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► ILO Evaluation

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This evaluation has been conducted according to ILO's evaluation policies and procedures. It has undergone quality control by the ILO Evaluation Office.

► Project background

Scope of the project

The 13th Five-Year Social and Economic Development Plan (2016-2020) and the China's National Plan to Implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established the twin goals of eradicating extreme poverty and of ensuring universal social protection. On the part of the European Union (EU), the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, emphasises reinforcing dialogue on social policies, promoting social security and cohesion, full and quality employment, occupational safety and health, and decent work.

At the date of the signing of the new project, China and the EU had collaborated with the goal of ensuring universal social protection for more than fifteen years. The EU-China Social Security Project and the EU-China Social Protection Reform Project were respectively implemented in 2006-2011 and 2014-2018. They focused on building actuarial capacity and developing policy recommendations for reforms of the pension schemes, on social assistance reform, and on the financial sustainability of the social security system.

The "Improving China's Institutional Capacity towards Universal Social Protection" (referred to as "the Project") is a 2.300.000 Euros funded agreement between China and the EU under its Partnership Instrument (PI). The EU Partnership Instrument is charged with the task of promoting cooperation and alliance-building on issues of EU-own or mutual interest with third countries and on challenges of global concern¹. The Project is implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) with a duration of 36 months. It builds on the 2 previous projects mentioned above and expands to new areas of collaboration.

The Project has the following objectives, outputs and activities (from project's PRODOC):

► Project objectives, outputs and activities

Overall objective: Strengthen China's institutional capacity to improve its social protection in terms of extended coverage and adequacy and financial sustainability of pension schemes, in support of the realisation of international standards and the EU 2020 strategy.

Specific objective 1: Contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits

Outputs

OP1.1 - Policy recommendations on ratification and application of C102 and improving adequacy & financial sustainability of the Chinese pension schemes formulated in consultation with the government and social partners

OP 1.2 - Actuarial capacity of the MOHRSS and its provincial branches strengthened

OP1.3 – National experts and policy makers have improved their knowledge on the relevance of C102 and long-term planning of pension schemes, including multi-pillar options

OP1.4 - SPF & ILS social security advocated towards the public audience in China

Activities

A1.1 - Organize events to promote technical understanding, awareness and knowledge about C102, international good practices and challenges in the application of C102, old-age benefits and related actuarial principles

¹ <https://pimap.eu/>

A1.2 - Provide technical assistance to the government of China in improving actuarial analysis and legal research

A1.3 - Promote public understanding about social protection floor and ILS related to social security

Specific objectives 2: Contribute to the extension of the coverage of social security to workers in non-standard forms of employment, with a special attention to migrant workers and women

Outputs

OP2.1 - Options for the revision of the design of social security schemes and the improvement of operational and administrative procedures in support of universal coverage are identified and validated with the government and social partners

OP2.2 - Assessment of China's social security coverage and measures to close coverage gaps and improve portability are carried out in partnership with the government and social partners for submission to policy makers

OP2.3 - Government and social partners have improved their knowledge of international good practices and challenges in extending social protection coverage, especially for workers in non-standard forms of employment, rural migrant workers and women

OP2.4 - Promotional materials on access to social security for workers in NSFE, rural migrant workers and women are made available to key stakeholders

Activities

A2.1 - Organize events for governments and/or social partners to discuss and agree on measures towards universal social security coverage

A2.2 - Conduct research/assessments of social security coverage for workers in non-standard employment

A2.3 - Disseminate communication products on social security for workers in non-standard employment

It encompasses the following activities:

- Technical assistance to MOHRSS technical departments
- National technical dialogues
- Training workshops
- International high level policy dialogues and international seminars
- Development of policy technical notes
- Research combining international good practices, particularly from the EU member states, with national specific research elements
- Study visits to increase the knowledge of EU member states' experience

Project's governance arrangements

The Department of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) is the national counterpart of the project. The Social Insurance Administration (SIA) is the executive department designated by MOHRSS to be responsible for the project's implementation.

The Project is governed by a steering and a management committees:

- The Project Steering Committee (PSC) is composed of ILO and EU representatives and it is tasked with strategic oversight of the project implementation, including reporting on project progress in accordance with ILO-EU PI.
- The Project Management Committee (PMC) is composed of representatives of ILO and MOHRSS and aims to approve the project work plan and review the project's progress.

The PMC shows a wide composition and representation of participants from headquarters and ten provinces (Annex E). By the end of 2020, two PSC meetings and two PMC meetings were organized.

The project hold regular informal meetings with EUD (once a month or prior to key events) to discuss project progress and opportunities for joint collaboration and exchange. In addition, a project management coordination team was established with representatives from MOHRSS International Department, Social Insurance Administration (SIA) and ILO. It meets regularly (at least once a month and sometimes twice a month) to take operational decisions regarding the implementation of projects' activities. All meetings are followed by memos of decisions taken.

