

Policy Review Report

Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Protection Programmes

On request of the Armenian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 12-13 December 2022 (Online)


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List of abbreviations

ALMP	Active Labour Market Policies
BB	Bridge Building
CSW	Centres for Social Work
DSP	Department of Social Protection (Ireland)
ESAP2	Employment and Social Affairs Platform 2
EU	European Union
FSIO	Federal Insurance Office (Switzerland)
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
IPA	Intergovernmental Personal Act
ILO	International Labour Organization
IGEES	Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Armenia)
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NAO	National Audit Office (UK)
INSEE	National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (France)
NAPA	National Platform for Poverty (Switzerland)
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
USSC	Unified Social Services Centres
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USA	United States of America

1 Introduction

The Bridge Building (BB) Policy Review was requested by the Republic of Armenia and hosted by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research (European Centre). It was the third event in a series of mutual learning events, including peer reviews and policy reviews that were offered to BB countries¹ by the European Centre, following a methodology applied and widely used within the European Union in employment, social and inclusion policies. By implementing mutual learning activities in the BB countries, the European Centre provides answers to countries' needs related to fighting poverty, especially for vulnerable groups and to the better coping with the health and social consequences of COVID-19.

Policy Reviews provide expertise and promote mutual exchange of experience and knowledge transfer about the situation on a selected topic in the BB countries (here: Armenia, Moldova, North Macedonia, and the Ukraine). The delegations consisted of representatives of the ministries of labour and/or social affairs, the public employment services, and social services. The policy review attracted significant interest, with over 60 registrations.

The purpose of the policy review was to discuss the participating BB countries and especially Armenia's existing institutional structure and approach in conducting monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tasks for social protection programmes with focus on child protection and family/population policies. Specifically, it aimed at answering the following questions:

- *What are the main characteristics of the M&E institutional architectures in Armenia and the other BB countries?*
- *What are the main challenges of undertaking effective M&E activities and impact evaluation, especially in child protection and family/population policies?*
- *Which governance structures implemented in EU countries and beyond may be most suitable and scalable in achieving better M&E in the BB countries?*
- *In which ways is impact evaluation conducted in BB peer countries and what are promising practices applicable to the fields of child protection, family policy, and active labour market policy?*
- *What role does partnership play at all governance levels (from the municipal to the central level) and between different ministerial and other governmental and non-governmental (civil society, research, etc.) organisations?*

1 The BB countries are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and the Ukraine. See this website for more information about the European Centre's Bridge Building activities: <https://www.euro.centre.org/domains/bridging-building>

The two-day policy review took place online and consisted of inputs from national and international experts as well as discussions in working groups.

The opening remarks to the policy review were provided by Franz Svehla, Deputy Head of Department Bilateral Relations and International Affairs, Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection. Inputs contributing to this report comprised a keynote by Dr. Elif Naz Kayran from the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, and presentations by Shushanna Tevanyan and Hayk Muradyan from the Armenian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Hugh Cronin from the Irish Department of Social Protection, Kristoffer Lundberg from the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, as well as Dr. Sabina Littmann, Dr. Malte Flachmeyer and Gisela Hochuli from the Swiss Federal Social Insurance Office.

The first working group session focused on current systems and practices in the countries while the second session highlighted impact evaluation case studies at national levels. The working groups contributed to a fruitful and constructive discussion about common challenges and promising policy solutions.

The evaluation of the policy review by the participants showed the following results: over 80% of participants responded that the event has increased their knowledge and that they have learned about useful approaches for their professional work. Furthermore, most participants informed that the event allowed them to openly communicate, exchange experience, develop their professional network and receive new policy perspectives for their job. Participants also appreciated learning about international practices as well as the presentation of different structural approaches for monitoring and evaluation of social policies.

This report summarises insights gained during the policy review and aims at further sharing these with a wider audience. It is structured as follows: after the introduction the next subchapters provide a brief overview of existing approaches towards monitoring and evaluation in Armenia as well as in the other participating countries. Chapter 4 highlights the main challenges and issues discussed during the policy review and chapter 5 outlines the key messages of the event on how to improve M&E activities. Finally, chapter 6 presents conclusions.

