraparound support services to provide holistic care and promote sustainable pathways out of poverty. Key components include: (i) cash transfers for education, healthcare, and nutrition; (ii) parental training and employability initiatives; (iii) counselling and emotional support; (iv) vocational training and life skills programs; and (v) access to essential social services.

FHH project

Female economic participation in Iran remains low. Against this background, UNICEF plans to support initiatives promoting economic participation and work-life balance for vulnerable female heads of households and young girls. Leveraging Adolescent and Youth Empowerment Centers (AYECs), the program will provide "cash-plus" interventions, combining financial assistance with vocational training and social support. This two-pronged strategy aims to build resilience and empower women to participate in the formal economy.

The program will be implemented across diverse communities, considering regional variations in poverty and labour market conditions. A comprehensive needs assessment will inform the design of culturally relevant interventions. Through collaboration with various ministries and organizations, the program will ensure alignment with national priorities and leverage existing resources.

Main Findings

CiSS intervention

In terms of the overall project design, the project documents clearly identify the long-term impact of the planned activities. While most of the indicators are well defined, measurable, and able to capture the impact of the project, some of the indicators (particularly those related to nutrition) could be better described. Furthermore, the project's objective is highly relevant to the needs of the target group – CiSS who face numerous and overlapping deprivations: from lack of access to health and education to nutrition related challenges. In addition, the overall Theory of Change is clearly described in the available documents and the project's objectives should be fulfilled in the planned timeframe (which is currently set for 12 months, although ongoing discussions with the national authorities are exploring the possibility for providing additional assistance to children who require it beyond the initial 12 months).

In terms of information availability, a situation analysis that was conducted prior to the roll-out of the intervention allows for a clear baseline assessment. It also reveals a significant heterogeneity of the target beneficiary group – there is a significant difference in the baseline indicators between Iranian and refugee CiSS. For the time being, there is no defined control group. However, as part of the discussions with the country office, a control group will be established by implementing a delayed intervention. This means that initially all subjects will be monitored and then they will be gradually introduced to the program while continuing to

track all participants. Overall, the M&E system should have sufficient capacity to support the implementation of the planned programme. Before the program's launch, several preparatory activities have been conducted in collaboration with key government entities such as the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Ministry of Interior (Municipality), and the Ministry of Labour, Cooperative, and Social Welfare (MCLSW), specifically the State Welfare Organization (SWO).

FHH intervention

In terms of the project design, the overall long-term impact of the project as well as the steps needed to achieve it are clearly outlined in the project documents. Furthermore, the beneficiary group is clearly identified. The intervention is expected to last for about 12 months (although this is still to be finalized, based on the ongoing local labour market analysis). Furthermore, available evidence from elsewhere (mostly in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa), points to a possibility of reaching the project objective. While project documents did not reveal specific indicators to be considered in the analysis, the discussions with UNICEF suggested the following indicators that could be considered: (a) number of women who demonstrate improved financial literacy; (b) number of women who report increased self-confidence, wellbeing or empowerment (attitude level indicator); (c) whether or not employment was obtained (including types of employment); (d) likelihood of increase in decision-making within the household; (e) likelihood of increased recognition and value of unpaid care work within the household and community. Furthermore, given that different components of the project (i.e. supply and demand side interventions) will be rolled out at the same time, it will be only possible to evaluate the project as a whole (rather than its separate components).

Thus far, there is some information on the basic socio-economic indicators in the selected counties, which suggest significant heterogeneity in term of indicators such as poverty or education attainment. Furthermore, as part of the discussions with UNICEF colleagues, we have discussed a possible way forward in selecting the control group – it would consist of women who are eligible for the programme but not yet enrolled. Similarly to the intervention above, a control group will be established by implementing a delayed intervention. This means that initially all subjects will be monitored and then they will be gradually introduced to the program while continuing to track all participants.

Institutional context – both interventions

As part of our analysis of the institutional context, the viewpoints of various stakeholders were analysed and compared. Broadly, all stakeholders are interested in the overall effectiveness of the programme as well as documenting barriers and enablers that could be addressed in a potential scale-up of the project. Furthermore, all stakeholders are also interested in the medium-to-longer term effects of the intervention, which could further strengthen the case for a potential scale-up. Nevertheless, some challenges could still be present mostly revolving around: (i) coordination challenges and high turnover of staff, particularly at the national government agencies; (ii) capacity of some of the partners, in particular the NGOs; (iii) mentorship to dedicated staff, particularly around evaluation analyses.

Recommendations

CiSS intervention

Project design

1. While majority of project outcomes are clearly defined, definition and measurement of the nutrition indicator needs better elaboration. Against this background, we

recommend selecting a set of nutrition indicators to be considered. Given the short-termism of the project, we suggest selecting nutrition indicators that are sensitive to short-term changes: (a) intake of cereals, roots, and tubers; (b) cereals; and (c) fruit and vegetable intake. In case the project duration is extended, additional indicators could also be selected (e.g. BMI index).

2. The main project document presents an appendix table that could benefit from a clear definition of output, outcome, and impact level. While output is mentioned (and in many instances it is equivalent to the proposed measurable indicator), a better operationalization of outcome and impact level events is also needed. In other words, the appendix table could benefit from an additional couple of columns that could also reflect the intervention's outcome and impact indicators.

Information availability

1. Only a situation analysis has been conducted, which provides an overview of some of the indicators for the two sub-sets of children (approximately 800 children in street situations). However, the sample is biased. Some administrative data is available from the Iranian Welfare Organization database, but only for the Iranian children. We recommend a construction of a solid baseline (right before the roll-out of the intervention) which will also include determining the size of the two groups (e.g. treatment and control); this, in turn, can further facilitate the process of evaluation.
2. For the time being, there is no defined control group. However, as part of the discussions with the country office, we have discussed the possibility of creating a control group, which would consist of children eligible for the programme but not yet enrolled. In addition, we advised creation of a control group that would include both, Iranian and refugee children, given the clear heterogeneity of the two groups. In the evaluability assessment document, we also provide a snapshot of the evaluation technique to be used in order to draw solid causal links between the intervention and the final outcomes.

FHH intervention

Project design

1. While a situation analysis is not presented in the project documents, they emphasise the need for conducting a thorough market analysis prior to the initiation of the programme. One of the main recommendations is thus conducting a situation analysis prior to the beginning of the implementation process.
2. There is a need for a better representation of the indicators as output, outcome, and impact levels. As an illustration, this evaluability assessment provides a graph, which is a useful snapshot of some of the main indicators to be considered and, potentially, used.
3. Given that the project components will be rolled out at the same time (e.g. provision of training as well as provision of childcare), we recommend that the intervention should be evaluated as a whole (as it would be impossible to disentangle the effect of the demand side intervention vs the effect of the supply side intervention).

Information availability

1. The review of available documents did not suggest availability of baseline data. Against this background, we recommend collection of baseline data in the selected counties.
2. We have discussed a possible way forward on selecting the control group – it would consist of women who are eligible for the programme but not yet enrolled. The gradual

enrolment in the programme will allow for a possibility of creation of a quasi-control group which would be used in an appropriate evaluation assessment. In addition, in the main evaluability document we have provided a snapshot of the evaluation technique to be used in this instance.

3. The reviewed documents do not provide explicit information on the frequency of the data collection. However, we expect that there will be a survey which will be administered at various points of the project, which will allow for all possible indicators to be assessed. We also recommend following the female headed households for couple of time points after the intervention has finished in order to assess the durability of employment gained as a result of the implemented intervention.

Institutional context – both interventions

1. There are some overall doubts regarding the involvement of the authorities, given the staff turnover the relevant ministry. This has also been listed as a potential challenge for the CiSS project. A close cooperation and coordination with the national authorities should be maintained. It should be as frequent as possible to account for a potential high turnover of staff in different agencies.
2. Budget for this activity has already been allocated. There may be a need for mentorship of MCLSW staff involved in the process of programme evaluation. UNICEF should take the lead in mentoring staff (particularly of NGO and/or national authorities in the area of M&E) in order to ensure a proper implementation of the project.
3. There is a risk that findings revealing program challenges or limitations may create hesitation among stakeholders, especially if they impact perceptions of effectiveness. We strongly recommend coupling the quantitative evaluation mentioned above with an additional, qualitative evaluation. It will serve as a further triangulation of the findings of the qualitative assessment and could also provide further evidence for a positive impact of the project (in case the quantitative analysis yields statistically insignificant results).

1. Introduction

Iran is an upper middle-income country with a GDP per capita of 16,154 USD (constant USD, PPP) (World Bank, 2024). Nevertheless, heavy reliance on natural resources as well as international sanctions have taken their toll on the country's economy. The average change in GDP per capita has oscillated between recession and growth; in fact, over the last ten years (from 2013 until 2023), the yearly change in GDP per capita averaged 1% - insufficient to significantly improve the living standards of the population. This is evident when considering some of the relevant socio-economic indicators. The national poverty headcount has been roughly 4 percent (considering the thresholds of 3.65 USD per day); however, when considering a metric which is more appropriate for an upper-middle income country (6.85 USD per day), it transpires that roughly a fifth of the population in Iran could be considered as poor (World Bank, 2024). More importantly, the poverty headcount hasn't significantly changed over the last decade. It could also be argued that the poverty headcount is even higher among the more vulnerable and marginalized segments of the population (e.g. large households, female headed households). Indeed, the latest data from the World Development Indicators suggest that over one third of females in the country are not employed.