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the project's relevance and delivery

The COVID-19 outbreak has led to a situation of social lockdown and economic disruption, in particular in the first half of 2020. Workers in non-stand forms of employment, migrant workers and women were amongst the most affected by the crisis worldwide because of the lack or insufficiency of established social security measures. In this context, the COVID-19 pandemics has increased the relevance of the project's objectives and focus in the following ways:

1. The preoccupations of the Chinese government at the end of 2020 stressed the importance of assisting the most vulnerable to access social protection. China responded rapidly to contain the epidemic. It offered rapid health protection to COVID-19 affected individuals. It also helped sustain the economy and the employment levels such that unemployment rates rapidly reached pre crisis levels. But the government also highlighted that many vulnerable workers were left insufficiently protected².
2. The necessity to respond to COVID-19 delayed some of the national policy initiatives envisaged in the medium term plans, for example the constitution of a national pension pool and the long envisaged retirement reforms. These are being considered no in the new five-year plan (2021-2025). Furthermore, the governments' response to maintain and further lower social security contributions in order to sustain the economic recovery and protect jobs has worsened the long-term financial sustainability of social security. These circumstances stress the continued importance to cooperate with MOHRSS in the areas of social security pension reforms and financial sustainability.
3. The pandemic accelerated the digital technology transformation of social security administration and services and reinforced the realization that they are critical to respond to ongoing changes in the future of work involving remote and automated access to social security. As planned, the Project will assist the government in taking stock of the rapid digital transformation which occurred unevenly across the country and will allow Social Insurance Administration to harness its potential for better and more efficient service delivery in a more strategic way.

From July 2020 to September 2020, the project was unable to realise domestic travels to conduct projected surveys and focus groups in Zhejiang, Sichuan and Guangdong Provinces and to realise face-to-face meetings in Beijing. International travels were also cancelled. In that context, the Project reviewed the work plan with the EU and MOHRSS and developed contingency measures to adjust some of the activities. The contingency measures included the implementation of:

- an innovative online training of MOHRSS actuaries with International Training Centre – ILO (ITCILO)
- five online e-coaching sessions for MOHRSS actuaries
- 4 policy exchanges between policy officials and academics of EU and China through zoom webinars on:
 - Relative poverty indicators and social security policies
 - Institutional constraints for the extension of social insurance coverage to informal economy workers

² Emphasis was put on the growing number who found work in platform industries as the crisis unfolded. New regulations sought to improve the ability of migrant workers to access and their level of protection under unemployment insurance. Some provinces announced new pilots to extend employee pensions to flexible and migrant workers. A guiding opinion from the State Council published in 2021 indicated that priority would be given to strengthen the employment injury coverage of food delivery, online car-hailing and instant delivery services² and that a new regulatory framework would be imminent.

- Social security of platform workers in China
- International experiences and standards in monitoring the employment and social security coverage of workers in the platform economy
- diverse knowledge/communication products: 6 issues of Policy Monitor, 1 working paper, 3 technical notes, 3 research briefs, 1 policy brief, 1 fact sheet, 3 podcasts, 2 issues of Project Newsletter,

Moreover, despite some delays, during the period being evaluated, the project has:

- Finalized a study on the compatibility of policy and legal dispensation in China with the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and organized a technical discussion.
- In collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security (CALSS) conducted three field missions to Zhejiang, Sichuan and Guangdong Provinces, one national research seminar. It implemented a questionnaire survey of 3, 000 non-standard workers; and realised the draft report on assessment of China's social security coverage.
- In collaboration with the Zhejiang University, completed a needs assessment report and a draft outline, which will be used for the development of Training of Trainers guidebook on actuarial principles and techniques.
- Published a call for expression of interest for the study on the digital transformation of social insurance administration and services to ensure universal social security coverage in China
https://www.ilo.org/beijing/about-the-office/WCMS_775469/lang--en/index.htm
- In collaboration with the ITCILO designed a mixed online and face-to-face 'Hackathon on Educating and Enabling Access for Platform workers to Social Security'

► Project's evaluation

Background

The ILO considers that evaluation is an integral part of the implementation of technical cooperation activities. Evaluations are therefore carried out for all ILO projects with the aims of accountability, learning and planning, as well as knowledge creation. In accordance with the ILO-EU agreement, two evaluations are required during the project implementation, one at the mid-term and the other at the end of the Action. Considering the impact of COVID pandemic on feasibility of evaluation and its implications on implementation of project activities, the mid-term evaluation was scheduled three months after the mid-point of the project life, from **April to June 2021**.

Given the size and funding of the Project, under ILO regulations, the mid-term evaluation has been agreed to be an internal evaluation managed by the Project team and conducted by an internal ILO certified evaluator, supported by an independent national evaluator. The selected evaluator did not participate in the design, management nor supervision of the Project, thus it acts in an independent manner. The evaluator carried out the ILO EVAL Internal Evaluator Certification Program in 2019.

