

Volume 1- Main Evaluation Report
UNICEF Malaysia 2022-2025
Country Programme Evaluation



UNICEF Malaysia 2022-2025 Country Programme Evaluation

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ADAP	Adolescent Development and Participation
APPGM	All-Party Parliamentary Group
AQUAM	Air Quality Monitoring
ATD	Alternatives to Immigration Detention
BHEUU	Legal Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CFCI	Child-Friendly Cities Initiative
CICL	Children in Conflict with the Law
CP	Country Programme
CPAP	Country Programme Action Plan
CPD	Country Programme Document
CPE	Country Programme Evaluation
CRB	Child rights and Business
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DOSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
EAPRO	UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
ET	Evaluation Team
EVAC	Ending Violence Against Children
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FS4A	Future Skills for All
GAP	Global Advocacy Priority
HIC	High-Income Country
HNWI	High-Net-Worth Individuals
IHBR	Institute for Health Behavioural Research
IMELC	Iskander Malaysia Eco-Life Challenge
IRDA	Iskander Regional Development Authority
IYRES	Institute for Youth Research
KePKAS	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment of Sabah
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTIQAI+.	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/questioning, Asexual
LPPKN	Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara
LTA	Long-Term Arrangement
MAPO	Council for Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants
MASW	Malaysian Association for Social Workers
MCO	UNICEF Malaysia Country Office
MDEC	Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation
MEITD	Ministry of Education, Innovation and Talent Development Sarawak
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOHR	Ministry of Human Resources
MOSTI	Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation

MOYS	Ministry of Youth and Sport
MP	Members of Parliament
MWFC	Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development
MYRWP	Multi-Year Rolling Work Plan
NADMA	National Disaster Management Agency
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NCEMH	National Centre of Excellence for Mental Health
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NECIC	National Early Childhood Intervention Council
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NRES	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability
OCC	Office of the Children's Commissioner
PACOS	Partner of Community Organisations Trust
PFP	Private Fundraising Partnership
PSP	Private Sector Partnership
QA	Quality Assurance
RAM	Results Assessment Module
SBCC	Social Behavioural Change Communications
SDEC	Sarawak Digital Economy Corporation Berhad
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPA	Strategic Priority Areas
SSW	Social Service Workforce
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
T4D	Technology for development
UK	United Kingdom
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UMIC	Upper-Middle-Income Country
UMS	University Malaysia Sabah
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UPM	University of Putra Malaysia
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
YELL	Youth Environment Living Labs
YLP	Young Leaders Programme



Executive Summary

Introduction

This report is the result of the first Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) for UNICEF Malaysia. The evaluation is both summative and formative, assessing the performance of the 2022-2025 Country Programme (CP) and drawing lessons to inform the next CP for 2026-2030. The evaluation focusses on the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the CP and the extent to which cross-cutting issues such as equity, human rights, disability inclusion, gender equality, and child rights were integrated. The evaluation also assesses UNICEF's strategic positioning among the development community and national partners.

The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the UNICEF Evaluation Policy (2023) and adhered to UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016), UNICEF Ethical Guidelines for Evaluations (2020), and Disability-Inclusive Evaluation in UNICEF: Guidelines for Achieving UNDIS Standards (2022). It was conducted using a theory-based, utilisation-focused, and participatory approach. Mixed methods were used to develop evidenced findings based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Malaysia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Overall, the UNICEF Malaysia Country Office (MCO) has continued to strongly advocate for children's rights in Malaysia. The Government values MCO's work on children's rights and needs. The main findings of the evaluation are summarised below.

Relevance

UNICEF Malaysia's work across all sectors is highly relevant to meeting children's needs, and its advice on policy and legislative changes is particularly relevant. Its support has adapted to the evolving country context during the period of the CP and responded to emerging challenges such as climate change, mental health and cyberbullying.

The MCO prioritises the rights and needs of children in programme design, particularly the most vulnerable, although there are still opportunities to ensure that more children are not 'left behind.' Through advocacy efforts with relevant ministries, UNICEF has worked diligently to address the needs of children affected by migration (which includes refugee, migrant, stateless and other undocumented children).¹ However, current legislation and lack of government prioritisation limits progress and ongoing barriers to education and healthcare continue to impact on child protection for children affected by migration. The CP was informed by a situation analysis and drew on evidence and lessons. However, more inclusive stakeholder consultations would enhance MCO's understanding of the social and cultural context and ensure the relevance of interventions. There is scope for UNICEF to engage more with communities at design stage, and to work more closely with civil society organisations that support indigenous children.

¹ For the purpose of UNICEF Malaysia's programming.

Mainstreaming of gender and disability is progressing but is yet to be fully integrated into programming. Interventions are generally gender-sensitive and, although some focus on key issues such as child marriage (targeted intervention), programming cannot yet be considered gender-responsive or gender-transformative. Disability-inclusive programming is still evolving.

UNICEF's mission on child rights and its relationship with the Government are regarded as comparative advantages. While it demonstrates the ability to bring Government and NGOs together, there are mixed perceptions on how well the MCO can facilitate cooperation between partners who do not share a common view on key UNICEF issues.

Coherence

The CP is aligned with the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, the Twelfth Malaysia Plan, and several national policies. Furthermore, the CP responds to the 'leave no one behind' UN agenda and is an integral part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021-2025. It is aligned to SDGs 1-5, 13 and 16.

While effective partnerships are in place, there is currently no comprehensive partnership strategy. MCO's relationship with CSO partners is sometimes regarded as transactional, and it has yet to develop how it works with CSOs and organisations working with vulnerable children (UNICEF's intended target).

Cooperation between UNICEF and the private sector is in its infancy, but partnerships with universities are working well. They are seen as efficient and reflect good practice. There are positive synergies and linkages with other UN agencies which could be further developed to leverage joint programming and unified advocacy. The Country Programme has seen a greater and more direct collaboration between UNICEF Malaysia and the Government; this shift is more aligned with a country graduating into a HIC (High Income Country).

The value of UNICEF's work on policy advocacy and advice is recognised and adds value to Government, placing it strategically within the national development landscape and strengthening its position amidst other actors. As a critical partner for achieving the CP objectives, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) leads eight activities in the Multi-Year Rolling Work Plan (MYRWP) of 2023-2025 and the Government supports 20 of a further 35 activities. More collaborative relations and partnerships were seen at the state level (e.g. Sabah, Sarawak and Penang).

Collaboration between the MCO programme, communications, and fundraising teams is improving but needs to be more systematic and synergistic to enhance understanding across teams with different skills and approaches.

Effectiveness

As the CP draws to a close, there are positive indications that the CP will achieve its expected goals and will have contributed to child well-being, equity and ending violence against children. This has been a result of various programming strategies which put evidence-based policy advocacy and advice at the core of MCO's work during this CP.

Policy advocacy and advice have been key to MCO contributing to changes in national or subnational policies and strategies. Thus, the groundwork has been laid, and the potential impact of this work on affected and vulnerable children should emerge in the not-too-distant future. Evidence generation has been appreciated by Government and by CSOs, although the extent to which this is used beyond UNICEF's direct partners is not monitored. While media mentions are tracked, there is scope to improve tracking downloads for specific documents, and references to UNICEF reports in other important documents. There is also potential for MCO to improve engagement of stakeholders (including the Government) in study or research concepts.

UNICEF Malaysia has achieved better results on the ground and added more value when it has collaborated on existing interventions that already have government ownership. Although individual interventions may be completed successfully, scaling them up requires long-term commitment from the Government. UNICEF needs a more strategic approach that integrates learning from its innovations on how best to improve child rights in line with resources available. Learning from pilots and scale-up efforts will be important for this, though more data is required as pilots were only started during this CP cycle.

Current programming results suggest that the MCO has made progress in its work on climate change (with respect to children),² mental health, early childhood development and nutrition in terms of policy advice, systems strengthening and social behavioural change. It has an opportunity now to position itself as a lead organisation in bringing a child rights focus to these areas, particularly in the absence of other key players, including other UN agencies.

Efficiency

MCO has developed various internal strategies under the CP. While this has provided a focus to different thematic areas, and has enabled MCO to align its work with national strategies, there has been insufficient clarity for key stakeholders (UNICEF staff, government counterparts and CSOs) on how individual plans support MCO's broader strategic objectives in Malaysia, and how progress is monitored overall. Without a more comprehensive overview and prioritisation of interventions and proposals, it has been more challenging to align scale-up opportunities with national budget cycles for government investment.

The pace of CP implementation increased in the last 18 months due to a more stable internal and external environment. While direct sourcing of implementing partners and trusted CSOs has been administratively efficient, it is not clear whether this approach has provided the best value for money overall. Allocations to the CP have shown an increasing trend year over year. The MCO has utilised almost 100 per cent of the allocation, the actual spending had only reached 65 percent of the planned CP budget. Since 2021, the MCO team grew by 24 percent, including a strengthening of the communications team, and there was a reduction in use of consultants. The MCO leveraged expertise from UNICEF Regional Office and HQ. However, there is potential for MCO to further leverage the strengths (expertise and experience) of other CSOs and organisations working in areas relevant to MCO in addressing the rights and needs of children.

Annual reports provide the main source of information on CP progress and achievements, with no other regular systematic monitoring or reporting in place to support a more adaptive approach, other than ad hoc reviews and/or retreats. Implementing partners' reports are linked to tranche release rather than results reporting. Disaggregated data reporting is not consistent across MCO interventions. Although efforts are in place to systematise reporting, this relies on consistency and quality of government data (census, surveys or administrative data). It is not clear to what extent MCO is currently maximising the use of available data.

Sustainability

UNICEF Malaysia's work includes activities that can support sustainability through capacity building, institutional strengthening and improving the enabling environment for child rights. However, there is not yet a deliberate sustainability objective across these activities, which is sometimes reflected in the quality of interventions' exit strategies and sustainability plans. Expensive or isolated pilots also hinder sustainability and scale-up, particularly when there is a lack of government commitment and ownership, inadequate human resource capacity and other challenges such as changing priorities.

² Malaysia is ranked 61 (from the bottom) among 163 countries on the Children's Climate Risk Index 2023.

CSOs often cannot sustain their activities without UNICEF Malaysia funding and can sometimes be left with uncertainty over follow-up arrangements. Stand-alone (NGO-type) projects are unlikely to continue if they are not integrated into government intervention or system strengthening. Exit strategies and sustainability plans, as are not always clearly articulated in CP interventions. Whilst these problems are not unique to the MCO, there is scope to give greater attention to sustainability planning during intervention design.

UNICEF faces challenges in advancing on specific children's rights issues. It needs to fulfil its UN mandate (to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential)³ and yet faces obstacles due to Malaysia's apprehension to commit to Conventions, Resolutions or Treaties that may not align with the Federal Constitution. A key example is Malaysia's reservations regarding the CRC (Articles 2,7,14, 28.1.a, and 27). UNICEF needs to be able to demonstrate results in order to evidence what works under specific circumstances, and what resources are needed. When full government support is not immediately forthcoming, pilots enable UNICEF to advocate further for change in children's rights, particularly for unpopular themes or difficult to reach children (such as undocumented or stateless children).

Deep-rooted social and public perceptions and political definitions and interpretations of policies/laws affect sustained child rights for all, and the principle of leaving no child behind. There is still work to be done to change public perceptions. Overall, the focus on sustainability remains a work in progress but is evolving under the current MCO management.

Lessons Learned

The evaluation has identified the following learning points from the implementation of the CP 2022-2025.

- **Evidence is important for policy advice and advocacy, but effective collaboration is also key.** In addition to evidence generation, it is essential to have the support of champions within the government. Creative approaches are needed to navigate the process and overcome obstacles; this may involve working with multiple relevant ministries at different levels. Collaboration with CSOs (if appropriate and inclusive) also adds value and strength.
- **Gaining stakeholder buy-in requires an investment over time, especially with government.** Considerable time and effort is required to engage with stakeholders in the design of pilots, studies, and research. However, having government on board at the political and technical level will create better conditions for broad implementation or more widespread use of evidence. This will have greater effect in the longer term.
- **Even with proof of concept, government buy-in is not always assured, and pilot interventions may still face risks to further scale-up.** Factors that can impact on future roll-out / scale-up of interventions include changing government priorities; a perception of inadequate initial consultation during design; excessive cost or lack of scalability. These factors can be explored at design stage and incorporated into strategic decision-making and prioritisation.
- **UNICEF has delivered better results when collaborating with government and others on existing initiatives.** Examples such as the Youth Mental Health Index, Child Wellbeing Index and the Iskander Malaysia Eco-Life Challenge have offered quicker wins with greater replicability and scalability. Addressing bottlenecks takes time, so UNICEF must balance activities between interventions that can deliver immediate results and scale, and initiatives that take more time to produce results.

³ However, this could be hindered due to the combination of lack of capacity, operating space or will.

- **Sharing experience from other countries has been an effective way of gaining buy-in from government on more challenging child rights issues.** Study tours and benchmarking with other countries have provided valuable insights for the government on how other jurisdictions have tackled similar challenges and what options are possible in the Malaysian context. MCO has an important role in ensuring momentum and follow up on next steps to gain full benefit from such exercises.
- **With a growing corporate and global investment in social behaviour change (SBC), there is a need for MCO to apply a broader approach to achieve wider programmatic goals.** This means ensuring that SBC is effectively integrated into each sector as part of an SBC driven system.
- **Efforts by MCO to challenge gender norms around child marriage are an example of gender-transformative work,** as they target societal beliefs and practices that contribute to its acceptance. **However, beyond child marriage, MCO needs to identify how it can add value by defining and implementing gender-transformative processes at both the intervention and community levels.** This includes finding ways to directly and indirectly put gender issues on the national agenda, particularly where the root cause of gender inequalities can be addressed.
- **High-level engagement has proven to drive change in policy and law reform.** Gaining buy-in from individual champions in government has enabled key issues to remain on the agenda in spite of structural changes. Engagement with the diplomatic community also helps advocacy on politically sensitive issues.
- **The Malaysia CP is unusual among CPs in other UMICs (Upper-Middle-Income Countries) and HICs in having only two outcomes (programme components) in addition to the programme effectiveness component.** This has led to a grouping of all other areas/sectors into the programme effectiveness component, which has been difficult to monitor.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (Strategic positioning): MCO should use a child rights lens for prioritising key focus areas of interventions for the next country programme. This includes:

- Supporting inclusiveness in existing systems to help children left behind.** UNICEF should consult closely with the Government of Malaysia and relevant ministries to prioritise a discussion about services for children affected by migration (including refugee, migrant, stateless and undocumented children) and other children who are often 'left behind'. This is in line with UNICEF's global mandate focus areas (broadly focused within UNICEF's mandate regarding the survival, protection and development of all children, which are universal development imperatives).
- Working with partners to address inclusiveness.** UNICEF should collaborate with other UN agencies to maximise impact while also considering the role of other international and local organisations in generating evidence through research and policy advice. By exploring synergies and complementarities with such partners, UNICEF should aim to leverage the expertise and experience of those who are also working with vulnerable children to meet their needs. A comprehensive mapping of other actors' interventions (including those of Government) would provide a useful step in identifying synergies or overlaps so that UNICEF can better define its role and how best to complement national efforts to improve child rights, particularly in relation to policy and advocacy. The next CP should also include mechanisms to monitor progress in leveraging investments and expertise and contributing to/influencing improved child rights and basic needs.

Recommendation 2 (Partnerships): MCO should develop, implement and monitor a comprehensive partnership strategy with clarity on partnership opportunities, types and modalities. The strategy should be part of MCO's broader strategic goals, extending beyond implementing partner contracting. The strategy should include:

- a) **Partnerships with the private sector for programming (beyond fundraising).** The strategy should define its priorities for working with private sector organisations (industry and sector associations, umbrella organisations, chambers of commerce, employers' organisations) and how this will increase impact in areas like child rights and business (CRB).
- b) **Building of long-term relationships with common end goals rather than activity-oriented transactional relationships.** This requires the MCO to maintain good communication with partners post-contract and keep them informed of next steps. It would also mean co-creating interventions focusing on long-term goals addressing systemic changes.
- c) **Identification of various partnership mechanisms.** These include strategic alliances/partnerships, joint initiatives (including with UN agencies) and public-private partnerships. They should also include ways to leverage private sector, media and other partner resources and expertise, for example to access new technologies and innovation, improve localised cultural sensitivity, reduce costs, share risk and improve efficiency.
- d) **Collaboration with organisations already working in Malaysia** to address common issues.
- e) **Working with all relevant ministries/departments** to have integrated holistic, sustainable programming or intervention (from the concept stage).
- f) **Enhancing internal partnership (within MCO)** between programme, communications and fundraising teams with aligned goals not only in Private Fundraising Partnership (PFP) but also in programming with tangible targets and appropriate monitoring to measure progress and results.

Recommendation 3 (Programming strategies): MCO should continue to expand HIC programme strategies. This should be through:

- a) **Maintaining the current programming strategies** with a focus on policy processes (and their timing) and building advocacy coalitions. This could include expanding collaboration with the media, universities, research institutes, CSOs, UN agencies, rights-based organisations and coalitions on children in poverty.
- b) **Continuing to focus on system strengthening, institutional capacity building and promoting social and behavioural change.** The programming should be context-specific, evidence-based, and reinforce a child-rights-based approach.

Recommendation 4: MCO should develop the CPD 2026-2030 with key focus areas supported by an appropriate organisational structure and mechanism. This may include:

- a) Having more than two outcomes in the CP, excluding Programme Effectiveness.
- b) Regrouping the Outcome 1 social policy (and social protection), which now includes education, nutrition and climate change.
- c) Exploring areas to build on (e.g., climate change, mental health and nutrition) based on gaps in child rights in Malaysia, as well as on progress and achievements in the current CP to have a more strategic fit with policy level or systems strengthening work instead of project-based work.

- d) Exploring the potential to work on early childhood development, an area that needs MCO support at various levels and also in facilitating multiple ministries' work.
- e) Focusing on multisectoral interventions that advance cross-sectoral and cross-cutting elements to maximize programmatic and long-term synergistic gains (e.g., climate change, mental health and child marriage).
- f) Ensuring cross-sectoral areas and cross-cutting elements have indicators of success contributing to the objectives of the CP.
- g) Strengthening gender transformative and disability-inclusive programming. Ensuring that there is consistent use of gender needs assessment, or gender analysis prior to programming in any sector. This may require strengthening capacities of MCO staff.
- h) Building on the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) work and contribution to the digital transformation agenda in the education sector (and others as relevant).
- i) Considering who to collaborate with to tackle difficult areas, and how best to support children affected by migration (refugee, migrant, stateless and other undocumented children).

Recommendations 5 (M&E): Strengthening a) internal monitoring capacity within MCO and b) external capacities with the government on data collection and reporting on national interventions through the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM). This may include:

- a) Building internal capacity within MCO staff on results-based management. In doing so, MCO should ensure that RBM involves realistic and manageable data collection and reporting that generates useful data that is not overly complex and does not rely too heavily on quantitative data alone. MCO should leverage expertise of the PME team and the regional advisors of respective thematic areas to help the section/area teams have appropriate indicators with baseline and targets (at the intervention design stage).
- b) Creating monitoring tools that complement the global guidance in CP management. It should be simple to apply and accessible by all relevant users during PFP-funded and donor-funded projects.
- c) Strengthening M&E capacities and national data collection/management system in the government (ministries and agencies) to foster an evaluation culture. This could include supporting DOSM in collecting/monitoring reporting for SDG purposes and national interventions.



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1. Introduction

The UNICEF Malaysia Country Office (MCO) commissioned the evaluation of the Country Programme 2022-2025 (CP) to inform its planning of the next Country Programme (2026-2030) which will have a strong focus on supporting Malaysia to achieve its 2030 targets for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its Leave No One Behind commitments and to deliver the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan for 2026 – 2030. The evaluation was conducted between May and December 2024. It is the first independent Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) for Malaysia and comes at a critical and strategic moment as Malaysia aims to graduate to High-Income Country (HIC) status within the next five years.

The report consists of six sections. Section 2 presents the purpose of the CPE and provides a summary of the approach and methodology adopted by the evaluation. Section 3 describes the country context and the Malaysia Country Programme. The evaluation findings are presented in Section 4 by evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability). Conclusions, lessons learned, and recommendations are presented in Sections 5, 6, and 7.

2. Evaluation purpose and methodology

2.1. Purpose of the Country Programme Evaluation

The East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) of UNICEF commissioned the independent Malaysia CPE in close collaboration with the Malaysia country office (MCO). The terms of reference for the CPE are attached in Annex 1. The **purpose** of the CPE is both summative and formative. It assesses the past and ongoing implementation of the Country Programme to inform future programming, including the preparation of the next Country Programme 2026-2030.

The **specific objectives** of the evaluation are to:⁴

- Assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the current Country Programme 2022-2025, with a strong cross-cutting focus on equity, human rights, disability inclusion, gender equality, adolescent participation and child rights and business and with a focus on the specific programme areas which have not been subject to recent evaluation.
- Identify key challenges that constrain, or catalysts that enhance, the effectiveness of CP implementation and its results (including synergies with the fundraising side of the MCO).
- Assess the ability of the CP to respond and adapt to changing contexts, emerging issues, and national priorities and address systemic change.
- Support accountability by providing an independent assessment of progress towards expected results of the CP, its contribution to national development results and Malaysia's child rights agenda, and UNICEF's contribution to United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) results.

⁴ As envisaged in the Terms of Reference. However, some changes suggested by MCO while finalizing the inception report have been incorporated.

- Identify key lessons to inform the design of the next CP (including lessons learned from the COVID-19 response and the extended mid-term review).
- Provide an assessment of UNICEF's strategic positioning (UNICEF's added value and comparative advantages and Convention on the Rights of the Child monitoring mandate) among the development community and national partners, considering its ability to respond to the rights and the needs of children in Malaysia.
- Guide UNICEF in being fit-for-purpose for a country on the verge of graduating to HIC status.

The CPE is aimed at a diverse range of audiences. The primary intended users are the UNICEF MCO and EAPRO, UNICEF Headquarters, and the Government of Malaysia. Secondary users include other national implementing partners, the UN Country Team (UNCT), other development partners/funders, rights holders, and duty bearers.

2.2. Scope of the Evaluation

The **primary scope** of the CPE was to assess the current CP (2022-2025) for its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. While the implementation of the CP is still ongoing, the temporal scope of the evaluation focussed on the period from March 2022 to mid-2024. However, it also examined interventions carried over from the previous CP (2016-2022) to the current programme, to assess the performance of programme implementation strategies that would have only reached scale during the current Country Programme.

Regarding **geographical scope**, the evaluation assessed results at national and subnational levels. This was also in line with the twin-track strategy adopted by the CP, which focuses on building inclusive policy frameworks and systems that meet the rights and the needs of all children while also supporting targeted interventions tailored to specific groups of vulnerable children, reflecting variations in geography, age, sex, citizenship, migration status, disability, and ethnicity, among other issues.⁵

UNICEF has a broad scope of large-scale activities falling under three programme components: 1) **child well-being, equality and inclusion** (including interventions in social policy and social protection, nutrition, education, climate and adolescent participation); 2) **ending violence against children** (with interventions in enabling environment, social workforce strengthening and addressing social norms); and 3) **programme effectiveness**⁶ which includes cross-sectoral programme support in areas such communication and public advocacy, planning monitoring and evaluation (PME), mental health, social and behaviour change, disability inclusion, children affected by migration, youth affected by migration, and child rights and business.

In terms of **thematic scope**, the CPE reviewed the CPD's programme prioritisation and results structure, including key areas of child rights deprivations, alignment with the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), the UNSDCF, the Twelfth Malaysia Plan, Madani frameworks, UNICEF's guidance for programming in HICs; and emerging priorities with potential for further innovation and scale-up (such as climate, mental health, child rights and business and children affected by migration).⁷

⁵ UNICEF Country Programme Document – Malaysia (E/ICEF/2022/P/L.1), 2022.

⁶ See more details on programme components in Section 2.2.

⁷ TOR for this CPE.

The CPE focused on assessing progress, highlights and bottlenecks in the use of **programme strategies and approaches** outlined in the Country Programme Document (CPD) 2022-2025,⁸ including policy advocacy (and awareness raising), evidence generation (and child rights monitoring) and innovation (including modelling). It informed the evolving scale-up of MCO's subnational approach, including a review of geographical areas with the most significant child rights deprivations and optimizing the pathway from modelling to evidence and advocacy to strengthen systems and drive systemic change.

The CPE took a **cross-cutting approach and focussed on assessing the meaningful participation of adolescents and youth** in the various CP initiatives, which is a key driver of UNICEF's strategy and programming in Malaysia.⁹

The CPE builds upon the existing evidence base of UNICEF country programming in Malaysia, including the Extended Mid-Year Review of the current CP conducted in 2023, the 2018 mid-term review of the previous CP, the Developmental Evaluation on Innovation for Children in Malaysia (2019), the Formative Evaluation of Role and Engagement of Business Sector to Respect and Promote of Child Rights (2020), a Real-time Assessment of UNICEF COVID-19 response at country level (2020), and other thematic, programme and activity-specific reports produced by UNICEF and partners. The CPE was also guided by UNICEF's Programme Guidance for High-Income Countries (2023), where applicable to Malaysia, an upper-middle-income country aiming to achieve High-Income (HIC) status within the next five years.

2.3. Methodology and approach to the evaluation

2.3.1. Overall approach

The evaluation approach to CPE was theory-based, utilisation-focused, and participatory. The evaluation adhered to the United Nations Evaluations Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016), UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluations (2020), and the UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System (2008). Furthermore, the CPE was guided by the UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis (2021) and Disability-Inclusive Evaluations in UNICEF: Guidelines for Achieving UNDIS Standards (2022).

The CPE was undertaken in accordance with the provisions of UNICEF's Evaluation Policy (2023). The evaluation integrated a human rights-based approach, including gender equality, disability equality, youth participation, climate action, and resilience, based on results-based management principles (refer to 5.1.4). The approaches described in Table 1 are interlinked and complementary to each other.

Table 1 Evaluation approaches

Approaches	Description
Theory-based approach	The theory-based approach was used to assess the contribution of CP to the desired outcomes of addressing systemic change promoting child well-being and rights in Malaysia.
Utilisation-focused approach	Adopting a utilisation-focused approach, the evaluation team (ET) pursued and prioritized the CPE's usefulness to its intended primary and secondary users. This was aimed at ensuring the relevance, utility, and uptake of the CPE's recommendations in informing the next steps of MCO work in Malaysia.

⁸ Strategies outlined in the *GoM Economic Planning Unit -UNICEF Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) 2022-2025*, including (a) strategic collaboration with UN agencies, (b) promoting evidence-informed policy dialogue, (c) strengthening human rights monitoring mechanisms, (d) public advocacy and communications; (e) technical support to policy implementation, including inclusive digitization of the government; (f) enhancing cooperation with priority states, local governments, private sector partners and civil society organisations and educational institutions; (g) social and behavioural change communications; (h) creating opportunities for adolescents to participate in decision making.

⁹ This aligns with Youth 2030 (The UN Youth Strategy), 2020.

Participatory approach	This approach was used to ensure meaningful participation of the wide range of stakeholders involved in the CP implementation. Diverse stakeholder participation was facilitated with the support of MCO and served to ensure an ethical approach, to strengthen evidence through triangulation of data, and to support utility through validation of findings and recommendations.
Human rights, gender and equity-sensitive approach	As required by UNEG, the CPE applied the approach to assess the extent to which these principles were mainstreamed in the CP design, delivery, strategies, and results achieved. The assessment was centred on the principle of leaving no one behind.

2.3.2. Evaluation matrix and questions

An evaluation matrix developed by the ET during the inception phase provided the broad analytical framework for this CPE. The matrix is organised by evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability) and by each criterion's respective evaluation questions. Table 2 presents the evaluation questions. Annex 2 provides the complete evaluation matrix with indicators, sources of data and data collection methods for each evaluation criterion/question.

Table 2. Evaluation criteria and questions

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Questions
1. Relevance	<p>1.1 To what extent has UNICEF ensured that the rights and the needs of children, especially the most vulnerable, have been considered in the planning and implementation of UNICEF-supported interventions under the Country Programme and UNSDCF? To what extent have the CP strategies been designed in a way that they will contribute to coherent and effective implementation and the sustainability of equity, disability-inclusive and gender-equitable results?¹⁰</p> <p>1.2 To what extent have the Country Programme's objectives (including any adjustment of objectives) remained appropriate and relevant to the changing circumstances in Malaysia? Is the MCO nimble enough to respond and adapt? To what extent did MCO engage in prioritisation, resulting in strategic adjustments to the results framework and key activities and outputs?¹¹</p>
2. Coherence	<p>2.1 To what extent are UNICEF strategies aligned with national priorities and international partners' policies? To what extent is the CP strategy linked to and achieving synergistic effects with other interventions of UN agencies?</p> <p>2.2 To what extent were meaningful partnerships or coordination mechanisms established with other key actors, e.g., government at national and local levels, civil society, private sector, NGOs, academia, other UN agencies under the UNSDCF (including UNCT and Results groups), etc., to promote complementarity, harmonization, avoid duplication of efforts, miscommunication and clearer accountabilities to maximize the achievement of results? What have been the CO's key leverage points that contributed to progress and results?</p> <p>2.3 Whether and how the key programme strategies contributed to better positioning UNICEF in the national development landscape, and whether and how have these key programme strategies accelerated and strengthened the achievement of high-level results beyond the sum of sectoral results of programme sections under the CPD and UNSDCF?</p> <p>2.4 To what extent is the internal balancing of programmes, communication and fundraising optimized in MCO? Within programmes, to what extent does the current results structure optimize coherence within the office, as well as with the UNSDCF? How can UNICEF work better internally to further enhance and advance programming to realize better results for children in Malaysia, especially the most vulnerable?</p>

¹⁰ It was 5.2 (sustainability) in ToR. The question has been moved here as it is related to CP design.

¹¹ In the TOR it was the first part question 4.1 (efficiency). It was moved here as 1.2 (relevance) is related adaptability and adjustments to changing contexts.

3. Effectiveness	<p>3.1 To what extent were programme outputs (short-term/intermediate results) delivered, and did they contribute sufficiently to progress toward desired programme outcomes, UNSDCF strategies, and to address systemic change for children?</p> <p>3.2 To what extent has the combination of strategies of policy advocacy, evidence generation and innovation employed to achieve programme objectives under the CPD and UNSDCG been successful?</p> <p>3.3 To what extent did different groups, particularly vulnerable children (such as girls, children with disabilities, indigenous children, stateless/refugee/migrant/undocumented children) benefit in different ways from the CP implementation? What are the major factors influencing (or not) CP results for vulnerable groups?</p> <p>3.4 What has been the depth and thoroughness of situation analysis, evaluations, research and studies conducted during the CPD period, and how have these been utilized to enhance programming?</p> <p>3.5 To what extent have UNICEF activities contributed to changes in or implementation of national/subnational policies, strategies, regulatory frameworks, tools and processes to expand access for children in Malaysia, including the most vulnerable?¹²</p> <p>3.6 To what extent did the CO put in place mechanisms to support Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), and did such efforts support effective and timely results?¹³</p>
4. Efficiency	<p>4.1 To what extent did the CO engage in prioritisation, resulting in strategic adjustments to the results framework and to key activities and outputs? How effectively and timely did the CO adapt to evolving contexts, including the financial and operational challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, as spelled out in contributions through joint initiatives? Could comparable results have been attained through alternative strategies with fewer resources or in a more timely way?</p> <p>4.2 To what extent were the key strategies of the CPD clearly articulated and communicated externally, sufficient expertise and skills leveraged, and efficient monitoring and reporting systems established?</p>
5. Sustainability	<p>5.1 To what extent do capacities, regulatory frameworks, budgets and political will exist at both national and subnational levels to sustain and scale up programming in areas that UNICEF has supported? To what extent did UNICEF support or implement measures to enhance the sustainability and utility of key strategies, programme or interventions aimed at advancing child rights/reducing child vulnerability in Malaysia?¹⁴</p> <p>5.2 What are contributing or constraining factors to make systemic change? What role have CSOs played in these strategies?¹⁵</p> <p>5.3 What are the main challenges and opportunities for ensuring sustained results for child rights in Malaysia beyond the current CPD? What are the gaps to realising children's rights and ensuring that all children in Malaysia have equal opportunities and thrive in safe, protective and nurturing environments?</p> <p>5.4 What are the lessons learned that can be applied, and what are the critical next steps or recommendations moving forward?</p>

¹² Initially 1.3 in TOR (relevance). After rewording slightly, it was moved to effectiveness.

¹³ Initially, in the TOR it was part of 4.2 (efficiency), now it is moved to 3.6 (effectiveness) as it is part of results achieved.

¹⁴ While the first question is an ideal outcome, the second question was added based on inputs during inception phase to address at intermediate level.

¹⁵ Initially part of 5.1, made into a separate question for better focus.

2.3.3. Methodology and data collection

The ET used a mixed-methods approach in which qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources was collected and analysed. The mix of methods and diverse range of sources enabled triangulation and validation to develop the evaluation evidence, and enhance the credibility of its findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Primary data was collected between July 29, 2024, and September 30, 2024.¹⁶ The evaluation undertook two missions to Malaysia: a) a two-week mission by three members of the team to Kuala Lumpur/Putrajaya and Eastern Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak) and b) a one-week mission to Kuala Lumpur/Putrajaya by one member of the team. Eastern Malaysia was chosen because of the number of MCO interventions that have been implemented in these two States compared to others. Additionally, they were also priority States in the Twelfth Malaysia Plan.

Desk review

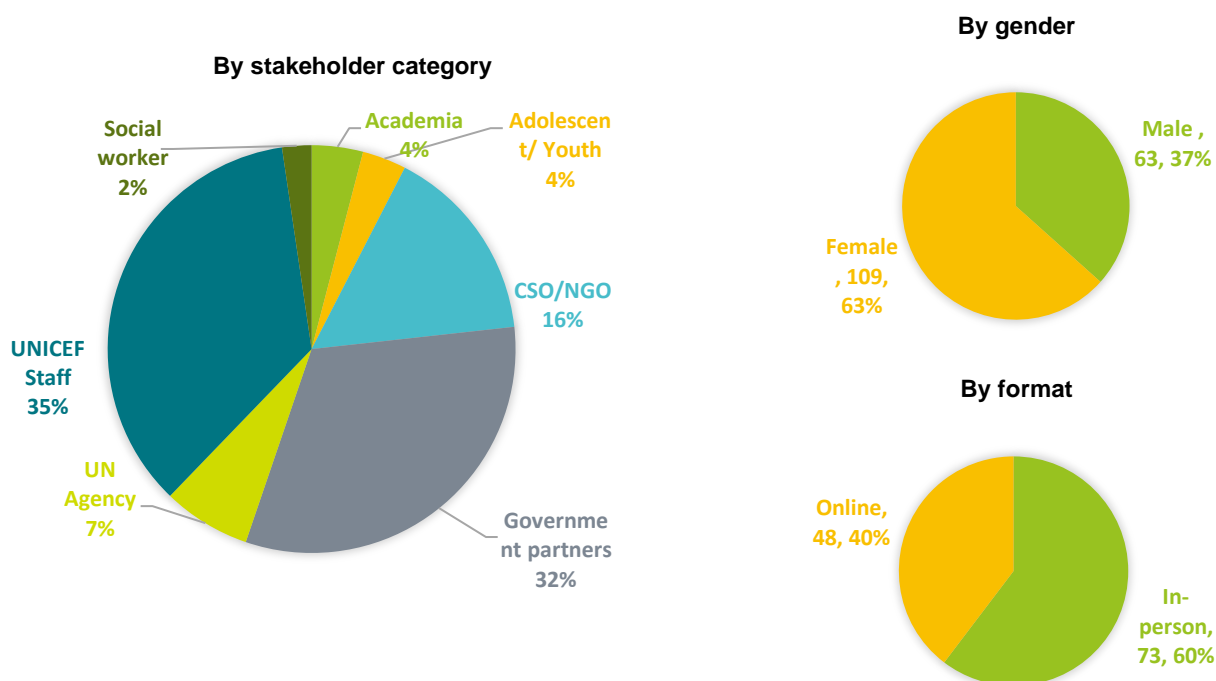
More than 160 documents were reviewed. This included the CP and related documents in its development, the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP), the Country Programme Management Plan and related Programme Strategy Notes, annual reports, work plans, evaluation reports, gender programmatic reviews, mid-year and end-year reviews, completed and active intervention reports, Results Assessment Module (RAM) reports and internal data (including monitoring data). The ET reviewed the UNSDCF, UN agency reports, key government documents, policies, statistics and other open data.