Against this background, Iran has developed a large and sophisticated social protection system. Depending on the definition used, social protection encompasses a broad spectrum of programmes. This includes social assistance (non-contributory), social insurance (contributory), and provisions for education, health, housing, and other forms of support. In addition, when a wider definition of social protection is considered, it is provided by a network of over 40 institutions and government bodies, including Bonyads, operating under the purview of both the Presidency and the Supreme Leader's office. Furthermore, there are three most prominent institutions in the area of social protection in Iran: (i) The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare (MCLSW) is the main ministry concerning social protection and in charge of policymaking, coordination and monitoring. It is also the guardian of the Iranian Welfare Database (IWD), the main database used for social protection programmes. (ii) The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation (IKRF) is administered by the Office of the Supreme Leader and one of the largest institutions offering social protection services. In 2022, the IKRF covered about 4.48 million individuals through cash or in-kind transfers. (iii) The State Welfare Organization (SWO) is affiliated with the MCLSW and offers care, treatment, and empowerment services to about 7 million individuals (Hosseini and Biló, 2022).

Since 2010, the largest cash transfer in the country has been the Quasi-Universal Basic Income (or *Yaraneh* (subsidy) in Persian). Under the programme every citizen of the country who qualifies for the programme is entitled to a fixed monthly amount, paid through electronic transfer to the household head's bank account. Over time, due to the devaluation of the national currency, the amount of the transfer has been increasing. Furthermore, and since 2022, the amount of the transfer has been different, depending on the household's socio-economic standing (Hosseini and Biló, 2022).

In addition, Iran has some experience with the so-called soft conditional cash transfer programme or social cash transfers (SCTs), implemented as a pilot project since March 2021 in two provinces of Khouzestan and Kermanshah with support from UNICEF and the Government of Austria. The programme aims to provide predictable cash transfers to vulnerable families with children to mitigate negative impacts. An additional cash plus programme has also been piloted in Baharestan country (Tehran province), since 2023.

2. Description of the intervention

2.1 Children in Street Situations (CiSS)

Children in Street Situations (CiSS) in Tehran face complex challenges including poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, malnutrition, and protection concerns. The vast majority of these children are 'on-the-move' or 'refugees'. These challenges are exacerbated by factors such as cultural stigma, limited social protection systems, and economic disparities. Against this background, UNICEF (in conjunction with national partners) has developed a Cash Plus Scheme as a multi-faceted intervention designed to address the interconnected challenges faced by CiSS in Tehran. The program combines direct financial assistance with wraparound support services to provide holistic care and promote sustainable pathways out of poverty. Key components include: (i) cash transfers for education, healthcare, and nutrition; (ii) parental training and employability initiatives; (iii) counselling and emotional support; (iv) vocational training and life skills programs; and (v) access to essential social services.

2.2 FHH project

Female economic participation in Iran remains low at 14.3% (Statista, 2024). Against this background, UNICEF plans to support initiatives promoting economic participation and work-life balance for vulnerable female heads of households and young girls. Leveraging Adolescent and Youth Empowerment Centers (AYECs), the program will provide "cash-plus" interventions, combining financial assistance with vocational training and social support. This two-pronged strategy aims to build resilience and empower women to participate in the formal economy.

The program will be implemented across diverse communities, considering regional variations in poverty and labour market conditions. A comprehensive needs assessment will inform the design of culturally relevant interventions. Through collaboration with various ministries and organizations, the program will ensure alignment with national priorities and leverage existing resources.

3. Methodology

Overall, this evaluability assessment was guided by UNICEF's Guidance for conducting evaluability assessments (UNICEF, 2019). In particular, in evaluability assessment we focused on the following broad themes: (i) Is there a well-articulated theory of change, while also being flexible and responsive to external factors?; (ii) Is there a logical flow from outputs to outcomes?; (iii) Is the data collection mechanism (in terms of human and financial resources in place)? (iv) Are baseline and targets well defined?

More specifically, given the stage of the programme implementation, this evaluability assessment is evaluability 'in principle' and looking at the clarity of the conceptual underpinnings and design of the intervention including the underlying theory of change and how it has been translated into the intervention results framework. Nevertheless, methodologically, this evaluability assessment also provides some specific guidance and pointers which could be useful once the programmes go through an evaluability 'in practice.' In that respect, this evaluability assessment also provides some recommendations regarding the design, scope, approach, and methodology of the evaluation of the programme.

Methodologically, this evaluability assessment follows a three-pronged approach, each of them providing answers to the three broad checklist components of Davis (2013) (project design, information availability, institutional context):

- (a) Review of background documents and additional literature review. The review of the available documents allowed us to analyse in specific detail the overall project design. It helped in further studying the presented theory of change, as well as its clarity, relevance, validity, and reliability. Moreover, the review of the existing documents could also identify the linkages that are most critical for the overall success of the project. Finally, we have also conducted a broad overview of the literature on similar types of projects from elsewhere (to the extent possible), which, in turn helped ascertain the overall plausibility of the project, in terms of achieving the planned objectives within the presented timeframe.
- (b) Analysis of any available data collected so far. An overview of the descriptive statistics was also provided by the UNICEF Country Office, which provided insights into two specific aspects of the cash plus programmes: (a) data collection (for both, control and treatment groups) and (b) impact evaluation (particularly from the point of view homogeneity of treatment and the control groups as well as the subsequent adoption of appropriate evaluation techniques).
- (c) Stakeholders' feedback. Understanding of the institutional context is one of the building blocks in the checklist proposed by Davies (2013). Thus, this part of the methodological approach allowed us to identify any bottlenecks in the process of coordination between different stakeholders as well as shedding more light on the overall expectations that different stakeholders have. The feedback was received in a written form, based on a set of questions developed based on the evaluability checklist by Davies (2013). The list of questions is provided in the appendix of the report.

4. Results

4.1 Project Design – CiSS

Clarity

The project documents clearly identify the long-term impact of the planned activities. For example, the executive summary of the main project document states that the programme is expected to have a significant positive impact on the lives of CiSS in Tehran by: (a) improving the living standards and reducing poverty; (b) increasing access to education and healthcare; (c) enhancing nutritional status and overall well-being of the children; (d) promoting social inclusion and protection; and (e) building resilience and preparedness for crises (UNICEF, 2024b).

This is further elaborated in the main body of the project document. It is clearly elaborated that the project uses multi-faceted approach to address the interconnected challenges these children face, which include lack of access to education, cultural stigma, health issues (including mental health), psychosocial challenges, and malnutrition. Furthermore, it is clearly stated that the programme will provide direct financial assistance for education, including school fees, supplies, and transportation. It will be coupled with parental training and employability initiatives to improve family stability and income. Additionally, cash transfers will be provided for improved nutrition and to access essential clinical health services (UNICEF, 2024b).

Nevertheless, some of the outcomes need to be better described, particularly in terms of how they are going to be measured. For example, the appendix of the main project document includes two measures which are clearly identified and measurable: (a) number of children returning to school; and (b) number of CiSS households whose incomes have improved. In

addition, the appendix also includes an indicator specified as 'number of children and household members whose nutrition has improved' (UNICEF, 2024b). Given that nutrition could be measured and defined in different ways (e.g. minimum acceptable diet, minimum number of meals, BMI status etc.), a better definition of this indicator could lead to better identification and measurement. Against this background, we have conducted a review of the available outcome indicators which we provide in the Appendix Table A1.

Relevance

The project's objective is highly relevant to the needs of the target group. As indicated in the executive summary of the main project document, CiSS in Tehran face complex challenges including poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, malnutrition, and protection concerns. Moreover, these challenges are exacerbated by factors such as cultural stigma, limited social protection systems, and economic disparities (UNICEF, 2024b).

Furthermore, the project documents are clear about defining the differences/heterogeneity between the two types of children in street situation in Tehran: Iranian ones and those who are refugees from elsewhere (e.g. Afghanistan). For example, while there is very little difference in the average age of the two groups of children, the rest of the metrics differ. Over 55% of non-Iranian CiSS are concentrated in just three neighbourhoods, and more than 70% live in twelve neighbourhoods. In contrast, Iranian CiSS are more dispersed across the city. The top five neighbourhoods contain 42% of Iranian CiSS but account for 66% of non-Iranian CiSS. Second, Iranian CiSS mostly live in smaller households, with 71% residing in households of fewer than 4 members. In contrast, non-Iranian CiSS tend to live in larger households, with 45% in households of 4-6 members and 39% in households of 6-8 members (UNICEF, 2024a; UNICEF, 2024b).

In addition, the main project document is clear about the situation analysis that was carried out in the preparatory phase of the project. More specifically, as outlined on page 15 of the main project document, a situation analysis was carried out in collaboration with SWO (Tehran Department), collecting micro-data to better understand the context. Furthermore, interviews with specialists in the field were organized and conducted to gather expert insights regarding the overall situation of CiSS in the city (UNICEF, 2024b).

Plausibility

The overall Theory of Change is clearly described in both, the inception report, and the main project document. More specifically, CiSS are at the core of the project and their overall well-being in the long run will be targeted through a few project elements: (a) cash transfers for education, healthcare, and nutrition; (b) parental training and employability initiatives; (c) counselling and emotional support; (d) vocational training and life skills programs; and (e) access to essential social services. It is expected that the administration of these programme components will improve the human capital of the CiSS and thus, break the intergenerational transmission of poverty (UNICEF, 2024a; UNICEF, 2024b).