The mid-term evaluation was conducted to review the project performance, using the OECD/DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability). The evaluation also examined cross-cutting concerns including how gender has been effectively mainstreamed in the project design and implementation. The findings and recommendations of the evaluation are expected to enhance learning within the ILO and among key stakeholders and guide the project team in adjusting if necessary the project's approach and scope for implementation during the project's remaining period.

Purpose

The purpose of the mid-term evaluation is to review the project **progress, achievements and challenges**, inform the ILO, project partners and the donor of key lessons learned, and propose recommendations for improvement. Specifically, the mid-term evaluation focused on the following aspects:

- (1) Assessing the project's design and activities, its implementation strategy and approaches, the challenges and how these challenges are addressed; and to what extent these contribute to the achievement of project objectives.
- (2) Drawing key findings and lessons learned and proposing improvements and adjustments needed to ensure that the project remains relevant to the needs of the target groups and contributes to knowledge development.
- (3) Assessing the impact of COVID on the project implementation and how the project responded to mitigate that impact.

Scope

The evaluation covered the period from **July 2019 to March 2021**, to create an accurate and comprehensive picture of the project implementation, generating findings on evaluation criteria and documenting good practices and lessons learned. The evaluation integrated gender equality and non-discrimination as a cross-cutting concern throughout its methodology and all deliverables including the final report.

Clients

The clients and users of this mid-term evaluation include the ILO project team, management and specialists at country, regional and headquarters levels, donor, MOHRSS and other project partners in China.

Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation reviewed the project's implementation against the OECD DAC established evaluation criteria, especially:

- **Relevance and strategic fit of the Project:** Is the intervention aligned with the strategies of ILO, MOHRSS and EU?
- **Coherence:** how well does the intervention fit?
- **Effectiveness and Project's progress and of the management arrangements:** is the intervention achieving its objectives?
- **Efficiency:** How well are resources being used?
- **Sustainability:** Will the benefits last?

A detailed analytic framework of questions and sub-questions can be found in Annex B.

▶ Methodology

The evaluation was carried out with a mixed methods approach, which included two phases: the documentary review and the collection of information from the main stakeholders. The purpose of using a mixed methods approach was to compile enough information to support triangulation of results.

The documentary review included a documentary analysis of the project files, including, but not limited to: documents related to the design and implementation of the project, project reports, project products and activity documents, as well as communication and visibility elements.

The collection of information from consultations with the main actors. Due to the restrictions imposed by the health emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the collection of information was carried out 100% remotely, via Zoom and Teams interviews. 26 individuals were interviewed. Interviews were carried out individually and in group.

The gender distribution in the interviews was almost even with 14 females, 12 males participating in the review.

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with the ILO standard policies and procedures and complied with the evaluation norms and followed ethical safeguards. The evaluation addressed the overall ILO evaluation criteria as defined in the ILO Policy Guidelines for results-based evaluation: principles, rationale, planning and managing for evaluations (4th edition 2020). The evaluation also took into account the gender issues as guided by the ILO guidance note 3.1: Integrating gender equality in monitoring and evaluation (3rd version 2019).

The ILO adheres to the United Nations system evaluation norms and standards as well as to the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards.

► Main findings

Relevance and strategic fit of the Project

The relevance of the Project's design for tripartite stakeholders

The evaluation based on interviews and documentary evidence, finds that the Project formulation took into consideration the needs of the MOHRSS. At the stage of project design, the project objectives and activities were defined in articulation with MOHRSS departments through various dialogues on the government's and social partners needs and priorities. The project was officially launched in presence of the Vice Minister of MOHRSS, Mr You Jun and the Ambassador of the European Union in China, Mr Nicolas Chapuis which shows the endorsement to the project at the highest levels. The PMC composition includes representatives of MOHRSS international department, SIA and provincial governments. These different levels of government have been represented in the two PMC meetings so far and according to the minutes of the meetings, they have endorsed the yearly workplans and confirmed the relevance of its proposed deliverables to MOHRSS. The government interviewees stressed the good project governance systems in place that have ensured that the Projects' work plan is dynamically aligned with MOHRSS needs and priorities. They also praised the regular operational coordination between the Project and the Ministry that allows to monitor and adapt the project implementation to rapid changing circumstances, within the projects' logical framework.



China has built the largest social security network in the world. But like other countries it is now confronted with challenges including the impact of ageing in the long term balance of social security funds and the expansion of the digital economy. This project will strengthen international exchanges between EU, China and ILO to resolve some of these challenges."

► Mr YOU Jun, Vice Minister of MOHRSS, Launch of the project, Beijing 18 December 2019
https://www.ilo.org/beijing/information-resources/public-information/WCMS_732755/lang--en/index.htm

In the same way, the evaluation could also assess that the needs of the China Enterprise Confederation (CEC) were adequately considered. The CEC is a member of the PMC and took part in its second meeting. Under project output 2.2, a questionnaire was applied to companies to assess the employers' perspectives on the social protection coverage of flexible workers. Conversations were held with representatives of platform and non-platform companies in Zhejiang, Sichuan, Guangdong and Beijing (Directors of Human Resources and Product managers) and with representatives of platform companies at national level, with the aim of including the employers' perspective on the same issues. The evaluation interviews showed that the project globally contributed to employers understanding of the current and future challenges of the social security system and the options for coverage of platform workers and workers in non-standard forms of employment. The employers' representatives welcome further knowledge sharing processes and activities planned by the project.