Key informant interviews

The ET conducted 112 semi-structured interviews and nine focus group discussions across a diverse range of stakeholders, allowing 172 informants to be consulted in total, both in person and virtually. Figure 1 presents a snapshot of stakeholders consulted by category, format and gender. Almost half of the stakeholders met were from the Government (32 per cent) or CSO/NGOs (16 per cent). UNICEF staff accounted for 35 per cent of the stakeholders. Seven per cent were UN agency staff, four per cent of informants were adolescents (two individuals) or youth (four individuals) involved in UNICEF supported initiatives, four per cent were from academia/ research institutes, and two per cent were social workers.

¹⁶ Most interviews and focus group discussions were completed between July 29, 2024, and August 30, 2024; however, the perception survey was completed on September 30, 2024.

Figure 1. Stakeholders consulted by category, format and gender



Source: Evaluation Team Malaysia CPE

Perception survey

An online perception survey was conducted among external stakeholders relevant to the current CP (including staff of federal and state level government, NGOs and CSOs, Universities/Research Institutions, and the private sector). The survey was focused on partner (past, previous and potential partners) perceptions and did not include youth and adolescents. Seventy-five responses were received, a 35 per cent response rate. Sixty-one per cent of the respondents were female, 33 per cent were male, and the rest preferred not to say. Most respondents were from the government – 43 per cent (Federal government - 35 per cent and State government – 8 per cent); and NGO/CSOs (NGOs – 28 per cent and CSOs – 4 per cent) – refer to Annex 7 for full analysis of survey results.

Case studies

The evaluation attempted to conduct case studies on policy advocacy, evidence generation, and pilot and modelling activities. The activities identified are listed in annex 4. While the ET was successful in collecting some information, it was not adequate to present as detailed case studies in the traditional format. However, the collected information is synthesised and presented in the report, including boxes within the text highlighting specific activities (see Box 6, and Box 12 on CFCI, Box 7 on the National Youth Mental Health Index, Box 8 on the Social Work Profession Bill, Box 9 on Advocacy contributing to changes to the Child Witness Act, Box 11 on Future Skills for All).

2.3.4. Sampling Strategy

Before sampling, a stakeholder mapping exercise was completed with input from the MCO team. The ET used purposive sampling to focus on stakeholders with in-depth knowledge of MCO and the CP, those involved in planning and implementing MCO interventions, and those with technical expertise on aspects relevant to the UNICEF mandate and MCO interventions. A snowballing approach was also used to interview additional people based on the informants' recommendations. The online perception survey was distributed to all external partners identified by MCO, including government staff at federal and state level, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, social workers, and other UN agency staff. This included partners previously and currently engaged with MCO during CP implementation, as well as potential future partners. Key informants who were already interviewed by the ET were also invited to participate in the perception survey.

2.3.5. Data analysis

Quantitative and qualitative analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarise and analyse quantitative data, including outcome and output indicator data (see annex 9), financial data (see annex 10), and human resources trends (annex 11). Qualitative analysis was performed through content and thematic analysis.

Contribution analysis

A contribution analysis method was used to assess the causal links between the interventions and the observed results in the theory of change, and how and why the component or interventions made a difference (contribution) or not to the outcomes. The assumptions behind the causal links in the theory of change and the related narratives explain the ET's assessments in relation to the CP's contribution.

Triangulation

Data for this evaluation was triangulated in three ways: a) data triangulation of the same information collected from various sources (e.g., UNICEF staff, government officials, CSO representatives, other implementation partners, adolescents and youth); b) methodological triangulation of information obtained through different methods (e.g., interviews, focus group discussions, perception survey, desk/document review); and c) evaluator triangulation among the ET members.

2.4. Evaluation limitations

The evaluation faced the following limitations:

- Firstly, stakeholder availability presented a challenge, as some key stakeholders were not accessible for interviews or discussions. This limited the depth of insights that could be gathered. Additionally, fewer focus group discussions (FGDs) with children, youth, and social workers were conducted than originally planned, affecting the breadth of perspectives included in the evaluation. A total of approximately 8-10 FGDs with adolescents/ youth, and social workers were targeted during the inception phase. The ET conducted 1 FGD with social workers, and 3 FGDs with adolescents/youth. Addition individual interviews with social workers and adolescent/ youths were conducted, however these differed in nature to FGDs.
- Secondly gaps in the availability and quality of monitoring data limited the ability to comprehensively assess programme outcomes. This made it more difficult to measure the full effect of the interventions. Additionally, with only 2 years of CP implementation, it was difficult to assess outcomes.

- Furthermore, one of the evaluation questions related to Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) was not fully addressed, due to insufficient data. AAP is typically associated with humanitarian contexts, which might explain its limited application in Malaysia. It was also noted by KIIs with MCO that the term was not applicable to Malaysia. However, the evaluation did consider accountability to rights holders, particularly focusing on the participation of children and adolescents within this context.
- Finally, there was limited information available to carry out some of the identified case studies, for in-depth analysis of the programming strategies. This restricted the ability to highlight detailed concrete examples of successes of examples of the programming strategies.

2.5. Ethical Issues

The CPE was conducted by a team of independent consultants who had no prior or direct involvement with the CP. The ET was guided by the UNEG Norms and Standards and United Nations and UNICEF, in particular, concerning the independence of judgement, impartiality, honesty and integrity, accountability, respect, the protection of the rights and welfare of participants and communities informed consent, protecting privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of participants, ensuring cultural sensitivity, respecting the autonomy of participants and avoidance of risks and harm to those participating in this evaluation or their communities.

In its interactions with stakeholders, the ET ensured that privacy and respect for rights were honoured. Before each interview, the evaluators informed the key informants about the purpose of the evaluation, the intended use of the findings, and the basic principles of anonymity of participants to ensure informed consent. Furthermore, all key informants were informed that they could end their participation anytime. Similarly, participants of the online perception survey were informed about the anonymity, confidentiality, and intended use of their responses.

The CPE did not interview young children, and instead used secondary data available at MCO through their consultations with children. It did, however, consult with adolescents (between 10 to 19 years) and youth (under 24) with appropriate permissions (including parental consent for under 18s) obtained through MCO and/or their partners (civil society organisations).

An independent ethical review board appointed by UNICEF ethically cleared the inception report and the data collection tools, after their queries were addressed.



3. Country Context and UNICEF Country programme

3.1. Country Context

3.1.1. Socio-economic and political context

Malaysia is an **upper-middle-income** and culturally diverse¹⁷ country with a population of 33.38 million, of which 9.13 million are children under 18.¹⁸ The country is moving towards high-income country (HIC) status.¹⁹ Malaysia is ranked 63 among 193 countries in the Human Development Index, which indicates a "very high Human Development."²⁰

Despite recent political changes and the effects of COVID-19, a degree of political stability has been seen since 2023. Alongside a stronger fiscal outlook, the country is expected to meet the government target of four to five per cent economic growth (at the end of First Quarter 2024, it was 4.2 per cent).²¹ Although rural absolute poverty is decreasing in Malaysia, it increased in urban areas from 3.9 per cent to 4.5 per cent between 2019 and 2022. However, the national numbers (6.2 per cent for Malaysia) mask the state-level poverty rates; for example, it is 19.7 per cent in Sabah, 13.2 per cent in Kelantan and 10.8 per cent in Sarawak.²²

Malaysia's diversified economy attracts migrant workers from across the region and the country hosts over 180,000 asylum seekers and refugees. About 8.3 per cent of the population and 4.2 per cent of all children are non-citizens.²³ Children affected by migration (including refugee, migrant, stateless and other undocumented children) face limited to no access to basic services (including education, health, legal protection, welfare and support services).²⁴ These children are among the most vulnerable and face heightened risk of poverty, child labour and gender-based violence, including child marriage, abuse and exploitation. Under-five mortality rates are 15 to 25 times higher for migrant, refugee and stateless children compared to Malaysian children,²⁵ and only 34 per cent of refugee children are enrolled in informal education.²⁶ Over 1,400 children are detained in immigration detention centres nationwide.²⁷

Other vulnerable groups in Malaysia include indigenous children, particularly from communities such as the Orang Asli (Peninsular Malaysia) and the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak. Many indigenous children live in rural areas with limited access to basic services, which impacts their well-being. They face significant barriers to accessing quality education (see section 3.1.3). They also face difficulties accessing healthcare, with services often located far from their communities. Malnutrition and infant mortality rates are higher for indigenous children (see section 3.1.5). Poverty is widespread within indigenous communities, impacting children's lives in multiple ways. According to government data from 2022, the incidence of

¹⁷ Fifty per cent of the citizens are Malay, 14 per cent are Bumiputra (indigenous), 23 per cent are Chinese, and seven per cent are of Indian origin. Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), *Children Statistics*, Malaysia 2023

¹⁸ DOSM, *Children Statistics*, Malaysia 2023

¹⁹ The World Bank, *Malaysia to Achieve High-Income Status between 2024 and 2028*

²⁰ UNDP, *Human Development Report, 2023/2024*

²¹ Ministry of Finance, 2024. *Economic Growth Surpasses Expectations in First Quarter*. Press Release May 17, 2024

²² Ministry of Economy. *Incidence of absolute poverty by ethnic group, strata and state, Malaysia 1970 - 2022*

²³ DOSM. 2020 Census and Ministry of Finance, *Budget 2024 Highlights*, 2023.

²⁴ UNICEF EAPRO, *Migration and child protection risks – Malaysia Case Study, Child labour and other protection risks faced by migrant children living on palm oil plantations in Sabah*, April 2023

²⁵ CodeBlue 'Regaining Malaysia's Humanity And Child Rights — Dr Amar-Singh HSS & Yuenwah San', 25 January 2023. <https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2023/01/regaining-malysias-humanity-and-child-rights-dr-amar-singh-hss-yuenwah-san/>

²⁶ Asian Displacement Solutions Platform. *Realising the Right to Education for Refugee and Stateless Children in Malaysia*, 2023

²⁷ Selangor Journal, *KDN hopes for priority to welfare, better asset capability*, 2023

absolute poverty amongst Bumiputera was 7.9 percent, while relative poverty stood at 18.6 percent.²⁸ Indigenous communities often face land ownership issues, with many living on lands that are either not officially recognised or vulnerable to encroachment by logging or development projects. In Peninsular Malaysia, an estimated 12 percent of the Orang Asli population live on land classified as "customary land". In Sabah and Sarawak, around 1.5 million indigenous people claim rights to Native Customary Rights (NCR) land.²⁹ However, much of this customary land is not formally registered or recognised by the government.³⁰ This land insecurity impacts their ability to provide stable homes for children.

Children with disabilities often do not experience equitable access to services and opportunities, including significant barriers to education, health and social protection services (see section 3.1.7). These barriers include attitudinal, financial, informational, legal, and structural obstacles that limit their ability to fully participate in society.³¹

3.1.2. Government priorities and policies

Despite constitutional commitments to rights, Malaysia has ratified only three of nine core human rights treaties, all with reservations. These are the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), with specific articles not fully accepted due to conflicts with national laws and policies. Although Malaysia has signed the CRC, the country has reservations with regard to **Articles 2,7,14, 28(1a)** and **37**, which related to non-discrimination (2); name and nationality (7); freedom of thought, conscience and religion (14); free and compulsory education at primary level (281a); and torture and deprivation of liberty (37). These reservations reflect areas where the Malaysian government felt that the CRC's provisions conflicted with national laws, particularly those that related to religious and cultural considerations, as Malaysia has a plural legal system that includes both civil and Sharia law. The impact of reservations affects UNICEF's work on ensuring equitable rights for children from diverse backgrounds.

Without fully embracing **Article 2**, stateless children or children born to unmarried parents face systemic discrimination in areas like education, healthcare, and legal recognition. Statelessness remains a significant issue in Malaysia. While overall numbers of stateless children are unknown, these may include undocumented children from nomadic populations, children who are abandoned, born out of wedlock, and without proof of birth in Malaysia, and some children of refugees and migrants. Malaysia's partial reservation on **Article 7** has implications for children's rights to nationality, especially for children born to stateless or undocumented parents. The reservation on **Article 14** reflects the influence of religious principles within Malaysia's governance, where Islamic law may restrict the freedom of religion for children, especially for those within Muslim families. This reservation also makes it challenging for Malaysia to uphold LGBTQAI+ rights. Malaysia's reservations on **Article 28(1a)** limit its commitment to providing free, universal education, particularly affecting marginalised groups including children affected by migration, who face significant barriers in accessing education. Malaysia's reservations to **Article 37** allows for the use of detention and corporal punishment, which can be applied to children under certain circumstances, and particularly affects children in conflict with the law. The 2023 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) highlighted ongoing challenges in ensuring human rights protection, particularly for marginalized groups.³²

²⁸ Ministry of Economy, Household Income, Poverty and Household Expenditure data. <https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/en/socio-economic-statistics/household-income-poverty-and-household-expenditure>

²⁹ International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, *The Indigenous World 2021*.

³⁰ Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), Report on the National Inquiry into the Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2013

³¹ UNICEF Malaysia, Issue Brief: Children with Disabilities in Malaysia, 2019

³² UN Human Rights Council, *Universal Periodic Review – Malaysia, Third Cycle*. < www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/my-index >

The Government of Malaysia has recently completed a mid-term review of the Twelfth Malaysia Plan to facilitate the preparation of the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan. The Malaysia Madani Framework provides an overarching framework to build a better Malaysia including children. In addition, several key national policies, plans or Acts are relevant to UNICEF's mandate (Box 1).

Box 1. Examples of relevant national policies, strategies, plans and Acts

Social Policy

- National Strategy Plan in Handling the Causes of Child Marriage 2020 – 2025
- National Climate Change Policy 2.0.
- Child Act 2001
- National Child Policy 2009, updated in 2024
- Persons with Disability Act 2008
- National Action Plan and Policy on Person with Disabilities 2012-2023

Child Protection

- National Child Protection Policy 2009
- Plan of Action on Child Online Protection 2015-2020
- Sexual Offences against Children Act 2017 (amended 2023)
- Evidence of the Child Witnesses Act 2007 (amended 2023 and also in 2024)

Youth

- Malaysia Youth Policy 2015

Migration

- 3rd Action Plan of Anti-Trafficking in Persons 2021-2025 (NAPTIP 3.0)
- Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 (amended 2010)

Nutrition and Health

- Food Act 1983
- Food Regulation 1985
- National Plan of Action for Nutrition of Malaysia III 2016-2025
- National Nutrition Policy 2.0 of Malaysia
- National Strategic Plan to Combat the Burden of Malnutrition among Children in Malaysia (2022-2030)
- Strategic Plan for Reduction in Sugar Consumption among the Population of Malaysia (2022-2025)
- National Planetary Health Action Plan (2024)

Education

- National Digital Education Policy (2023)
- Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025
- Zero Reject Policy (2018)

Digitalisation and Technology

- Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (2021)
- National Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy 2021-2030

Financial allocations to the education sector are strong, at 15.4 per cent of the 2024 government budget (14.2 per cent in 2023).³³ Health comprises 12.6 per cent of the government budget in 2024³⁴ (an increase from 10.3 per cent of the government budget in 2021³⁵), still below the 15 per cent Abuja target.

Evidence of underinvestment in social assistance (allocations comprise just 1.2 per cent of gross domestic product) translates into gaps in social protection coverage.³⁶ Only 26 per cent of the population is served by a social protection floor, and under two per cent of children receive social assistance.³⁷ Social assistance includes cash aids, budgets to the social welfare department, civil society organisations and NGOs, transportation support to students from underprivileged students and tax deductions.

3.1.3. Education and employment

The Ministry of Education (MOE) provides free primary and secondary education to all Malaysians (including registered citizens, permanent residents and other residents with legal documents), while public post-secondary and tertiary education is largely subsidised. Under the Compulsory Education Act introduced in 2003, all children are required to complete six years of primary education. However, pre-primary, and secondary education, has not yet been made mandatory. Public post-secondary and tertiary education are largely subsidised, with fees at the tertiary level being supported by almost 90 per cent. The MOE consistently has the largest budget compared to other ministries, with at least 15.4 per cent of the federal budget being allocated to education since 2016.³⁸ Gross enrolment rates by level of education between 2016 and 2020 are presented in Figure 2. In 2022, Malaysia registered a completion rate of 99.3 per cent for primary school and 97.8 per cent for secondary school,³⁹ with girls more likely to enrol in secondary school.⁴⁰ Between 2016 and 2020, the achievement of minimum proficiency levels for both reading and mathematics remained high (at least 98 per cent) for grades 2/3. However, these proficiency levels were lower as student progress to higher levels of schooling, suggesting that many students are not adequately prepared with the foundational skills needed before they are promoted to higher levels of schooling.⁴¹ Quality of education is a concern, with the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) findings for Malaysia indicating that quality of education has been dropping, with average 2022 results down compared to 2018 in mathematics, reading and science.⁴² In response to these challenges, Malaysia is committed to enhancing its education sector through initiatives led by the MOE, including revising the school curriculum, enhancing the competencies and capabilities of educators and implementing proactive measures to reduce student dropout rates.

³³ Ministry of Finance, *Budget 2024 Highlights*, 2023.

³⁴ Malaysian Investment Development Authority, 'BMI: Malaysia's medical devices market to benefit from health spending in 2024', 2024 <www.mida.gov.my/mida-news/bmi-malaysias-medical-devices-market-to-benefit-from-health-spending-in-2024/#:~:text=per cent2Cper centE2per cent80per cent9Dper cent20saidper cent20BMI.,2024per cent20healthper cent20budget,3per cent20billionper cent20allocatedper cent20inper cent202023>

³⁵ Ministry of Health, 2022. Malaysia National Health Accounts Health Expenditure Report 2011-2021

³⁶ UNICEF Malaysia, 2023. Country Office Annual Report 2023.

³⁷ UNICEF Malaysia, 2023, Country Office Annual Report 2023.

³⁸ Ministry of Education (MOE), Malaysian Educational Statistics, Quick Facts, 2018.

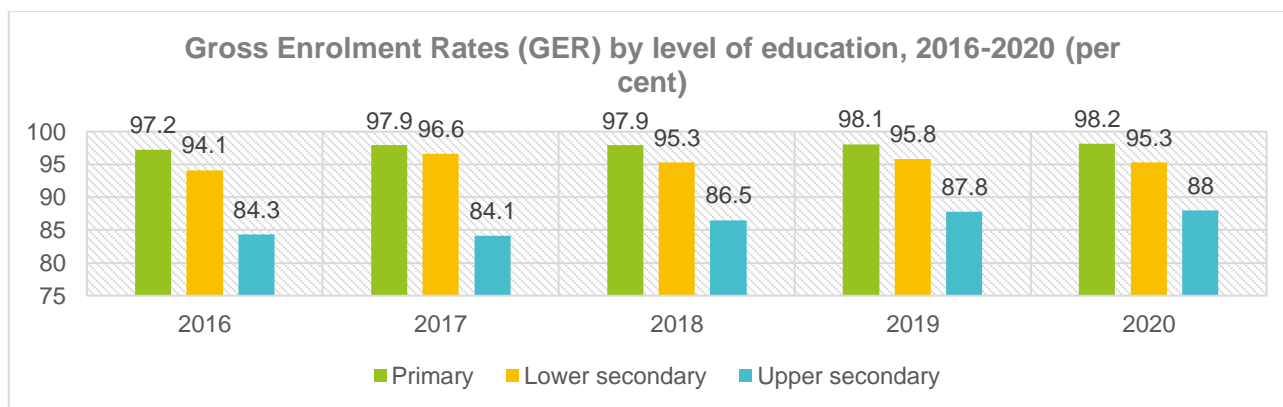
³⁹ DOSM, Children Statistics, 2022.

⁴⁰ "Girls are consistently enrolling at higher rates than boys in both primary and secondary schools. In 2022, the gross enrolment rate for girls in primary and secondary levels were 98.4 per cent and 94.5 per cent respectively" DOSM quoted in The Sun, 'DOSM: Women surpass men in educational attainment', 2023. <<https://thesun.my/local-news/dosm-women-surpass-men-in-educational-attainment-LD11213976>>.

⁴¹ Government of Malaysia, Ministry of Education and UNICEF, Education 2030 in Malaysia: 5-Year National Progress Report of SDG 4, 2023

⁴² OECD PISA 2022 Results (Volume I and II) - Country Notes: Malaysia (December 2023)

Figure 2 Gross Enrolment Rates (GER) by level of education, 2016-2020 (per cent)



Source: Government of Malaysia, Ministry of Education and UNICEF, Education 2030 in Malaysia: 5-Year National Progress Report of SDG 4, 2023.

In 2019, MOE introduced the Zero Reject Policy, aimed at ensuring that no child is denied access to education, regardless of their special needs. In March 2022, the MOE revised its admission guidelines, specifying that the policy is focused on children with special needs. Refugee and stateless children are provided educational opportunities through alternative learning centres (ALCs) or private institutions. According to UNHCR, there are 54,450 refugee children below the age of 18, as of September 2024.⁴³ Currently, about 150 ALCs in Peninsular Malaysia cater to refugees recognized by UNHCR, but only 28 provide secondary education. These centres in Peninsular Malaysia serve only 34 per cent of school-age refugee children, leaving two-thirds without access to formal education.⁴⁴ In Sabah, there is an estimated number of 300 ALCs.⁴⁵

Indigenous children face significant barriers to accessing quality education, including socio-economic factors (poverty, parental apathy towards education and lack of proper documentation); geographical challenges (long distances to schools and inadequate infrastructure); language barriers; and misalignment of indigenous culture and mainstream schooling.⁴⁶ These obstacles contribute to lower secondary school completion rates compared to non-indigenous children. The MOE has introduced several policies and programmes aimed at improving literacy rate, retention, academic performance, and inclusivity for indigenous students. For example, the enrolment of Orang Asli children in primary school increased five-fold since the introduction of compulsory primary education and government initiatives supporting their schooling. However significant challenges persist - enrolment rates among Orang Asli children remain low across all educational levels, and their academic results remain low in comparison to national averages.⁴⁷

As of 2023, the youth unemployment rate among Malaysians aged 15–25 years stood at 10.7 per cent.⁴⁸ The Malaysian Youth Index revealed moderate youth quality of life and well-being, while their political and civic engagement remained low; youth interest in political activities declined over the past five years.⁴⁹ The Malaysia Youth Index is an index developed to monitor the development of youth prosperity in the country. It acts as benchmark to measure whether youth prosperity and risen or dropped based on the value of index.

⁴³ UNCHR (2024). Figures at a glance in Malaysia (<https://www.unhcr.org/my/what-we-do/figures-glance-malaysia>).

⁴⁴ Policy Brief: Education for All – realising the right to education for refugee and stateless children in Malaysia. SUHKAM, International Rescue, ADSP, UNHC

⁴⁵ UNICEF MCO 'Education for every child: Alternative Learning Centres in Sabah provide education to children left out of the formal schooling system', 25 July 2024. (<https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/stories/education-every-child>)

⁴⁶ Government of Malaysia, Ministry of Education and UNICEF, Education 2030 in Malaysia: 5-Year National Progress Report of SDG 4, 2023

⁴⁷ Government of Malaysia, Ministry of Education and UNICEF, Education 2030 in Malaysia: 5-Year National Progress Report of SDG 4, 2023

⁴⁸ DOSM, 2023

⁴⁹ IYRES, Malaysia Youth Index 2020, 2021.

3.1.4. Urbanisation and rural areas

Malaysia is one of the most urbanized countries in East Asia, and its urbanisation rate has tripled in the last five decades. As of 2023, approximately 79 per cent of Malaysia's population lived in urban areas, while 21 per cent resided in rural areas.⁵⁰ The Population and housing Census of Malaysia 2020 recorded 100 per cent of the population of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya living in urban areas, followed by Selangor at 95.8 per cent, Penang at 92.5 per cent and Melaka at 90.9 per cent of the population living in urban areas. The state of Kelantan has the lowest rate of urbanisation at 44.1 per cent. Followed by Pahang (52.8 per cent), Perlis (53.8 per cent), Sabah (54.7) and Sarawak (57 per cent). This divide has implications for overall economic development and wealth distribution, further complicates access to services and opportunities for children and young people in remote and rural areas. The Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) indicates that urban schools generally have better resources and facilities compared to rural schools, impacting the educational outcomes for children. The 2021 Labour Force Survey showed that youth unemployment rates were higher in urban areas, with about 13.8 per cent of urban youth (aged 15-24) being unemployed, compared to 8.5 per cent in rural areas. Access to health care and social services is also often better in urban areas.

3.1.5. Nutrition

Malaysian children face a triple burden of malnutrition (a coexistence of undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency, and obesity). In 2022, 10.9 per cent of infants had low birth weight,⁵¹ and in 2016, only 40.3 per cent of infants aged 0-5 months were exclusively breastfed.⁵² By 2022, 21.2 per cent of children under 5 were affected by stunting, while 11 per cent suffered from wasting— higher than the regional average of 8.9 per cent.⁵³ In addition, a significant proportion of children aged 6 months to 12 are not attaining the average needs (Estimated Average Requirement) for calcium (70 per cent) and vitamin D, (84 per cent).⁵⁴ These prevalence estimates are considerably higher than typically expect for an upper-middle income country. Overweight rates for children under 5 were at 5.2 per cent⁵⁵, and obesity rates amongst children and adolescents are high in comparison to other countries in the region. As of 2019, obesity rates amongst 5–19-year-olds were estimated at 17.6 per cent for boys and 12 per cent for girls.⁵⁶ Disparities exist, with children from rural areas and indigenous children experiencing a significantly higher prevalence of malnutrition. In 2022, stunting among children under-5 rates were highest in the ethnicities of 'Other Bumiputera' at 23.9 per cent, followed by 'Others' (21.6 per cent), Malays (21.8 per cent), Chinese (18.7 per cent), and Indians (14.4 per cent), and stunting was most prevalent in the state of Pahang.⁵⁷ Undernutrition among Orang Asli children under-5 is severe (stunting at 43.8 per cent and wasting at 12.3 per cent)⁵⁸, and the overall prevalence of anaemia among Orang Asli children aged 6–13 years ranges from 41.0 per cent to 70.4 per cent.⁵⁹

⁵⁰ World Bank data (2024)

⁵¹ Government of Malaysia, Ministry of Health, National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS), Maternal Child Health, 2022

⁵² Global Nutrition Report, Country Profiles Malaysia, 2022 (<https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/south-eastern-asia/malaysia/>)

⁵³ Global Nutrition Report, Country Profiles Malaysia, 2022

⁵⁴ Poh, B., Wong, J., Lee, S., Chia, J., Yeo, G., Sharif, R., . . . Khouw, I. (2023). Triple burden of malnutrition among Malaysian children aged 6 months to 12 years: Current findings from SEANUTS II Malaysia. *Public Health Nutrition*, 1-36. doi:10.1017/S1368980023002239

⁵⁵ Ministry of Health Malaysia, Technical Report National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2022: Maternal and Child Health, Malaysia, 2022

⁵⁶ Global Nutrition Report, Country Profiles Malaysia, 2022

⁵⁷ Ministry of Health Malaysia, Technical Report National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2022: Maternal and Child Health, Malaysia, 2022

⁵⁸ Ministry of Health Malaysia, Institute for Public Health, Technical Report Orang Asli Health Survey 2022. 2024

⁵⁹ Khalil MKN, Abd Razak MA, Tahir FA, Sahril N, Shahein NA, Rezali MS, et al. Prevalence and Risk Factors of Anaemia among Orang Asli Children in Malaysia: A Scoping Review. *Nutrients*. 2023;15(6)

3.1.6. Children and adolescents' rights and protection

Violence against children remains a concern in Malaysia. Two-thirds of children aged one to five experienced violent discipline, and more than half endured psychological aggression.⁶⁰ Close to half of parents believe parenting requires physical punishment. The reported number of sexual crimes involving children increased by 9.5 per cent between 2021 and 2022, and an estimated 100,000 children aged 12–17 years (1 in 25) are subjected to online sexual exploitation and abuse annually.⁶¹ Numbers reported are assumed to be only the tip of the iceberg. At least 1,500 children end up in child marriage every year, although significant data gaps obscure the true number, which is likely higher.⁶² An unverified number of children grow up in institutional care, including registered and unregistered government and non-government institutions. Children who grow up in institutions are regularly isolated from their families and local communities. Deprived of parental care, they can endure physical, psychological, emotional and social harm.⁶³ Unregulated institutional care settings in Malaysia place children at a heightened risk of suffering violence and abuse.⁶⁴

In 2023, the Human Rights Commission Act (Amendment 2023) was passed, strengthening the role of the Children's Commissioner in protecting and promoting children's rights. Since ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995, Malaysia submitted its second report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2021 and is preparing for the committee's review in 2025.

Among adolescents, abuse at home is a prevalent issue in Malaysia. An adolescent health survey in 2022 found 7.5 per cent of respondents reported physical abuse and 41 per cent reported verbal abuse.⁶⁵ Mental health among adolescents has worsened, with 26.9 per cent reporting depression and increased feelings of loneliness and suicidal thoughts, especially among girls (36.1 per cent). The prevalence of depression was significantly higher in female adolescents (36.1 per cent) compared to males, (17.7 per cent). The prevalence increased with age and was highest among Bumiputera indigenous people in Sabah (33 per cent).⁶⁶

In Malaysia, migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, stateless, and other undocumented children face heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and abuse due to their lack of legal status, and face a number of barriers accessing protection systems. These children are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labour, and economic exploitation, particularly in hazardous industries like palm oil plantations. Estimates suggest that up to 60,000 Indonesian children live on these plantations in Sabah,^{67,68} where a growing body of evidence indicates that children are engaged in harmful labour.⁶⁹ Despite legal frameworks, challenges in implementing an effective system of child protection for children affected by migration remains in practice.⁷⁰ There are limited services for children affected by migration, for example, a lack of suitable alternative care placements,⁷¹ challenges in identifying protection risks by immigration personnel, and weak enforcement of child labour laws further exacerbating vulnerabilities.

⁶⁰ NHMS, Maternal Child Health, 2022

⁶¹ ECAPT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF, Disrupting Harm in Malaysia: Evidence on Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2022

⁶² UNICEF, *Raising the age of marriage in Malaysia*, 2022. Based on numbers as of 2018 – statistics of 2007-2017 from Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.

⁶³ UNICEF, 'Children in alternative care', 14 June 2021. (<https://www.unicef.org/protection/children-in-alternative-care>)

⁶⁴ UNICEF MCO, 'Statement by Robert Gass, UNICEF Representative in Malaysia, on child abuse cases in welfare homes', 12 September 2024

⁶⁵ NHMS, Adolescent Health Survey, 2022

⁶⁶ NHMS, Adolescent Health Survey, 2022

⁶⁷ Earthworm, Children in the Plantations of Sabah: Stakeholder consultation workshop report – challenges for businesses and recommendations for improved sustainability practices, 2017

⁶⁸ Actual numbers of children are likely to be higher, as these estimates do not include Filipino children.

⁶⁹ UNICEF, Children affected by migration in ASEAN Member States, Country Brief: Malaysia. 2023

⁷⁰ UNICEF, Children affected by migration in ASEAN Member States, Country Brief: Malaysia. 2023

⁷¹ International Detention Coalition, Strengthening Alternatives to Immigration Detention for Children: Mapping and assessment of residential care centres In Peninsular Malaysia, July 2020

3.1.7. Children with disabilities

One in 20 children in Malaysia has a disability.⁷² Nevertheless, only 152,038 children were recorded in the government disability registration system in 2022; this number is growing due to strengthened data collection and greater awareness of disability. Many of these children do not have access to adequate support services or are excluded from educational and social opportunities. A 'zero reject' policy stipulates that no child can be turned away from education. Since its implementation, over 10,000 children with disabilities have been enrolled in education.⁷³ However, education continues to be difficult to access for many children with disabilities. A UNICEF study on children out of school in Sabah, reported that at least half of registered children with disabilities did not attend school at all levels, when compared to their peers without disabilities.⁷⁴ Infrastructural and attitudinal barriers include a lack of inclusive teaching practices and insufficient support for special education needs - in 2022 only 31.6 per cent of primary schools were equipped with adapted infrastructure and materials for children with disabilities.⁷⁵

Children with disabilities often face difficulties accessing essential health care services. In 2019, the World Health Organisation estimated that 60 percent of children with disabilities in Malaysia did not have access to adequate healthcare services, particularly those living in rural or remote areas.⁷⁶ Children with disabilities and their families face barriers in accessing health and nutrition services equally, due to physical and attitudinal barriers.⁷⁷

Children with disabilities are also at a higher risk of abuse, neglect, and violence compared to their peers without impairment, and stigmatising attitudes towards disabilities in Malaysia exacerbate the isolation and exclusion of these children from social and community life. In 2016, a UNICEF study on Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices survey on Childhood disability in Malaysia found that the medical model of disability remained dominant, where children with disabilities are often regarded as passive recipients of services, rather than active participants with agency. The focus was primarily on the impairment itself as the main obstacle, rather than on environmental and social barriers to inclusion. Although government policy aligns with a rights-based approach, the study found that this perspective was not widely understood at the community level.⁷⁸

3.1.8. Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

Despite high education participation, women do not participate equally in public life. In 2023, Malaysia's Gender Gap Index score was 0.682 (ranked 13/19 in East Asia and the Pacific and 102/146 globally). With women comprising only 14.9 per cent of elected parliamentarians, the country ranked 122 of 146 for female political empowerment.⁷⁹ The labour force participation rate among females is 51.6 per cent and among males is 78 per cent for 2023.⁸⁰

⁷² Ministry of Health, National Health and Morbidity Survey 2019, 2020

⁷³ UNICEF Malaysia, Issue Brief: Children with Disabilities in Malaysia, 2019

⁷⁴ UNICEF, Children Out Of School – Malaysia: The Sabah Context, 2019

⁷⁵ UNESCO, SDG 4 Country Profiles Malaysia, 2024

⁷⁶ World Health Organization, Disability and Health Country Profile: Malaysia, 2019.