Furthermore, the activity description suggests that, largely, the project outcomes could be achieved. More specifically, the project aims to target 1000 CiSS (or roughly estimated 300 Iranian and estimated 700 Afghan refugee children) across all 22 districts in Tehran (UNICEF, 2024b). The project is expected to last for one year, spanning from mid-autumn 2024 until mid-autumn 2025. It will entail a transfer of 50,000K IRR (roughly 93 USD based on the UN Operational Rates of Exchange of December 2024) per child, every two months, with a maximum of 200 USD per household (UNICEF, 2024b). In other words, most of planned outcomes are short-term in nature (e.g. improvement in socio-economic standing of

households, improvement in school enrolment rates), which should be possible to be achieved in the planned time span.

In addition to the project documents, we have also conducted a literature review of the available evidence from elsewhere. While there is very little evidence on the use of cash plus programmes in the case of street children, there are some general guiding principles that are based on a similar project targeting street children in Kosovo (see Box 1 below).

Box 1. UNICEF key factors for consideration in design of cash-transfer programmes

- (i) Analysis of social and economic barriers to desired programme objectives including multidimensional child poverty, and their inter-relationship, in order to identify appropriate responses.
- (ii) Clear, accessible communication of programme objectives and operations, and programme participants' rights to participants, communities, and the general public.
- (iii) Strengthening linkages between cash transfers and social services, and the required supply response.
- (iv) Design and implementation of accompanying training and information, for example on nutritional information or early childhood development.
- (v) Addressing structural and institutional discrimination and working with communities to shift social norms and particular groups to overcome discrimination and exclusion.
- (vi) The expansion of quality services for health, education, nutrition, water, and sanitation, HIV, and child protection to reach the most disadvantaged populations.

Source: UNICEF (2023)

Validity and reliability

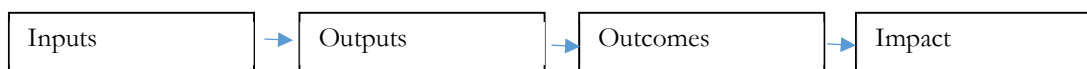
Most of the indicators are well defined, measurable, and able to capture the short-term impact of the project. This is the case for school enrolment of the children as well as overall socio-economic status of the recipients of the cash transfer.

Nevertheless, some of the indicators need to be better defined (particularly some of the nutrition indicators as we further outline above). Given the short-term nature of the project, when defining and measuring nutrition status, it should focus on those that are responsive to short/medium term projects (e.g. diet, number of meals etc)¹. Appendix Table A1 includes a list of possible indicators to be considered.

Furthermore, the main project document presents an appendix table that could benefit from a clear definition of output, outcome, and impact level. While output is mentioned (and in many instances it is equivalent to the proposed measurable indicator), a better operationalization of outcome and impact level events is also needed (as per the graphical representation below).

Graph 1. Theory of change map (with an application to a project aimed at CiSS in Iran)

¹ Nevertheless, recent discussions between UNICEF and the national authorities have also explored the possibility of extending the program to children who still require financial assistance and remain at risk after one year. Funding for this extension is yet to be confirmed and sought from both, UN, and governmental resources.



Testable

The review of the project documents suggested that the following three outcomes should be the most critical parts of the evaluation and should, thus, be the focus on the evaluation questions: (a) education enrolment of children in street situation; (b) improvement in the overall socio-economic situation of households of children in street situations; and (c) improvement in the nutrition status of the children in street situations (pending further definition and selection of the final indicator).

Contextualization

The main project document is rich in describing the overall social protection system in the country, including the role of other agents regarding the three outcomes mentioned above. First, most Iranian households are eligible for the cash transfer programme. It was launched years ago and has become a cornerstone of the country's social protection efforts. Initially, the program provided a monthly payment of 450,000 RIs (approximately 45 US dollars at the time) per household member. This initiative was prompted by high energy subsidies, leading the government to liberalize energy prices and redirect resources towards targeted social protection (UNICEF, 2024b).

Second, there are additional providers of social assistance in the country (UNICEF, 2024b):

- (a) State Welfare Organization: Operating under MCLSW, the SWO supports vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities, children, women heads of households, and drug users through social work, food baskets, and empowerment initiatives.
- (b) Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation: Supporting over 5 million people, this foundation focuses on health, education, and livelihood support, with orphaned children as a primary target group. Its assistance includes cash payments, basic needs, and skills training.
- (c) Barkat Foundation: A major governance-related foundation, Barkat focuses on poverty reduction, empowerment, and development by creating jobs, as well as providing education, health services, and housing for vulnerable groups.
- (d) Charities and NGOs: More than 22,000 official charities and NGOs in Iran offer support to vulnerable individuals in rural and urban areas, providing goods such as food baskets, education, and healthcare services.
- (e) Ehsan Foundation and Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs.

Consistency

There were two documents that were assessed as part of the evaluability analysis– main project document and the inception report. The proposed Theory of Change is consistent in both reviewed documents.

Complexity

As indicated above, this is a short-term project, valid for 12 months (one calendar year) and thus, even if there were multiple interactions between project components, they are not expected to significantly affect the main indicators that will be studied and evaluated at the end of the project.

Stakeholder agreement

As part of our analysis of the institutional context (further described below), the viewpoints of various stakeholders were analysed and compared. Broadly, all stakeholders are interested in the overall effectiveness of the programme as well as documenting barriers and enablers that could be addressed in a potential scale-up of the project. Furthermore, all stakeholders are also interested in the medium-to-longer term effects of the intervention, which could further strengthen the case for a potential scale-up.

4.2 Information availability - CiSS

Document availability

A complete set of documents have been reviewed for the purpose of this evaluability assessment. The set of documents have consisted of the inception report as well as the main project document.

Baseline data

As our review of the available documents suggests, there is detailed information available as part of the situation analysis. As highlighted in the previous section, there is data available from 809 CiSS, both Iranian and migrant/refugees, including a social, economic, and demographic analysis through surveys filled out by the social service workforce (SSWF). It also must be emphasized that the sample available through the situation analysis is biased, given the equal size of the two sub-samples: Iranian and migrant/refugee CiSS (UNICEF, 2024b).

While there is no data on the baseline, there are plans to collect information from two sources: (a) a survey conducted on a selected subsample of children enrolled in the programme; and (b) additional data, albeit for Iranian CiSS, could be available from the system of administrative data. More specifically, according to the project documents, surveys and interviews will be conducted at the start, mid-point, end, and six months after the program to assess immediate and long-term impacts on children's well-being and system responsiveness (UNICEF, 2024b).

Control group

For the time being, there is no defined control group. However, creating a control group, which would consist of children eligible for the programme but not enrolled yet (provided a rolling enrolment of CiSS into the intervention) was recommended². In addition, we advised creation of a control group that would include both, Iranian and refugee children, given the clear heterogeneity of the two groups which was established in the previous section. With this, we also advised a propensity score matching (or difference in difference with matching) methodology to be applied to the evaluation process. The appendix of this evaluability assessment provides additional information on the methodological approach to be applied in the process of evaluation of the cash programme.

Furthermore, according to the main project document, surveys and instruments are planned to be conducted at four intervals in the planned 12 months duration of the project - at the beginning, mid-point, end, and six months after program completion—to assess both, the immediate and long-term impacts on children's well-being and the responsiveness of the system (UNICEF, 2024b).

² Based on discussion with UNICEF, a control group will be established by implementing delayed intervention. This means that initially all subjects will be monitored and then they will be gradually introduced to the program while continuing to track all participants.

Indicators data

The data should be available from both sources: (a) survey; and (b) administrative data. By doing this comprehensive process of data collection, the project could generate sufficient information for all indicators. Given the indicators to be used in the analysis (e.g. enrolment in school, improvement in socio-economic standing of households), administering the survey should be done at four time points (as further indicated above), which will give sufficient frequency of collected data (although the administrative data is available for Iranians only).

Availability of critical data

The project is clear about the target group, so, in principle, the intended and actual beneficiaries should be identifiable.

Gender disaggregated data

The design of the survey could be done in a way that a disaggregated data is available; in addition, data from administrative systems should also be able to be disaggregated by gender.

Capacity of the M&E system

Overall, the M&E system should have sufficient capacity to support the implementation of the planned programme. Before the program's launch, several preparatory activities have been conducted in collaboration with key government entities such as the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Ministry of Interior (Municipality), and the Ministry of Labour, Cooperative, and Social Welfare (MCLSW), specifically the State Welfare Organization (SWO). These efforts focused on institutional arrangements, resource mobilization, and setting up the program structure. Furthermore, UNICEF coordinated a two-day session in February 2024 with participation of over 14 governmental, non-governmental, and UN entities. During this session, the draft CiSS Social Protection Support Strategy was reviewed and finalized through a participatory approach. The project aimed to enhance child protection processes in various areas, such as Children in Street Situation, neglected children, and those with disabilities or who have been victimized (UNICEF, 2024b). The specific objectives include:

- **Process Mapping:** Identifying and documenting the organization's current processes.
- **Problem Identification:** Pinpointing issues and bottlenecks within these processes.
- **Process Improvement:** Proposing solutions to address identified problems.
- **Standardization:** Establishing standardized procedures and guidelines.
- **Implementation:** Ensuring the successful implementation of improved processes.

By achieving those objectives, the project strengthened child protection efforts and improve the lives of vulnerable children in Iran.

4.3 Project Design - FHH

Clarity

The overall long-term impact of the project as well as the steps needed to achieve it are clearly outlined in the project documents. As indicated in the main project document, the essence of this programme is applying a cash-plus approach to address the immediate needs of vulnerable female headed households and young girls while also providing a pathway to longer-term economic security. At the supply side, the programme will offer financial assistance aimed at various aspects of well-being, including improved nutrition, and essential healthcare. At the demand side, this approach supports the economic empowerment of

women by fostering demand for their products, e.g. care economy, thereby enhancing their market presence and encouraging entrepreneurial activity. The strategy here is to provide affordable childcare options within communities, to establish community-based care services, and to promote shared caregiving responsibilities within families and communities (UNICEF, 2024d).