2 Background and practice in Armenia

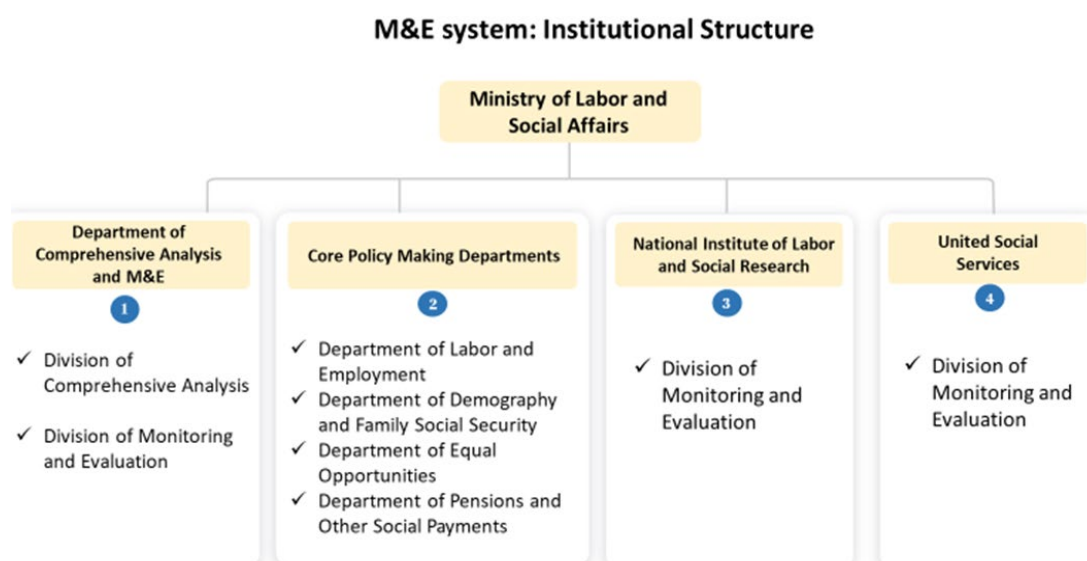
The institutional architecture and the M&E approach to policymaking in Armenia was introduced by a ministerial decree in 2013 (adopted by a government decree in 2014). In 2017, 41 projects were evaluated based on a new methodology which was revised for the third time in 2022. In Armenia, the main actors of M&E of social protection programmes at the national level are:

- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA),
- Ministry of Finance,
- National Chamber of Audit; and
- The Prime Minister’s Office.

M&E activities are financed by a separate budget line within the overall budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia. M&E of social protection programmes is not legally obligatory. In contrast, M&E of active labour market programmes are obligatory (they are under scrutiny by the Prime Minister’s Office). While the M&E plan is a mandatory section for each labour market policy document, roles and responsibilities of designated actors are not defined by law.

The structure of the M&E architecture within the Armenian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) is provided in the following figure (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Institutional structure of M&E system in MoLSA



Source: PowerPoint presentation from MoLSA representatives

M&E plays a crucial role in ensuring that policies and programmes implemented by the Armenian ministry are achieving their intended outcomes and impact. The M&E targeted system within the ministry involves a range of activities, including monitoring the implementation of policies and programmes, tracking progress and results, evaluating impact, and using the findings to inform policy and programme-related decision-making.

One of the key components of the M&E system developed at MoLSA is the development of performance indicators for each programme. These indicators are used to track progress and measure the effectiveness of programmes in achieving their intended outcomes. For example, indicators may include the number of beneficiaries served, the percentage of beneficiaries who successfully completed a programme, or the change in poverty rates among the targeted population. MoLSA also conducts regular monitoring and reporting of the implementation of policies and programmes. This includes tracking the allocation and utilisation of resources as well as the performance of service providers and contractors.

MoLSA conducts both process evaluations and impact evaluations. Process evaluations are most common and focus on assessing the implementation process and identifying opportunities for improvement. The ministry also carries out outcome evaluations *ex post* by focusing on the effectiveness of the policy as well as cost-effectiveness from a budgetary perspective. Impact evaluations and other *ex ante* evaluations, on the other hand, often aim to measure the causal effects of policies and programmes on the target population before the policies are being implemented widely. *Ex ante* impact evaluations, however, are rarely used within MoLSA and, if planned, are mostly outsourced.

