



# **Independent Evaluation of UNICEF Country Programme in Montenegro 2017–2021**

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UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office**

*Final Evaluation Report  
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*Prepared by The KonTerra Group*

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| CEDAW   | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women |
| CO      | Country Office (UNICEF)  |
| CP      | Country Programme (UNICEF)   |
| CPE     | Country Programme Evaluation   |
| CRC     | Convention on the Rights of the Child                                      |
| CRM     | Child Rights Monitoring  |
| CRPD    | Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities                      |
| CSO     | Civil Society Organization   |
| CSW     | Centre for Social Work   |
| DaO     | Delivering as One  |
| EC      | European Commission  |
| ECARO   | Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (UNICEF)                           |
| ECD     | Early Childhood Development  |
| EU      | European Union   |
| GDP     | Gross Domestic Product   |
| GEEW    | Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women                                   |
| KAP     | Knowledge, Attitude and Practice   |
| M&E     | Monitoring & Evaluation  |
| MEIS    | Montenegrin Education Information System                                   |
| MICS    | Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey  |
| MODA    | Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis                          |
| MONSTAT | Statistical Office of Montenegro   |
| MoRES   | Monitoring Results for Equity Systems                                      |
| MTR     | Midterm Review   |
| NGO     | Non-Governmental Organization  |
| NSSD    | National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030                         |
| OECD    | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development                     |
| OSCE    | Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe                        |
| PISA    | Programme for International Student Assessment                             |
| PRIS    | Judicial Information System  |
| RBM     | Results-Based Management   |
| SDGs    | Sustainable Development Goals  |
| SWIS    | Social Welfare Information System  |
| TOC     | Theory of Change   |
| UN      | United Nations   |
| TOR     | Terms of Reference   |
| UNCT    | United Nations Country Team  |
| UNDP    | United Nations Development Programme                                       |
| UNECE   | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe                              |
| UNHCR   | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees                              |
| UNICEF  | United Nations Children's Fund   |
| UNDAF   | United Nations Development Assistance Framework                            |
| UNSDCF  | UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework                           |
| WHO     | World Health Organization  |

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### **Disclaimer**

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## Executive Summary

### INTRODUCTION

ES1. Since the independence of Montenegro in 2006, UNICEF has supported the national government in its efforts to ensure that all children and adolescents enjoy international standards as called for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights conventions and guiding principles of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the European Union. Two UNICEF country programmes (CPs) of cooperation with the Government of Montenegro have been developed and implemented: 2012–2016 and the current one 2017–2021. To ensure learning and accountability, this Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) assesses the performance of the CP and draws lessons from implementation to inform the design of the next CP (2022–2026) and the planning of the next United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).

### COUNTRY CONTEXT

ES2. European Union (EU) membership has been a priority for the Government of Montenegro since independence; the country was officially approved as an EU candidate country in 2010 with negotiations opening in 2012. The negotiation documents include concerns that would need to be addressed to attain EU requirements, or *Acquis*, including the need for an overall multisector reform of the child rights and social protection system in line with UNICEF standards. The special concerns raised also point to the limited administrative capacity of the government, corruption, weak intersectoral coordination, inefficiency at the municipal level and insufficient implementation of the legislative framework. Moreover, the same documents maintain that human rights should be addressed, including problems with social exclusion and discrimination against minorities and persons with disabilities, including children, women's rights, and violence against women and children.

ES3. Over the last decade, there have been significant improvements on several child rights issues, particularly deinstitutionalization of children, inclusive education and preschool attendance of a majority of children, including from minority groups. The legislative framework is now more in line with international standards; the Ombudsperson's Office has been strengthened; children's access to health, education and justice has improved; specialized institutions to support implementation of legislation and strategies have been established; and the National Council for the Rights of the Child has been revitalized. Moreover, social norms and behaviour with regard to children's and adolescents' rights and protection are improving.

ES4. Full implementation of national child rights strategies is still challenged by a weak decentralization process and limited resources and capacities at municipality level. Sixty-six per cent of children under 14 had experienced physical and psychological abuses in 2018; less than 20 per cent of newborns are exclusively breastfed; and vaccination rates for children remain low and even decreasing in recent years. Poverty and interlinked inequities remain a challenge and minority populations, including Roma and Egyptians, are still marginalized from mainstream development processes.

ES5. The United Nations system in Montenegro has applied "Delivering as One" (DaO) principles, with one programme (Integrated UN Programme for Montenegro or UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), one leader, joint operation, common premises and joint communication. UNDAF 2017–2016 focuses on (1) social inclusion, (2) democratic governance, (3) environmental sustainability and (4) economic governance and is fully aligned with the National Strategy on Sustainable Development 2030 and the EU Accession Agenda. UNICEF leads the social inclusion component and actively participates in economic governance and democratic governance.

### EVALUATION OBJECT

ES6. The UNICEF CP 2012–2016 underwent a midterm review in 2014 that showed positive achievements of the legal and institutional framework reform and concerns on a number of

other child rights and protection issues. In response to the review and the increased corporate focus on adolescent empowerment of UNICEF, the CO launched a new initiative in 2015, which was carried over into CP 2017–2021, which focuses on: (1) social and child protection, (2) quality education and adolescent empowerment and (3) child rights monitoring (CRM) and access to justice. The overall theory of change defines the CP vision of change in terms of contribution to enhanced equitable systems for the realization of the children's rights in Montenegro, with special focus on those affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion. The CP implementation strategies included cross-sectoral programming, advocacy and social change campaigns; capacity development; policy dialogue and advice; child rights monitoring; knowledge generation; innovations; piloting, modelling and scaling-up; and partnerships.

ES7. To further the focus on cross-sectoral programming, the Country Office (CO) prepared a strategy in 2018 entitled, “Bridges & Champions for Change: A Strategy to Achieve Cross-sector Priorities for Children in Montenegro 2018–2021”, with four focus areas: (1) early childhood development (ECD), (2) adolescent and young people's skills and empowerment, (3) safe and inclusive communities and (4) child poverty reduction.

ES8. The key national partners include line ministries for Education, Sports and Youth, Justice, Labour and Social Welfare, Health, and national institutes such as the Bureau for Education and preschool institutions at the local level, the Institute for Social and Child Protection Montenegro, the Ombudsperson's Office and the Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT).

## **EVALUATION PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY**

ES9. The CO in Montenegro commissioned the independent Country Programme Evaluation (CPE). The CPE was managed by the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO) in close collaboration with the CO and conducted by an independent evaluation team from The KonTerra Group. The CPE objectives are threefold: (1) an independent assessment of the performance of the 2017–2021 in promoting children's rights and protection and supporting national priorities, including the European Union (EU) accession; (2) assessment of UNICEF strategic positioning, programmatic priorities and implementation strategies and (3) identification of good practices, lessons learned, and recommendations to guide future programming. The evaluation's time scope is January 2015 to December 2019. It includes the adolescent empowerment initiative launched in 2015 and the full CP 2017–2021. The geographic scope covers the whole country of Montenegro.

ES10. To ensure usefulness of the CPE, the approach put emphasis on ownership of evaluation results by applying a participatory approach with the strong participation of CO staff in workshops at various stages of the of the evaluation, including for validating preliminary findings and identifying key conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned. Other key CP stakeholders, including the government, national institutions, parliamentary committees, civil society organizations (CSOs), municipal structures and other partners participated in the CPE through interviews and an online perception survey. Moreover, the evaluation team engaged with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG), which includes relevant partners from the government, parliamentary committees, CSOs and the United Nations.

ES11. Data collection employed an appreciative inquiry, focusing on strengths and opportunities identified through narratives or perceptions. The CPE is informed by (1) secondary data sources reviewed in a desk study of context documents, including programme documents, evaluations, studies and assessments; (2) primary data sources through interviews with 151 key internal and external stakeholders (23 per cent male and 77 per cent female) at central and municipality level; and (3) an online perception survey among key CP partners assessing their appreciation of the CP as well as the UNICEF strategic position and role in promoting children's rights and protection in Montenegro.

ES12. The interviewed and surveyed stakeholders were selected through a purposive sampling strategy and represented the government, the judiciary, CSOs, donors, the United Nations and other entities relevant to the CP. Nine municipalities were visited. They were

selected based on their socioeconomic profiles and different levels of perceived capacity to implement child rights legislation, strategies and programmes.

ES13. The data analysis was based on a realist evaluation approach combined with a contribution analysis to explain what works, how, for whom, to what extent and in what circumstance. The robustness of the explanatory framework is based on a broad range of sources that have been triangulated. The CPE used the standard evaluation criteria: relevance and coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Success Stories**

ES14. The appreciative inquiry allowed identification of key success stories of UNICEF work in Montenegro with input from UNICEF staff, CSO partners, the government, national institutions, front-line staff and think tanks. The success stories are confirmed in various evaluations and studies. An overall and critical finding was the ease by which success stories were identified by all stakeholder groups, reflecting not only a very high degree of knowledge of UNICEF and the CP, but also the clear identification of UNICEF as successful. Another critical finding was the knowledge and understanding held by UNICEF technical staff of all CP activities in different sectors, including those in which staff are not directly involved. This reflects a team that is used to working in an integrated manner.

ES15. Six success stories were highlighted by the various stakeholder groups: (1) ECD and quality and access to preschool; (2) mainstreaming of children living with disabilities; (3) life skills support to adolescents; (4) deinstitutionalization and no children under 3 in institutions; (5) parenting for lifelong health (children 2–9); and (6) from juvenile justice to access to justice for all children. These success stories underline UNICEF strategic positioning and comparative advantage in child and adolescent rights and protection and its ability to influence social norms and mobilize the government and its institutions to develop an enabling legislative environment, strategies and action plans. This has been possible through the CP multipronged intervention approach based on a number of components that often take place in a stepwise fashion, with one component feeding into the next: (1) knowledge generation through substantive research; (2) targeted outreach with awareness and advocacy to influence behaviour, beliefs and decision-making at all levels; (3) policy dialogue and technical support to develop legislation and strategies; (4) innovation, piloting and modelling, and scaling-up; and (5) capacity development of institutions and staff at national and local levels. Furthermore, a flexible, responsive and integrated approach and partnerships as well as a long-term vision were identified as critical.

ES16. The CP has fostered a wide range of innovation and innovative approaches across the respective sectors including, among others, a multi-country media literacy campaign for children's safety through visual arts, innovative models for learning (UPSHIFT), the provision of platforms for influencing the development of policies, including U-Report and Young Reporters and the establishment of a learning hub to promote ongoing innovation (Youth Lab).

### **Relevance and Coherence**

ES17. The CPE finds that the CP is well aligned with the EU accession process, particularly in ensuring an updating of the legislative framework and national capacity to respond to children's and adolescents' rights and protection and in alignment with key human rights conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Likewise, the CP is aligned with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) 2030 and thereby with the plan of Montenegro to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Montenegro was one of 22 countries worldwide that prepared a self-assessment of its planning processes vis-à-vis the SDGs in 2016. One important highlight is the need to support Montenegro in the strengthening of statistical services, particularly MONSTAT, which is part of the CP component 3.

ES18. The CP focus on equitable access to quality health, education, social support, justice and child protection services for all children, particularly those affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion, is fully aligned with the inclusive growth pillar of the Government of Montenegro Development Directions 2017–2021. This is made evident by the CP provisions for access to quality preschool education, primary and secondary education, improved access for children with special education needs, violence against women and children, day-care centres for children with disabilities, deinstitutionalization, amendment of the social and child protection law and local service provisions. The CPE found that the cross-sectoral work included some attention to health within child protection, patronage nurses, and in quality and dignified maternal care. Interviewed stakeholders highlighted the need for more attention to traditional primary health care and children; youth called for more attention to mental health, as already called for in the midterm review of CP 2012–2016. The integrated approach adopted for the new ECD initiative addresses health needs, including mobilizing health sector professionals for integrated and cross-sectoral work.

ES19. The CPE found documented advances in reaching international standards for all children and adolescent rights and protection and responding to recommendations from the international human rights commissions. Despite this, there are concerns among key stakeholders regarding the limited work with the official national Roma and Egyptian coordination body as well as the National Women's Machinery. Gender equality issues are considered in the CP design and sex-disaggregated data is available, but the CPE found limited attention to context-specific and dynamic gender analysis in the CP implementation, including in the otherwise comprehensive and rich amount of knowledge products generated under the CP.

ES20. The CP design and aspirations are predominantly focused on ensuring that national legislation follows international standards. This is in line with the overall national priority on EU accession. However, the CPE also notes that the annual EC staff reports on the progress of the EU access negotiation repeatedly point to the weak implementation capacity. This position was also stressed during CPE interviews with stakeholders in Montenegro.

ES21. Finally, the CPE finds that the programme is aligned with UNDAF and the principles of Delivering as One (DaO) as implemented in Montenegro. The UNICEF CP directly contributes to three of the four outcomes of the UNDAF for Montenegro: democratic governance, social inclusion and economic governance. During data collection, the CPE found that the UNDAF component on change and environment would benefit from UNICEF involvement to promote the children's voice in line with the UNICEF Corporate Strategic Plan.

## **Effectiveness**

ES22. Overall, the planned achievement of programme results is on track and expected to be fully reached by the end of 2021. During the primary data collection, the CPE found that stakeholders are satisfied with the improvement of the access of all children to education, justice, health, and social and child protection. Still, the issue of implementation and capacity at the municipality level has been raised as a key concern in studies, reviews and evaluations as well as during primary data collection.

ES23. The CP support to training, improvement and support of information and data management systems such as SWIS (social welfare information system), MEIS (Montenegrin Education Information System), PRIS (Judicial Information System) and MICS (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey) have been critical for the strengthening of the national data systems for evidence-based decision-making. While stakeholders noticed some improvements in data compatibility and exchange among various systems, challenges remain. Likewise, while the systems are transparent, the knowledge and understanding of the systems among stakeholders at municipality level were found to be limited during the CPE.

ES24. At an institutional level, the CP has contributed to improved national systems for equitable access to education, justice, health, and social and child protection through activities that led to new legislation and the update of existing ones as well as strategies on action plans

on key child rights areas such as violence, preschool education, inclusive education and family law. A key result is also the new Strategy on Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019–2023, which builds on all relevant existing national strategies related to education, justice, health, and social and child protection and offers integrated interventions in the accompanying action plan.

ES25. The CP has mainly addressed child poverty indirectly through strengthened social protection systems and social inclusion programming. While progress can be observed on social protection and social inclusion, the existing evidence is not sufficient for the CPE to determine whether these have in turn led to poverty reduction. The CPE recognizes the recent application of the Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) approach in the 2019 multidimensional child poverty study. The study has yet to be finalized and published but is expected to contribute to poverty programming.

ES26. Promoting effective and independent child rights monitoring is a key function of UNICEF. Since the launch of the first country operations, UNICEF has gradually supported the development of a strong and independent child rights monitoring framework in Montenegro. This is in line with identified needs as highlighted in independent reports on the implementation of child rights and protection in Montenegro as well as in the barriers and bottleneck analysis prepared for the CP. The CPE finds that the CP has been able to follow up on some of the recommendations, including supporting the government in strengthening the functionality of the Council for the Rights of the Child and strengthening the capacity of the Deputy Ombudsperson's Office in charge of child rights, social protection and youth. However, the CPE finds that most of these follow-up activities are still in progress.

ES27. The CP implementation has led to a broad range of positive unintended impacts and some negative ones according to UNICEF staff and partner organizations. The introduction of piloted models and new technologies as well as UNICEF long-term advocacy and communication for social change have led to individual behaviour change and the emergence of unplanned partnerships and allowed for a deepened understanding of the issues facing children and youth in Montenegro. This has allowed for the child rights agenda to move further than what was planned in the CP document. The CPE did not find systematic documentation of unintended negative results and plans for follow-up. Still, the CO expressed full awareness of negative impacts such as insufficient capacity at some schools partly as a result of an otherwise successful UNICEF initiative promoting early childhood education. Based on the discussions during the CPE primary data collection, it is expected that the CO will address such challenges in the design of the next CP.

## **Efficiency**

ES28. The budgets for CP 2012–2016 of USD 11.6 million and for the CP 2017–2021 of USD 11.7 million reflect the CP focus on support to the legislative reform process as well as awareness raising and advocacy. Based on comparison with other CPs in the Western Balkans, the CPE finds the budget is appropriate for the CP and its ambitions.

ES29. Staffing has increased slightly in comparison to the previous CP cycle and is also appropriate for the scope of the CP. The CP maintains flexibility in human resources through the use of consultants and partnerships with universities or research institutions to support emerging areas of work, such as health and ECD. An important factor leading to the successful implementation of the CP is a highly professional and skilled UNICEF team. Opportunities for resource mobilization have been exploited in an efficient manner, which combined with the flexible programme design, has allowed the CO to respond to emerging needs throughout the CP period such as ECD and the empowerment of adolescents. This has been possible through a combination of the CO direct resource mobilization in Montenegro based on its well-recognized strategic position and its collaboration with UNICEF headquarters and regional office for joint resource mobilization. The new funding increasingly includes private sector engagement in children's rights issues.

ES30. Full application of results-based management (RBM) is still a work in progress. Overall, the building blocks are there and the system is transparent with frequent communications about results. However, the CPE also finds that key components of the RBM system are not exploited fully. This is particularly the case with lack of systematic attention to assumptions identified in the planning process but are missing in the internal monitoring.

## **Sustainability**

ES31. National partners show strong commitment to the CP but still expect UNICEF to take a major leadership role on a number of issues, including innovative approaches, social change campaigns and, to a certain degree, capacity development. The CPE identified a number of results that have been institutionalized into national programmes, including the data management and monitoring systems such as MICS, which is fully operated by MONSTAT. Likewise, institutions that have been financially and technically supported by UNICEF since their creation such as the resource centres in the Ministry of Education are now continued mainly with national investment complemented by some ad hoc technical support from UNICEF.

ES32. The CPE finds that the key challenge to sustainability of CP results is the weak effectiveness of the structures for child rights protection at the municipality level. While the CP has supported institutional strengthening of municipal structures, the CPE did not see evidence of initiatives that would guarantee sustainability at the municipality level.

ES33. The CO has been successful in developing innovative approaches and there is some evidence for the uptake and sustainability of these pilots, although not all elements have yet received sustainable institutionalization. One such example is a four-country innovative research project on media literacy launched in 2016 in Montenegro based on CO cooperation with the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. Through funds mobilized from the private sector, the initiative has been piloted in six primary schools and is ready for scaling up. In addition, the Golden Advisors to the Ombudsperson's Office have been institutionalized with full national ownership in national structures, providing hope for sustainability. The social-emotional skills programme component of the adolescent empowerment programme is now part of the primary and secondary school curriculum and the UPSHIFT learning module is planned to be mainstreamed in schools in the near future.

## **Impact**

ES34. As reflected in the success stories, the CP has changed attitudes and social behaviour in Montenegro on critical issues such as deinstitutionalization, early childhood education, adolescent participation, and the creation of a non-violent environment for children. The CPE finds that these social norms changes will have long-term impacts if complementary strategies will take place in line with the CP integrated multipronged approach. To ensure institutionalization and long-term impact of this approach the CPE found some weaknesses in the national capacity that still needs to be addressed, particularly national capacity for undertaking multi-year targeted campaigns for change of social norms. Critical for this successful impact has been a long-term vision and integrated support towards system building that includes evidence, advocacy (attitude changes), piloting and modelling, capacity development and subsequent uptake by government. The implementation of the cross-sectoral strategic approach launched by UNICEF is challenged by the current siloed approach at national level and limited national capacity for integrated work. One factor that may mitigate the siloed approaches would be the establishment of programme-based budgeting for the national budget at the level of the Ministry of Finance. With support from the EU, staff from line ministries are being trained in programme-based budgets. This provides an opportunity for UNICEF to further promote the introduction of cross-sectoral programming on child rights and protection at national level. In addition, UNICEF support to the revitalization of the Council on the Rights of the Child should support increased capacity for cross-sectoral work.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Overall Conclusions

ES35. Overall, the CP 2017–2021 has successfully contributed to an increased awareness of children’s and adolescents’ rights and protection needs in Montenegro. This has translated into national commitments as expressed through the adoption of a wide range of legislation, strategies and plans of action for children with disabilities, education, ECD, youth and justice. The CP has particularly responded to the needs of the most vulnerable children and adolescents and to families marginalized from the general development processes, including ethnic minorities and children living with disabilities. The combination of the CP implementation strategies has contributed to the legislative framework of Montenegro and has contributed to the National Strategy on Sustainable Development 2030.

ES36. Critical to success has been the UNICEF combination of implementation strategies through a multipronged intervention based on the following components: (1) knowledge generation through substantive research and knowledge, attitude and practice (KAPs); (2) advocacy aimed at all existing and potential stakeholders, including parents, front-line staff in municipalities, national and local politicians, local and central administration, CSOs and international cooperation; (3) policy dialogue and technical support to develop legislation and strategies; (4) piloting of new approaches to services at the local level; and (5) training and capacity development of front-line staff. Furthermore, a flexible, responsive and integrated approach and partnerships have been important for success. The UNICEF 2018 strategy emphasizing cross-sectoral programming is a positive evolution but faces challenges from national capacity and structures for promoting cross-sectoral programming.

### Coverage and Focus

ES37. The CP is based on a sound analysis of needs, bottlenecks and barriers identified in the planning and substantive theories of change combined with the comparative advantages of UNICEF in Montenegro. This has led to a CP focus on supporting the Government of Montenegro in fulfilling its obligations vis-à-vis international standards while stressing support to implementation of national policies, legislation and strategies related to children’s rights and priorities.

ES38. The key areas for further focus involve the actual implementation of strategies and policies. This would involve four discrete dimensions: (1) ongoing strengthening and adapting of policies to the current national environment; (2) assisting the government in identifying bottlenecks and barriers to implementation of targeted legislation and strategies at municipal levels; (3) adaptation of interventions to specialized target groups (for example, adaptations of CP support for abused and neglected children from more affluent households); and (4) promotion of cross-sectoral programming efforts.

### Partnerships

ES39. The implementation of the CP has been possible through well-established and constructive partnerships with key ministries, the judiciary, key national institutions such as the Ombudsperson’s Office and specialized institutes, parliamentary committees, CSOs, United Nations agencies, private sector, the EU and other cooperation partners. These partnerships have still to be defined in terms of cross-sectoral approaches. UNICEF has already established a partnership with the Ministry of Finance, forming a good basis for future strengthened partnerships around programme budgeting for the rights of the child and adolescent. Strengthening partnerships with the Department of Gender Equality, Department for Promotion and Protection of Roma and Egyptian Rights and the engagement of the National Women’s Machinery have potential for strengthening the strategic promotion of children’s rights in future programming.

### Cross-Cutting Issues

ES40. The CP equity approach focuses on the rights of vulnerable children affected by poverty, adversity, and exclusion, including children with disabilities and children from minority

groups. Monitoring systems such as the MICS allow for the identification of equity challenges in line with relevant human rights conventions. Two areas for further strengthening include increased attention to gender equity and cross-cutting themes related to climate change and the environment.

ES41. While the CP has addressed girls' protection needs through initiatives such as ending child marriage, preschool enrolment or adolescent girls' participation in youth activities, there has been no systematic context-specific gender analysis as called for by the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, thereby limiting updated gender-responsive initiatives. Disaggregated gender equality data – although present in UNICEF information systems and national studies – are not consistently applied for programmatic purposes. For climate change, the CP has prioritized other components considered to be more immediate needs within the CP; however, the Young Reporters activities suggest that climate change is an area of interest among children and adolescents in Montenegro.

## LESSONS LEARNED

ES42. The CPE participatory approach to the development of conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned distilled some lessons learned from the country programme process in Montenegro that the UNICEF CO together with the CPE consider transferable to other contexts.

### Linking CP to the EU Process

ES43. Linking the CP to the politically important EU access process has allowed high national commitment to the CP cycle. The success of this linkage requires a CO team skilled in supporting the government in developing and implementing legislation, policies and strategies and with a strong expertise in changing social norms and behaviour.

### Innovative Approach

ES44. Use of innovative and flexible approaches tailored to emergent needs and the local and national context has proven critical to attract the interest of national stakeholders. This has been possible through proactive collaboration with UNICEF corporate innovation specialists and the resources provided by the Office of Innovation.

### Commitment

ES45. UNICEF success stories in Montenegro build on a long-term vision for selected focus areas that goes beyond the five-year programme cycle and with long-term approaches to advocacy and social norms change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

ES46. The following recommendations developed during a participatory workshop with the UNICEF Country Office are **targeted** to the key decision makers for the design and implementation of the next CP in Montenegro, which are particularly the **UNICEF Country Office in Montenegro and the Government of Montenegro**.

### R1 - Coverage and Focus

ES47. The CPE recommends that the UNICEF future CP continues focusing on support to the government as well as key national children's rights and protection institutions and CSOs to ensure (1) full alignment of national legislation, policies and strategies on children's rights and protection with international norms, standards and conventions, including the EU Acquis as well as (2) full implementation of the children's rights and protection legislation, policies and strategies. The support should increasingly focus on the development of an institutionalized national system that ensures implementation and monitoring of implementation at both centralized and decentralized levels. To establish an effective system the CPE recommends that the following issues be considered in future CPs:

- Strengthening the capacity and functionality of the National Council for the Rights of the Child. Special attention should be given to the continuous identification of bottlenecks for implementation at municipality level.
- In strengthening the capacity and functionality of the National Council for the Rights of the Child attention should be paid to a layered but fully integrated structure with operational local Councils for the Rights of the Child at municipality level.
- The CP should use UNICEF innovation strengths to develop and test new support models with focus on scaling-up for the implementation of children's rights and protection legislation and strategies at central and municipality levels.
- In terms of thematic focus, the CPE recommends that future CPs continue the cross-sectoral approaches and further strengthen multidimensional poverty as an underlying principle. For the latter, attention should be given to both vertical integration between central and local levels as well as cross-sectoral integration among different line ministries.

## **R2 - Approaches**

ES48. The CPE recommends that the next CP be fully based on the cross-sectoral approach outlined in the UNICEF Montenegro Strategy to Achieve Cross-Sector Priorities for Children in Montenegro 2018–2021. Further attention should be given to the adaptation of this approach to main national policies and strategies of relevance for child rights in Montenegro through:

- Assessing the implications, potential and political commitment of the government to cross-sectoral approaches in Montenegro both at national and municipality levels.
- Supporting key line ministries in preparing child rights programmes to be budgeted according to the new programme budgeting approach launched by the Ministry of Finance in cooperation with the EU.
- Developing national capacity to plan and deliver integrated, multipronged interventions based on the combination of implementation strategies proven to be successful in the CP. Special attention should be given to national capacity to prepare and implement long-term social change initiatives.
- Generate further knowledge on how best to address deeply rooted problems related to child poverty, violence, exclusion, and drop-outs, including further development of the knowledge, understanding and application multidimensional poverty in UNICEF programming.

## **R3 - Partnerships**

ES49. To promote the cross-sectoral approach, the CPE recommends that future CPs strengthen functional partnerships for implementation of the CP through the following:

- Strengthen active participation of key departments in line ministries, particularly the Department of Gender Equality and Department for Promotion and Protection of Roma and Egyptian Rights at the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights in the CP.
- Build on UNICEF corporate knowledge on public-private partnerships to generate knowledge and build models on how to ensure private sector long-term involvement in the promotion of children's rights and protection in Montenegro.

## **R4 - Cross-Cutting Issues**

ES50. In line with the call for an increased focus on cross-sectoral programming and implementation and with attention to sustainability and long-term impact, the CPE recommends that future CPs pay increased attention to gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women while continuing the focus on equity applied in the current CP. The next CP should include:

- Strengthening the approach to gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women and moving from gender sensitivity towards gender responsiveness within the CP.
- Promoting UNICEF role in all components of the UNDAF, including in climate change and environment in which the voice of children and youth is critical.
- Consider further strengthening of knowledge and attention to the mental health of children and adolescents.

## Introduction

1. Since the independence of Montenegro in 2006, UNICEF has supported the national government in its effort to ensure that all Montenegrin children and adolescents enjoy the international rights and protections of the child as expressed in human rights conventions and the guiding principles of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union. Two UNICEF country programmes (CP) of cooperation with the Government of Montenegro have been developed and implemented: 2012–2016 and the current one 2017–2021. In line with UNICEF principles of learning and accountability, independent country programme evaluations (CPEs) are called for at least every two programme cycles. This is the final report of the CPE commissioned by the UNICEF Montenegro Country Office and managed by the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO). Being a formative evaluation with a strong focus on learning, it sets out to draw lessons learned from CP implementation to inform the design of the next CP, which is expected for 2022–2026, as well as the UN Country Team (UNCT) planning process for the next United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), also expected for 2022–2026. The evaluation was carried out prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and any statements regarding future programming in the report should be taken in view of the still unforeseen impact that COVID-19 may have on UNICEF or the Montenegro context.
2. The evaluation report follows the UNICEF general format for CP evaluations and is organized as follows:

|     |                                  |   |
|-----|----------------------------------|---|
| 1.  | Introduction                     | Brief background to the evaluation report   |
| 2.  | Country Context                  | Policy, demographic, socioeconomic, political, institutional and international factors relevant for the definition of the target group, partners, and design and implementation of the CP |
| 3.  | Evaluation Object                | Brief description of the CP: background, design and implementation status   |
| 4.  | Evaluation Purpose & Methodology | Evaluation process: scope, focus, timeline covered, criteria, design and methodology, data sources, how has data collection taken place, analysis focus, challenges in the process        |
| 5.  | Findings                         | What can be verifiably observed and triangulated for the response to the key questions of the evaluation  |
| 5.1 | Success Stories                  | Unpacking of key success stories for the CP   |
| 5.2 | Relevance & Coherence            | Assessment of the extent to which the design and intended results of the CP are consistent with the needs of children and the priorities of the Government of Montenegro                  |
| 5.3 | Effectiveness                    | Assessment of progress made to address the equity gaps affecting the most vulnerable children   |
| 5.4 | Efficiency                       | Assessment of the extent to which UNICEF achieves value for invested resources  |
| 5.5 | Sustainability                   | Assessment of the extent to which continuation of positive effects from the CP interventions are ensured, including their potential for scale-up and replication                          |
| 5.6 | Impact                           | Assessment of the extent to which the CP contributes to or can be reasonably expected to contribute to positive long-term changes for children in Montenegro                              |
| 6.  | Conclusions                      | Summary of key strengths and weaknesses of the CP, including identification of key factors contributing to – or inhibiting – the achievement of impact                                    |
| 7.  | Lessons Learned                  | Description of lessons learned from the CP applicable to broader settings   |
| 8.  | Recommendations                  | Presentation of recommendations based on the evidence, which target actions to be considered for the remainder of the current CP and for integration into the next CP                     |
|     | Annexes                          |   |

## 1. Country Context

### *Key country context elements for the UNICEF Country Programme*

1. The EU accession process is a strong motivating factor for reform, but there are still challenges to reach international standards in child rights and protection.
2. Significant challenges remain for achieving the SDGs, including gender equality and justice.
3. The decentralization process is weak and local administrations at the municipality level lack implementation capacity.
4. Poverty remains a key challenge and is interlinked with other persistent inequalities such as rural/urban, north/south, minorities/majorities, people with disabilities/rest of population, etc. Vulnerability is driven by a complex set of these factors.
5. Social norms and behaviour with regard to children's rights and protection are improving. Still, high rates of physical and psychological abuse continue, less than 20 per cent of newborns are exclusively breastfed and vaccination rates for children remain low.
6. There have been significant improvements in the deinstitutionalization of children to community-supported care.
7. Montenegro is a United Nations Delivering as One country with a well-established operational and programmatic collaboration among the agencies in Montenegro, allowing greater integrated focus and operational efficiency.