Furthermore, as further elaborated in the project documents, sustainable livelihoods are at the heart of the initiative, which focuses on enhancing employability and skill development (UNICEF, 2024c; UNICEF, 2024d). This is achieved through comprehensive vocational training programs that equip individuals with market-relevant skills, tailored to meet the needs of local economic conditions and production value chains. Training components include value chain analysis, cooperative formation, microfinance, cost-benefit analysis, marketing, and branding. These skills will not only improve participants' immediate employability but also empower them to build and sustain micro-enterprises that contribute to the local economy.

Additionally, this initiative emphasizes a holistic approach to vocational training by integrating social support mechanisms available through AYECS, which can include mentorship, career counselling, personal development programs as well as MHPSS. This layered approach helps ensure that participants are equipped with both technical skills and the resilience needed to navigate the challenges of employment or entrepreneurship. By building these capacities, the initiative enables individuals to actively contribute to their communities' economic development while securing stable incomes for themselves and their families (UNICEF, 2024c; UNICEF, 2024d).

Relevance

The overall beneficiary group is clearly identified. More specifically, as indicated in the main project document, the low participation rate is particularly concerning among young, educated women who should be poised to drive Iran's economic development. However, they encounter disproportionately high unemployment rates, with 32% of young women (ages 15-24) unemployed compared to 17% of their male counterparts. This disparity signals a troubling disconnect between the skills and aspirations of young women and the limited opportunities accessible to them (UNICEF, 2024d).

As indicated in the project documents, several factors underlie this persistent inequality. While Iran's constitution upholds equal employment rights, some legal provisions can in cases restrict women's professional activities and impede their employment, through entrenched social and cultural norms in certain population groups may prioritize domestic roles over professional ones, discouraging many women from seeking employment. Economic challenges further compound these barriers. Iran has faced two waves of economic sanctions in recent years, alongside the global pandemic, both of which have strained the national economy (UNICEF, 2024c; UNICEF, 2024d).

However, as indicated by the project document, the issue of low female labour force participation and high female unemployment cannot be resolved by focusing solely on individual women. Policy interventions can be extended to address the systemic barriers and challenges that may result in discriminatory norms. They must aim to create an enabling environment that supports women's workforce participation. This includes promoting flexible work arrangements, expanding access to quality childcare, and providing targeted support for women entrepreneurs. Additionally, investing in education and skills training can empower women with the competencies needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving economy. These interventions will only be effective if implemented alongside community-level initiatives that address the root causes of female labour market exclusion (UNICEF, 2024d).

While the project documents do not present a clear situational analysis, they emphasise that to effectively address the economic challenges faced by FHH, a thorough labour market analysis is essential. This analysis should be conducted by an independent consultant or research team specializing in gender and labour market dynamics. AYECS staff, with appropriate training and incentives from UNICEF, can contribute to data collection and community engagement. It will entail the following components: (a) Economic Factors: Assess wage levels, employment opportunities, skills gaps, access to finance and resources, and barriers to entrepreneurship for women; (b) Cultural Factors: Examine gender norms, social expectations, and cultural practices that impact women's labour force participation, access to education and training, and decision-making power; (c) Quality of Employment: Analyse job types, working conditions, job security, and career advancement opportunities available to women (UNICEF, 2024d).

Plausibility

The intervention is expected to last for 12 months. However, the duration of the programme is only mentioned in the inception report (UNICEF, 2024c). Given the planned interventions, it is likely that they could be achieved after 12 months of receiving the grant³.

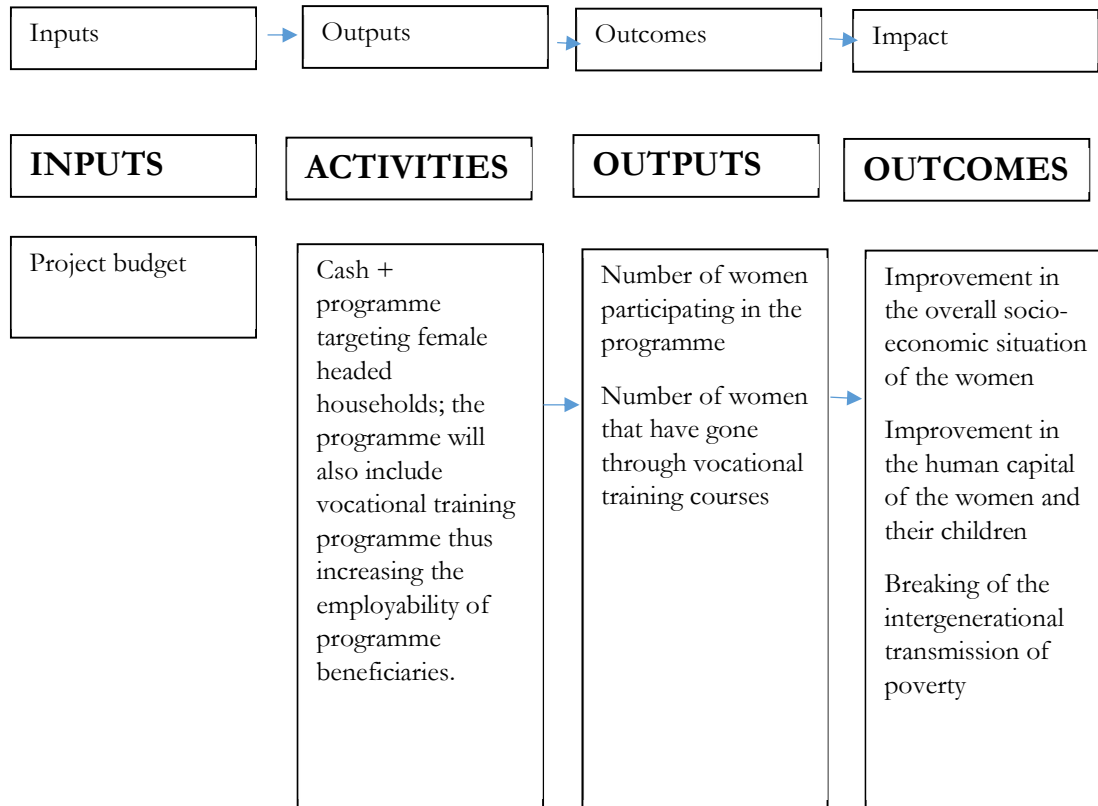
The evidence of similar projects is mostly confined to Sub-Saharan Africa, where available evidence has studied the differentiated impact of cash transfers on labour market outcomes and household asset ownership of female vs male headed households. In Kenya, for example, the cash transfer was associated with a seven-percentage point increase in household participation in non-farm enterprise for female-headed households. Furthermore, transfer was reported as the most important second source of capital for female-headed households (Asfaw et al., 2012). In Malawi, a similar programme has resulted with an increase in ownership of agricultural assets, with pronounced impact among female headed households (Covarrubias et al., 2012). Finally, in Ghana, in an analysis of the impact of the LEAP programme, female-headed households saw a significant increase in female labour to own-farm activities of around nine days in the previous season, with the effect again being much larger in smaller households (13 days) (Handa et al., 2014).

Validity and reliability?

Our review of the project documents suggests that there is a need for better spelling out of the output, outcome, and impact level. Moreover, relevant indicators are not presented (UNICEF, 2024d). Graph 2 below provides a snapshot of the potential indicators for output, outcome and impact levels. Subsequent communication with the UNICEF office suggested that the following indicators could be considered: (a) number of women who demonstrate improved financial literacy; (b) number of women who report increased self-confidence, wellbeing or empowerment (attitude level indicator); (c) whether or not employment was obtained (including types of employment); (d) likelihood of increase in decision-making within the household; (e) likelihood of increased recognition and value of unpaid care work within the household and community.

³ The results of the ongoing labour market analysis will ascertain the overall duration of this project.

Graph 2. Theory of change map for the analysis of project outputs, outcomes and impact of the project aimed at empowering female headed households in Iran



Source: Author based on the review of the documents

Testability

Given that all of the project components will roll out at the same time (e.g. provision of training as well as provision of childcare), it is impossible to disentangle different components of the project and their individual impact on the main outcome variables. Nevertheless, it would be possible to measure and study the impact of the provision of supply and demand side interventions (provided jointly) on employability of women in short to medium term.

Contextualization

As further described in the project documents, labour market barriers that are faced by women are further exacerbated by the ongoing economic challenges that the country faces. For example, Iran has faced two waves of economic sanctions in recent years, alongside the global pandemic, both of which have strained the national economy. These pressures disproportionately affect women, who are frequently the first to lose jobs or be excluded from the labour market in difficult times (UNICEF, 2024c; UNICEF, 2024d).

Consistency

Only two documents were reviewed – the main project document and the inception report, which are consistent with each other.

Complexity

There is a clear separation between the demand and supply driven components of the programme. However, as indicated above, given that the project components will be rolled out at the same time, the evaluation is expected to be conducted on the entire project, rather than different components (i.e. demand vs. supply related interventions).

Stakeholder agreement

As part of our analysis of the institutional context (further described below), the viewpoints of various stakeholders were analysed and compared. Broadly, all stakeholders are interested in the overall effectiveness of the programme as well as documenting barriers and enablers that could be addressed in a potential scale-up of the project. Furthermore, all stakeholders are also interested in the medium-to-longer term effects of the intervention, which could further strengthen the case for a potential scale-up.