Representatives of MoLSA identified five key challenges regarding their country's M&E schemes:

1. **Limited resources:** MoLSA faces resource constraints in terms of funding, qualified staff and time allocated to M&E tasks, which impact the quality and frequency of M&E activities.
2. **Data quality and availability:** The availability of reliable and accurate data can be a challenge in Armenia. Frequently, Information Management Systems which are key in collecting relevant data on targeted groups are missing. Therefore, data is often incomplete or inconsistent, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of social policies and programmes. Ministries and public institutions do not prioritize routine monitoring programmes. Data is collected only when used for progress reporting instead of proactive planning for the data requirements when it comes to M&E activities.

3. **Limited capacity of staff to carry out M&E:** MoLSA faces challenges in terms of the technical capacity of staff to conduct M&E activities. This includes limitations in having sufficient qualified staff for data analysis and interpretation as well as in the design and implementation of evaluations. Furthermore, there is no specific code of ethics applied when it comes to the evaluation of policies targeted to vulnerable groups.
4. **Lack of stakeholder participation:** The engagement of stakeholders, including beneficiaries and civil society organisations in M&E activities are limited. This impacts the quality and relevance of M&E findings and limit opportunities for learning and improvement.
5. **Insufficient use of findings:** Even when M&E activities are conducted, findings may not be used effectively to inform policy and programme-related decision-making.

To overcome some of these challenges, the Armenian government has been taking efforts for improving their M&E capacity. The ministry together with UNICEF, for example, has conducted an evaluation of the introduction of integrated social systems in the country to assess how the Unified Social Services Centers (USSCs) have contributed to the quality of services for the vulnerable population. Here, the country faced challenges in developing and identifying target indicators as well as the use of counterfactual analysis. To address these challenges, the government has developed an M&E framework for social programmes, which includes specific guidelines for data collection, analysis, and reporting. The Armenian government has implemented a system of digitized administrative data collection for social programmes to further improve data quality and availability. This system allows for real-time monitoring of programme implementation and has improved the quality and timeliness of data. The government has also consolidated several social programmes to reduce duplication and improve service delivery. For example, the government has consolidated several cash transfer programmes into a single programme, which has reduced administrative costs and improved targeting of beneficiaries as outlined in the "National Strategy on Social Protection".

To promote stakeholder engagement, the government has involved beneficiaries and civil society organisations in the design and implementation of evaluations of social programmes. Moreover, Armenia is currently developing ethical guidelines for conducting qualitative studies with vulnerable groups. These efforts show the government's commitment to improving the effectiveness of social policies in Armenia through evidence-based decision-making and stakeholder engagement.

3 Status Quo of the M&E implementation in other countries

The Ukraine

M&E of social protection programmes in the Ukraine are carried out by various governmental and non-governmental institutions. There the Ministry of Social Policy and the Ministry of Economy are responsible for implementing and monitoring the social protection system. The Ministry of Social Policy carries out regular assessments of the effectiveness of social protection programmes and services, including social assistance, pension, and healthcare. As an external collaborator of M&E activities of the ministry, the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine conducts research and provides policy advice on social issues, including poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.

One of the main challenges identified by representatives concerning M&E in the Ukraine is the collection and the processing of statistical data, especially since Russia's military aggression against the Ukraine in February 2022. For instance, the 2021 Monitoring and Evaluation Report of the Ministry of Social Policy could only be prepared in October 2022. However, there have been calls for strengthening the institutional capacity for M&E and improving the coordination among different actors involved in recent years.² Monitoring is provided for a wide range of specific benefits such as for housing subsidies, child benefit, for children under guardianship, etc.³

The monitoring of current Social Protection Programmes in 2021 was provided following the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine „On Monitoring and Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Social Support for the Population Programmes” (as amended) and the Methods on Monitoring and Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Social Support for the Population Programmes. According to their monitoring and evaluation analysis, there has been a reduction in the number of beneficiaries under the main social programmes, which include childbirth benefit, benefits for single

2 The monitoring of the social protection programmes in 2021 was provided following the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine „On Monitoring and Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Social Support for the Population Programmes” (as amended) and the Methods on Monitoring and Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Social Support for the Population Programmes.

