

## Comments from ILO, UNICEF and the GCSPF on the draft report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the EU funded Global Action “Improving synergies between social protection and PFM”

(DCI-HUM 2018/041-579 – GLO/19/19/EUR)

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First, we would like to commend the evaluation team for the extensive analysis through the desk review and interviews with stakeholders, and thank EC-INTPA for giving us the opportunity to provide comments on the draft report. While the overall review is positive, we appreciate the highlight of few shortcomings and recommendations that we take as points for further discussion on possible adjustments and improvements within the short-time frame, available resources and priorities of the partner countries.

Here are general comments from the three implementing partners, namely ILO, UNICEF and GCSPF:

- 1) **Timeframe of the mid-term evaluation is unclear:** The implementation period covered by the mid-term evaluation is not clearly set and not consistently applied across the report. In the agreed evaluation plan of the Action, the MTE was taking place between April and July 2021; in the TOR and the introduction of the report of the MTE, the indicated period is from Oct 2019 to Dec 2021. However, while it is also interesting for the PMU and in particular ILO to receive feedback on projects of the second batch of Approach 2, those projects started in March 2022, therefore outside the evaluation period. This point also raises a valid issue acknowledged by the evaluators: the findings and recommendations of the MTE come at a very late stage of implementation of the Programme, which leaves very limited or no leverage for adjusting the programme planning and implementation. The Programme has now entered in its closing phase and will implement the work plan approved with the second annual report, and reconfirmed by the national stakeholders in November 2022.
- 2) **Introduction :** It clearly states the period of the project (pg. 3), including a calendar of the field phase, and geographical coverage (countries concerned), embodied within the approaches of the action and the global / regional activities. Regarding the period, the reports acknowledged of the limitation of some of recommendations from the Evaluation due to its extension throughout time. Nevertheless, information provided in first paragraph of “main challenges” (pg. 4) is not clear, notably when compared with the information with third paragraph in conclusions (pg. 40). Both perspectives seem to be contradictory.
- 3) **Criteria and Questions:** In the introduction it clearly states that the evaluation is in line with the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, but the evaluation criteria (table 1) do not specifically mention “the impact”.
- 4) **The gender dimension could be strengthened:** The absence of gender in the methodology and the evaluation tools is an aspect which is both surprising and disappointing. In a project such as this, the gender dimension is crucial and we would expect the evaluation methodology itself to have been based on a gender approach, if it has, this should be clearly described under the methodology section.

- 5) **The scope of the evaluation goes beyond the Action:** The evaluation aims to address synergies in SP and PFM and the findings are relevant to this purpose. However, during the inception phase of the MTE, we pointed out that the reconstruction of the intervention logic and some of the questions attempted to assess results were going beyond the Action results framework and approved project documents for the global components and the country projects. Some of the feedback and recommendations continue going beyond what was agreed in the results framework.
- 6) **The projects are driven by countries' priorities and do not cover all issues:** The evaluators acknowledged very well that the country projects were designed to specifically respond to priorities identified by the national stakeholders, which makes the strength of this Programme, as being entirely demand driven. For that reason, the country projects do not systematically cover all issues (disability, gender, crisis response, etc..) and do not aim to contribute to all indicators of the results framework, but only those relevant for the country. The countries' priorities and results framework were approved by the steering committee at the start of the projects, and are those now being implemented.
- 7) **Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on governments' priorities:** While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the project implementation is clearly acknowledged, the evaluation could take further into consideration the complete shift of governments' priorities to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, leaving aside questions related to long-term development of SP systems, financing and PFM. This situation lasted during almost two years, as most of the partner countries went through a second wave of pandemic late 2021 and early 2022. Moreover, the MTE does not acknowledge the unprecedented working conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictive measures on the Programme's staff and national stakeholders, who nevertheless have remained committed to the implementation of the Programme.
- 8) **Work on implementation, delivery and monitoring of SP systems is given less attention:** The second strategic outcome of the Action related to the improvement of the implementation, administration, delivery and monitoring of the SP systems is less covered by the MTE than the first outcome of facilitating the design and financing of social protection systems and third outcome of developing shock-responsive systems. The annual progress report and country reports provide a lot of information on results achieved under the second outcome of the Action; feedback and assessment of this area of work would also be very relevant for the country projects.
- 9) **The challenge of engaging with Ministries of Finance and IMF could be more explicitly acknowledged:** First, Addressing PFM only under the angle of SP is quite innovative for the Ministries of Finance, who usually look at PFM globally. IMF too considers PFM under a broader lens and not under a sectoral approach. This difference of approaches has also made the collaboration with IMF challenging, but still feasible around the issue of social spending in Togo and Nepal. Second, the projects are social protection projects, therefore, institutionally, they are anchored in the Ministries in charge of social protection and not Ministries of Finance; however, the latter are members of the countries' steering committees and engaged in most of the activities of the projects. Still despite those bottlenecks, the countries, with support of the cross-