According to the documentary review, worker representatives were consulted in several occasions from the inception to different stages of the Project implementation. Like the CEC, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is member of the PMC and has been invited to its two meetings. It has been invited to participate in the Project's events and has taken an active role in some of them. For example, ACFTU participated in the Employment Injury Seminar, on 27 April 2021, aimed at discussing regulations for the protection of platform workers under employment injury insurance. ACFTU contributed to the programme as discussant with two representatives and provided important feedback to improve the

recommendations. Moreover, under objective 2 (Output 2.2), the project undertook a survey of 3,145 Chinese workers in non-standard forms of employment (NSFE). The survey aimed at understanding workers' views vis-à-vis their current social security coverage, their needs and their ability to pay for social security. Focus groups and direct face-to-face interviews were held with platform workers in Guangdong Province. Despite this, however, the evaluation was unable to directly assess with representatives of workers if they considered that their needs were adequately considered because ACFTU was not available for the interview.

The documentary review showed that the needs of other relevant ministries were also taken into consideration when designing the Project. According to the PRODOC, the Project has the potential to support the achievement of the goals of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) by strengthening the coordination and development of social security. The project can support the objectives of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) with recommendations on financial sustainability of social security and on the financial governance of the social security funds including related to investments. The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCAOC): the project supports the goals of the Ministry in what refers to policies and standards on social protection floors and its linkages to social security system.

In practice, the Project contributed to the Annual Conference on Social Assistance held in Shanghai in 2019 at the joint invitation of the MCAOC and UNICEF, with a presentation on Social Protection Floors. The Project published a Working Paper on the Linkages of the objective of reducing relative poverty and social protection policy, a cross cutting policy concern between MCAOC and MOHRSS. The Project organised and moderated a one day UN Dialogue on COVID Recovery with presentations from Ministries of Health, Civil Affairs and Finance on the branches of social security under their supervision. The Project held several meetings with the National Healthcare Security Administration (NHSA) to discuss standards related to national health insurance and maternity insurance. The Project produced 1 technical note on maternal health insurance: international practices and current situation in China. The project's manager moderated a Global UN Policy seminar on Health and Sickness policies to combat pandemic and wrote a joint Paper with ILO colleagues on the topic which was published under International Policy Center UN Policy Focus Magazine issue June 2021. 1 Policy brief and 2 podcasts were produced on sickness insurance standards and their use during the crisis. Officials from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) were involved in Project's meetings. The head of the labour market survey unit at NBS and several members of the NBS participated in a dialogue on monitoring the employment, labour and social security situation of workers in flexible and platform work realized by the project.

In short, as per the evidence reviewed, ACFTU and CEC have through their participation in Project activities, contributed to forthcoming policy development processes, through their technical advice and recommendations. MOHRSS, SIA and other ministries and government agencies have also benefited from the project's outputs.

The Project's contribution to policies at international, regional and national levels

The Project was created under the ILO's Project and Budget (P&B) 2018-2019 and was aligned to its Outcome 3: *"creating and extending social protection floors, especially on improving and modernizing national protection strategies, promoting gender equality and non-discrimination, increasing constituent capacities and on expanding constituent's knowledge-base for effective implementation of social protection systems"*. The Project directly contributes towards the achievement of SDG targets 1.3, 3.8, 5.4, 8.5 and 10.4. It directly contributes to the ILO's flagship programme on building social protection floors for all, which is implemented up to 2030 and intends to support the development and dissemination of knowledge on Social Protection.

The Project was designed with a great potential of contributing to P&B 18-19 Outcome 2 on the ratification and application of international labour standards. The Project continues to be relevant vis-à-vis P&B 2020-2021, being directly related to Outcome 8: comprehensive and sustainable social protection for all. It contributes to Output 8.1, in what refers to promoting the ratification of Convention 102 and other up-to-date social security standards and on strengthening the capacity of tripartite constituents to participate in national policy debates on social protection as it promotes the implementation of the ILO's Convention 202 and Recommendation 204.

During the 108th session of the International Labour Conference (ILC), June 2019, the ILO adopted the Future of Work initiative, which calls on developing and enhancing social protection systems. The call for strengthening the capacities of

all people to benefit from the opportunities of a changing world of work through universal access to comprehensive and sustainable social protection is mentioned in the Future of Work report and subsequent declaration. The Project's Specific Objective 2 on the extension of the coverage of social security to workers in non-standard forms of employment, with special attention to migrant workers and women contributes to this realize the ILC's call and declaration.

With relation to the regional ILO strategies, the Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2020, signals the challenges of informal and migrant workers toward their own social security, pointing out that the great majority of informal workers in Asia remain outside or within limited social and health protection systems. The Project's work in the thematic area has strong potential for contributing to the ILO's Asia Pacific goals of improving social protection systems.