3 Other benefits: for children to single parents, for children whose parents avoid paying alimony, for low-income families, for persons with disabilities since childhood and children with disabilities, for child adoption benefit and for persons who live together with a person with a disability.

persons, children under guardianship, low-income families, and housing subsidies. However, two programmes saw an increase in the number of participants, namely child adoption benefit and assistance for persons with disabilities since childhood and children with disabilities. The most efficient programmes in terms of assistance to income ratio were the assistance to low-income families and assistance for children to single persons, indicating that these targeted programmes are better suited for the poor population.

North Macedonia

In North Macedonia, M&E of social protection programmes is carried out by various institutions, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the State Statistical Office, and the Agency for Electronic Communications. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, specifically the Social Protection Department and the Social Inspection Department, are responsible for designing and implementing social protection programmes and services. They carry out regular evaluations of the effectiveness of their programmes. The State Statistical Office collects and analyses data of various social and economic indicators, which are used to monitor and evaluate the impact of social policies. In addition, other stakeholders involved in evaluation processes are the Institute for Social Activities, local authorities, Centres of Social Work (CSW) at inter-municipality and municipality level, public and private social providers, service users and the Ombudsman. The latter implements an independent monitoring mechanism.

The North Macedonian government is currently implementing the National Strategy for Development of Social Protection 2022-2032 and the National Strategy for Deinstitutionalisation. Both plans follow the need for expanded monitoring within the ministries in charge of the implementation of policies.

Different from these policies, impact evaluation of active labour market policies (ALMP) is based on EU standards and those of the International Labour Organization (ILO). They also build on best practices from more developed and other former transition economies. The evaluation of ALMP is conducted every five years through counterfactual analysis and usage of administrative data since availability of personal data appears to be a challenge. Evaluations are also conducted by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) through the Employment and Social Affairs Platform 2 (ESAP2) funded by the EU as well as by independent researchers. Results are made publicly available.

However, there are concerns about the quality and reliability of the data collected for evaluation purposes. There is also a need for greater coordination among different actors involved in the M&E processes. In recent years, there have been

efforts to improve the institutional capacity for M&E, including through the development of a National Evaluation Policy and the establishment of a National Evaluation Council to coordinate and oversee M&E activities.

Moldova

Moldova has made efforts to develop an evaluation framework for social policies, but there are still significant challenges to evaluating the impact of social policies in the country. One of the biggest challenges in this area is the lack of a clear and comprehensive methodology for evaluating the impact of social protection programmes.

Evaluation is mostly conducted based on quantitative data and compared with the results of previous years. Qualitative assessment of the impact of policies is usually carried out only on certain policies with the support of NGOs and international partners (i.e., World Bank, UNDP).

Sweden

Sweden implements a dual system in the process of M&E of social services with a clear division of responsibilities between the government and the relevant agencies (Social Insurance Agency, Pensions Agency, Statistics Sweden, etc.). Furthermore, government offices can use appropriation directions, grants and assignments to steer the agencies. However, the agencies are autonomously deciding on how to implement M&E processes.

Three of the most distinct characteristics of the Swedish M&E architecture, identified by the representative of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs are the following: Firstly, there is a well-established framework for M&E with a clear organisational structure which enables independent evaluation. Secondly, the Swedish administrative record structure for capturing microdata of the population is used regularly by public authorities and collaborating external institutions such as universities and research institutions to conduct the evaluation of policies. Finally, there is sufficient high-qualified staff at the ministries and intense collaboration practiced with external researchers conducting M&E on social policy.

Ireland

Ireland has a solid system of M&E of social policies in place. The government evaluates policies on a regular basis to ensure their effectiveness and impact. The Department of Social Protection (DSP) aims to promote active participation and inclusion in society by providing income supports, employment services, and other

services. Their objective is to ensure that clients remain at the heart of their operations, with a focus on providing efficient and effective services while continuing to develop their staff, structures, and processes. In line with Pathways to Work 2021-2025, the national employment services strategy, the DSP is committed to conducting and publishing formal evaluations. These evaluations are supervised by the Labour Market Advisory Council, which ensures that the evaluations are comprehensive and of high quality. The DSP hopes to continue to improve their services and provide the best possible outcomes for their clients.