⁷⁷ UNICEF Malaysia, Issue Brief: Children with Disabilities in Malaysia, 2019

⁷⁸ UNICEF Malaysia, Childhood disability in Malaysia: a study of knowledge, attitudes and practices, 2016

⁷⁹ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report*, 2023

⁸⁰ World Bank Gender Data Portal, 2024

Although accurate data on the prevalence of child marriage in Malaysia is limited, 2018 records show that approximately 1,500 child marriages occur annually, and around 90 per cent of these are girls.⁸¹ Child marriage among boys is much less common, but still occurs. The difference in rates of child marriage for boys and girls reflects the higher vulnerability of girls to child marriage in Malaysia, largely due to cultural expectations, economic pressures, and legal frameworks that more readily permit girls to marry at a younger age. The detrimental impact of child marriage on girls includes premature pregnancy with higher risks of maternal mortality, higher vulnerability to domestic violence, discontinuation of education, restriction of freedoms and perpetuation of intergenerational cycles of poverty.⁸²

Physical and sexual violence affect both boys and girls in Malaysia, however girls and young women are disproportionately affected. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (2017), 10.9 per cent of women aged 15-24 reported experiencing physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner. The same survey indicated that 6.5 per cent of young women experienced sexual violence before the age of 18.

3.1.9. Climate change and environment

Climate change effects are apparent in Malaysia. Intense flooding has become common, causing displacement and loss of life and property. Children are at high risk of climate and environmental shocks, and those in marginalized communities are even more so. Environmental factors such as air pollution, hazardous waste disposal, and flooding pose direct threats to children's health and well-being.⁸³ In 2024, Malaysia was ranked 117/180 on the Environmental Performance Index (an improvement from 130 in 2022).

3.1.10. Digital landscape

The digital landscape in Malaysia is highly dynamic, with widespread internet use and a growing number of users across all age groups. As of January 2024, there were 33.59 million internet users in Malaysia, representing an internet penetration rate of 97.4 per cent of the total population.⁸⁴ An estimated 85.4 percent of Malaysia's total internet user base (regardless of age) use at least one social media platform. The digital space among children and young people is popular, with platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp being widely used. Educational technology has seen an increase, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, with e-learning tools and platforms becoming part of school curriculums. However, despite Malaysia's recent digital progress, a digital divide is exacerbating existing inequities, affecting children and young people who do not have equal access to devices and digital literacy.

Accelerating digital transformation in public service delivery, strengthening digital economy, and mainstreaming digitalisation for inclusive development are focus areas/priorities of Twelfth Malaysia Plan. Furthermore, concerns about excessive screen time, online safety, and exposure to inappropriate content remain, leading to efforts by the government and NGOs to promote digital literacy, responsible use, and internet safety among children and young people. The Malaysian government has also implemented policies like the National Cybersecurity Policy to safeguard young users online. The General Comment 25 (2021) of the CRC on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, states that digital environment is becoming increasingly important across most aspects of children's lives and the rights of every child must be respected, protected and fulfilled in the digital environment.⁸⁵

⁸¹ UNICEF *Advocacy Brief: Towards*

. However, this statistic is likely an undercount as it excludes Muslim girls between the ages of 16 and 18, Native Courts' marriages, and refugee marriages.

⁸² UNICEF Malaysia Internal Strategy to End Child Marriage 2023 and beyond, 2023.

⁸³ UNICEF, *Impact of climate change on children*, 2021.

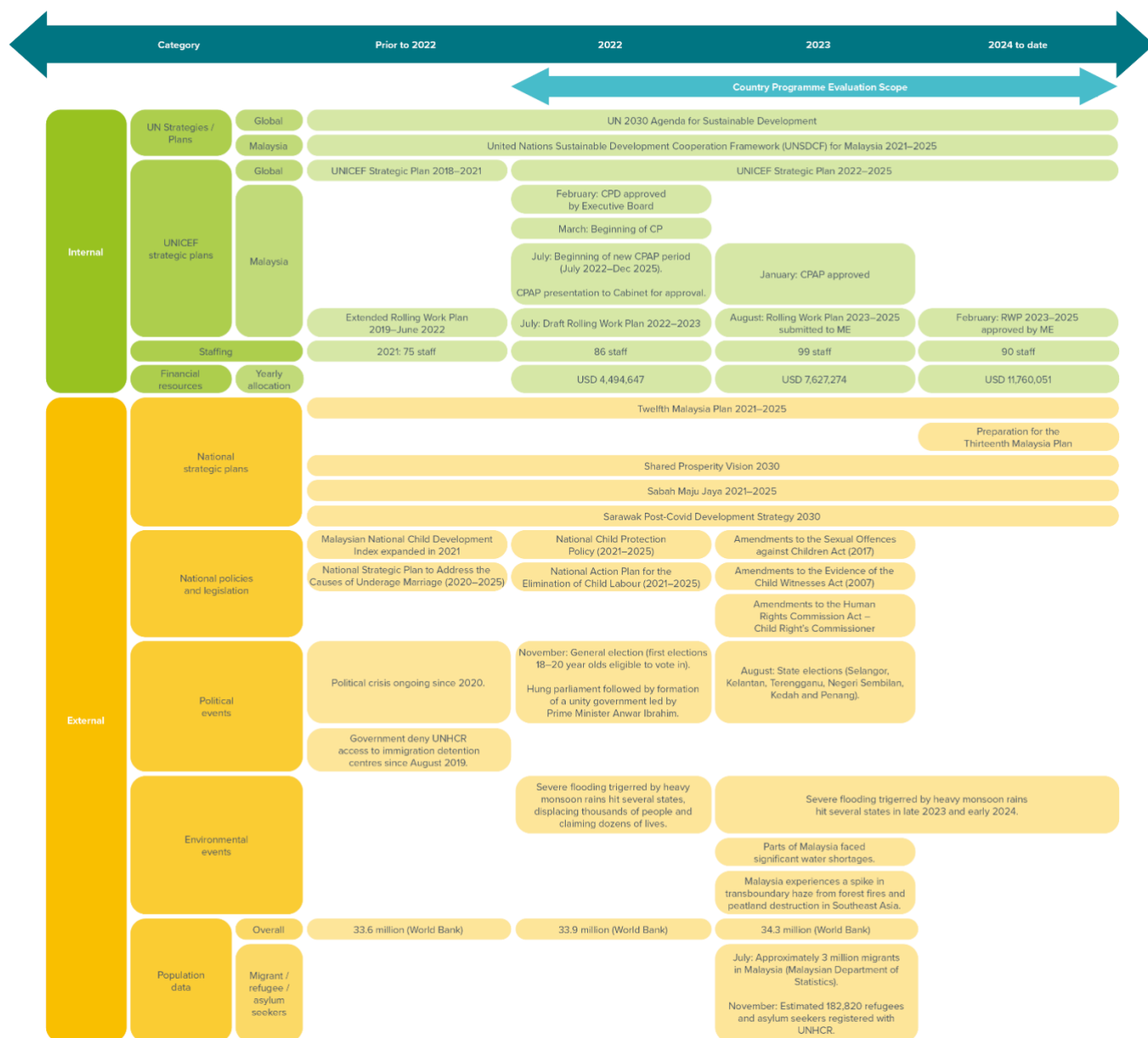
⁸⁴ DataReportal, *Digital 2024: Malaysia*. 23 February 2024. (Available at <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-malaysia>)

⁸⁵ GC 25 (2021) on children's rights on digital environment

3.1.11. Timeline of contextual events

Figure 3 provides a timeline of key contextual events throughout the CP implementation, highlighting both internal developments within UNICEF and the UN, as well as external national strategies, major events, and other influencing factors.

Figure 3 Timeline of contextual events during CP



Source: Compiled by the ET. Staffing and early allocation and data provided by MCO (2024 data as of 17th Sept 2024). Overall population data sourced from World Bank, data on migrant population from Malaysian Department of Statistics, and data on refugees and asylum seekers from UNHCR.

3.2. UNICEF Malaysia Country Programme

3.2.1. MCO Context and CPD preparation

The current CPD consultation process with the Government began in 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the process. The Government and UNICEF agreed to extend the previous CPAP by 1.5 years to June 2022. Meanwhile, discussions and consultations continued through 2021 on the draft CPD, which was presented to the Executive Board during the First Regular Session in February 2022. The CPD started in March 2022 and will end in December 2025, in alignment with CPAP 2022-2025.

The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Malaysia 2021 to 2025 (UNSDCF), developed in 2020 also played a role in the delay. The CPD needed to be revised to align with UNSDCF. The UNSDCF 2021-2025 is yet to be finalised and approved by the Government. However, approval was given for the UNSDCF Results and Resources Framework, to facilitate the approval of the CPDs for UNICEF, UNDP, and UNFPA. The CPAP 2022-2025 was approved by the cabinet in February 2023, with prior approval given by the Attorney General's Chambers. UNICEF's implementation was based on a Rolling Work Plan 2021-2022, and Rolling Work Plan 2023-2025 respectively approved by the Ministry of Economy.

3.2.2. Country Programme components and development process

The Country Programme has been designed in partnership with the Government of Malaysia and is aligned with Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 the Twelfth Malaysia Plan 2021-2025. The CPD is noted to be broadly aligned with one of the three themes that anchors the Twelfth Plan – "Strengthening security, well-being and inclusivity" and two of the four catalytic policy enablers – "Accelerating technology adoption" and "Developing future talent".

The Programme responds directly to the 2030 Agenda (particularly to SDGs 1-5, 13 and 16)⁸⁶ and to the UN 'Leaving No One Behind' agenda. It forms an integral part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Malaysia 2021-2025, with UNICEF Malaysia contributing to three of the four Strategic Priority Areas (SPAs) – presented in Box 2.

Box 2. UNSDCF Strategic Priority Areas (SPAs) involving UNICEF Malaysia

- SPA 1 (People): By 2025, poor and vulnerable groups living in Malaysia will benefit from more equity-focused and high-quality social services as well as a social protection system that ensures all have an adequate standard of living.
- SPA 2 (Planet): By 2025, environmental sustainability and resilience are mainstreamed as priorities within the national development agenda across all sectors and levels of society.
- SPA 4 (Peace): By 2025, Malaysia has strengthened democratic governance, and all people living in Malaysia benefit from a more cohesive society, strengthened governance and participation.

Source: UNSDCF Results and Resources Framework 2021-2025 and UNICEF Malaysia CPD 2022-2025.

The Country Programme's vision is "for all boys and girls in Malaysia, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, to realize their rights and have equal opportunity and thrive in safe, protective, and nurturing environments." The programme's goal is "to support national efforts to accelerate the realization of children's rights and progress towards the achievement of the SDGs for all children in Malaysia."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 13 (climate action), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions).

⁸⁷ UNICEF Malaysia *Programme Strategy Note 2021-2025*. July 14, 2020.

3.2.3. Country Programme 2022-2025 Components

The CP prioritized two programme components: a) child well-being, equity and inclusion, and b) ending violence against children. The third component of programme effectiveness includes programme coordination, planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME), advocacy and communication, and cross-sectoral programme support (which includes a) gender and disability, b) children on the move, c) private sector engagement, d) social behaviour change, e) innovation technology for development, and f) disaster risk reduction and emergency response). Table 3 presents a snapshot of the CP components.

The CP adopts a twin-track strategy, focusing on inclusive policy frameworks and systems that meet the needs of all children, and supporting the development of targeted interventions tailored to specific groups of vulnerable children, reflecting variations in geography, sex, citizenship, migration status, disability, and ethnicity.

Table 3. UNICEF Malaysia Country Programme Components

Programme Components and Outcome Statements	Outputs (Area and Statement)
<p>Outcome 1: Child well-being, equity and inclusion</p> <p>By 2025, children, especially the most vulnerable, have more equitable utilisation of quality nutrition, education and social protection systems and are empowered to address issues that impact their mental health and psychosocial well-being.</p>	<p>Social policy: National capacities are strengthened to develop evidence-informed laws, policies, plans, budgets and institutional reforms that reduce gender inequality and socio-economic disparities and promote social inclusion.</p>
	<p>Nutrition: The government has increased its capacity to develop and implement evidence-informed policies, regulatory frameworks and interventions that address malnutrition among children and women and promote healthy eating and feeding practices.</p>
	<p>Education: UNICEF education stakeholders have increased capacity in education planning and programme implementation for equity-focused and evidence-based quality education, especially for the most vulnerable children.</p>
	<p>Climate change and environment: Government, young people and private sector partners have enhanced their capacity to develop and accelerate the implementation of child-centred climate, environmental and disaster risk recovery policies and actions.</p>
	<p>Adolescent development and participation (ADAP): Adolescent girls and boys, especially the most vulnerable, have increased skills and capacity to maximize their psychosocial well-being, support their transition to employment, and be empowered to participate in decision-making that affects their lives meaningfully.</p>
<p>Outcome 2: Ending violence against children</p> <p>By 2025, children, especially the most vulnerable, are empowered and equitably benefit from quality systems and services that effectively prevent and respond to violence.</p>	<p>Enabling environment: National capacities are strengthened to develop evidence-informed laws, policies, plans, budgets and institutional reforms that prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and harmful practices affecting children.</p>
	<p>Service delivery and social service workforce: National service delivery systems are strengthened to better identify, prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and harmful practices affecting children.</p>
	<p>Social norms for children's rights: Children, families, and communities progressively adopt positive attitudes and practices that identify, prevent, and respond to violence, exploitation, and harmful practices at home, in schools, in communities, and online.</p>
<p>Outcome 3: Programme effectiveness</p>	<p>Programme Coordination and Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation: UNICEF staff and partners are provided guidance, tools and resources to effectively plan, coordinate and monitor programmes, including on disability sensitivity and gender transformation.</p>

<p>By 2025, The Government of Malaysia-UNICEF country programme is efficiently designed, coordinated, managed, evaluated and supported to meet quality integrated programming standards for achieving results for children.</p>	<p>Advocacy and Communications: UNICEF staff and partners are provided disability-sensitive and gender-transformative tools, guidance and resources for effective advocacy and partnerships and social and behaviour change on child rights issues with stakeholders.</p>
	<p>Cross-sectoral Programme Support⁸⁸: Strategies to address cross-cutting issues related to child rights are developed and applied.</p>

Source: MCO Country Programme Document 2022-2025

Outcome 1: Child well-being, equity and inclusion

The component aims to ensure that children, particularly the most vulnerable, benefit more equitably from quality social protection systems and public services. In collaboration with development partners, UNICEF Malaysia envisages providing multisectoral **social policy** support through a multi-pronged approach and pathways, including strengthening child rights reporting, governance and policy coordination mechanisms in Malaysia. The MCO plans to strengthen national capacities to develop and implement evidence-informed policies, regulations and interventions that address child and maternal **malnutrition**. Among others, UNICEF also intends to promote innovation in nutrition interventions, particularly targeting the most vulnerable through partnerships with state-level authorities, CSOs and engagement with the private sector.

Furthermore, as part of the component, UNICEF aims to strengthen the capacity of the public and alternative **education** sectors to deliver equity-focused quality education as part of its “reimagining education.” This includes supporting inclusive learning and flexible pathways to learning and skills development, including through the use of digital platforms, especially for the most vulnerable children. UNICEF also plans to strengthen the capacity of the Government to identify and manage **climate change and environmental** risks to children and advocate for child-sensitive environmental legislation, policies, services and disaster risk reduction measures. This includes not only increasing stakeholder awareness, providing technical support to legislative and policy development, and implementing a sustainability-focused education curriculum but also empowering children and young people to participate in public dialogue on environmental sustainability.

In partnership with the Government and other United Nations entities, the MCO has planned to support **adolescents and young people**, particularly the most vulnerable, to maximise their psychosocial well-being and meaningful participation in informed decision-making processes. This includes partnerships with government agencies, civil society organisations, youth organisations, and the private sector, as well as the promotion of evidence-informed public and policy dialogue on adolescent mental health and strengthening child participation mechanisms at all levels.

Table 4 presents key government agencies and partners of the component by area.

Table 4. Key government ministries/agencies in child well-being, equity and inclusion

Area	Key partners
Social policy	Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD), Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance, Sarawak State Government, Ministry of Women, Early Childhood and Community Well-being Development of Sarawak, Sabah State Economic Planning Unit (UPEN Sabah), Parliament of Malaysia and City Councils.
Nutrition	Ministry of Health (MOH), MWFCD, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security.
Reimagine Education	Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), UPEN Sabah, Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), Ministry of Education,

⁸⁸ Please refer to details in the narrative provided later in Programme Effectiveness.

	Innovation and Talent Development (MEITD) Sarawak, Sarawak Digital Economy Corporation Berhad (SDEC).
Climate change & environmental sustainability	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability (NRES), Ministry of Economy, National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA), MWFC, Ministry of Youth and Sport (MOYS), Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI), Environment Protection Department of Sabah, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment of Sabah (KePKAS), Iskander Regional Development Authority (IRDA).
Adolescent development and participation (ADAP)	MOSTI and MOYS, MOH, MOE, MDEC, SUHAKAM/Office of Children’s Commissioner (OCC).

Outcome 2: Ending violence against children

The component’s aim is that children, particularly the most vulnerable, are empowered and more equitably benefit from quality systems and services that prevent and respond to violence, neglect, exploitation and harmful practices. UNICEF envisages promoting an **enabling environment** through support for the development of evidence-based policies, budgets, and institutional arrangements aimed at ending violence against children. Through evidence generation, the component plans to improve the understanding of the magnitude, nature and drivers of violence, harmful practices and exploitation of children. In addition, among others, the area intends to inform legal reform and the design of policy approaches for a more robust child protection system that serves all children in Malaysia, including children affected by migration, stateless children and other undocumented children.

In addition, UNICEF plans to strengthen **service delivery** systems to better prevent and address violence against children. This includes supporting the implementation of the Social Work Profession Bill, the National Social Work Competency Standards for Social Work Practice, and the Social Work Case Management System Manual. UNICEF also intends to support the scale-up of diversion and community-based rehabilitation of young offenders.

Furthermore, UNICEF aims to address **social norms** (knowledge, attitudes, and practices) of families, service providers, and faith and community leaders regarding violence, abuse, neglect, harmful practices (i.e. child marriage, corporal punishment), stigma, and discrimination.

Table 5 presents key government agencies and partners of the component by area.

Table 5. Key government agencies and other partners in ending violence against children

Area	Key partners
Enabling environment	MWFC, Department of Social Welfare (DSW), Ministry of Communication, MOHA, the Council for Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants (MAPO), Attorney General Chambers, Legal Affairs Division, Prime Minister’s Department (BHEUU, JPM), Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM).
Service delivery and Social Services Workforce	MWFC, DSW, SUHAKAM, OCC, MOHA/Department of Immigration, Malaysia Association of Social Workers, Office of the Chief Registrar Federal Court of Malaysia, National Security Council.
Social norms for children’s rights	MWFC, Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN), KEMAS, DSW, Sabah State Government (UPEN, JHEWA), Pelajar Bukan Pengantin Coalition, Partners of Community Organisations (PACOS Trust), National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC).

Outcome 3: Programme effectiveness

The programme effectiveness component aims to ensure that the CP is efficiently coordinated, managed, monitored and evaluated (including knowledge creation/dissemination and evidence-based communications). In addition, as indicated by MCO, the component plans to strengthen multisectoral coordination and provide cross-sectoral programming⁸⁹ support to ensure programming excellence that includes:⁹⁰

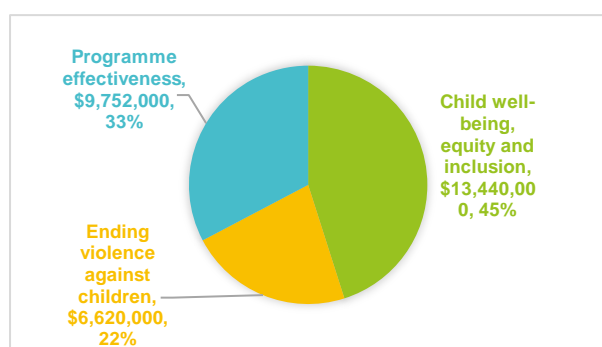
- Gender-transformative programming.
- Disability-inclusive programming.
- Children on the move, stateless children and undocumented children.
- Private sector engagement.
- Social and behavioural change communications.
- Innovation and technology for development.
- Emergency response and climate action.
- Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
- Public communication advocacy.
- Child Rights Body Mechanisms

Cross sectoral interventions are integrated or mainstreamed into the respective sectoral outputs under outcome 1 and outcome 2, while the activities/budget in the programme effectiveness cross-sectoral output are mainly dedicated for staff cost, internal capacity building or cross-sectoral specific interventions. The cross-sectoral priorities of the CPD mirror the Change Strategies and Cross-Cutting Elements of the corporate UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025. However, the CPD does not explicitly mention the linkages or alignment. The Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Communications, the Ministry of Finance, Department of Statistics, and MWFC are key government partners for this component.

3.2.4. Country Programme Budget

The budget for the Country Programme (2022-2025) implementation is USD 29.812 million. Eighty-nine per cent of the funding is from other resources, and the balance (11 per cent) is from regular resources. Two-thirds of the budget is planned for child well-being, equity and inclusion (45 per cent) and ending violence against children (22 per cent). Figure 4 and Table 6 present the budget summary details by programme component. Globally, MCO is unique among the UNICEF country offices. It is a hybrid office that is self-funded, which offers flexibility in programming as it is not dependent on external donor funding.⁹¹ MCO ranks third in fundraising among all country offices globally, following China and India- an impressive achievement considering Malaysia's significantly smaller population compared to those two countries.

Figure 4 Country Programme Budget Summary



Source: MCO Country Programme Document 2022-2025

Table 6 Country Programme Budget Summary

Programme components	Regular Resources	Other resources	Total
Child well-being, equity and inclusion	\$1,716,000	\$11,680,000	\$13,440,000
Ending violence against children	\$720,000	\$5,900,000	\$6,620,000
Programme effectiveness	\$932,000	\$8,820,000	\$9,752,000
Total	\$3,412,000	\$26,400,000	\$29,812,000

⁸⁹ It was noted during the inception phase that the cross-sectoral output has evolved throughout the programming cycle.

⁹⁰ As stated in CPAP 2022 – 2025.

⁹¹ UNICEF Malaysia is both a programme and a private-sector fundraising office.

3.2.5. Theory of change

The Country Programme Document narrates the overarching theory of change and presents a results framework; however, it does not develop a visual overall theory of change for the Country Programme. Instead, the MCO team developed two separate theories of change for two programme components: child well-being, equity, and inclusion (Outcome 1) and ending violence against children (Outcome 2).⁹² These two theories of change describe in detail the pathways through which UNICEF and its partners intend to achieve systemic change and present assumptions that determine success for each component.

Figure 5 presents a visualisation of the theory of change which was developed by the ET for all three components as a tool to support the evaluation. This was based on the CPD, CPAP, the results and resources framework, and Programme Strategy Notes⁹³ and incorporates key information from the theories of change developed earlier for the two programme components (annex 3).

The theory of change indicates the pathways to achieving the overall vision of the CP, based on changes brought about through two programmatic priority areas (child well-being, equity and inclusion, and ending violence against children) and the programme effectiveness component. The theory of change includes the following elements: overall vision, expected changes (outcomes) and pathways to changes (outputs), bottlenecks, key assumptions, programming strategies, and cross-cutting themes. While the diagram does not specifically indicate risks, it implies that when an assumption does not hold true, it becomes a risk and impedes change. If found to be false, key assumptions present the greatest risks to programme success.

The theory of change depicts the programming strategies through which change is expected to occur (pathways to change). They include policy advocacy, evidence generation and innovations (modelling and scaling up),⁹⁴ UNCT coordination, and the overall twin-track strategy to address bottlenecks. The cross-sectoral priorities include migration, gender, equity, youth and adolescents, people with disabilities, social behaviour change, child rights and business.

Thematic area interventions, cross-sectoral programming, planning, monitoring and evaluation, and communication, are intended to bring about overall change. Evidence generation, innovations (modelling), and public and policy dialogue/advocacy are envisaged to change social behaviour and norms and strengthen systems of laws, policies, programmes and services. Multistakeholder partnerships create ownership and buy-in at various levels (among diverse stakeholders) to bring positive changes to all children and adolescents (including migrants, refugees, stateless and indigenous peoples).

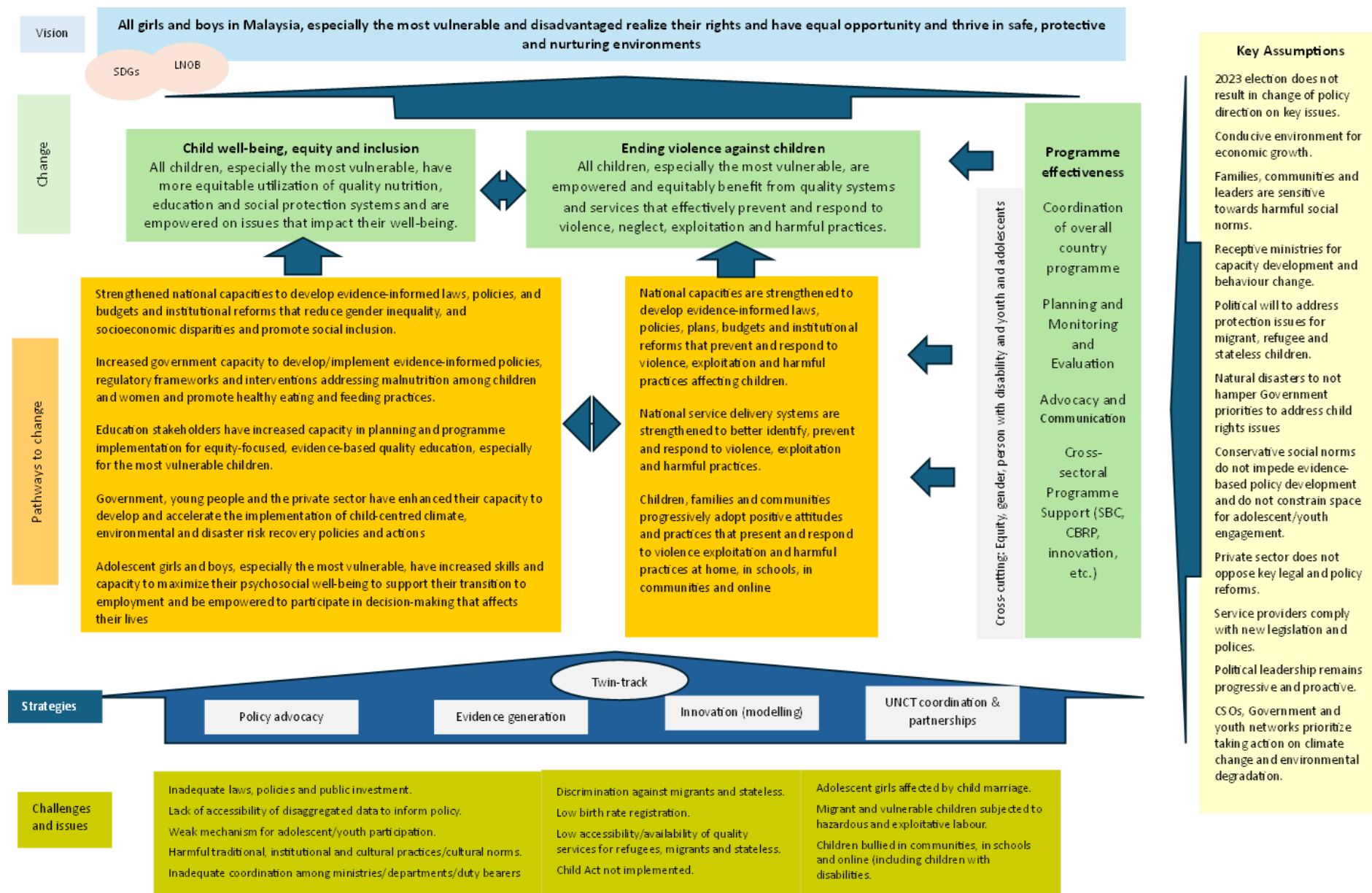
The theory of change provides the basis from which the CPE has examined the actual implementation and results of the programme and its interventions, and its understanding of the factors which have positively or negatively influenced the results achieved under the CP. This also involved testing the underlying assumptions of the theory of change to understand the extent to which these held true and affected/contributed to results.

⁹² Provided in Annex 3 for reference.

⁹³ Programme Strategy Note for UNICEF Malaysia 2021-2025, July 2020.

⁹⁴ These strategies emerged during the extended mid-year review in 2023 as lessons learned

Figure 5: Reconstructed Theory of Change (Source: Evaluation Team)





4. Findings

4.1. Evaluation Criteria 1: Relevance

Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the Country Programme gives importance to ensuring the rights and needs of children, particularly the most vulnerable (including children on the move, stateless children, other undocumented children, and Indigenous children), nevertheless, there is scope to ensure a stronger focus on ensuring that no one is 'left behind'.

The design of the CP is integrally linked to the UNSDCF and the Common Country Analysis, and reflects findings, recommendations and lessons learned from previous evaluations and reviews. Situational assessments have informed CP and intervention-level planning, ensuring relevance to the evolving needs of Malaysian children. However, there is potential to improve the inclusivity of stakeholder consultations in designing interventions. The CP is also broadly aligned to the Twelfth Malaysia Plan.

MCO support across sectors is relevant to the needs of Malaysian children, particularly advice on policy and legislative changes. UNICEF Malaysia has adapted flexibility to the evolving local context and needs throughout the CP implementation, maintaining its relevance.

Despite efforts (such as briefings to government, advocacy letters, and inviting representatives from outside Malaysia who sit on Human Rights Treaty committees or who work as special rapporteurs to advocate with the government), UNICEF has struggled to address childhood statelessness sufficiently, due to the lack of government prioritisation and political will, and existing national legislation. Discrimination based on statelessness, such as limited access to education and health care, continues to expose stateless children to protection risks including violence, abuse, trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

In addition to striving to keep the needs of Stateless children on the policy agenda, the CP has been proactive in venturing into new areas. MCO also diversified focus into areas such as the environment/ climate change, refugees and migration in responding to the needs of children in Malaysia. This expanded focus reflects government requests for technical support.

While the CP addresses gender and disability, these aspects are not fully integrated into all areas of programming. Although interventions are gender-sensitive, they are not necessarily gender-responsive or gender-transformative.⁹⁵

As a UN agency, UNICEF Malaysia's convening power is a comparative advantage. However, there are mixed perspectives regarding MCO's ability to convene diverse partners. UNICEF Malaysia's mission on child rights and its relationship with the Government are seen as key strengths.

4.1.1. Extent to which rights and needs of children considered in the planning and implementation of MCO interventions under the CP and UNSDCF

Planning

Although the UNSDCF has not been signed by the Government of Malaysia, the design of the UNICEF Country Programme is integrally linked to the UNSDCF⁹⁶ which is underpinned by the Common Country Analysis (CCA). As per the UN Reform, the MCO, along with other UN agencies in Malaysia, was involved in developing the CCA. As mentioned, the Child Well-being, Equity and Inclusion programme component and its outcome is aligned with UNSDCF's Strategic Priority Area (SPA 1): People and SPA 2 (Planet). The Ending Violence Against Children programme component and its outcome are aligned with UNSDCF's SPA 1 (People) and SPA 4 (Peace).

As indicated earlier in the report, the CP is also broadly aligned with Twelfth Malaysia Plan. It is aligned with one of the three key themes – “strengthening security, wellbeing and inclusivity,” and two of the policy enablers – “accelerating technology adoption and innovation” and “developing future talent”. The CP work is also directly aligned with one of the 14 game changers of the Twelfth Plan - “multiplying growth of less developed states especially Sabah and Sarawak to reduce development gap.” Furthermore, the MCO undertook a situation analysis to understand the situation of children in Malaysia and has carried out additional assessments (e.g., the ongoing Child-Friendly Cities Initiative and the Child Wellbeing Index situation analyses in Sarawak and Sabah) to ensure that specific interventions are informed by, and take account of the rights and needs of the children, especially the most vulnerable. The MCO could enhance its efforts to address the needs of Indigenous children in Malaysia (e.g., working with indigenous CSOs such as PACOs Trust). A clear understanding of the social and cultural context by all in MCO is critical for designing and implementing interventions that are most relevant. To achieve this more effectively, staff could make repeated visits to the communities where the interventions are planned, in collaboration with partners as appropriate.

The current **CPD also reflected various findings, recommendations and lessons learned from previous evaluations and reviews.** These included:

- The mid-term evaluation (2019) of the previous 2016-2020 country programme confirmed the relevance of MCO's key priorities while recommending an additional focus on malnutrition (includes addressing undernutrition in vulnerable population and growing trends of obesity in the overall population) inclusion and quality of education, adolescent mental health, climate change, young people's participation and private sector engagement.
- The Gender Programmatic Review (2019), which identified key deprivations for boys and girls and capacity gaps and recommended targeted approaches.
- The evaluation of the #ThisAbility Flagship Initiative (2019) of UNICEF highlighted the need to strengthen disability-inclusive programming.
- The developmental evaluation on Innovation for Children (2019) recommended strengthening the use of innovations as a key driver for results and pursuing partnerships that take innovations to scale.
- Lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

95 Gender responsive – deliberately addresses gender differences and gender inequalities in roles, responsibilities, rights and relations. Gender transformative – transforms gender stereotypes and gender norms and relations for gender equality and an enabling environment (UNICEF Gender Equality Marker and Gender Tag Guidance Notes, 2022).

96 It was noted that the UNSDCF 2021-2025 is the first one prepared for Malaysia. The UN system in Malaysia did not have a UNDAF earlier.

At the same time, the recommendations of the formative evaluation of the Role and Engagement of the Business Sector to Respect and Promote Child Rights in Malaysia (2021) were not addressed, as the MCO viewed that the evaluation findings and recommendations were oriented toward private sector partnership with fundraising perspective than programming.

During the current CPD preparation process, external stakeholders (including government and CSOs) were consulted. Although there are some positive examples of involvement of stakeholders prior to undertaking evidence-generation activities and pilots (e.g. the integrated social protection pilot being planned in a Sarawak has been co-created with government counterparts from the onset), this has not always been explicit or consistent. This has proven to be a bottleneck for uptake and scaling up, particularly for pilot programs. In some instances, such as the government-led diversion and probation pilots, stakeholders were involved in co-designing, planning (including sustainability and scale-up) and implementation. Despite this, it did not translate to government carrying out the original plan to scale-up.

Involvement of children and young people in the design and development of the current CPD included consultations of over one hundred young people (in Selangor, Sabah and Sarawak in November 2019), to inform the Situation Analysis of Adolescent in Malaysia.⁹⁷ These consultations provided a space for adolescents to identify priority issues in Malaysia and to carry out causal analyses in relation to these issues. Adolescents were also engaged in informing and validating the Situation Analysis for Women and Children.⁹⁸ This included a large, external workshop carried out in Kuala Lumpur in September 2018 involving young people who were advocates from marginalised groups (young refugees and persons with disabilities). In addition, a series of three consultations took place involving 129 adolescents in the peninsula (Selangor), Sabah (Kota Kinabalu) and Sarawak (Kuching). It was noted that youth are being involved in providing input to the new CPD (2026 – 2030) design. For example, Young People's Consultations were conducted in November 2024, in which 43 young people⁹⁹ validated and provided feedback on deprivation statements related to health, education, protection against violence, climate, poverty, and participation.¹⁰⁰

ADAP is a relatively new area for MCO; it only started in 2019. UNICEF involved youth in the CP implementation by hiring Youth Champions,¹⁰¹ the Youth Environment Living Labs (YELL) coordinator¹⁰² interns, and UNVs. UNICEF's Young Leaders Programme also facilitated young people's participation in UNICEF's programmes, advocacy and community engagement (see section 4.3.2).

⁹⁷ UNICEF MCO, Situation Analysis of Adolescent in Malaysia, 2020

⁹⁸ UNICEF MCO, Situation Analysis for Women and Children, 2020.