4.4 Information availability - FHH

Document availability

For the purposes of this evaluability assessment, we have reviewed all available documents – inception report and main project document.

Baseline measures and control group

Thus far, there is no information on the baseline (although there are plans to conduct a situation analysis, as further indicated in the main project document) (UNICEF, 2024d). Nevertheless, there is some county-level administrative and census data for the six counties. There are a few observations based on the available county level data. First, female poverty in the selected counties ranges from 10.4 percent in Isfahan to 31 percent in Zabol. Second, the rest of the socio-economic variables are highly correlated with the overall female poverty rate at county level. For example, while primary education completion rate among females in Isfahan is almost 90 percent, it is about 5 percentage points lower in Zabol (UNICEF, 2024e).

Furthermore, as part of the discussions with UNICEF colleagues, we have discussed a possible way forward on selecting the control group – it would consist of women who are eligible for the programme but not yet enrolled. The gradual enrolment in the programme will allow for a possibility of creation of a quasi-control group which would be used in an appropriate evaluation assessment (consisting of either propensity score matching or difference in difference with matching). The appendix of this evaluability assessment provides further information on the methodological approach that should be considered when conducting the final evaluation of this cash plus programme.

Indicators data including availability of critical data

The reviewed documents do not provide information on this (UNICEF, 2024d). However, subsequent communication with the UNICEF office suggested that the following indicators could be considered: (a) number of women who demonstrate improved financial literacy; (b) number of women who report increased self-confidence, wellbeing or empowerment (attitude level indicator); (c) whether or not employment was obtained (including types of employment); (d) likelihood of increase in decision-making within the household; (e) likelihood of increased recognition and value of unpaid care work within the household and community.

Capacity of the M&E systems

One of the project documents has emphasized the following when it comes to the overall development of M&E systems: (a) develop a robust monitoring and evaluation framework with

specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound indicators; (b) regularly collect data on program activities, outputs, and outcomes, disaggregated by sex and other relevant factors; (c) conduct periodic evaluations to assess program impact, identify challenges, and inform adaptive management; (d) establish a learning system to capture and share lessons learned throughout the program cycle (UNICEF, 2024d).

Furthermore, there is a clear delineation of functions and responsibilities of different stakeholders involved in the implementation of the programme. As indicated in the main project document, UNICEF will spearhead this program, collaborating with a network of partners who will contribute their expertise and resources (UNICEF, 2024d):

- (a) Leadership and coordination: UNICEF leads overall program coordination, provides technical assistance, conducts monitoring and evaluation, and champions advocacy efforts. The Ministry of Youth and Sport oversees AYECs as central implementation hubs.
- (b) Community Engagement and Delivery: AYEC Centres: Identify and enroll beneficiaries, deliver training, and provide ongoing support.
- (c) Enhancing Employability: The Ministry of Cooperative, Labor and Social Welfare & Technical Vocational Training Organization collaborate on job training and skills development and facilitate linkages to employment opportunities.
- (d) Strengthening Program Impact: The Ministry of Health and Medical Education supports the health and nutrition aspects of the cash plus program and cooperate on enhancing employability if the local job market calls for it. State Welfare Organization & Imam Khomeini Relief Committee assist with targeting vulnerable households and contribute to social protection schemes. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and NBCRC provide guidance on child rights and ensure program compliance. And Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs champions gender equality and supports women's empowerment throughout implementation.

4.5 Institutional context – CiSS and FHH (both interventions)

Practicality

Accessibility to and availability of stakeholders

Judging by most of the KIIs, there shouldn't be major constraints in terms of implementation of the projects. In their words: "Key stakeholders, including government agencies, community leaders, NGOs, and FHH and CISS participants, are largely accessible. Moreover, most staff and stakeholders are anticipated to be present, with a focus on coordinating evaluation activities to avoid overlaps with major holiday periods." In addition, there are no major constraints related to the overall weather conditions.

However, some of the key stakeholders have expressed some concern regarding the overall consistency of government involvement especially in following past decisions due to high staff turnovers which is likely in the new government. Thus, more advocacy by the implementation unit would be needed for moving forward.

Specifically related to the CiSS project, there shouldn't be any issues related to the accessibility and availability of stakeholders. Nevertheless, some of the stakeholders have also outlined potential challenges working on this interventions; the potential challenges revolve around the following: (a) time constraints of some of the government officials due to their involvement in other programmes; (b) coordination challenges in bringing together multiple stakeholders from different organizations (for example, working Ministry of Education

could be challenging as many of the students will have issues in their entry or re-entry to school system).

Availability of resources

According to the interviewed stakeholders, there is already a skilled team in place to do the evaluation; in addition, sufficient funding for the purposes of the evaluation has been allocated. More specifically, MCLSW has engaged a research team (funded by UNICEF) to conduct an evaluation of the CiSS project using a quasi-experimental methodology. Similar mechanism is also expected to be established for the evaluation of the FHH project. However, while the country is strong in conducting research, evaluation exercises are not well established in Iran. Hence, UNICEF is assigned to take the lead on the final summative evaluation of the cash plus schemes of concern in this report (or the equivalent real time evaluation, should the interventions continue) and required mentorship will be provided to the dedicated staff.

Timing

The timing is appropriate, as both FHH and CiSS schemes have accumulated substantial implementation experience. This allows the evaluation to extract meaningful insights and contribute to refining program design. Furthermore, with the evolving economic context, an evaluation is well-positioned to provide critical input that can guide future adjustments and influence stakeholder decision-making, particularly as the projects are entering important review phases. With that said, the evaluation is proposed to happen in a year (Q4 2025/Q1 2026). According to some of the interviewed stakeholders, “conducting an evaluability assessment at this stage is crucial for improving the program design and ensuring it is set up for success.”

Coordination requirements

Given the multisectoral nature of FHH and CiSS interventions, coordination with various donors, government departments (e.g., MCLSW, MOJ (NBCRC)), NGOs, and possibly other UN agencies is necessary. A structured coordination plan is needed to facilitate joint input, particularly from government entities, on prioritizing evaluation outcomes and aligning them with broader national objectives on social protection.

This is even more important, given the buy in that UNICEF would like to obtain with potential donors. In addition, this evaluation could also support the ongoing donor proposals.

Focusing specifically on CiSS project, the process of coordination could be organized in a fashion that accommodates the interests of different stakeholders. The MoJ's role as the lead coordinator is crucial for streamlining communication and ensuring all government entities are working together effectively. They could take the lead in organizing technical working groups - establishing technical working groups with representatives from each stakeholder organization can facilitate collaborative decision-making and problem-solving. Furthermore, creating shared information platforms or databases can ensure all stakeholders have access to the latest program data and updates, facilitating transparency and informed decision-making. This is even more important given that information may be fragmented and held within separate organizations, limiting access, and hindering informed decision-making. In addition, scheduling regular meetings and consultations between government entities, UNICEF and NGOs can ensure smooth implementation and address any challenges that arise.

Finally, there may be some issues with the involvement of NGOs. While most NGOs are overall more than eager to help programme implementation, in times they have been subject to more intensive or additional layers of supervisory mechanisms which may add to the bureaucracy

and hence highly reduce the required agility of the programme. Thus, they may need support to build their capacity in line with the programme needs. Nevertheless, NGOs shall play a crucial role, particularly in providing access to school to children that may have been missed by the school system (e.g. over the age children, undocumented migrants).

Utility

Interest in the evaluation

This is primarily an activity which is spearheaded by UNICEF Country office in Iran. Furthermore, UNICEF follows its standard process when commissioning an evaluation but will ensure key stakeholders are engaged in form of a steering committee or a reference group. It is worth noting that evaluation of cash plus programme has been approved in February 2023 as part of the country programme document of UNICEF Iran for 2023-2027 submitted to UNICEF executive board by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Islamic Republic of Iran. In addition, at the national level, MCLSW has been designated as the official impact assessment body for the CiSS project. With UNICEF's and MCLSW's both share a high interest and have functions independent from the project's implementation ensures objectivity and rigor in the evaluation process. Similar accountability mechanism will also be established in the case of the FHH project.

Furthermore, stakeholders are primarily interested in assessing the effectiveness, reach, and economic impact of cash-plus interventions on target populations (CiSS and FHH). For example, when it comes to the FHH programme, stakeholders are interested if skill learning leads to employment. In doing so, stakeholders are also interested in medium-to-longer term effects of the programme (e.g. if CiSS are in school the following year, or if the FHH with skill building leads to more durable employment of the programme beneficiaries). These are both applicable for government bodies and potential donors. Moreover, stakeholders would like to understand the schemes' impact on reducing child labour, enhancing income stability for FHH, and fostering positive community outcomes. Prioritizing these inquiries is essential for realistic data collection and feasible analysis, as stakeholders expect these findings to inform evidence-based decision-making on potential program expansion.

In addition, some of the key interviewed stakeholders would be keen to know if the provided cash transfers create any dependencies on the transfers as well as the challenges and barriers that would prevent the programme from being further scaled up. More specifically, as one of the stakeholders pointed out: "Questions related to the program's impact on the well-being of CiSS should be prioritized, as they are central to the program's objectives. Also, questions about the effectiveness and sustainability of the program's interventions should also be prioritized to inform future program design and policy decisions."