In addition, the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) was founded in March 2012 with the aim of expanding analytic capacities for evidence-informed policy making following the budgetary pressures created in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. IGEES's role is to build capacity across all departments of the ministries (recruitment process of 20-30 graduates per year; training of 230 of 40,000 civil servants). A key goal is to ensure that reviews and strategic analysis of public expenditure are informed by high-quality economic analysis. Ireland has also developed a set of indicators to track social protection policies such as poverty and income inequality. Furthermore, through public consultations and feedback mechanisms, the country has made efforts to engage citizens in the M&E processes. Important challenges identified by the Irish representative are setting up the required data infrastructure to conduct regular M&E activities, having sufficient highly qualified staff, and ensuring transparency of the evaluation process.

Switzerland

The experts from the Swiss Federal Social Insurance Office (FSIO) informed that their research and evaluation division comprises four women and four men, making up a total of 6.4 full-time equivalents (FTE). The Research and Evaluation division is responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating research projects, with an average of 20 projects per year. In addition, they provide advice to the FSIO on research and evaluation issues and ensure quality control of the research process within the office. The main areas of research for the FSIO include monitoring and analysing subsystems, evaluating measures and legislative changes, and examining sustainable financing and financial viability. The work of the division focuses on vulnerable groups. Through these efforts, the FSIO aims to inform policy decisions and contribute to the continuous improvement of the social security system.

In addition, the M&E of the National Poverty Platform (NAPA)⁴ is an important component of Switzerland's efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion. The

4 National Poverty Platform: <https://www.gegenarmut.ch/home>

platform includes a comprehensive set of indicators and metrics that track poverty rates and trends as well as the impact of poverty-reduction policies and interventions. NAPA has identified five thematic priorities, which include enhancing the participation of people affected by poverty, addressing the challenges faced by young people in education and employment, supporting the vocational qualification of adults affected by poverty, tackling family poverty, and addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty. NAPA has an allocated budget of approximately 2.5 million EUR to fund initiatives in the five thematic areas. The evaluation of NAPA consisted of a variety of methodologies such as explorative interviews, standardised online survey, qualitative interviews, focus groups, and validation of results with various NAPA bodies. It also involves a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organisations, and academic institutions, all of whom collaborate to ensure that Switzerland's poverty-reduction strategies are evidence-based, targeted, and effective. The report is available to the public.

Additional M&E systems of selected countries were presented by the European Centre and are summarised in the following.

USA: Development of M&E architecture in the pioneering case

In the United States of America (USA) evaluation activities are strongly linked to the executive branch and to the federal agencies in charge of different policies, such as the labour market, education, and health. Each federal agency has advanced and generously funded evaluation units within each branch (such as the Office of Policy Development and Research within the US Department of Housing and Urban Development or the Chief Evaluation Office within the US Department of Labor). As a vital characteristic of the US M&E architecture, in-house and outsourced evaluations can be financed by multiple federal, state, and local executive branches of government. Notably, the Federal Office of Management and Budget is mandated to ask for evaluation reports from each federal agency (Baiz et al., 2019).

The evaluation units in the executive branch conduct pilot and *ex ante* evaluations, whereas outsourced research often concentrates on *ex post* policy evaluations. The outsourcing of evaluation research in the USA is usually conducted by independent research institutes such as Rand Corporation, Brookings Institution or Urban Institute or universities. Moreover, the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) programme for the mobility of staff of public administration and research institutes and universities (placement of up to 4 years) allows making up for potential staff shortages in house qualified for evaluation and capacity building in the public institutions.

Lastly, the US M&E architecture puts great weight on the issue of transparency and public dissemination of results. It uses policy "Clearinghouses" in federal agencies to disseminate the results and key messages in a non-technical language.

United Kingdom, Germany, France: European M&E architecture case examples

In the *United Kingdom (UK)*, the rationale of M&E architecture started in the 1980s along with the "New Public Management"⁵ principle of the Blair government (Debu, 2019). In the UK, the National Audit Office (NAO) is at the centre of managing policy evaluations (with an annual budget of 73.3 million EUR equal to 64.5 million GBP). Other important institutions are the Scrutiny Unit, the Treasury, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, Behavioral Insights Team (2010) and the What Works Network⁶ (since 2013 with ten thematic centres) linked to the executive branch, conducting and disseminating evaluation findings on different policy topics. Works Centers also facilitate active dissemination and non-technical reports and publication of results. Financing of M&E in the UK is managed on a project basis. However, many highly qualified analysts are often employed in public administration. Like in the US system, strong links with independent researchers are promoted in the UK when outsourcing evaluation needs. There is no legal obligation to evaluate public policies (except for specific policies affecting businesses above a threshold of influence), but evaluations are "expected" by the public and the parliament (especially *ex post* reviews). The UK architecture is strong as there are multiple and codified systematic guidelines and standards for evaluation such as the Magenta Book⁷.