### 1.1 Administrative – Policy Structure

3. Montenegro is an **upper middle-income country** in the Western Balkans.<sup>1,2</sup> The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Index was 67.3 in 2019, ranking Montenegro as 87 out of 162 countries on a global level, according to the Sustainable Development Report 2020.<sup>3</sup> The regional average for the Western Balkans was 70.4. According to the 2020 Report, among the 17 SDGs, targets for one goal were achieved in Montenegro in 2019, namely the targets set for ending poverty,<sup>4</sup> while significant challenges remain for reaching targets in areas such as gender equality, climate action, peace, justice and strong institutions.<sup>5</sup> However, as explained later, different forms of poverty still remain a challenge with associated vulnerability and risks for abuse of child rights and protection.
4. A former Yugoslav republic, Montenegro declared independence in 2006 after having formed a state union with Serbia since 1991. In October 2007, the new Constitution of Montenegro was decreed, confirming the country's respect for social justice based on the rule of law. The constitution is generally recognized as being in line with European Union (EU) standards. It includes general references to children, including their rights to

<sup>1</sup> Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

<sup>2</sup> EIU (2019) "Country Report Montenegro" Economist Intelligent Unit. In 2018, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to EUR 4,663 million or EUR 7,495 per capita and has seen a steady increase since 2012. In 2016 agriculture contributed 9 per cent to the GDP, industry 19 per cent and services 72 per cent.

<sup>3</sup> Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., LaFortune, G., Fuller, G. (2019): Sustainable Development Report 2019. New York: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the indicators for the SDG 1 on poverty are estimated percentage of the population that is living under the poverty threshold of USD 1.90 a day and USD 3.20 a day, which was under 0.01. As explained later in this CPE report, poverty is still a major challenge in Montenegro for children's rights and protection.

<sup>5</sup> UN Sustainable Report Dashboards 2019: Montenegro.

protection from psychological, physical, economic and any other exploitation or abuse (article 74).<sup>6</sup>

5. Serbia and Montenegro started **accession negotiations with the EU** in 2005 and Montenegro continued the negotiations as an independent country after 2006. Montenegro was officially approved as an EU candidate country in 2010, with negotiations opening in 2012. Over the years, there have been various predictions as to when Montenegro will become an EU member state. Based on interviews with the evaluation's key informants, EU membership is unlikely to occur during the next country programme cycle (2021–2025).<sup>7</sup>
6. Montenegro is a member of the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the Central European Free Trade Agreement, the Union for the Mediterranean, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and other international bodies.
7. The **public administration system** in Montenegro consists of 17 ministries and a number of administrative bodies with executive responsibilities. Of special interest for UNICEF cooperation in Montenegro are the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Public Administration, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Ministry of Sports and Youth, Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism and the Office of the Prime Minister – that is, 12 out of 17 ministries and the Prime Minister's Office. The work of public administration and legislative implementation is overseen by **parliamentary committees**, including the Committees on Human Rights and Freedom, Health, Labour and Social Welfare, Education, Science, Arts and Sports and Gender Equality. Moreover, an **Ombudsperson's Office** exists independently from other state bodies and accountable only to the Parliament. The Office is the national mechanism for international human rights treaties.<sup>8,9</sup>
8. **Public administration reform has been leading the political agenda** in Montenegro since independence. It is particularly defined by the EU accession process and the harmonization of existing legislation with standards and principles of essential international institutions such as the EU, United Nations and OSCE.<sup>10</sup> Through the reform process, the ministries are now administrative bodies with the right to develop internal and foreign policies related to legislation, strategies, projects and programmes. Moreover, the line ministries typically prepare for ratification and participate in **international treaty work**. Implementation is managed by other administrative institutions. International cooperation has been key to the reform process and to bringing the legislative framework to international standards with partners from the United Nations system, the EU, OSCE and some bilateral donors, particularly Germany, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Norway and the United States.<sup>11</sup> According to the analysis of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 8 per cent of the Official Development Assistance was allocated to education and 86 per cent to

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<sup>6</sup> Constitution of Montenegro, English Translation, Parliament of Montenegro. The Law on Social and Child Protection and the Law on Amendments to the Family Law explicitly define the notion of a child as a person below the age of 18.

<sup>7</sup> Source: UNICEF staff, Government staff, donors and other United Nations agencies.

<sup>8</sup> Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro.

<sup>9</sup> Montenegro has ratified United Nations bodies of treaties on human rights, including the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) and its three optional protocols, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as well as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

<sup>10</sup> See for instance Cerovic, D. et al. (2018) "The Thorny Road to Public Administration Reform in Montenegro" Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences, Special Issue 2018, pp. 27–43.

<sup>11</sup> [OECD Development Finance Data: Montenegro 2017–2018](#).

capacity development of other social infrastructure and services. The UNICEF focus and operational manoeuvrability should be seen in this framework.

9. In terms of sector focus, the Government of Montenegro Development Directions 2017–2021 present three pillars: (1) smart growth, (2) sustainable growth, both focusing on economic development; and (3) inclusive growth based on the labour market, education, sport, social welfare and health care.<sup>12</sup> There is a clear priority on the first two pillars in the Development Directions, with focus on the ongoing structural reform processes and reference to the EU access negotiations, including the reform of social and child protection. For the inclusive growth pillar, the Development Directions outline measures that include preschool education, primary education infrastructure, access to children with special needs,<sup>13</sup> violence against women and children, day-care centres for children with disabilities, deinstitutionalization, amendment of the social and child protection law and local service provisions. Generally, limited attention is given to decentralization processes and how to ensure local service provisions.<sup>14</sup>
10. **Administratively, Montenegro is divided into 24 self-governing local municipalities**, including the historical capital, the capital city of Podgorica, and one urban municipality, which is a subdivision of the capital city.<sup>15</sup> The right to local self-government is outlined in the Law on Local Self-Government, which guarantees decentralization in principle.<sup>16</sup> However, fiscal decentralization is still a challenge. This is highlighted in the annual analysis of the progress of negotiations for EU accession presented in European Commission (EC) Staff Working Documents.<sup>17</sup> The documents describe the impact of weak decentralization, including social services that are not standardized, an insufficient number of local staff and lack of appropriate involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs). Overall, the reports question the sustainability of the social services. The challenging decentralization process is also emphasized in the National Strategy on Sustainable Development (NSSD) 2030, which points to resulting problems with local-level social challenges.<sup>18</sup> The municipalities have their own budgets and are financed from their own resources in addition to resources from the state.<sup>19</sup> There are huge differences in the capacity of the municipalities to mobilize resources.<sup>20</sup> The municipalities are organized in the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro, which works on inter-municipal cooperation but with limited decision-making influence.
11. Of special interest for UNICEF areas of intervention is the mandate and responsibility described in the local governance law, stipulating that municipalities, in accordance with their possibilities, shall participate in the provision of conditions and improvement of the following sectors: health protection, education, social and child protection, employment and other sectors of interest for the local population. The law also prescribes that they must carry out the rights and duties of a founder of institutions established within these sectors, in accordance with the law. In practice, municipality responsibilities are

<sup>12</sup> [Government of Montenegro \(2017\) Montenegro Development Directions 2018–2021](#).

<sup>13</sup> According to the [Ministry of Education \(2007\) “Law on Education of Children with Special Needs”](#), children with special needs are children with physical, mental and sensory disability; behavioural disorders; serious chronic diseases; emotional disorders; combined disorders; children ill for a long time and other children who encounter difficulties in learning, who need education by the educational programme with adjusted tuition and additional professional help or by a special curriculum. It should be noted that in many documents reviewed for the CPE, the following is often written: “Children with disabilities and special needs”.

<sup>14</sup> “Inclusive growth” investment for 2015–2017 constitutes EUR 55 million, corresponding to 1.90 per cent of the total estimated value of the identified projects.

<sup>15</sup> Law on Territorial Organization of Montenegro (Official Gazette No. 3/2020).

<sup>16</sup> [Law on Local Self-Government “Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro”, No. 42/2003, 28/2004, 75/2005, 13/2006 and “Official Gazette of Montenegro” No. 88/2009 and 3/2010](#).

<sup>17</sup> [EC Staff Working Document: Montenegro Reports Accompanying EC Communication](#). Analysed for the CPE for 2006, 2007, 2010, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019.

<sup>18</sup> [Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism \(2016\) “National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Montenegro”](#).

<sup>19</sup> Law of Local Self-Government Financing “Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro”, No. 42/03 and 44/03 (correction) and “Official Gazette of Montenegro”, No. 5/08 and 74/2010.

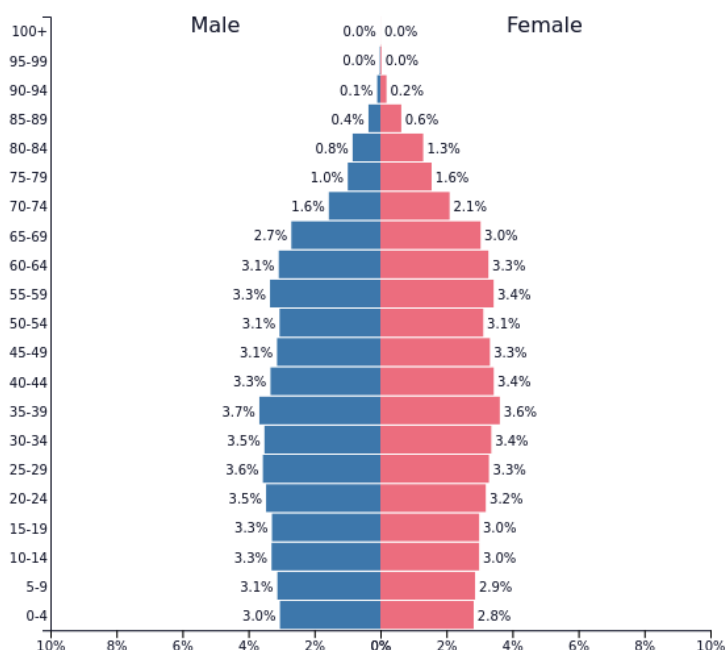
<sup>20</sup> Source: UNICEF staff, government staff, donors and other United Nations agencies.

relatively limited, including in the areas of child and adolescent rights and protection, health and education.

## 1.2 Demographics

12. The latest population census took place in 2011 and showed a total **population of 620,029 inhabitants**.<sup>21</sup> Estimates from the Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT), show a total population of 622,182 inhabitants as of 1 January 2019. The Montenegrin population is relatively old with life expectancies of 81 years for women and 75 years for men in 2018, while the annual demographic increase was 1.2 per cent.<sup>22</sup> These numbers are reflected in the following population pyramid:

**Figure 1: Population pyramid based on 2019 estimates from the United Nations**



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision. [www.PopulationPyramid.net](http://www.PopulationPyramid.net)

13. According to the 2016 National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) 2030, Montenegro has faced a long-term decline in fertility over the last decades and improvement of the demographic trends is identified as a priority theme of the NSSD.<sup>23</sup> The urbanization rate is 67 per cent with an annual increase of 0.5 per cent point over the last 10 years.<sup>24</sup>
14. Since independence, advances have taken place toward **the social inclusion of ethnic groups**, notably through education and training. Montenegro recognizes Albanian, Bosniak, Croat, Muslim, Roma and Serb national minorities and minority councils have been established and are the official channels of communication with the government. During the last population census, data were disaggregated by ethnicity, showing a composition of 45 per cent Montenegrin, 29 per cent Serbian, 9 per cent Bosniak, 5 per cent Albanian, 1 per cent Roma, 7 per cent others, and 5 per cent unspecified.<sup>25</sup> Ethnic belonging in the census is based on self-identification and it is generally acknowledged

<sup>21</sup> MONSTAT.

<sup>22</sup> MONSTAT.

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism (2016) "National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Montenegro". The NSSD is the national translation of the global Sustainable Development Goals.

<sup>24</sup> Montenegro – Urban population as a share of total population.

<sup>25</sup> MONSTAT.

that the Roma population constitutes around 3 per cent.<sup>26</sup> While there have been important advances for social inclusion of ethnic groups since independence, challenges remain, particularly for ensuring equal development of Roma and other minorities.

15. According to the 2019 EC Staff Working Documents, ethnically disaggregated data are no longer collected systematically.<sup>27</sup> However, both the 2013 and the 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)<sup>28</sup> include special information on the Montenegro Roma Settlements, defined as clusters with at least ten self-identified Roma households.<sup>29</sup> Ethnic issues continue to have practical implications for equal rights and opportunities for every citizen. While the main languages used at the municipality level are Montenegrin, Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian, Albanian is the principal language in a couple of municipalities, resulting in special requirements for front-line staff. Likewise, national civil society organizations (CSOs) are often based on ethnic identity as are various national interest groups working on the same issues, for instance parents' associations for children with disabilities.

### 1.3 Socioeconomic Inequalities

16. **Persistent inequalities remain** a key challenge for children's rights and protection, and vulnerability is driven by a complex set of those inequalities between people living in different settings, such as urban vs rural areas and north vs south. Other key factors defining vulnerability relate to ethnicity, gender, age and disabilities. These inequalities are all strongly interlinked and often mutually reinforcing. The inequalities have a number of pervasive adverse impacts on children's rights and protection. For instance, a 2015 regional study prepared by UNICEF and the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) showed that children's needs for justice across criminal, civil and administrative settings are inadequately addressed. The lack of access to justice is often related to poor understanding among children and their families about child rights, which is particularly linked to general high vulnerability. Furthermore, the interviews for the study in Montenegro showed that, although various institutional measures had been set up to promote children's access to justice, there were a number of gaps, for instance, inadequate specialized training, lack of staff and inappropriate infrastructure.<sup>30</sup> In a 2019 general study on the legal system in Montenegro, the World Bank writes that marginalized groups often do not have access to justice because it is financially inaccessible.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, according to UNICEF staff, the access to justice for juveniles has improved in recent years as a result of increased attention and external support.<sup>32</sup>
17. The **regional divide** is quite stark in Montenegro. In addition to the self-governing municipalities, Montenegro is divided into three regions without governance structures: The North, the Centre, and the South, each representing different socioeconomic and demographic compositions. The North, in particular, is characterized by a low level of socioeconomic development, a high level of poverty and constant internal migration toward the South and Centre. According to the NSSD, economic development in the

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<sup>26</sup> UNDP, World Bank and the European Union (2018) "Roma at a Glance – Montenegro" with data from Eurostat, World Bank and the Council of Europe. The short document notes that the term "Roma" is used to refer to a number of different groups (e.g., Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal) and includes travellers.

<sup>27</sup> European Commission (2019) Commission Staff Working Document: Montenegro 2019 Report Accompanying the Document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

<sup>28</sup> The Multi Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICSs) were introduced by corporate UNICEF in the mid-1990s in response to a lack of data to monitor the progress towards the World Summit for Children (WSC) goals. The MICS's are carried out as national household surveys with several modules and are carried out around every three to five years.

<sup>29</sup> [UNICEF & MONSTAT \(2019\) "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS6."](#)

<sup>30</sup> [UNICEF and IDLO \(2015\) "Children's Equitable Access to Justice" Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNICEF, Geneva, 2015.](#)

<sup>31</sup> [World Bank \(2019\) "Result-Oriented Review of Delivery of Justice in Montenegro".](#)

<sup>32</sup> Source: UNICEF staff.

North is only at 50 per cent of the national level and the employment rate was 10 percentage points lower than the national level.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, the latest MICS (2018) shows that the early childhood education attendance rate stands at 37 per cent in the North, and 60 and 51 per cent respectively in the Centre and South.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the primary school completion rate was 99 per cent in the North, and 96 and 92 per cent in the Centre and South. These differences are linked to different traditions, norms and beliefs. In the North, for example, fewer parents believe that children should attend preschool.<sup>35</sup> Many preschool education facilities in the North remain underused, while facilities operate beyond capacity in the South.<sup>36</sup> Overall, though, the complexity of various differences – regional, ethnic, urban-rural and socioeconomic – are important, which is also reflected in the following examples of regional differences identified in the latest MICS (2018).<sup>37</sup>

**Table 1: Examples of regional differences in child-related indicators**

| Key Child-Related Socioeconomic Indicators   | North Region | Centre Region | South Region |
|--|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Deprivation: % of household members deprived in at least 3 key material indicators | 48           | 31            | 28           |
| WASH: % of households using basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services  | 88           | 98            | 96           |
| Child marriage: % of women married before age of 15                                | 1.3          | 0.7           | 0.7          |
| Primary school completion: % rate  | 98.8         | 96.1          | 92.3         |
| Early childhood education programme participation: % rate                          | 37.1         | 59.6          | 51.3         |
| Malnutrition: % of children under 5 moderately wasted                              | 3.9          | 1.3           | 2.7          |
| Malnutrition: % of children under 5 moderately overweight                          | 12.2         | 3.8           | 11.4         |

Source: MICS 2018

18. **Around 25 per cent of the population lives at risk of poverty**,<sup>38</sup> a percentage that has remained almost stable since the first MONSTAT-EU Annual Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) in 2013<sup>39</sup> (25 per cent) with little variation in 2018 (24 per cent)<sup>40</sup>. The EU-SILC also measures the rate of children at risk of poverty, which was 35 per cent in 2013 and 32 per cent in 2018. The average monthly salary in Montenegro for February 2018 was EUR 511, excluding taxes and fees, while the minimum consumer basket for a four-member household in the same month was EUR 629.<sup>41</sup> This figure highlights the need for multiple income earners per family. Income inequality has increased steadily in recent decades, according to the World Inequality Database, with the top 10 per cent of the population earning 27 per cent of total income in 1990 and 33 per cent in 2015.<sup>42</sup> The Gini index increased substantially between 2010 and 2012 from

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism (2016) "National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Montenegro".

<sup>34</sup> UNICEF & MONSTAT (2019) "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS6".

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF & Ministry of Education (2016) "Strategy for Early and Preschool Education in Montenegro (2016 – 2020)".

<sup>36</sup> Jadranka Kaluđerović, J. & V. Golubović (2019) "In-Work Poverty in Montenegro" European Social Policy Network (ESPN).

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF & MONSTAT (2020) "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS6".

<sup>38</sup> At-risk-of-poverty rate refers to the percentage of persons (in total population) with the equivalized total disposable income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. At-risk-of-poverty threshold is determined as 60 per cent of the median equivalized disposable income of all households, expressed in euro.

<sup>39</sup> EU-SILC.

<sup>40</sup> MONSTAT Data.

<sup>41</sup> MONSTAT Data. The minimal consumer basket refers to the household consumption, including food and non-food products and services which ensure the maintenance of life and working capacity of household members following the minimal recommendations of WHO and USDA Food Guide 2010, requirements of minimal value of caloric intake of 2,211 kcal per day, per person.

<sup>42</sup> World Inequality Database – Montenegro.

29 to 41 per cent, reflecting the global financial crisis. According to MONSTAT, the Gini index has decreased slightly from 39 per cent in 2013 to 37 per cent in 2017.<sup>43</sup>

19. The **unemployment rate** remains high although it has been declining over the last decade, from 19 per cent in 2009 to 15 per cent in 2019, according to the MONSTAT Labour Force Survey.<sup>44</sup> The female unemployment rate has remained slightly higher than males over the last decade. Youth unemployment (15–24 years) is particularly high and was reported at 29 per cent in 2018,<sup>45</sup> while the ILO estimates it at 22 per cent in 2019.<sup>46</sup> Among youth with tertiary education, unemployment was 28 per cent in 2014.<sup>47</sup>
20. While important advances have taken place toward **social integration** of ethnic groups, notably through education and training, challenges exist. Particularly for Roma and Egyptians, who are still considered the most marginalized and vulnerable in Montenegro.<sup>48,49</sup> The MICS 2013 and 2018 show important socioeconomic differences between the Roma population and the overall averages of the Montenegrin society, including an expansive population pyramid with a young and growing population, a high rate of child marriage and low attendance and completion rates in primary school.<sup>50,51</sup> There are other minority groups in Montenegro, such as Balkan Egyptians, that are incorporated by MICS under Roma but not spelled out to keep the text brief.<sup>52</sup>
21. Discrimination based on sex is explicitly prohibited by the constitution, but various reports indicate that despite improved legislation and strategy documents, women continue to face inequality in social and political participation as well as in the sharing of opportunities and responsibilities within families, as documented in the 2019 Gender Equality Index. In fact, the authors of the report presenting the index conclude that a lot remains to be achieved to reach full gender equality in Montenegro.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, gender-based violence is widespread and generally accepted.<sup>54</sup> The Gender Gap Index, calculated by the World Economic Forum based on economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment, was 0.710 in 2018, ranking Montenegro 71 out of 153 countries and the lowest among Western Balkan countries.<sup>55</sup>

## 1.4 Children's Rights & Protection

22. To respond to the social challenges and international standards set out in regional and global conventions and requirements for EU members, the Government of Montenegro has carried out comprehensive reforms of the social and child rights and protection system over the past 10 years, in collaboration with UNICEF and other partners. However, child rights and protection are still challenged on a number of issues.
23. **Abuse.** Sixty-six per cent of children aged 1 to 14 had experienced some form of physical punishment or psychological aggression by adult household members one month prior to the MICS 2018 interview.<sup>56</sup> The high disciplinary abuse level continues during

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<sup>43</sup> MONSTAT, World Bank, UNICEF (2018) "Statistics on Income and Living Conditions 2013-2017".

<sup>44</sup> MONSTAT Labour Force Survey.

<sup>45</sup> World Bank Group (2020) "The Economic and Social Impact of COVID 19" Western Balkans Regular Economic Report, No. 17.

<sup>46</sup> About the ILO in Montenegro.

<sup>47</sup> 2016 European Commission Staff Working Document on the Accession of Montenegro.

<sup>48</sup> Council of Europe (2019) "The Opinion on Montenegro" Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

<sup>49</sup> EC (2018) Staff Working Documents: Montenegro Reports Accompanying EC Communication.

<sup>50</sup> UNICEF and MONSTAT (2019) "MICS 2018 – Montenegro (Roma Settlements)" and UNICEF and MONSTAT (2014) "MICS5 – Montenegro (Roma Settlements)".

<sup>51</sup> It should be noted that the Roma sample for the survey is relatively small.

<sup>52</sup> UNICEF staff. The use of Roma to cover several minorities is also used by other agencies such as EUROSTAT, UNDP and the World Bank as shown earlier.

<sup>53</sup> UNDP, Ministry for Human and Minorities Rights, MONSTAT, EIGE (2019) "Gender Equality Index for Montenegro 2019.

<sup>54</sup> See for instance, Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro (Ombudsperson) (2017) Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights in Montenegro – third cycle.

<sup>55</sup> World Economic Forum, the Global Gap Index 2020.

<sup>56</sup> UNICEF & MONSTAT (2019) "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS 2018".

adolescence.<sup>57</sup> The MICS 2018 did not find significant differences among abuse by gender.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, women caregivers tend to be slightly more in favour of physical discipline than men.<sup>59</sup> MICS 2018 furthermore compares incidents of psychological abuse among children 1 to 14 years of age according to wealth groups and finds that 64 per cent of children in the richest households have experienced psychological punishment compared to 62 per cent among the poorest.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, children in richer household experience less physical punishment than in poor households with 19 per cent of children in the richest households experiencing only psychological abuse while it is 12 per cent for the poorest. What these numbers particularly highlight is the underlying complexity defining children's vulnerability.

24. **Education.** Access to education in Montenegro is free of charge although textbooks, meals and school accessories still have to be paid for by parents in most cases.<sup>61</sup> Concerns have been raised about the quality of teaching and education infrastructure.<sup>62</sup> Referring to the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the World Bank states that nearly 50 per cent of students are not attaining basic proficiency in science and mathematics and 40 per cent lack basic proficiency in reading.<sup>63</sup> The 2018 PISA shows that Montenegro had moved closer to the OECD average in science and mathematics performance. While slight improvements can be observed since the first participation of Montenegro in PISA in 2006,<sup>64</sup> the country still scores well below OECD averages in all three performance categories.<sup>65</sup>
25. **Health.** Seven per cent of children under 5 are stunted,<sup>66</sup> while two per cent are wasted<sup>67</sup> and seven per cent overweight, according to MICS 2018. In the Roma settlements, some of the nutritional indicators are more critical, with 21 per cent of children under 5 being stunted while the wasting was three per cent. However, only three per cent of the children under 5 was overweight. It is particularly younger children who are malnourished and girls tend to be affected slightly more than boys. Twenty per cent of children under 6 months were exclusively breastfed in 2018, which is an improvement from MICS 2013 when only 17 per cent of children under 5 months were exclusively breastfed. Among children in Roma settlements, the number of children under 6 months who were exclusively breastfed in both 2013 and 2018 was 14 per cent.<sup>68</sup>
26. In terms of child vaccinations, the country has faced challenges with antivaccination campaigns for several years. The coverage of the MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) vaccine was 64 per cent in 2015.<sup>69</sup> In 2018, the measles vaccination rate had dropped to 42 per cent.<sup>70</sup> Montenegro does not have a multi-year vaccination plan (2018).<sup>71</sup>

<sup>57</sup> UNICEF & MONSTAT (2019) "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS 2018".

<sup>58</sup> Based on survey responses administered to caregivers of children as part of MICS.

<sup>59</sup> www.monstat.org.

<sup>60</sup> UNICEF & MONSTAT (2019) "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS 2018". Data shows the following percentages for children experiencing psychosocial punishment according to the wealth of the household: poorest quintile: 62, second: 55, middle: 59, fourth: 62, richest: 64. It is not clear from the available data if this difference is influenced by gender and/or other factors.

<sup>61</sup> Protector of Human Rights and Freedom in Montenegro (2017) "Alternative Report concerning the Second and Third Periodic Reports of Montenegro on Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child".

<sup>62</sup> Ombudsperson's Office (2017) Alternative Report of Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro concerning the Second and Third Periodic Reports of Montenegro on Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>63</sup> World Bank (2019) Reform Momentum Needed Western Balkans Regular Economic Report No. 15.

<sup>64</sup> OECD (2019) "PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do" PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris.

<sup>65</sup> Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018: Montenegro, OECD. PISA measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills and is carried out every three years.

<sup>66</sup> Height for age, -2 standard deviations.

<sup>67</sup> Weight for height, -2 standard deviations.

<sup>68</sup> UNICEF & MONSTAT (2019) "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS6" and UNICEF & MONSTAT (2014) "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS5".

<sup>69</sup> UNICEF (2017) Submission of an Integrated Report for the CRC and Optional Protocols (OPAC and OPSC), UNICEF Country Office in the Montenegro report quoting data from the Institute for Public Health.

<sup>70</sup> Montenegro: WHO and UNICEF estimates of immunization coverage: 2019 revision.

<sup>71</sup> WHO vaccine-preventable diseases: monitoring system, 2019 global summary.

27. **Trafficking.** Several international organizations, including the EU, report that Montenegro is a transit country for trafficking in human beings.<sup>72</sup> Victims of sex trafficking in Montenegro include women and girls from Montenegro, who are exploited in hospitality facilities, bars, restaurants, nightclubs and cafes. Children, particularly Roma and Albanian, are subjected to forced begging while Roma girls have been sold to forced child marriages.<sup>73</sup> Significant efforts have been undertaken to meet international standards for eliminating trafficking, including awareness raising and advocacy organized by the Roma Council and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Still, major challenges remain, including the changes in the status and roles of the previously independent Office for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons under the Ministry of Interior in 2018.<sup>74</sup>
28. **Institutional Care.** Large-scale institutional care of children with disabilities, orphans and other vulnerable children was particularly widespread in Eastern and Central Europe (including Montenegro) before the reform processes in the 2000s. UNICEF, the EU and NGOs, among others, have supported the deinstitutionalization efforts of the Government of Montenegro. Three former special education facilities for children have been transformed into resource centres for the education sector. The awareness of children's rights has increased, and systems of foster families and alternative care at the family and community levels have been established for most children in line with the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).<sup>75</sup> Moreover, there is a move from a medical model focusing on children's physical and mental 'defects' towards empowerment models as agreed in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).<sup>76,77</sup>

## 1.5 EU Integration Process

29. Montenegro is well advanced in the **EU integration process**, which was already launched in 2000 with the EU policy for the gradual integration of Western Balkan countries and the launch of the Stabilization and Association Process. At the independence of Montenegro in 2006, the European Council reaffirmed the country's partnership status with the EU and its potential as a member state.<sup>78</sup> A Stabilization and Association Agreement was signed in 2007,<sup>79</sup> committing the country to harmonize its legislation with the EU Acquis Communautaire, that is, treaties, EU legislation, international agreements, standards, court verdicts, fundamental rights provisions and horizontal principles in the treaties such as equality and non-discrimination – in short, EU law<sup>80</sup> also referred to as the European administrative space.
30. Montenegro applied for EU membership in December 2008 and its candidacy was approved by the European Council in 2010 based on the European Commission's opinion for the potential of Montenegro to attain the Acquis.<sup>81,82</sup> The opinion expressed concerns about the lack of administrative capacity, corruption, weak intersectoral coordination, inefficiency at the municipal level and lack of implementation capacity for the legislative framework. Human rights concerns were also stressed, including social exclusion and discrimination against the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities; persons with disabilities, including children; trafficking in human beings including children; women's

<sup>72</sup> EC Annual Staff Working Documents: Montenegro Reports Accompanying EC Communication.

<sup>73</sup> [United States State Department \(2019\) "2019 Trafficking in Persons Report – Montenegro"](#).

<sup>74</sup> [United States State Department \(2018\) "2018 Trafficking in Persons Report – Montenegro"](#). According to the report the office no longer has "adequate authority, capacity and impact to implement anti-trafficking efforts".

<sup>75</sup> See for instance EC Annual Staff Working Documents: Montenegro Reports Accompanying EC Communication.

<sup>76</sup> [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

<sup>77</sup> The exact number of children with disabilities is not available due to the absence of appropriate data collection system (UNICEF Montenegro (2017) "Terms of Reference: Analysis of System Response and Support to Children with Disabilities").

<sup>78</sup> [EC \(2006\) Staff Working Documents: Montenegro 2006 Progress Report](#).

<sup>79</sup> [Ministry of Foreign Affairs – European Integration of Montenegro \(2013\) "Montenegro & EU"](#).

<sup>80</sup> EUabc.com.

<sup>81</sup> [Official Journal of the European Union, L 88/, Council Decision 2010/199/CFSP of 22 March 2010](#).