The Project is directly linked to achieving the goals of ILO's Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP 2016-2020) for China especially Priority 2 on promoting and extending social protection in and out of the workplace and it also promotes the achievement of the UNDAF's (United National Development Assistance Framework's) priority areas 1 and 3. The new ILO DWCP covers the period 2021-25. It will be aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for the People's Republic of China, signed 18 August 2020 for the period 2021-2025. The UNSDCF has three pillars: People and Prosperity, Planet and Partnership. ILO's DWCP is reflected in Strategic Pillar 1: People and Prosperity. Its Outcome 2 Output 2.3 states that with *UN will provide analytical inputs and technical assistance to strengthen China's capacity to provide access to adequate and high quality social protection mechanisms and services for all people in China throughout the life-course*. Specifically, the output's narrative indicates that UN analytical and technical assistance work will inform national and subnational decisions on improving the basic medical insurance system, pension schemes, unemployment insurance, work-related injury insurance, social assistance systems, support and caring for children, women and elderly people left behind in rural areas, as well as rehabilitation services and full social inclusion for persons with disabilities. The UN will work with the Government to develop ways of providing adequate protection to workers in informal employment, including gig workers, care workers and migrant workers.

At a national level, the Project provides support to the achievement of the objectives established in the 13th Five Year Plan (2016-2020) of China and the new 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025). In respect to the former, it contributes to improve social benefits and coverage of social protection, as well as supporting the development of solutions to tackle the priorities outlined in the 13th five-year plan for Human Resources and Social Security Development:

- Expand social protection coverage
- Improve the design of social security systems
- Provide appropriate-level protection (adequacy of benefits)
- Improve financial sustainability of funds

The 14th Plan has reiterated the objective to enhance the social security system. According to the outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives, through the Year 2035, China will take small steps to raise the retirement age. The five-year plan proposes vastly expanding the middle-income population, i.e. elevating migrant workers' status and incomes. Hukou barriers will be lowered and urban social services—above all social security, healthcare and education—made more accessible.

The Project's vis-à-vis its partners' priorities, capacities and expectations

All Project partners mentioned that the approaches taken by the Project are in line with their organization's priorities, capacities and expectations.

The Project contributes to the application of the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, with emphasises reinforcing dialogue on social policies, promoting social security and cohesion, full and quality employment, occupational safety and health, and decent work. The theme of social security coverage of workers in non-standard forms of employment has become more prominent in Europe over the past two years. In 2019, the European Council adopted the Council Recommendation on Access to social protection in which European Member States are recommended to ensure that all workers and the self-employed can adhere to social protection schemes. In the scope of the ILO EU CHINA Project, the head of EU Indicators' Sub-Group (ISG) of the European Social Protection Committee shared with an audience

comprising officials from MOHRSS including CALSS and a team of the CHINA National Bureau of Statistics Labour Market Research Unit, the principles and goals of this Recommendation and on the monitoring framework piloted in the EU in 2020 that tracks progress towards the attainment of those goals. In 2021, the European Commission launched the second-stage consultation of European social partners on how to improve the working conditions for people working through digital labour platforms. This followed the first-stage consultation, which was open from 24 February to 7 April 2021, to which the Commission received replies from 14 EU-wide social partners. Based on the replies received, the European Commission concluded that there was a need for further EU action to ensure basic labour standards and rights to people working through platforms. The EU CHINA Project provides fertile ground for cooperation in an area where China is also making very significant progress. The Project has promoted the exchange of practices with presentations given to Chinese audiences by the European Labour Authority on the EU Wide Campaign to Tackle Undeclared Work, and provided room for sharing online practices from Europe on covering platform workers and self-employed by European academics and officials from Spain, Sweden, Netherlands. The project also produced case studies of EU countries that have good practices in extending social security coverage to platform workers.

► Joint Learning on digital transformation of social security

The policy and practice of social security digital governance offers wide scope for exchanges of practices between EU and CHINA. The COVID 19 crisis has highlighted the critical importance of digital technology to facilitate the remote information and claiming of social security benefits and to ensure payments to workers during crises and in the future of work. The Project has partnered with the International Social Security Association (ISSA) and the United Nations University-EGOV Unit (UNU-EGOV), to provide MOHRSS with top expertise in this domain. This strengthens an already existing MoU between ISSA and UNU-EGOV to promote knowledge development on social security digital transformation. MOHRSS is vice president of ISSA Information Technology Commission, which is headed by the National Social Security Institute of Spain. This partnership has developed a deep learning track consisting of **five joint learning events** targeted specifically to the MOHRSS Information Centre and Social Insurance Administration officials. Based on the preliminary exchanges, international consultants will be able to better understand the outstanding queries and learning needs. They will develop research questions to address to practitioners internationally in order to have a collection of practices that responds to MOHRSS' needs, degree of digital maturity and expectations.