In addition, some of the stakeholders have expressed interest in the link between the programme and people with disabilities. More specifically, stakeholders are interested in the ratio of CWD or FHH with CWD to the total beneficiary of each programme as well as if the programme could offer a more advanced screening approach to select and address CWD needs. Along the same lines, some of the stakeholders are interested in the accessibility considerations for reaching out to beneficiaries of the two programmes who have disabilities.

Ethical issues

Stakeholders pointed out that ethical considerations are paramount, especially concerning confidentiality and sensitivity with vulnerable populations, including children and FHH participants. These are known issues, and existing protocols, such as informed consent and confidentiality assurances, should be strictly adhered to. Ethical constraints will necessitate

additional precautions in data collection, particularly with CiSS populations, to ensure participant welfare and data integrity.

Risks

There is a risk that findings revealing program challenges or limitations may create hesitation among stakeholders, especially if they impact perceptions of effectiveness. In other words, the desire of reporting only success of a programme can increase the possibility of defining success at the output level of the programme rather than the outcome. Hence, it is imperative to deploy methodological approaches in evidence generation about the performance of the programme and avoid relying solely on qualitative narratives. However, past positive collaboration suggests that stakeholders are likely to approach the evaluation with an open mind, using any constructive criticism to drive program improvement. Proactive communication and careful framing of findings will be crucial to maintaining stakeholder support and facilitating effective implementation of recommendations.

According to some of the stakeholder, there is additional risk involving beneficiaries themselves. More specifically, there's a risk that CiSS and their families may resist the program's conditional cash transfer model, as they may be accustomed to unconditional cash transfers. This could hinder participation and impact the program's effectiveness.

5. Conclusions

CiSS intervention

In terms of the overall project design, the project documents clearly identify the long-term impact of the planned activities. While most of the indicators are well defined, measurable, and able to capture the impact of the project, some of the indicators (particularly those related to nutrition) could be better described. Furthermore, the project's objective is highly relevant to the needs of the target group – CiSS who face numerous and overlapping deprivations: from lack of access to health and education to nutrition related challenges. In addition, the overall Theory of Change is clearly described in the available documents and the project's objectives should be fulfilled in the planned timeframe.

In terms of information availability, a situation analysis that was conducted prior to the roll-out of the intervention allows for a clear baseline assessment. It also reveals a significant heterogeneity of the target beneficiary group – there is a significant difference in the baseline indicators between Iranian and refugee CiSS. For the time being, there is no defined control group. However, as part of the discussion for the purposes of the project, we have discussed the possibility of creating a control group, which would consist of children eligible for the programme but not enrolled yet. Overall, the M&E system should have sufficient capacity to support the implementation of the planned programme. Before the program's launch, several preparatory activities have been conducted in collaboration with key government entities such as the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Ministry of Interior (Municipality), and the Ministry of Labour, Cooperative, and Social Welfare (MCLSW), specifically the State Welfare Organization (SWO).

FHH intervention

In terms of the overall project design, the overall long-term impact of the project as well as the steps needed to achieve it are clearly outlined in the project documents. Furthermore, the overall beneficiary group is clearly identified. The intervention is expected to last for about 12 months and, available evidence from elsewhere (mostly in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa)

points to a possibility of reaching the project objective. However, our review of the project document suggests that there is a need for better spelling out of the output, outcome, and impact level. Moreover, relevant indicators are not presented. Furthermore, given that different components of the project (i.e. supply and demand side interventions) will be rolled out at the same time, it will be only possible to evaluate the project as a whole (rather than its separate components).

Thus far, there is no information on the baseline. Furthermore, as part of the discussions with UNICEF colleagues, we have discussed a possible way forward on selecting the control group – it would consist of women who are eligible for the programme but not yet enrolled.

Institutional context – both interventions

As part of our analysis of the institutional context, the viewpoints of various stakeholders were analysed and compared. Broadly, all stakeholders are interested in the overall effectiveness of the programme as well as documenting barriers and enablers that could be addressed in a potential scale of the project. Furthermore, all stakeholders are also interested in the medium-to-longer term effects of the intervention, which could further strengthen the case for a potential scale-up. Nevertheless, some challenges could still be present mostly revolving around: (i) coordination challenges and high turnover of staff, at the national and governmental entities; (ii) capacity of some of the partners, in particular the NGOs; (iii) mentorship to dedicated staff, particularly around evaluation facilitation and use.

6. Recommendations

6.1 CiSS intervention

6.1.1 Project design

1. While majority of project outcomes are clearly defined, definition and measurement of the nutrition indicator needs better elaboration. Against this background, we recommend selecting a set of nutrition indicators to be considered. Given the short-termism of the project, we suggest selecting nutrition indicators that are sensitive to short-term changes: (a) intake of cereals, roots, and tubers; (b) cereals; and (c) fruit and vegetable intake. In case the project duration is extended, additional indicators could also be selected (e.g. BMI index).
2. The main project document presents an appendix table that could benefit from a clear definition of output, outcome, and impact level. While output is mentioned (and in many instances it is equivalent to the proposed measurable indicator), a better operationalization of outcome and impact level events is also needed. In other words, the appendix table could benefit from additional couple of columns that could also reflect the intervention's outcome and impact indicators.

6.1.2 Information availability

1. Only a situation analysis has been conducted, which provides an overview of some of the indicators for the two sub-sets of children (approximately 800 children in street situations). However, the sample is biased. Some administrative data is available from the Iranian Welfare Organization database, but only for the Iranian children. We recommend a construction of solid baseline (right before the roll-out of the intervention) which will also include determining the size of the two groups (e.g. treatment and control); this, in turn, can further facilitate the process of evaluation.

2. For the time being, there is no defined control group. However, as part of the discussion with the country office, we have discussed the possibility of creating a control group, which would consist of children eligible for the programme but not enrolled yet. In addition, we advised creation of a control group that would include both, Iranian and refugee children, given the clear heterogeneity of the two groups. In the evaluability assessment document, we also provide a snapshot of the evaluation technique to be used in order to draw solid causal links between the intervention and the final outcomes.

6.2 FHH intervention

6.2.1 Project design

1. While a situation analysis is not presented in the project documents, they emphasise the need for conducting a thorough market analysis prior to the initiation of the programme. One of the main recommendations is thus conducting a situation analysis prior to the beginning of the implementation process.
2. There is a need for a better representation of the indicators as output, outcome, and impact levels. As an illustration, this evaluability assessment provides a graph, which is a useful snapshot of some of the main indicators to be considered and, potentially, used.
3. Given that all of the project components will be rolled out at the same time (e.g. provision of training as well as provision of childcare), we recommend that the intervention should be evaluated as a whole (as it would be impossible to disentangle the effect of the demand side intervention vs the effect of the supply side intervention).

6.2.2 Information availability

1. The review of available documents did not suggest availability of baseline data. Against this background, we recommend a collection of baseline data in the selected counties.
2. We have discussed a possible way forward on selecting the control group – it would consist of women who are eligible for the programme but not yet enrolled. The gradual enrolment in the programme will allow for a possibility of creation of a quasi-control group which would be used in an appropriate evaluation assessment. In addition, in the main evaluability document we have provided a snapshot of the evaluation technique to be used in this instance.
3. The reviewed documents do not provide explicit information on the frequency of the data collection. However, we expect that there will be a survey which will be administered at various points of the project, which will allow for all possible indicators to be assessed. We also recommend following the female headed households for couple of time points after the intervention has finished in order to assess the durability of employment gained as a result of the implemented intervention.

6.3 Both projects

6.3.1 Institutional context

1. There are some overall doubts regarding the involvement of the authorities, given the staff turnovers within the relevant national entities and diversity of the stakeholder organizations. This has also been listed as a potential challenge for the CiSS project. A close cooperation and coordination with the national authorities should be maintained possibly through a solid coordination mechanism that allow for frequent reviews and facilitation depending on the roles.

2. Budget for this activity has already been allocated. There may be a need for mentorship of MCLSW staff involved in the process of programme evaluation. UNICEF should take the lead in mentoring staff (particularly of NGO and/or national authorities in the area of M&E) in order to ensure a proper implementation of the project.
3. There is a risk that findings revealing program challenges or limitations may create hesitation among stakeholders, especially if they impact perceptions of effectiveness. We strongly recommend coupling the quantitative evaluation mentioned above with an additional, qualitative evaluation. It will serve as a further triangulation of the findings of the qualitative assessment and could also provide further evidence for a positive impact of the project (in case the quantitative analysis yields statistically insignificant results).