<sup>82</sup> [EC \(2010\) "Commission Opinion on Montenegro's application for membership of the European Union"](#).

rights; and violence against women and children. The opinion highlighted, among other things, the need for an overall multisectoral reform of the child and social protection system, in line with UNICEF standards.<sup>83,84</sup>

31. **Accession negotiations** with the EU opened in 2012 and consisted of a total of 33 chapters. In 2019, 32 chapters had been opened for negotiation, of which three had been provisionally closed with a good level of preparation with regard to the Acquis, including chapter 26 on education and culture.<sup>85</sup> The last chapter, which is on competition policy, was opened in 2020. Independent reports, such as the Economist Intelligence Unit, describe how concerns about corruption and lack of respect for the rule of law remain stumbling blocks for the EU accession of Montenegro, as reflected in the challenges related to chapters 23 and 24: judiciary and fundamental rights and justice, freedom and democracy.<sup>86</sup>
32. Since 2007, Montenegro has received financial and technical help from the EU Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA): IPA I (2007–2013) for a total amount of EUR 233 million; and IPA II (2014–2020) with an indicative budget of EUR 279 million. Key actions funded under the IPA include support for the anti-discrimination and gender equality policies; promotion and protection of the human rights of Roma and other vulnerable groups; and sectoral programmes on employment, education and social policies, which include funding for children with special education needs. UNICEF has been involved in the implementation of these funds (both IPA I and II).
33. Key observations, concerns and recommendations expressed in the EC annual reports – with analysis on the progress of the accession negotiation – show some development in key areas related to child rights and protection.<sup>87</sup> While the reports show legislative improvements, concerns remain regarding the lack of implementation of legislative frameworks, including lack of capacity. Key recommendations from the reports include strengthening legislative implementation capacity, human rights institutions and effective implementation of fundamental rights policies on gender equality, people with disabilities, the child and Roma populations. This should happen through sufficient budget allocation to implement the policies, improve the capacity of responsible institutions, and strengthen inter-institutional coordination. Furthermore, alternative care services need to be strengthened to complete the successful deinstitutionalization efforts according to the reports.

## 1.6 United Nations in Montenegro

34. The United Nations system in Montenegro is composed of five resident agencies: UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as well as 11 regionally based agencies participating from their headquarters in Vienna, Istanbul, Geneva, Budapest and Venice.<sup>88</sup> In 2009, the United Nations system in Montenegro adopted the

<sup>83</sup> [EC \(2010\) “EC Staff Working Document: Analytical Report Accompanying EC Communication – Commission Opinion on Montenegro’s application for membership of the European Union”](#).

<sup>84</sup> The reform process requested by the EU should be seen in the context of the structure of the country. As a small country with limited administrative capacity, Montenegro faces challenges in exploiting economies of scale for the provision of public goods and services.

<sup>85</sup> European Commission (2019) Commission Staff Working Document: Montenegro 2019 Report Accompanying the Document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

<sup>86</sup> EIU (2019) “Country Report Montenegro” Economist Intelligence Unit.

<sup>87</sup> Annual [EC Staff Working Document: Montenegro Reports Accompanying EC Communication](#). Analyzed for the CPE for 2006, 2007, 2010, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019.

<sup>88</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), United Nations Organization on Drug and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Women, United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), United Nations Organization on Procurement Services (UNOPS).

United Nations system of “Delivering as One (DaO)”.<sup>89</sup> As such, the United Nations in Montenegro implements all DaO standard operating procedures: one programme, a common budgetary framework and one fund, one leader, operating as one, common premises and communicating as one.

35. The 16 resident and non-resident United Nations agencies, funds and programmes jointly implement the Integrated UN Programme for Montenegro 2017–2021<sup>90</sup> in line with United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF).<sup>91</sup> The outcome-based programme is developed in close cooperation with the government and consists of four priority areas of cooperation: (1) democratic governance, (2) environmental sustainability, (3) social inclusion and (4) economic governance. This builds on the first UNDAF in Montenegro 2012–2016, which was organized around (1) social inclusion, (2) democratic governance and (3) sustainable economic development and environmental protection. Moreover, UNDAF 2017–2021 responds to the National Strategy on Sustainable Development 2030<sup>92</sup> and the EU Accession Agenda.
36. There is complementarity between the United Nations agenda as expressed in UNDAF 2017–2021 and the EU accession process with nearly two thirds of SDG targets (109 out of 169 targets) linked with the chapters of the Acquis.<sup>93</sup> The complementarity is particularly strong in areas of energy, water, climate, land and governance (strong institutions, peace and justice), while it is weaker for reduced inequalities (32 per cent),<sup>94</sup> education (38 per cent), hunger and poverty (52 per cent), and gender equality (54 per cent). The sectors with the weakest links of complementarity correspond with the UNICEF focus areas. The same analysis emphasizes that stronger links need to be developed between chapter 19 on social policy and employment and programmes for young unemployed people and chapter 24 on justice and protection of human rights among the most vulnerable such as Roma and children. While the links related to education are considered weak, it was also noted that the corresponding Acquis chapter (26) is provisionally closed.
37. In the same report, the discussion on resources revealed that “Montenegro primarily relies on budgetary allocations to meet the obligations stemming from Acquis chapter 19 (social policy and employment). Social and child protection system reform is predominantly funded by national resources, with the support of IPA II funds. Once the country accesses the European Union, it is eligible to benefit from the European Social Fund and other similar funds. Consequently, strengthening administrative capacities of all stakeholders will be required.”
38. The 2015 evaluation of the Integrated UN Programme 2012–2016 shows the significant institutional and legislative development that took place on social inclusion through UNICEF leadership in cooperation particularly with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and UNDP. However, the evaluation also highlights concern regarding implementation at the municipality level.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> [General Assembly of the United Nations: Delivering as ONE.](#)

<sup>90</sup> [UN \(2016\) “Integrated UN Programme for Montenegro 2017–2021 – UN Development Assistance Framework for Montenegro”.](#)

<sup>91</sup> [United Nations in Montenegro.](#)

<sup>92</sup> [Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism \(2016\) “National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Montenegro”.](#)

<sup>93</sup> See for instance UN & Government of Montenegro “Unravelling Connections: EU accession and the 2030 Agenda – case of Montenegro.”

<sup>94</sup> The analysis for determining the degree of links is based on expert assessments and only covered the 18 chapters of the Acquis directly relevant for the SDGs. For each chapter, the experts assigned a value to the SDGs assessed as contributing to the chapter: weak, medium and strong. For the calculations of the links between the SDGs and the chapters of the Acquis, the assigned values were presented numerically for the final evaluation of the percentage of the links. This means that higher percentage refers to stronger links and higher contribution of the SDG to the specific Acquis chapter.

<sup>95</sup> [UN \(2016\) “Integrated UN Programme for Montenegro 2017–2021 – UN Development Assistance Framework for Montenegro”.](#)

## 1.7 Other Relevant Actors in Montenegro

39. In addition to the government and parliament institutions, United Nations agencies, OSCE, Council of Europe, and some donors, there are a number of other actors engaged directly in child rights and protection in Montenegro, including civil society, academia and the private sector. The civil society involved include direct stakeholders such as parents' interest groups and non-voluntary organizations. UNICEF collaborates with all these stakeholder groups in various forms, such as subcontracted consultancies and as partners.

## 1.8 UNICEF in Montenegro

40. UNICEF opened a suboffice in Montenegro in the early 1990s. After the country's independence, the suboffice became the UNICEF Country Office (CO) for Montenegro. The CO initially focused on increasing the harmonization of the child-related legal framework with international human rights conventions, including the CRC and the EU Acquis. The lessons learned of the 2010–2011 programme presented to the UNICEF Executive Board in 2011 showed the need for strategic investments in children and building capacities at all levels to ensure implementation of the gains in the legislative framework. Moreover, there was a need for an integrated focus on social protection, education and justice.<sup>96</sup>

## 2. Evaluation Object

### *Key characteristics of UNICEF Country Programmes (CP) in Montenegro*

1. CP 2012–2016 focused on child protection and social inclusion and child rights policies and EU integration.
2. The Midterm Review (MTR) of CP 2012–2016 showed positive achievements of the legal and institutional framework reform but with concerns on a number of issues, including implementation capacity, gender equality analysis, national capacity for communication for development and follow-through on behaviour change from successful campaigns.
3. In response to the MTR and the increased corporate focus of UNICEF on adolescent development and participation, a new initiative focusing on adolescent empowerment was launched in 2015.
4. CP 2017–2021 is organized around three components: social and child protection, quality education and adolescent empowerment, and child rights monitoring (CRM) and access to justice.
5. The CP supports the government and others to implement legislation, policies and development plans based on international norms, standards and conventions on child rights and protection by simultaneously strengthening national knowledge, knowhow and discourse on child rights while supporting systemic health, education, child/social protection and justice reforms.
6. The total budget for CP 2012–2016 was USD 11.75 million (child protection and social inclusion: 53 per cent, child rights, policies and planning: 36 per cent, cross-sectoral costs: 11 per cent).
7. The total budget for CP 2017–2021 is USD 11.61 million (social and child protection: 38 per cent, quality education and adolescent empowerment: 36 per cent, CRM and access to justice: 17 per cent, programme effectiveness: 10 per cent).

<sup>96</sup> United Nations Children's Fund Executive Board Annual session 2011, 20–23 June 2011: Draft country programme document Montenegro.

8. The key rights holders of the CP are all children and adolescents in Montenegro with special attention to the vulnerable affected by poverty, adversity, lack of protection and exclusion.
9. The implementation strategies are awareness raising and advocacy for social change; capacity development, including training; policy dialogue and advice; child rights monitoring and knowledge generation; innovations and innovative approaches; and piloting, modelling and support to scaling-up.
10. Although the UNICEF CO is not involved in direct service delivery, the support to strengthening cross-sectoral initiatives is receiving increased attention in the CP, particularly with the development of a strategic note on cross-sectoral programming in 2018.
11. Key partners include the EU, the UN system, CSOs, the media and academia, and within the government, UNICEF is working with a number of line ministries, specialized services, the Ombudsperson's Office, the justice system and parliamentary committees.

41. The Country Programme Evaluation as defined in the Terms of Reference<sup>97</sup> refers to the current Country Programme (CP) 2017–2021. However, the CPE covers activities related to adolescent empowerment and youth friendly initiatives initiated in the former CP 2012–2016 that have continued under the current CP.

## 2.1 Country Programme 2012–2016

42. The goal of the Country Programme 2012–2016 was “to aid efforts by Montenegro to increase equity and ensure the inclusion of children and women who were in need of special protection, lived in poverty or were socially marginalized.” The total budget for CP 2012–2016 was USD 11.75 million (child protection and social inclusion: 53 per cent, child rights, policies and planning: 36 per cent, cross-sectoral costs: 11 per cent).<sup>98</sup>
43. The programme comprised two mutually reinforcing components:
  - Child protection and social inclusion with the strategic goal that by the end of 2016, (1) Montenegro would have addressed disparities and gaps in access to quality social services for excluded and vulnerable boys, girls and families in line with UN standards; and (2) relevant state authorities would have ensured that professionals from the social protection, health and education sectors effectively provided services at the local level for vulnerable boys and girls in line with national standards.
  - Child rights, policies and planning<sup>99</sup> with the strategic goal that by the end of 2016, the legal and policy framework of Montenegro would be harmonized with EU/UN standards and policies related to child-focused governance and social inclusion of children would be implemented and monitored.
44. Key **implementation strategies** included advocacy and public engagement, capacity development, including training, policy dialogue and advice, innovations and innovative approaches, child rights monitoring and knowledge generation, piloting and support to scaling-up.
45. A **midterm review** of the programme in 2014<sup>100</sup> concluded that the progress of the CP was encouraging, with many targets already achieved. As such, the stakeholders engaged

<sup>97</sup> UNICEF (2019) “Terms of Reference – Independent Evaluation of UNICEF Country Programme in Montenegro 2017–2021”.

<sup>98</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund Executive Board Annual session 2011, 20–23 June 2011: Draft country programme document Montenegro.

<sup>99</sup> “Planning” is referred to as EU integration in the Midterm Review and some other UNICEF documents.

<sup>100</sup> Ilic, D. R & K. Byrne (2014) Midterm Review of the UNICEF/Government of Montenegro Programme of Cooperation, UNICEF. The Midterm Review was carried out from March 2014 – January 2015.

in the review process considered that the CP fully met the requirements and priorities, and the review process noted that the CP is among the most successful in the ECARO region, notably for activities linked to juvenile justice system reform. The stakeholders also noted the need for greater investment in health and early childhood development (ECD). The successful implementation was ascribed, among other things, to increasing capacity of the health, education and social welfare sectors to collaborate for common outcomes, capacity development at all levels, campaigns for changing behaviour and beliefs, knowledge management and child rights monitoring. A number of **lessons learned** and successes were identified, including:

- Social inclusion was a challenge despite commitment and economic growth.
- While satisfactory legislative, policy and strategy frameworks were in place, implementation was often slow, sporadic and somewhat passive.
- Local leadership was inefficient and not accountable to demand.
- Limited technical and financial resources resulted in inconsistent delivery of quality local services.
- There was limited capacity to produce the required disaggregated, child-focused data to support policy development and programme planning, despite noticeable improvements in data published by MONSTAT.
- The UNICEF CO team was professional and highly committed, which has been a key factor for success.
- The juvenile justice system reform was assessed as one of the best in the ECARO region.

46. The MTR also assessed the CP against the Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda (RKLA)<sup>101</sup> for the relevant areas and concluded that, in spite of progress, the analysed areas required additional attention and strengthening. With regard to RKLA 10, 2nd Decade, 2nd Chance, the review concluded that work with adolescents needed much greater emphasis in the UNICEF CP, particularly marginalized adolescents in need of a ‘second chance’ with regard to family, school and community.

47. The review generated more than 43 recommendations,<sup>102</sup> suggesting the need to focus in particular on issues such as gender equality; social stigma; minorities; poverty; ECD; inclusive education; child protection; children’s access to justice; capacity of the civil society to engage in child right issues; the institutional framework for child rights monitoring; mother and child health care; national capacity for communication for development; institutional frameworks to ensure local implementation capacity; and child-focused budgets at all levels.

48. Adolescent empowerment<sup>103</sup> was developed in 2015 as part of a global partnership with the financial institution ING<sup>104</sup> and UNICEF.<sup>105</sup> An additional intermediate result was introduced in the 2016 work plan: youth empowerment and participation<sup>106</sup> defined as

<sup>101</sup> ECARO established the regional leadership and learning agenda with 10 focus areas (RKLA) in 2002 to provide a platform for greater collaboration, learning, leadership and visibility in the region. The 10 priority results areas were children’s right not to be deprived from family environment; children’s right not to be deprived of liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily; children’s right to education: early learning and school readiness; children’s right to education, including all out-of-school children in quality learning; children’s right to be born HIV-free; children’s right to health: infant mortality, integrated ECD; children’s right to social protection, disaster risk reduction, and 2nd Decade, 2nd Chance. The 10 results areas were reduced to eight in 2015 when Early Learning and School Readiness and Inclusive Education were merged into “Early Learning and Inclusive Education” and Health was merged with Child Well-Being to “Young Child Health and Well-Being”. It is explicitly recognized that each RKLA result area requires multisectoral responses.

<sup>102</sup> The recommendations were generally not directed to specific stakeholder groups.

<sup>103</sup> The UNICEF Adolescent Empowerment Programme is part of the joint UN Youth Programme dubbed “Kreaktivacija”.

<sup>104</sup> ING is a Dutch multinational banking and financial services corporation.

<sup>105</sup> [ING Power for Youth](#).

<sup>106</sup> Youth, “2nd decade”, adolescents and young people are often overlapping and a clear distinction not always evident. Referring to United Nations definitions, UNICEF applies Adolescents: 10–19 years, Youth: 15–24 years and Young People: 10–24 years, which is the term that covers all adolescents and youth. The Committee on the Rights of the Child defines Adolescents as the period from 10 to 18 years in its “General Comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during

“quality innovative learning and labour market skills building on adolescent boys and girls and youth-friendly services available and fully utilized.” Indicators included a Youth Lab for innovative solutions established; the number of duty bearers trained to identify adolescents at risk and refer them to adequate support; the number of relevant life-skills programmes/materials; the number of adolescents receiving life-skills training; and the number of youth-led community-based initiatives. The programme was to be evaluated in 2018<sup>107</sup> at the end of the ING programme. However, since the programme was extended for three more years and interventions in the programme are designed to have a long-term impact, both ECARO and the CO decided to carry out the evaluation at a later stage, when more data would be available.

## 2.2 Country Programme 2017–2021

49. As part of the 2014 MTR of the CP, a situation analysis was carried out following the UNICEF framework for Monitoring Results for Equity Systems (MoRES), with the summary results of the Determinant Analysis presented in Table 2.<sup>108</sup> The analysis shows the key bottlenecks and barriers to achieving the overall goal of the UNICEF CP and to protecting children’s rights, helping meet their basic needs and expanding their opportunities to reach their full potential.

**Table 2: Bottleneck and barriers for UNICEF Country Programme in Montenegro<sup>109</sup>**

|                      | DETERMINANTS  | ISSUES   |
|----------------------|---|--|
| ENABLING ENVIRONMENT | Social norms  | Insufficient human rights culture  |
|                      | Legislation/Policy  | Weak enforcement and implementation in some sectors<br>Weak database   |
|                      | Budget expenditure  | Insufficient disaggregation, equity, transparency, sustainability  |
|                      | Management/Coordination   | Silo sectoral approaches<br>Confusion at central/local interface in certain aspects  |
| SUPPLY               | Availability of essential inputs                                  | Silo approach to service planning in some areas  |
|                      | Access to adequately staffed services, facilities and information | Lack of professional capacity in some services<br>Inclusion not sufficiently integrated in professional education/training<br>Frequent lack of a holistic approach |
| DEMAND               | Financial access  | Corruption and charges   |
|                      | Social and cultural practices and beliefs                         | Gender inequality<br>Discrimination and stigma<br>Acceptance of poor practice  |
|                      | Timing/Continuity of use  | Lack of information, mobility, lack of awareness, lack of confidence in systems  |
| QUALITY              | Quality   | Somewhat passive approach to reform: weak accountability and performance management  |

Source: Midterm Review Country Programme 2012–2016.<sup>110</sup> The analysis did not present any enablers.

50. The results of the MoRES were further developed in four key thematic theories of change (TOC) for the CP 2017–2021 based on bottleneck and barrier analyses:

- TOC for Access to Justice and Child Rights Monitoring,

adolescence.” UNICEF’s mandate for children covers up to 18 years but considering the agenda setting role of youth over 18 years, UNICEF activities for adolescents’ rights go beyond 18 years. In the UNICEF corporate strategies 2014–2017 and 2018–2021, the focus is on adolescents (UNICEF defines Adolescents as the age group 10–19), while the EU IPA, for instance, focuses on youth referring to the age group 15–24, similar to that of MONSTAT and the UNDAF for Montenegro. Overall, it is from the Strategy Plan 2018–2021 that UNICEF includes a clear focus on the rights of adolescents.

<sup>107</sup> Costed Evaluation Plan – Montenegro – UNICEF country programme of cooperation 2017–2021.

<sup>108</sup> The MTR does not specify who participated in the MoRES exercise, noting only that the MoRES was based on expert opinions generated in a workshop with various CP stakeholders.

<sup>109</sup> MoRES Determinants Analysis, 2015.

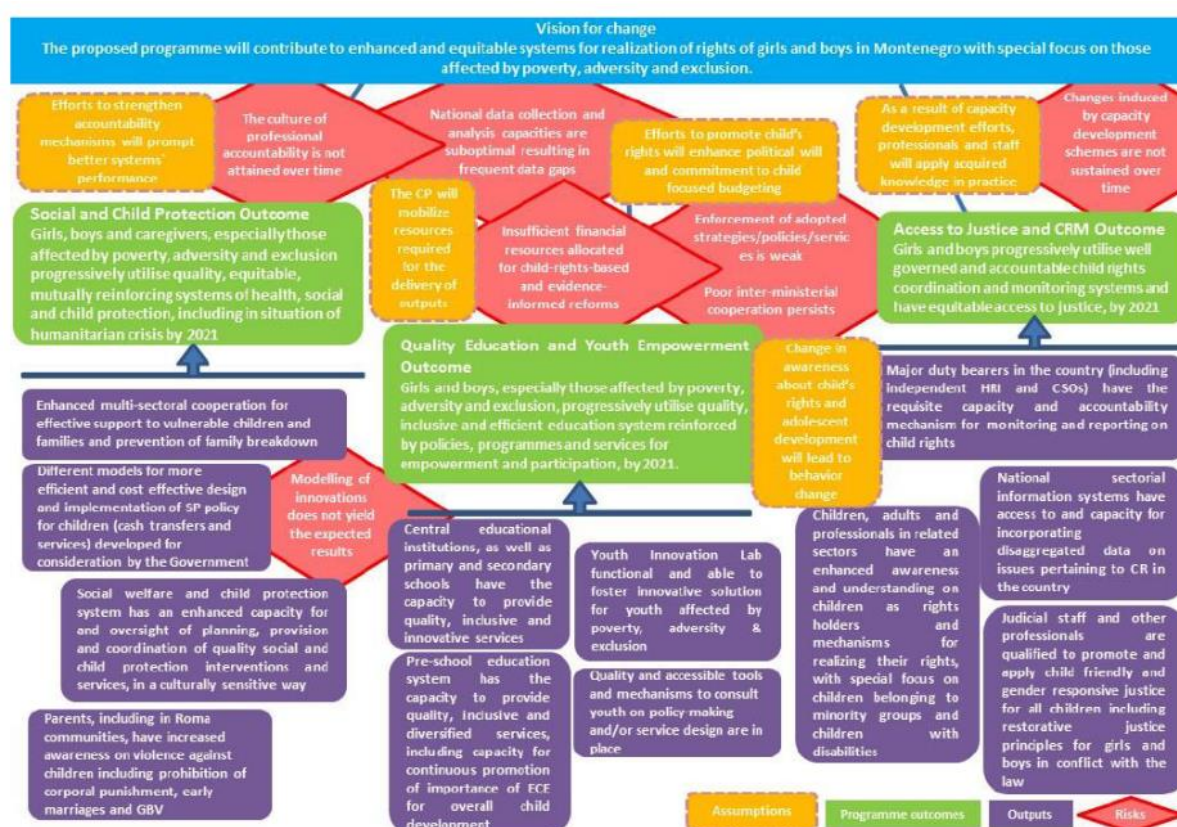
<sup>110</sup> Ilic, D. R & K. Byrne (2014) Midterm Review of the UNICEF/Government of Montenegro Programme of Cooperation, UNICEF.

- TOC Education and Youth,
- TOC Empowerment and Participation of Adolescents, and
- TOC Social and Child Protection.

In addition, a result chain was prepared for Early Child Development.

51. The overall TOC of the CP 2017–2021 is presented in the Strategy Note with detailed hypotheses and assumptions based on the analysis in the thematic TOCs, as can be seen in the following figure.<sup>111</sup> There is no clear distinction between the assumptions and the hypotheses which are used for the internal logic of the TOC, that is, to describe causality. There are also no assumptions/hypotheses regarding the programme implementation conditions and the contributions from other partners/stakeholders to the TOC. Assumptions/hypotheses regarding external factors that could influence the CP are presented in a special section as External Risks and Planned Response. The lack of clarity between assumptions and linkages within the TOC is also evident in the visual presentation of the TOC, which was made available to the CPE (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Theory of Change UNICEF Country Programme 2017-2021, Montenegro**



Source: UNICEF (2016) "Strategy Note for Country Programme 2017–2021"

52. In addition to the programme results, outcomes, and outputs outlined in the summary TOC illustration, the TOC also defines a programme effectiveness outcome based on programme coordination; external relations; planning and monitoring; and communications, advocacy and partnerships. The programme management outcome

<sup>111</sup> UNICEF (2016) "Strategy Note for Country Programme 2017-2021".

includes consideration of governance systems; financial resources and stewardship; and human resource management.

53. The Country Programme 2017–2021 was approved by the Executive Board in September 2016.<sup>112</sup> Its overall goal is to “contribute to enhancing equitable systems for the progressive realization of the rights of children in Montenegro, with special focus on children affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion.”<sup>113</sup>
54. The key direct target group of the CP is children affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion, with the overall goal of leaving no child behind through strategic actions that address existing inequalities (poverty, ethnicity, disabilities, gender, rural/urban). To support this target group, the CP works with stakeholder groups at various levels, including with line ministries for Education, Justice, Labour and Social Welfare, and Health, national institutes such as the Bureau for Education, preschool institutions at the local level, the Institute for Social and Child Protection Montenegro, the Ombudsperson’s Office, parliamentary committees, and MONSTAT.
55. To improve the situation of children affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion, the CP is organized around three programme components (outcomes):
  - Component 1: Social and Child Protection,
  - Component 2: Quality Education and Adolescent Empowerment, and
  - Component 3: Child Rights Monitoring (CRM) and Access to Justice.
56. The implementation of the programme takes place through a number of implementation strategies:
  - a. Cross-sectoral programming
  - b. Institutional support to the Government of Montenegro and civil society at the national and municipality levels through various strategic activities, including:
    - Advocacy and public engagement,
    - Capacity development, including training,
    - Policy dialogue and advice,
    - Innovations and innovative approaches,
    - Child rights monitoring and knowledge generation, and
    - Piloting and support to scaling-up.
  - c. Partnerships through collaboration with other organizations supporting Montenegro in improving children’s conditions. These collaborations include coordination, harmonization, joint programming with the EU, the UN system/UN Country Team, CSOs, media, and academia.
57. For the implementation of the CP, UNICEF is not involved in direct delivery of services, which are provided and managed by the central government and municipalities. The UNICEF focus is to enhance a self-sustained system in Montenegro for equitable realization of the rights of girls and boys, with special focus on children affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion. The total budget for CP 2017–2021 is USD 11.61 million (social and child protection: 38 per cent, quality education and adolescent empowerment: 36 per cent, CRM and access to justice: 17 per cent, programme effectiveness: 10 per cent).<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund Executive Board, Second regular session 2016 14–16 September 2016 Country programme document Montenegro.

<sup>113</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund Executive Board Annual session 2011, 20–23 June 2011: Draft country programme document Montenegro.

<sup>114</sup> UNICEF (2016) “Strategy Note for Country Programme 2017–2021”.

### 3. Evaluation Purpose & Methodology

#### *Key characteristics of the Country Programme Evaluation (CPE)*

1. Participatory approach with workshops and continuous dialogue with UNICEF team and co-generation of conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned.
2. Non-experimental design with a theory-based approach based on appreciative inquiry combined with characteristics of a realist evaluation and contribution analysis.
3. Data collection through interviews, workshops on success stories and unintended impacts, online perception survey on success stories and a comprehensive document review.
4. Data sources include UNICEF, national and municipality authorities, parliamentary committees, front-line staff, specialized agencies, EU, UN agencies and a comprehensive list of background documents.
5. The key purpose of the CPE is to inform the next CP of UNICEF 2022–2026.
6. The CPE follows a comprehensive evaluation framework with questions organized around the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria.

#### 3.1 Role of Country Programme Evaluations

58. UNICEF country support is structured in **five-year country programmes of cooperation with the governments of specific countries**. The CP document forms an integral part of the well-established **country programme cycle** of UNICEF, consisting of preparation, programming, implementation, and monitoring, and evaluation. As part of the CP cycle, country offices annually prepare annual/two-year rolling plans (and in some cases and reports, as well as periodic technical reviews and thematic evaluations in support of the programme, which form part of the corporate monitoring and evaluation requirements). Moreover, CP evaluations are called for at least once every two-year programme cycle to feed into subsequent CP documents and the UNDAFs.<sup>115</sup> As such, CPEs are strategic exercises with a strong focus on learning and accountability.

#### 3.2 Purpose, Objectives & Scope of the CPE

59. The independent evaluation of the UNICEF Country Programme in Montenegro 2017–2021 (CPE) was launched in 2019 with the purpose of identifying promising interventions, drawing lessons and providing recommendations that could inform the planning process for the CP 2022–2026 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). The CPE objectives are threefold:
1. Provide an independent assessment of the performance of the 2017–2021 country programme seen in relation to expected results and contributions made to:
    - Reduce human rights issues affecting children for which equity gaps and gender form a part; and
    - National priorities including the EU accession and sustainable development.
  2. Assess UNICEF strategic positioning, programmatic priorities and implementation strategies.

<sup>115</sup> [UNICEF Evaluation Office \(2018\) “Revised Evaluation Policy of UNICEF”](#). CPEs might also be launched in response to radical contextual or internal changes that require a refocusing of UNICEF work.

3. Identify good practices, draw lessons on significant and promising interventions and provide forward-looking recommendations to guide priority-setting in future programming.

60. The primary **intended users of the CPE** are:

1. UNICEF internal stakeholders;<sup>116</sup>
  2. The Government of Montenegro, including all relevant ministries<sup>117</sup> and national institutions,<sup>118</sup> including judicial institutions;<sup>119</sup>
  3. The Ombudsperson's Office and other national preventive institutions for international human rights treaties;
  4. Human Rights and Freedom and Gender Equality parliamentary committees; and
  5. Independent bodies, civil society and academia.
  6. The United Nations system in Montenegro, particularly the United Nations Country Team (UNCT); and
  7. The European Union (EU) and other cooperating partners.
61. The evaluation's scope addresses the period from January 2015 to December 2019. It includes the adolescent empowerment initiative launched in 2015 under CP 2012–2016 and the full CP 2017–2021 with its three components<sup>120</sup> and implemented across the three regions and at central level in Podgorica.

### 3.3 Evaluation Approach

62. The CPE is a strategic forward-looking exercise seeking answers to how well-positioned UNICEF is to support the Government of Montenegro and key stakeholders' efforts to protect all children's rights and meet their basic needs in line with the commitments of the CRC. This is done by analysing the **CP contribution to changes** based on the **TOCs** that define the programme. As a **theory-based evaluation**, the CPE identifies what has worked well and what has been more challenging in the CP implementation by assessing the results and analysing the processes that led to results and their contribution to overall impact.
63. The CPE is an independent exercise as called for in the UNICEF evaluation policy. Its overall objective is to provide useful findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned that will directly influence the next CP cycle. To ensure the usefulness of the evaluation process and results, the CPE approach emphasises ownership of the CPE results among those who have been and will be involved in the CP cycle, primarily the Country Office, with management and technical staff being key stakeholders. Therefore, they have participated in the CPE process through interviews and workshops at various stages of the in-country data collection, including validating preliminary findings and identifying key conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned. Other key stakeholders to the CP, particularly the government and its institutions, CSOs and other partners, participated in the CPE through interviews and participation in an online survey focused on stakeholders' perception of the CP. Moreover, the CPE has interacted with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG), which comprises relevant partners from the government, parliamentary committees, CSOs, and the United Nations.

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<sup>116</sup> Country Office (CO), the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO), Headquarters Management and the Executive Board.

<sup>117</sup> The Prime Minister, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Public Administration, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Ministry of Sports and Youth, Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism.

<sup>118</sup> Particularly the Institute for Social and Child Protection, the Ombudsperson, the Institute for Public Health and the Bureau for Education.

<sup>119</sup> Supreme Court, Supreme State Prosecutor's Office, Judicial Training Centre and other related institutions such as the Bar Chamber.

<sup>120</sup> Social and Child Protection, Quality Education and Adolescent Empowerment, and Child Rights Monitoring (CRM) and Access to Justice.