In *Germany*, the evaluation is overseen by the public administration in cooperation with independent research institutions at the federal level with relatively little involvement of the Bundestag (national parliament). The rationale for the development of the architecture parallels the UK and the "New Public Management" principles (Baiz and Bono, 2019). Since 2013, all public policy in Germany needs to be mandatorily evaluated *ex post*. Despite that publishing evaluation results is not an obligation, leading to relatively little effort to engage in public discussion and dissemination. Non-university independent research institutes at the federal level lead the policy evaluation efforts and are funded by public state and federal funds.

5 The «New Public Management» approach promotes efficiency and effectiveness in public policy making and a decision-making oriented to prioritise output. It is associated historically with fiscally cautious public spending orientation.

6 What Works Network: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network>

7 The Magenta Book: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book>

The German Evaluation Society (DeGEval)⁸ produces the methodological framework for the institutions involved in evaluating and designing public policies. It has a mission to standardise the guidelines for M&E.

France is the latest among the EU cases discussed here in terms of the development of its M&E architecture in the 2000s. The need for evaluation, however, has been promoted in the country by the parliament's internal regulations, which have put forward since 2014 the obligation to evaluate each new law after three years of its entry into force (Desplatz and Lacouette-Fougère, 2019). Requests for evaluation are mainly expressed by public administration offices and are conducted in-house. INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) and the statistical services of each ministry are the bodies conducting evaluations. Since 2013, the France Stratégie⁹, an autonomous organisation placed under the department of the Prime Minister, has been conducting many evaluations in the social policy domain. There is neither a centralised national institution for evaluation nor a central budget line for it. Each body requesting evaluation is responsible for funding it. Exchanges and cooperation with external researchers are practiced only minimally and the evaluation relies on the capacities of the public administration staff.

4 Major issues discussed during the policy review

During the policy review participating BB countries exchanged experiences about their M&E practices, the challenges hindering the effectiveness of M&E activities, and ways forward to strengthen their M&E architectures. The following section summarises the key points of these discussions.

4.1 Pressing challenges

Next to Armenia's challenges already mentioned in chapter 2, pressing challenges of some other participating countries discussed are presented below:

⁸ DeGEval – Evaluation Society: <https://www.degeval.org/en/home/>

⁹ France Stratégie: <https://www.strategie.gouv.fr/>

- In *North Macedonia*, the decentralisation of social policies at the local level involving municipalities is a major challenge when it comes to the coordination of M&E activities. The country is currently in the process of establishing a new system for data gathering, which will present integrated software on social protection for all vulnerable groups and social services. However, this system is planned to be functional only in 2024. In the meantime, the Ministry is using social protection software for social cash benefits. Furthermore, the fragmentation of child protection and social protection programmes creates difficulties in evaluating the impact of these programmes. Additionally, the relation and impact of programmes in other sectors such as health and education versus family or social protection are often overlooked. One of the major challenges in the country is the lack of funding allocated to M&E activities. Moreover, data availability of high-quality data is a challenge, as the data reported through information systems is not always up to date. Previously, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has conducted training on data collection and developed 24 routine monitoring indicators hoping for the Ministry staff to track progress on policy outcomes. However, the system cannot afford generating data for them. An information management system is missing, and this further complicates the collection of reliable data. The discussion pointed out that the M&E plan has not been used as expected.
- *Sweden* faces the significant challenge of ensuring interoperability between state information systems while simultaneously protecting individual data. To achieve this, it was discussed that Sweden could first establish uniform micro data capture procedures to facilitate evaluation. However, the legal aspects of data protection pose a challenge at the governmental level due to the strength of data protection rights. Despite this, Sweden recognises the potential benefits of utilising high-quality microdata while ensuring the protection of individual rights. Therefore, efforts to develop effective solutions continue, with economic and societal benefits in mind. Sweden is also facing a significant challenge in the use of surveys. As a result, even more information depends on administrative data.