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Appendix

Table A1. Proposed set of indicators for the nutrition section

Indicator	Definition	Source
Adolescent underweight	Children and adolescents aged 5–19 years who are more than one standard deviation below the median BMI for age of the WHO growth reference for school-aged children and adolescents.	https://globalnutritionreport.org/3a7f16#2b2ab2e8-adolescent-underweight
Intake of cereals, roots, and tubers	Share of cereals, roots, and tubers in total DES as % (a high % indicates a low diversity of the food supply). DES – Dietary Energy Supply.	https://www.fao.org/4/y5773e/y5773e05.htm
Cereals	Availability of cereals per person	https://www.fao.org/4/y5773e/y5773e05.htm
Fruits and vegetable intake	Availability of fruit and vegetables per person	https://www.fao.org/4/y5773e/y5773e05.htm

Source: Author based on a literature review

Table A2. Project Design – Children in Street Situation Programme

1. Project Design (as described in a Theory of Change, Logical Framework, or narrative)		Yes	Partially	No	Comments
Clarity?	Are the long-term impact and outcomes clearly identified and are the proposed steps towards achieving these clearly defined?		X		While majority of project outcomes a clearly defined, definition and measurement of the nutrition indicator needs better elaboration. We provide a set of indicators that could be considered.
Relevant?	Is the project objective clearly relevant to the needs of the target group, as identified by any form of situation analysis, baseline study, or other evidence and argument? Is the intended beneficiary group clearly identified?	X			Yes, the intended group is clearly identified. Our review of the available documents also revealed significant heterogeneity in the sample requiring a refined evaluation strategy (see below).
Plausible?	Is there a continuous causal chain, connecting the intervening agency with the final impact of concern?	X			Yes, the theory of change is well described and plausible.
	Is it likely that the project objective could be achieved, given the planned interventions, within the project lifespan? Is there evidence from elsewhere that it could be achieved?	X			The project objective could be achieved. While there is not much information on availability of similar projects, there are some general principles that could be applied when designing programmes targeting CiSS.
Validity and reliability?	Are there <i>valid</i> indicators for each expected event (output, outcome, and impact levels)? I.e. will they capture what is expected to happen? Are they <i>reliable</i> indicators? I.e. will observations by different observers find the same thing?			X	While majority of project outcomes a clearly defined, definition and measurement of the nutrition indicator needs better elaboration. We provide a set of indicators that could be considered. While output is mentioned (and in many instances it is equivalent to the proposed measurable indicator), a better operationalization of outcome and impact level events is also needed

Testable?	Is it possible to identify which linkages in the causal chain will be most critical to the success of the project, and thus should be the focus of evaluation questions?		X		As we indicate above, further refinement of the nutrition indicators could help with the overall focus of the evaluation questions.
Contextualised?	Have assumptions about the roles of other actors outside the project been made explicit? (both enablers and constrainers) Are there plausible plans to monitor these in any practicable way?	X			The overall project document has very well described the overall social protection system in the country. It has also provided the roles of other actors that could impact upon the overall wellbeing of the beneficiaries.
Consistent?	Is there consistency in the way the Theory of Change is described across various project multiple documents (Design, M&E plans, work plans, progress reports, etc.)	X			Only limited number of available documents were assessed.
Complexity?	Are there expected to be multiple interactions between different project components? [complicating attribution of causes and identification of effects] How clearly defined are the expected interactions?			X	Given the short duration of the project, even in the case of multiple interactions, they are likely to have limited effect on the final outcomes.
Agreement?	To what extent are different stakeholders holding different views about the project objectives and how they will be achieved? How visible are the views of stakeholders who might be expected to have different views?	X			Questions to KIIs suggested a broad alignment of the overall expectations of different stakeholders.

Table A3. Project Design – FHH Programme

1. Project Design (as described in a Theory of Change, Logical Framework, or narrative)		Yes	Partially	No	Comments
Clarity?	Are the long-term impact and outcomes clearly identified and are the proposed steps towards achieving these clearly defined?	X			The long-term impact outcomes and the steps towards achieving them are well outlined in the reviewed documents.
Relevant?	Is the project objective clearly relevant to the needs of the target group, as identified by any form of situation analysis, baseline study, or other evidence and argument? Is the intended beneficiary group clearly identified?		X		While a situation analysis is not presented in the project documents, they emphasise the need for conducting a thorough market analysis prior to the initiation of the programme.
Plausible?	Is there a continuous causal chain, connecting the intervening agency with the final impact of concern?	X			The project is expected to have a positive impact on the employability of women.
	Is it likely that the project objective could be achieved, given the planned interventions, within the project lifespan? Is there evidence from elsewhere that it could be achieved?	X			Our review of available evidence suggests that similar programmes have had a positive effect on labour force participation of women (albeit in Sub-Saharan African context).
Validity and reliability?	Are there <i>valid</i> indicators for each expected event (output, outcome, and impact levels)? I.e. will they capture what is expected to happen? Are they <i>reliable</i> indicators? I.e. will observations by different observers find the same thing?		X		There is a need for a better representation of the indicators as output, outcome, and impact levels. Subsequent communication with the UNICEF office suggested that the following indicators could be considered: (a) number of women who demonstrate improved financial literacy; (b) number of women who report increased self-confidence, wellbeing or empowerment (attitude level indicator); (c) whether or not employment was obtained (including types of employment); (d) likelihood of increase in decision-making within the household; (e) likelihood of increased recognition and value of unpaid care work within the household and community.

Testable?	Is it possible to identify which linkages in the causal chain will be most critical to the success of the project, and thus should be the focus of evaluation questions?			X	Given that all of the project components will roll out at the same time (e.g. provision of training as well as provision of childcare), it is impossible to disentangle different components of the project.
Contextualised?	Have assumptions about the roles of other actors outside the project been made explicit? (both enablers and constrainers) Are there plausible plans to monitor these in any practicable way?	X			Yes, these are taken into account, particularly the overall economic environment.
Consistent?	Is there consistency in the way the Theory of Change is described across various project multiple documents (Design, M&E plans, work plans, progress reports, etc.)	X			Only two documents were reviewed, where there is consistency of the presented information.
Complexity?	Are there expected to be multiple interactions between different project components? [complicating attribution of causes and identification of effects] How clearly defined are the expected interactions?	X			There is a clear separation between the demand and supply driven components of the programme. However, as indicated above, given that the project components will be rolled out at the same time, the evaluation is expected to be conducted on the entire project, rather than different components.
Agreement?	To what extent are different stakeholders holding different views about the project objectives and how they will be achieved? How visible are the views of stakeholders who might be expected to have different views?	X			Questions to KIIs suggested a broad alignment of the overall expectations of different stakeholders.

Table A4. Information availability – Children in Street Situation Programme

2. Information availability		Yes	Partially	No	Comments
Is a complete set of documents available?	...relative to what could have been expected? E.g. Project proposal, Progress Reports, Evaluations / impact assessments, Commissioned studies	X			Yes, the available documents consisted of inception report and a main project document.
Do baseline measures exist?	If baseline data is not yet available, are there specific plans for when baseline data would be collected and how feasible are these?	X			According to the main project document, surveys and instruments are planned to be conducted at four intervals in the planned 12 months duration of the project to assess both the immediate and long-term impacts on children's well-being and the responsiveness of the system.
	If baseline data exists in the form of survey data, is the raw data available, or just selected currently relevant items? Is the sampling process clear? Are the survey instruments available?			X	Only a situation analysis has been conducted, which provides an overview of some of the indicators for the two sub-sets of children. However, the sample is biased.
	If baseline data is in the form of national or subnational statistics, how disaggregated is the data? Are time series data available, for pre-project years?			X	Some administrative data is available, but only for the Iranian children (not those who are migrant or refugees).
Is there data on a control group?	Is it clear how the control group compares to the intervention group? Is the raw data available or just summary statistics? Are the members of the control group identifiable and potentially contactable? How frequently has data been collected on the status of the control group?		X		For the time being, there is no defined control group. However, as part of the discussion for the purposes of the project, we have discussed the possibility of creating a control group, which would consist of children eligible for the programme but not enrolled. Based on discussion with UNICEF, a control group will be established by implementing delayed intervention. This means that initially all subjects will be monitored and then they will be gradually introduced to the program while continuing to track all participants. In addition, we advised creation of a control group that would include both, Iranian and refugee children, given the clear heterogeneity of the two groups which was established in the previous section.

Is data being collected for all the indicators?	Is it with sufficient frequency? Is there significant missing data? Are the measures being used reliable i.e. Is measurement error likely to be a problem?	X			The planned survey should be able to collect information with sufficient frequency.
Is critical data available?	Are the intended and actual beneficiaries identifiable? Is there a record of who was involved in what project activities and when?	X			The project is clear about the target group, so, in principle, the intended and actual beneficiaries should be identifiable.
Is gender-disaggregated data available?	In the baseline? For each of the indicators during project intervention? In the control group? In any mid-term or process review?		X		The design of the survey could be done in a way that a disaggregated data is available; in addition, data from administrative systems should also be able to be disaggregated by gender.
If reviews or evaluations have been carried out...	Are the reports available? Are the authors contactable? Is the raw data available? Is the sampling process clear? Are the survey instruments available?			X	No further evaluations have been carried out.
Do existing M&E systems have the capacity to deliver?	Where data is not yet available, do existing staff and systems have the capacity to do so in the future? Are responsibilities, sources and periodicities defined and appropriate? Is the budget adequate?	X			Before the programme launch several capacity building exercises have been conducted, including preparedness technical session.

Table A5. Information availability – FHH Programme

2. Information availability		Yes	Partially	No	Comments
Is a complete set of documents available?	...relative to what could have been expected? E.g. Project proposal, Progress Reports, Evaluations / impact assessments, Commissioned studies	X			Yes, the available documents consisted of inception report and a main project document.
Do baseline measures exist?	If baseline data is not yet available, are there specific plans for when baseline data would be collected and how feasible are these?		X		The review of available documents did not suggest availability of baseline data. Nevertheless, there is some county-level administrative and census data for the six counties. Based on it, there are a few observations. First, female poverty in the selected counties ranges from 10.4 percent in Isfahan to 31 percent in Zabol. Second, the rest of the socio-economic variables are highly correlates with the overall female poverty rate at county level. For example, while primary education completion rate among females in Isfahan is almost 90 percent, it is about 5 percentage points lower in Zabol.
	If baseline data exists in the form of survey data, is the raw data available, or just selected currently relevant items? Is the sampling process clear? Are the survey instruments available?		X		
	If baseline data is in the form of national or subnational statistics, how disaggregated is the data? Are time series data available, for pre-project years?		X		
Is there data on a control group?	Is it clear how the control group compares to the intervention group? Is the raw data available or just summary statistics? Are the members of the control group identifiable and potentially contactable? How frequently has data been collected on the status of the control group?			X	We have discussed a possible way forward on selecting the control group – it would consist of women who are eligible for the programme but not yet enrolled. The gradual enrolment in the programme will allow for a possibility of creation of a quasi-control group which would be used in an appropriate evaluation assessment.
Is data being collected for all the indicators?	Is it with sufficient frequency? Is there significant missing data? Are the measures being used reliable i.e. Is measurement error likely to be a problem?			X	The reviewed documents do not provide information on this. However, we expect that there will be a survey which will be administered at various points of the project, which will allow for all possible indicators to be assessed.
Is critical data available?	Are the intended and actual beneficiaries identifiable? Is there a record of who was involved in what project activities and when?			X	Same as above.