⁹⁹ Aged between 8 and 22. Within this group, four are from B40 households, two are children of deaf adults, five are persons with disabilities (including three young people from the deaf community, one young person with physical disability, and one young person with speech impediment), seven are from indigenous communities from Sabah and Sarawak, and 11 are representatives from Children's Councils including the Child Friendly City's (CFCI) Petaling Jaya Children's Council and Kuching South's Children's Council and the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Children's Consultative Council.

¹⁰⁰ UNICEF MCO, Young People's Consultation report (Abridged preliminary version, 8 November 2024)

¹⁰¹ Social media influencers under the Climate Change area. They were hired for one year for 5 days a month.

¹⁰² Joint programme with UNDP.

Another example of youth engagement in implementation of the CP was the Youth on the Move Fellowship, in which a young person with experience as a refugee in Malaysia was contracted for six months between 2023 and 2024. The refugee youth fellow was engaged in planning to contribute ideas from their personal experience, inputting in the design of a refugee module, and conducting interviews with other refugees. This was a pioneering initiative, with MCO being the first UNICEF country office in Asia to implement it. MCO and the refugee youth fellow benefitted mutually due to the initiative. However, after his term ended, it has not been continued, and this initiative has not translated to wider benefits to youth and children with similar lived experience.

In January 2024, the internal employee resource group 'Young UNICEF' was established for staff in MCO under 35 years.¹⁰³ Although this is primarily an internally oriented group, one of the intended purposes is to promote the voices of young people and ensure they are embedded in UNICEF's work in Malaysia, and provide a platform for young staff to provide perspectives to the senior management of the MCO. However, it was emphasised that being UNICEF staff, their voices should not replace non-staff voices, as the latter will likely be closer to the most vulnerable and free of bias.

The MCO has been a strong advocate of children's rights in Malaysia for several decades. MCO's lobbying along with other CSOs, contributed to government removing two regressive amendments that were proposed which would have led to further increasing the number of stateless children. Forty-four per cent of survey respondents strongly agreed that UNICEF considers the needs of children (particularly vulnerable children) in Malaysia when planning its activities, while forty-nine per cent mildly agreed. Subsequent sections discuss specific intervention examples in detail.

Implementation

The MCO has been proactive in venturing into new areas to address the current needs of children. For example, cyberbullying is a new issue in Malaysia. This was also incorporated into the current CPD (Output 2.3). The MCO has started supporting the government in legislating on this emerging topic. Other examples of new areas of programming include Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP), climate change and environmental sustainability, with importance given in the CPD and specific outputs (Output 1.4 and 1.5, respectively). Similarly, MCO's work on migration (children affected by migration) is recent; initiated by an EU-funded project between 2018 and 2022. In the EU Children Affected by Migration Project, UNICEF in a large sense catalysed actions responding to the needs of children affected by migration. Mental health programming also started during the current CPD, as a pillar of ADAP (under the adolescent development focus), and in response to adolescent and youth voices on mental health being a major concern. This expansion of coverage was highlighted by Government stakeholders as relevant and valuable, as demonstrated by the Government requests to MCO for additional technical support (see Box 3). At the same time, it was also noted that MCO was not able to meet a government request to optimise vaccination uptake among non-citizens in Sabah, due to MCO programming prioritisation of not focusing on service delivery.

¹⁰³ Approximately 20 MCO staff are in this category/group.

Box 3. Examples of government requests to MCO for technical support

- Child Sexual Abuse Research conducted at the request of the Prime Minister's Department, in response to a suggestion from UNICEF.
- Sarawak State government officials visited MCO in 2022 to request technical support in the development of the region (particularly in addressing the needs of the children).
- The support provided towards the Malaysia Youth Mental Health Index 2023 was upon the request of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.
- Support in developing the module for hearing impaired in the DELIMa for Ministry of Education.
- Support in providing growth monitoring equipment and data collection.

Source: Compiled by the ET from documents and KIs.

4.1.2. Extent to which design of CP strategies contribute to the sustainability of equity, disability-inclusive and gender-equitable results

As indicated in Section 1.2 and envisaged in CPAP 2022-2025, the design included gender transformative programming, disability-inclusive programming and programming for children on the move, stateless children and undocumented children. Gender and disability are cross-cutting (cross-sectoral) themes and have been included in the Programme Effectiveness component of the CPAP/CPD. However, there are no indicators of success for these cross-sectoral areas.

Gender-equitable programming

The use of gender equality markers was not evident in MCO interventions. While current programming focuses on the needs of both boys and girls, evidence of a systematic gender-based need assessment in programming was lacking. Discussions with CSOs/ government stakeholders and review of documents did not indicate that MCO interventions consistently consider the needs of boys and girls separately. Examples include Future Skills for All (FS4A), UNICEF's Young Leaders Programme, C-HAT and mental health work. While 44 per cent of the perception survey respondents agreed that UNICEF in Malaysia considered the needs of both boys and girls when planning activities, 49 per cent only mildly agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Most current CP **interventions are gender-sensitive** but not necessarily gender-responsive or gender-transformative.¹⁰⁴ However change in the right direction is observed in the recent parenting intervention, which was noted to have done gender transformative programming, with more Rohingya fathers involved in parenting than pre-intervention. MCO has focussed on child marriage as a priority of MCO's gender programming. MCO was not able to employ a child marriage specialist, but worked closely with the MWFCO on implementing three prioritised actions out of six in the child marriage action plan.

Due to the local context in Malaysia, the LGBTIQAI+ agenda was rather sensitive. From the Malaysian government perspective, the topic of LGBTIQAI+ is off the agenda and not a focus, due to both political and religious concerns. Therefore, the inclusion of LGBTIQAI+ participants across MCO interventions is not a consistent focus. However, a few interventions have consciously succeeded in including LGBTIQAI+ participants when less controversial (e.g., the Young Leaders Programme).

¹⁰⁴ Gender sensitive (acknowledges but works around gender differences and inequalities); gender responsive (deliberately addresses gender difference and gender inequalities in roles, responsibilities, rights and relations); and gender transformative (transforms gender stereotypes and gender norms and relations for gender equality and an enabling environment) - *UNICEF Gender Equality Marker and Gender Tag Guidance Note (2022)*

Disability-inclusive programming

UNICEF's flagship report "Living on the Edge"¹⁰⁵, and "Families on the Edge" multi-year research series¹⁰⁶, recommended strengthening inclusive education, improving healthcare services, expanding social protection, and creating more robust legal protections for children with disabilities. The report also stresses the importance of fostering public awareness and attitudinal change to reduce stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities. Working closely with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF Malaysia is advocating for education policies that integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools. UNICEF supports training programs for teachers including adapting techniques to suit children with various types of disabilities. UNICEF is also starting to work with NGOs to develop inclusive early childhood education programs, advocating for early screening programs to identify developmental disabilities, and ensuring that children with disabilities are eligible for government assistance programmes. Furthermore, UNICEF is strongly encouraging all data to be disaggregated by gender, age and disability, thereby reducing the data gap on children with disabilities. Disability has been integrated into programming including in a study on the cost of raising children with disabilities, which will be used to inform social protection work.

Disability-inclusive programming is still evolving and is not consistently mainstreamed into MCO interventions in the current CP. An example of disability-focused programming is the module development for persons with a hearing impairment to be part of the MOE's DELIMa. Despite the strong collaboration with the MOE, the MCO has not pursued collaboration with the MOE's special education unit to address the needs of over 120,000 students with disabilities in Malaysia. However, working with an NGO, efforts are underway to initiate and build a centre of excellence for disability knowledge and training materials. Starting with translating the Disability Act into a more readable format, some documents will be translated into easy-to-read language.

Geographic equity

The 13 states and 3 federal territories in Malaysia have developed in different phases due to different reasons. The states of East Malaysia are among the less developed states in Malaysia and with the highest incidence of absolute poverty. Based on such facts and in line with the Twelfth Plan to bridge the development gap, the current CP has dedicated planned programming in Sarawak and Sabah to reduce geographical disparities to support better geographic equity. Prior to this CP, UNICEF interventions in Eastern Malaysia were more impromptu.

¹⁰⁵ UNICEF MCO, Living on the Edge : Longitudinal study on post-COVID-19 impact assessment among low-income households in Kuala Lumpur. UNICEF, 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Jointly commissioned by UNICEF and UNFPA in 2020, with four published issues by May 2021..

4.1.3. Extent to which CP objectives remained appropriate and relevant to the changing circumstances in Malaysia

During the current CP period, Malaysia underwent significant political change, including political leadership, new coalitions, and reforms across ministries. Changes in ministers impact the implementation of interventions and policy advocacy efforts. Government stakeholders highlighted that MCO has been able to keep up with changing circumstances and support various ministries (e.g., MWFCD). The government stakeholders acknowledged that while MCO is proactive in supporting updates on earlier policies and/or plans, it is also nimble enough to respond to requests when a plan of action, policy revision, or draft of a new policy is needed. Government stakeholders also commended MCO's ability to work on current issues of cyberbullying and mental health affecting children in Malaysia.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, MCO was able to adapt to hybrid and online approaches. Furthermore, the UN Reform and the UNSDCF¹⁰⁷ also meant revisions to the initial CPD prepared.

Discussions across stakeholder groups highlighted the continued relevance of the **CP and its interventions despite the changing circumstances in Malaysia**. However, internal stakeholders (UNICEF) would have preferred more outcomes in the Country Programme, and in the design of the cross-sectoral sections of the country programme (Outcome 3) to better reflect the realities on the ground.

Half of the perception survey respondents (51 per cent) mildly agreed that MCO's activities were relevant to the changing circumstances in Malaysia between 2022 and 2024. A smaller group (39 per cent) strongly agreed with the statement, while 8 per cent disagreed.

4.1.4. Extent to which MCO engaged in prioritisation and made strategic adjustments

In the initial year of the CP, the frequent turnover of MCO top management¹⁰⁸ led to constant directive adjustments, which proved challenging for staff and were not seen as strategic. The CP's multi-year rolling work plan (MYRWP) 2023-2025 was approved by the Government in February 2024 after extensive consultation between 2022-2023. Since the first quarter of 2023, MCO has had stable top management.

However, some MCO interventions are fragmented and/or standalone and are not designed to be integrated into systems strengthening or existing/new government interventions. For example, while UNICEF continues to address climate issues, follow-up on the Climate Youth Champion initiative may be important, particularly in terms of maintaining connections between Youth Champion Clusters and government entities. Additionally, it may be valuable to explore how initiatives such as the KitaConnect programme (which provides a platform for adolescents and youth to share their views) could be more effectively integrated into government processes.

¹⁰⁷ The current UNSDCF was the first such framework for Malaysia. There was no UNDAF prepared for Malaysia earlier.

¹⁰⁸ Although the MCO had a Deputy Representative (Programmes) as OIC in 2022 (January – December), several short-term replacements were appointed as Representatives/OICs during that year.

The evaluation finds that there is still work to do overall in MCO to ensure appropriate and strategic prioritisation. Some strategic prioritisation and structural adjustments of teams had been made in 2024 to bring better synergies and focus. The social policy (including social protection), communication, and technology for development (T4D) teams have been strengthened. Also, Gender and disability, ADAP, and MHPSS have been clustered together. However, there remains work to be done, as new management cannot fix all the past missteps/ practices, and change takes time. The initial decision in the design of the CPD was to have only two components besides the programme effectiveness component. This led to cross-cutting and cross-sectoral areas bundled under programme effectiveness with no specific indicators to measure progress/success. A review of samples of CPDs of high-income countries (HICs) and upper-middle-income countries (UMICs) indicated that all CPDs reviewed had at least three outcomes, excluding the programme effectiveness (Annex 8).

4.1.5. Comparative advantages of MCO

Various partners in Malaysia perceive UNICEF as a “trusted brand,” and collaboration with UNICEF is seen as relevant, with potential to raise the profile of CSOs in Malaysia, in addition to supporting their agenda and position. Stakeholders, in general, agreed that the MCO brought international/ regional experience and expertise from other countries, which was essential for benchmarking Malaysia with neighbouring countries. Government stakeholders viewed the MCO's ability to access and hire “good” consultants as a strength.

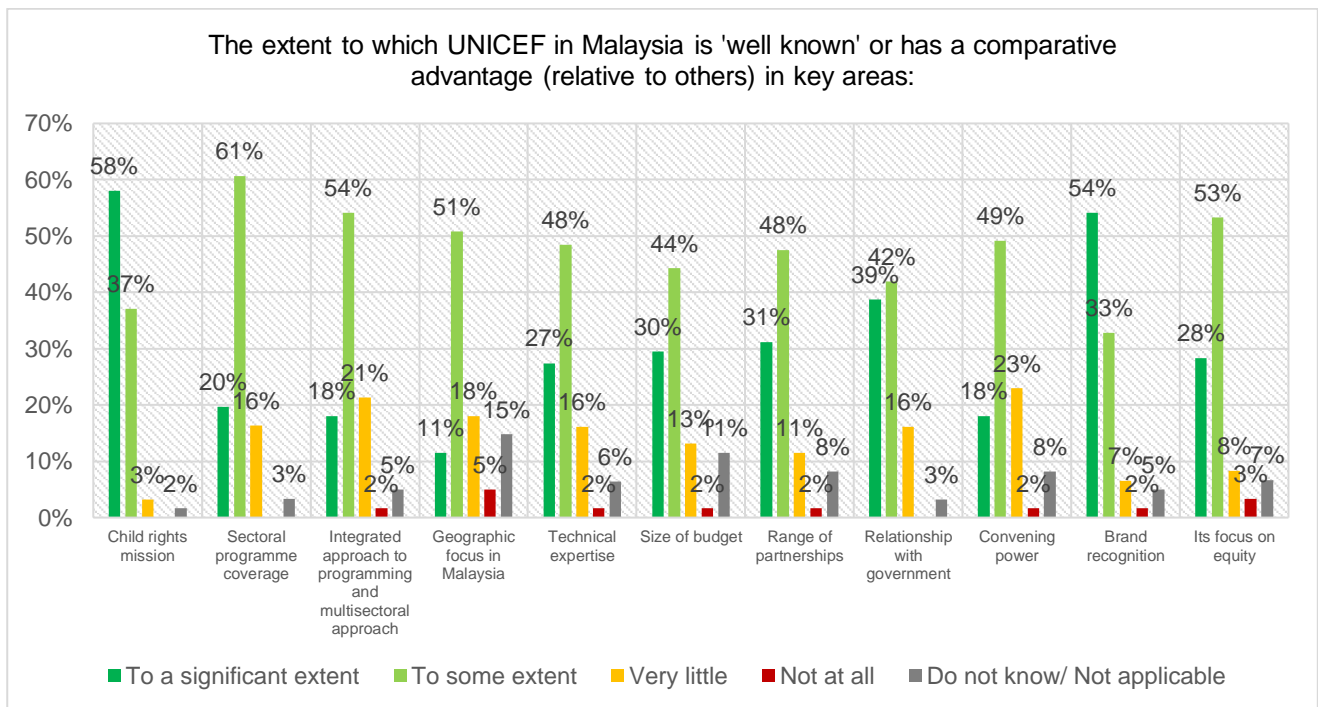
Although many interviewees commented that UNICEF, as a UN agency has convening power, in contrast survey respondents perceived this power to be somewhat limited. Only 49 per cent of respondents felt UNICEF had a comparative advantage in convening power to some extent, while 23 per cent believed it had very little advantage in this area. While stakeholders acknowledge the ability of MCO to convene; some mentioned that there is scope to improve and to bring together diverse partners.

The survey highlighted two main areas where UNICEF Malaysia is perceived to have the strongest comparative advantage: its **mission on child rights** (58 per cent of respondents perceived this was significant) and its **brand recognition** (54 per cent). This triangulates with key informant interview (KII) data and review of documents, which suggested UNICEF was well known for its child rights mission and global branding, and had an “aggressive marketing and fund-raising strategy” in Malaysia. The Formative Evaluation of the Role and Engagement of The Business Sector (2021)¹⁰⁹ had previously found that UNICEF’s brand awareness and recognition overall was good amongst respondents from the private sector, however none of the respondents were well-aware of UNICEF’s programmatic priorities and focus. Fifty percent of businesses were only modestly interested (or less) in collaboration with UNICEF specifically because of the brand name.

The next best perceived comparative advantage by CPE perception survey respondents was **UNICEF’s relationship with the Government** (39 per cent perceived this was significant), an advantage also highlighted in document review and KIIs across key stakeholder categories.

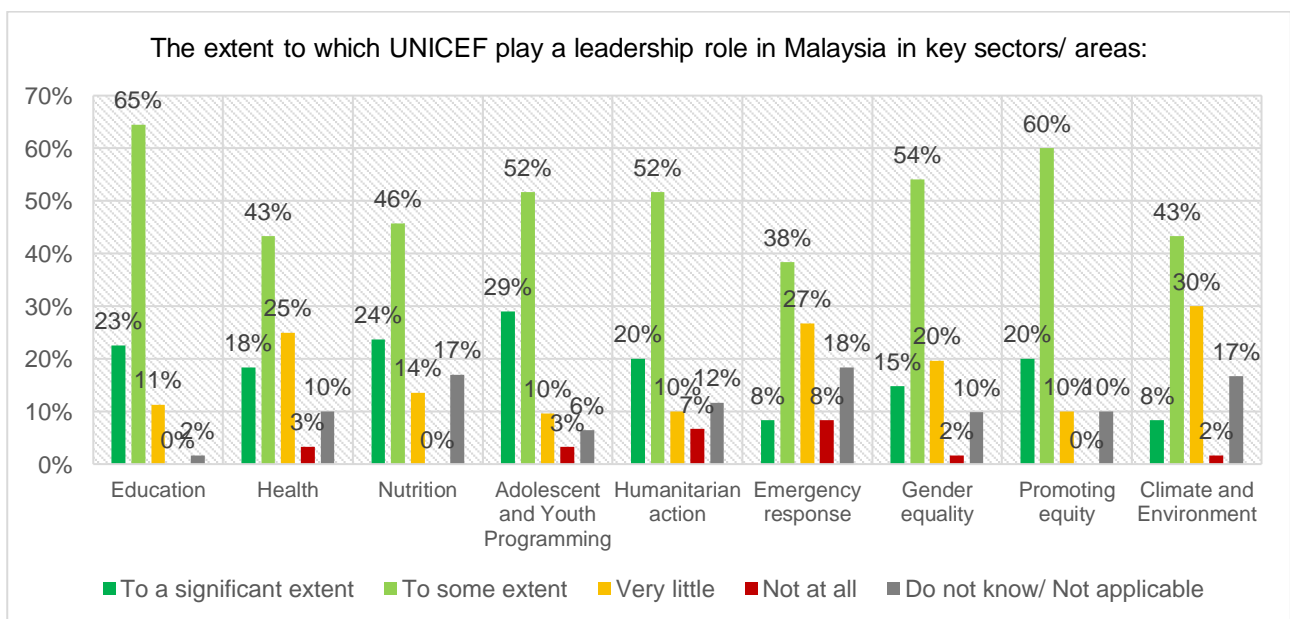
¹⁰⁹ UNICEF MCO, Formative Evaluation of the Role and Engagement of the Business Sector to Respect and Promote Child Rights in Malaysia, 2021

Figure 6 Perception survey results - extent to which UNICEF has a comparative advantage (relative to others) in key areas



Less than 25 per cent of the survey respondents believed that UNICEF played a significant leadership role in key areas such as education, health, nutrition, gender equality, promoting equity, climate and environment and emergency response. The area where UNICEF was seen to have the most significant leadership role was ADAP, with 29 per cent of respondents recognising this. A large proportion of respondents (around 45 per cent and above) viewed that UNICEF played a leadership role only to some extent in various areas (mentioned above).

Figure 7 Perception survey results - extent to which UNICEF plays a leadership role in key sectors/ areas



4.2. Evaluation Criteria 2: Coherence

Summary of Key Findings

The CP is aligned to Malaysia's Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 and the Twelfth Malaysia Plan along with several national policies. The CP responds to the UN's 'leave no one behind' agenda and is an integral part of UNSDCF 2021-2025, in addition to aligning to SDG 1-5, 13 and 16. Some of UNICEF's focal areas which respond to needs and priorities of children in Malaysia are yet to be prioritised by Government.

UNICEF Malaysia has developed effective partnerships at many levels. UNICEF's partnerships with Government have grown in importance and breadth since 2021 and it has positioned itself well amidst key Government ministries. However, there is a lack of a strategic approach to MCO's relationships with other partners in the broader development landscape. Private-sector partnerships are still evolving, and CSO collaboration is primarily focused on a range of agencies near the capital city area. Synergies and linkages with other UN agencies were evident; however, there is potential to collaborate, explore, and leverage more joint programming and unified advocacy. There has also been a shift in the type of implementing partners - working more with government than CSOs in the past.

Policy advocacy¹¹⁰ and advice (technical assistance) work has helped to better position MCO strategically in the development landscape; although other entities are also regarded as key strategic partners and are consulted for advice and cost-benefit analyses. The MWFCD is a critical partner for UNICEF as it is the lead ministry across 8 activities in the CPD, and the supporting ministry/ agency for 20 of the 35 activities contained in the MYRWP, 2023-2025. The internal balancing of working together of programmes, communications, and fundraising teams at MCO is a work in progress and currently not optimised or systematic. The interaction, collaboration, and interconnectedness among the three teams—the programme, communication, and PFP teams—could be improved, and mechanisms and processes could be put in place for more systematic periodic interaction.

¹¹⁰ Policy advocacy often involves working government officials/stakeholders to develop, update, and monitor policies. Policy advocacy uses evidence-based data to prove the importance of an issue and the effectiveness of the proposed solution. In public advocacy, a variety of strategies are used to influence decision-making including social media campaigns, community mobilisation, and lobbying, among others. It focuses on empowering marginalised groups in the society to influence public policies.

4.2.1. Extent to which UNICEF strategies aligned with national priorities and other partners' policies

The UNICEF Malaysia CP was prepared in partnership with the Government of Malaysia and is aligned with the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 and the Twelfth Malaysia Plan 2021-2025 (or 'Twelfth plan'). MCO's decision to do more focused work in Sabah and Sarawak aligns with the Twelfth Plan. Annex 12 maps the CPD alignment to the Twelfth Plan and Vision 2030, to illustrate the key areas of coherence. The Twelfth Plan also emphasised green development to ensure environmental sustainability and transition Malaysia toward its goal of becoming a low carbon economy. In response, the CP included an output focus on climate change and environmental sustainability (Output 1.4), marking a relatively new programming area in the MCO. The Future Skills for All (FS4A) aligns with the digital transformation focus in the Twelfth Plan and related to STEM (science, technology, engineering) and education priority. Nevertheless, it was pointed out by government stakeholders interviewed that the MCO has activity in only one of the eight priority districts identified in the Twelfth Plan.

As highlighted in the context section, UNICEF's work aligns with several national policies and strategies. MCO's contribution to amending and updating laws and policies and strategies demonstrates this coherence. Box 4 provides some examples of MCO's work and support that the government viewed as significantly relevant and valuable.

Box 4. MCO's relevant contributions to policy amendments

- Amendments to the Sexual Offences Against Children Act (2017).
- Amendments to the Evidence of Child Witness Act (2017).
- Technical support in developing the National Child Policy (revised to ensure comprehensiveness with UNICEF support), and accompanying Plan of Action.
- Input to Draft Framework on the Online Safety Bill.

Source: Compiled from documents and KIs by the ET.

UNICEF's mandate is rooted in the commitment to advance the rights of every child, regardless of background, circumstance, or ability, ensuring that no child is left behind. All MCOs work is guided by CRC. However, MCO's work and interventions in addressing the needs of refugee, stateless and undocumented children may not be seen as directly coherent with current national policies and regulatory frameworks, or government, political and public interest. For example, the work on education in alternative/ community learning centres, birth registration and child marriage are not high on the government's agenda, although they may be high on the agenda of NGOs. Regardless, UNICEF strives to protect the most vulnerable and marginalised children by promoting access to education, healthcare, protection, and inclusion in safe, nurturing environments. While the government may not immediately respond or act, as desired by the MCO, government stakeholders valued UNICEF's "alternative perspective" and opinions with regard to these issues, when channelled via the appropriate structures.

As outlined in the 2021 Progress update on UNICEF experience in HIC and in countries transitioning from upper-middle-income to high-income status within the framework of the UNICEF universal agenda for child rights, UNICEF has a role to play in supporting the government to address inequalities faced by refugee, migrant, and minority ethnic children. This is also in light of the UNICEF Goal Area dedicated to child poverty in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

With Malaysia scheduled to appear before the Committee on the Rights of the Child in September 2025 (and a pre-session in February 2025), UNICEF outlined the significance of proposed amendments to the Federal Constitution on children. UNICEF together with UNHCR presented the global and regional trends, and country examples of how statelessness for children is addressed in other countries (Bulgaria, Egypt, Indonesia). In the presentation to politicians, UNICEF and UNHCR shared concerns regarding the proposed amendments, best practices and that 22 countries had made recommendations to Malaysia's citizenship provisions; two to halt regressive amendments, and nine to address statelessness.

Malaysia sits on the Human Rights Council (2022-2024) and UNICEF has emphasised that as a council member, the country has committed to prioritising the rights of vulnerable groups, particularly children, women, the indigenous people, and the elderly. UNICEF is also working on these issues in line with Malaysia assuming chair of ASEAN in 2025. UNICEF formally addressed¹¹¹ the Minister of Home Affairs regarding proposed amendments to the Constitution expressing concern that certain amendments may increase the incidence of childhood statelessness. Thus, UNICEF is striving to keep the issue of statelessness on the policy agenda, despite the unpopularity of the issue.¹¹²

4.2.2. Extent to which CP is linked to and achieves synergies with other UN agency interventions

The CP responds to the 2030 Agenda, leaves no one behind, and is an integral part of UNSDCF 2021-2025. The Malaysia CP is aligned to SDGs 1-5, 13, and 16.¹¹³ Three of the four Strategic Priority Areas (SPA 1, 2 & 4) of the UNSDCF¹¹⁴ involve UNICEF. While the Government of Malaysia has signed UNICEF's CPAP, the UNSDCF has not yet been signed.

Further synergies and linkages are observed through UNICEF's role as lead of the People's Results Group and the Gender and Social Protection subgroups of the UN Country Team. UNICEF also leads the Operations Management Team and Administration and Finance Working Group of the UNCT. It was reported that the UN Migration Group (comprising IOM, ILO, UNICEF, and UNHCR, among others) was formed in 2022. The MCO is involved in the study on undocumented children conducted by UNRC in Sabah and is leading the education sector component of the study.

Evidence highlighted **synergies and linkages with other UN agencies** (UNDP, UNHCR, ILO) and a few of their interventions (refer to Box 5 for examples). Nevertheless, there is **potential to collaborate and synergize more and explore joint programming with UN agencies** (e.g., UNDP, ILO, IOM, UNHCR, UNFPA) and leverage UNRC in advocacy (with unified messages or 'one voice' as relevant). Not tapping into or leveraging the SDG Fund, available globally (UN SDG Fund) and in the country, was seen by some key informants as a missed opportunity.

¹¹¹ UNICEF wrote a letter to the Minister expressing its concern and requesting to a meeting to discuss.

¹¹² The concerns UNICEF highlighted related to amendments included nationality to children born in Malaysia who would otherwise be stateless by removing the route to citizenship by 'operation of the law' and subjecting applicants to citizenship 'by registration only'; removal of right to automatic nationality for foundlings and abandoned children; removal of right to automatic nationality for children of permanent residents of Malaysia; and reducing age limit from 21 to 18 years for stateless child applicants to apply for citizenship.

¹¹³ SDG 1 – No poverty; SDG 2 – Zero hunger; SDG 3 – Good health and well-being; SDG 4 – Quality education; SDG 5 – Gender equality; SDG 13 – Climate action; and SDG 16 – Peace, justice and strong institutions

¹¹⁴ Malaysia UNSDCF Results Framework 2021-2025

Box 5. Examples of UNICEF's linkages with other UN agencies.

- UNDP and UNICEF partner to implement Youth Environment Living Labs (YELL) programme, with financial support from the EU.
- UNICEF supported the Baseline Assessment of the National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights led by UNDP.
- UNICEF provided input to developing the Social Protection Framework and National Poverty Index for Malaysia, both led by UNDP.
- 'Families on the Edge' – a multi-year joint publication by UNICEF and UNFPA¹¹⁵.
- UNICEF supported the National Centre of Excellence for Mental Health (NCEMH) to develop a strategic plan for mental health in collaboration with WHO.
- Together with UNHCR, UNICEF contributed to a joint advocacy brief and high-level input to the government on integrating refugee and undocumented children in national education systems. UNICEF also worked closely with UNHCR on various activities under the EU Migration Programme.

Source: Compiled from documents and KIs by the ET.

Interviews highlighted that although there are global agreements and frameworks exist between UN agencies on working together, they have not fully materialised in Malaysia. However, exceptions were seen in collaboration with ILO (a recent joint project of ILO and UNICEF funded by the EU for Eastern Malaysia) and the global UNICEF-WHO Joint Programme on Mental Health, in which Malaysia actively participated, as one of the two countries from East Asia and Pacific region. UNICEF and UNHCR have a strategic collaborative framework at global level, with detailed joint action plans recommended for each operation. While UNICEF and UNHCR have a technical-level joint workplan in Malaysia for 2024-2025,¹¹⁶ there remains space for further joint implementation with regard to refugee children in Malaysia (although UNHCR's budget has been cut in recent years).

4.2.3. Extent to which partnerships / coordination mechanisms established with key actors to maximise results

MCO has developed “partnerships” at many levels with diverse actors. However, the term “partnership” is loosely defined/ used in MCO and the perception of what constitutes a “partnership” with UNICEF varies. This could be partly attributed to the fact that **MCO does not have a partnership strategy.**

The **key government partners** for implementing the CP in Malaysia are the Ministry of Economy, the MWCFD, and the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Economy signs the CPAP and is the counterpart for MCO. In MCO's CP implementation, the **MWCFD is a critical partner as it is the lead ministry in eight activities and a supporting ministry/ agency in 20 of the total 35 activities of the MYRWP 2023.** The review of documents indicated that MCO works with 13 ministries at the federal level; however, interviews with internal and external stakeholders indicate that the extent of collaboration varies widely.

¹¹⁵ The latest issue 'Living on the Edge' published in 2024 was published only by UNICEF.

¹¹⁶ UNICEF UNHCR Joint Workplan 2024-2025

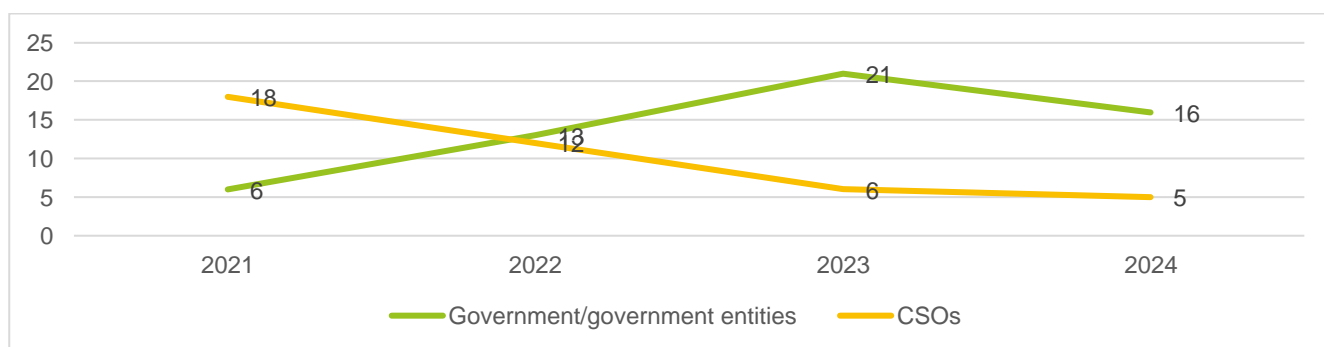
According to discussions and documents, MCO teams work with multiple departments within a ministry (e.g., MWFC, Ministry of Education, MOH), depending on the thematic area of focus, and this facilitates the building of relationships at a technical level. However, discussions with government highlighted that it was always essential to ensure the International Division within a ministry is aware of UNICEF's work (even if it is not currently doing policy advocacy work with the ministry). A consistent communication strategy when working with government partners may be needed (other UN agencies may already have such a strategy). This may help to ensure transparent and effective collaboration, which fosters mutual understanding at all times.

The evaluation noted **more collaborative relations and partnerships at the State Government level** (e.g., Sabah, Sarawak, and Penang). More focused work/ programming in states is recent (as compared to ad hoc events in the past). MCO has collaborated in Sabah State with Environmental Protection Department, Ministry of Community Development and People's Well Being and State Health Department and in Sarawak State with Ministry of Women, Early Childhood and Community Wellbeing Development, Economic Planning Unit, Ministry of Public Health, Housing and Local Development and with seven local councils

The MCO has worked extensively with CSOs as implementing partners in Malaysia and relationships are agreed in a partnership document. Although they collaborate well and perceive UNICEF as valuable in supporting their agenda, some CSOs interviewed in the evaluation considered the relationship to be too 'one-way' and lack meaningful engagement beyond provision of data. Some also felt that UNICEF did not recognise or value the insights and experience that CSOs have through working more closely on the ground.

The evaluation noted that there has been a **shift in the type of implementing partners that UNICEF has been working with since 2021**, with the number of different government entities increasing (Figure 8); this reflects a broader government base and buy-in (intended or not).¹¹⁷ Factual evidence coupled with the strength from advocacy coalitions on child rights, built from trusted partnerships, can help build momentum on children's rights in Malaysia. This was demonstrated when different groups including UNICEF discussed alternatives to detention, and was also the case with law reform.

Figure 8 Trend in the type of implementing partners (2021-2024)



Source: MCO

¹¹⁷ In 2023, four public universities were re-classified as government entities

Partnerships with universities in Malaysia for CP implementation **were seen as a good practice**. Examples of partnerships include Communication for Development (C4D) centres at three universities (UPM, UKM and UMS), evidence-generation studies/research or the development of modules through universities. The MCO, as part of CP implementation, has also collaborated with other research entities (affiliated with ministries) – for example, the Institute for Youth Research (IYRES) and the Institute for Health Behavioural Research (IHBR) on a mental health resolution paper.

Partnerships with the private sector are still evolving and are not significant in programming, although the government considers partnership with the private sector as important. Discussions highlighted the need to work with the private sector on child rights and business (CRB) and the potential to leverage work on mental health. In the case of CRB, it was also pointed out that MCO should look at working through umbrella organisations and industry/sector associations instead of trying to work with one firm. Linkages to ILO in this regard could be encouraged, as they have access to employers' organisations, or chambers of commerce.

In terms of its strategic fit, MCO has demonstrated its leverage when it has added value to an existing government intervention, either by filling a gap or enhancing government efforts. In addition to its successes in policy advocacy work, examples include its involvement in FS4A in DELIMa, Youth Mental Health Index, Child Well-Being Index, and Iskander Malaysia Eco Life Challenge (refer to the discussion in Section 1.3).

4.2.4. Extent to which key programme strategies have contributed to positioning UNICEF in the national development landscape

An analysis of the programming practices in HICs indicated that UNICEF employs four main programming strategies: evidence generation and knowledge management, advocacy for systems/policy change, social and behaviour change, and technical assistance for systems strengthening.¹¹⁸ Policy advocacy, evidence generation and pilots/modelling constitute the three main programming strategies employed in the Malaysia CP.