64. To ensure that the CPE is an inclusive and constructive exercise, the TOR called for the application of an **appreciative inquiry approach** which was applied for data collection.<sup>121</sup> The approach is premised on the belief that by focusing on positive results, the evaluation becomes a more constructive and inclusive exercise, promoting ownership of the evaluation's findings, conclusions and recommendations. The world of evaluation approaches and methods is large and confusing, with many overlapping definitions. For instance, "appreciative inquiry" is referred to as a "data collection method" in the UNICEF RBM Handbook,<sup>122</sup> while the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) refers to it as an "evaluation methodology".<sup>123</sup> For the CPE, appreciative inquiry was used as a qualitative data collection approach, focusing on learning from successful experiences, exploring the CP results and impacts and identifying perceived key contributing factors. By focusing on strengths and opportunities identified through narratives or perceptions, the CPE provides a positive outlook for future programming. This does not mean that challenges and problems are ignored. Rather, they have been addressed from a positive and learning perspective.
65. Key to the successful application of appreciative inquiry as a data collection approach has been the **engagement of key stakeholders** in the process of identifying: (1) success stories, contributing factors and challenges; (2) positive and negative unexpected results; and (3) how this can be used in future programming. These elements have been addressed through different data collection modalities, particularly workshops with UNICEF staff identifying and unpacking success stories and unintended impacts of the CP, a perception survey among key partners on the CP success stories, key informant interviews and document review.
66. For data analysis, appreciative inquiry has been complemented by a **realist evaluation approach**, which sets out to explain what works, how, why, for whom, to what extent and in what circumstances. It assumes that programme effectiveness will always be conditional and it is oriented to improve understanding of the key contexts and mechanisms contributing to how and why programmes work. Key to realist evaluations is the assumption that nothing works everywhere or for everyone and that context is critical for programme results. This requires a good understanding of the context, which will be ensured through a comprehensive context analysis to frame programme results. As such, the explanatory framework in the realist approach is based on the notion that outcomes are generated by the CP and its context as a full system. The robustness of the explanatory framework is based on the broad range of data sources that have been triangulated.
67. Recognizing the challenges of capturing the results of complex programmes implemented in complex systems with many actors' activities, the data analysis has also been guided by an overall **contribution assessment approach** of the CP contribution to the capacity of Montenegro to protect and ensure the rights of children as well as the UNDAF/UNSDCF.
68. Moreover, the evaluation has been guided by the "Norms and Standards" and the "Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation" developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG),<sup>124</sup> and the UNICEF corporate guidance for equity-focused evaluations.

<sup>121</sup> Appreciative inquiry was developed in the 1980s by D. Cooperrider and colleagues at the Case Western Reserve University in Ohio as a research tool to organizational change with focus on strengths rather than weaknesses. It is based on the belief that people and organizations will be drawn towards constructive actions in the future by affirming positive moments of their past (Michael, S. (2005) "The Promise of Appreciative Inquiry as an Interview Tool for Field Research" *Development in Practice*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Apr. 2005), pp. 222–230). Cooperrider has identified five principles of appreciative inquiry: constructionist, simultaneity, anticipatory, poetic and positive stressing the importance of perceptions. Over the years, appreciative inquiry has developed and been adapted to different contexts, including development evaluations (see for instance [www.betterevaluations.com](http://www.betterevaluations.com)).

<sup>122</sup> UNICEF (2017) "Results-Based Management Handbook".

<sup>123</sup> [UNEG \(2015\) "UNEG Handbook for Conducting Evaluations of Normative Work in the UN System".](https://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914)

<sup>124</sup> United Nations Evaluation Group. Norms and Standards for Evaluation, 2016, available at <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>.

Considering the CP focus on enforcement of the child rights and protection legislative, policy and strategic frameworks, the CPE is furthermore guided by the UNEG Handbook on evaluation of normative activities in the United Nations.<sup>125</sup> The handbook defines three categories of normative work: “(1) development of norms and standards, (2) support to governments and others to integrate norms and standards into legislation, policies and development plans, and (3) support to governments and others to implement legislation, policies and development plans based on international norms, standards and conventions.” The CPE considers that the CP focuses particularly on the third category of normative work.

### 3.4 Data Sources

69. Because of the nature of the CP and the strategic focus of the CPE, the evaluation is mainly informed by qualitative data and perceptions generated from secondary data, complemented by primary data.<sup>126</sup> Based on the CPE plan outlined in the TOR, the secondary data analysis should take place before the primary data collection, which, as mentioned, consisted of interviews with key stakeholders in Montenegro and an online survey. In this sequence, the primary data collection would fill in information gaps identified through the comprehensive desk review. However, due to changes in the team composition prior to in-country data collection, the comprehensive desk review was primarily carried out after, which meant that the opportunity to use primary data collection to inform data gaps in the secondary data analysis was missed.<sup>127</sup>

70. The following are the main data sources:

1. Secondary data sources reviewed in a desk study. Documents were reviewed with attention to their specific contribution to the context analysis and findings of the CPE classifying information in relation to evaluation questions outlined in the evaluation matrix. The reviewed documents and databases are presented in Annex 1 with an indication of how the documents and databases will serve the CPE.
2. Primary data sources collected through interviews with key internal and external stakeholders for assessing general perceptions on the relevance, coherence, coverage, effectiveness, efficiency, coordination, sustainability and impacts of the CP as well as the UNICEF strategic position and role in promoting children’s rights and protection in Montenegro.<sup>128</sup> Please refer to Annex 2 for a list of people interviewed for the CPE. The interviewed stakeholders were selected through purposive sampling and represented:
  - The government, CSOs, donors, United Nations, and national institutions in Podgorica, with emphasis on persons who have direct contact with UNICEF during planning, programming and implementation. Moreover, the CPE interviewed persons who had not worked directly with UNICEF but, through their work, were related to UNICEF focus areas. In addition to the interviews, many of these stakeholders also participated in an online perception survey. Please refer to Annex 3 for a summary of the results of the survey.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>125</sup> UNEG (2015) “[UNEG Handbook for Conducting Evaluations of Normative Work in the UN System](#)”.

<sup>126</sup> The distinction between primary and secondary data sources does not refer to the quality of the data collected or importance for the CPE. Rather, it is based on the general use of the concepts in evaluations: primary data are collected by the CPE for the specific analysis, while secondary data have been generated by someone else for another purpose.

<sup>127</sup> As noted earlier, the team leader was replaced shortly before the primary data collection.

<sup>128</sup> In total 151 people were interviewed face-to-face, of whom 23 per cent were men (M) and 77 per cent women (F). The distribution of the interviewed informants by stakeholder group was UNICEF: 16 (3M, 13F), international organizations: 11 (2M, 9F), parliamentary committees: 4 (1M, 3F), line ministries and their institutions and judicial system: 41 (9M, 32F), municipalities: 49 (14M, 35F), and CSOs, including implementing partners: 30 (6M, 24F).

<sup>129</sup> The perception survey was administered to key partners among CSOs, think tanks, and the government and its institutions. Twenty-five professionals participated in the survey, which corresponds to around 50 per cent of the number that was invited to participate.

- Municipalities selected for their representativeness vis-à-vis key change strategies of the CP and perceived implementation capacity and responsiveness to child rights, education and health legislation. Nine municipalities were visited, representing different socioeconomic levels and different levels of perceived capacity to implement child rights legislation, strategies and programmes. Please refer to Annex 7 for a list of municipalities visited as well as their geographic location.

### 3.5 Evaluation Framework

71. The CPE is organized around key questions following the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria:<sup>130</sup> relevance and coherence,<sup>131</sup> effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact.
72. To ensure consistency during the data collection and analysis, an evaluation matrix has been developed (Annex 4). The matrix outlines the criteria above and is complemented by specific questions, key indicators, main sources of information, and data collection and analysis tools. This subsection discusses how the evaluation criteria and questions are addressed in the CPE.<sup>132</sup>
73. The **relevance and coherence** criteria provide an assessment of the extent to which the design and intended results of the CP are consistent with the needs of children and adolescents and the priorities of the Government of Montenegro, and if they remained suited to the country context during the period covered by the evaluation. This is done through an analysis of the CP response to the needs of children and adolescents as expressed in reviews and assessments of the fulfilment of international human rights treaties, EU annual assessments and thematic and general evaluations and studies by Montenegro, while also assessing UNICEF coordination and leadership role, including the importance of partnerships as well as the overall approach through implementation strategies. The basis of the analysis is the information gathered from the comprehensive document review as presented in Annex 1, which is complemented by perceptions collected during stakeholder interviews and an online perception survey. Moreover, the analysis assesses the CP contribution to the national agenda, including the EU accession process, the SDGs, and the United Nations Delivering as One, while paying special attention to the CP reflection of human rights and equity principles, including gender equality and empowerment of women (GEEW).<sup>133</sup>
74. The **effectiveness** criterion provides an assessment of the progress in addressing the equity gaps that affect the most vulnerable children. This is done through an analysis of the CP contribution to equitable access for all children to education, justice, health, and social and child protection. Special attention is given to the children who are most vulnerable in terms of meeting their protection rights and opportunities to reach their full potential. The vulnerable children include ethnic minority children, children with disabilities and children affected by poverty as well as children without parental care, children at risk of or affected by violence, child labour, child marriages, child begging, etc. Considering the importance of DaO in Montenegro, the UNICEF contribution to

<sup>130</sup> [OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation \(2019\) "Better Criteria for Better Evaluation Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use Development Assistance Committee \(DAC\) of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\).](#)

<sup>131</sup> Relevance and Coherence have been merged into one overall set of questions to reflect the strategic and institutional level of the CP, hence the evaluation and to avoid otherwise necessary duplications.

<sup>132</sup> The questions closely reflect the original questions presented in the TOR but with some further development and adaptation based on the dialogue with the CO and the Evaluation Manager.

<sup>133</sup> GEEW is also sometimes referred to as GEWE. The concept relates to [United Nations Economic and Social Commissions conclusions in 1997 \(ECOSOC 1997/2\)](#) on gender mainstreaming, recognizing that a twin-track approach is necessary for achieving gender equality: gender mainstreaming transformation as well as policies and programmes targeting women's and girls' specific needs. This is further translated into the [UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women \(UN-SWAP\)](#) from 2006 with six focus areas: accountability, results-based management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), resource allocation, capacity development, coherence and oversight. The international oversight takes place inter alia through national reporting to the Commission on the Status of Women. In Montenegro, the UN Country Team prepared an assessment of the [Gender Equality SWAP Scorecard Assessment Report](#) in 2017.

UNDAF is also assessed. The basis of the effectiveness analysis is the UNICEF annual reporting, studies and evaluations complemented by information collected during interviews. Moreover, the effectiveness assessment reviews the CP response to the MoRES prepared as part of the MTR of CP 2012–2016. The effectiveness chapter also identifies unintended positive and negative results as identified in UNICEF staff workshops during the CPE, an online survey, and interviews. Finally, the effectiveness analysis assesses the effectiveness of the intersectoral approach.

75. The **efficiency** criterion assesses the extent to which UNICEF achieves value for invested resources, including the management of funds, operational planning strategies, implementation of activities and delivery of outputs. This is done through an analysis of the appropriateness of the level of financial and human resources allocated for CP implementation and in consideration of its ambitions. Moreover, the efficiency assessment addresses the CO resource mobilization efforts. The basis of the analysis is the UNICEF annual reports and the use of the results-based management system, complemented by perceptions expressed during the CPE interviews with key stakeholders. Furthermore, the efficiency assessment addresses the CO strategic positioning in Montenegro.
76. The **sustainability** criterion provides an assessment of the extent to which the continuation of positive effects from the CP interventions were ensured, including their potential for scale-up and replication. This is done through an assessment of the likelihood that the achieved results will be sustainable based in particular on the CPE assessment of national ownership of the results identified through interviews and analysis of national plans and recent UNICEF reports, including knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) surveys. Key indicators include national budget allocation and exit strategies. Moreover, sustainability will be assessed through an analysis of the innovations used to address bottlenecks and barriers to children's rights and protection.
77. The **impact** criterion provides an assessment of the extent to which the CP contributes to or can be reasonably expected to contribute to positive long-term changes for children in Montenegro. This is done through the CPE judgement on the likelihood that UNICEF activities, cross-sectoral approach and results will be fully institutionalized in Montenegro. The assessment is based on the likelihood that there will be a strengthened national framework for policies and legislative institutions, implementation at all levels, and monitoring and evaluation.

### ***Evaluation Limitations***

78. The CPE team considers the following as challenges to interpretation of some of the findings:
  1. The timing of the desk review after in-country data collection as described above. The main challenge was that the interviews were not sufficiently focused on evidence gaps. To mitigate this challenge, the CPE has benefitted from a very comprehensive review of the zero draft of the CPE report and additional discussions with the evaluation team.
  2. Lack of systematic evidence-based knowledge on the capacity of municipalities to implement legislation, policies, strategies and plans related to child rights and protection. In the absence of studies documenting relevant information on differences in the municipalities' capacities, the CPE used national experts' perceptions for the sampling of municipalities to be visited. While the information collected at the municipality level has been important for informing the CPE, the information available does not allow one to draw conclusions on factors that influence implementation capacity of the individual municipality.

3. Challenges with definitions of a number of concepts. For instance, the CPE team has noticed that many concepts are used for different forms of collaborative work, such as intersectoral, multisectoral, cross-sectoral, trans-sectoral but with lack of clarity about what is actually understood. To mitigate the challenge, the CPE has tried to clarify what the use of the terms refers to in different information sources. However, this is not always possible.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

79. The CPE was developed by a team of independent consultants with no prior direct involvement in the CP. The national consultant on the team is a member of the CO National Ethical Board as an independent member, which is not considered as causing a conflict of interest with the CPE. Furthermore, the CPE is guided by the “Norms and Standards” and the “Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation” developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG),<sup>134</sup> and the UNICEF corporate guidance for equity-focused evaluations. All team members of the CPE are well acquainted with the different set of norms and ethical guidelines, and the work was undertaken in full compliance with requirements of independence, impartiality, credibility, no conflicts of interest and accountability.
80. In its interaction with stakeholders, the CPE team ensured that **privacy and respect for rights** were honoured. Ahead of each interview, the evaluators informed key informants about the purpose of the evaluation, the criteria applied, the intended use of findings and the basic principle of full anonymity of participants. The findings in the report are referenced but without divulging the source of primary data.
81. **Gender equality** in line with UNICEF guidelines was applied when selecting data collection sources, with due consideration for the Montenegro contexts and in consultation with implementing organizations that have prime knowledge of local conditions.
82. In line with the CPE strategic focus, the evaluation did not interview the ultimate target group of the CP: children and adolescents. As a result, the CPE is also in line with the **UNICEF safeguarding policy** with regard to interviewing children and adolescents. As part of the secondary data collection, though, the CPE has used relevant information from the existing consultations of CO with children and adolescents.

### 3.7 Organization of the Evaluation

83. The key phases of the CPE were: (1) inception phase, including a visit to Montenegro and preparation of the Inception Report (October 2019–February 2020), (2) desk review (March–April 2020), (3) in-country data collection (February 2020), (4) co-generation of conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned (end of February 2020), (5) data analysis and report drafting (April–May 2020), (6) presentation of first draft evaluation report (June 2020), and (7) presentation of final evaluation result to the Evaluation Reference Group and other key stakeholders (September 2020).
84. The evaluation team is composed of four evaluation experts: Lene Poulsen, Team Leader; Zehra Kacapor-Dzihic, Senior Evaluator; Lidija Brnović, National Evaluator; Aleksandra Gligorovic, Research Analyst.

## 4. Findings

### *Key Overall Findings*

1. The highly professional approach and active participation in a wide range of sectors and events in Montenegro combined with evidence-based support to well-identified needs

<sup>134</sup> [United Nations Evaluation Group \(2017\) “Norms and Standards for Evaluation”](#).

are critical factors for the UNICEF strategic leadership role in child rights and protection in Montenegro.

2. UNICEF Montenegro is broadly recognized for a number of clearly identifiable success stories that are considered to have made a difference for child and adolescent rights and protection. Key to the success stories is the multipronged intervention approach that takes the form of integrated and cross-sectoral programming where a number of components often take place in a stepwise approach where one component feeds into the next, typically starting with research leading to an evidence based long-term social change campaign followed by piloting of concrete activities, modelling and scaling-up.
3. The CP focuses on the full alignment of the legislative framework, policies and strategies with international norms and standards on child rights and protection as well as national institutional capacity to implement this legislation, policies and development. Limited implementation at municipality level remains a key challenge.
4. The CP is moving toward a cross-sectoral approach, which is generally considered a positive development, but this is not fully aligned with the current national structure.
5. Overall, UNICEF presence, long-term vision, strategic positioning and support to key child and adolescent rights have changed attitudes in Montenegro towards critical child rights and protection issues, for instance, large-scale institutionalization of children with disabilities. The changed attitudes should lead to long-term positive impacts on child protection.

## 4.1 Success Stories

### 4.1.1 Key Characteristics of the Success Stories

85. The CPE Appreciative Inquiry sought to identify key success stories of UNICEF work in Montenegro from primary data sources.<sup>135</sup> The compilation of the success stories was intended to identify cross-cutting commonalities among the stories that could be identified as the key factors contributing to their success. These factors could then be systematically integrated into future programming. The underlying criteria were to identify stories that were perceived to have led to a substantive change on specific issues related to children's rights and protection, and thereby directly linked to UNICEF strategic position in Montenegro in promoting children's rights and protection through the combination of the implementation strategies. An overall finding for the CPE of these exercises was the ease with which success stories were identified, reflecting not only a very high degree of knowledge among stakeholders of UNICEF and the CP but also the clear identification of UNICEF as being successful with its CP in Montenegro. Moreover, the CPE found that UNICEF technical staff has great knowledge and understanding of all UNICEF activities in different sectors, including those with which they are not directly involved.<sup>136</sup> This reflects an integrated team that works in an integrated manner.
86. The following sections present six key success stories identified during the CPE. They are interconnected and they are based on the application of all three main categories of implementation strategies: (1) cross-sectoral programming, (2) institutional support to the Government of Montenegro and civil society at the national and municipality levels through various strategic activities, and (3) partnerships with other organizations supporting Montenegro in improving children's conditions. As the success stories identified during the CPE share common factors driving the success, the section below

<sup>135</sup> Principally from the following primary data sources: key informant interviews, workshops with UNICEF staff, and an online perception survey focused on identifying success stories and contributing factors (see Annex 5). The primary data collection was complemented with information gathered in progress reports and studies of UNICEF and other stakeholders in Montenegro.

<sup>136</sup> The staff workshop used a rotating technique having different staff identifying factors that have led to the successes identified by other staff members.

provides detailed presentations of two representative success stories followed by briefer outlines of four others that share driving factors of success.

87. Key factors common across the identified success stories were the use of an integrated and multipronged intervention in the form of advocacy and interventions with a number of components that often took place in a stepwise approach: (1) knowledge generation through substantive research and KAPs, (2) targeted outreach and advocacy to influence behaviour, beliefs and decision-making of all existing and potential stakeholders including parents, front-line staff in municipalities, national and local politicians, local and central administration, CSOs and international cooperation actors, (3) policy dialogue and technical support to the development of legislation and strategies, (4) piloting and modelling of innovative approaches, and (5) training and capacity development of institutions and staff at the national and local levels. Furthermore, (6) a flexible and responsive approach based on partnerships is critical as well as a long-term vision.

#### **4.1.2 Early Childhood Development<sup>137</sup> and Quality and Access to Preschool<sup>138</sup>**

88. According to MICS 2013, 40 per cent of children attended early childhood education overall, while the number was 18 per cent for the Roma children. As noted in the 2016 EC staff progress report on the Montenegro EU accession preparations, the EU target is 95 per cent in 2020.<sup>139</sup> In fact, the 18 per cent for Roma children was already an achievement, considering that it was 2 per cent in 2009 according to the results framework for the CP 2012–2016.<sup>140</sup> Recognizing the very low coverage of 3–6 year-old children attending early childhood education, the disparities resulting from the socioeconomic status of families and the long-term consequences of low attendance at preschool activities led the CO to initiate comprehensive reforms in this area and the CP 2017–2021 continued with a strengthened focus on coverage of quality and access to early education. According to MICS 2018,<sup>141</sup> 53 per cent of all children of pre-primary school age attended an early childhood education programme, while the number was 16 per cent among Roma children.<sup>142,143</sup> During the CPE, the Ministry of Education reported that the overall preschool enrolment rate in 2019 was 73 per cent.
89. According to various stakeholders interviewed for the CPE, including UNICEF staff, this success story is the result of the continuous focus of the CP on preschool enrolment across CP cycles. In 2015, the CO launched a social change campaign called “Preschool for All” in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the Faculty for Preschool Education, the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, the Art School for Music and Ballet, the Pedagogical Centre of Montenegro (NGO), municipalities and local preschools. The

<sup>137</sup> ECARO defines “early child development” as the continuous process of acquiring skills and abilities from conception to the age of school entry across the domains of cognition, language, motor social and emotional development which help individuals to think, solve problems, communicate, express emotions and form relationships. ECARO (2019) “Supporting Children with Developmental Difficulties in Early Childhood”.

<sup>138</sup> In its 2019 Strategic Directions on ECD, ECARO defines preschool education as all services provided in educational institutions that offer structured teaching-learning opportunities for children under age 6 (incorporating pre-primary education).

<sup>139</sup> [2016 Commission Staff Report on Montenegro's accession.](#)

<sup>140</sup> UNICEF CO RAM and SMQs 2012–2016.

<sup>141</sup> [UNICEF & MONSTAT \(2020\) “Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS6”.](#)

<sup>142</sup> The special MICS on the Roma population showed that 16 per cent of Roma children at the age of 3 to 6 attended an early childhood education programme. The CPE did not have the opportunity to verify the number but notes that because of the ethnical self-identification comparisons timelines for monitoring can be challenging.

<sup>143</sup> The CPE recognizes that apparently the number of Roma children attending early childhood education did not improve between MICS 2013 and MICS 2018 but went from 18 to 16 per cent. According to the MICS methodology the confidence level is 95 percent with a relative margin error of 12 per cent meaning that the apparent decrease is within the statistical relative margin of error. It should also be noted that in a joint publication from 2018 by UNDP and the World Bank entitled “Roma at a Glance in Montenegro” it is noted that “pre-primary enrolment rates among marginalized Roma increased significantly between 2011 and 2017 to 28 percent. A key contributing factor to these differences is the reliance on self-identification and the continuous marginalization of Roma and other minorities.

social change campaign was based on KAP surveys and other research<sup>144,145,146</sup> and supported by MICS5 data from 2013, which allowed it to adapt messages to local conditions. During the CPE visits to the municipalities, it was noted that one of the contributing factors to the success of the social change campaign vis-à-vis pre-school was the use of both the Montenegrin and Albanian languages. The success of the campaign is linked to the fact that it did not stand alone but was complemented by concrete actions in terms of capacity development and support for implementation of the preschool legislation as described below. While an immediate success has been observed in terms of changes in parents' attitudes and behaviour towards early childhood education, several stakeholders noted during the CPE that the campaign still needs to be repeated regularly, considering that behaviour changes take years to become institutionalized.

90. At the institutional level, UNICEF has supported the development of the "Strategy for Early and Preschool Education 2016–2020",<sup>147</sup> which foresees an increased allocation to early childhood education from 0.38 to 0.53 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>148</sup> Likewise, recognizing that the preschool coverage of Roma and other minority children was much lower than for the whole population, UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Human Rights and Minorities and the Ministry of Education to ensure development and implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians 2016–2020.<sup>149</sup> The strategy includes special provisions such as preparatory kindergartens for Roma and Egyptian children, who had never been part of the formal education and awareness raising campaigns for Roma parents.
91. To support implementation of the preschool legislation, UNICEF has worked at various levels. Representatives from the government, the parliamentary committees, and other institutional stakeholders reported during the CPE that UNICEF is a critical partner for the programme of early childhood intervention, including for capacity development for training of preschool teachers with a view to enhance their capacity to prepare materials and plans individualized for each child. Two representatives from every public preschool institution have been trained and they are tasked to replicate the acquired knowledge at the school level.<sup>150</sup>
92. In 2017, the CO launched an evaluation of the programme investment case on Early Childhood Development.<sup>151</sup> The programme was part of a corporate programme funded by the H&M Conscious Foundation (HMCF) entitled "Unleashing Children's Potential". The evaluation focused on early childhood education and showed the cost of the "Preschool for All" campaign should be considered as an investment in children to attend preschool. The total cost of this investment is USD 110 per child attending preschool.<sup>152</sup> The evaluation and its recommendations have been applied in the CP 2017–2021.
93. The increased focus on ECD in the CP 2017–2021 is in line with the UNICEF commitment to the Nurturing Care Framework launched in collaboration with WHO and the World

<sup>144</sup> See for instance IPSOS (2016) "Public Opinion Survey on Preschool Education: Awareness, Attitudes and Practices of Parents from Montenegrin Northern Municipalities."

<sup>145</sup> The KAP showed, among other things, that children do not attend preschool in the North because the mothers stayed home. But the KAP also highlighted a number of attitudes and infrastructural barriers to attendance, including distance to the schools.

<sup>146</sup> See for instance IPSOS (2014) "A Study on Investing in Early Childhood Education in Montenegro".

<sup>147</sup> UNICEF Montenegro and Ministry of Education of the Government of Montenegro (2016) "Strategy on Early and Preschool Education in Montenegro 2016-2020".

<sup>148</sup> Gheorghe, C. & A. Hadzibegovic (2017) "Evaluation of the Programme "Montenegro – Investment Case on Early Childhood Development" UNICEF.

<sup>149</sup> Ministry of Human and Minority Rights.

<sup>150</sup> The resource centres are established in former institutions that have been abolished as part of the deinstitutionalization process. In fact, this is an example of how the CP components are closely interrelated and how the CPs are the continuation of a well-established process to achieve international standards on child rights issues.

<sup>151</sup> Gheorghe, C. & A. Hadzibegovic (2017) "Evaluation of the Programme "Montenegro – Investment Case on Early Childhood Development" UNICEF.

<sup>152</sup> It should be noted that the costs do not reflect contribution/attribution considerations vis-à-vis the advocacy but are only based on costs of campaigns compared to additional coverage.

Bank in 2018.<sup>153</sup> The framework focuses on ECD based on a multisectoral approach as spelled out in the CO Strategy on Cross-Sectoral Programming<sup>154</sup> from 2018. This is yet another example on how the success stories are connecting different opportunities offered for the programme implementation.

94. To strengthen the evidence base on ECD in Montenegro, UNICEF has launched a number of studies in 2019 as well as project proposals. As part of this process, UNICEF organized an international conference in collaboration with the University of Donja Gorica, “Investing in the Early Years – Conference on Fiscal and Public Administration Imperatives for Early Childhood Development” in October 2019. During the CPE, many key informants referred to the conference as a successful input to advancing the ECD Agenda in Montenegro. The success was demonstrated by the high level of evidence-based presentations at the conference and joint agreements developed by participants. A critical piece of information presented was the cost of inaction, namely that allocation of 0.6 per cent of the GDP to ECD would lead to returns of 3.6 per cent. Participants recognized these concrete impact calculations as critical for committing national stakeholders to move the agenda forward.
95. In spite of the success story, the CPE noted during the primary data collection, that the capacities of some preschool institutions the South and Centre have not kept pace with the demand for preschool options, leading to overcrowding as an unintended negative impact of the success, described in Section 4.3.4. In addition, capacity at the mid-level administration is perceived by key stakeholders to be limited, particularly at municipal level, further reducing the potential for sustaining the success over time.
96. **Summary regarding the success story of preschool coverage and ECD.** The long-term vision and continuous attention in UNICEF CPs have been critical for the success of preschool attendance and initial success of ECD focus. It is important that the initiative focused on all levels and targeted municipalities with the lowest coverage, which coincided with the poorest part of the country. Moreover, addressing the issue through the simultaneous implementation of multiple approaches such as sponsoring research studies, supporting long-term social change campaigns, providing capacity development trainings and convening stakeholders for policy dialogue, are seen as critical by interviewed stakeholders.

#### 4.1.3 Mainstreaming of Children Living with Disabilities

97. As described earlier in the country context section, the stigma in Montenegro around persons living with disabilities presented a great challenge for meeting child and adolescent rights and protection. Over the years, various reports on the status of Montenegro vis-à-vis the implementation of human rights conventions have called for greater attention to children with disabilities to ensure inclusiveness<sup>155</sup> in access to education and health.<sup>156</sup> Likewise, the Government of Montenegro Development Directions 2017–2021<sup>157</sup> outline measures for inclusive development and the EC annual staff report from 2018 indicates limited progress in ensuring equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities.<sup>158</sup> The situation analysis prepared for CP

<sup>153</sup> WHO, World Bank, UNICEF (2018) “Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development - A Framework for Linking Survive and Thrive to Transform Health and Human Potential”.

<sup>154</sup> Bridges & Champions for Change: A Strategy to Achieve Cross-Sector Priorities for Children in Montenegro 2018–2021.

<sup>155</sup> The Strategic Note for the CP 2017-2021 defines “inclusive(ness)” in terms of considering the specific needs of children with disabilities and their families, as well as those affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion, in all programming activities.

<sup>156</sup> See for instance status reports on the implementation of international human rights treaties by Montenegro: CRC (2018)

“Concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Montenegro (Adopted by the Committee at its seventy-eighth session (14 May-1 June 2018)” CRC/C/MNE/CO/2-3, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2017) “Concluding observations on the initial report of Montenegro” UNICEF MNE (2017) Submission of An Integrated Report for the CRC and Optional Protocols (OPAC and OPSC) UNICEF Country Office in the Montenegro Report.

<sup>157</sup> [Government of Montenegro \(2017\) Montenegro Development Directions 2018 - 2021.](#)

<sup>158</sup> 2018 Commission Staff Report on Montenegro’s accession.

2017–2021 also stresses stigma and discrimination as a key barrier for ensuring the rights of the child and child protection.<sup>159</sup>

98. In response to the challenge, in 2010 UNICEF launched the social change campaign “It’s About Ability” in order to change social norms and national policies. This campaign ran until 2013 and was recognized in 2016 as one of 12 most innovative social change campaigns to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.<sup>160</sup> It has been followed by other campaigns and interventions designed to change social norms. According to CPE interviews with various stakeholder groups, the success of the campaign is seen in relation to the follow-up with other activities and the overall perception that UNICEF activities are based on long-term vision and continuous support to specific themes such as children living with disabilities.<sup>161</sup> The CPE also finds that this is a clear reflection of the UNICEF strategic leadership position on specific and critical issues related to children’s rights and protection. Standard indicators related to children with disabilities in the 2017–2021 CP, including inclusive education, are almost fully achieved,<sup>162</sup> and in 2019, the number of children with disabilities in primary school with referrals was 990.<sup>163</sup> However, according to the CO, reliable statistics on people living with disabilities are still limited.
99. The integrated and cross-sectoral approach has been significant and responds to the Ombudsperson’s call for intersectoral collaboration but also continuous social change campaigns to ensure inclusive development.<sup>164</sup> As part of the focus on disabilities and inclusive education, the CO has launched a number of technical studies that have facilitated evidence-based advocacy and policy support. Some of these studies have been part of projects with CSOs such as “Our Initiative”, allowing further outreach, capacity development, and institutionalization of inclusive education. According to UNICEF staff, the success has been premised on the government’s openness to reform and support for inclusive development as well as the conducive climate created by the EU accession process.
100. At the institutional level, the Ministry of Education has a special unit on preschool and inclusive education working with the 2019–2025 Strategy for Inclusive Education developed in cooperation with UNICEF.<sup>165</sup>
101. The cooperation includes resource centres to support inclusive education, established in former institutions for children with disabilities. The resource centres offer services such as assistive materials for education of children with disabilities and training of front-line staff in municipalities on topics such as the development of individual plans for children with disabilities. Among the most cited teaching material supported by UNICEF is DAISY<sup>166</sup> material for visually impaired children. Montenegro is the first country in the world where DAISY has been fully integrated into inclusive education.<sup>167</sup> The programme received a global award in 2020 when it was recognized as one the best innovative inclusive education practices at an international summit on inclusive education and communication technologies (Zero Project 2020 Conference).<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Midterm Review of the UNICEF/Government of Montenegro Programme of Cooperation.

<sup>160</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/en/stories/its-about-ability-campaign-recognized-innovative-policy>.