International practices will draw greatly on EU experiences. For example, ISSA and ILO, through EU CHINA Project are cooperating in view of benefiting MOHRSS pilot provinces in this project of exposure to good practices in Estonia in May 2022. Furthermore, at the launch of the initiative, EU's Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI) was highlighted. EESSI is an IT system helping social security institutions exchange social security information across Europe. EESSI speeds up exchanges between social security institutions on cases related to different branches of social security (such as, family, old-age pension, sickness benefits, accidents at work etc.). It allows them to handle individual cases more quickly and to make calculation and payment of benefits faster. The implementation of the EESSI in Europe into its operation runs from 2019 to 2022. It follows the objectives of Europe's Digital Decade that sets out the objectives, principles and measures to support the digital transformation of public administrations, achieve cross-border interoperability and facilitate the interaction with citizens. The ongoing experience is extremely relevant for CHINA's own efforts to better coordinate its fragmented social security system through digital technologies.

Counterparts from MOHRSS regret that the COVID-19 pandemic disturbed the plans of the Project to further exchanging knowledge through in-site visits to Europe and China. Being able to undertake these visits, during the remaining timeframe of the Project, would further enhance the EU-China knowledge sharing exercise, including the opportunity for China to exchange its experience with EU partners.

The evaluation conducted a survey in order to assess the satisfaction of direct beneficiaries with the project's approaches by selecting one activity as an example. The Project implemented e-coaching sessions on actuarial policy and practice. Their aim was to improve the understanding of actuarial models used for the valuation of social security pension systems, improve data management and assumption setting processes, actuarial reporting and application of actuarial techniques,

by introducing techniques and case studies. The participants were asked to prepare responses to pre-session exercises on the topic of each session. They were also asked to formulate questions in advance to help the experts develop the contents of their presentations and animate the group discussions during the meetings. Sessions targeted about ten participants each selected by MOHRSS from central level and different Provinces. During the period of review for the present evaluation, the Project had undertaken 3 e-coaching sessions in October 2020, December 2020 and March 2021 with a participation of 25 actuaries working for the Chinese Social Insurance Administration. The survey was sent to 25 individuals out of which 16 participants completed the questionnaire, some of these participants participated in more than one session of the e-coaching.

Some participants indicated that the training broadened their perspective of the function and the role of the actuary in the social insurance system. 81% of participants stated that the e-coaching session was a new approach, while about 19% had already participated in similar trainings. More than half of the respondents (56%) mentioned that the knowledge acquired through the e-coaching was relevant to their work, while 31% said it was relevant, and only 12% mentioned the content was not directly related to their work. The survey showed that the content of the training met the knowledge and skills level of most of the participants. 87% of respondents agreed that the content was very consistent with their expectations.

Respondents indicated they considered applying the acquired knowledge as follows:

- When writing actuarial reports for a specific district, especially with assumptions and sensitivity analyses
- When establishing a pension review mechanism
- To improve their methods of analysis
- To enhance their data processing methods
- To systematic summarize and analyse social insurance data
- To evaluate and improve one's work

Participants gave important recommendations to improve the e-coaching methodology for future editions. They requested to be exposed to more international case studies and practical experiences. At the same time, some participants said they needed more comparative information on the applicability of different methods of data collection and utilization for actuarial studies in the policy and institutional environment of China. Participants expressed the need for more targeted, in-depth and detailed teaching. They expressed the need to complement online with offline face-to-face communication. Some respondents expressed an interest in more advanced actuarial methods. Finally, a few participants recommended the offer of more personalized support to individual problems and needs.

The relevance of the Project in the context the COVID-19 pandemic

Although designed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the relevance of the Project continued in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviewees in the evaluation, especially those from International Organizations, agreed that this context exacerbated the importance of well-established social protection systems to enable societies to be more resilient.

At the same time, ILO and the MOHRSS highlighted that the objective of the Project to build social security institutional capacity, goes beyond the response to the current conjuncture and the shocks that resulted from it. The Project aims to achieve lasting, not temporary impacts only. Notwithstanding, the crisis demonstrated the need of including workers in non-standard forms of employment in social protection. In response to the pandemic, China actively promoted flexible employment as a source of jobs creation. In this regard, the Project launched new research and promoted policy recommendations aimed at developing a social protection system that responds to the needs of workers in non-standard forms of employment, with attention to women and migrants. As a result, the Project generated innovative approaches in terms of methodology (for example the survey questionnaires applied) and in terms of recommendations, that can be further replicated or used as references in the region and beyond.

The Project jointly led with UNICEF office in China and the UNDP office in China the organisation of a UN Policy Dialogue on Social Protection³. The dialogue focused on the sustainable recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic and on building an inclusive social protection system. Experts from around the world shared the international experience and learned from the efforts in China on strengthening social protection for the groups hardest hit by the pandemic. The Dialogue noted the recurrence of major health and natural crises over the past decades, and recommended to further build the shock responsiveness of social protection systems, through a diversity of instruments including the extension of health and unemployment protection.