Perspectives on the strategic positioning of UNICEF in the national development landscape

When linked to advocacy work, evidence generation (e.g., studies/research, briefing notes and benchmarking with other countries) has been instrumental in government amending law/policies/strategies or updating/developing plans. The 2023 and 2022 Country Office Annual Reports confirm that building an evidence base on the situation of children in Malaysia is one of the major contributors and drivers of results. Notable examples include suggesting principles to incorporate into the national strategic plan for children and adolescents on mental health; as well as providing evidence and benchmarking to the Legal Affairs Division, Prime Minister's Department during the amendment of the Sexual Offences against Children Act 2017. There are also several other major actors involved in evidence generation and advocacy work in Malaysia, including the World Bank's Knowledge and Research Hub, which is engaged in advisory services, policy notes, and in-depth reports; the Asian Development Bank, which is involved in education and health sectors; and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPGM),¹¹⁹ which also provides policy advice, conducts research and studies (evidence generation), and projects on the ground.

¹¹⁸ Programming in HICs

¹¹⁹ APPGM has an annual budget of about USD 4 -5 million (<https://appgm-sdq.com/>).

UNICEF-led studies and reports in mental health have become foundational documents for the MOH.¹²⁰ The collaboration to develop the Youth Mental Health Index within the Malaysian Youth Index has also strategically positioned MCO with MOYS. MCO is also strategically positioned with MOH in its nutrition work at the policy level and at the ground level through its pilots. MWFCDC acknowledges that the study on the impact of COVID-19 on child poverty has positioned UNICEF as a priority partner for work on children.

In education, the **MOE sees MCO as a strategic partner, especially in advancing its digital transformation agenda** and in a convening role to bring relevant ministries together to streamline early childhood development.

While the current climate change interventions are small (focused on small and fragmented projects), there is **potential for the MCO to position itself strategically at the policy level in the development of climate change law and/or the National Adaptation Plan** or in ensuring the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)¹²¹ reflects just transitions and rights including children's rights.¹²² The evaluation found no other UN agency in Malaysia is currently involved in these strategic policy-level activities.

Although the MCO is known for its work in **social protection** in Malaysia, the government partnered with UNDP to lead on creating a social protection framework for Malaysia, which may question UNICEF's strategic positioning as a go-to organization for social protection.¹²³ Discussions with government stakeholders highlighted that while UNICEF focuses on social protection for children, from the government's perspective, the focus was on social protection for the entire family.

The UNDP-ICU project initially focused on developing a beneficiary registry database, but later recognised the need for a social protection framework to support the registry. Limitations in translating social protection core principles by the consultants have led to stronger engagement of all UN agencies working on social protection to strengthen the quality of the framework. Since 2023, UNICEF has been strengthening its work in social protection, through a strategy focused on evidence generation, modelling and exposure to best practices. In the area of evidence generation, UNICEF linked urban poverty studies with the need to introduce a child grant and disability grant, and partnered with the University of Malaya to explore the fiscal space available to address these recommendations. On the policy modelling front, UNICEF in collaboration with the KPWK in Sarawak, has developed two models on integrated social protection. Building on this, it is now working on a "cash plus" model for households in public housing in Kuala Lumpur. This has been supported by a 5-million-ringgit allocation from the Ministry of Finance in the October 2024 budget to implement an integrated social protection programme focusing on the first thousand days in geographical areas highlighted in the Living on the Edge study. On exposure to regional and international best practices, UNICEF has invited government counterparts to key events such as regional social protection conferences in Bali and Thailand. UNICEF also recently co-organised a second Social Policy Conference in Kuching with the University of Malaya and KPWK Sarawak, drawing over 250 participants from 14 countries and including several federal ministers.

¹²⁰ A Malaysia Country Report on System Strengthening for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Children and Adolescent in Malaysia (<https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/reports/strengthening-mental-health-psychosocial-support-systems-services>).

¹²¹ NDCs are national climate action plans that countries submit to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat every five years. NDCs are key part of the Paris Agreement (<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/all-about-ndcs>).

¹²² The latter two are Paris Agreement requirements.

¹²³ It was noted that UNDP reached out to UNICEF to get input.

Higher level results

Although not explicitly highlighted as a programme strategy, MCO's systems-strengthening work, for example within local child-rights NGOs, has contributed to **improved social cohesion**, alongside training on reporting to Human Rights bodies, which was organised in collaboration with UNHCR. MCO's work at multiple levels on strengthening and professionalizing social service workforces (SSWs) has also been appreciated by government stakeholders, and it is perceived as a key partner in moving the work forward. Other examples include strengthening the Office of the Children's Commissioner, for which UNICEF is funding a 50 per cent UNV post.

Overall, MCO's key programme strategies contribute to a broader national focus on children in Malaysia in particular due to UNICEF providing evidence and the MCO's advocacy work. Beyond this, Section 1.3 (effectiveness) discusses programme strategies and whether they enable achieving results beyond the sum of the sectoral results of programme sections under the CPD and UNDSCF.

4.2.5. Extent to which internal balancing of programmes, communication and fundraising is optimised

Organizational mechanisms/processes for internal synergies in MCO

Internal synergies are evolving within MCO and KIIs were positive in relation to opportunities for future collaboration. A recent example was found in the preparation of the joint alternative CRC report, involving various MCO teams. The creation of taskforces (geographic and thematic) in MCO are a mechanism that would allow for joint development, planning and implementation of multisectoral projects,¹²⁴ although these are still at a nascent stage.

KIIs highlighted the potential for more cohesive programming instead of fragmented children-related activities, feeling that this would better define UNICEF's role and differentiate it from NGOs working in similar areas. The recent decoupling of SBC from ADAP and grouping of ADAP with the Gender and Disabilities team was perceived by some programme team members as a move in the positive direction for better cohesiveness.

Synergies between programme interventions, communication and fundraising

In terms of fundraising, UNICEF's Malaysia country office has its own private fundraising partnership (PFP) team in addition to the programme, operations, and communication teams; although this team's work is guided by the Private Sector Partnership (PSP) strategy in Geneva rather than by the CPD. An effect of this arrangement is that the annual PSP review takes place in October/November while the CP review takes place in January/February, meaning that the MCO programme team misses out on additional funding requirements (as the excess is given to global programming).¹²⁵ The interaction between the programme team and the PFP team was perceived to be good but lacks synergy, although since 2023, the programme team has been involved in meetings and presentations on key topics (such as climate change programming) with high-net-worth individuals (HNWI).¹²⁶ It was also noted that the programme team has now involved in PFP in its Sarawak task force.

¹²⁴ Currently, it is more about developing a strategy, an action plan, or a results framework and sharing what each one is doing, for example, in Sabah.

¹²⁶ Fund raised from HNWI is less than two per cent. Ninety-eight per cent of the funds raised are from individual giving.

The communications team in MCO works more closely with the PFP team due to the communication requirements for individual giving, although KIIs estimated that the majority of fundraising communication is related to global UNICEF work (including emergencies), primarily due to the lack of local success stories. The programme team highlighted that the gap has been identified, and this has been changing in recent months.¹²⁷ Interactions between the communications team and the different programme section teams are not systematic or regular although there is more interaction with education, nutrition, child protection, youth and climate change teams. The communication team was seen as providing a bridge between the programme team and the PFP team. However, their involvement has tended to be towards the end of the activity/intervention rather than at the planning stage and KIIs indicated that external communication about MCO work is often hindered by the lack of a clear “game plan” – particularly for policy advocacy/legislative work where results are more difficult to communicate.

Contributing and impeding factors for MCO teams to work together to enhance better results for children

The evaluation found that some staff lack buy-in and ownership of the current CP due to a “lack of direction” in those areas that are not guided by clear indicators of progress within the Programme Effectiveness component, including cross-sectoral areas. In the corporate UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025, education, nutrition and social policy are three separate Goal Areas. However, in the CP, they are merged under one Outcome.¹²⁸

While joint planning is being encouraged through taskforces, it has not previously been pursued due to a lack of multisectoral interventions (e.g., in early childhood development) and a lack of strategic rationale. For example, the evaluation noted that grouping of thematic areas was sometimes driven by budget arrangements, such as in the case of mental health and ADAP rather than being driven by a coherent strategy. These organisational groupings unintentionally limit the scope of work that could be done. For instance, mental health is currently an activity solely under ADAP, despite potential for cross-sectoral collaboration with other areas. Similarly, the absence of a full-time gender expert at MCO should not prevent all programmes from integrating a gender lens into their activities.

In some instances, the evaluation also found a lack of coordination between UNICEF staff when working with divisions within the same ministry. Although this may not be feasible with MWFC due to the range of different activities in which they are working with MCO, internal coordination on UNICEF’s side is important to demonstrate that it is a coherent organisation.

The evaluation did find several examples of teams working together in MCO. These included a) results structure facilitated (as in Output 2.1 - enabling environment under ending violence against children in Activity 4). The child protection team collaborated with the social policy team on public finance for child protection system reform and the National Child Policy Plan of Action; and b) organic synergies and/or personal interests/connections, as in the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative team involving ADAP and climate change teams. Furthermore, the M&E team supported the nutrition person in the evaluation of the sugar-sweetened beverage tax evaluation.

¹²⁷ The ET was not provided with any data to confirm this trend.

¹²⁸ Merging Strategic Plan Goal Areas under a particular outcome is a common practice for UNICEF in UMIC and HIC. See Annex 6 for Country Programme Components in a sample of HICs/UMICs.

4.3. Evaluation Criteria 3: Effectiveness

Summary of Key Findings

The CP has made good progress at the output level and is on track to contribute to outcomes. The programming strategies (policy advocacy, evidence generation, and pilots) have contributed to achieving CP objectives in several ways and to varying degrees. Policy advocacy and advice, supported by evidence generation, has been at the core of MCO's work during the period of this CP.

The MCO has contributed to child well-being, equity and ending violence against children. Policy advocacy and advice were key to MCO contributing to changes in national or subnational policies and strategies and national budget allocation. However, the impact of this work is not yet evident on the ground (among affected/vulnerable children). Evidence generation has been appreciated at the government level and, to some extent, at the CSO level; the extent of use beyond the direct partners involved is not explicitly known, as they are not tracked. Also, the utilisation and reach of some studies were not evident. There was potential for MCO to improve its consultations with relevant stakeholders (including the government) while conceptualizing a study or research. More time is required to measure the success of pilots and sustainable scale-up.

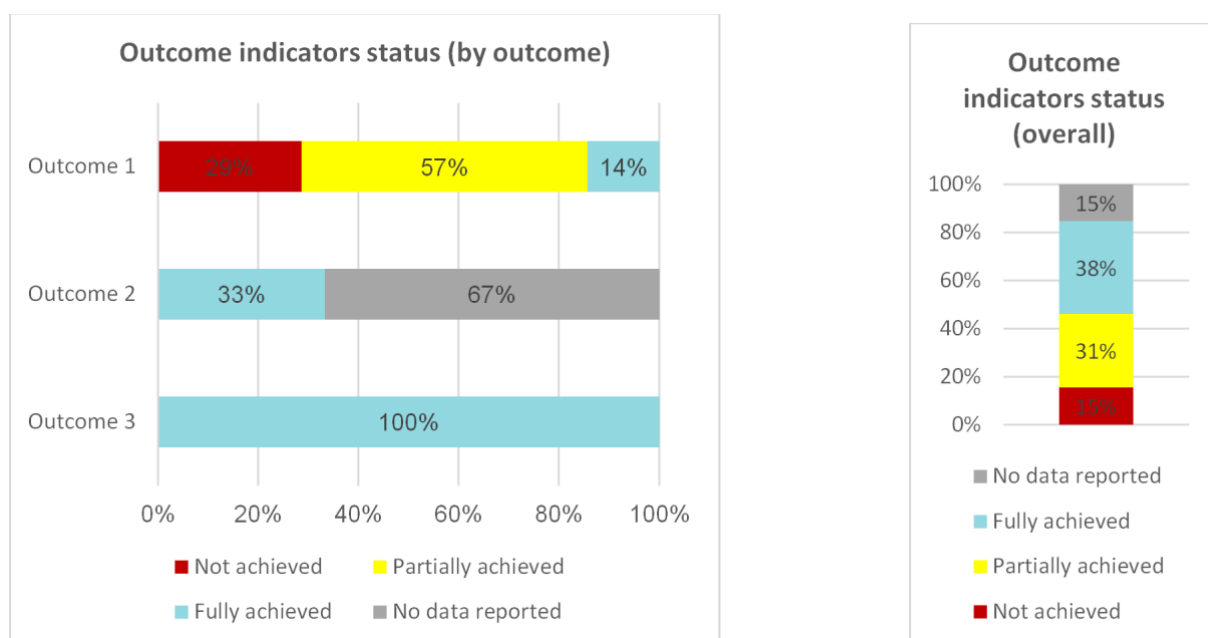
UNICEF has been more effective in achieving results when it gets involved in an existing intervention (of the government or another organization) and adds value. The effectiveness of pilot initiatives is limited without government support. Although UNICEF is exploring new approaches to advancing child rights, all efforts require strategic prioritisation, and resources. While there is some evidence of effective cross-sectoral collaboration across teams, such collaborations are not systematic, institutionalised, or fully operational across all outcome areas.

4.3.1. Achievement of outcomes and outputs

Progress made on CP outcomes

The review of Results Assessment Module (RAM) data/reports until the end of 2023 indicated that the CP was on track to achieve the targets set for the three outcome areas. It was noted that the information in RAM is self-reported. While attempts are made to refer to other available data sources, often it is based on internally available data. This applies to both the indicator actual value and the indicator results assessment (e.g., fully achieved, on track, etc. Figure 9 summarises the CP performance for each outcome and overall, while detailed analysis is provided in annex 9. Overall, the analysis (of the indicators) indicated that for 2022-2023, the CP has fully achieved the targets for 38 per cent of the indicators and partially achieved targets for 31 per cent. However, the CP did not achieve targets for 15 per cent of the indicators and data was unavailable for the other 15 per cent. The source for some of the indicators are the national health and morbidity survey, which is conducted every four years, impacting annual data availability.

Figure 9 Progress on CP outcome indicators (2022-2024)¹²⁹



Source: Compiled from RAM reports by the ET

¹²⁹ Fully achieved – indicator target achieved 100per cent; Partially achieved – indicator target is at least at 50per cent achieved; Not achieved – indicator target achieved is less than 50per cent

Figure 9 presents progress on the indicators by outcomes:

- For Outcome 1 (Child Well-being, Equity, and Inclusion component), the CP has made progress on most of its indicators—it partially achieved 57 per cent and fully achieved the targets on 14 per cent of its indicators and has not achieved 29 per cent of its indicators.
- For Outcome 2 (Ending Violence against Children component), data was unavailable for 67 per cent of the indicators, while it fully achieved the target for 33 per cent.
- For Outcome 3 (Programme Effectiveness component), the CP has fully achieved its targets for 2023 for all its indicators.

With about 69 per cent overall achievement (fully or partially) by the end of 2023, the CP has the potential to achieve its objectives. Nevertheless, the lack of data and low/ no achievement in the remaining indicators could be a bottleneck for the CP in achieving all its objectives by the end of 2025.

Progress made toward achievement of planned CP outputs

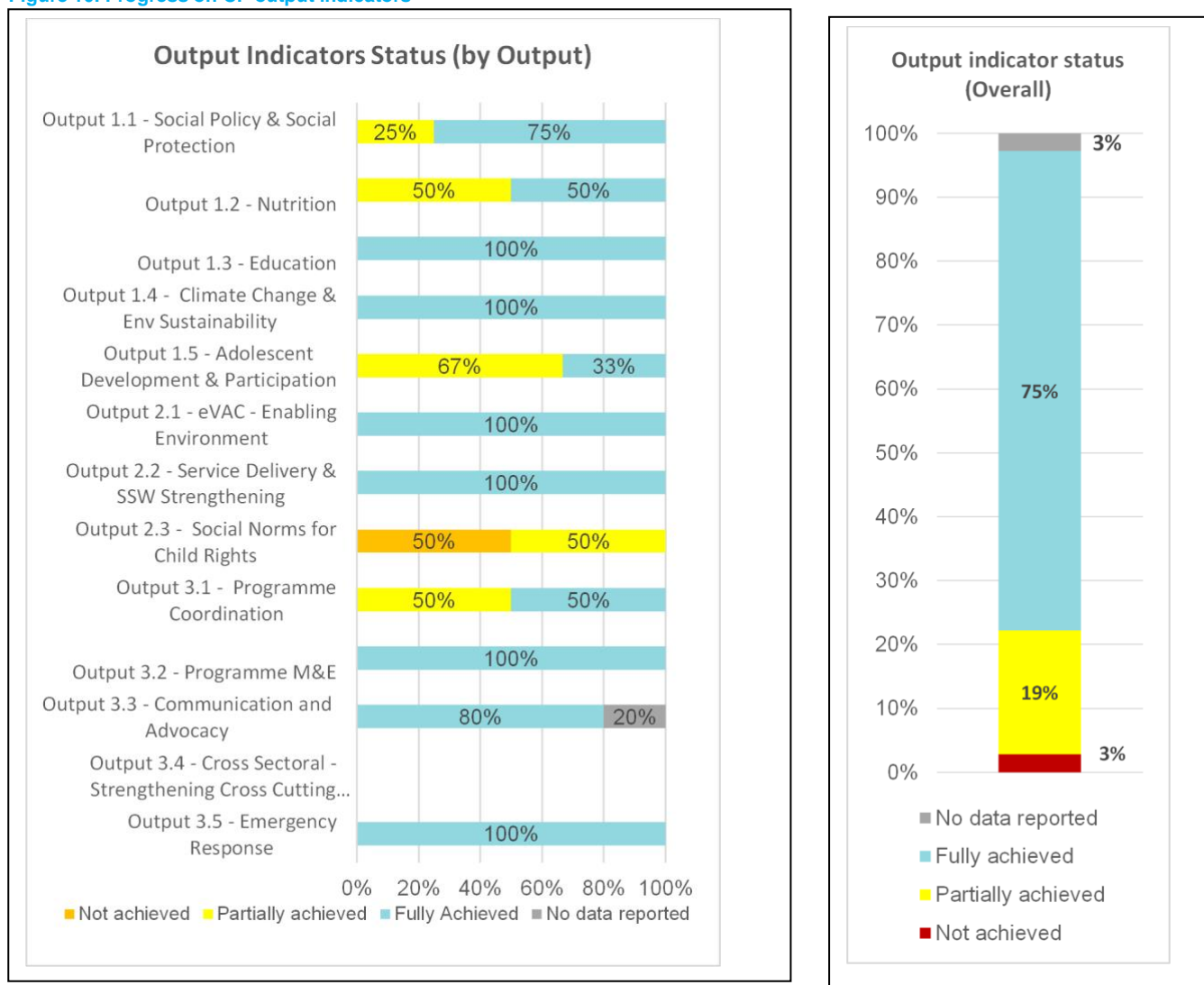
Figure 10 presents a summary analysis of the CP's overall performance at the output level (see annex 9 for details). Analysis of RAM data indicated that 75 per cent of the output indicators targets have been 'fully achieved' for 2022-2023. The CP 'partially achieved' targets for another 19 per cent of indicators. The remaining indicators were either not achieved (3 per cent) or no data has been reported (3 per cent).

Overall, the outputs contribute to the respective outcomes at different levels and to varying degrees. However, the contribution of outputs to the respective outcomes may not be integrated and/or cohesive and therefore may not have the additionality of the sum of outputs to achieve the outcomes.

The CP has 'fully achieved' its targets for 2022-2023 output indicators for education, climate changes and environmental sustainability, enabling environment under EVAC, service delivery and SSW strengthening, programme M&E and emergency response. The targets were 'partially achieved' in the remaining indicators and were rated as 'on track', except for one output indicator reported as 'not achieved'; hence, the output (social norms and child rights) was rated as constrained in the RAM. Data was reported as 'not available' for one indicator. No indicators for cross-sectoral areas are available for the CP, limiting the ability to assess progress and achievements in these areas. It was noted that Core Strategic Indicators (CSI) that are relevant to the respective cross-sectoral area were linked to the outcome/output results structure in the RAM system but not presented in CP results framework. There are no additional indicators added to the output assuming that cross-sectoral elements are integrated into relevant programme component and be reflected in the outcome indicators.

With most outputs indicating ‘full’ or ‘partial’ achievement, the CP is expected to have high levels of achievement in terms of output indicators by the end of 2025. At the outcome level, efforts to get data (in Outcome 2) and a considerable focus on those indicators ‘not achieved’ and ‘partially achieved’ will enable achievement of CP’s objectives. However, availability of national data will be a hindering factor to assess progress. Examples of key achievements and contributions by UNICEF Malaysia are discussed in the following section.

Figure 10. Progress on CP output indicators¹³⁰



Source: Compiled from RAM reports by the ET

¹³⁰ Fully achieved – indicator target achieved 100per cent; Partially achieved – indicator target is at least at 50per cent achieved; Not achieved – indicator target achieved is less than 50per cent.

4.3.2. Key results of the Country Programme

Contribution to Child Wellbeing, Equity and Inclusion

Social Policy

UNICEF Malaysia has been supporting MWFC in finalizing the National Child Policy and developing a costed Plan of Action. The Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) has been a key contribution of UNICEF Malaysia to enhancing child well-being, equity, and inclusion. Petaling Jaya, the first CFCI in both Malaysia and Southeast Asia, has set the stage for further progress (see Box 6 below). Seven city councils in Sarawak¹³¹ have committed (signed an MoU) to becoming child-friendly cities and have established, or are in the process of establishing, child councils. Furthermore, discussions on joining CFCI are ongoing with twenty councils in other states (Sabah, Johor and Penang).

Box 6. Child-Friendly City Initiative – beginnings in Malaysia

The CFCI is a UNICEF-led initiative that supports municipal governments in realising children's rights at the local level, based on the principles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The initiative was launched by UNICEF in 1996 in response to the Habitat II conference, with the goal of making cities and communities more inclusive, safe, and supportive environments for children. It is also a network that brings together government and other stakeholders such as civil society organisations, the private sector, academia, media and children. In Malaysia, several city councils have embarked on this initiative through the support provided by UNICEF. Petaling Jaya is one of the first city councils¹³² to be officially recognized as a CFCI, having signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNICEF in 2020 which first gave them a Candidate City status. This recognition is valid for 24 months, from October 2023 to September 2025. The city will continue to collaborate with UNICEF Malaysia in developing its Plan of Action for the next phase and will set up a child rights monitoring system in 2024.

The CFCI aligns with the SDGs, specifically Goal 11 for Sustainable Cities and Communities, Goal 10 to Reduce Inequalities, and Goal 5 for Gender Equality. With this recognition, Petaling Jaya joins a network of hundreds of Child-Friendly Cities in 40 countries worldwide.

UNICEF Malaysia is also supporting the Sarawak Ministry of Women, Early Childhood and Community Wellbeing Development (KPWK) in developing a Child Wellbeing Index. This initiative, which is currently in the data collection phase, will complement the existing Sarawak Social Wellbeing Index, also a pioneering effort in Malaysia. Additionally, since April 2024, work on a Sabah Child Wellbeing Index has been underway. By November 2024, it too had progressed to the data collection phase.

Discussions with internal and external stakeholders highlighted, that prior to this CP, MCO primarily conducted ad hoc, one-off events in Eastern Malaysia. However, since 2023, there has been a focused strategy to implement interventions in Sabah and Sarawak. UNICEF guided the UNCT in offering technical assistance to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), specifically on addressing gaps in missing data or incomplete SDG indicators. It was identified that 58 out of 85 indicators were unreported or partially reported. Although it was not intended to populate these indicators, the assistance led to an additional eight indicators to become fully reported- an unintended positive outcome.

¹³¹ MBKS, DBKU, Palawan, Miri, Bintulu, SibU and Kota Samaritan councils

¹³² The ET was not able to interview Petaling Jaya City Council to understand the benefits of the CFCI. MCO could not get at an appointment with Petaling Jaya City Council, despite repeated requests.

The Living on the Edge publication and its media promotion has generated a lot of discussion, including leading to the Ministry of Finance indicating USD 1.12 million (5 million ringgit) allocation in its recent budget 2025 speech in October 2024 for social protection intervention in the low-cost flats in Kuala Lumpur (see Box 10). The 2nd Social Regional Policy Forum held in Sarawak attracted 250 participants (including 100 international participants from 14 countries)

Education

Discussions with MOE acknowledged the contributions of UNICEF Malaysia to different facets of their work. MCO's Future Skills for All (FS4A)¹³³ module, which is part of MOE's DELIMa initiative, contributes to developing digital skills for children in schools, aligning with the Twelfth Plan's priorities of digital transformation and STEM education. In 2022, FS4A was adapted to include sign language. Thanks to MCO's continuous work and policy advice, the module was officially adopted by MOE in 2023, making it a ministry programme. Discussions and documents reported that approximately 41,000 students and teachers have benefitted from FS4A¹³⁴ (refer to subsequent discussions on programming strategies).

The evaluation also highlighted UNICEF Malaysia's crucial role in collaborating with MOE and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) to expand the DELIMa platform to children in institutions under the Malaysian Prison Department, enhancing the capacities of 44 teachers from 11 institutions nationwide. The work on inclusive digital transformation and future skills development through DELIMa for mainstream and marginalized children has been recognized as a good practice for South-South-Triangular Cooperation on Transforming Education and Delivering SDG4. As a result, Malaysia has been selected as one of the six Learning Pioneer countries¹³⁵ globally by UNICEF, further establishing UNICEF as a key partner to the government in advancing educational innovations.

Furthermore, discussions underscored that UNICEF Malaysia's support has contributed to early warning systems, enabling MOE to identify children at risk of dropping out of school and provide targeted interventions tailored to their needs. Additionally, the MOE acknowledged UNICEF Malaysia's technical support in the five-year (2016-2020) review of SDG4, and the publication of the MOE report that included key recommendations.¹³⁶

¹³³ Developed with MOE, Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), DiGI Telecommunications and Arus Academy.

¹³⁴ Based on quizzes taken and badges collected – 28,000 students, 3,500 teachers and about 10,000 unknowns. Source of this information is Arus Academy provided during evaluation data collection.

¹³⁵ UNICEF's Learning Pioneers Programme (<https://www.unicef.org/digitaleducation/stories/unicefs-learning-pioneers-programme-shaping-future-learning>)

¹³⁶ MOE and UNICEF (2023). Education 2030 in Malaysia - 5-year National Progress Report of SDG 4.

Nutrition

With Malaysia sporadically lagging behind on several nutrition aspects (e.g., stunting, malnutrition, and obesity) among children, it was appropriate for MCO to contribute on multiple fronts (capacity building, carrying out a pilot intervention and also providing policy advice/ support). Key contributions of MCO in this area, noted by the evaluation from documents and highlighted by external stakeholder include: a) capacity development of 60 nutritionists in behavioural change communication in collaboration with the UNICEF C4D centres and MOH; b) support to MOH's obesity intervention – C-HAT¹³⁷ – which was carried out in 10 states in 49 schools and reached about 2,300 children (1,080 completed the programme).¹³⁸ Although discussions reported c) weight reduction and improvement in mental health as outcomes, the evaluation could not assess the extent of the improvement and/ or the proportion of children with positive outcomes.¹³⁹ Other contributions of MCO included d) ongoing support in drafting a Nutrition Act,¹⁴⁰ and e) technical support to the MOH for strengthening the growth monitoring and promotion programme to improve service delivery, along with procuring anthropometric equipment for distribution to 114 clinics across six states, including 45 in Sabah.¹⁴¹

Additionally, evaluation interviews highlighted that UNICEF, (as part of the MOH technical working committee¹⁴² to address the double burden of malnutrition and reduce sugar intake), contributed to discussions and the development of the National Strategic Plan for Sugar Reduction among the Malaysia Population (2022-2025) and the National Strategic Plan to Combat Double Burden of Malnutrition among Children in Malaysia (2022-2030). The 2022-2023 sugar-sweetened beverage tax evaluation was a contributing factor to these strategy developments.

Mental health

The findings on mental health stressed in UNICEF's Living on the Edge report, (Key Highlight 5 in the report) caused a significant ripple effect. A key contribution of UNICEF Malaysia noted by the evaluation was the support to developing the National Youth Mental Health Index. It was the first of its kind globally and in ASEAN,¹⁴³ and was demand-driven by MOYS. Furthermore, the evidence-generation efforts of MCO contribute to strengthening the MOH's mental health programming. The MCO's involvement in adapting the Helping Adolescents Thrive Tool (HAT) to the Malaysian context was also highlighted during KIIs.

Box 7. National Youth Mental Health Index

MOYS had an existing National Youth Well-Being Index. However, it saw a gap and a need for information on mental health specifically. The Malaysia Youth Mental Health Index (2023) developed in collaboration with NCEMH and IYRES was launched in 2024. MOYS, in consultation with NCEMH, is expected to monitor and update the Index every two years.

¹³⁷ The previous version of the intervention was known as “trim and fit.”

¹³⁸ Neither the C-Hat report nor the intervention outcomes (other than the numbers on participation and completion) were shared with the ET due to “confidentiality” reasons. It was noted that there was an internal presentation on results; however, it was also not shared.

¹³⁹ As reports were not shared

¹⁴⁰ Currently, Malaysia does not have a Nutrition Act but has only a Food Act.

¹⁴¹ MOH selected the clinics.

¹⁴² UNICEF was invited by MOH to be part of the committee.

¹⁴³ MyMHI 2023 (https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/4421/file/UNICEF_MyMHI2023_ENG_Final.pdf).

ADAP

As a cross-sectoral priority, ADAP collaborated on strengthening participation of young people with other sections in MCO interventions (e.g. child protection, social policy, corporate alliance, communications). Through ADAP interventions, UNICEF Malaysia enhanced youth participation (e.g., KitaConnect programme) and leadership (e.g., UNICEF's Young Leaders Programme) for youth participating in the respective CP interventions. For example, MCO supported youth from Young Leaders Programme (YLP) to participate in the development of the National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights (NAPHR). Representatives from the YLP also participated in consultations for the National Budget process in 2022 with the Ministry of Finance (MOF), which was the first time MOF consulted young people, as a result of UNICEF's advocacy. UNICEF also helped young people influence policy on the Youth Mental Health Index, in collaboration with IYRES. Additionally, the communications team involved youth in shaping and pre-testing campaigns on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

UNICEF Malaysia funding is required to sustain or replicate these interventions as part of the "learning journey." Out of the 45 youths selected, only 20 completed the Young Leaders Programme. The planned focus on youth employability was limited to conducting a study, Pathways of Employability, with no evidence that it had been published or further utilised. Also, discussion with programme staff indicated that there was no dedicated staff to carry on the youth employability aspect under ADAP.

Climate change

The evaluation noted that Youth champions,¹⁴⁴ appointed by MCO, advocated for and created awareness on climate action in Malaysia through social media, and each one had their followers. Youth Champions were also involved in policy planning for NRES (providing youth voices) before COP 27 (youth were able to accompany UNICEF staff in visits to the ministry and were briefed before attend the climate change conference). However, the long-term end goal of these appointments was not evident, as when the contracts ended for the Youth Champions, they were neither renewed nor replacements brought in. The Youth Environment Living Labs (YELL), a joint programme with UNDP,¹⁴⁵ has facilitated dialogue between youth and NRES, and has developed a network of partners with a few examples of seed funded projects.¹⁴⁶

Iskander Regional Development Authority (IRDA) has been implementing the Iskander Malaysia Eco-Life Challenge (IMELC) for a decade. It was noted that UNICEF Malaysia's collaboration and funding helped in implementing all aspects of the interventions for two years. IMELC was focused on climate adaptation and mitigation. With UNICEF Malaysia's involvement, IRDA also included DRR, which is an essential value addition. IMELC was implemented in 900 primary schools in Johor¹⁴⁷ with permission from Johor's State Department of Education. Activities and competitions included reducing the use of electricity and water and increasing recycling.¹⁴⁸ It was noted that teachers and students were proud to have UNICEF's logo on their certificates.

¹⁴⁴ They were recruited for one year (five days a month) to be social media influencers. Their contracts have not been renewed, and no new people have been recruited to continue the concept.

¹⁴⁵ The donor funding is through UNDP, and the implementation is done with support from UNICEF.

¹⁴⁶ Youth used the YELL grant to train rangers on biodiversity gaps in the Amanjaya forest reserve Perak state; in the East Coast state a group of students made a booklet documenting how villagers used traditional knowledge to adapt to climate adaptation.

¹⁴⁷ It was noted that IRDA was already implementing IMELC in 900 schools.

¹⁴⁸ It was noted that PTAs and communities supported the children in the competition.

MCO support to SEADPRI-UKM led to the development of disaster risk reduction (DRR) modules for schools. With collaboration with NADMA, NRES and MOE, DRR modules were piloted in two schools (one in Pahang and the other in Sabah).¹⁴⁹ With the MOE planning to implement the module as a formal programme in schools, discussions highlighted that it is being rolled out in 30 primary schools per zone in eastern Malaysia. The roll out in 120 schools is being achieved through collaboration with UNICEF¹⁵⁰, MOE and NADMA. SEADPRI trained State Education Officers, who subsequently trained teachers, who in turn trained students.¹⁵¹ The MOE has approved the curriculum. An unintended outcome was that MOE granted SEADPRI “expert status”, allowing them to provide ongoing support for any future modifications to the modules and appointing them as the designated expert for curriculum changes as needed.

As part of programming in Sabah, MCO collaborated with the Environmental Protection Department to pilot the Air Quality Monitoring (AQUAM) initiative in 5 schools, teaching students about air pollution, including the impact of car idling. Aside from the sensor, all aspects of equipment content creation and website design were handled locally. While some hitches regarding equipment and website are to be ironed out, the intervention is being scaled up in additional schools. The specific methods of student engagement were unclear; however, it was reported that the initiative raised awareness among 550 schoolchildren in Sabah. The evaluation was unable to assess the extent of this awareness-building.

Beyond the interventions (pilots) in climate change, it is important that UNICEF Malaysia proactively scan the policy environment to engage from the outset of an initiative. Under the 2016 Climate Change Paris Agreement, Malaysia is required to submit their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) outlining their commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As Malaysia moves to becoming a low carbon economy, UNICEF could provide the perspective of child rights. Countries are encouraged to develop and implement a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) to mitigate the impacts of climate change, including on different groups. There is potential for UNICEF Malaysia to bring the children’s aspects into both the NDC and NAP under a ‘just transition’ angle. Discussions with external stakeholders highlighted that there are currently no UN agencies involved in this space, and it could be a good opportunity for UNICEF Malaysia to enhance its profile in climate action.

¹⁴⁹ Discussions highlighted that the initial support was only for the development of DRR modules. SEADPRI took it further due to its relationship with NADMA. UNICEF has subsequently supported the training and scaling up.

¹⁵⁰ UNICEF contributed funding and links to MOE, while SEADPRI brought expertise and strong linkage with NADMA and NRES

¹⁵¹ SEADPRI provided support as the training trickled down.

Contribution to Ending Violence Against Children

Evidence indicated that during the CP 2022-2025, UNICEF Malaysia has continued to influence law and policy reform, provide technical advice, advocate, and generate evidence on ending violence against children. Policy advocacy was at the core of the child protection team's work.