<sup>161</sup> CPE interviews with UNICEF staff, government staff, CSOs, academia, donors, and other United Nations agencies.

<sup>162</sup> UNICEF Montenegro: Result Assessment Monitoring (RAM) and Strategic Management Questions (SMQ), 2015–2020.

<sup>163</sup> Source: UNICEF CO.

<sup>164</sup> Ombudsperson (2017) Alternative Report of Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro Concerning the Second and Third Periodic Reports of Montenegro On Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>165</sup> [Montenegro Inclusive Education Strategy 2019-2025](#). UNICEF has supported the Ministry of Education to develop three successive strategies for inclusive education (2008–2013; 2014–2018; 2019–2025), as well as a range of policy and programmatic initiatives aimed to facilitate their implementation.

<sup>166</sup> Digital accessible information system (DAISY).

<sup>167</sup> Aragonés, S. B. (2015) “Evaluation of the Project ‘Using Textbooks in DAISY Format – Primary School Teacher Training in Using Audio Textbooks’” UNICEF.

<sup>168</sup> [UNICEF Montenegro](#).

102. DAISY textbooks and training were piloted in Montenegro and evaluated in 2014,<sup>169</sup> showing that the package was highly relevant, but that additional infrastructure training and integration of parents would be needed for its continuous success and sustainability.<sup>170</sup> During the CPE, it was noted by the Ministry of Education that the introduction of DAISY has been positive and useful not only for visually impaired children but also children with dyslexia and other traditional learning challenges. DAISY is part of the new education strategy. But it was also noted that some schools apply DAISY without special training of the teachers beforehand witnessing to the reliance and appropriateness of the programme, although long-term success is still not guaranteed.<sup>171</sup>
103. During CPE visits to municipalities, it was noted that the focus on inclusiveness in legislation, social norms and national strategies has been translated into a number of special measures. These include municipality action plans on disabilities, early detection and intervention on behalf of children with disabilities; local guidelines for parents with children with disabilities; special infrastructure in schools allowing full access of children with physical disabilities; and day-care centres for children with disabilities run by parents. It was also noted that these centres are not licensed for service delivery in some municipalities, and that generally the centres for social work<sup>172</sup> suffer from limited material and human resources related to disability issues. Some local resource persons informed the CPE that disability is a private issue that has to be dealt with by families. The CPE also learned that in municipalities with a large Albanian-speaking population, the staff at the day-care centres for children with disabilities only speak Montenegrin, limiting their ability to support ethnic Albanian parents.
104. Recently, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education in drafting the Inclusive Education Strategy 2019–2025, which underlines the importance of addressing institutionalization and takes a long-term approach to inclusive education. Moreover, a new project has been launched on augmentative and alternative communication with funds from the UNICEF Innovation Fund<sup>173</sup> to improve communication between children with disabilities and their parents and teachers, thereby incorporating another change strategy from the CP, namely innovation and innovative approaches. The project is part of a regional initiative.
105. In 2019, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Council for the Rights of the Child, supported an analysis of the potential for an integrated system response to disability in Montenegro, recognizing that disability is still by and large categorized as a health or medical issue.<sup>174</sup> The analysis focused on the health, social protection and education sectors, and it found a fragmented normative response to disability that weakens the coordination, monitoring and integration required by international treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons

<sup>169</sup> Aragonés, S. B. (2015) "Evaluation of the Project 'Using Textbooks in DAISY Format – Primary School Teacher Training in Using Audio Textbooks'" .

<sup>170</sup> The evaluation warned about potential lack of knowledge of DAISY at the municipality level and questioned national capacity to continue production.

<sup>171</sup> However, textbooks and training materials for teachers are expensive and, overall, the methodology as a systematic approach has been in decline in recent years. Moreover, the CPE learned that the UNICEF CO did not manage to raise funds for DAISY implementation, especially capacity-building, in 2019.

<sup>172</sup> Centres for Social Work (CSWs) are the key institutions in the area of social and child protection in Montenegro at local level. There were 13 functional CSWs with 12 branch units to cover the whole country (IDEAS (2019) "Analysis of the Work of Centres for Social Work in Montenegro" UNICEF/MoLSW). Among the mandated responsibilities of the CSWs is monitoring the rights and protection of children with disabilities, preparing development plans and participating in the local commissions for the referral of children into educational programmes. There are 18 such commissions in the country. The working principle of the CSWs was changed to case management as part of the reform of the social and child protection system to promote an integrated/multisectoral approach with the focus on the needs of the individual. The case management is supported by an electronic tracking system. Multidisciplinary teams introduced by UNICEF continue in 17 municipalities. The analysis showed that only 17 per cent of case workers were involved in case management due to insufficient capacity, which also led to insufficient connection with the communities.

<sup>173</sup> For every child: a VOICE: Harnessing 21st-century technology to promote communication, education, and social inclusion for young children with developmental delays and disabilities.

<sup>174</sup> Pluriconsult (2019) "Analysis of System Response and Support to Children with Disabilities" UNICEF & Council for the Rights of the Child.

with Disabilities. The analysis suggests a number of recommendations, many of which are in line with the recommendations from international bodies such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child to the Montenegro implementation of the CRC.<sup>175</sup>

106. **Summary regarding the success story of focusing on children with disabilities and children with disabilities now attending mainstream schools:** A long-term vision and continuous attention to specific subjects at many different levels has been critical to the success of UNICEF at breaking the stigma on children living with disabilities. Still, this success story comes with a caveat as other success stories where signs of institutionalization, for instance, in terms of the government's adaptation of the DAISY package, does not necessarily mean sustainability. The success hitherto has been supported by evidence-based social change campaigns and interventions, including KAP surveys. Other critical elements are strong buy-in from the government and CSOs, partly in response to the campaigns; a programme rooted in human rights conventions; and a longer-term programme to make change happen for a child rights issue that has been challenged by social norms, in this case, government adoption of legislation and strategies on inclusive education, capacity development and the allocation of special resources. Finally, it should be noted that changing social norms and behaviour is a long-term process and requires repeated interventions as called for by the Ombudsperson in his 2017 report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.<sup>176</sup>

#### 4.1.4 Other Key Success Stories Identified during the CPE

107. Other key success stories identified during primary data collection include:

1. **Focus on Adolescents – Life Skills Support to Adolescents:** While the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) addresses all children below the age of 18, it also recognizes that different phases in the child's life are linked to different needs and capacities. The different capacities, aspirations, energy and creativity of adolescents and their special vulnerabilities have been recognized internationally, including in the 2016 general comment to the CRC.<sup>177</sup>

UNICEF has responded with a set of corporate measures to ensure greater investment in educational opportunities and skills training for adolescents at the national level. The CO in Montenegro has aligned with the UNICEF corporate emphasis on supporting youth empowerment via the launch of the Adolescent Empowerment and Participation initiative in 2015.<sup>178,179</sup> The initiative was developed as a multipronged intervention approach adapted to the special needs of adolescents, which were identified through knowledge generation from KAPs and other studies. The specific activities – described in more detail elsewhere in the report – promoted through the initiative and the UNICEF external communications included (1) media literacy campaign<sup>180</sup> developed in partnership with electronic media targeting both parents and adolescents; (2) “Young Reporters” initiative, which trained 51 young people to report in established media and communication tools such as U-Report;<sup>181</sup> and (3) UPSHIFT<sup>182</sup>

<sup>175</sup> See for instance CRC (2018) “Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Montenegro (Adopted by the committee at its seventy-eighth session (14 May–1 June 2018))” CRC/C/MNE/CO/2-3.

<sup>176</sup> Ombudsperson (2017) Alternative Report of Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro concerning the Second and Third Periodic Reports of Montenegro on Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>177</sup> General Comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence. Committee on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>178</sup> The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) addresses all children below the age of 18 and recognizes that different phases in the child's life are linked to different needs and capacities. UNICEF has responded to the CRC with the development of a set of corporate measures to ensure greater investment in educational opportunities and skills training for adolescents at the national level.

<sup>179</sup> The initiative was launched under the title, “Youth Programme”, a global initiative funded by a partnership with ING.

<sup>180</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/en/media-literacy-launched-2018>

<sup>181</sup> U-Report is a messaging tool developed by the UNICEF Office of Innovation to empower young people to engage with and speak out on issues that matter to them.

<sup>182</sup> UPSHIFT is another approach developed by the UNICEF Office of Innovation. It aims to build transferrable skills and create opportunities for adolescents. UPSHIFT focuses on activities identified by adolescents and have included issues such as sexual and reproductive health and digital literacy. The process is supported by mentors and is meant to provide participating

with establishment of a Youth Lab,<sup>183</sup> focusing on local challenges for adolescents by using available technology. The initiative represents a combination of the CP implementation strategies, including sponsoring research studies, developing campaigns (Young Report and supporting the capacity-building of front-line staff from the health, education and social protection professions). The interventions received considerable recognition, including the Young Reporters winning the 2019 Global Media and Information Literacy Award from UNESCO.<sup>184</sup> The initiatives created increased attention to placing the issues of adolescents on the public agenda, inspiring girls to become more engaged in new technologies and IT and the uptake by the government of some of the promoted pilot activities such as the support for enhancing social and emotional skills reflected in the 2017 revised Law on Primary Education. Some activities, such as the hackathons launched under the programme have become so common that the Innovation Lab will stop hosting them.

2. **Deinstitutionalization and “No Children under 3” in Institutions:** In 2017, there were no longer any children institutionalized under the age of 3. This is to a large degree accredited to the support of UNICEF through awareness raising, advocacy, continuous and highly skilled support, legislative updating, multiple strategies, and identification and implementation of alternative community-based solutions.<sup>185</sup> During the CPE, however, it was noted that both in 2018 and 2019 one child under the age of 3 had been institutionalized, mainly because alternative services were not available. This new development to the success story underlines the importance of long-term and continuous support, with strong engagement of the national government and independent institutions to ensure continued attention to critical issues.
3. **Parenting for Lifelong Health (children 2–9):** The CP initiative “Parenting for Lifelong Health” was designed for parents of children aged 2–9, with the objective of reducing the risk of child abuse and neglect. When the parenting programme was first introduced, UNICEF was uncertain about the interest in learning positive parenting skills, which go against the traditional way of children’s upbringing. However, the programme was based on solid knowledge generation created through UNICEF-supported technical studies and backed up by assessments.<sup>186</sup> The approach consisted of the gradual introduction of positive parenting techniques for small groups by trained health, education, and social and child protection professionals. The package for the training of professionals was piloted before being implemented at a larger scale. The success factors of the initiative include the simultaneous involvement of key players at health centres, kindergartens and NGOs. When discussing the success with various stakeholders, the timing of the introduction of the various products was highlighted.<sup>187</sup> This is only possible through good

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adolescents with the skills to design and effectively manage social change projects. The UPSHIFT team helps frame the initiative. Montenegro was the first among three countries to test UPSHIFT.

<sup>183</sup> In 2016, UNICEF established the Youth Innovation Lab in Montenegro, which serves as a hub for innovative youth empowerment programmes. The Youth Innovation Lab is a space and set of protocols for engaging young people, technologists, private sector and civil society in problem-solving. Youth can contribute ideas, spearhead their own projects and provide the energy and optimism that leads to constructive progress within the community. The Lab is focused on community engagement where one of the primary goals is working with local youth. This involves the development of co-creative activities with an emphasis placed on mentorship, welcoming ideas and input from participants, skills training and facilitating youth so that they can make a positive impact on their own community. The Youth Lab in Montenegro is the sixth in the world.

<sup>184</sup> The hackathons have been for young computer programmers meeting to develop new software in record time. On the Young Reporters, see <https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/en/young-reporters> On the award, see <https://en.unesco.org/news/transformational-initiatives-celebrated-global-media-and-information-literacy-awards-2019>.

<sup>185</sup> CPE interviews, workshop and online survey with UNICEF staff, government staff, CSOs, academia, donors and other United Nations agencies.

<sup>186</sup> See for instance Petković, S. & T. Milić, (2018) Field Researcher Parenting Adolescents, UNICEF, EU ROM (2018) “Protecting Children from Violence and Promoting Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Western Balkans and Turkey”, EU, and Women’s Right Center (n/a) Protection of Child Victims and Witnesses of Domestic Violence in Montenegro: Monitoring the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention and UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime.

<sup>187</sup> CPE interviews and workshop with UNICEF staff, government staff, CSOs and academia.

preparation and constant monitoring of the situation on the ground to identify needed support at the right time. During the primary data collection at the partner level, the CPE learned that parents found that the programme helped them change their approaches in dealing with children leading to improved parent-child interaction and positive attention to children focusing more on positive behaviours. CSOs have adopted the model for their programmes in general and requested similar skills programmes for parents of adolescents.<sup>188</sup> The CPE notes the potential for engaging Roma and Egyptian parents in the recently developed Parenting for Lifelong Health programme, financed by the EU and the Austrian Development Agency.<sup>189</sup> The programme's follow-up training will focus more on fathers.

4. **From Juvenile Justice to Access to Justice for All Children:** The improvement of access to justice for children and the improvement of the court system regarding the rights of the child was identified as a success story primarily as a result of the integrated approach to all sections of the legal systems in which children might be involved, either as a victim or offender or as children participating in family and administrative proceedings. The support included policy reform, capacity strengthening, awareness raising and raising of demand, and improvement of the status and rights of children participating in civil law and administrative proceedings.<sup>190</sup> The CPE learned during primary data collection among judiciary professionals and CSOs that children in some family-law-related proceedings still do not have child-friendly premises and specialists are not trained how to tackle the needs of children under these circumstances.<sup>191</sup> The simultaneous support comprises capacity development such as training and training of trainers, and physical infrastructure with child-friendly chambers that have been developed based on a series of studies and research of the different judicial institutions. A number of courts and prosecutors, for instance, were equipped for hearings with children to limit the damage of the proceedings on children.

108. In the following Findings sections on relevance and coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact, the success stories are further analysed from these perspectives.<sup>192</sup> It should be recognized though that all success stories are nuanced and include some aspects that can be strengthened.

## 4.2 Relevance

### *Key Findings – Relevance & Coherence*

1. The Country Programme is aligned with EU accession process, particularly by focusing on child and adolescent rights and protection, including responding to social exclusion of ethnic minorities and children with disabilities. Still there is limited response to the EC call for legislative implementation capacity.
2. The CP is aligned to the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) 2030 and thereby also with the plan of Montenegro to achieve the United Nations Sustainable

<sup>188</sup> This finding is based on observations from school front-line staff and was not further explained.

<sup>189</sup> Montenegro is one of the countries participating in the UNICEF-led regional initiative funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) on "Social Inclusion of Roma Children and Children with Disabilities in the Western Balkans and Moldova" (implementation 2019–2021).

<sup>190</sup> Alternative measures were first introduced in 2006 with support to implementation of alternative measures focusing on children in conflict with law, and special protection of child victims and witness of crime.

<sup>191</sup> According to the CO, the part related to equipment applies to children in all proceedings, not only family; however almost all professionals have been trained at least once.

<sup>192</sup> Please note that the substantial evidence of the success stories identified by the CPE warrants a special and coherent description of these in line with the principles of appreciative inquiry. However, the CPE recognizes that the UNICEF format for presenting findings following OECD/DAC criteria is not fully compatible with an appreciative inquiry.

Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the international human rights conventions, including the CRC and the United Nations Delivering as One .

3. Documented advances in reaching international standards for child and adolescent rights and protection and responding to recommendations from international human rights commissions have been possible by focusing on integrated and multisectoral approaches and a relevant, sound combination of implementation strategies.
4. A critical contributing factor to the relevant and coherent approach of the CP is the UNICEF strategic leadership role and convening power for bringing key stakeholders together in partnerships around child rights and protection issues. This convening and leveraging power are based on its highly recognized role as the international protector of children's rights, solid partnerships, knowledge generation and evidence-based national agenda-setting.
5. While the CPE finds the CP to be highly relevant to the needs in Montenegro, the CPE also found some concerns regarding limited work with the official national Roma and Egyptian coordination body as well as the National Women's Machinery.
6. The CPE found that gender equality issues are considered in the CP design and sex-disaggregated data are planned for many indicators in the result framework. However, the CPE noticed limited context-specific and dynamic gender analysis reporting as called for by the UNICEF gender policy.
7. While the CPE finds that the CP is highly relevant to needs and coherent with other initiatives, the CPE also found concerns regarding the focus on the legislative framework, policies and strategies as well as institutional capacity to implement those, whereas there is limited attention on how to actually implement at municipality level. This concern should be seen in the light of similar concerns raised in the review of the former CP and in a number of other reviews and evaluations.

#### **4.2.1 Is the CP, its focus, components and change strategies aligned with (1) the needs of children and adolescents affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion; (2) national policies and priorities, particularly those related to the EU accession process and the SDGs; and (3) Delivering as One?**

109. As can be seen in the TOC for the CP (presented in Figure 2), the overall vision for change is defined in terms of the programme's contribution to equitable systems for the rights of the children in Montenegro, with a special focus on children affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion. The three programmatic outcomes further stress support to this target group through interventions in health, education, social support, child protection and justice.
110. As described in section 2 of this report, this is fully aligned with the inclusive growth pillar of the Government of Montenegro Development Directions 2017–2021 and its provisions for preschool education, primary education, physical infrastructure, access for children with special education needs,<sup>193</sup> violence against women and children, day-care centres for children with disabilities, deinstitutionalization, amendment of the social and child protection law and local service provisions.

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<sup>193</sup> According to [Ministry of Education \(2007\) "Law on Education of Children with Special Needs"](#), children with special needs are children with physical, mental, and sensory disability; behavioural disorders; serious chronic diseases; emotional disorders; combined disorders; children ill for a long time; and other children who encounter difficulties in learning who need education by the educational programme with adjusted tuition and additional professional help or by a special curriculum. It should be noted that in many documents reviewed for the CPE, the following is often written, "children with disabilities and special needs".

111. Likewise, the CP is fully aligned with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) 2030<sup>194</sup> and thereby with the plan of Montenegro to achieve the SDGs. Montenegro was one of 22 countries worldwide that prepared a self-assessment of its planning process vis-à-vis the SDGs.<sup>195</sup> The report shows that Montenegro would need support to strengthen statistical services, particularly MONSTAT, which is part of the CP component 3. For the specific SDGs that the CP covers, the following is noted for the relationship between the CP and the NSSD:

- SDG 1 on ending poverty, including ensuring social stability and promoting resilience of natural and social systems, which the CPE finds is in line with the CP support to social welfare and child rights;
- SDG 3 on healthy lives and well-being, including enhanced health care for mothers, newborn babies and other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, prevention and disease control, elimination of discrimination of persons with disabilities, and improvement of intersectoral cooperation. The CPE finds that, overall, the CP support is in line with this. While the CPE also finds that health has received relatively limited attention in the CP, the recent focus on child vaccinations, support to patronage nurses and the integrated approach of the ECD initiative will lead to a more balanced response to SDG 3;
- SDG 4 on equitable and quality education, including preschool education. The CPE finds that the CP is a critical contributor to the achievement of preschool for all as well as quality education, for instance, through inclusive education;
- SDG 5 on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. As described below in section 4.2.4, gender equality is considered in the design of the CP; however, the CPE questions the CP approach to gender transformative work in terms of limited attention to gender responsiveness in the implementation of the implementation strategies and general attention to context-specific and dynamic gender analysis as called for by the UNICEF gender policy;
- SDG 8 on sustained and inclusive economic growth presents a range of measures that are not directly relevant to the UNICEF mandate. On the other hand, the CPE finds that the CP initiatives on youth and adolescents provides an important contribution to this SDG and shows the flexibility and innovativeness of the CP programming;
- SDG 9 on resilient infrastructure and innovation presents a range of measures that are not directly relevant to the UNICEF mandate. On the other hand, the CPE finds that the CP implementation strategy on innovation is in line with the spirit of this SDG;
- SDG 10 on reducing inequality among countries and fostering innovation, including eliminating discrimination against persons with disabilities, building a multi-ethnic civil society and fighting against social exclusion. The CPE finds that the CP use of regional programmes developed by ECARO such as the augmentative and alternative communication initiative and adolescent empowerment partnering with CSOs, as well as its three main components, are fully aligned with this SDG;
- SDG 16 on peaceful societies and access to justice for all, including building sectoral policies, strengthening public administration and building capacity. The CPE finds that the CP component on access to justice for children and adolescents is a key contributor to this SDG as well as the CP work on protection and ending violence;
- SDG 17 on partnerships, including building national capacity for sustainable development and promoting cross-sectoral approaches. The CPE finds that the CP is fully aligned with these measures. In addition, the CP implementation strategy on partnerships is fully aligned with this SDG.

<sup>194</sup> [Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism \(2016\) "National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Montenegro".](#)

<sup>195</sup> [Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism \(2016\) "Voluntary National Reviews at the HLPF 2016 – Montenegro".](#)

112. The relatively limited attention to health in the first phases of the CP and particularly at the municipality level was confirmed during CPE interviews with the CO, the government, the parliament and CSOs who all highlighted a need to increasingly pay attention not only to traditional primary health care, but also to mental health. Social and emotional skills for adolescents and youth are seen as an important priority by Montenegro stakeholders as evidenced by the success of institutionalizing this component of the adolescent empowerment programme. In this vein, mental health is seen as related to the overall social and emotional well-being of adolescents. This topic has been raised by adolescents during the UNICEF adolescent initiatives, who have called for more focus on mental health and adolescent health in general.<sup>196</sup>
113. The need in Montenegro for more focus on health in general (but especially mental health) was also highlighted in the MTR of CP 2012–2016 and by the internal and regional ranking of Montenegro on health issues as shown in the KidsRights Index.<sup>197</sup> For comparison we show the sector ranking of available data for the Western Balkans in the following table. It should be noted that according to the CO, the relatively good health indicators in Montenegro compared to other countries, such as the very low neonatal mortality, makes resource mobilization for health for an international organization like UNICEF more challenging. This despite the fact, that some health indicators are particularly low in Montenegro, including child immunization and exclusive breast feeding.
114. The resource mobilization challenges partly explain the reduced activities on health issues in the CP. During the CPE data collection in Montenegro, it was noted that the CO recently recruited a part-time health expert, which was generally considered as a positive development by various stakeholders from the Government. Still, it was noted that the subject would require more technical resources. It should also be noted that the CPE collected limited information on the CP's implementation of health and mental health aspect. On the other hand, the collected data include ample information on the needs.

**Table 3: KidsRights Index 2020**

|                      | Overall Kidsrights Index |              | Life      |              | Health     |              | Education |              | Protection |              | Enabling Child Rights Environment |              |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
|                      | Rank                     | Score        | Rank      | Score        | Rank       | Score        | Rank      | Score        | Rank       | Score        | Rank                              | Score        |
| Serbia               | 36                       | 0.572        | 51        | 0.621        | 87         | 0.624        | 60        | 0.530        | 58         | 0.647        | 052-063                           | 0.463        |
| <b>Montenegro</b>    | <b>42</b>                | <b>0.566</b> | <b>38</b> | <b>0.634</b> | <b>110</b> | <b>0.575</b> | <b>44</b> | <b>0.558</b> | <b>62</b>  | <b>0.640</b> | <b>064-075</b>                    | <b>0.447</b> |
| Macedonia            | 46                       | 0.561        | 20        | 0.669        | 83         | 0.630        | 74        | 0.516        | 60         | 0.644        | 088-097                           | 0.397        |
| Albania              | 52                       | 0.552        | 41        | 0.633        | 62         | 0.647        | 53        | 0.547        | 44         | 0.662        | 098-123                           | 0.347        |
| Bosnia & Herzegovina | 61                       | 0.540        | 42        | 0.631        | 107        | 0.591        | 70        | 0.521        | 32         | 0.678        | 098-123                           |              |

Source: [Kids Rights Organization](#)

Global ranking among 181 countries and scoring (full child right is 1).

115. The low health ranking is particularly due to the low immunization rate in Montenegro. KidsRights indicators for 2015 and 2017 similarly show low scores for health. The CPE

<sup>196</sup> Source: CO staff and partner organizations.

<sup>197</sup> The KidsRights Index is based on 20 indicators related to life (5< mortality rate, life expectancy at birth, maternal mortality ratio), health care (per cent 5< underweight, immunization at 1, per cent of population using improved sanitation, per cent of population using improved drinking water), education (expected years of schooling, sex inequality in expected years of schooling), protection (child labour, adolescent birth rate, birth registration), child rights environment (non-discrimination, best interest of child, enabling legislation, available budget, child participation, disaggregate data management, state-CSO cooperation for child rights participation). [Kids Rights Organization](#).

learned that over the last two CP cycles, the CO has decreased its volume of work related to health and mental health due to funding constraints and prioritization. Furthermore, as noted already in the MTR of CP 2012–2016, UNICEF has faced concerns in mobilizing health professionals for an integrated response to child rights and protection. This was consistent with the concerns raised by respondents during interviews with government institutions and the CO. Based on discussions with government institutions and the CO, the CPE finds that recently launched CO initiatives in collaboration with the Institute for Public Health will address the low breastfeeding rate. It was also noted that the integrated approach adopted for the new ECD initiative, built to a large extent on the global UNICEF/WHO/World Bank initiative on nurturing care<sup>198</sup> addresses some of these challenges.

116. The CPE finds that the CP is fully aligned with the principles of the key human rights conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The regular reviews of the respective committees on these human rights conventions, including comments from CSOs and the Ombudsperson, have generated very long lists of recommendations (see for instance comments in the document review in Annex 1 to this report). Most of these recommendations are not prioritized or directed to specific actors, and generally they go far beyond what UNICEF can and should do. Still, UNICEF plays a critical role to ensure their implementation.<sup>199</sup> The CPE finds that the new Strategy on Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019–2023<sup>200</sup> provides a substantive follow-up to many of these recommendations, although a full response will depend on the implementation plans for this new strategy as laid out in the Accompanying Action Plan.
117. The CPE notes particularly that the many recommendations include concerns regarding the implementation of the legislative framework. The CPE finds that the CP design and aspirations are predominantly focused on ensuring that the national legislation follows international standards. This is in line with the overall national priority on EU accession. However, the CPE also notes that annual EC staff reports on the progress of the EU access negotiation repeatedly point to the weak implementation capacity in Montenegro.<sup>201</sup> This position was stressed during the CPE interviews with all main stakeholder groups.
118. Finally, the CPE finds that the programme is fully aligned with UNDAF and the principles of DaO as implemented in Montenegro. The UNICEF country programme directly contributes to three of the four outcomes of the UNDAF for Montenegro: democratic governance, social inclusion and economic governance. The last component (environmental sustainability) covers climate change and environmental degradation; the UNICEF Corporate Strategic Plan 2018–2021 highlight this as a new vulnerability challenge for children.<sup>202</sup> Children’s voice in national responses to climate change and environmental degradation is important as highlighted by several stakeholders during the CPE. Likewise, the Young Reporters of the UNICEF media literacy initiative have reported on the importance of children’s and adolescents’ engagement in the climate change dialogue.<sup>203</sup> As described earlier in section 2.6, the United Nations system in Montenegro implements all DaO standard operating procedures for the mutual benefits of the participating agencies, including UNICEF, and thereby also the CP. The physical proximity of the relatively small country offices facilitates programmatic cooperation likely to increase the impact potential.

<sup>198</sup> UNICEF, World Bank, WHO (2018) “Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development - A Framework for Helping Children Survive and Thrive to Transform Health and Human Potential.”

<sup>199</sup> CPE document review and interviews with government and CSO stakeholders.

<sup>200</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare & UNICEF (2019) “Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019–2023”.

<sup>201</sup> EC Staff Working Document: Montenegro Reports Accompanying EC Communication for 2010, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019.

<sup>202</sup> UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021.

<sup>203</sup> Source: media consultant and CO.

#### **4.2.2 To what extent is UNICEF coordinating with national partners, including other UN organizations, civil society, independent institutions and academia to avoid overlaps, leverage contributions, and catalyse and advocate for joint work?**

119. Primary data collection through interviews with key stakeholders highlighted the UNICEF strategic position in promoting children's rights and protection in Montenegro. This is observed, for instance, through its convening power to bring together multiple stakeholders from different levels around child rights and child protection issues. The annual programmes and country reports<sup>204</sup> document the UNICEF organization of a large number of conferences, workshops and meetings, and its participation in multi-stakeholder events. The CPE found that the shared responsibility among UNICEF and partners, such as the government, government institutions, Ombudsperson and CSOs in organizing these events was a critical contributing factor to the strong partnerships that were subsequently fostered through daily interactions with these different national stakeholders. The convening power of UNICEF to leverage stakeholder contributions for child rights and protections then allowed partnerships related to child rights and protection to emerge that could potentially be sustained without ongoing UNICEF support.
120. This strategic positioning approach is influenced by the fact that UNICEF is operating in a country with a limited number of resident external partners. Both primary and secondary data sources have pointed to the high professionalism of the CO in providing continuous policy dialogue and supporting a broad spectrum of child rights and protection-focused evidence-based initiatives. Moreover, during interviews, various partners pointed to UNICEF availability to participate in events when called upon and agenda-setting new initiatives.
121. The importance of the coordination, partnership building and the UNICEF general strategic positioning with regard to children's rights and protection should also be seen in the light of the many different sectors and line ministries involved in UNICEF activities, including health, labour and social welfare, education, justice, human rights and minorities, and linked institutions. In particular, the CO has worked directly with 33 CSOs, 24 government institutions, and one private organization through implementation agreements on a variety of activities, including knowledge generation, events, social change campaigns and capacity development under the CPs.<sup>205</sup> Likewise, as described above, the CO works in full cooperation with other United Nations agencies in Montenegro, the EU delegation in particular with the EU Rule of Law programme in the justice system reform, Council of Europe and other partners. Despite the UNICEF strength in partnership and coordination, engagement with some institutions remains limited. This includes the Department for Promotion and Protection of Roma and Egyptian Rights, the Department for Gender at the Ministry of Human Rights and Minorities and OSCE.

#### **4.2.3 To what an extent is the combination of implementation strategies deployed by UNICEF relevant given the CP objectives and the country context, and, if not, what should UNICEF do to enhance their relevance?**

122. As noted earlier (section 4.1.2), the CPE finds that the key characteristic of the success stories is the integrated multipronged intervention approach that combines the various implementation strategies, including cross-sectoral programming, partnerships, capacity development, advocacy and public engagement, policy dialogue, child rights monitoring, knowledge generation, and innovations, piloting, modelling and scaling-up. The greatest challenges to the application of the implementation strategies identified by

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<sup>204</sup> For instance, Country Office Annual Reports (COAR) 2015–2019; Annual Management Plans 2011–2019; and Annual Work Plans. Please refer to Annex 1, “Document Review”, for further details on the annual country reports and programmes.

<sup>205</sup> Information from the CO.

the CPE include the limited attention to the level of decentralization and local capacity, the limited transfer to national institutions of knowledge for organizing public advocacy and Communications for Social Change (C4SC) multi-year campaigns and the lack of a broad understanding among different stakeholders of the role of piloting. Rather, as witnessed during several CPE interviews among various stakeholders, particularly external, the concept of pilots as a component of a systematic approach for modelling and scaling up is not far from clear. These issues will be further discussed in the following sections on effectiveness and sustainability.