Is gender-disaggregated data available?	In the baseline? For each of the indicators during project intervention? In the control group? In any mid-term or process review?	NA	NA	NA	Not applicable as the project only focuses on females.
If reviews or evaluations have been carried out...	Are the reports available? Are the authors contactable? Is the raw data available? Is the sampling process clear? Are the survey instruments available?			X	No further evaluations have been conducted.
Do existing M&E systems have the capacity to deliver?	Where data is not yet available, do existing staff and systems have the capacity to do so in the future? Are responsibilities, sources and periodicities defined and appropriate? Is the budget adequate?		X		As part of the programme implementation, there are plans to further strengthen the M&E systems in the country. In addition, our review of the available documents suggested a clear delineation of roles of different stakeholders involved in the implementation of the programme.

Table A6. Institutional context – CiSS and FHH Programme

3. Institutional context		Yes	Partially	No	Comments
Practicality					
Accessibility to and availability of stakeholders?	<p>Are there physical security risks? Will weather be a constraint?</p> <p>Are staff and key stakeholders likely to be present, or absent on leave or secondment? Can reported availability be relied upon?</p>		X		<p>There are some overall doubts regarding the involvement of the authorities, given the staff turnover the relevant ministry.</p> <p>This has also been listed as a potential challenge for the CiSS project.</p>
Resources available to do the evaluation?	Time available in total and in country? Timing within the schedule of all other activities? Funding available for the relevant team and duration? People with the necessary skills available at this point?		X		<p>Budget for this activity has already been allocated. However, there may be a need for further mentorship of staff who will be involved in the process of programme evaluation.</p>
Is the timing, right?	Is there an opportunity for an evaluation to have an influence? Has the project accumulated enough implementation experience to enable useful lessons to be extracted? If the evaluation was planned in advance, is the evaluation still relevant?				
Coordination requirements?	How many other donors, government departments, or NGOs need to be or want to be involved? What forms of coordination are possible and/or required?	X			<p>As further outlined in the project documents, a coordinated approach to both programmes is needed, given the involvement of different stakeholders.</p> <p>For the CiSS project specifically, establishing a technical working group who will be meeting regularly is very important. In particular, it has been emphasized that the continuous exchange of information will be even more important, given the lack of available data or the fragmented nature of the data availability.</p>
Utility					

Who wants an evaluation?	Have the primary users been clearly identified? Can they be involved in defining the evaluation? Will they participate in an evaluation process?	X			Most of the stakeholders are interested in the effectiveness of the programmes, both in short and medium/long run; they would also like to know both, the barriers and the enablers in the programme implementation which would be crucial in the process of scaling up of the programmes.
What do stakeholders want to know?	What evaluation questions are of interest to whom? Are these realistic, given the project design and likely data availability? Can they be prioritised? How do people want to see the results used? Is this realistic?	X			
What sort of evaluation process do stakeholders want?	What designs do stakeholders express interest in? Could this work given evaluation the questions of interest and likely information availability, and resources available?	X			UNICEF follows its own process when commissioning an evaluation but will ensure key stakeholders are engaged in form of steering committee or reference group.
What ethical issues exist?	Are they known or knowable? Are they likely to be manageable? What constraints will they impose?		X		Ethical constraints will necessitate additional precautions in data collection, particularly with CISS populations, to ensure participant welfare and data integrity. NBCRC staff also pointed out that as the programme targets a specific vulnerable group, CiSS, which could inadvertently lead to further stigmatization or discrimination.
What are the risks?	Will stakeholders be able to manage negative findings? Have previous evaluation experiences prejudiced stakeholder's likely participation?		X		There is a risk that findings revealing program challenges or limitations may create hesitation among stakeholders, especially if they impact perceptions of effectiveness.

Propensity score matching

To establish a causal relationship between participation in the cash plus program, we advise employing a propensity score matching (PSM) analysis. PSM is a well-established technique used to mitigate selection bias in observational data by matching treatment and control units based on observable characteristics. As per the established practice, the analysis should be limited to eligible beneficiaries (i.e. children or female headed households accordingly). The treatment group should comprise children that are affiliated with the cash plus program, while the control group consisted of children eligible but not affiliated with the program. The analysis will, therefore, compare the outcome variables of children in the treatment group and the control group. In addition, we advise coupling this approach with the doubly robust inverse probability-weighted regression-adjustment (IPWRA) estimator which combines regression analysis to predict treatment and outcome status, making it robust to potential misspecification of either the treatment or the outcome model.

Several seminal studies have pioneered the use of PSM (propensity score matching) (e.g., Rosenbaum & Rubin 1983; Dehejia & Wahba 2002; Heckman et al., 1998; Caliendo & Kopeinig 2005; Smith & Todd 2005). Estimation of the average treatment effects on the treatment (ATET) group using matching methods relies on two key assumptions. First, the conditional independence assumption (CIA) implies that selection into the treatment group is solely based on observable characteristics (selection on observables). Second, that the common support or overlap condition is satisfied. Common support is the area where the balancing score has positive density for both treatment and comparison units. No matches can be made to estimate the average treatment effects on the ATET parameter in the absence of overlap between the treatment and non-treatment groups.

When both of these conditions are satisfied, the average treatment impact (ATET) is calculated as follows:

$$ATET = E(Y1 - Y0 | D=1) = E(Y1 | D=1) - E(Y0 | D=1)$$

While matching, one should rely on the usual diagnostic tests, including post matching bias reduction, the likelihood ratio test of the joint significance of all covariates, and the pseudo-R2 from probit of treatment status on covariates after matching on matched sample. After matching, there should be no systematic differences in the distribution of covariates between the treatment and control groups, the pseudo-R2 should be low, and the joint significance of all covariates should be rejected.

More importantly, the correlates included in the matching procedure must satisfy an important condition of the empirical strategy, i.e., they are derived from the same source and from the same environment (Caliendo & Kopeining, 2008, Heckman et al, 1999). Thus, the following variables could be used to predict the probability of being treated: child's gender (male or female), child's age, socio-economic situation of the household (captured by asset index quintiles), mother's educational attainment, ethnicity of the household head, work status of the household head, and household living conditions (proxied by whether or not the household lives in a slum).

Difference in difference with matching. The implementation of the difference-in-difference with matching estimator is very similar to the cross-sectional version, except that the outcome is measured in changes (between the pre-shock and post-shock periods) instead of levels. For the treated cases, the dependent variable is the difference between outcomes in a period following the income shock and prior to the income shock, and for comparison cases, the outcome difference is calculated over the same periods. We shall rely on this technique when

estimating the impact of an income shock/coping measure adoption on health outcomes of infants and young children.

References:

1. Caliendo, M. and S. Kopeining (2005). "Some practical guidance for the implementation of propensity score matching". IZA Discussion Paper, no. 1588, Bonn, Germany.
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3. Heckman, J., H. Ichimura, J. Smith and P. Todd (1998). "Characterising Selection Bias Using Experimental Data". *Econometrica* 66(5): pp.1017-1098.
4. Rosenbaum P.R. and D.B. Rubin (1983). "The central role of the propensity score observational studies for causal effects". *Biometrika* 70(1): 41-55.
5. Smith, J. and P. Todd (2005). "Does matching overcome LaLonde's critique of non-experimental estimators?". *Journal of Econometrics*, 125 (1-2): 305-353.

KII questions

1. Accessibility to and availability of stakeholders? (Are there physical security risks? Will weather be a constraint? Are staff and key stakeholders likely to be present, or absent on leave or secondment? Can reported availability be relied upon?)
2. Resources available to do the evaluation? (Time available in total and in country? Timing within the schedule of all other activities? Funding available for the relevant team and duration? People with the necessary skills available at this point?)
3. Is the timing, right? (Is there an opportunity for an evaluation to have an influence? Has the project accumulated enough implementation experience to enable useful lessons to be extracted? If the evaluation was planned in advance, is the evaluation still relevant?)
4. Coordination requirements? (How many other donors, government departments, or NGOs need to be or want to be involved? What forms of coordination are possible and/or required?)
5. Who wants an evaluation? (Have the primary users been clearly identified? Can they be involved in defining the evaluation? Will they participate in an evaluation process?)
6. What do stakeholders want to know? (What evaluation questions are of interest to whom? Are these realistic, given the project design and likely data availability? Can they be prioritised? How do people want to see the results used? Is this realistic?)
7. What sort of evaluation process do stakeholders want? (What designs do stakeholders express interest in? Could these work given evaluation the questions of interest and likely information availability, and resources available?)
8. What ethical issues exist? (Are they known or knowable? Are they likely to be manageable? What constraints will they impose?)
9. What are the risks? (Will stakeholders be able to manage negative findings? Have previous evaluation experiences prejudiced stakeholder's likely participation?)