Enabling environment

Discussions and documents reviewed highlighted that during the CP period, MCO has made a significant contribution to Malaysia's journey to a more child-friendly justice system. In 2023, the attention generated by the launch of the study *Disrupting Harm in Malaysia: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse* by ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF (2022), and other ongoing advocacy and technical engagement contributed to amendments to two important Acts (i) the Sexual Offences against Children Act and (ii) the Evidence of Child Witness Act. The high-level roundtable on child victims and witnesses, organised by UNICEF Malaysia in 2023 and attended by high-level UK and Malaysian judiciary, led to affirmation and the commitment of all parts of the judiciary in Malaysia to undertake further reform. Additionally, the UNICEF Country Led Evaluation of Child Justice Reform: The Diversion Pilot (2022) provided the basis for the Government of Malaysia to consider extending the diversion pilot in 2024. UNICEF embarked on an assessment of Department of Social Work (DSW) institutions for CICAL which aims to strengthen the capacity of DSW to improve the quality of institutional care for CICAL.

In regard to the inclusion of refugee and migrant children in the national child protection system, UNICEF is working with state authorities, UNHCR and local actors to pilot a stronger and more refugee/migrant-inclusive Social Service Workforce at the sub-national level in Penang. In total, 50 frontline Government and NGO social service workers (14 Male/36 Female) were trained on caring for vulnerable children, focused on refugee and migrant children, and consultations were held to address coordination bottlenecks and expand referral pathways for refugee and migrant children in need of child protection services. UNICEF continued its strategic advocacy to support the government in establishing alternatives to immigration detention (ATD), advocating with the Home Minister for implementing non-custodial, community-based ATD, and initiated discussions on a possible MoU to provide technical support on this and other areas of cooperation on children affected by migration.

With regard to birth registration, despite MCO's efforts (including policy advocacy and evidence generation studies) spanning multiple CPs, the political environment has not been conducive to making progress on this front. In 2023, UNICEF published a comprehensive study on the birth registration of children affected by migration in Peninsular Malaysia¹⁵² to inform MCO's policy dialogue and advocacy work. Other than the study, no progress was made in strengthening birth registration for children affected by migration activity due to political constraints. UNICEF Malaysia has also been focusing on statelessness; this includes technical support to NGOs, direct advocacy with the Government of Malaysia, MPs, and foreign embassies and also through UNCT and the CRC Committee.

¹⁵² UNICEF Malaysia, *For Every Child, an Identity: Challenges in Birth Registration for Children Affected by Migration in Peninsular Malaysia*. Putrajaya, Malaysia, 2023.

In 2023, UNICEF Malaysia was the sole external organization invited to contribute and provide technical assistance to the Government's mid-term review of the National Strategic Plan in Handling the Causes of Child Marriage. This was seen as a recognition of MCO's work in this regard in Malaysia and globally. Additionally, MCO's #SayaSayangSaya social media campaign for young people, on self-love, healthy relationships and prevention of online sexual exploitation and abuse, reached high audience numbers online in early 2023.¹⁵³

Strengthening Social Service Work

After years of persistent advocacy by MCO, which began in 2010, the Social Work Profession Bill is finally approaching a breakthrough (more details included later in Box 8). Following multiple drafts and name changes, the Bill is now nearing its tabling by the MWFC in Parliament, expected in early 2025. The discussions highlighted the success of UNICEF's "Heroes Among Us" public campaign, which drew significant attention to the importance of social work. MCO has adopted a multi-pronged approach to push for the approval of the Social Work Profession Bill (see subsequent discussions). Once enacted, the Bill will establish mandatory licensing and registration for social workers in Malaysia, along with a competency framework to standardise the profession.

A key advocacy achievement was pushing for structural adjustment in MWFC that could lead to increased resources for children. MCO's advocacy was instrumental in upgrading the Children's Unit in MWFC into a Children's Department (JPKK) in 2023.

Protection of children affected by migration

UNICEF Malaysia continued its strategic advocacy to support the government in establishing alternatives to immigration detention (ATD). In response to the government's launch of a "child-friendly" detention centre in September, UNICEF together with local NGOs have advocated to the Home Minister for implementing non-custodial, community-based ATD and initiated discussions on a possible MoU to provide technical support on this and other areas of cooperation for children affected by migration. UNICEF continued to engage with CSOs, policymakers, the diplomatic community and other UN agencies to coordinate advocacy efforts on ATD.

Beyond capacity building, consultations were held to address coordination bottlenecks and expand referral pathways for refugee and migrant children in need of child protection services. In addition, UNICEF Malaysia advanced policy discussions with the government, embassies, and NGOs to strengthen the connections between anti-trafficking and child protection mechanisms, focusing on building inclusive child protection systems, instead of separate and disjointed efforts to respond to child trafficking.

Social norms for children

The evaluation observed that this was only the second year of implementing a dedicated social norms output aimed at ending violence against children (EVAC) – prior to this CPD, there was no such output. Other efforts related to providing technical support to the Government of Malaysia for implementing the National Strategic Plan in Handling the Causes of Child Marriages; and promoting awareness of child online protection. While MCO has contributed, it is challenging to determine the impact of its facilitation on Malaysia's strategy regarding Child Marriage during the CP (although the government acknowledges the value of UNICEF in this regard).

There has been an emphasis on identifying pathways to scale up gender-transformative and disability-inclusive positive parenting programming in collaboration with KEMAS, the National

¹⁵³ The campaign reached close to 500,000 on Instagram, with 3.9 million video views. RAM 2023.

Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN), Parenting for Lifelong Health and the University of Putra Malaysia (UPM). Parenting programming has been identified as a key prevention strategy for EVAC in Malaysia. UNICEF and partners have been working on adapting the existing parenting modules (Naungan Kasih) to incorporate gender-transformative content and approaches as part of a HQ-led gender initiative that is being rolled out in 12 countries. For the first time, parenting modules are being pilot tested with refugees to address violence against children in the Rohingya refugee community. Meanwhile, the National Scaling Consortium continues to explore further opportunities for scaling. In 2023, a pilot started via the KEMAS preschool system, which is a potential entry point for nationwide scaling with a total reach of 200,000 children. After successful advocacy, Naungan Kasih has also been included in the MOH's National Action Plan for Child Health 2030 and potential scaling through public health care settings is being explored. While parenting component has progressed lack of adequate ownership from LPPKN has been a barrier to achieving scale implementation.

Despite several multi-pronged approaches to EVAC, only 34 percent of the perception survey respondents strongly agreed that UNICEF contributed to reducing violence against children; while 51 per cent only mildly agreed.

Working on social norms within a programme cycle to deliver results is a challenge, particularly work on violence against children and harmful practices requires long-term engagement. Changing deep-rooted societal beliefs is inherently gradual. MCO's work in this regard has laid the groundwork, but results may take longer to fully materialize due to cultural complexities.

Cross-sectoral collaborations

While there is some evidence of effective cross-sectoral collaborations across various teams, such collaborations are not systematic and fully operational across outcome areas. In practice, sectoral silos continue, which decelerates integrated support to addressing children's needs and rights. Examples of cross-sectoral collaborations highlighted from internal stakeholder discussions and documents include:

- The child protection team is collaborating with the social policy team on national child policy to ensure that the national child policy incorporates EVAC.
- The CFCI team is involved with climate action, and the ADAP team contributing to CFCI interventions.
- Nutrition and CRB teams are collaborating on shared initiatives.
- Collaboration of various teams with SBC – for example, the child protection team on the violence against children study, the mental health team on the health-seeking behaviour study and the CRB team on the study on child labour on children around the plantation area and their access to services.
- There is collaboration on contributions to both the State Party and NGO reports for the CRC.

A significant structural issue noted is that the MCO lacks matrix reporting or consistent management oversight on collaboration across result areas. The feasibility of having performance indicators for internal collaboration should be explored to ensure multisectoral integrated programmes to demonstrate more holistic results. With no "funding limitation," there is less incentive to work together. Discussions during the evaluation revealed that although taskforces are intended to promote teamwork, brainstorming, planning, and implementing integrated interventions in practice MCO has not reached that stage yet.

Some examples, where more collaboration could have helped MCO include C-HAT (although it was implemented through MOH, the nutrition person collaborating with education person could have ensured better ownership from MOE for scale up, as the intervention is in schools). Another area is the AQUAM project implemented by the climate change team could have tapped in the already existing relationship with MOE through MCO education staff. Mental health was narrowly focused on youth while there is demand for mental health support for children, social workers and could have tapped into respective teams.

Only 21 per cent of the survey respondents perceived that the MCO contributed to a 'significant extent' to promoting multisectoral coordination. On the other hand, 72 per cent of the respondents perceived UNICEF Malaysia contributed to multisectoral coordination 'to some extent' (54 per cent) and 'very little' (18 per cent).

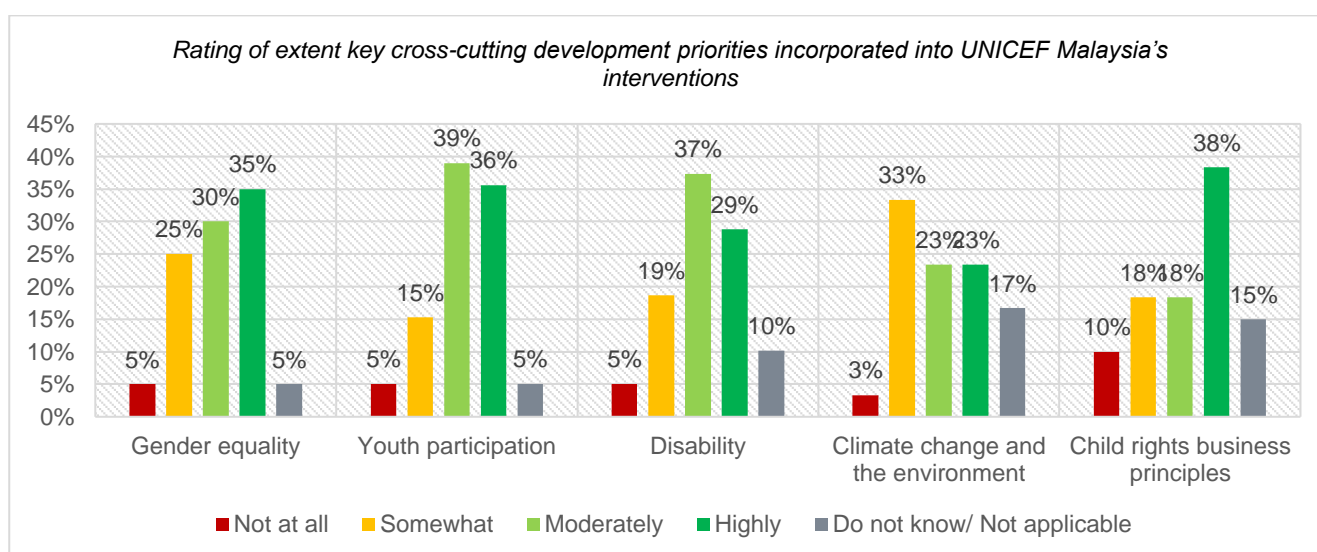
Social Behavioural Change Communications (SBCC) has not been articulated in the current CPD, with no indicator. In addition to working with the communications team on public advocacy and creating public awareness, the SBC/C4D team has collaborated with nutrition, mental health, and CRB teams. Furthermore, a key part of SBC's work has been strengthening the C4D centres (in UKM, UMS and UPM) created during the previous CP. The C4D centres carry out training for government, CSOs and academics, conduct local research, provide advisory support and have been equipped to support the government. For example, the UMS-UNICEF C4D Research Unit has worked closely with the Department of Health in Sabah and Sabah Council of Social Services. At the time of data collection, the C4D team trained by UNICEF expected to sign a letter of intent with the Health Department's Promotion Unit and the Sabah Thalassemia Society to raise awareness about Thalassemia. The unit has also previously provided C4D training on nutrition to the Health Department of Sabah, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Sabah Environmental Education Network and the Sabah Teacher Education Institute. UNICEF funding for C4D centres is expected to stop by the end of the current CP. The parenting programming pilot incorporated SBC and gender transformative approach, which included co-design workshop, and garnered attention from EAPRO on its gender transformative approach.

As noted from KIIs, child rights dialogue with the government can be difficult, and there is a need for UNICEF Malaysia to be creative, which includes South-South collaboration and/or through the ASEAN platform. It was also emphasised that the focus on child rights for business should prioritise industry or sector associations and umbrella bodies rather than individual companies.¹⁵⁴ There was a lack of evidence to suggest that the recommendations from the Evaluation of the Role and Engagement of the Business Sector to Respect and Promote Child Rights in Malaysia have been implemented. For example: strategizing on UNICEF's value-proposition / value addition in business engagements and clarify this better; pilot Business Engagement Actions on selected thematic areas first, and incorporate more explicitly the role of the business sector in needs analysis and theories of change. Additionally, there was a recommendation around clarifying roles and responsibilities for the PFP and communications for sharing information on Business Engagement Actions that are not funding-only engagements.

¹⁵⁴ While the latter would be more suitable for fundraising, working with associations would help broader and more effective reach to manifest child rights.

In terms of the incorporation of **cross-cutting themes in CP interventions**, two-thirds of the perception survey respondents consider **gender** to be incorporated into various CP interventions—to a ‘high extent’ (35 per cent) and a ‘moderate extent’ (30 per cent). The remaining consider it integrated to ‘some extent’ or ‘not at all’. This is consistent with discussions and review of documents. There is a need to institutionalise gender considerations/perspective within MCO, going beyond just participation and disaggregated data. In fact, even disaggregated data reporting in MCO interventions is not consistent. About 75 per cent of the respondents perceive that CP interventions incorporate **youth** participation to a ‘high’ (36 per cent) or ‘moderate’ extent (39 per cent). While 29 per cent perceive that CP interventions integrate **disability** to a ‘great extent’, 37 per cent perceived that it was only to a ‘moderate extent’. Less than 50 per cent of the survey respondents perceive that the CP integrates **climate change and environmental sustainability** to a ‘moderate’ (23 per cent) and/or ‘high’ extent (23 per cent).

Figure 11 Perception Survey: Rating of key cross-cutting priorities incorporation into UNICEF Malaysia’s interventions



Key enabling factors and challenges to achieve CP results

Based on all primary and secondary data analysed, the evaluation noted the following key factors that either facilitated or constrained the achievement of CP results:

Table 7 Key enabling factors and challenges to achieve CP results

Key enabling factors in achieving CP results	Key challenges in achieving CP results
The political stability of the government and a strong civil service has helped in establishing and strengthening relationships with the government at various levels	Limited human resource capacity within constrained MCO in two ways a) approved positions being vacant (e.g., Social Policy).and b) one person teams (e.g., education and nutrition)
Working with the private sector on FS4A (digital skills), and other areas of children’s rights and business principles such as, Children’s Digital Rights and Protection, and advocacy regarding issues related to children on oil palm plantations.	Change of Director and Minister in a particular ministry, hence a new direction (e.g., MOH).
Benchmarking against other countries (e.g., systems, laws, etc).	The government has its own priorities which may hinder pace work to meet UNICEF priorities and timelines.

<p>Alignment of proposed initiative with priorities of the department/ministry and the policy which enhances ownership and uptake.</p>	<p>Some studies conducted by MCO may lack generalisability to the national context and, therefore, have poor/ limited uptake (e.g., the cost of raising children with disability study was initially conducted only in Sabah and Sarawak. MWFCDD did not see the findings of the study as applicable to the rest of Malaysia. Therefore, MCO has now planned to expand the study to the whole of Malaysia)</p> <p>UNICEF's focus on children and youth while MWFCDD's focus is on families.</p>
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Overall challenges and issues to realising targeted change for all children in Malaysia identified by the evaluation include; lack of political willingness/prioritisation of child rights, inadequate laws, policies, and public investment, lack of accessibility of disaggregated data to inform policy, weak mechanisms for adolescent participation, harmful practices and social norms, inadequate coordination among ministries, departments and duty bearers, discrimination against migrants, refugees and stateless and Indigenous people, which also leads to low accessibility/ availability of quality services, adolescent girls affected by child marriage, migrant and vulnerable children subjected to hazardous and exploitative labour (with lack of access to social services) and children bullied in families, communities, in schools and online among others.

The roadblocks of working with social norms are particularly evident when addressing issues like child marriage, and corporal punishment etc. These are sensitive topic and deeply intertwined in cultural, religious and societal beliefs. As such progress shifting these norms cannot be measured in the same way as policy and service delivery outputs. With limited research and studies on social norms, MCO has been making efforts to contribute to this area of knowledge to help design interventions targeted towards specific social behaviour change.

4.3.3. Programming strategies and their success in achieving CP objectives

The programming strategies (policy advocacy, evidence generation and pilots) have contributed to achieving CP objectives in several ways. The extent to which each programming strategy was used by each section (thematic area) varied depending on their plan and interventions to contribute to the CP objectives.

Policy advocacy

Policy advocacy was key to MCO contributing to changes in national or subnational policies and strategies. The CPE noted during discussions that it was not always advocacy alone that made a change; at times, it was more policy advice and technical assistance and other support. Both advocacy and policy advice were backed by evidence generation and not necessarily pilots, and their contributions have placed MCO in a favourable position as the country undergoes the process of graduating into a HIC in the next five years.

Some teams, including education and nutrition, have used a “backdoor” approach to policy advocacy (such as coalition building, strategic framing, or building on existing relationships), while others (such as the child protection team) use a multi-pronged approach: engagement with prominent decision-makers, including the Parliamentary Special Select Committee on Women, Children and Community Development and individual Members of Parliament (MPs), public advocacy campaigns (e.g., Heroes Among Us), advocacy through CSOs and mobilizing support from other-related ministries.

Since 2010, the MCO has been a persistent advocate for the Social Work Profession Bill. It is close to being tabled in Parliament (see Box 8) and is seen as one of the key achievements of this CP.

Box 8. Social Work Profession Bill – the advocacy saga

MCO has supported the Social Work Profession Bill since 2010. Over time, the name of the Bill and the drafts have changed. Changes in Government and priorities also led to delays. The bill was highlighted as pivotal, as Malaysia was lagging behind other countries in the region that have enacted policies and laws to professionalize social work. For example, the Philippines (1965), Singapore (2009), Thailand (2012), and Indonesia (2019). Malaysia's social worker to general population ratio was 1:8,576 in comparison to Singapore (1:3,448) and Australia (1:1,040).

In the current CP, MCO deployed a multi-pronged approach to advocacy. This included work with and through the Malaysian Association for Social Workers (MASW), advocacy workshops, a communication campaign, a publication promoting social workers entitled Heroes Among Us, engaging influencers, TV, media and micro-influencers, public awareness creation with MPs to vote for the Bill, parliamentary advocacy and briefing/press notes to MPs. Furthermore, MCO organised a study trip to the Philippines (the first country in ASEAN to have a law on social work professionalization. The combination of various advocacy efforts of MCO led to an MP giving a press brief about social work and the Bill on the World Social Work Day (March 19, 2024) organised by MWFCF.¹⁵⁵ UNICEF Malaysia continues to work with MWFCF and other champions such as medical social workers, academics teaching social work and MASW to help push this Bill through.

The Bill is expected to be tabled in Parliament by MWFCF in early 2025. The approval of the Social Work Profession Bill would demonstrate Malaysia's commitment to the 2020 Hanoi Declaration and Roadmap, which promotes professionalization across the ASEAN region. The Bill is expected to introduce licensing and registration for social workers, establish a competency framework, and create a formal mechanism for addressing grievances and accountability within the profession.

Sustained advocacy efforts led to structural changes in MWFCF, which could result in greater resources for children. The upgrading of the Children's unit to a Children's Department (JKKK) in the Department of Social Welfare should also lead to the capacity building of more Child Protectors¹⁵⁶ (1,122 new Child Protectors to be trained with new foundational training modules over three years). Additionally, the Department of Social Welfare aims to reduce the ratio of Child Protectors to children from 1:108 to 1:30.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Both, without prompting and direct involvement by UNICEF Malaysia.

¹⁵⁶ The new Child Protectors do not have social work qualifications; hence, the training is critical.

¹⁵⁷ Based on interviews with internal and external stakeholders.

As a result of ongoing advocacy and technical support from UNICEF Malaysia, it was noted that critical amendments were made to the Sexual Offences against Children Act and the Evidence of Child Witness Act. The amendments included allowing for pre-recording of child victim's evidence; restricts inappropriate questioning in court; and extend existing protection in the Evidence of Child Witness Act to all children under 18 (Box 9).

Box 9. Significant changes to the Evidence of Child Witness Act due to MCO advocacy

In 2022, UNICEF Malaysia facilitated a study trip to the United Kingdom (UK) organised by the Parliamentary Special Selection Committee. The purpose was to understand promising practices that could be adopted by Malaysia to improve the effectiveness and child-sensitivity of criminal proceedings involving child victims and witnesses. The participants included members from the Judiciary, Department of Social Welfare, MWFC, SUHAKAM, and Royal Malaysian Police.

Subsequent to the trip to UK, the Parliamentary Special Selection Committee prepared a 5 year Roadmap for Strengthening Support for Child Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System- which was a series of recommendations aimed to improve the effectiveness and child-sensitivity of criminal proceedings involving child victims and witnesses. These recommendations included amending the Evidence of Witness Act to introduce : special hearings as in the UK; empowering judges to prevent improper questioning of the child; increasing the application of the Act to all children below 18.

Subsequent to this, the peer-to-peer exchange between Malaysia and the UK has continued to date with a High-Level Roundtable co-hosted by the Judiciary and UNICEF where UK judges were invited to share their experience on how child victims are supported to give their best evidence to representatives from the judiciary, Attorney General's Chambers, Bar Council and Sabah and Sarawak Law Associations.

This was then followed by the amendments to the Evidence of Child Witness Act which addressed the recommendations in the roadmap.

Discussions during the evaluation highlighted that the law now empowers the judge to prevent improper questioning by counsel. This was seen as a good development.

Evidence indicated that while MCO has been successful in policy advocacy in amending /developing some of the policies, strategies and/or plans of action, the impact of this work (changes in policies, etc.) is not yet evident on the ground (with the affected/vulnerable population). This may be partly due to the brief period since the changes were put in place.

Furthermore, it was noted that MCO co-led and contributed technical expertise during high-level policy dialogues and national consultations for the Transforming Education Summit. The perspectives and voices of school-going children¹⁵⁸ contributed to the global advocacy efforts to ensure every child achieves basic reading and math skills.¹⁵⁹

MCO's advocacy work is largely focused on policy advocacy (discussed above) and to some extent on public advocacy (e.g. "Heroes among us" campaign or using youth as advocates), rather than on private sector campaigning for change. The provision of advice has produced good results and should be the core of MCO's work going forward.

¹⁵⁸ Collected through the U-Report.

¹⁵⁹ Malaysia has low scores in reading and math.

Evidence generation

UNICEF has collaborated with multiple government ministries and agencies on various evidence-generation interventions. Key examples include (not listed in order of significance):

- UNICEF Malaysia supported the review of the Plan of Action on Child Online Protection 2010-2015 and generated evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse as part of a research effort in 13 countries. The MWFCD and MCMC supported the launch of the resulting Disrupting Harm report. The report also positioned UNICEF Malaysia as a thought leader in preventing child abuse and exploitation, evident from the fact that the Legal Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department agreed to subsequent research.
- The mapping of mental health services for children and adolescents in collaboration with MOH strengthened referral and back-referral systems. Furthermore, UNICEF Malaysia collaborated with MOH on a study on contributing factors to psychological distress and health-seeking behaviours among adolescents living in low-cost flats during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- UNICEF Malaysia further extended its flagship Families of the Edge longitudinal study (2020 to 2022) to publish the Living on the Edge study (2023). These studies aimed to understand the impact of the increased cost of living among households living in low-cost flats in Klang Valley and Penang. See Box 10 for evidence on utilisation of this evidence generation.
- Along with MOYS and NCEMH, UNICEF Malaysia produced the Malaysia Youth Mental Health Index.
- With reference to the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, MCO supported the integration of children's rights in the national baseline assessment by engaging child rights stakeholders in civil society to participate in consultations.
- UNICEF Malaysia supported MOH in evaluating the impact of sugar-sweetened beverage taxes in Malaysia to inform decision-making which directly led to the increase of sugar-sweetened beverage tax.
- UNICEF Malaysia supported MWFCD and the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) in reviewing and finalizing social work education and curricula. It also worked with MWFCD and DSW to map the SSW in terms of its role in child protection. The review and the mapping informed MCO's technical assistance to National Child Policy and the development of the SSW-strengthening roadmap.
- MCO continued to generate evidence in its strategic advocacy to support the government in establishing alternatives to immigration detention. Together with MOHA, MCO conducted a mapping study of children in immigration detention centres and trafficking shelters. In addition, MCO facilitated bilateral sharing of experience and learning between Thai and Malaysian government counterparts.
- In evidence generation for MOH, UNICEF Malaysia is supporting the growth monitoring programme for children under five years of age and the subsequent implementation research.

- MCO finalised a comprehensive study on the birth registration of children under five years of age in Peninsular Malaysia among those affected by migration. The study was intended to inform policy dialogue and advocacy.
- MCO supported the country-led evaluation of Malaysia's first diversion pilot – an initiative to prevent children in conflict with the law from adverse effects of the formal judicial system currently available for children in Malaysia. The evaluation provided recommendations for the next steps.
- UNICEF Malaysia used data and evidence to advocate for the most vulnerable children. A critical work in this regard was providing technical assistance to strengthen the mandate of the Office of Children's Commissioner.
- Discussions with MCO highlighted the mapping exercise of women's organisations and organisations providing services. However, during discussions with the government (agencies and departments at the State level) and women's organisations, it was revealed that they were unaware of such a study being undertaken by UNICEF Malaysia. It was concluded that involving organisations on the ground (CSOs), alongside the government, would assist MCO in more effectively identifying relevant and active local organisations.
- The Sarawak Child Wellbeing Index is a work in progress, with data collection underway, and will be the first in Malaysia when completed.
- A Sabah Child Wellbeing Index has also been in development since April 2024, and by November 2024 had also moved into the data collection phase.
- MCO is currently working with the Ministry of Economy and DOSM on a poverty study aimed at determining child poverty rates and institutionalising a measure for it. While the work is still ongoing and the evaluation cannot yet assess the effectiveness of the outputs, this collaboration marks a significant milestone. It is the first time UNICEF has secured an agreement with the government to work on measuring and defining child poverty in Malaysia.

The evaluation noted that some **evidence generation** has been conducted by MCO **at the request of the government**. For example, the comparison of the Social Work laws in countries at the request of the MWFCD and research on 'Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: Children's Journey to Justice' was conducted at the request of the Legal Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department (BHEUU), in response to a suggestion from UNICEF.

Evidence generation was perceived as one of the strengths of MCO. Some well-known evidence pieces include the “Families on the Edge” multi-year research series¹⁶⁰, which was followed by the Living on the Edge report published by UNICEF in May 2024, the “Disrupting Harm in Malaysia” report¹⁶¹ amongst others. Box 10 highlights the Living on the Edge study as a positive example of utilisation of evidence generation in contributing to achievement of CP objectives.

Box 10 Utilisation of Living on the Edge Study

The Living on the Edge study reached over 3 million people through media coverage, and multiple government ministries responded to the findings of the study. This included parliamentary questions to Ministers on plans to address the nutrition issues found in the study. Furthermore, the study was specifically cited by MOF in its Budget 2025 speech of October 2024. In this budget speech, MOF indicated an allocation of USD 1.12 million dollars (5 million ringgit) towards a government pilot project co-funded with UNICEF to address child malnutrition issues in Klang Valley People’s Housing Programme (PPR).¹⁶²

However, this effective utilisation of evidence generation has not always been consistent. While non-confidential evidence-based reports are typically launched with promotional campaigns, the uptake of these documents vary beyond directly involved partners/ CSOs is not always clearly evident. The evaluation found that MCO does not track the downloads or webpage¹⁶³ views, which could aid understanding of their impact. Additionally, some evidence generation reports may “disappear”, or become less visible over time. Examples include the Pathways to Employability report¹⁶⁴ (a study on youth not in employment, education, or training), the presentation/report produced by Special Olympics of Asia Pacific, and the C-HAT report. It was highlighted that the launch of evidence products should not be as “one-off” activities. There is a need for a concrete plan to ensure government uptake, including dissemination and integration into Government plans and programmes, PPP efforts and follow up CP (current/next) interventions.

Innovations (modelling) and pilots

Innovations (modelling) and pilots have been one of the three programming strategies for this CP. The evaluation found that the Strategy of conducting “pilots” has to be revisited. It is not always clear whether the government has reached an agreement on the concept and scaling up prior to launching the pilot. However, MCO may point out that the pilot is being conducted to demonstrate evidence, and moderate the stance of the government, when they do not fully endorse the child rights initiative initially. The evaluation noted that proof of concept does not mean that scale-up or buy-in from the government is given, and a lot of other factors come into play, including cost and the political will of the government.

¹⁶⁰ Jointly commissioned by UNICEF and UNFPA in 2020, with four published issues by May 2021..

¹⁶¹ ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF. (2022). *Disrupting Harm in Malaysia: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse*. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.

¹⁶² Ministry of Finance, *Budget Speech 2025*, 18 October 2024

¹⁶³ <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/research-and-reports>

¹⁶⁴ Khan, A., Wilson, M., Bhatkal, T., Khongkhachan, P., Kartha, A., New, S.S (2023) ‘*Pathways to Employability: Youth not in Education, Employment or Training in Malaysia*’. Kuala Lumpur: UNICEF Malaysia.

Examples of key pilots include:

- The Future Skills for All (FS4A) initiative, approved by MOE and integrated into MOE's DELIMa platform (Box 11).
- C-HAT, a nutrition pilot conducted alongside MOH in 10 states across 49 schools. It reached more than 2,000 students; however, 1,081 completed the programme. Although the project ended in 2023, the report had not been published at the time of this evaluation. For scale-up in schools, the concept is being "sold" to MOE. It requires the buy in, budget allocation and commitment of MOH and MOE for effective, sustainable implementation.
- CFCI, which started in Petaling Jaya and is now in the process of being scaled up in Sarawak (Box 12), Johor, Sabah and Penang.
- KitaConnect is implemented through a CSO. Although effective in inclusive youth participation, replication will require UNICEF's funding. It is currently in its second round of funding from MCO. The end goal is not evident.
- In the KEMAS pilot for parenting, evidence allowed for the government (KEMAS) to commit to scaling-up parenting programmes through KEMAS pre-schools. While this has been agreed in principle, negotiations are underway for commitment of funds for long-term.
- On diversion and probation pilots, the government agreed on the concept prior to the start of the pilot, and it was government-led. The model was developed with various government agencies, including getting cabinet approval before it began. However, the government does not want to commit to scale up until after there is enough evidence to scale up.

Box 11. Future Skills for All (FS4A) – digital skills

FS4A (Future Skills for All) is a collaborative initiative between UNICEF, MDEC, and Celcom Digi, with funding from UNICEF Malaysia and DiGi Telecommunications. SDEC is a local logistics partner and is involved in the digital economy agenda. The programme aims to enhance coding literacy among students (by teaching them programming languages such as HTML, Python, Micro bit and SQL). The module is designed for students in Years 5 and 6 of primary school, as well as the first two to three years of secondary school and is accessible to all students and teachers. To ensure inclusivity, FS4A also caters to schools with limited internet access. Learning kits—including cards, booklets, and pen drives—have been developed to provide offline access to PDF files and videos and are available via Google Drive. These kits can be used in schools when computer labs are occupied, offering flexibility for teachers and students.

In Sarawak, the pilot is being implemented in collaboration with the MOE and the state government, targeting selected schools in both "good access" and "remote" areas. This pilot involves 56 secondary schools in the central district, reaching 78 teachers and 234 students, with each school assigning at least one teacher and three students to participate. It covers all modules of the FS4A. It has also been piloted in 5 ALC schools in Sabah (both offline and online) and in an Indigenous community in Perak (online only).

UNICEF's support has been instrumental in MOE's decision to adopt FS4A as a formal ministry programme.

Box 12. Rolling out of CFCI in Sarawak

The state of Sarawak was convinced about the value of CFCI after a discussion that took place in Putrajaya in April 2022. Following this discussion in July 2022 a CFCI workshop was hosted by the Ministry of Women, Early Childhood & Community Wellbeing Development (KPWK) in Kuching. Three months later, in October 2022, two CFCI MoUs were signed by Kuching South City Council (MBKS) and Miri City Council (MCC). In February 2023, Kuching North City Council (DBKU) came on board by signing a CFCI MoU, and in April of the same year, another MoU was signed with the Padawan Municipal Council (MPP). Subsequently the Sibul Municipal Council, Kota Samarahan Municipal Council and Bintulu Development Authority signed CFCI MoUs as well. To further support the CFCI initiatives in Sarawak the 1st Cohort of CFCI Situation Analysis contract was awarded to the Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak Campus.

The evaluation team's discussions with four municipal councils and the two ministries overseeing the CFCI initiative in Sarawak (the Ministry of Women, Early Childhood & Community Wellbeing Development and the Sarawak Ministry of Public Health, Housing and Local Government) highlighted enthusiasm and interest in the initiative. The working relationship with UNICEF Malaysia on CFCI has been good. The number of city councils in Sarawak that have signed a MoU on CFCI is encouraging. All four city council representatives agreed that CFCI was a useful initiative and added value to the respective city councils' work. They also added that previously, there was some level of engagement with children; however, CFCI provides a proper justification and framework to anchor their efforts. CFCI, as an initiative, is also useful for budget allocation or reallocation to ensure children's engagement, and the relevant cost was factored into planning and not something that took place on a more ad hoc basis.

Some city council representatives also highlighted that the workshops on CFCI organised by UNICEF were an eye-opener that children's engagement was critical in policy planning and infrastructure development at the local community level as it provides the mandate for the inclusion of children.

The evaluation noted that all city councils were in the midst of forming their child councils.¹⁶⁵ Despite buy-in, progress has been slow for several reasons. Firstly, delays in conducting the Situation Analysis, have led some city councils to begin forming child councils without what they perceive as sufficient information and direction. However, MCO was of the view that situation analysis not a requirement to form children's council, and that having a children's council formed in advance of the SitAn is advantageous, so that it can meaningfully participate in the SitAn as well in the plan of action. Meanwhile, the ministries expressed concerns about limited involvement and lack of updates on the study or its preliminary findings, creating the impression that key stakeholders, particularly the government, were not fully engaged in the process by MCO. The programme team, however, contends that the government had not followed UNICEF's guidance. **The above indicates a disconnect between MCO, some city councils, and the government ministries regarding expectations and roles.**

All city councils interviewed highlighted the need for clearer guidance for implementation, noting that their progress could have been more effective if MCO had provided more specific guidelines and reference materials. Some city councils also shared that when they sought further guidance from UNICEF, they were told they were free to plan and design based on their needs and context. **The delayed situation analysis studies and the need for specific rules and examples from UNICEF were seen by city councils as contributing factors in the delayed planning and implementation of CFCI activities.** However, MCO clarified that a handbook, guidance notes, and a locally adapted toolkit were shared with the councils. While some councils made use of these resources, others did not. Some **local council/city council stakeholders interviewed demonstrated limited awareness of existing resources**, such as the Child-Friendly City Initiative Guidance Notes, the Child-friendly Cities and Communities Handbook, Subnational and Local Governance Framework, or the Effective Representative and Inclusive Child Participation

¹⁶⁵ The city councils have solicited the support of schools in their districts and used social media platforms to encourage students to apply to be part of the child council. The Kota Samarahan City Council have also engaged with political centres within the district to reach out to the less fortunate or academically less inclined children to ensure better representation in the child council.

document. Some council members highlighted the need for more localised and customised reference materials. MCO noted that councils had requested a standardized template for Child Council selection criteria and Terms of Reference, which was provided during training. Councils were encouraged to adapt these tools to suit their diverse demographics. MCO further highlighted that not all council representatives interviewed had attended the training, indicating that information may not have been fully transferred to the relevant focal points at the council level.