123. The CPE found a strong national commitment to the implementation strategies as witnessed during interviews with both national authorities and CSOs. Particularly, the CPE found that the reference to the CP as a joint programme of the national government and UNICEF is based on real involvement and engagement from the national stakeholders reflected for instance in a knowledge of the CP components among particular government institutions interviewed during the CPE.
124. While the CPE found a commitment to the CP focus on an integrated and holistic approach, the CPE also noted that the national governance structure with involvement of many different line ministries for promotion of children's rights and protection requires special coordination efforts of overall national institutions. The revitalization of the National Council for the Rights of the Child supported by UNICEF should provide such a structure. However, as discussed elsewhere in this report, UNICEF CO and other partners still have concerns regarding the authority and convening power of the council with its current location under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.
125. The need for a holistic or integrated approach to address children's rights and protection has been highlighted in a number of studies and assessments over the years, including in the 2014 MoRES that identifies the "silo sectoral approaches" as a key bottleneck. As such, the "Strategy to Achieve Cross-Sector Priorities for Children in Montenegro 2018–2021" is responding to the alternative in terms of sector-based approaches.<sup>206</sup> The cross-sectoral strategy was developed with a view to producing sustainable results in the lives of children, especially considering that (1) multiple overlapping deprivations experienced by children cannot be addressed by any one sector alone; (2) a focus on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children requires holistic, multisectoral approaches; and (3) accelerated progress is needed to reach the ambitious targets of the country programme and to support Montenegro in meeting its EU Acquis and SDG commitments.<sup>207</sup> The strategy builds on positive synergies within the CP, for instance health and early childhood education as well as with other initiatives, including programmes of other UNDAF partners. The CPE finds that the strategy is an excellent example of the flexible approach in the CO planning and implementation with a high degree of capacity to respond to emerging needs. Through the annual reports and other result reporting such as the Result Assessment Module (RAM), the CP is reviewed regularly for its appropriateness to respond to needs.

#### **4.2.4 To what extent have human-rights-based, GEEW-responsive and equity-focused approaches been applied in the CP design and implementation?**

126. The UNICEF corporate mandate and role in upholding children's rights and protection is well recognized among all stakeholders the CPE met during the primary data collection and no one questions that UNICEF activities are designed in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, stakeholders recognize the value of the CP multipronged intervention approach<sup>208</sup> as critical for the promotion of equity

<sup>206</sup> The new strategy was developed with the arrival of new leadership at the CO in 2017.

<sup>207</sup> "Bridges & Champions for Change: A Strategy to achieve Cross-sector Priorities for Children in Montenegro 2018–2021" UNICEF 2018.

<sup>208</sup> Including knowledge generation, broad targeted outreach campaigns, multi-stakeholder interventions, capacity development, and participatory planning and monitoring.

principles. Moreover, the focus on inclusiveness ensures that the rights of vulnerable groups, particularly children with disabilities and children from minority groups, is in line with relevant human right conventions. The CPE finds that an important contributing factor to the human-rights-based approach is the partnerships with and institutional support to the Ombudsperson's Office and CSOs at the central and local levels. It should also be mentioned that the EU accession process by itself requires that Montenegro adopt international human rights standards. Hence, the appropriateness that UNICEF, as the critical partner on children's rights, follows those principles.

127. The CPE found that the CP includes a number of initiatives addressing girls and women's gender specific needs and threats, particularly child marriage and gender-based violence. As such the CP document and related work plans specifically state that UNICEF will promote social norms that tackle gender stereotypes and ensure gender mainstreaming. Moreover, increased awareness on gender-based violence and early marriages is included in an indicator as well as an output on gender-responsive justice. However, overall, the CPE found limited attention to the "how" of GEEW and particularly the notion of gender responsiveness as an approach that goes beyond recognizing different needs and opportunities of girls and boys, women and men. Gender responsiveness, as defined by the UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2018–21<sup>209</sup> requires "routine mapping of the nature and scale of gender inequalities as they affect UNICEF priority results" and systematic use of gender programmatic review, which the CPE did not find in Montenegro. Rather, some initial reflections were given to gender issues while limited attention was given to the specificities and dynamic gender relations in different contexts such as geographical localities and socioeconomic groups. For instance, the 2017 TOC for Empowerment and Participation of Adolescents states that "all monitoring and evaluation efforts will include the collection of gender-disaggregated data".<sup>210</sup> The CPE assumes that the commitment only refers to sex-disaggregated data. As this is certainly important, the document does not provide any analysis on what the specific GEEW challenges are for adolescents.<sup>211</sup>
128. In fact, the challenges regarding the GEEW approach and lack of proper gender analysis was already highlighted in the Gender Scorecard Report prepared as a self-assessment by the United Nations Country Team in 2017 with active involvement of UNICEF.<sup>212</sup> The report focuses on attention given to gender across seven programmatic dimensions in the resident United Nations organizations.<sup>213</sup> According to the report, among 15 analysed indicators, only six met or exceeded minimum standards. The report highlights the only joint United Nations Youth programme and notes that the project document does not include a gender analysis.
129. According to the corporate UNICEF Gender Action Plan, programmes should be based on partnerships for gender equity. The CPE observed that the CP interacts with national CSOs working on gender equality and have implementing arrangements with national NGOs, such as Women's Rights Centres, SOS Niksic and SOS Podgorica. However, while engagement with CSOs and NGOs within the CP is strong, other prominent national level actors are not as connected as partners of the CP, such as the Gender Equality Department in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights. While these stakeholders recognize the importance of the CP focus on the most vulnerable, they also noticed that the vulnerable vis-à-vis gender inequality is not limited to groups affected by poverty, disability and other traditional UNICEF exclusion and inclusion indicators. For example, during the CPE in-country data collection, members of the Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and the Department of Gender Equality expressed concerns regarding

<sup>209</sup> UNICEF (2017) "Gender Action Plan 2018-2021".

<sup>210</sup> ING and UNICEF (2017) "Empowerment and Participation of Adolescents in Montenegro – Theory of Change".

<sup>211</sup> It should be noted that during the finalization of the CPE report, the team was informed that the CO had launched a gender programmatic review.

<sup>212</sup> UNCT Montenegro (2017) [Gender Equality SWAP Scorecard Assessment Report](#).

<sup>213</sup> Planning, Programming and M&E, Partnerships, Leadership and Organizational Culture, Gender Architecture and Capacities, Resources and Results.

the reliability of the statistics on gender or family-based violence, as these issues are largely hidden in many of the “non-vulnerable” societal groups. Rather, gender-based violence and gender inequality also exist among the more affluent groups, for instance, which is not reflected in the CP GEEW approach. The development of the new action plan for gender equality could be an important moment to integrate issues of gender equality of girls and adolescents with the support of the Secretariat-General of the government.

130. A strength of the CP is knowledge generation, which is reflected in the huge number of technical studies and evaluations. However, the desk review of the CPE (Annex 1) revealed that while some studies refer to gender, it is mostly in a very general way based on gender stereotypes. Many studies do not use a gender lens at all.<sup>214</sup> Similarly, some of the project proposals state that the projects will consider gender as required in the standard project proposal format but without specification of how.

### 4.3 Effectiveness

#### *Key Findings – Effectiveness*

1. The CP has been transformative on various equitable access concerns in Montenegro, particularly through integrated and multipronged interventions that address quality education, access to justice for children and adolescents, access to early childhood education for minorities and access for children with disabilities.
2. The CP has effectively addressed child rights and protection issues through an emphasis on social protection and social inclusion programming intended to reduce social inequities. While positive progress is observed, the preliminary results from a Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) based on MICS 2018 data highlight equity issues, including higher child deprivation/poverty among Roma and Egyptian children than among other children in Montenegro.
3. The CP has fostered a wide range of innovation and innovative approaches across the respective sectors including, among others, a multi-country media literacy campaign for children’s safety through visual arts, innovative models for learning (UPSHIFT), the provision of platforms for influencing the development of policies (U-Report and Young Reporters, and the establishment of a learning hub to promote ongoing innovation (Youth Lab).
4. The CO has effectively followed up on recommendations from the 2017 evaluation of the Child Rights monitoring systems. The CPE finds that there are still concerns regarding implementation of recommendations of the Committee on Child Rights at the municipality level and the heightening of Child Rights Monitoring to the level of the Prime Minister.
5. The CP introduced piloted models and new technologies, working directly with youth, and through the UNICEF long-term advocacy and communication for social change. These have led to individual behaviour change, the emergence of unplanned partnerships and allowed for a deepened understanding of the issues facing children and youth in Montenegro. This has allowed it to move the child rights agenda further than what was planned in the CP document.
6. UNICEF has a significant role in the DaO process, including the effectiveness of the results group under UNICEF leadership. This has been furthered by the recognized strong knowledge management and strategic positioning of UNICEF. Yet, monitoring of UNICEF contributions to the UNDAF process is somewhat limited in the UNICEF annual reporting documents.

<sup>214</sup> Please refer to Annex 1, “Document Review”, for the full list of documents analysed for the CPE. As can be seen, examples of weak attention to gender/GEEW analysis include the sector-based theories of change prepared for CP 2017–2021 and various of the assessments, evaluations and technical studies prepared in the context of the CP.

7. The cross-sectoral strategy outlining four priorities is evidence-based and generally recognized as a positive development. The full alignment of cross-sectoral programming into national programmes is still limited due to a highly sector-based national governance structure.

#### **4.3.1 To what extent has the CP contributed to systems for equitable access of all children to education, justice, health, and social and child protection?**

131. The CPE finds that the CP has strengthened national systems, allowing increased access of all children to education, justice, and social and child protection. This has happened through a number of complementary activities such as awareness raising and advocacy, policy dialogue and technical advice, modelling and innovativeness and capacity development, which have led to various direct results.
132. On an institutional level, the CP has contributed to improved national systems for equitable access to education, justice, health, and social and child protection through activities that have led to (1) an updated legislative framework and national strategies on the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence 2017–2021, Early and Preschool Upbringing and Education 2016–2020, Integration of Persons with Disabilities 2016–2020, the Montenegro Inclusive Education Strategy 2019–2025, the Strategy for the Reform of Judiciary 2019–2022, the amended family law of Montenegro adopted in 2016 as well as action plans for the implementation of the youth strategy; and (2) the new Strategy on Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019–2023,<sup>215</sup> which builds on all relevant existing national strategies related to education, justice, health, and social and child protection, and offers integrated responses in the Accompanying Action Plan. This institutional and normative support has contributed to the efforts of Montenegro to align children’s rights and protection with international norms and standards, including the EU Acquis.
133. This normative strengthening is further supported by the Institute for Social and Child Protection, which was established with UNICEF support under CP 2012–2016. The CP 2017–2021 has supported the capacity of 40 per cent of the staff. The CPE has noted that the functioning and capacity of the institute was questioned by several stakeholders during primary data collection.<sup>216</sup>
134. Furthermore, the CP has contributed to strengthening the national child rights and protection oversight system through capacity development support to the Ombudsperson’s Office, improvement of the child rights monitoring system and establishment of the national Council for the Rights of the Child.
135. In terms of achievement of the planned outcomes, the following table presents the achievement level for the three CP components vis-à-vis the planned targets as well as the CPE assessment of the likelihood that the target will be achieved before the conclusion of the programme at the end of 2021. The assessment is based on the information collected during the CPE primary data collection in Montenegro and informed by both external and internal stakeholders. As already highlighted, the scope of the CPE does not include the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on CP programming and implementation.

Table 4: Summary of Achieved Results vs Targets<sup>217</sup>

<sup>215</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare & UNICEF (2019) “Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019–2023”.

<sup>216</sup> The 2018 EC staff report also questions the capacity of the ISSP and notes that the institute is underfunded.

<sup>217</sup> UNICEF: Outcome Indicator Status Over Time by Business Area as of 19 January 2020 complemented by CO information.

| INDICATOR<br>SI: STANDARD INDICATOR  | TARGET   | ACHIEVEMENTS<br>19 JANUARY<br>2020 <sup>218</sup> | COMMENTS WITH CPE<br>ASSESSMENT <sup>219</sup> ON THE<br>LIKELIHOOD OF FULL<br>ACHIEVEMENT BEFORE END<br>2021 <sup>220</sup>   |
|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Child Protection</b>  |  |   |  |
| SI: Children 0–17 living in residential care   | 2019: 150<br>2021: 135   | 156   | On track and likely to be fully achieved if assumptions on stable environment hold.  |
| SI: Number of girls and boys who have experienced violence reached by health, social work or justice/law enforcement services                                      | 2019: 5 100<br>2020: 5 300<br>2021: 5 500                          | 6 728   | Fully achieved and likely to be fully institutionalized  |
| Share of new children admitted to the National Institution for Children without parental care out of all children already residing in that institution             | 2021: 13% (overall); for <3 years: 0%                              | 12  | Partially achieved and with challenges for becoming fully achieved based on recent development with increased number of children >3 being institutionalized. At the end of 2019, one child <3 was in institutional care. |
| Boys and girls utilizing standardized family and community services per 100 000 child population   | 2021: 449 (228 boys, 221 girls, 41 <3 years 103 with disabilities) | Fully achieved                                    | Fully achieved, but the reporting does not provide details corresponding to the target.  |
| No. of cases of violence against boys and girls registered   | 2021: 500  | 448   | Partially achieved and likely to be fully achieved if assumptions on stable environment hold.  |
| <b>Quality Education and Adolescent Empowerment</b>  |  |   |  |
| SI: Gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education   | 2017: 60%<br>2019: 73%   | 73%   | Fully achieved and likely to be fully institutionalized  |
| Average share of 15-year-old students who perform at PISA level 2 or above (R: reading, M: math, S: science)   | 2021: R – 66%, M – 54%, S – 59%                                    | R:56%<br>M:54%<br>S:52%                           | Partially achieved and unlikely to be fully achieved   |
| Percentage of children with disabilities (CWD) and Roma enrolled in primary education  | 2021: CWD – 48%; Roma – 95%  | CWD – 81.46%<br>Roma – 84.23%                     | Partly achieved and unlikely to be fully achieved  |
| Percentage of recommendations submitted by adolescents through U-Report, which are acted upon by national/local institutions                                       | 2020: 20%  | 20%   | Fully achieved. The CPE questions the relatively low target rate.  |
| Early childhood education enrolment rate (3–6 years)   | 2021: 80%  | 66%   | Partly achieved and likely to be fully achieved if assumptions on stable environment hold.   |
| <b>Child Rights Monitoring (CRM) and Access to Justice</b>   |  |   |  |
| Percentage of girls and boys that are in contact with the justice and administrative bodies who benefit from interventions to improve children's access to justice | 2021: 60   | n/a   | Likely to be achieved considering successful accomplishments on justice legislation and actions plans achieved in 2019   |

<sup>218</sup> The stated achievements are based on information available in the RAM as of 19 January 2020. Some of the achievements were recorded at earlier dates.

<sup>219</sup> The CPE assessment on the likelihood of full achievement.

<sup>220</sup> These assessments were made prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic may have an additional influence on the likelihood of achievement.

| INDICATOR<br>SI: STANDARD INDICATOR   | TARGET                           | ACHIEVEMENTS<br>19 JANUARY<br>2020 <sup>218</sup> | COMMENTS WITH CPE<br>ASSESSMENT <sup>219</sup> ON THE<br>LIKELIHOOD OF FULL<br>ACHIEVEMENT BEFORE END<br>2021 <sup>220</sup>   |
|---|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Degree of congruence among the government, autonomous bodies and CSOs on the comprehensiveness and acceptability of Child Rights Monitoring (CRM) reports                           | 2021: Very high                  | Medium  | Unlikely to be very high, but with UNICEF's support to alternative reporting likely to be high.  |
| Proportion of complaints made by children or their representatives to the Ombudsperson's Office officially investigated and for which a remedial action was taken within six months | 2021: 300                        | 211   | Partial achieved and likely to be fully achieved considering successful implementation of Young reporters, Golden Advisors, and similar UNICEF-supported initiatives.  |
| Percentage of specialized professionals who apply child friendly justice proceedings in working with children   | 2021: 100                        | 60%   | Partly achieved and unlikely to be fully achieved based on CPE's interviews with justice workers at different levels.  |
| Percentage of children directed to application of diversion measures over the number of children Prosecuted   | 2021: 65                         | n/a   | Likely to be achieved considering successful accomplishments on justice legislation and actions plans achieved in 2019 and information gathered during CPE interviews. |
| Percentage of recommendations submitted by adolescents through U-Report, which are acted upon by national/local institutions <sup>221</sup>   | 2019: 10<br>2020: 20<br>2030: 30 | 20%   | Likely to be fully achieved considering the successful implementation of adolescent initiatives and related focus to activities such as U-reports.                     |

Source: UNICEF: Outcome Indicator Status Over Time by Business Area as of 19 January 2020 complemented by CO information.

136. In terms of direct results monitored in the CP result framework,<sup>222</sup> the CPE notes the following of relevance for equitable access, reported as achieved by January 2020:

1. Social and child protection:

- 50 per cent of local operational multidisciplinary teams for protection from family violence and violence against children meet prescribed quality standards of work;<sup>223</sup>
- 100 per cent of municipalities with health and education professionals have strengthened capacity in early detection of disability and intervention;<sup>224</sup>
- Number of day-care centres, small group homes, and non-kin foster families compliant with international standards has increased;<sup>225</sup>
- Caregivers have improved understanding of detecting and follow-up on cases of violence and abuse against children;
- Nursing home visitation system established and nurses trained;
- A national vision for ECD established and agreed upon by national authorities and other key stakeholders;

<sup>221</sup> This indicator is also found in the Adolescent Empowerment Programme and is duplicated within the CRM and Access to Justice component because of its crossover nature.

<sup>222</sup> UNICEF: Output Indicator Status Over Time by Business Area as of 19 January 2020 complemented by CO information and information from Annual reports.

<sup>223</sup> The baseline value was 0 in 2016. The target for 2020 is 70.

<sup>224</sup> The baseline value was 30 in 2015. Target for 2019 was 100. No target for 2020.

<sup>225</sup> The baseline value in 2015 was nine day-care centres, one small group home, and 28 non-kin foster families. At the end of 2019, there were 15 day-care centres, one small group home and 44 non-kin foster families.

- Availability of child-friendly website and promotional materials, including in a language/form understandable to children belonging to minority groups and children with disabilities;
- Information on child rights in a child-friendly format is available to children and their families;
- Increased number of youth-led initiatives.

## 2. Education:

- The Montenegrin Education Information System (MEIS) is accessible to school management committees;
- Pre-service and in-service teacher training includes modules on diversity and inclusion issues;
- Increased number of primary and secondary schools have programme teams with capacity to implement programmes for social and emotional skills;
- Increased number of municipalities with alternative preschool education services;
- Increased number of kindergartens with capacity to provide early detection and intervention plans;
- Increased number of recommendations from ECD investment case implemented.
- Skills building at Montenegro Youth Innovation Lab reaching 45 per cent of the adolescent population of Montenegro.

## 3. Justice:

- Incorporation of child rights indicators into the Social Welfare Information System;
- Data on children participating in justice processes available in the Judicial Information System (PRIS);
- 60 per cent of judicial staff who work with cases involving children qualified to promote and apply child friendly and gender sensitive justice for all children, including restorative justice principles for girls and boys in conflict with the law;
- 100 per cent of child and professional support persons in professional support services equipped with specialized knowledge necessary to support child-friendly proceedings;
- Six municipalities (out of 24) with child-friendly spaces for child-friendly hearing.

137. Overall, the planned achievements of programme results are on track and the CPE expect that they will be fully reached by the end of 2021 as can be seen in the Table 4. During the primary data collection, the CPE found that stakeholders were satisfied with improved access of all children to education, justice, health, and social and child protection. Still, the issue of implementation and capacity at the municipality level has been raised as a key concern in studies, reviews and evaluations, and during CPE interviews with government, CSO and donor representatives.<sup>226</sup>

138. The combination of training and the establishment and improvement of information and data management and monitoring systems such as MICS, MEIS, SWIS and PRIS has been critical for strengthening systems. While stakeholders noticed that some improvements have taken place in terms of greater data compatibility and exchange among the systems, it is still considered a challenge. Likewise, while the systems are transparent, the CPE found that the knowledge and understanding of the systems at the municipality level was limited.

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<sup>226</sup>See for instance official and alternative reports on the CRC implementation, EC annual staff reports, and technical studies referenced in the Document Review in Annex 1.

### 4.3.2 What progress has been made to address the equity gaps that are affecting the most vulnerable children, e.g., children with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian children and children affected by poverty?

139. As highlighted in the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021, equity for children is both a stand-alone goal and a cross-cutting priority.<sup>227</sup> These principles are replicated in the CP in Montenegro with its focus on quality and coverage of social services, education and justice for all children. As can be seen in the analysis above on equitable access for children and adolescents to (1) social and child protection, (2) education, and (3) justice, the CPE finds that the CP has effectively addressed inequality in terms of increasing access through targeted programmes for vulnerable groups.
140. For a more systematic analysis of addressing barriers to equity, the CPE findings on the CP implementation response to the barriers and bottlenecks analysis to equity for children presented in the MoRES analysis in the CP theories of change are summarized in Table 5.<sup>228</sup>

**Table 5: CP Response to key barriers and bottlenecks to achieving equity<sup>229</sup>**

|                      | DETERMINANTS            | KEY ISSUES   | EXAMPLES OF CP RESPONSE AND RESULTS  |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| ENABLING ENVIRONMENT | Social norms            | Insufficient child rights culture<br>Lack of independent monitoring mechanisms<br>Child not recognized as a rights holder                | Continued support to Ombudsperson's Office/Deputy on Rights of the Child and Golden Advisors; comprehensive social change campaigns on key issues of child rights; Young reporters under medial literacy initiative strengthen children's voice in public debate; KAPs show changed attitudes towards key child rights issues  |
|                      | Legislation/Policy      | Focus on EU Acquis and harmonization of legislative framework and lack of implementation<br>Weak credible knowledge on child development | Continued support to development and update of legislation, strategies, and action plans. As a result, there is a comprehensive set of legislation, strategies and action plans on children's rights and protection in harmony with international standards & EU Acquis. CO undertakes regularly KAPs and commission technical studies and assessments on issues related to children's right resulting in knowledge for evidence-based legislative support |
|                      | Budget expenditure      | Insufficient budget planning   | Limited attention  |
|                      | Management/Coordination | Siloed sectoral approaches<br>Weak capacity for coordination   | Addressed at various levels: direct support to the government, e.g., Analysis of System Response and   |

<sup>227</sup> [UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021: Executive Summary](#).

<sup>228</sup> The barriers analysis used for the design of the CP is based on the MoRES analysis prepared as part of the MTR of CP 2012–2016. The scope of the CPE did not allow detailed analysis of the quality of the evidence used for the MoRES but notes that it was based on expert opinions and statistical evidence from MICS among others. Moreover, the CPE found that the identified barriers are reflected in the perception survey carried out for the CPE (see Annex 3) and were referred to by key stakeholders interviewed for the CPE, including donors, the government and CSOs.

<sup>229</sup> The assessment is based on the CPE review of the reporting documents for CP 2017–2021, particularly Result Assessment Modules (RAMs) and Strategic Monitoring Question (SMQs) for 2015–2020, Country Office Annual Reports (COARs) 2015–2019, as well as information obtained from UNICEF staff during CPE primary data collection compared to the key issues identified in the Theories of Change for CP 2017–2021. Please refer to Annex 1, "Document Review", for further information on the documents used for the assessment.

|        |   |  |   |
|--------|---|--|---|
|        |   | Accountability, monitoring and use of data<br>Confusion at central/local interface in certain aspects  | Support to Children with Disabilities; <sup>230</sup> UNICEF programmatic approach: cross-sectoral strategy and increased focus on ECD and participation in UNDAF; organization of inter-ministerial meetings on violence against children  |
| SUPPLY | Availability of essential inputs                                  | Silo approach to service planning  | Addressed through support to Centres for Social Work and Multidisciplinary Teams. The efficiency of those structures is still questioned.   |
|        | Access to adequately staffed services, facilities and information | Education system at all levels fails to provide quality and equitable services.<br>Youth/adolescents not recognized as a resource in society<br>Lack of awareness of children's rights among professionals, families, and children<br>Concept of children's access to justice is not incorporated in the policy framework or culture | Development of models: good practices of establishing child friendly spaces in the justice system based on analysis of existing system, the strategy on the reform of judiciary (2019–2022) includes equitable access to justice for children as an integral component in line with international standards, including actions for institutional and professional capacity development; as well as recent work on integrated models for ECD and patronage nurse services.<br>Comprehensive programmes on inclusive education, preschool, access to justice and adolescent empowerment are critical examples of the CP effective response to the key issues; social change campaigns and training and other capacity development initiatives based on KAPs and other quality research have increased the level of services; Effectiveness of the CSWs remain a challenge but partly addressed through capacity development; New Strategy on Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019–2023 |
| DEMAND | Social and cultural practices and beliefs                         | Gender inequality<br>Discrimination and stigma   | GEEW addressed in areas of obvious gender discrimination: child marriage and violence against children and women but no systematic GEEW response in a gender reflective manner<br>Discrimination and stigma against children with disabilities addressed and against minorities somewhat  |
|        | Timing/Continuity of use  | Lack of information, mobility, awareness and confidence in systems   | Addressed at various levels: SOS hotline; Young reporters to get the message out; support to the Ombudsperson's Office for children's rights and protection including a network of children Golden Advisors; continuous social change campaigns; information systems overall  |

<sup>230</sup> Pluriconsult (2019) "Analysis of System Response and Support to Children with Disabilities" UNICEF & Council for the Rights of the Child.

|         |         |   |  |
|---------|---------|---|--|
|         |         |   | improved through support to MONSTAT and coordinated support to MEIS, PRIS and SWIS   |
| QUALITY | Quality | Weak accountability and performance management of the sector reform | Partly addressed through support to child rights monitoring and publicity around studies and evaluations related to sector reform support. |

141. As revealed in Table 5, the CPE analysis shows that the CP has responded adequately to most of the key barriers and bottlenecks identified in the TOC. Many concrete results identified in the UNICEF reporting system<sup>231</sup> were also referred to by various external stakeholders interviewed for the CPE, providing further evidence of results in support of child rights and protection to reduce equity gaps. Although these are contributing to the EU accession process, key government institutions and UNICEF staff during the CPE primary data collection in Montenegro noted that the process is only halfway complete and important challenges remain before Montenegro is in full compliance with international norms and standards on child rights issues, as documented in the 2019 EC annual staff report.<sup>232</sup> The report states that Montenegro needs to ensure that adequate institutional mechanisms are in place to protect vulnerable groups from discrimination, including minorities, and highlights that violence against children remains an issue of serious concern.
142. Moreover, the CPE findings in Table 5 show that the CP has effectively contributed to the integration of equity issues in the national institutional framework related to child and adolescent rights. Critical results on this include some of the success stories described earlier (section 4.1) such as quality inclusive education for children with disabilities, ECD, justice for all children, as well as the recent Youth Law and Action Plan for 2019/2020. Likewise, the recent positive development of the role of the national Council for the Rights of the Child is an example of the CP contribution to the increased national commitment and capacity to addressing child inequity issues, including the monitoring of child rights.
143. Poverty is often highlighted as major contributing factor to child and adolescent inequity. The CPE finds that, so far, the CP has mainly addressed child poverty indirectly. The TOC presented in the Country Strategy Note is based on assumptions<sup>233</sup> that support to the social protection system will lower the poverty incidence rate. Moreover, the TOC is based on the principle of “inclusiveness”, understood as “taking into account the specific needs of children with disabilities and their families, as well as those affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion, in all programming activities”. Likewise, it is assumed that focus on quality education support to Roma and Egyptian children will contribute to breaking the negative social cycle of poverty and exclusion.

<sup>231</sup> Including Country Office Annual Reports (COARs) 2015–19, Result Assessment Modules (RAMs) and Standard Monitoring Questions (SMQs) for CP 2017–2021. Please refer to Annex 1, Document Review, for full list of reporting documents reviewed.

<sup>232</sup> EC Staff Working Document: Montenegro Report Accompanying EC Communication 2019.

<sup>233</sup> The Country Strategy Note prepared by the CO for the formulation of CP (the month/year of preparation is not indicated on the document), includes the overall theory of change (TOC) for the CP. Both the narrative and the graphic TOC operates both with assumptions and hypothesis. The distinction is not clear. Both assumptions and hypothesis are used for the internal logic of the TOC, that is causality related, while there are no assumptions/hypothesis regarding the programme implementation conditions, for instance, including implementation/process assumptions (that is, postulates at the design of the programme on how interventions should be designed and targeted in order to deliver the intended results for the intended target groups. Implementation assumptions are sometimes referred to as hypothesis, that is preliminary conclusions on the appropriateness of a programme design) and external environment assumptions (that is, assumptions on conditions and factors outside the control of the programme but which are critical for the successful implementation as planned, for instance will the government provide appropriate staff to the different functions that the CP aims at strengthening? Likewise, there are no assumptions on contributions from other partners/stakeholders to the TOC. Otherwise, assumptions/hypothesis regarding external factors that could influence the CP are presented in a special section as external risks and planned response. The CPE notes that the 2017 Cross-Sectoral Strategy includes process and external assumptions.

144. During the primary data collection, various external stakeholders from CSOs and other cooperation agencies stressed that child poverty is a critical issue related to child rights and protection, but without providing further details. Several referred to their expectations that the CP inclusiveness and focus on vulnerable and marginalized children will have an impact on child poverty.
145. However, the CPE finds that existing information does not provide sufficient evidence of the effectiveness of the CP indirect approaches to poverty reduction, and more specific data will be required reflecting the timeframe of the CP. The last child poverty analysis carried out in Montenegro is from 2011.<sup>234</sup> The CPE also notes that results presented by both UNICEF and its partners at the 2019 international conference on ECD<sup>235</sup> indicate that ECD through the integrated nurturing framework addressing health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, education and protection is assumed to be an effective poverty reduction approach. It should be noted that the two rounds of MICS in Montenegro have not covered poverty directly either, but they did provide information on material deprivation.
146. The multidimensional child poverty study launched in 2019<sup>236</sup> has yet to be finalized and published. The study is based on the MODA approach developed by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti and it includes indicators relevant for monitoring the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The MODA in Montenegro is based on data from MICS 2018 and, according to the CP 2019 Result Framework, the study shows that children under the age of 5 are more vulnerable to overlapping deprivations than older children and that there is higher child deprivation/poverty among Roma and Egyptian children than among other children. Related socioeconomic factors are highlighted in the result framework, including shame and stigma, social exclusion and discrimination. The CPE notes that it is expected among UNICEF staff and key partners that the final MODA will establish a causal relationship among the different factors and multidimensional poverty, and thus establish the required knowledge base to launch a public debate on child poverty. In fact, during the primary data collection, some United Nations partners noticed the absence of public awareness to the importance of poverty and the need for more focused poverty eradication measures to ensure human-rights-based sustainable development.
147. Based on the workplan for 2019–2020, the CPE expects that for the remainder of the CP, increased attention will be given to child poverty. MODA is expected to inform one of the identified advocacy results, including reducing inequity and poverty, presented as one of the eight advocacy results areas in the CO Advocacy and Communication Strategy 2018–2021. Likewise, the 2017 Cross-Sectoral Strategy<sup>237</sup> has child poverty reduction as one of its four priorities, building on knowledge, tools and models for greater equity and cost-effectiveness of social protection services for children and a stronger social and child protection system. Furthermore, the child poverty reduction component hinges on the ECD initiative launched as part of the CP and described in the cross-sectoral strategy. The initiative has full government support.
148. During the CPE primary data collection, it was also noted by UNICEF staff as well as some external consultants that various advocacy activities have successfully included messages regarding the need to focus on child poverty when addressing children's rights, for instance in the Young Reporters Volunteering Programme.<sup>238</sup> Moreover, it was noted that activities addressing preschool coverage, early marriage, punishment and child

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<sup>234</sup> [IPSOS \(2011\) "Child Poverty in Montenegro" UNICEF](#). The analysis calculated monetary poverty and compared with socioeconomic deprivation indicators.