Finally, the Project adjusted some activities and timelines. Some activities, which were envisaged to take place in a face-to-face format were converted to online. Study visits and missions of international experts were suspended, which delayed other activities of the Project. Nevertheless, the Project also turned the challenges caused by the pandemic into various learning opportunities, proposing innovative ways of capacitating stakeholders and communicating its results (i.e. the e-coaching, production of webinars and podcasts, mixed online – face to face hackathon).

Coherence

The Project's problem identification

The Project's problem identification is coherent with the Government of China, the EU and the ILO's shared commitment to promote the decent work agenda globally. The project provides a platform for cooperation towards a sustainable and inclusive demand driven growth model.

The problem identified reflects national needs and development objectives in the field of social protection established in the 13th Five-Year Plan, and the 14th Five-Year Plan. In these policy frameworks, social protection is considered, to be an enabler of economic transformation in China. The country has achieved significant progress towards building a comprehensive social protection system and extending coverage since the Social Insurance law of 2010. **This Project builds on the successes achieved this far by supporting its social security's institutional capacity at regulatory, policy and administrative levels.** At the regulatory level, it provides evidence to the country in order to help further align the laws and practice in the country with international standards. At the policy level it develops knowledge on innovative social protection strategies to cover workers in non-standard forms of employment. At the administrative level, the project contributes to make social security more robust by making recommendations towards a digital transformation strategy and a data governance plan for a coherent, robust and responsive social security system.

These three areas of action also reflect priorities at the European Union level, which offers significant room for policy exchange. On the side of the EU, national pensions systems are reviewed from time to time, to ensure continued adequacy and sustainability in the medium term. The EU published in 2021, a new European wide paper on Pensions and Adequacy survey. The project assists with monitoring the regulatory changes in pension systems in the EU and in China to promote mutual learning. At the same time, new laws and regulations are being adopted in some countries, often as a result of court cases, that reinforce the legal and social security protection of workers in platform economy. The Council Recommendation COM/2018/0132 final - 2018/059 on "access to social protection for workers and the self-employed" adopted in 2019 has established the policy framework for collaboration between Member States, to further improve the legal and institutional mechanisms to expand social security. During 2021, European wide consultations are ongoing on establishing a European wide cooperation initiative in this field. Finally, the EU's [Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information](#) (EESSI) already mentioned and the [Europe's Digital Decade](#) promoting digitalisation of public administration are policy initiatives unfolding in the EU that are relevant for China's social security administration.

³ <http://www.un.org.cn/special/SocialProtection.html>

The Project’s theory of change and logical framework

In a broad sense, the Project design is appropriate and coherent with the results it intends to achieve. The Project is also designed in a coherent and clear logical framework and a very complete theory of change (TOC). Risk and assumptions were also listed as part of the Project design.

The Project’s TOC is well-linked to the Project implementation plan and the assumptions made are valid. However, the change represented in the TOC, could be considered relatively ambitious for a Project of this size. Thus, it is recommended to have intermediary targets. Some suggestions for improvement are listed below:

Current text	Recommendation
“MOHRSS and Social Insurance Administration will be more capable to monitor social security coverage of non-standard workers at provincial and national levels” in the project intervention part	Should be moved to the “then” part., as an expected change as a result of the project intervention.
Enabling factors	The enabling factors need to exist to allow the change to happen. They should therefore be embedded in the risk and assumption matrix (to be reflected in a revised LOGFRAME of future phase of the project if needed).
By end 2022, women and men with irregular social protection coverage, especially workers in new forms of employment, migrant workers and women will benefit from extended social security coverage due to the following.	The concept of “extended social security coverage” should be explained. An approximate number or percentage of women and men that can be target, would make the expected change more evaluable.

The evaluation finds that the following aspects could improve the Logical Framework of the Project. Indicators mentioned in the log frame should demonstrate that data gathered is disaggregated by gender, which is not the case in the 2019.03.01 version of the document. This could match the EU PIMS (Partnership Instrument Monitoring System) indicators on gender, which are already being used by the Project on its reporting. More qualitative indicators could also be added, beyond satisfaction with learning to be able to report the changes within the system and the use of the knowledge generated and capacity developed.

Concerning the risks and assumptions mentioned within the Project document, all are coherent with the Project’s thematic and area of work. The evaluation recommends to better embed enabling factors in this matrix. In addition, within the current context and with the objective of institutional learning, the evaluation suggests a revision of the risks and assumptions matrix, which could reflect the arising challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and forecasted changes in the labour market.

The ILO’s crosscutting policy drivers: ILS, social dialogue, greening and gender equality and no discrimination

The evaluation finds that the Project is aligned to a great extent to the ILO’s crosscutting policy drivers related to International Labour Standards and Gender Equality and a lesser extent to social dialogue.

Within the Project’s Specific Objective 1, the Project aims to contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits. As part of this Objective, China is considering the ratification of C102, towards this end, extensive research and capacity development activities have been carried out with the support of the Project. The Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security undertook a review of national social security regulations in light of international standards and a gap analysis with the support of the Project.