4.2 The role of partnership

Participants discussed the role of partnership in strengthening and conducting M&E activities at all governance levels, from municipal to central levels, and between various ministerial and other governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Partnership can play a vital role in M&E of social protection programmes. Through partnerships stakeholders gain a broader perspective and deeper insight into the implementation of the programmes. This, in turn, helps in identifying gaps and designing appropriate interventions. Partnerships can also assist in improving data

quality and monitoring. Partner organisations may have better access to data sources, tools, and technologies, which help in improving data collection, analysis, and reporting. Additionally, partnerships can result in resource sharing, which reduces the costs of M&E. For example, partner organisations may have staff, expertise, or resources that can be shared, increasing the scope and quality of the M&E process. Moreover, partnerships help to increase accountability by involving multiple stakeholders in the M&E process. This results in a more comprehensive assessment of the programme's effectiveness and ensures that accountability is shared across different organisations. Partnerships also provide opportunities for learning and capacity building, with partner organisations sharing their skills, expertise, and knowledge within the evaluation team. Therefore, establishing strong partnerships is crucial to ensure effective and efficient M&E of social protection programmes, leading to better decision-making and improved outcomes.

The level of current partnership efforts and the challenges faced by countries varies across participating countries of the policy review. For instance, in the Ukraine, monitoring and evaluating social protection programmes is executed through a joint order involving the Ministry of Social Policy, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Finance, the State Statistics Service, and the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. In the country, cooperation with the Institute of Demography and Social Research provides an opportunity to develop materials on the effectiveness of different social support programmes for the population. The cooperation is carried out at national level. Furthermore, the institute investigates the extent to which receiving assistance reduces the level of poverty in the households of the recipients.

In Armenia, programme evaluations are conducted with support of international donors such as ILO and UNCEF. Currently, the MoLSA is conducting an evaluation of the pension systems in Armenia in collaboration with the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Representatives from Armenia provided the successful example of cooperation between institutions for student internships and instances where students request data for their individual studies.

4.3 Ways forward to improve M&E architecture

During the policy review participants engaged in discussions and exchanged opinions on how the presented practices could be applied in their respective countries to improve their M&E architectures.

Armenian participants stressed the importance of having a funding scheme for M&E to attract proficient M&E specialists to ministerial departments. To achieve this, designated budget lines are required, which solely focus on funding M&E activities. This has enabled the allocation of sufficient resources to attract and retain highly

qualified M&E professionals, which has improved the quality and effectiveness of M&E activities.

The Armenian delegation also suggested that the Magenta book in the UK¹⁰ serves as an exemplary model for developing a comprehensive M&E guidebook for social protection programmes in Armenia. Another important takeaway from the discussions was the separation of legal compliance audits from policy-level M&E practices and the need to follow the USA example in establishing strong links with academia. Armenia identified three main architectural practices suitable for implementation in Armenia which are those of the USA, France, and Sweden. Implementation of such models would also help overcome skill gaps in the offices of public institutions when it comes to conducting M&E activities.

Participants from *North Macedonia* recognised that diverse country contexts and specific characteristics of social protection systems exist. They stressed that some methodological tools could be applied in North Macedonia, especially the data collection practices (administrative, micro data) of Armenia regarding the case management in the child protection field. In terms of evaluation practices, the North Macedonian representatives stressed their preference to follow the Irish practice of evaluating the impact of social protection schemes and employment services. To be able to conduct such M&E practices the importance of strong systems of administrative and micro data collection have been reiterated.

The *Ukraine* is interested in involving additional partners such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations in evaluation practices of the government. Ukrainian participants suggested conducting satisfaction surveys with beneficiaries more frequently than every five years, potentially through NGOs that have better access to beneficiaries.

10 HMT Magenta Book (publishing.service.gov.uk):
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/879438/HMT_Magenta_Book.pdf

5 Key messages

Key message 1: Successful M&E strongly depends on the availability of reliable and complete data sources.

Both *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation of social policies depend on reliable data and population statistics and strong protocols for conducting qualitative evaluations. To ensure this, national statistics institutes must collaborate with the executive departments and the evaluation personnel to collect relevant data. Reliable administrative data, routine household surveys, and ad hoc thematic social surveys are promising ways of collecting micro data. For gathering qualitative and quantitative evidence, clear ethics and quality assurance guidelines are key. Countries should develop common national principles guaranteeing evaluations' independence, credibility and high quality.