<sup>235</sup> Investing in the Early Years – Conference on Fiscal and Public Administration Imperatives for Early Childhood Development.

<sup>236</sup> UNICEF (2010) "Terms of Reference Analysis of Multidimensional Child Poverty in Montenegro".

<sup>237</sup> UNICEF (2017) "Bridges & Champions for Change: A Strategy to Achieve Cross-sector Priorities for Children in Montenegro".

<sup>238</sup> This is further documented in the 2019 news article "[UNICEF volunteers – Young Reporters take over the "Načisto" talk show](#)". Narcisto is one of the most watched television talk shows in Montenegro.

abuse predominantly address the North – the region with the highest incidence of monetary poverty.

149. Other factors affecting vulnerability and exclusion, experienced by, for instance, people with disabilities or minority status, such as belonging to the Roma and Egyptians, have been effectively and directly addressed in various programmes as described in the Success Stories on the CP focus on children with disabilities and children with disabilities now attending mainstream schools and ECD and preschool coverage.

#### **4.3.3 To what extent does the CP address the documented scale and scope of the child rights issues affecting different groups of children?**

150. Based on the UNICEF strategic positioning in Montenegro vis-à-vis child rights issues, the CPE finds that the CO is effectively using opportunities to continuously identify new challenges for achieving the overall vision of children's rights and protection in Montenegro. This has recently been exemplified in the CO engagement in responses to ECD and adolescent empowerment through engagement in innovation and piloting, modelling and scaling-up.
151. Fostering innovations in processes and practices based on new technology is defined as a corporate change strategy in the current Strategic Plan 2018–2021. The CPE found that the implementation of the CP has resulted in various new technologies, such as NetFriends, which is an online game developed as an app for children to learn how to be safe online.<sup>239</sup> During the primary data collection, the CPE learned from specialists recruited by UNICEF to work on the initiative that the app was installed on personal devices of many users with a high level of satisfaction. According to a 2019 evaluation, the app had been downloaded more than 1,000 times and is now managed directly by the Ministry of Education with plans for integrating the game in regular IT classes for 9–11 year-old children.<sup>240</sup> The most quoted innovation referred to during the CPE primary data collection is the establishment of the Youth Innovation Lab, applying UNICEF UPSHIFT and U-Report methodology and approach.<sup>241</sup> The Youth Lab was established in cooperation with the Ministry of Education/Ministry of Youth and Sport and the NGO Digitalizuj.me. It has served as an effective hub for youth-led social innovations and user-centred policy design. The CPE found that the innovative approach is highly appreciated among its users. In 2017, a brand recognition survey found that 18 per cent of young people in Montenegro were aware of the programme. By 2020, the Youth Lab, through its programmes and youth initiatives, had reached almost 50 per cent of the adolescent population in Montenegro. According to UNICEF staff interviews, the innovations are planned to be piloted in schools as part of government uptake, however, this has not yet been implemented and more work on capacity development of teachers may be required before successful uptake can occur.
152. As part of the CP piloting implementation strategy, the CO has emphasized the uptake and administration by government of piloted services. This has, for instance, led to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare funding the piloting of the Family Outreach Service developed around the success story on deinstitutionalization. The CPE finds that such developments further demonstrate the effectiveness of the CP implementation strategies.

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<sup>239</sup> It was noted during the primary data collection that Montenegro has the highest rate of children playing games in the Western Balkans.

<sup>240</sup> Morton, S. et al. (2019) "Children's Experience Online: Building Global Understanding and Action – Impact Study of Global Kids Online Network - Impact Study" LSE Media and Communication, Matter of Focus UNICEF – Innocenti.

<sup>241</sup> UPSHIFT is a youth social innovation and social entrepreneurship programme, designed to build skills and opportunities for young people who are disadvantaged, due to (for example) poverty, gender, disability or ethnicity. ([UPSHIFT Facilitation Guide, UNICEF](#)).

153. The CPE found that the CO has recently launched modelling studies for emerging challenges such ECD and models for access to justice and youth unemployment.<sup>242</sup> While the models are described in the TOC and the Strategy Note developed for the preparation of the CP, the CPE found limited awareness of the UNICEF concept of modelling, let alone the 10 sine-qua-non principles established by UNICEF for demonstration modelling.<sup>243</sup> Particularly, the CPE found that partners and other external stakeholders often confuse models and pilots. Likewise, external stakeholders generally see pilots and models as small-scale implementation but not as testing for subsequent scale-up.
154. Promoting effective and independent child rights monitoring is a key function of UNICEF. Since the launch of the first country operations, UNICEF has gradually supported the development of a strong and independent child rights monitoring framework in Montenegro. This is in line with identified needs highlighted in independent reports on the implementation of child rights and protection-related treaties, as well as in the barriers and bottleneck analysis prepared for the CPs. A recent independent formative evaluation of the Child Rights Monitoring system in Montenegro, launched as part of UNICEF support, stresses that “international standards obligate states to establish two different types of monitoring mechanisms: (i) a well-coordinated governmental mechanism of monitoring that lies within the state structure; and (ii) an independent monitoring mechanism.”<sup>244</sup>
155. The findings of the evaluation identified a number of shortcomings of the system, including the non-functionality of the Council for the Rights of the Child, lack of qualitative data, weak levels of disaggregation of the data collected, lack of technical and financial resources, and uncertainty about the sustainability of the system.
156. The CPE finds that the CP has been able to follow up on some of the recommendations, including supporting the government in strengthening the functionality of the Council for the Rights of the Child, chaired by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The CPE was informed that the council meets several times a year with a participation of 14 representatives from different institutions and CSOs, including one child representative. The Minister of Labour and Social Welfare chairs the council and the work has focused on the preparation of the “Strategy to Achieve Cross-Sector Priorities for Children in Montenegro”. Moreover, with the CP, UNICEF has followed up on recommendations on strengthening national systems for data collection beyond SWIS and PRIS, including MEIS, the planned new judicial information system or ISP; the collection of data by the MoH; and strengthened national capacity on child rights issues. Likewise, based on statements made by several stakeholders during the primary data collection, the CPE finds that the CO has effectively supported the strengthening of the Ombudsperson’s Office for child rights and protection. The CPE finds that most of these activities are still works in progress.
157. On the other hand, follow-up on some of the recommendations has been less successful. This includes the CRM recommendation for repositioning of the Council on Child Rights under the Deputy Prime Minister in order to heighten the importance and priority of child rights issues at the government level. Moreover, the recommendation calls for participation of representatives from all line ministries involved in children’s issues, which would promote a cross-sectoral approach in line with the CP principles. According to the CO, UNICEF tried to ensure the reorganization in agreements in principle with the government. However, so far, no concrete reorganization has taken place. Likewise, the CPE did not find evidence of follow-up to another critical

<sup>242</sup> See for instance UNICEF (2019) “Indicators for children involved in justice proceedings and related metadata in Montenegro” and UNICEF MNE (2019) Strengthening Early Childhood Development in Montenegro – Project Proposal.

<sup>243</sup> UNICEF (n/a) “Designing a Model: the 10 “sine-qua-non” : starting point is a theory of change followed by (1) equity-based hypothesis, (2) child rights realization as overall goal, (3) baseline, (4) sustainability/exit strategy, (5) monitoring mechanisms, (6) impact equity-based evaluation, (7) cost-benefit analysis, (8) documentation of process, (9) resources and plans for dissemination, (10) total budget.

<sup>244</sup> Coram International (2018) “Programme-Informing Evaluation of the 2014–2017 Child Rights Monitoring System in Montenegro and Planned Approach to CRM under the 2017–2021 Country Programme” UNICEF.

recommendation from the CRM evaluation on establishing local child rights councils. During the CPE visits to municipalities, there was no evidence of functioning local child rights councils.

#### **4.3.4 Has implementation of the CP led to unintended positive and/or negative results and, if so, have these been appropriately assessed and addressed if necessary?**

158. Overall, the CPE found that the emphasis of UNICEF Montenegro on evidence-based programming has led to an extensive number of technical studies and programme assessments<sup>245</sup> as well as organization and/or participation in a broad number of technical workshops and conferences, which has led a constant internal and external reflection on the country programme.
159. The CPE appreciative inquiry approach allowed identification of a number of unintended impacts from the country programme. Many stakeholders reported on the general increased understanding of the importance of child rights issues, which has been witnessed in greater participation in many programmes and activities beyond traditional child rights agencies, such as the Ombudsperson's Office and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Likewise, the continuous attention to the subject has often increased the number of intermediaries and the final target group beyond what was planned. Some more specific unintended impacts reported during the primary data collection are presented in the following paragraphs. The CPE did not find systematic documentation on the unintended impacts and the plans for follow-up. Still, the CO expressed full awareness of the negative impacts and, based on the discussions during primary data collection, it is expected that they will be addressed in the design of the next CP.

#### ***Positive Unexpected Impacts***

160. The CPE informants identified a number of impacts that they considered as unexpected (i.e., not in original plans). The following presents a summary of some of the unintended impacts that stakeholders considered represented a significant positive contribution of the CP to child rights issues in Montenegro. The summary is based on information provided through interviews as well as the online perception survey.<sup>246</sup>
161. **The UNICEF public advocacy and communication for social change efforts led to the emergence of unplanned partnerships for the promotion of children's rights and protection.** Examples of partnerships that have been generated include the partnership within the Access to Justice initiative among actors such as the EU Delegation in Montenegro, the EU Support to the Rule of Law II Initiative (EURoL2) and the Council of Europe. The partnership was reinforced through UNICEF support and joint events were organized. Another intersectoral partnership that emerges from CP activities has been led by the Bar Chamber with UNICEF technical support to promote free legal aid provisions for children in court proceedings under a partnership of judges, prosecutors, lawyers and representatives of the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Moreover, to increase knowledge of children on how to access justice, with special focus on the most vulnerable children, a network of CSOs has been established. The awareness raised by UNICEF Children and Media social change campaign led to a partnership initially for organizing a conference. The partners include OSCE, the Agency for Electronic Media, the Ombudsperson, and the Ministry of Justice. The partnership led to a university course on media literacy and generated USAID grants for media literacy initiatives. The preparation of a special MICS on Roma and Egyptians in 2018 in collaboration with MONSTAT has provided evidence for new projects and programmes, including a collaboration between the Red Cross and Ministry of Human Rights and Minorities on activities to reduce the incidence of early marriage.

<sup>245</sup> Please see Annex 1, "Document Review".

<sup>246</sup> Please see Annex 3, "Results from the Perception Survey".

162. **Newly introduced models and technologies have generated positive spinoffs.** As described under Success Stories, the Parenting for Lifelong Health programme has had a very positive uptake. National partners supporting its implementation have observed that the focus on positive parenting has had a positive impact in households, where couples have reported improved positive and supporting relationships. It should be noted that gender equality was not addressed as an issue in the design of the programme and the initial participants were predominantly mothers. However, the fathers soon understood that “something interesting” was happening at the parenting workshops and slowly the number of male participants increased.
163. Another spinoff from one of the success stories is linked to the introduction of assistive technologies to children with disabilities in the resource centres. According to external stakeholders interviewed for the CPE, the full introduction of the new technologies has generated networking and mutual learning among partners within an educational system that hitherto had no tradition of working together.
164. Likewise, with the introduction of the programme of socio-emotional skills, “My Values and Virtues”, in the schools, it has been noted by teachers that the introduction of the notion of integrity has led to children putting less pressure on teachers to raise grades, creating a more harmonious working environment.
165. Finally, as presented in the success stories, the introduction of the DAISY<sup>247</sup> textbooks is a further illustration of new technologies leading to unplanned positive results. During the CPE, government representatives reported that DAISY has been found to be beneficial for other learning impaired children as well, including children with dyslexia, and that it can also benefit children with no learning disabilities. This was not foreseen in the original programme. Similarly, the integration of children with disabilities in the Young Athletes programme has not only reduced the stigma around disability but also significantly improved the motor skills of children with disabilities, which was not the original purpose of the activity.
166. **Working directly with youth has widened the understanding of key issues of relevance for children and youth well-being.** The UPSHIFT programme inspired participants to do a programme on sexual and reproductive health. Among the unexpected impacts was the involvement of religious leaders that the participants recruited to convince parents to send their children to workshops on sexual and reproductive health, broadening the scope of the programme.

### **Negative Unexpected Impacts**

167. **The success of some programmes can lead to negative impacts.** For instance, the CO as well as some government institutions reported to the CPE that the increase in the number of children enrolled in response to the “Preschool for All” social change campaign, including the changed policy under which not only children with working parents should be enrolled, led to some preschools not having sufficient capacity.
168. For instance, the CO as well as some government institutions reported to the CPE that the increase in the number of children enrolled in response to the “Preschool for All” social change campaign, including the changed policy under which not only children with working parents should be enrolled, led to some preschools not having sufficient capacity to absorb the incoming children. In some schools, the number of preschool children doubled or tripled without a concomitant increase in staffing or infrastructure leading to a perceived reduction in the quality of the education. It should be noted though that the challenge of insufficient capacity at many preschool institutions, and many establishments working above full capacity is a well-recognized challenge in Montenegro

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<sup>247</sup> Digital Accessible Information System.

and documented in many studies.<sup>248</sup> In 2014, a UNICEF study on investing in early childhood education noted that many kindergartens in the South and Centre function above full capacity, while there is unused capacity in the North due to outmigration from the North to the South and Centre regions.<sup>249</sup> The CO made adjustments to the “Preschool for All” to focus the social change campaign on those municipalities where the kindergartens operated below their capacities.

#### **4.3.5 To what extent did UNICEF contribute to the UNDAF objectives and the UN collaboration in Montenegro?**

169. UNICEF supports three of the four results areas of the current UNDAF 2017–2021:<sup>250</sup> democratic governance, social inclusion and economic governance; and it leads the social inclusion working group and is a critical member of the other working groups on gender and human rights, and monitoring and evaluation. Based on discussions with other United Nations partners, UNICEF staff and the EU, the CPE found that UNICEF participation in UNDAF is considered decisive for the effective planning and monitoring of the UNDAF.
170. As a lead agency in the social inclusion result group, UNICEF has been decisive in mobilizing funds from the global joint SDG fund for integrated social protection and employment. This joint programme aims to enhance the capacities of the social protection system to better serve people in need. Likewise, UNICEF has been an active partner in the development of a joint regional proposal for the United Nations Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).<sup>251</sup>
171. In terms of the CP concrete input to the results of UNDAF as of December 2019, the following is particularly noted based on a review of annual Joint Steering Committee Documents<sup>252</sup> and complemented with information from meetings with other United Nations partners and UNICEF staff:
  - Democratic Governance: support to local transparent governance through work with local CSOs for implementation of many activities; strengthening the child rights monitoring system; support to the Ombudsperson’s Office for child rights and protection; reform of the judicial system to promote children’s access to justice;
  - Social Inclusion: parenting for lifelong health; family outreach workers; the SOS helpline; support to implementation of the Istanbul Convention; durable housing solutions for vulnerable children; day-care facilities; empowering minorities and persons with disabilities; knowledge generation and child-rights monitoring;
  - Economic Governance: support to integrated case management at the Centres for Social Work and innovative solutions to youth unemployment;
  - UNICEF has decided not to participate directly in the component of Sustainable Economic Development and Environmental Protection in spite of the need to raise the voice of children and adolescents on climate change and environmental protection issues;
  - The results framework for the CP does not include all outcomes defined for the CP contribution to UNDAF in the CP document approved by the Executive Board in 2017, including an outcome indicator measuring change that includes the UNICEF

<sup>248</sup> See for instance Jadranka Kaluđerović, J. & V. Golubović (2019) “In-Work Poverty in Montenegro” European Social Policy Network (ESPN).

<sup>249</sup> Prica, I. et al. (2014) “A Study on Investing in Early Childhood Education in Montenegro”, UNICEF & IPSOS.

<sup>250</sup> [United Nations & Government of Montenegro \(2016\) “Integrated United Nations Programme for Montenegro 2017–2021.”](#)

<sup>251</sup> The joint programme with UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia focuses on supporting young people, women and decision- and opinion makers primarily through dialogue.

<sup>252</sup> United Nations in Montenegro annual work reports and UNCT annual report results 2015–2019.

contribution<sup>253</sup> and Global Innovation Index. Generally, the CPE finds that while general qualitative statements during the primary data collection indicate that UNICEF is a key contributor to UNDAF, the exact level of contribution cannot be determined based on available result data in UNCT annual report on results.

- The DaO is highly successful in terms of one office and the joint business plan. Based on a review of the UNDAF programmes, the CPE also finds that the UNDAF process shows joint programmes consisting of complementary agency programmes in each of the results groups.<sup>254</sup> The establishment of result groups with participation of senior staff from the participating United Nations agencies as well as government representatives strengthens the joint programmes. While the joint business plan and the examples of joint programmes have been positive, the CPE did not identify concrete assessments of cost-efficiency compared to individual agency programmes.

#### **4.3.6 To what extent are the programmatic priorities defined as intersectoral realistic to implement given the envisaged timeframe, the operational context and the human and financial resources available; and, if not, what programmatic priorities should UNICEF pursue to support national partners in enhancing intersectoral cooperation?**

172. The CPE finds that the increased focus on cross-sectoral programming as defined in the strategy document, “Bridges & Champions for Change: A Strategy to Achieve Cross-sector Priorities for Children in Montenegro 2018–2021”, reflects a process towards a more integrated implementation of the CP. The cross-sectoral strategy outlines four priorities: (1) ECD, (2) adolescent and young people’s skills and empowerment, (3) safe and inclusive communities, and (4) child poverty reduction. The UNICEF knowledge base as well as corporate and regional guidelines, including regional flagship results, all point to the importance of multisectoral approaches.<sup>255</sup> The CO cross-sectoral priorities are soundly based on prior analysis and studies, showing the importance of an integrated approach<sup>256</sup> and also reflect recommendations from the internal monitoring of the implementation of child and adolescent rights- and protection-relevant treaties of Montenegro. For instance, the Ombudsperson’s alternative report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child from 2017 calls for ensuring children’s rights and protection based on an integrated approach, including health care, social welfare and education, but also an integrated national institutional analysis of response capacity to cross-sectoral work for promoting children’s rights.<sup>257</sup> It should also be noted that the cross-sectoral priorities are fully supported by the government, as shown in CPE interviews. Moreover, the CPE finds that the CO has prepared background analyses and studies on the potential and national capacity for integrated system responses, as shown for instance in the theories of change prepared for the CP 2017–2021.<sup>258</sup> Based on the progress and workplans, the CPE considers it realistic that the planned integrated initiatives will be implemented with results as planned.

<sup>253</sup> No. of people accessing (a) standardized family and community services and cash transfers; (b) deinstitutionalization; (c) transfer accuracy targeting.

<sup>254</sup> Democratic Governance, Social Inclusion, Environmental Sustainability and Economic Governance.

<sup>255</sup> See for instance Toolkit: New Generation Situation Analysis (2019), Integrated Social Protection Systems – Enhancing Equity for Children (2012), Western Balkans: Sub-regional Guidance Note for Flagship Results (2019), Adolescent and Youth Engagement Strategic Framework (2017).

<sup>256</sup> See for instance the MoRES prepared for the CP 2017–2021 available in the 2014 Midterm Review of the UNICEF/Government of Montenegro Programme of Cooperation and the Strategy Note for CP 2017–2021 (2016) and the theories of change for the CP: Early Childhood Education Investment, Access to Justice and Child Rights Monitoring, Education and Youth, Empowerment and Participation of Adolescents, and Social and Child Protection. Likewise, independent evaluations have shown the need for integrated approaches; for instance, Petković, S. & T. Milić (2018) “Field Researcher Parenting Adolescents” calls for integrated responses and frameworks.

<sup>257</sup> Ombudsperson’s Office (2017) “Alternative Report of Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro concerning the Second and Third Periodic Reports of Montenegro on Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

<sup>258</sup> Strategy Note for CP 2017–2021 (2016) and the theories of change for the CP: Early Childhood Education Investment, Access to Justice and Child Rights Monitoring, Education and Youth, Empowerment and Participation of Adolescents, and Social and Child Protection.

173. As highlighted in the introduction to the success stories (4.1) the CPE found that the staff at the CO has the technical capacity and commitment for integrated planning and implementation of the CP. However, the CO is only one of the principal stakeholder groups of the CP and the programming and implementation has to adapt to the national structure for addressing children's rights and protection. Data collected through the desk study and through interviews with different stakeholder groups emphasized the traditional compartmentalized national structure. Still, key success stories identified in the CPE, including initiatives on ECD and adolescent empowerment are based on integrated programming principles. The CPE also finds that support to national Council on the Rights of the Child will contribute to greater opportunities to move towards an integrated approach. The government's commitment to initiatives such as the ECD as expressed in the 2019 international conference, for instance, further supports this finding.
174. It should be noted, though, that the CPE has some concerns regarding the diverse meanings attached to the word "cross-sectoral", including what it means to work in a cross-sectoral manner. This came across in the document review and key stakeholder interviews where multisectoral rather than cross-sectoral was in use, which may reflect the translation into Montenegrin. When asked about the definition of multi- or cross-sectoral, some stakeholders referred to "a simple exchange of information among two or more agencies" – a definition that differs from the UNICEF vision for cross-sectoral work in regional guidance and the CO strategy document of cross-sectoral programming. The CPE recognizes the cross-sectoral strategy's adapted definition of cross-sectoral as "sharing of information, resources, activities and capabilities by organizations in two or more sectors to achieve, jointly, an outcome for children that could not be achieved by organizations in one sector alone".<sup>259</sup> However, the CPE did not find a systematic definition at the CO or UNICEF for that matter on different forms of integrated work such as trans-sectoral, intersectoral, and multisectoral. The CPE has included some traditional definitions from organizational theory in the Glossary in Annex 9.

#### 4.4 Efficiency

##### *Key Findings – Efficiency*

1. The budget for the CP reflects the focus on the legislative reform process, awareness raising and advocacy rather than direct implementation. Based on comparison with other CPs in Western Balkan, the CPE finds the budget appropriate for the CP.
2. Opportunities for resource mobilization including with support of the regional bureau and headquarters has allowed the CP to respond to emerging needs throughout its programme period in a flexible manner. These additional activities cover areas, such as early childhood development and empowerment of adolescents.
3. Private sector engagement represents 15.7 per cent of the overall CP budget and there is interest among UNICEF staff to engage private sector even further in the next CP cycle.
4. The highly professional staff at the CO is the most fundamental element of successful implementation. Their capacity to translate local knowledge, the latest trends in development, and the latest science on child development into effective multipronged interventions and teamwork are critical for CP successful implementation.

<sup>259</sup> Overall, the CPE finds that UNICEF lacks clarity and optimal use of different forms of approaches that involve several sectors. While the "Bridge and Champions Strategy" offers a working definition of cross-sectoral, it is still not widely recognized. Other concepts are used in background documents without precision, for instance, the concept note for the 2019 ECD conference "Investing in the Early Years – Conference on Fiscal and Public Administration Imperatives for Early Childhood Development" states that multidisciplinary approaches are critical but also that trans-disciplinary competencies are necessary. One way to look at the differences based on social science disciplines is intra-sectoral: working within a single sector; cross-sectoral: viewing one sector from the perspective of another, multisectoral: different sectors analyse, plan, implement, and monitor together based on their own sector priorities; inter-sectoral: different sectors analyse, plan, implement, and monitor as one based on a synthesis of approaches; trans-sectoral: creating a new framework beyond existing ones such as ECD.

5. Staffing has slightly increased in comparison to the previous CP cycle and is appropriate for the scope of the CP. The CP maintains flexibility in human resources through the use of consultants and partnerships with universities or research institutions to support emerging areas of work (such as health or research studies).
6. UNICEF is highly appreciated by government partners, which has allowed for the organization to play a critical role in national agenda-setting on children's rights and protection.
7. Full application of results-based management is still a work in progress. The CPE found particularly that there is too little focus on learning in the results framework, including limited attention to failures or less successful initiatives.

**4.4.1 To what extent are the financial and human resources allocated by the CO appropriate to support the implementation of strategies and achievement of CP results and, if not, what could be done to ensure that resources match programmatic ambitions and needs?**

175. The Youth Programme which launched in late 2015 was budgeted for in the 2016 annual workplan with a total amount of USD 375,732 for activities related to: (1) the Youth Innovation Lab<sup>260</sup> and capacity development and (2) policy and service development for adolescent empowerment. An unfunded amount of USD 50,000 was included in the budget. The direct budgeted funds for the Youth Programme constitute around 20 per cent of the child protection and social inclusion component in 2016. The overall funded budget for 2016 was USD 2,243,000.

176. The Board Approved Budgets (BAB) for the CP 2017–2021 alongside the budget for former CP are shown in the following table.

**Table 6: Summary Budgets of Country Programmes 2012–2016 and 2017–2021**

| SUMMARY BUDGET – USD                  |                   |                 |            |   |                   |                 |            |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------|---|-------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Country Programme 2012–2016           |                   |                 |            | Country Programme 2017–2021                   |                   |                 |            |
| Programme component                   | Regular resources | Other resources | Total      | Programme component                           | Regular resources | Other resources | Total      |
| Child protection and social inclusion | 1 500 000         | 4 800 000       | 6 300 000  | Social and child protection                   | 1 264 000         | 3 150 000       | 4 414 000  |
|                                       |                   |                 |            | Quality education and adolescent empowerment  | 1 208 000         | 2 920 000       | 4 128 000  |
| Child rights, policies and planning   | 1 500 000         | 2 700 000       | 4 200 000  | Child rights monitoring and access to justice | 653 000           | 1 269 000       | 1 922 000  |
| Cross-sectoral costs                  | 750 000           | 500 000         | 1 250 000  | Programme effectiveness                       | 1 145 000         | 0               | 1 145 000  |
| Total                                 | 3 750 000         | 8 000 000       | 11 750 000 | Total   | 4 270 000         | 7 339 000       | 11 609 000 |

Source: Country Programme Documents (E/ICEF/2011/P/L.3 and E/ICEF/2016/P/L.14)

<sup>260</sup> The Youth Innovation Lab provides an environment where adolescents can benefit from innovative models for skills building and empowerment through experiential learning. The Lab targets adolescent boys and girls, including the most vulnerable groups (whether due to socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion or disability).

177. As can be seen in the summary budgets in Table 6, the total budget figure for CP 2017–2021 is similar to the former CP. Around one third of the budget comes from regular resources (unearmarked contributions) while two thirds come from other resources earmarked mainly from the private sector, bilateral donors and UNICEF global resources. A substantive percentage of the funding comes from joint collaboration with corporate and regional resource mobilization programmes, such as the ING programme supporting the youth programming, the global thematic funds and other global partnerships such as the WHO/World Bank/UNICEF programming for ECD. The following Table 7 provides further details of the funding sources in the current CP.

**Table 7: Funding sources Country Programme 2017–2021**

| <b>Summary by funding for Country Programme 2017-2021<br/>by funding source – USD</b> |   |                   |
|---|---|-------------------|
| Government  | Government of Montenegro                                    | 32 381            |
| UNICEF  | Core funds (regular resources and set-aside)                | 5 651 848         |
|   | Global Thematic Funds <sup>261</sup>                        | 2 153 053         |
| Private Sector  | ING <sup>262</sup>  | 1 627 587         |
|   | The Netherlands (National Committee and TUI) <sup>263</sup> | 155 010           |
|   | Telenor   | 86 543            |
| United Nations  | UNDP-Multi-Donor Trust Fund                                 | 543 961           |
| Bilateral Donors  | European Union  | 718 916           |
|   | Government of Norway  | 391 308           |
|   | Government of Sweden  | 210 482           |
|   | The United Kingdom  | 171 233           |
|   | Austrian Development Agency                                 | 101 663           |
|   | United States – USAID                                       | 88 722            |
|   | <b>Total</b>  | <b>11 932 707</b> |

Source: UNICEF Country Office

178. The CPE recognizes that the CP budget is relatively small compared to the average UNICEF country cooperation programmes. However, compared to the UNICEF cooperation programmes in the Western Balkans, the budget for the CP in Montenegro is higher than average when considering the size of the population.<sup>264</sup> The CPE finds that this budget level reflects UNICEF cooperation in an upper middle-income country with focus on support to the government and others to implement legislation, policies and strategies based on international norms, standards and conventions on children's rights and protection. As such, the CPE also finds that the CP programming is appropriately based on realistic budget opportunities.

179. The key resource under the current CP is CO staff. Over the years, the professional staffing at the CO has gradually increased, as can be seen in the following Table 8 with approved staffing structures. There are now two international professionals (the country

<sup>261</sup> The five Global Thematic Funds used for the CP in Montenegro cover: (1) Nutrition (addresses child and adolescent malnutrition); (2) Education (equitable access to quality education, learning outcomes, and skills development); (3) child protection (addresses violence against children, harmful practices (FGM/C and child marriage) and access to justice); (4) social protection, inclusion and governance (addresses children with disabilities, adolescent empowerment, child poverty and social protection), and (5) global humanitarian thematic response. For the Corporate Strategic Plan 2018–2021, there are a total of 10 thematic global funds for country, regional and global-level initiatives. They are pooled multi-year (four years) funds for the UNICEF Strategic Plans (2014–2017 and 2018–2021) allowing multi-year flexible planning with earmarked (soft) funding. UNICEF has a total of four thematic funds for the current strategic plan, including a fund on gender equality to support implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2018–2021.

<sup>262</sup> ING is a Dutch multinational banking and financial services corporation.

<sup>263</sup> TUI is a Dutch airline company.

<sup>264</sup> [UNICEF budgets for current country programmes](#) in Western Balkans: Albania: USD 16 million, Bosnia and Herzegovina: USD 30 million, Kosovo: USD 17 million, and Serbia USD 21 million. Country Programme Documents, UNICEF Executive Board.

representative and the deputy) and 12 national officers covering the programme areas. Overall, the number of technical advisors, including country management, has increased from nine (in the previous CP cycle) to 14 under the current CP cycle. At the time of the CPE country visit, there was one vacant job position for a Child Rights Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist. The CPE finds that the highly qualified national professional staff are critical for the successful and efficient implementation of the CP. This is further strengthened by excellent teamwork among all staff, allowing cross-sectoral and multisectoral analysis, planning, implementation and monitoring as outlined in the Cross-Sectoral Strategy. Overall, the CPE finds that the staffing is appropriate for the scope of the CP. Moreover, the CPE found flexibility in the human resource policy to recruit consultants in support of emerging areas of work such as health. Likewise, the CO use of consultants and partnerships with universities and research institutions provides a specialized workforce complementing the CO permanent staff.<sup>265</sup>

**Table 8: Staffing structure 2015–2016 and 2018–2021**

|  | Category                   | Integrated Budget | Regular Resources | Other Resources | United Nations Volunteer | Total |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------|
| <b>Approved Staffing Structure 2015–2016</b> | International Professional | 1                 |                   |                 |                          | 1     |
|  | National Officers          | 1                 | 5                 | 2               |                          | 8     |
|  | General Service            | 2                 | 2                 | 2               |                          | 6     |
|  | Total                      | 4                 | 7                 | 4               |                          | 15    |
| <b>Approved Staffing Structure 2018–2021</b> | International Professional | 2                 |                   |                 |                          | 2     |
|  | National Officers          | 2                 | 5                 | 4               | 1                        | 12    |
|  | General Service            | 6                 | 1                 | 1               |                          | 8     |
|  | Total                      | 10                | 6                 | 5               | 1                        | 22    |

Source: UNICEF Country Office

#### 4.4.2 To what an extent has the CO demonstrated capacity to take appropriate actions to identify or pursue funding opportunities?