Another challenge noted was in getting the participation and support of other ministries/agencies to join the CFCI subcommittees. The ministries are reluctant to join the initiative due to the lack of proper guidelines and necessary mandates. The councils felt that UNICEF could play a better role in coordination across the ministries to improve effectiveness. **It was noted that the lack of interagency and interministerial coordination would limit the effectiveness of CFCI and its ability to be sustained in the long run.** Funding remains unclear as CFCI sits between The Ministry of Women, Early Childhood & Community Wellbeing Development and The Sarawak Ministry of Public Health, Housing and Local Government and how funding will be channelled for CFCI.

CFCI has made good inroads in promoting and institutionalizing child rights, especially in the state of Sarawak with the signing of seven subsequent MoUs after Petaling Jaya and the expression of interest by local councils in other states. It is, therefore, paramount for UNICEF to continue providing the necessary support requested by the local councils to ensure that CFCI is a true success.

Alongside the examples above, the evaluation noted that the MCO has other pilots which are just starting, or likely to be launched in 2025. Baseline information was noted in some pilot interventions – for example in CHAT information on BMI, weight and height of children participating and in AQUAM on air pollution level at each school.

Perception by different categories of stakeholders on programming strategies

Fifty per cent or more of the survey respondents only perceived that UNICEF in Malaysia contributed to 'some extent' to policy advocacy/advice and legislative support, institutional and technical capacity development, innovations (new approaches and solutions), evidence and knowledge generation, and social behavioural change. Except for policy advocacy/ advice (32 per cent), less than 30 per cent of respondents perceived that UNICEF Malaysia contributed 'significantly' to evidence and knowledge generation, institutional and technical capacity, innovations and social behavioural change communication.

Despite several examples of successful policy and legislative support, the perception of partners is not as high. This is probably because as indicated earlier, the policy support and institutional strengthening is targeted to a specific Ministry or institution and may not be known by others. Also, some evidence generation activities are specific to development or updating a policy/strategy and may not be known outside unless there has been social media campaign. As noted earlier, some evidence generated are kept confidential. Furthermore, documents published in MCO website/launched through social media are not always in Malay. Also, as mentioned earlier, there are other organisations that are in the space involved in knowledge/evidence generation and policy advocacy. While policy advocacy and technical support is done directly by UNICEF with the government, the studies and interventions are conducted by others and hence partners know the organisation that conducted the study or implemented the intervention. Therefore, the sub-optimal results could be due to a combination of factors as mentioned above. Programme team working with the communication from the concept stage instead of only at the end to do the communication/promotion could also help creating better awareness of MCO's work.

UNICEF has been more effective in achieving results when it gets involved in an existing intervention (of the government or another organization) and adds value. Examples include:

- FS4A modules integrated into already existing MOE's DELIMa platform.
- DRR modules are included in IRDA's existing IMELC initiative, covering 900 primary schools in Johor State.
- Youth Mental Health Index as a supplement to the Malaysia Youth Index.
- Child Wellbeing Index as a complement to the Sarawak Wellbeing Index.
- The five AQUAM schools were already part of Sabah Environmental Protection Department's "Environmental-Friendly Schools" initiative.

As a UN agency, the convening power of UNICEF Malaysia is regarded as a key comparative advantage. However, opinions vary on MCO's ability to bring together diverse partners.

UNICEF Malaysia is well-positioned to convene partner organisations together with the government. It is able to also bring different ministries together. However, while all stakeholders acknowledge the ability of MCO to convene; some mentioned that there is scope to improve. It was pointed out that MCO should expand its partnership beyond the existing pool ("comfort zone") as there is a perception that UNICEF Malaysia tends to partner with some CSOs who have existing connections to the government and/ or staff. Furthermore, CSOs/NGOs highlighted the need for equitable partnerships. They emphasised that the MCO, as a facilitator, should create spaces for CSOs/ NGOs to interact with the government directly, rather than going through UNICEF. Some CSOs/NGOs suggested "that MCO should not be the gatekeeper" in these interactions.

4.3.4. Benefits to different groups, particularly vulnerable children

Much of UNICEF's policy advocacy work, contributing to amendments to laws and the development/ updating of strategies and plans of action, will eventually benefit children, particularly vulnerable children. However, this requires the allocation of a national/ subnational budget for implementing the updated policies and plans. Thus, the direct effect of benefits was not evident during this evaluation.

The MCO partnered with MOHA to expand the FS4A platform to children in institutions under Malaysian Prison Department. The materials developed in sign language helped hearing-impaired children. The offline kits of FS4A helped reach children in remote areas with connectivity issues and it helped reach indigenous children. FS4A piloted in five Alternative Learning Centres benefitted undocumented and stateless children attending these selected centres. While MCO has supported children with hearing impairment (sensory disability), efforts to support children with special needs and learning disabilities in Malaysia (especially in schools) was not evident.

The MCO has recently partnered with HOST International to provide case management services for at-risk refugee children and strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms in Rohingya and Myanmar refugee communities in Peninsular Malaysia, with a focus on Penang. This initiative is still in its early stages, making it difficult to assess its benefits for refugee children in the area. MCO is also working closely with the government and several CSOs to support the establishment of alternatives to detention centres for children in immigration detention, and this work takes more than one programme cycle.

UNICEF has consciously included children affected by migration (refugee, migrant, stateless and other undocumented children) in implementation of the CP, but there was a lack of evidence to suggest this translated to significant wider results beyond benefits to the participants in the interventions. One such example is the Youth on the Move Fellowship (as previously discussed in section 0). MCO and the refugee youth fellow benefitted mutually from the small-scale initiative; however, it has not translated to wider benefits to youth and children with similar lived experience.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, MCO was not able to carry out work on strengthening alternative care for children living in residential care in Malaysia, due to lack of capacity.

Survey results indicated that 34 per cent of the respondents 'strongly agree' that children, especially vulnerable children, have benefitted from MCO interventions. However, nearly half of the respondents (49 per cent) 'mildly agree' that these interventions have been beneficial for children. Additionally, when asked their views on whether UNICEF's support in Malaysia contributes to better recognition of children's rights in the country, 44 per cent "strongly agreed" and 46 per cent "mildly agreed". Some respondents pointed out the inadequate knowledge of child rights at the community level. Despite the MCO's efforts recognised, many noted that these initiatives have not been sufficient to effectively address the needs of the most vulnerable children in Malaysia, such as Indigenous and refugee or stateless children. Those involved with UNICEF in advocating for systemic change to enhance the recognition of child rights feel that it is premature to expect concrete outcomes.

Several factors impact the success of MCO interventions in this regard. First, policy work often fails to translate into tangible outcomes at the local level, in the short and medium-term, until national or subnational budgets are allocated for implementation. Additionally, while MCO interventions align with international conventions, they may not resonate with the prevailing political and public discourse in Malaysia. Furthermore, many pilot activities are small in scale and may lack adequate government buy-in or ownership, hindering their effectiveness and sustainability. Systems strengthening will need continued long-term support to have a systemic impact, especially for challenging issues where there is less political will.

4.3.5. Depth and thoroughness of situation analysis, evaluations, research and studies

The MCO conducts situation analysis for various interventions, to lay the foundation of programme interventions. However, delays (or prolonged durations) to conduct a situation analysis at the intervention level affects implementation (e.g., CFCI). At the CP level, the MCO is guided by the CCA that is conducted by all UN agencies in the country. Stakeholder perceptions regarding the depth and thoroughness of the studies, evaluations, and research may vary depending on the sector and stakeholder category (national or subnational government, CSO/ NGO, academia, or private sector).

In terms of **evaluations**, as part of this CP, MCO provided technical and financial support to MOH to evaluate the impact of the sugar-sweetened beverage tax. The policy recommendations from the evaluation supported government actions. MCO also supported the evaluation of the government led diversion pilot. Both these evaluations were reported to be **country-led and found to be useful**.

¹⁶⁶ This is UNICEF's first-ever global pilot programme for youth on the move, launched in 2022. It marks a significant step in breaking internal barriers for refugee and migrant youth. UNICEF Malaysia participated for the first time in 2023 by hosting a refugee youth, a notable move towards inclusion. As a 6-month pilot, it hasn't yet translated into broader benefits in Malaysia. However, UNICEF has expanded this initiative by launching a Youth on the Move UNV programme globally. Recognition should be given to these important milestones.

Through KIs and survey results, the evaluation found that in general, the government appreciated the **research and studies** conducted during this CP and considered them relevant, some more than others. The government viewed it as important that MCOs discuss and reach a consensus on the research scope and objectives, especially for evidence generation. The discrepancy in DOSM and UNICEF research data (in some studies) was another issue raised by the government. The potential of UNICEF Malaysia to conduct coordinated research (in some cases) involving all relevant ministries and between state and federal government agencies was highlighted, instead of the current siloed approach of working with one ministry or department. A collaborative approach could be practical and ensure a holistic approach to an issue and could be used nationally, instead of only in a particular area (issue of not consulting with government). There are early signs of UNICEF addressing this feedback through MCO's collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and DOSM on a national child poverty study. Although the work is still ongoing and the evaluation cannot comment on the results of the activity, UNICEF have co-developed the study's terms of reference with the government and established a technical and steering committee led by the Ministry of Economy.

Furthermore, as highlighted previously, the utilisation of some unpublished studies was not evident (e.g., the Pathway to Employability report, the report by the Special Olympics of Asia Pacific, and the C-Hat report).

Through KIs and survey results, the evaluation found that CSOs view evidence generation as technical papers ("good for academics"). However, they appreciate the summaries with key points. Some external stakeholders viewed studies conducted by MCO as taking a long time, and context and relevance may not be the same as when the study was envisaged. Not translating into the Malay Language could be an issue for some UNICEF Malaysia reports regarding accessibility and availability of information.

MCO contribution to Malaysia's SDG progress

MCO's various interventions under the current CP are aligned and contribute to SDGs. However, MCO reports (RAM reports, COARs and Extended Mid-Year Review) do not address/report explicitly on the contribution to respective SDGs and/or how each area has helped Malaysia progress on its SDG targets, The CPE, reviewed of the progress status of SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing) and 4 (quality education) in Malaysia.

A review of Malaysia's performance SDG 4 (quality education) indicated that the country has made great progress in attaining full literacy and ensuring teachers in schools have minimum qualifications. Despite the great success Malaysia has made in certain SDG indicators, at the Goal level, the country has significant challenges to meet SDG target for this Goal. Mathematical proficiency for lower secondary school remains a concern. Also, much improvement would be needed to strengthen ICT competencies in youth and many states need more push to achieve SDG targets for reading proficiency at the secondary level. Access to computers vary across Malaysia states with greater need for Sabah and Sarawak states.¹⁶⁷ While MCO is contributing to improving digital skill through its work in DELIMa/FS4A, other concerns remain for the achievement of SDG 4, and they are not the focus of the current CP interventions. MCO also supported MOE in preparing the SDG 4 progress report for the period 2016-2020.

167 Jeffrey Sachs Center (Sunway University). SDG for Malaysian states (2022). Available at: <https://sdg-for-malaysian-states-sdsn.hub.arcgis.com/pages/sdg-4-quality-education>

In terms of SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), Malaysia has significant challenges to achieve the SDG targets by 2030. All states and territories in Peninsular Malaysia and Eastern Malaysian states (Sabah and Sarawak) face major challenges for this Goal.¹⁶⁸ UNICEF data for Malaysia indicates slow or weak progress in terms prevalence of stunting, wasting and overweight among children under 5. For example, in 2022, the prevalence of stunting among children under 5 was 22 per cent.¹⁶⁹ While MCO's C-HAT pilot was addressing these issues, the pilot (reached about 2 000 children) has yet to be scaled up to help Malaysia move the needle on SDG progress.

The UNICEF data also indicates that eight per cent of the children live below national poverty line in Malaysia (2019 data).¹⁷⁰ While the allocation of USD 1.12 million (5 million ringgit) indicated in the recent Budget 2025 speech (due to MCO effort and evidence generation) will help children living in the low-cost flats in Kuala Lumpur, there is no clear plan how MCO would support/facilitate Malaysia reduce the children living in poverty across the country by 2030. Annex 14 presents UNICEF's benchmarking of Malaysia's standing in relation to global benchmarks, vis-a-vis Eastern and South-eastern Asia and other UMICs, and highlights where the country aims to be on these benchmarks by 2030.

4.3.6. Contribution to changes in or implementation of policies, strategies, and regulatory frameworks

During this CP, UNICEF Malaysia has contributed to changes in or implementation of national/subnational policies, strategies, regulatory frameworks, tools and processes to expand access for children in Malaysia, including the most vulnerable. Examples include:

- Amendments to the Sexual Offences Against Act and Evidence of Child Witness Act.
- Technical support in developing the new National Child Policy and associated Action Plan, a priority of MWFCDC.
- Support establishing an evidence-based, comprehensive reform and assistance with the pending Social Work Profession Bill.
- Strengthening of the Office of the Children's Commissioner.
- Upgrading the Children's Unit into a Children's Department in MWFCDC.
- Developing the State Nutrition Plan for Sarawak.
- Contributed to the development of strategic plans for reduction in sugar consumption among the population of Malaysia (2022-2025) and combating the brewer of malnutrition among children in Malaysia (2022-2030).

Evidence indicated that MCO, through CP intervention, has contributed to tools and processes to expand access for children in Malaysia, including the most vulnerable. Examples include:

- FS4A enabled access to children in schools. The module was modified for hearing-impaired students. Additionally, it was introduced in five Alternative Learning Centres (ALCs) and expanded the platform's reach for children in institutions under the Malaysian Prison Department.
- Adapting the THRIVE WHO-UNICEF tool teachers' guide to the Malaysian context and introducing it in teachers' training institutes.
- Development and introduction of DRR modules in primary schools (MOE adopted).
- Training modules for the new Child Protectors.

168 Jeffrey Sachs Center (Sunway University). SDG for Malaysian states (2022). Available at <https://sdg-for-malaysian-states-sdsn.hub.arcgis.com/pages/sdg-3-good-health-wellbeing>

169 UNICEF Sustainable Development Goals Data: Malaysia. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/sdgs/country/mys/>

170 UNICEF Sustainable Development Goals Data: Malaysia. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/sdgs/country/mys/>

4.4. Evaluation Criteria 4: Efficiency

Summary of Key Findings

Making strategic decisions about the MCOs efforts, and the prioritisation of focus areas for the most impact has been evolving, but there is still room for improvement to become even more tactical and streamlined. The MCO tends to produce several internal strategies under the CP, which can cause lack of focus on the overall CP or micro-focus on specific areas amongst staff (and partners). This is an area that could be revisited to consider and ensure all understand and are implementing a unified strategy, ensuring all activities align and contribute to the same outcome, whilst supporting the overall strategy.

The MCO's preferred single (direct) sourcing of implementing partners (CSOs) instead of open sourcing may not be good value for money, and also results in the MCO working with a limited number of CSOs.

Utilisation of funds is high against (almost 100 per cent) allocation but the actual spending is at 65 per cent vis-à-vis the overall CP budget.. Allocations to the CP have shown an increasing trend year over year. The MCO team has grown by 24 percent since 2021, and the number of consultants has been reduced.

Planning activities seem to be prioritised more in the MCO compared to monitoring and tracking indicators. The MCO depends on annual reports to understand progress/achievements in the CP implementation. There is no other periodic systematic monitoring and/or reporting unless a review or a retreat take place.¹⁷¹ Implementation partners' reports are more linked to tranche release than results reporting. Disaggregated data, although discussed in the MCO, is not reported consistently across MCO interventions. This is often, but not exclusively, due to a lack of government disaggregated data.

¹⁷¹ This could be either due to lack/inadequate disaggregated government data (census, surveys or administrative data or likely that MCO may not be taking advantage of all available data.

4.4.1. Prioritisation and strategic adjustments

Prioritisation in MCO

The turnover of top management in the MCO during the initial period of the CP led to multiple revisions to the CPD with each change. Furthermore, strategic adjustments and prioritisation were necessary in 2022 following the general elections and changes in government in Malaysia. With a stable government and steady top management in the MCO (Country Representative and Deputy Representative—Programmes) since 2023, the MCO has been able to focus on prioritisation more strategically. It was reported that "prioritisation exercises" have become more systematic compared to previous practices and continue to evolve. One such prioritisation exercise took place in February 2022, primarily to support the development of the Workplan. Another followed during the extended mid-year review in August 2023. However, this remains an area with room for further improvement.

The evaluation noted from discussions that in addition to regular programme meetings, there are planned and ad-hoc bilateral meetings between the Deputy Representative (Programmes), and thematic leads and geographic/cross-sectoral thematic task teams. Also, it was reported that the programme planning and review retreat¹⁷² helped identify key programme priorities and synergies. However, the extent to which this is practiced and monitored is unclear. The retreat also provided an occasion for Programme, Communication and PFP teams to explore working collaboratively.

The annual review meeting¹⁷³ with the government gave MCO an opportunity to share achievements and plans and potentially identify opportunities to strengthen partnerships and align with priorities.

The development of the "Vulnerable Children Strategy" (Planning Framework and Strategies for Addressing the Rights of Vulnerable Children in Malaysia, published internally in November 2023) was highlighted; however, this was in addition to creating geographic and thematic task forces, which have, in turn, produced strategies. It was not evident explicitly how the "Vulnerable Strategy" is monitored in a structured or systematic way. MCO should revisit the practice of producing several (internal) strategies under the CP. The MCO requires specific action plans (that could be monitored) that contribute to achieving CP results instead of multiple strategies. It could lead to micro-focus and dilution of efforts rather than looking at the big picture to ensure a strategic fit of the MCO in Malaysia, a country working towards graduating into a HIC. The above indicated that the MCO planning tends to be more internally focused than strategic. This also leads to the need to refine the prioritisation process and mechanism in the MCO further.

The evaluation noted the presence of the Research and Evaluation Committee (REC)¹⁷⁴ in MCO to review and strategically identify priorities for evidence-generation activities for the year. Although the REC is expected to meet every quarter, other "priorities" have not enabled it to meet in the same frequency.

¹⁷² The ET was informed by MCO that this programme planning retreat is held during the first quarter of each year.

¹⁷³ At the time of writing, only one annual review meeting had been held in December 2023. The reason cited for this was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on previous years.

¹⁷⁴ Established in October 2022, with two updated SOPs in April 2023 and July 2024 .

Cost-efficiency

The evaluation noted in general, none of the partners had issues with the amount of funding received from MCO to conduct studies, research and/or implement interventions. Contrary to the UNICEF guidelines for open-source contracting, MCO preferred a single-source method to contract to implement partners. It was highlighted that it might not be the most value-for-money option. The cost of evidence-generation activities ranged from USD 20,000 to USD 300,000, depending on the scope of the study/research.

A comparative analysis was not always feasible; however, after a deep dive into one intervention, it was noted that the cost of skill building per participant was USD 3,000. Looking at the content and discussions with different stakeholders suggested that the participants could have had better options/value for money in Malaysia for the same cost (if the money had been given to them).¹⁷⁵ Private sector collaboration and leveraging of funds is not explicit in UNICEF Malaysia. Leveraging with government is evident and could be in kind also; however, no numbers were shared with the ET.

Timeliness of interventions

The evaluation observed that with a **more stable environment internally and externally, the pace of implementation is gaining momentum**. It was noted that programme teams currently experience less pressure and accountability to meet delivery timelines, compared to situations of traditional donor funding, which typically includes strict timeline requirements. As previously mentioned in the report, 98 per cent of the fund raised locally is from individual donations. Some external stakeholders have expressed concerns regarding delays and the lengthy duration required to conduct studies and research. At the same time, flexible funding allows MCO to engage in multi-year research projects. Conversely, CSOs highlighted that they faced difficulties in meeting timeline pressures and expectations for their activities from UNICEF Malaysia.

Government stakeholders indicated the need for MCO to explore the possibility of aligning financial procedures and payment tranches with government cycles to avoid delays in implementation. Also, in terms of scaling up, aligning to budget cycles is critical to ensure the government budget is allocated to ensure the continuity and rollout of the activities.

¹⁷⁵ This does not include boarding costs. This is cost of study/tuition fee.

4.4.2. Human and financial resources and monitoring

Budget utilisation

Budget utilisation is high relative to allocation, but the actual spending is at 65 per cent compared to the overall CP budget. Financial resources have not posed an issue for MCO. For this evaluation, the analysis examined utilisation vis-à-vis year-to-year allocations and the planned overall CP budget. MCO defined utilisation as the sum of commitments¹⁷⁶ and actual spending. A review of financial data reveals **a positive trend in allocations¹⁷⁷ to the country programme**, which increased from USD 4.49 million in 2022, to USD 7.63 million in 2023, to USD 11.76 million in 2024—an overall increase of **162 per cent increase vis-a-vis 2022**.¹⁷⁸ Annual allocations include commitments from the previous year carried forward, unspent in previous year and new allocations for the year and net of any adjustments.¹⁷⁹

The programme has absorbed allocations efficiently and effectively, as seen from an almost 100 per cent execution rate¹⁸⁰ (99.96 per cent for 2022, 99.56 per cent for 2023, and 74.95 per cent for nine months in 2024). The analysis indicated that commitments¹⁸¹ account for about 25 per cent of the utilisation and is carried forward into the following year each year (see Annex 10 for presentation of analysis). In addition to the carried forward due to multi-year contracts, MCO also has a practice of parking of funds as “fund reservations” for partnerships with government and CSOs.

However, with 15 months remaining, the **cumulative utilisation stands at only 65 per cent vis-à-vis the overall planned budget for the CP** (Figure 12) including commitments. MCO will need to meet the remaining planned budget (35 per cent) in the next 15 months. Although, MCO has the flexibility to carry over funds into the next CP cycle, as there is less donor pressure and accountability to spend funds and deliver results within a certain period.

Further analysis by component indicated that **Components 1 and 2 utilisation is only 53 and 52 per cent** (as of September 2024) when compared to the planned CP budget, respectively. However, the utilisation of the programme effectiveness component is at 89 per cent, and this boosts the overall utilisation picture of MCO against the planned CP budget. At the output level (see Figure 13), EVAC – Service Delivery and SSW Strengthening (2.2) has the highest utilisation (83 per cent). In contrast, education (1.3), social norms for child rights (2.3) and emergency response (3.5) have the lowest utilisation (28 per cent, 22 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively) vis-à-vis planned CP budget. With everything that cannot fit into Outcomes 1 or 2 put in Programme Effectiveness, utilisation on strengthening cross-cutting strategies is at 93 per cent. **Overall, the pace of spending/ utilisation needs to increase significantly, otherwise there will be a huge unspent carryover into next CPD (in addition to commitments).**

¹⁷⁶ Commitment could be longer-term contracts or funds locked in fund reservation through the duration of partnership with implementing partners (e.g., Government or CSOs).

¹⁷⁷ Allocation = committed in the previous year and carried forward + new allotment.

¹⁷⁸ This is also partly due to commitments carried forward and unspent of previous year. This includes carry forward plus fresh(new for the year) allocations – 2022 – USD 2.44 million, 2023 – USD 5.10 million and 2024 – USD 7.40 million)

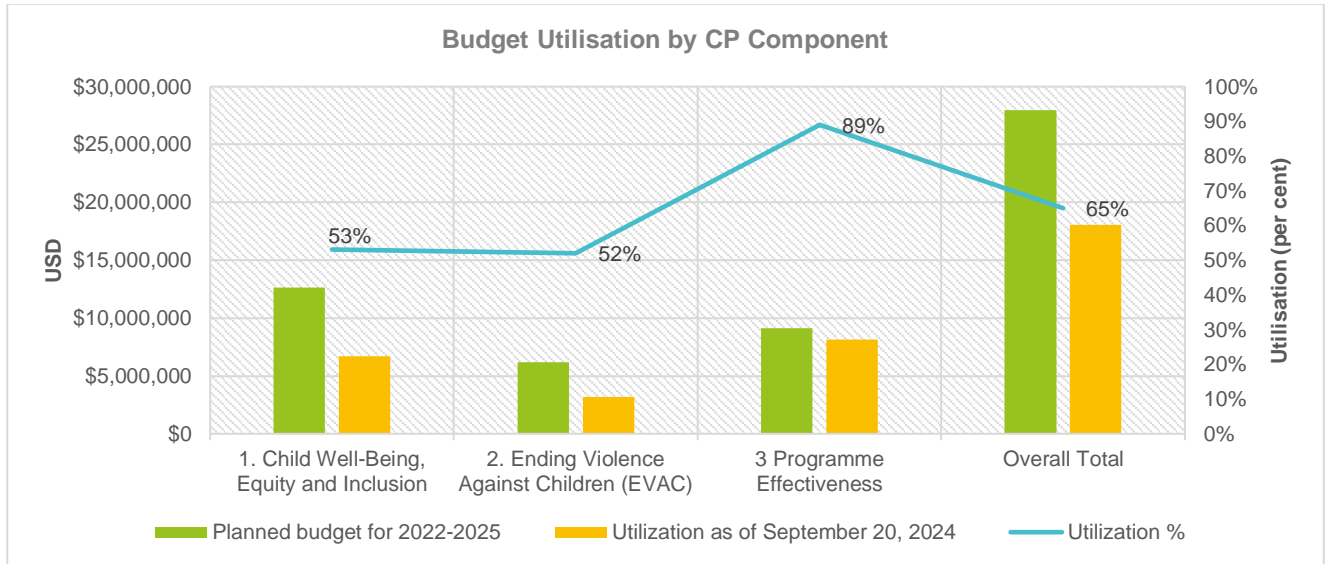
¹⁷⁹ For example, Total allocation for 2024 = New allotment for 2024 + Commitments carried forward + Unspent 2023 - adjustments

¹⁸⁰ Execution Rate = Utilisation/Allocation.

¹⁸¹ The commitment for 2024 is at 37 per cent as of September 20, 2024.

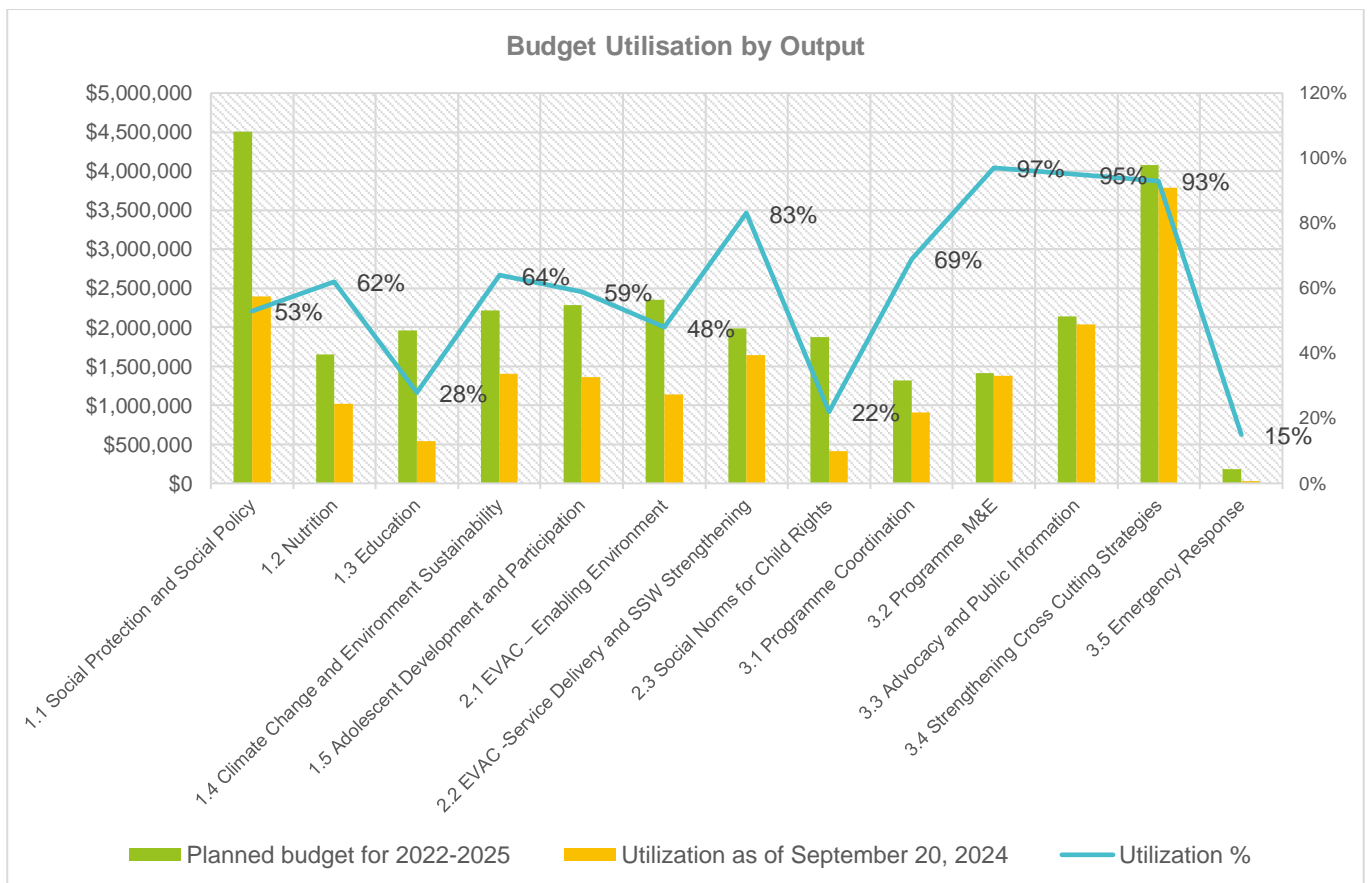
As indicated above, while the absorption/utilisation remains high, the money MCO has been able to actually spend in a year has ranged between USD 3.47 million (2022) and USD 5.78 million (2023) with 2024 nine-month spending at USD 4.42 million. Furthermore, it was also noted that out of planned programmable budget of USD 26.40 million for the CP, MCO has a funding gap of USD 12.17 million at the time of this CPE, of which USD 8.08 million is expected to be funded by PFP in 2025. This leaves a gap of USD 4.09 million to meet the planned budget.

Figure 12 Budget Utilisation by CP Component



Source: ET analysis of MCO data (as of September 20, 2024)

Figure 13 Budget Utilisation by CP Output



Human resources

As stated earlier in this report, the multiple turnovers (“revolving door”) in the Country Representative and Deputy Representative (Programmes) positions initially hindered the start of the CP. Discussions highlighted the challenge of getting consistent directives as there was a lack of stability in the top management. However, since the appointment of a Country Representative and Deputy Representative (Programmes) in early 2023, the management of the country programme implementation has steadily improved.

In 2022, at the CP’s onset, there were only six international staff, compared to ten as of September 2024. Overall, the **MCO team¹⁸² has grown by 24 per cent**, from 84 in 2021 to 104 in 2024 (see Annex 11). The programme team saw the most significant increase, with a 30 per cent growth (from 33 staff in 2021, to 43 in 2024) to support the implementation of the CP. In 2024, MCO strategically reduced its reliance on consultants¹⁸³ and hired more full-time staff. This was attributed to the programme team’s improved planning of human resources requirements compared to earlier years. There are 33 per cent more national officers and GS positions in 2024 vis-à-vis 2021. About 50 per cent of the MCO staff were national officers (NOAs, NOBs & NOCs), and this was reported to be comparable to other HICs and UMICs in Latin America.

Nevertheless, the vacancy rate at MCO fluctuated between 11 per cent and 15 per cent of all positions during the CP period. In 2024, the vacancy rate was 13 per cent (14 / 104 posts). Although considered “not the most efficient,” approach, the MCO hired consultants, interns, and/or UNVs to address this issue for the programme team. Additionally, internal staff KIIs pointed out the use of stretch teams for short-term periods (3 months) to be a consequence of insufficient planning. Discussions highlighted that planning has improved throughout 2024, and a recruitment plan is in place; however, there remains a need for more effective long-term strategic planning concerning human resources requirements.

Staff costs accounts for 53 per cent of the actual spent (not including commitments) for 2024. It has shown a declining trend since 2022 (65 per cent). This does not include staff cost of PFP team. This was noted to be comparable to other UMICs/HICs (such as Thailand, Chile and Uruguay). The staff cost for Thailand was at 59 per cent. The MCO is a unique office with an effective private fundraising and partnerships (PFP) team (23 per cent of MCO staff, second only to the programme team - 48 per cent). The PFP team not only raises funds to support programming in Malaysia but also contributes to global funds.

Internal (RO/HQ) and external expertise

In addition to benefitting from stretch assignments of staff from the Regional Office and other country offices, the MCO leveraged the Regional Office’s expertise on ADAP, gender, and child rights for business. With a lack of senior staff in Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME), the MCO also leveraged the expertise of other staff for annual reporting and conducting an internal mid-term review of the CP. As highlighted by external stakeholders, UNICEF Malaysia’s ability to hire good consultants to provide technical assistance was acknowledged by government stakeholders.

¹⁸² This includes international staff, national officers, GS positions, consultants, interns, and UNVs.

¹⁸³ The number of consultants reduced by 75 per cent in 2024 as compared to the 2022 and 2023 levels (see Annex 11).

Communications

The communications team, which had not expanded in number relative to current demands or in proportion to other teams, has recently been strengthened, though it is still reported to be insufficient. Despite this, the communications team has been active in delivering content across both traditional and social media. In 2023, there were 782 mentions of UNICEF in 2023 in articles and broadcasts in Malaysia, though it is important to note that 90 per cent of these mentions were related to global UNICEF activities, not UNICEF Malaysia specifically. The communications team was also actively engaged in social media (Table 8). The team collaborates closely with the programme and PFP teams, leading to social media posts that cover both programme activities and fundraising. This overlap may cause confusion, as non-UNICEF interviewees indicated that many in Malaysia perceive UNICEF primarily as a fundraising organization and are unaware of the full scope of its in-country programmes. Additionally, the communications team has supported the Youth Climate Champions by providing content for their social media posts.

Table 8 UNICEF Malaysia social media followers and engagement (as of end of November 2023)

Followers across all UNICEF social media channels	Social media engagement across all content and all platforms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facebook – 405,597• Twitter – 19,737• Instagram – 151,438• Threads – 9,893• YouTube – 4,170	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facebook – 211,548• Twitter – 12,080• Instagram – 525,053

Source: MCO Data, as of end of November 2023

With only one staff member in both Sabah and Sarawak, the communications team relies heavily on local content creators. A key challenge in ensuring effective communication is the programme team's ability to clearly define their activities and expected results. Unlike other countries where UNICEF is more directly involved in on-the-ground work, in Malaysia, the responsibility mostly lies with local CSOs, making it difficult to showcase programme successes. This lack of direct involvement, combined with an insufficient number of local stories, poses additional hurdles. Moreover, without a dedicated office or larger team in Sabah and Sarawak, the development of local content must rely on limited third-party contributors.