Key message 2: Legal mandates assist in raising resources for evaluation.

The willingness of policymakers plays a crucial role in creating a fruitful climate for effective and routine evaluation activities. Implementing regular mandatory *ex post* evaluations have the potential to set norms for building a solid evidence-based policy-making infrastructure. Alternatively, several key policy areas can be determined as part of routine evaluations, depending on the resources available in the countries.

Key message 3: Overcoming the obstacle of missing highly qualified staff on M&E.

Employing highly qualified personnel for M&E activities is one of the most prevalent challenges. To overcome this, public authorities should establish partnerships with independent research institutions and universities to facilitate the exchange of know-how and skills. It is also necessary for highly qualified staff to have career options within the public sphere.

Key message 4: Transparency and independency are key components for ensuring successful M&E.

Successful M&E relies on transparency and on the independence of the actors conducting the tasks. Countries must choose reliable partners when outsourcing their evaluation activities and, when performed in-house, must ensure as much transparency as possible. Publication of evaluation reports is critical and should be followed in any event, along with evaluation plans accompanying public policies.

Key message 5: M&E architecture development depends on countries' needs.

Developing M&E architectures takes time and requires investments. There is a variety of ways to organise the institutions, the level of centralisation, funding schemes, actors involved and the routineness of M&E in social policies and there is no one-size-fits-all model of institutional design. The variation in M&E architectures available within European countries demonstrates that latecomers such as France have been able to build an infrastructure for effective M&E, learning from the best practices of the early-comers. Countries, thus, should approach building their M&E architecture based on their needs.

Key message 6: Partnership is needed to overcome gaps and implement M&E.

National public authorities need to establish collaborations with different research agencies, public departments, independent research institutions and universities, and private actors to either build or use the capacities available that are required for evaluation. Collaboration with international organisations and/or international NGOs is crucial for learning from other countries in building and improving the M&E architecture in their country. BB countries can benefit from evaluation in large projects where various actors are involved.

Key message 7: Dissemination of evaluation results.

Informed decision making relies on feedback loops between M&E actors and policymakers. Drafting non-technical reports of findings should become a routine task within the M&E process. Different stakeholders should be involved in the dissemination and implementation activities of the evaluations to maximise policy impact.

6 Conclusions

The discussions held during the policy review (online, 12-13 December 2022) highlighted that the architecture of M&E varies across the participating countries, with some countries relying solely on government agencies (ARM), while others involve both government and agencies (SE) or outsource M&E to external bodies or independent researchers (MKD). Creating comprehensive practices to evaluate the impact of social protection schemes and employment services requires adopting a realistic approach.

The collection of data is a major challenge across many participating countries next to the creation of integrated Information Management Systems while in parallel

ensuring data protection. There is a need recognised by participants for a standardised approach to check the quality of data as well as to adopt codes of conduct/ethics and draft comprehensive M&E guidebooks for Social Protection Programmes. It also is crucial to ensure transparency in how evaluation is done, the results obtained, and how they are followed-up, including the legal binding to publish evaluation results.

The discussions highlighted that to carry out successful M&E, it is important to ensure that staff is highly qualified and constantly upskilled. In cases where there is a shortage of staff or staff is untrained, outsourcing M&E services can be a solution, while in parallel keeping adequate in-house capacity. Furthermore, ad hoc, or ongoing funding can be established with external partners to ensure high-quality delivery, transparency, and independence in the M&E process. Enhancing and improving funding schemes to allocate resources for independent evaluations, whether in-house or outsourced, is necessary. An infrastructure for data sources should be set up, which enables evaluation such as administrative data, survey data, etc.

The policy review revealed that partnership plays a vital role in M&E. Establishing strong links with academia, as practised in the USA, and with Statistical Offices, such as experienced in ARM, is essential. Furthermore, participants confirm the importance of strengthening cooperation with international organisations, like the partnership between the Armenian MoLSA and UNICEF.

In conclusion, building an M&E architecture that fits to diverse regional contexts and needs (e.g. available social policy institutions and services) requires mandatory policy evaluations with necessary methodological expertise, data, and skills made available. M&E results need to be transformed into actionable and non-technical language. Results should be made available to all stakeholders in any event. M&E should not be limited to an *ex post* activity but be a constant discussion as part of the design of social policy and programmes.

7 References

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