180. As can be seen in Table 7, opportunities for resource mobilization have been exploited in an efficient manner, which, combined with the flexible programme design, has allowed the CO to respond to emerging needs throughout the CP period, including seizing opportunities to secure funds from private sector companies in Montenegro. Private sector funding accounts for nearly 15.7 per cent of the overall CP budget and there is interest among the UNICEF stakeholders for increasing the private sector engagement in the next CP. Among key activities for identifying private sector funding is a recent mapping of funding opportunities prepared by a consultant as well as recruitment of an international consultant to explore and pursue these opportunities and to train CO staff in how to identify and nurture private sector partnerships within the CP implementation. It was noted that there currently is no staff responsible for private sector fundraising and collaboration. This is seen as a growing concern, because the CO is increasingly challenged in the mobilization of traditional funds. As described earlier, the CO has also played a leadership role in mobilizing funds from the United Nations SDG fund for joint UNDAF programmes, which also benefits UNICEF programming.

181. Moreover, the CO has successfully pursued opportunities offered by corporate private multi-year partnership agreements for adolescent engagement and empowerment.

<sup>265</sup> See for instance the review of studies, assessments and other technical papers in the “Document Review” in Annex 1.

#### **4.4.3 To what extent has UNICEF strategically approached and used challenges, driving factors and opportunities at the national and international levels to optimize its long-term contribution and position itself as an effective partner to the Government of Montenegro?**

182. Both primary and secondary data confirms that UNICEF is well recognized in Montenegro as the United Nations guardian for child rights and protection. According to the Annual Report 2017, UNICEF Montenegro was the most popular international organization according to a national survey.<sup>266</sup> The high recognition of UNICEF Montenegro was confirmed and highlighted in both the perception survey (Annex 6) and interviews with representatives from the government, donors, CSOs and other cooperation partners. Moreover, primary data collection confirmed that UNICEF is considered a reliable partner with deep knowledge and technical skills, which places it strategically in human rights and development settings at the national level. Stakeholders particularly referred to the role of UNICEF in supporting the development of national policies and action plans in line with international norms and the EU Acquis.<sup>267</sup>
183. The CP has furthermore supported the government, CSOs and other key stakeholders' participation in regional and international child right initiatives. For instance, two mayors from Montenegro participated in a Regional Meeting of Mayors for Children and Youth in 2019<sup>268</sup> and UNICEF facilitates participation of CSOs and the Ombudsperson's office in international meetings of the CRC. In this context, UNICEF also supports development of alternative reports on the status of implementation of the CRC.<sup>269</sup>
184. The CPE has some concerns with the apparent reliance of the government and other partners on the convening role of UNICEF and its proactive approach to developing national initiatives in support of child rights and protection. The CPE has not identified exit strategies or discussions on sunset clauses in the programmes of cooperation.

#### **4.4.4 Is implementation of the CP supported by a clearly defined RBM system to plan, gather and use credible evidence on the programme performance and results?**

185. The CPE finds that, overall, the building blocks of RBM are there: theories of change, results frameworks, monitoring and evaluation processes, establishing feedback loops for learning, knowledge management, and transparent reporting and communication processes regarding results. Moreover, the system is transparent, with frequent communications about the results.<sup>270</sup> The CPE also finds that key components of the RBM system are not exploited fully. This is particularly the case with lack of systematic attention to assumptions as part of the monitoring system. As already described in the introductory presentation of the CP 2017–2021 and the accompanying theories of change (section 2.2) while assumptions are identified for some of the sector theories of change, the CPE found a lack of clarity between assumptions and linkages within the TOC and key assumptions on external contributions are lacking. While the CPE found that the identified assumptions in the 2018 Cross-Sectoral Strategy are more coherent, the CPE did not identify any analysis of the relevance of the initial assumptions as part of the monitoring system or the business continuity plan.

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<sup>266</sup> UNICEF Country Office (2018) Annual Report 2017.

<sup>267</sup> Examples of national policies, strategies and action plans development in cooperation with UNICEF include Strategy on the protection from domestic violence 2016–2020, Strategy on Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence 2017–2021, Strategy for Early and Preschool Upbringing and Education 2016–2020, Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Reform of Judiciary 2019–2022, Inclusive Education Strategy in Montenegro 2014–2018, A Costed Strategy on Realization of Child Rights (2019), Strategy for the Development of the Social and Child Protection System for the Period 2018–2022.

<sup>268</sup> Country Office Annual Report 2019.

<sup>269</sup> See for instance Ombudsperson's Office (2017) Alternative Report of Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro concerning the Second and Third Periodic Reports of Montenegro on Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Centre for the Children Rights of Montenegro (2017) "Alternative Report on implementation of the Recommendations of the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child".

<sup>270</sup> See for instance UNICEF Montenegro Country Office Annual Reports 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and Result Assessment Modules.

186. The CPE noticed some lack of clarity among staff and different interpretations about the reason for applying RBM as well as what it covers and what it does not cover. Moreover, being an organization that promotes innovative approaches and thinking, as a key change strategy, procedures set in place or initiative established to focus on learning from failures represent an opportunity currently missed and a management culture embracing failure. However, the CPE did not identify systematic learning from failures or less successful undertakings.
187. Finally, in terms of risk management, the CPE noted annually updated risk registers as part of the business continuity plans. The CPE did not observe adoption of risk alert programming with translation of the risks for the different programmes and regular updates. The CPE also notes with interest that while pandemics were considered as medium to high risks in the risk registers for 2017 and 2018, they no longer figured in the 2019 risk register. The CPE did not explore the underlying reason.

## 4.5 Sustainability

### *Key Findings – Sustainability*

1. National partners show strong commitment to the CP but still expect UNICEF to take a major leadership role. The CPE did not see evidence of national budgetary allocations in all CP areas. There are a number of results that have been institutionalized into national programmes, including data management systems such as MICS, which is fully operated by the national statistics office, MONSTAT.
2. The effectiveness of the structures for child rights protection at the municipality level is questioned by a number of stakeholders and documented in recent assessments and reviews. While the CP has supported institutional strengthening of municipal structures, the CPE did not find evidence of initiatives that would guarantee sustainability at the municipality level.
3. Many piloted activities, such as Golden Advisors, have been institutionalized in the national administration and the Ombudsperson's Office. This provides promises of sustainability. Other innovations such as UPSHIFT are still not sufficiently institutionalized to be considered sustainable.
4. The implementation strategies are being institutionalized at national level with government funding some pilot activities and supporting scale-up of various initiatives based on rigorous assessments.

#### **4.5.1 Are CP results sustainable and, if not, what can UNICEF do to advance sustainability at both the national and local levels?**

188. The CPE found a strong commitment to the CP among national partners, although national ownership of the CP results has still to be translated into budgetary allocations for some areas. Still, the CPE identified a number of results that have been integrated into national programmes, particularly the data management and monitoring systems and household surveys MICS, SWIS and MEIS. Likewise, institutions that have been financially and technically supported by UNICEF since their creation, such as the resource centres in the Ministry of Education are now continued mainly with national investment complemented by some ad hoc technical support from UNICEF. The CPE also noted that the government is funding some pilot activities, including the Family Outreach Worker service in five Montenegrin municipalities funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.<sup>271</sup> The CPE finds that these examples demonstrate great likelihood of sustainability of the CP initiatives, including the approaches. This is confirmed for instance through the Government's approval of the four focus areas in the cross-sectoral strategy 2018–2021.
189. Another promising development supporting the likelihood of sustainability of the CP results is the increasing engagement of the private sector in promoting children's rights and protection as described in section 4.4.2. The CPE has also noted the ongoing efforts of the CO to strengthen its capacity for mobilizing the private sector, for instance, through recruitment of a private sector specialists.<sup>272</sup> Likewise, the CPE interviews with national CSOs confirmed their commitment to continue working for the full implementation of the CRC in Montenegro.
190. At the municipality level, the CPE found that the Centres for Social Work are contested in their current form. A key limitation is the lack of human resources among case managers, which affects the quality of work and limited services available for them to

<sup>271</sup> See for instance Country Office Annual Reports 2017 and 2018.

<sup>272</sup> See for instance the CO job vacancy announcements 2020.

refer cases. However, these centres have undergone important reform since 2010 with the support of UNICEF and function as fully sustainable public bodies. The support has for instance included an evaluation of their capacity in 2019.<sup>273</sup> Likewise, UNICEF prepared an assessment of the work of the Operational Multidisciplinary Teams in the protection of children from violence in 2017.<sup>274</sup> The CPE expects that such studies will form the basis for an updated analysis of how best to ensure optimized and sustained functioning of these Centres for Social Welfare, considering the local capacity challenges described earlier.

191. The CPE finds that the multipronged intervention approach of the CP with a combination of the different implementation strategies and based on joint programming with the government leads to increasing national ownership and full commitment by the national government. As described above, the CPE identified concrete examples where the initiatives such as the government funding of the piloting of the Family Outreach Services and the replication of the use of the DAISY textbook system beyond the schools originally targeted for the CPs. Likewise, the CPE found a number of examples where UNICEF has mobilized a national dialogue for an integrated national follow-up to the recommendations on the CRC application in Montenegro. It should be noted that the CPE found very little use of the term “exit strategy”. Rather, primary data sources indicated that it is well understood that the government and other national actors will eventually be fully responsible for all child rights and protection initiatives in Montenegro. Moreover, it was stressed by various stakeholders that the CP process in itself is a partnership between UNICEF and the government aiming at greater ownership of the initiatives that have been defined in partnership.

#### **4.5.2 What progress has been made to develop innovative and promising interventions to advance fulfilment of child rights and, given national priorities and partner capacities, what could be done to advance scale-up?**

192. The CP data sources, including the document review and interviews with key stakeholders, highlighted how the CO has successfully developed innovative approaches. The CPE furthermore noted that the CO has taken a proactive approach in its work with the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. For instance, for a four-country innovative research project on media launched in 2015, Montenegro contacted UNICEF – Innocenti and requested to participate through the directly mobilized funding of the CO. Finally, the innovation research was launched in Montenegro in early 2016 and has generated the successful media literacy initiative, which has been piloted and is now about to be scaled up. The initiative directly supports children’s safety through developing media literacy and through visual arts aimed at adolescents in primary schools. Originally, the innovation was planned to be piloted in one primary school, but through funds mobilized from the private sector, particularly the telecommunications company Telenor, it has been piloted in six primary schools and is now ready for scaling up.<sup>275</sup>
193. Other examples of innovative approaches, which have been piloted, modelled and scaled up include Golden Advisors, Young Reporters and preschool, which have been further described in the success stories.<sup>276</sup> For instance, UNICEF has supported pilots for scaling up to mainstream successful interventions and thereby ensuring sustainability under the adolescents component through Youth Innovation Labs offering skills building. Some of these pilots are: the social-emotional skills programme which is now part of the curriculum with workshops in non-formal settings bridging the gap in those areas where schools were waiting to implement the programme; UPSHIFT which is currently planned to be mainstreamed in the schools in Montenegro; and U-Report

<sup>273</sup> IDEAS (2019) ‘Analysis of the Work of the Centres for Social Work in Montenegro’ Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

<sup>274</sup> UNICEF (2017) Assessing the Work of the Operational Multidisciplinary Teams in the Protection of Children from Violence in Montenegro.

<sup>275</sup> See for instance UNICEF & ING (2019) “Empowerment and Participation of Adolescents in Montenegro”.

<sup>276</sup> Country Office Annual Reports 2017–2019 and Results Assessment Module 2018/2020.

which as a multi-country initiative, helps to amplify the voice of the youth and serves as a means to generate awareness and consultation on various issues, including recently serving as a platform to share information on COVID-19 with youth.

## 4.6 Impact

### *Key Findings – Impact*

1. Overall, UNICEF presence, long-term vision, strategic positioning and support to key child and adolescent rights issues have changed attitudes and social behaviour in Montenegro in the direction of the CRC. The CPE finds that the changes in social behaviour will lead to long-term impacts if support to complementary implementation strategies are guaranteed.
2. Long-term and comprehensive social change campaigns are critical for contributing to the impact of the CP through the promotion of increased awareness among government stakeholders, promoting social behaviour change among citizens and coalescing partnerships around child rights issues.
3. The CP provides capacity development on a number of technical issues to promote long-term impact with a view of moving towards national ownership. However, the CPE did not identify specific UNICEF initiatives aiming at strengthening national systems to undertake their own multi-year targeted campaigns for changing social norms.
4. Potential impact from the CP move toward cross-sectoral planning and implementation depends on national capacity to work across sectors, including line ministries and the authority given to an overall cross-sectoral body such as the Council on the Rights of Children.

#### **4.6.1 What foundations for the longer-term impact of UNICEF work can be reasonably expected for children in Montenegro?**

194. As the success stories show, the responsibility for the continuation of various successful UNICEF initiatives, such as preschool coverage and deinstitutionalization, has been transferred to national actors, particularly line ministries. The monitoring of children's rights and protection has been transferred to national authorities, including MONSTAT for MICS and the Ombudsperson's Office. Critical for the success of this impact has been a long-term vision and integrated support. Likewise, the relatively quick change on attitudes towards children with disabilities, foster parenting, ECD and child violence reported by key stakeholders of the CPE<sup>277</sup> should contribute to the likelihood of longer-term impact on child and adolescent rights. However, precarious results indicate a need for long-term support to key issues that the CP put on the agenda in Montenegro, for instance, deinstitutionalization of children younger than 3 years of age. Similarly, according to MICS 2013, 2.6 per cent of women justified men beating their wife while in 2018 the number had increased to 6.1 per cent.<sup>278</sup> It should also be noted that, as shown in earlier chapters, several of the thematic evaluations carried out on parts of the CP portfolio do not find enough evidence to conclude that there will be longer-term impact.<sup>279</sup>
195. UNICEF has worked on raising awareness and strengthening the capacities of adolescents on social and emotional skills and employability. Still, the CO needs to focus on a more systematic approach to capacity-building and supporting government institutions and municipalities to take up these activities for adolescents and youth. The

<sup>277</sup> CPE interviews with UNICEF staff, government staff, Ombudsperson's Office, and CSOs.

<sup>278</sup> Survey among women aged 15 to 49 years. [UNICEF & MONSTAT \(2019\) "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS6" and UNICEF & MONSTAT \(2014\) "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – MICS5"](#).

<sup>279</sup> See for instance Gheorghe, C, & A. Hadzibegovic (2017) "Evaluation of the Programme "Montenegro – Investment Case on Early Childhood Development" UNICEF.

CP results can be usefully conceptualized as contributions toward the ongoing and progressive realization of child rights; as such, challenges are expected. Systems building happens over time, as does the cultivation of political will in support of child rights; results should be understood through this lens. A number of initiatives have been piloted; a few of them have been successful and show promise for scalability. Scale-up would be dependent on development of a realistic plan for capacity-building and resourcing – and perhaps further calibration to fit local context realities. Some efforts were less successful; DAISY, for example, seemed to need further adjustment.

196. In terms of the cross-sectoral strategic approach launched by UNICEF, the CPE finds that the national capacity to provide cross-sectoral/integrated responses to child rights and protection needs to be strengthened. The CPE learned about recent efforts for programme-based budgeting for the national budget at the level of the Ministry of Finance. With support from the EU, staff from sector/line ministries are currently being trained in programme-based budgets. The programmes are not fully defined and will be adapted to needs. This should open an opportunity for a more effective introduction of cross-sectoral programming on child rights and protection. Effective engagement with the Ministry of Finance is a crucial element in building robust political will and ensuring that funding is available to support the various elements of the child protection system.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Overall Conclusions

197. Overall, the CP 2017–2021 has successfully contributed to an increased awareness of child and adolescent rights and protection needs in Montenegro, which has been translated into national commitments as expressed through the adoption of a wide range of legislation, strategies and plans of action on children with disability, education, ECD, youth and justice. The CP has particularly responded to the needs of the most vulnerable children and adolescents and to families marginalized from the general development processes, including ethnic minorities and children living with disabilities. The multi-pronged intervention approach of the CP has contributed greatly to the development of the normative framework of Montenegro in line with the EU Acquis and has contributed to the National Strategy on Sustainable Development 2030 and thereby to the achievements of the sustainable development goals by Montenegro.
198. This successful implementation has been possible through the UNICEF strategic positioning and leadership role in promoting children's rights and protection. This role has been achieved through supporting the national partners in identifying key challenges and offering a multipronged intervention approach that is increasingly based on bringing all relevant sectors and key stakeholders together at the national level. While the CPE greatly appreciates UNICEF 2018 strategy of moving toward cross-sectoral programming, it also finds that there are still uncertainties about the meaning and implications of working in a cross-sectoral manner. As such the CPE finds that the approach still needs to be further internalized among staff and partners. The UNICEF strategic positioning has been strengthened by the highly recognized knowledge products, for instance, assessments and research studies and monitoring instruments, including the MICS, which have contributed to evidence-based national legislation and strategies. Furthermore, UNICEF strategic positioning has been reinforced by its critical role in the UNDAF process.
199. An overall key factor for the successful implementation of the CP is the highly professional and committed staff working as one team complementing the skills and knowledge of each other. Moreover, critical to the successful implementation has been the combination of implementation strategies through a multipronged intervention approach based on the following components: (1) knowledge generation through substantive research and KAPs, (2) advocacy aimed at all existing and potential

stakeholders, including parents, front-line staff in municipalities, national and local politicians, local and central administration, CSOs and international cooperation, (3) policy dialogue and technical support to develop legislation and strategies, (4) piloting of new approaches to services at the local level, and (5) training and capacity development of front-line staff. Furthermore, a flexible, responsive, and integrated approach and partnerships has been critical.

200. Finally, the success of the CP is linked to the long-term vision and continuous focus on key challenges related to child and adolescent rights and protection and identification of emerging needs and response opportunities.

## 5.2 Coverage and Focus

201. The CP is based on a sound analysis of needs, bottlenecks and barriers identified in the planning process through the MoRES and substantive theories of change combined with comparative advantages of UNICEF in Montenegro. This has led to a CP focus on supporting the Government of Montenegro in fulfilling its obligations vis-à-vis international standards while stressing support to implementation of national policies, legislation and strategies related to children's rights and priorities.
202. While UNICEF support has included follow-up to recommendations provided by key partners and bodies such as the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the EC annual staff reports on the Montenegro EU access process, there is a key concern that has been repeated by these different partners and bodies, namely the lack of implementation of strategies and policies. This concern can also be found in recommendations from the 2014 MTR of CP 2012–2016 and a number of technical studies and recommendations launched by UNICEF over the last years.
203. The CPE finds that it will be important for UNICEF to assist the government in identifying bottlenecks and barriers to implementing national child rights and protection legislation and strategies at municipality level and help in developing a sustainable response for creating the necessary capacity to ensure future implementation.
204. The CP has successfully worked to address the needs of vulnerable children, particularly children affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion. The CPE expects that this will be further facilitated through recent work on multidimensional poverty. However, the CPE did not find substantial evidence of targeted CP support for children and adolescents from more affluent households affected by abuse and negligence, recognizing that the approaches should be adapted to the specific target group.

## 5.3 Approaches

205. The key approach to the CP successful implementation has been the flexible combination of implementation strategies and the increasing focus on an integrated approach bringing key stakeholders and sectors together for joint, complementary, mutually reinforcing and transparent programming and implementation. However, as the CP is a cooperation programme between UNICEF and the Government of Montenegro, it is crucial that the newly proposed cross-sectoral strategy can be adapted to the national context. As highlighted in the earlier barriers and bottlenecks analysis, the challenge is a highly sectoral and siloed system, which will need to be adapted to a more integrated approach to ensure children and adolescents' rights and protection, which by nature requires the involvement of many different sectors.
206. The CPE appreciates the work UNICEF has supported in revitalizing the National Council for the Rights of the Child and the new national Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019–2023, as well as attempts to elevate the responsibility for the Rights of the Child to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as recommended by the 2017 CRM to heighten the importance and priority of child rights issues at the government level.

The CPE considers that these efforts are works in progress that need to be further strengthened and adapted to the current national environment.

## **5.4 Partnerships**

207. The implementation of the CP has been possible through well-established and constructive partnerships with key ministries, judiciary, key national institutions such as the Ombudsperson's Office and specialized institutions, the parliamentary committees, CSOs, United Nations agencies, private sector, the EU and other cooperation partners. These partnerships have still to be defined in terms of cross-sectoral approaches. The outcome of the 2019 conference on ECD showed some promise with national commitments to future multisector programming, but the "how" has still to be defined.
208. At the national level, the CPE noted promising programme-based budgeting initiatives under the Ministry of Finance, which are critical to support a national cross-sectoral approach to address the rights of the child. UNICEF has already established a partnership with the Ministry of Finance, forming a good basis for future strengthened partnerships around programme budgeting for the rights of the child and adolescents.
209. During the CPE, various key institutions noted their limited involvement in the CP hitherto, particularly the Department of Gender Equality and Department for Promotion and Protection of Roma and Egyptian Rights at the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, that have a potential national strategic role in promoting the rights of the child and adolescents. Moreover, the CPE noted very limited engagement of the national women machinery in the CP.

## **5.5 Cross-Cutting Issues**

210. While the CP has addressed girls' protection needs in various initiatives – for instance, on child marriage, preschool, and adolescent girls' participation in UPSHIFT activities – there has not been a systematic inclusion of gender context-specific and dynamic gender analysis as called for by the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, thereby limiting updated gender-responsive initiatives. Likewise, many of the otherwise high-quality technical studies prepared under the CP do not pay any or very limited attention to gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women (GEEW). The CPE appreciates that most data collected in UNICEF internal information systems, as well as through the standardized monitoring instruments, such as the MICS, provides disaggregated data. However, the disaggregated data has yet to be fully applied to influence UNICEF programmatic choices.
211. The CP focus on the rights of vulnerable children affected by poverty, adversity and exclusion, including children with disabilities and children from minority groups, is based on effective monitoring systems, such as the MICS, allowing equity challenges for children to be identified in line with relevant human right conventions.
212. UNICEF has decided not to get involved in all four components of the current UNDAF and thus is not participating in the component on climate change and environment. While the CPE recognizes the need for specialization, it also finds that there is a strong need to ensure the voices of children and adolescents are heard in the national climate change and environment agenda, as underlined in various activities of the Young Reporters.

## **6. Lessons Learned**

213. The CPE participatory approach to the development of conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned distilled some lessons learned from the country programme process in Montenegro that the UNICEF CO, together with the CPE, consider transferable to other contexts.

## **Linking CP to EU Process**

214. Linking the CP to the politically highly important EU accession process has allowed high national commitment to the CP cycle and has resulted in a number of windows of opportunity for advocacy and leveraging funding for child and adolescent rights and protection. This has been possible through a continuous dialogue and close partnership with the EU Delegation and mutual collaboration on programmatic activities. The success of this linkage requires a CO team skilled in supporting the government and others in developing and implementing legislation, policies and strategies based on international norms, standards and conventions and with strong expertise on changing social norms and behaviour.

### Innovative Approach

215. Use of innovative and flexible approaches tailored to emergent needs and the local and national context has proven critical to attract the interest of national stakeholders. This has been possible through proactive collaboration with the UNICEF corporate innovation specialists and the resources provided by the Office of Innovation. Furthermore, the introduction of innovative approaches is based on strong knowledge generation, including from KAPs and combined with complementary implementation strategies including capacity development, policy dialogue and advice, child rights monitoring and knowledge generation.

### Commitment

216. UNICEF success stories in Montenegro build on a long-term vision for selected focus areas that go beyond the five-year programme cycle. Furthermore, to be implemented, successful awareness raising and advocacy campaigns for social norms and behaviour change require at least two years and must be accompanied by regular KAP to monitor the impact and adapt the campaign messages when necessary.

## 7. Recommendations

217. In order to respond to the purpose of the CPE in terms of providing guidance for priority-setting in future programming, the following recommendations **target** the key decision-makers for the design and implementation of the next CP in Montenegro, that is particularly the **UNICEF Country Office in Montenegro and the government**. The focus and direction of the recommendations were developed during a participatory workshop with the UNICEF Country Office in Montenegro.

### R1. Coverage and Focus

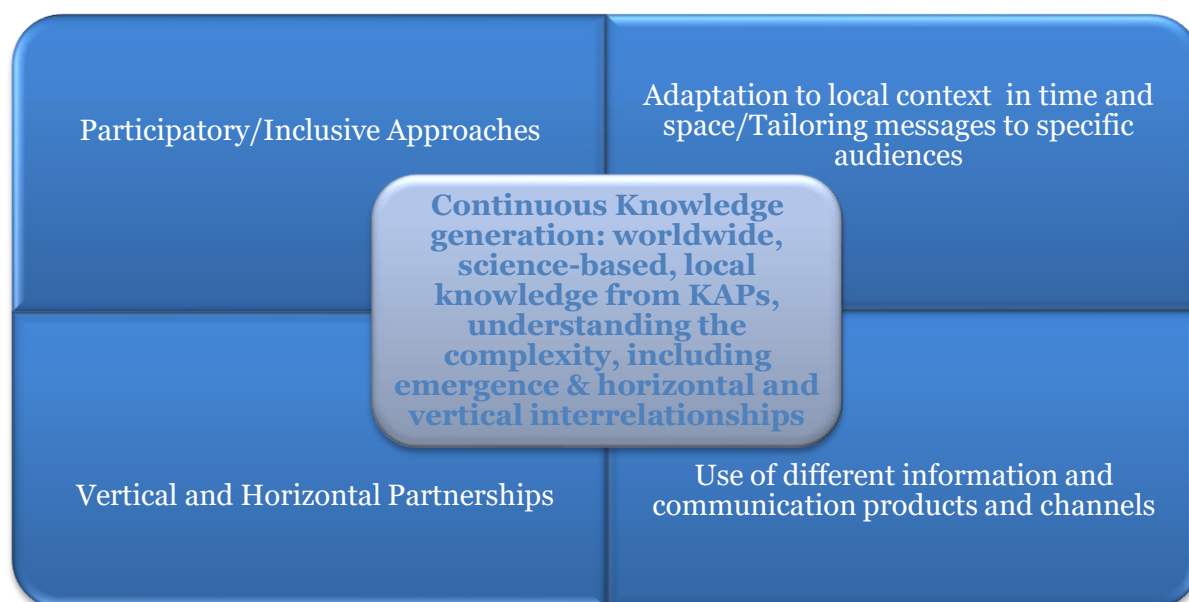
218. The CPE recommends that the UNICEF future CP continues focusing on support to the government as well as key national children's rights and protection institutions and CSOs to ensure (1) full alignment of national legislation, policies and strategies on children's rights and protection with international norms, standards and conventions, including the EU Acquis as well as (2) full implementation of the children's rights and protection legislation, policies and strategies. The support should increasingly focus on development of an institutionalized national system that ensures implementation and monitoring of implementation at both centralized and decentralized levels. To establish an effective system the CPE recommends that the following issues be considered in future CPs:
- Strengthening the capacity and functionality of the National Council for the Rights of the Child so it can assume its role in systematically monitoring the implementation of children's rights and protection legislation, policies and strategies and provide guidance for future actions. Special attention should be given to the continuous identification of bottlenecks for implementation at municipality level with attention focused on overall national policy and the ongoing process of decentralization and the disparities in resources and capacity at municipality level.

- In strengthening the capacity and functionality of the National Council for the Rights of the Child, attention should be paid to a layered but fully integrated structure with operational local Councils for the Rights of the Child at municipality level. Their tasks should include reporting on the implementation of the Strategy for the Realization of Child Rights.
  - The CP should use UNICEF innovation strengths to develop and test new support models with focus on scaling-up for implementation of children's rights and protection legislation and strategies at central and municipality level. Innovation efforts should also be used for development of new models for advocacy for concerted actions with a view to scaling-up.
219. In terms of thematic focus, the CPE recommends that future CPs continue and further strengthen:
- Multidimensional poverty as an underlying principle of the CP.
  - Cross-sectoral approach as an underlying principle of the CP with focus on ECD, safe and inclusive communities, and adolescent empowerment. Special attention should be given to vertically (for instance, of central and local levels) and horizontally integrated (for instance, different line ministries) national systems that can accommodate and promote cross-sectoral programming and implementation. To promote sustainability, the CO should consider developing and testing new models for cross-sectoral work in the framework of Montenegro for children's rights and protection with a view to scaling-up.

## **R2. Approaches**

220. The CPE recommends that the next CP be fully based on the cross-sectoral approach outlined in the UNICEF Montenegro Strategy to Achieve Cross-sector Priorities for Children in Montenegro 2018–2021. Further attention should be given to adaptation of this approach to national policies and strategies of relevance for child rights in Montenegro through:
- Assessing the implications, potential and political commitment of the government to cross-sectoral approaches in Montenegro both at the national level and the municipality level. This will require further clarification of the concept of cross-sectoral and related organizational structures such as multisectoral and trans-sectoral and opportunities for their application in the context of Montenegro. The model that has been applied for the new ECD initiative starting with advocacy could form the basis for similar cross-sectoral initiatives. This would bring together multiple sectors, multiple stakeholder groups and multiple programmes and initiatives with attention to integration at both vertical level, such as different line ministries and horizontal integration such as municipal and national integration.
  - Supporting the key line ministries in preparing child rights programmes to be budgeted according to the new programme budgeting approach launched by the Ministry of Finance in cooperation with the EU.
  - Developing national capacity to plan and deliver integrated multipronged interventions based on the combination of implementation strategies proven to be successful in the CP. Special attention should be given to national capacity to prepare and implement long-term social change initiatives as outlined in Figure 3.
  - Generate further knowledge on how best to address deeply rooted problems related to child poverty, violence, exclusion, and dropouts, including further development of the knowledge, understanding and application of multidimensional poverty in UNICEF programming. This should include considerations to developing new models that can be scaled up in Montenegro.

**Figure 3: Basic principles for recommended social change model to be transferred to national authorities.**



### **R3. Partnerships**

221. To promote the cross-sectoral approach, the CPE recommends that future CPs strengthen functional partnerships for implementation of the CP through the following:

- Strengthen active participation of key departments in line ministries, particularly the Department of Gender Equality and Department for Promotion and Protection of Roma and Egyptian Rights at the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights in the CP. Overall, partnerships with the national women machinery and national structures to promote the rights of minorities should be strengthened to ensure their active participation in the CP.
- Build on UNICEF corporate knowledge of public-private partnerships to generate knowledge and build models for how to ensure long-term involvement of the private sector in the promotion of children's rights and protection in Montenegro.

### **R4. Cross-Cutting Issues**

222. In line with the call for an increased focus on cross-sectoral programming and implementation and with attention to sustainability and long-term impact, the CPE recommends that future CPs pay increased attention to gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women while continuing the focus on equity as applied in the current CP. The CPE particularly recommends that the next CP should include:

- Strengthening the approach to gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women (GEEW) and moving from gender sensitivity towards gender responsiveness to promote transformative change through systematic inclusion of a GEEW needs assessment and response plans in all initiatives, including research, studies, and evaluations prepared within the CP.
- Promoting UNICEF role in all components of the UNDAF, including in climate change and environment in which the voice of children and youth is critical.
- Consider further strengthening of knowledge and attention to mental health of children in adolescents.