country component, were able to build or strengthen the relationship with Ministries of finance; and enhanced the dialogue between Ministries in charge of social protection and Ministries of Labour through joint analytical work, workshop and trainings. Furthermore, the project being demand driven, it adapted its interventions to respond to the capacity building requests of the Ministries of Finance, rather than implementing some assessment of the PFM under an approach perhaps until now too innovative. Only recently, because it was not a priority during the COVID-19 response, some countries are asking to work on assessing their PFM for the SP sector. Beyond highlighting the low engagement with Ministries of Finance and IMF in certain countries, it would be appreciated if the evaluation could bring some ideas and thoughts on how to improve such joint work.

- 10) **Conclusion:** The findings are leading to the conclusions, but the relationship between them are not so clear. The logical relationship between them could be strengthened, maybe by trying to address possible contradictions in recommendation 01. Example is provided directly in the document on page 43.
- 11) **The recommendations are too many and too ambitious to be implemented within the project timeframe:** In standard evaluation practice, recommendations should be kept to around 10 maximum whereas here the team has developed over 25 smaller recommendations. The eight general recommendations are acknowledged and help bringing more thoughts on how the intervention could have been better designed and implemented in certain aspects. The implementing partners will consider the long list of bullet points as possible examples of what could be done to implement the proposed recommendations rather than a list of activities that should put in place in the coming months. The recommendations should be given a timeframe and classify across those that would be recommendable to implement before ending the Programme and those that are to be considered for a future project, and by which partner. Because of the limited timeframe and resources, the implementing partners will review the approved work plans and explore links between the agreed activities and the recommendations. At this stage, there is very limited or no space to include new activities as the work plans have been approved by the global steering committee, and reconfirmed with the national stakeholders early November 2022.
- 12) **Next steps and dissemination:** We understand as per the TOR that the evaluators will implement these activities. It is likely that this list of activities will overlap with the reporting and the final evaluation, which will take place between May and September 2023. The modalities for the dissemination of the results of the MTE needs to be strategic to avoid overcrowding the national stakeholders agenda with too many workshops, at a time that activities will accelerate and country team will start planning closing events. (cf. the difficulties in organizing the country review meetings). Same will go for the IPs who will concentrate on accelerating the activities, implementing the relevant and feasible recommendations, boosting the research and publications, C&V and many different events linked to the closure of this programme in 2023. Importantly, as per the ILO Evaluation Guidelines, the report should be shared with and commented by the Programme's stakeholders in addition to the implementing partners, and comments should be responded prior to finalizing the report.
- 13) **Presentation of the main findings and color code for the Justification Criterion (JCs):** The main findings are based in triangulated data and summarized in boxes with bullet points according to the EQ, which is useful and reads well. We understand that color codes are used against each of

the JCs to enable readers to get a quick overall assessment of the progress against each action area. However, there are areas where color codes do not fully align with the detailed assessment mentioned in the narrative, for instance where there are two colors assigned, or where the narrative shows solid progress while the color shows otherwise. If establishing clarity of the colors applied is difficult, the messages may be more clearly conveyed without the color codes in the table.