Monitoring and reporting

The full potential and scope of the **PME function has not yet been fully utilised** in the MCO. **Particularly in the area of monitoring, which requires significant improvement.** In the MCO, planning has been prioritized over monitoring, limiting the ability to track progress and performance consistently against set plans. The lack of continuity of senior-level staffing in PME during the current CPD has also hindered the potential of continuously tracking or checking progress and performance against plans, and identifying issues in advance to ensure quality and avoid bottlenecks. It was noted that the PME section supported various planning and review processes throughout the year, with the Extended Mid-Year Review in 2023 providing an opportunity to reflect on programme progress. It was noted that MCO M&E is primarily linked to UNICEF global monitoring and reporting processes.

The evaluation noted issues with the baseline and target metrics/ indicators. There are no indicators for cross-sectoral activities, particularly for Component 3. However, it was noted that Core Strategic Indicators that are relevant to the respective cross-sectoral were linked to outcome/output structure in the RAM system, though not presented in the CP result framework. This has contributed to staff not “seeing themselves” explicitly in the CPD and hence lacking direction. Reporting of disaggregated data (e.g., by sex gender, age group and disability) is not consistent across MCO interventions.

Across the MCO, interventions undertaken by CSOs are listed mainly as activities and, in some cases, as outputs. Outcomes for activities conducted are not envisaged and hence not monitored. Reporting on projects is more linked to the release of payment tranches than results monitoring. A culture of reporting is lacking due to the absence of traditional donor funding, with 98 per cent of the funds being raised locally is through ‘individual giving’.

During evaluation discussions, it was observed that many programme staff focused more on describing past or planned activities and outputs rather than addressing the critical “so what” question regarding the impact of UNICEF’s efforts. Additionally, delivery and reporting timelines often became unclear. The evaluation highlighted that while there are existing guidelines for annual reporting—intended as a key compilation of activities and results for the year—the reports often lack a clear, straightforward narrative. In external reports, there is a need for a more accessible, “user-friendly” explanation of what the MCO does, avoiding overly technical language to ensure better understanding and engagement.

As UNICEF’s agenda evolves in high-income countries, future efforts and programming will likely focus on some or all of UNICEF’s global priorities such as child-rights monitoring and accountability mechanisms, social policy (including financing, social protection, and local governance), child protection, inclusive education, nutrition, mental health, early childhood development, and migration, all tailored to local and regional contexts.¹⁸⁴ Cross-cutting elements, including gender equality, climate change, ADAP, child rights in business, and reaching marginalized children—including those with disabilities—will remain central to these efforts and integrated with change strategies.

184 UNICEF. 2023. Programme Guidance for High Income Countries (HICs).

4.5. Evaluation Criteria 5: Sustainability

Summary of Key Findings

While UNICEF Malaysia's efforts include capacity building, institutional strengthening and improving the enabling environment, these elements may not be presented in terms of their potential to drive sustained change, or how they collectively ensure that processes continue after UNICEF's involvement is phased out. Exit strategies and sustainability plans are not clearly defined in CP interventions. Looking ahead, it is essential to prioritise how UNICEF actions or interventions will be sustained from the outset of an initiative.

The lack of government ownership and commitment in some areas, changes in priorities and champions, and inadequate human resource capacity were found to hinder sustainability and scale-up. Often, CSOs cannot continue activities without UNICEF Malaysia funding, and are uncertain about what to expect next. Expensive and/ or isolated pilots are unlikely to be scaled up.

Beyond UNICEF's efforts, deep-rooted social perceptions, public opinion, and current political interpretations of policies and laws influence sustained change in the protection of child rights for all, ensuring that no child is left behind.

Overall, achieving sustainability in MCO approaches is an ongoing effort. Progress towards sustainability in MCO activities is viewed as mixed, as it varies depending on the specific interventions or activities. For example, even if a particular policy is improved in terms of the CRC principles, continuous work from UNICEF is required to monitor national budget allocation and implementation. There is also potential for UNICEF to support capacity development amongst government to monitor the implementation of specific updated/revised policies against their commitments under the CRC.

4.5.1. Continuity and scale-up of UNICEF support

Exit strategies and sustainability plans are not explicit for most MCO activities and interventions at the design stage. As summarised by a government stakeholder, “Sustainability is often overlooked in planning and treated as an afterthought.” Despite this, UNICEF Malaysia's work includes capacity building at individual levels, systems/ institutional strengthening, and creating an enabling environment for advancing child rights and reducing child vulnerability in Malaysia. Evidently, these cannot be envisaged in one single intervention and require efforts across many institutions and systems.

Although the Malaysian Government is financially strong, some ministries may be constrained by human resources. Limited human resources may restrict the ability to scale-up, but activities could still be carried out on a smaller scale or on a need basis. Interventions where the government has been informed and engaged from the design stage, and where there is clear buy-in (e.g. work with NCEMH on mental issues; collaboration with the Children’s Commissioner; support and inputs to the Legal Affairs Division on specific amendments to child related Acts, co-design with KPWK on an integrated social protection model in Sarawak, or field studies for MWFCD to consider alternatives to detention), are more likely to continue or be scaled up. However, the evaluation notes that while ownership in specific interventions is one aspect, addressing recommendations involving multiple agencies and coordination could be difficult, particularly without one agency in a leadership role. This could be seen from the C-HAT example discussed subsequently. It also highlights the issue of not bringing all relevant stakeholders at the design and implementation stage (as in the case of CFCI). Government ownership is essential for securing allocations in the national or state budget. It was noted that political will requires UNICEF Malaysia to deliberately foster ownership amongst government officials, and engage all relevant stakeholders within ministries and departments at the federal and state level according to the relevant protocol.

However, document review, KIIs and survey responses highlighted that CSOs have limited human and financial resources, and hence, interventions implemented through them by MCO are often unlikely to continue or scale up without UNICEF Malaysia’s funding, even for the immediate next phase.

Scale-up plans and associated costs were not clearly evident in several pilot projects. For example, while the C-HAT pilot was planned and implemented by MOH in schools, the concept is now being used to convince and get the commitment of the MOE for scale-up and cost-sharing. Fragmented stand-alone projects are often viewed as individual-driven and are unlikely to continue beyond their initial phase without sustained UNICEF funding and government commitment. The lack of government ownership and commitment before undertaking interventions and, in some cases, insufficient consultations on pilots or research, negatively affects both the sustainability and impact of these initiatives. In some cases, there was not always a clear or explicit plan for how the government will assume control of the pilot. In the case of a UNICEF-supported activity centre for street children in Sabah, the Department of Skills Development Sabah (Jabatan Pembangunan Kemahiran) has continued funding the centre after the conclusion of the UNICEF pilot. However, discussions highlighted that the centre’s operations have been modified and no longer fully align with the initial plan or objectives. A key area identified for improvement was the lack of community involvement in the centre, which is essential for successfully replicating similar centres in the state.

4.5.2. Contributing and constraining factors to making systemic change

At the policy level, UNICEF has contributed to revising and updating child-related policies and strategies in Malaysia (as discussed earlier in this report). However, there are notable gaps in establishing a conducive fiscal policy environment across all levels, which hinders the operationalisation and scaling of these initiatives at the national level. Consequently, policy work and systems strengthening require multiple cycles of the country programme.

For instance, CFCI is being rolled out simultaneously across several city councils. However, there is a need for more guidelines and support to sustain the initial interest from city councils (largely generated by the government push). It was informed that the global handbook has been adopted to Malaysia. Furthermore, there is a need to ensure and reflect the nexus between the “sustainable cities” of the Twelfth Malaysia Plan and concepts of “friendly cities” and “smart cities” promoted by other agencies/organisations. Lack of integration (UNICEF ensuring the synergies) will lead to city councils leaning toward one concept or another and not taking a holistic approach. As mentioned earlier in the report, UNICEF has facilitated collaborations with other relevant ministries to ensure sustainability and diversity in funding for the city councils.

The evaluation identified several key **contributing factors** essential to achieving systemic change based on various discussions:

- Technical assistance and contribution to policy, strategy and regulatory framework changes that benefit children, particularly vulnerable children (as noted in various instances cited earlier in the report).
- Systems strengthening (e.g., MOH, Office of the Children’s Commissioner).
- Government directives, exemplified by the CFCI.
- Government request for studies, research, or activities to address identified gaps that UNICEF can effectively fill and provide new perspectives.

Conversely, several **hindering factors** were highlighted during discussions:

- Lack of government ownership during the design phase or at inception of an initiative. It was also noted that sometimes, changing internal mechanisms within the government structures may cause initial buy-in to change over time.
- Insufficient prioritisation of a particular child rights issue amongst stakeholders (e.g. LGBTIQAI+ issues, or services for stateless children).
- Pilot projects operating in silos, insufficiently integrated into systems strengthening or existing and new government interventions.
- High costs associated with pilot interventions.
- Changes in government priorities or shifts in top-level champions.
- Failure to facilitate cross-sectoral analysis and actions to address child rights issues by engaging relevant ministries during the design and implementation phases.

4.5.3. Main challenges and opportunities for ensuring sustained results for child rights

The evaluation noted that legal, policy and system changes in Malaysia are primarily driven by “champions” rather than through institutional reforms. While UNICEF Malaysia could continue to focus on work by collaborating with these “champions” as they drive change, if there is political change, or change of personnel UNICEF efforts may be stalled or lost. Institutional reform also requires long-term investment, which may take more than one programme (CP) cycle, as learned from strengthening SSW work.

Besides benchmarking studies, UNICEF Malaysia’s approach of facilitating officials from the government to learn from neighbouring and other countries has not only been appreciated by the government but has also proven to be effective (e.g., exchange visits accelerating progress related to the Evidence of Child Witness Act and CFCI). Such visits, which often require follow up upon return, allow the government to observe and learn from practices of other similar regions or countries, which can be adapted to the Malaysian context.

Deep-rooted social perceptions, public attitudes and political definitions may hinder the full realisation of sustained child rights for all and the overall UNICEF goal of leaving no child living in Malaysia behind. Exposure to fresh ideas can provide frameworks for comparison and identify areas for improvement. Although Malaysia is performing well economically and has met or is on track to achieve several SDG targets, it is lagging on some social issues, including nutritional issues such as stunting and malnutrition, including for some Malaysian children. Despite Malaysia's ratification of international conventions such as the CRC, the CEDAW, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, several reservations remain in place. Moreover, the ongoing apprehension of government to take into account refugees, undocumented and stateless children, contravenes many key principles in the CRC (although the government has signed the CRC with reservations), and deprives children in Malaysia the right to access essential services. UNICEF still has a role to play in Malaysia by helping to expose ‘change-makers’ to successful models and potential approaches for pursuing changes and improving systems for all children.



5. Conclusions

Overall, the MCO has continued to strongly advocate for children's rights in Malaysia, and the government values MCO's work on the rights and needs of children. Malaysia has ratified the CRC, CEDAW, and CRPD, albeit with reservations. The CP implementation has been affected by delays in its development and the structure of the CP itself.

5.1. Relevance

UNICEF Malaysia's work is highly relevant to meeting children's needs. The support of the MCO across sectors is relevant to the needs of children in Malaysia, particularly advice on policy and legislative changes. UNICEF Malaysia has been flexible in responding to the evolving country context and needs throughout the CP implementation and has remained relevant. MCO has proactively ventured into new areas (e.g., climate change and mental health) and worked on contemporary issues which are presenting as ongoing challenges (e.g., cyberbullying), during this CP timeframe.

The rights and needs of children, particularly the most vulnerable, are critical considerations in programme design. Nevertheless, there is still room to prevent more children from being 'left behind'. The MCO could enhance its efforts to address the needs of Indigenous children in Malaysia (e.g., working with indigenous CSOs). UNICEF's advocacy efforts with the Ministry of Home Affairs and MWFCDC have been striving to address the needs of children affected by migration (which includes refugee, migrant, stateless and other undocumented children)¹⁸⁵, however, due to insufficient government prioritisation and existing national legislation, progress remains limited to a few interventions. Ongoing barriers to education and healthcare for stateless, refugee, migrant and other undocumented children in Malaysia is one of the major bottlenecks with regard to the realisation of child rights.

While the CPD and CP interventions reflected various findings, recommendations, lessons learned and reviews, and the office conducted a situation analysis, there is potential to be more inclusive in stakeholder consultations in designing and implementing interventions. A clear understanding of the social and cultural context by all in MCO is critical for designing and implementing interventions that are most relevant. To achieve this more effectively, staff could make repeated visits to the communities where the interventions are planned, in collaboration with partners as appropriate.

Gender and disability are not always well integrated into CP interventions, although the MCO has a specific focus on child marriage (targeted intervention). Interventions are gender-sensitive but not necessarily gender-responsive or gender-transformative. Disability-inclusive programming is still evolving and although progressing, it is not consistently mainstreamed in designing and implementing CP interventions. MCO's ongoing efforts to strengthen work in this area include gender and inclusive training for staff in October 2024.

UNICEF's mission on child rights and its relationship with the Government are seen as comparative advantages. UNICEF Malaysia's power to bring Government and NGOs together is a comparative advantage. However, there are mixed perspectives regarding MCO's ability to convene partners with diverse views on issues that UNICEF works on.

¹⁸⁵ For the purpose of UNICEF Malaysia's programming.

5.2. Coherence

The CP is aligned with the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, the Twelfth Malaysia Plan, and several national policies. Furthermore, the CP responds to the 'leave no one behind' UN agenda and is an integral part of the UNSDCF 2021-2025. It is aligned to SDG 1-5, 13 and 16.

UNICEF Malaysia has developed effective partnerships at various levels. However, the MCO lacks an overall partnership strategy. Private sector partnerships are still evolving, and CSO partnerships are limited and are more transactional, although there is a mapping exercise underway of NGOs working on women's rights and disabilities. The MCO has not fully explored partnerships with various CSOs and organisations working to advance the rights of vulnerable children (UNICEF's intended target). Partnerships with universities are a good practice and seem to work efficiently.

Synergies and linkages with other UN agencies are noted; nevertheless, there is potential to collaborate, explore, and leverage more joint programming and unified advocacy.

Compared to previous CPs, UNICEF Malaysia increased direct collaboration with the Government, which indicates a shift in the scope of MCO's work (fit for a country graduating into a HIC).

Policy advocacy and advisory efforts have strategically enhanced MCO's position within the national development landscape; however, this space is shared with many other key players also collaborating with the government. However, MCO has added value to existing government interventions. The MWFCDC is a critical partner in ensuring the achievement of CP objectives. In the MYRWP 2023-2025, MWFCDC is the lead for 8 activities and the government supports for 20 of a further 35 activities. UNICEF Malaysia is regarded as an important partner or ally by some ministries. More collaborative relations and partnerships were noted at the state level (e.g., Sabah, Sarawak and Penang).

A more systematic and synergistic approach could enhance and strengthen the interconnectedness, interaction, and collaboration among the MCO programme, communications, and fundraising teams. In addition to it is important to build a culture of working together and understanding each other, as different teams (programme, communications and PFP) bring different skills and think/work differently. Ongoing efforts that continue to evolve include the PFP team involving the programme team to meet potential corporate donors, and the programme team involving communication team earlier in the intervention cycle.

5.3. Effectiveness

The CP has made good progress at the output level and is on track to contribute to outcomes; however, progress could be constrained by the time left before the CP is due to finish. The programming strategies (policy advocacy, evidence generation, and pilots) have contributed to achieving CP objectives in several ways and to varying degrees. Policy advocacy/advice, supported by evidence generation, has been at the core of MCO's work during this CP. MCO has contributed to child well-being, equity and ending violence against children.

Policy advocacy and advice have been key to MCO contributing to changes in national or subnational policies and strategies. Thus, the groundwork has been laid, and the potential impact of this work on affected and vulnerable children should emerge in the not-too-distant future.

Evidence generation has been appreciated at the government level and, to some extent, at the CSO level; the extent of use beyond the direct partners involved is not explicitly known, as they are not quantitatively tracked. Also, the utilisation (internally or externally) and reach of some studies and research were not always evident, although the CPE asked many interviewees to indicate which reports were the most useful. The office could enhance its tracking of downloads for specific documents, media mentions, and references of UNICEF reports in other important documents. There is potential for MCO to improve its consultations with relevant stakeholders (including the government) while conceptualising a study or research. More time is required to measure the success of pilots and sustainable scale-up, as most pilots only started during this CP cycle.

UNICEF Malaysia has achieved better results on the ground when it has become involved in existing government interventions and added value. Unless there is government ownership, interventions may not be as effective as engaging in on-going interventions to add value. Interventions per se may be completed successfully; however, the scale up needs long-term commitment from the government (even if they were involved in the design stage). This challenge requires more strategic thinking as UNICEF clearly aims to try out new approaches towards realising child rights, and establish what works, provided there are sufficient resources and effort. Prioritisation must be more strategic and deliberate. While there is some evidence of effective cross-sectoral collaboration across various teams, such collaborations are not systematic, institutionalised, or fully operational across outcome areas.

Current programming results suggest that the MCO has the potential to carve a niche in climate change (with respect to children)¹⁸⁶ mental health, early childhood development and nutrition in terms of policy advice, systems strengthening and social behavioural change. There is also a potential gap in these areas, with no key players (including UN agencies) currently leading in these areas (in terms of a child rights focus).

¹⁸⁶ Malaysia is ranked 61 (from the bottom) among 163 countries on the Children's Climate Risk Index 2023.

5.4. Efficiency

While prioritisation exercises have evolved compared to previous practices, there is still space for more strategic, deliberate and efficient actions. MCO tends to produce several internal strategies under the CP, and this can result in some confusion, and could be revisited to ensure clear messages and prioritisation for all (UNICEF staff, government counterparts and CSOs). It was not evident how these different strategies linked directly to the CP, and how they were monitored and reported on. Having a range of internal strategies may be useful internally for different thematic areas, but it could lead to micro-focus instead of considering the bigger picture in terms of strategic alignment of MCO in Malaysia, a country working towards graduating into a HIC. The MCO practice of developing internal strategies would suggest that MCO planning is more internally focused than outward-looking or strategic. However, MCO believes these strategies help in aligning better with national strategies. Furthermore, the timing of interventions and/or proposals do not tend to fully align with national budget cycles for government investment to scale up/implement.

A more stable environment, internally and externally, has pushed the pace of CP implementation in the last 18 months. For various, often bureaucratic, reasons the MCO favours single (direct) sourcing of implementing partners rather than open sourcing. However, this may not be good value for money. The MCO tends to work with a limited number of (“trusted”) CSOs.

Utilisation is high (almost 100 per cent) against allocation but the actual spending is at 65 percent vis-à-vis the overall CP budget. Allocations to the CP have shown an increasing trend year over year. The MCO team has grown by 24 percent since 2021, with the number of consultants reduced. The MCO has also tapped into EAPRO/HQ expertise, as required. The communication team has been strengthened. Yet, there is still a need to ensure there is a systematic recruitment and procurement plan in place. The MCO can further leverage the strengths (expertise and experience) of other CSOs and organisations working in areas relevant to MCO in addressing the rights and needs of children.

The MCO places greater emphasis on planning than on monitoring, depending mainly on annual reports to understand the progress made and achievements in the CP implementation. No other periodic systematic monitoring and/or reporting is in place, unless there is a review or a retreat, which can lead to informed mid-way correction during the year. Implementing partners' reports are more linked to tranche release than results reporting. Disaggregated data reporting is not consistent across MCO interventions, although efforts are in place to systematise such reporting, which is often reliant on government data. This could be either due to the lack of adequate disaggregated government data (census, surveys or administrative data) and/or possibly MCO not taking advantage of the available data.

5.5. Sustainability

Many aspects of UNICEF Malaysia's work include activities that can lead to sustainable interventions such as capacity building, institutional strengthening and work towards improving the enabling environment for child rights. However, these approaches and interventions are not necessarily inherently cohesive nor are they strategically considered as leading to sustainability of efforts. The MCO could improve on designing exit strategies and sustainability plans, as they are not always clearly articulated in CP interventions. The MCO could also concentrate on monitoring the implementation of the policies they contributed to once approved to track sustained change at the sub-national level.

Sometimes, UNICEF needs to advance on specific children's rights issues. However, Malaysia is cautious about signing up to Conventions, Resolutions or Treaties that do not align with the Federal Constitution, and hence has reservations regarding the CRC (Articles 2,7,14, 28(1)(a) and 37). Thus, certain initiatives that UNICEF would like to support do not receive an immediate response, resulting in a stalemate. Yet UNICEF must be able to move forward sometimes without government buy-in to fulfil their UN mandate (to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential).¹⁸⁷ Conversely, to demonstrate progress on children's rights to government, UNICEF requires results to demonstrate what works under specific circumstances and demonstrate also what resources were needed. Pilots enable UNICEF to advocate further for change in children's rights, particularly with unpopular themes or difficult to reach children (including undocumented or stateless children).

The varying levels of government buy-in and ownership, changes in priorities and champions, and inadequate human resource capacity were found to hinder sustainability and scale-up in some cases. Whilst these problems are not unique to the MCO, greater attention should be given to sustainability planning at the outset of intervention design. This is the case also for interventions that take place in partnership with CSOs. CSOs often cannot continue activities without UNICEF Malaysia funding, and are often left in the dark regarding follow-up. Expensive and/or isolated pilots and a lack of government commitment and ownership will affect scaling up. Stand-alone (NGO-type) projects are unlikely to continue if they are not integrated into government intervention or system strengthening.

Deep-rooted social and public perceptions and political definitions and interpretations of policies/laws affect sustained child rights for all, and the principle of leaving no child behind. There is still work to be done in changing public perceptions. Overall, the focus on sustainability remains work in progress but is evolving with the current MCO management.

¹⁸⁷ However, this could be hindered due to the combination of lack of capacity, operating space or will.



Integration

Set background

Clear frame

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$$b = 0, \quad y = ax + c$$

Summary of $y = ax + c$

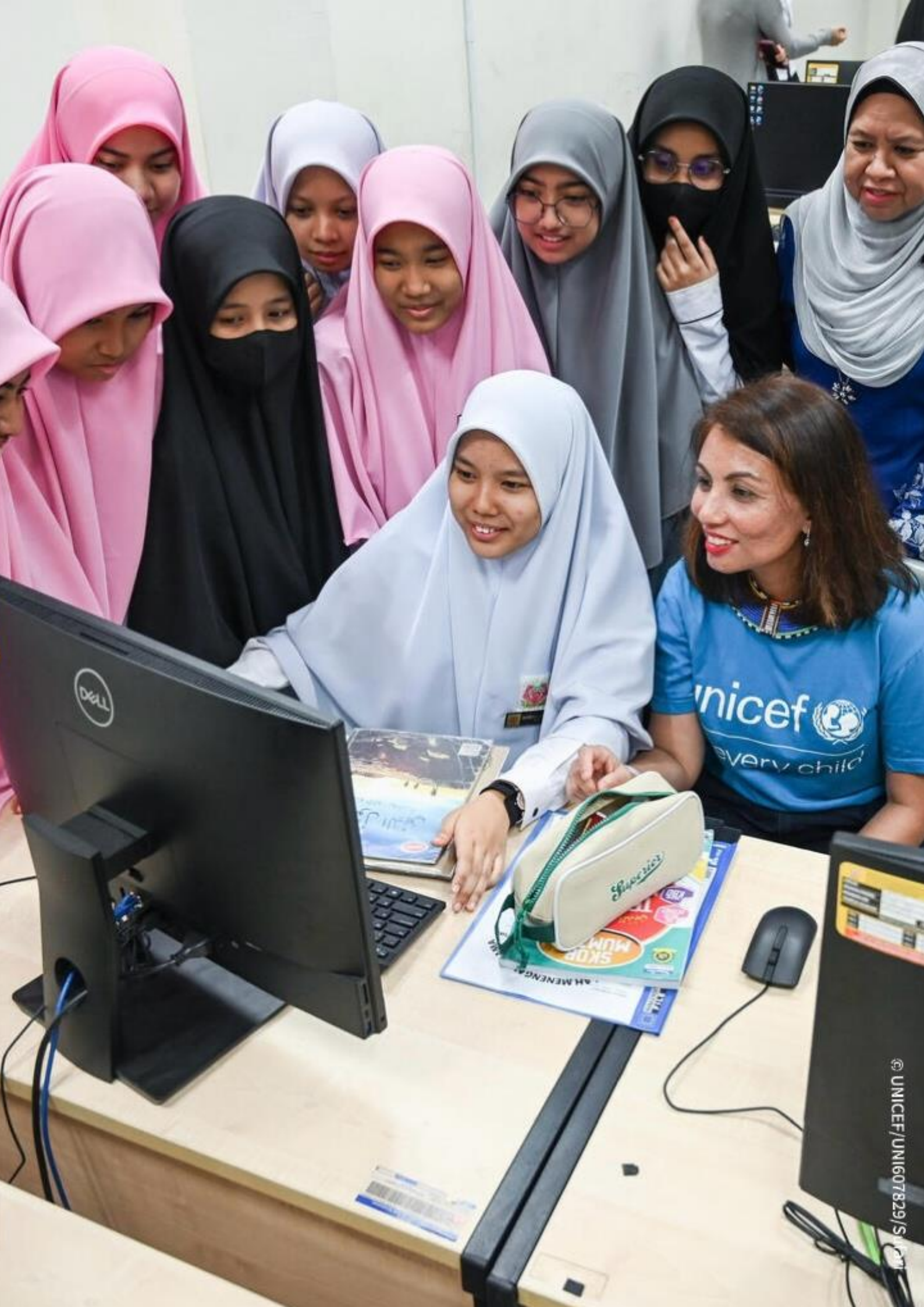
6. Lessons Learned

The following lessons were learned during the CPE related to the implementation of the CP 2022-2025

- **Evidence is important for policy advice and advocacy, but effective collaboration is also key.** In addition to evidence generation, it is essential to have the support of champions within the government. Creative approaches are needed to navigate the process and overcome obstacles; this may involve working with multiple relevant ministries at different levels. Collaborations of CSOs (if appropriate and inclusive) add value and strength.
- **Gaining stakeholder buy-in, especially with the government, requires an investment over time.** Considerable time and effort is required to engage with stakeholders in the design of pilots, studies, and research. However, having government on board at the political and technical level will ensure broader implementation or more widespread use of evidence. This will have greater effect in the longer term.
- **Even with proof of concept, government buy-in is not always assured, and pilot interventions may still face risks to further scale-up.** Factors that can impact on future roll-out / scale-up of interventions include changing government priorities; insufficient ownership by government of the issue; a perception of inadequate initial consultation during the design stage; or the lack of applicability or replicability at the national level, or in other states (beyond the state where the pilot took place). Also, the cost may prove unfeasible. Even if the government was involved in the design stage, after completion of the pilot/intervention, they may not commit long-term to scale-up. These factors can be explored at design stage and incorporated into strategic decision-making and prioritisation.
- **UNICEF has delivered better results when collaborating with government and others on existing initiatives.** Examples such as the Youth Mental Health Index, Child Wellbeing Index and the Iskander Malaysia Eco-Life Challenge (IMELC) have offered quicker wins with greater replicability and scalability. Addressing bottlenecks takes time, so UNICEF must balance activities between interventions that can deliver immediate results and scale, and initiatives that take more time to produce results.
- **Sharing experience from other countries has been an effective way of gaining buy-in from government on more challenging child rights issues.** Benchmarking with other countries and study tours have effectively brought the government on board on respective and difficult child rights issues. This has helped the government understand how other jurisdictions have addressed the challenge and helped them review different options to move forward. However, the MCO must follow-up and ensure continuity regarding the next steps following study tours and benchmarking, to gain full benefit from such exercises.
- **With a growing corporate and global investment in social behaviour change, there is a need for MCO to apply a broader approach in SBC in Malaysia to achieve wider programmatic goals.** For SBC to yield programmatic results, it has to be effectively integrated in each sector as well as creating an environment of SBC driven system.
- **Efforts by MCO to challenge gender norms around child marriage are an example of gender-transformative work,** as they target societal beliefs and practices that contribute to its acceptance. **However, beyond child marriage, MCO needs to identify how it can add value in Malaysia by defining and implementing gender-transformative**

processes at both the intervention and community levels. This includes finding ways to directly and indirectly put gender issues on the national agenda, particularly where the root cause of gender inequalities can be addressed.

- **High-level engagement has proven to drive change in policy and law reform.** MCO was able to leverage its relationship with champions of child rights even when they moved, such as the Minister of Law and Institutional Reform, who was a former Chair of Parliamentary Special Select Committee. The “Heroes Among Us” campaign helped connect with various MPs. **Engagement with the diplomatic community** helps advocacy on politically sensitive issues.
- The current **CPD structure of having only two outcomes** (programme components) in addition to the programme effectiveness component, has been reason for lot of debate in MCO. This has led to grouping all other areas/sectors under the programme effectiveness component. With a lack of indicators to measure progress/success contributing to the CP, this has been difficult to monitor. Other HICs and UMICs have more than two outcomes (in addition to the programme effectiveness component).



7. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (Strategic positioning): MCO should use a child rights lens for prioritising key focus areas of intervention for the next country programme.

This includes:

a) Supporting inclusiveness in existing systems to help children left behind:

UNICEF should consult closely with the Government of Malaysia and relevant ministries to prioritise a discussion about services for children affected by migration (including refugee, migrant, stateless and undocumented children) and other children, who are often 'left behind'. This is in line with global mandate focus areas (broadly focused within UNICEF's mandate regarding the survival, protection and development of all children, which are universal development imperatives). Plan to align with government fiscal planning and budgeting and advocating to ensure child-friendly allocations/funding across MCO's focus areas. This includes ensuring national child-related policy commitments are better reflected in budget processes and the flow and use of budgeted resources for service delivery reaches 'children left behind' including at the subnational level.

b) Working with partners to address inclusiveness.

UNICEF should collaborate with other UN agencies to maximise impact while also considering the role of other international and local organisations in generating evidence through research and policy advice. By exploring synergies and complementarities with such partners, UNICEF should aim to leverage the expertise and experience of those who are also working with vulnerable children to meet their needs. A comprehensive mapping of other actors' interventions (including those of government) would provide a useful step in identifying synergies or overlaps so that UNICEF Malaysia can better define its roles and how best to complement national efforts to improve child rights, particularly in relation to policy and advocacy. The next CP should also include mechanism to monitor progress in leveraging investments and expertise and contributing to/influencing improved child rights and basic needs.

Priority: High	Time frame: Medium to Long-term
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Recommendation 2 (Partnerships): MCO should develop, implement and monitor a comprehensive partnership strategy with clarity on partnership opportunities, types and modalities. The strategy should be part of MCO's broader strategic goals, extending beyond implementation partner contracting.

The strategy should include:

- a) Partnerships with the private sector for programming (beyond fundraising).** The strategy should define its priorities for working with private sector organisations (industry and sector associations, umbrella organisations, chambers of commerce, employers' organisations) and how this will increase impact in areas like child rights and business. UNICEF could work closely with organisations such as ASEAN, ILO, ADB, or the World Bank who may have linkages with chambers of commerce or employers' organisations.
- b) Building of long-term relationships with common end goals rather than activity-oriented transactional relationships.** This also requires the MCO to maintain good communication with partners post-contract and keep them informed of next steps. It would also mean co-creation of interventions focusing on long-term goals addressing systemic changes.

- c) **Identification of the various partnership mechanisms.** These include strategic alliances/partnerships, joint initiatives (including with UN agencies), and public-private partnerships. They should also include ways to leverage private sector, media, networks and other partner resources and expertise, for example to access new technologies and innovation, improve localised cultural sensitivity, share risks, reduce costs, and improve efficiency.
- d) **Collaboration with organisations already working in Malaysia** to address common issues..
- e) **Working with all relevant ministries/departments** to have integrated holistic, sustainable programming or intervention (from the concept stage).
- f) **Enhancing internal partnership (within MCO)** between programme, communications and fundraising teams with aligned goals not only in Private Fundraising Partnership (PFP) but also in programming with tangible targets and appropriate monitoring to measure progress and results.

Priority: Medium	Time frame: Short to Medium
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Recommendation 3 (Programming strategies): MCO should continue to expand HIC programme strategies. This should be through:

- a) **Maintaining the current programming strategies with a focus on policy processes, paying particular attention to the timing of these policy processes, and building advocacy coalitions.** This could include expanding collaboration with the media, universities, research institutes, coalitions on children in poverty, or rights-based organisations, other CSOs, other UN agencies.
- b) **Continuing to focus on system strengthening, institutional capacity building, and promoting social and behavioural change.** The programming should be context-specific, evidence-based, and reinforce a child-rights-based approach.

Priority: High	Time frame: Short to Medium
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Recommendation 4: MCO should develop the CPD 2026-2030 with key focus areas supported by an appropriate organisational structure and mechanism.

This may include:

- a) Having more than two outcomes in the CP, excluding Programme Effectiveness.
- b) Regrouping the Outcome 1 social policy (and social protection), which now includes education, nutrition and climate change.
- c) Exploring areas to build on (e.g., climate change, mental health and nutrition) based on gaps in child rights in Malaysia, as well as on progress and achievements in the current CP to have a more strategic fit with policy level or systems strengthening work instead of project-based work.
- d) Exploring the potential to work on early childhood development, an area that needs MCO support at various levels and also in facilitating multiple ministries' work.
- e) Focusing on multisectoral interventions that advance cross-sectoral and cross-cutting element to maximize programmatic and long-term synergistic gains (e.g., climate change, mental health and child marriage)
- f) Ensuring cross-sectoral areas and cross-cutting elements s have indicators of success contributing to the objectives of the CP.
- g) Strengthening gender transformative and disability-inclusive programming. Ensuring that there is a gender needs assessment, or use of a gender analysis prior to programming in any sector explaining how gender intersects with other areas such as mental health,

climate change, SBC, etc. This may require strengthening capacities of MCO staff and making them aware of the metrics in UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2025 Goal.

- h)** Building on the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) work and contribution to the digital transformation agenda in the education sector (and others as relevant).
- i)** Considering who to collaborate with to tackle difficult areas and how best to support children affected by migration (refugee, migrant, stateless and other undocumented children) in Malaysia.

Priority: High	Time frame: Short Term
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Recommendations 5 (M&E): Strengthening a) internal monitoring capacity within MCO and b) external capacities with the government on data collection and reporting on national interventions through the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM).

This may include:

- a)** Building internal capacity among MCO staff on results-based management (RBM). In doing so, MCO should ensure that RBM involves realistic and manageable data collection and reporting that generates useful data that is not overly complex and does not rely too heavily on quantitative data alone. MCO should leverage the expertise of the PME team, and the regional advisors of respective thematic areas, to help the section/area teams have appropriate indicators with baseline and targets (at the intervention design stage).
- b)** Creating monitoring tools that complement the global guidance in Country Programme management. It should be easy to use for all, and that can be used for PFP-funded and donor-funded projects.
- c)** Strengthening M&E capacities and national data collection/management system in the government (ministries and agencies) to foster an evaluation culture. This could include supporting DOSM in collecting/monitoring reporting for SDG purposes and national interventions.

Annexes

See separate attachment.

Annex 1 Terms of Reference

Annex 2 Evaluation Matrix

Annex 3 Country Programme Theories of Change Outcomes 1 and 2

Annex 4 List of Evidence Generation, Policy Advocacy, and Pilots during the CP

Annex 5 Data collection tools

Annex 6 Stakeholders consulted

Annex 7 Perception Survey Analysis

Annex 8 Country Programme Components in a Sample of HICs and UMICs

Annex 9 Outcome and output indicator ratings analysis

Annex 10 Financial data analysis

Annex 11 Human Resources Trends in MCO

Annex 12 CPD Alignment to Twelfth Malaysia Plan and Vision 2030

Annex 13 Bibliography

Annex 14 Benchmarking where Malaysia is and where it aims to be by 2030