Whilst most of the interviewees indicated that the social security system in China is non-discriminatory by law, all women and men have the same right to social protection, in practice there remain certain obstacles for equitable access to social

security. In particular, women in China tend to be overrepresented in certain forms of non-standard employment. For that reason the Project targets specifically women and migrant workers under Objective 2. **In effect, the impacts of social protection systems are not gender neutral. There are many underlying causes that prevent women from benefiting from social protection interventions or accessing social services in an equal manner to men.** According to the ILO, states must therefore ensure that social security is designed, implemented and monitored taking into account the different experiences of men and women. Recommendation No. 202 (para 3d) highlights the need to streamline the principle of non-discrimination throughout the life cycle.

Within this context, **the project has explicitly established the objective to contribute to reducing discrimination based on gender in social security provisions in line with international standards.** Based on findings from the gap analysis of national legal provisions with C102, the project made technical recommendations on improving the provision of maternal medical coverage notably to women in flexible forms of employment in urban areas and those working in rural areas. In addition, pension parametric reforms are being discussed aimed at enhancing the sustainability of social security and constitute a priority of 14th Plan. They include the consideration for raising and equalizing women and men's retirement ages, extending contribution years and establishing index (CPI/Wage) mechanisms for pension benefit levels. The project has advised MOHRSS actuaries through e-coaching, on mechanisms to adjust retirement ages that take into account gender equality. Furthermore, the Project has been collecting data disaggregated by gender and is including gender considerations in its capacity development activities (such as monitoring of the gender of speakers and participants).

The evaluation finds that the Project could do more to embed social dialogue in project activities and to emphasize this dimension as a fundamental principle of the ILO. ILO conventions and recommendations explicitly require consultations with the most representative workers' and employers' organizations in order to ensure a proper implementation of their provisions. As per the ILO's understanding of the terminology, there is no "one size fits all" model of social dialogue, based on this, **it would be important for the Project to establish a Project specific strategy, which could fit the communication needs of all relevant stakeholders including tripartite partners, while at the same time respecting the governance system of the social protection system in China. Adapting social dialogue to the particular context** is key to ensuring full ownership by the parties involved and sustainability of the process.

The evaluation was unable to find any linkages to greening within the Project objectives or activities. **It is recommended that when addressing the issue of social security administration and technological changes, the issues of environmental sustainability be more forcefully considered.**

Project's coherence with the capacity of stakeholders and the political space in China

The Project implementation approaches have in general been designed to meet and reinforce the actual capacity of the constituents. Most of the interviewed participants from MOHRSS agreed that the Project's interventions and contributions are designed and implemented at an adequate technical level that brings value added to the constituents' current state of knowledge and capacity.

The project is also coherent and relevant in the policy context of a changing world of work.

Most project partners are an integrated and fundamental part of the Project, being the Ministry the most important Project partner. Stakeholders are invited to all Project activities and their voices are heard towards improving the project implementation and even its design. The document review of this evaluation indicated that the Project design was modified at the request of MOHRSS during the first year of implementation, adapting the timeline of the Project and changing some of the deliverables from year 1 to year 2 to allow for the needs of the Ministry to be addressed, which is a positive sign vis-à-vis the strategic fit of the Project within the Ministry timelines and objectives.

Moreover, the Project has regular governance and coordination meetings with both the donor and MOHRSS to review and appropriately fit the Project to the needs of these stakeholders. The meetings are documented and the recommendations monitored and reported.

The EU-China relationship

The European Union, has a longstanding cooperation with China related to the improvement of the Chinese social protection system. During the period 2006-2011, China and the EU have cooperated through the EU-China Social Security Project (EUCSS). From 2014 to 2018, China and the EU co-funded the EU-China Social Protection Reform Project (SPRP). These two projects precede the current EU-ILO-MOHRSS implemented Project. These Projects, including the one being evaluated, reflect the interest of the EU to see China as an equal major economic partner and to promote decent work through economic exchanges and equal competition. The overall objective of this cooperation is to support China's transformation from an export led economy to an economic growth model that is based on domestic demand and consumption, which requires a stronger social protection system.

The cooperation agenda for the EU and China is set out in the annual EU-China Summit Joint Statements and the mid-term 'EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation' signed by the EU and China in 2013. The latter is currently under review as the EU and China work to identify the targets for 2025. In the former document, EU indicates that it is in the EU's interest to support China's transition to a more sustainable and inclusive social and economic model by promoting core labour standards and decent work and welfare reform. In the latter it explicitly indicates its intention to reinforce dialogue on social policies, promote social security and social cohesion and to enhance cooperation with the ILO, in order to further promote the decent work agenda. The policy dialogue is realized through the Partnership Instrument (PI). Managed by the EU Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, PI is specifically designed to promote EU's external strategies, policies and actions.

As part of the EU-China cooperation strategies, a series of policy dialogues are organized directly by the European Commission in Brussels with MOHRSS, some of which have been on social protection related topics such as ageing and long term care. These dialogues aim at better understanding the Chinese legal and regulatory framework, while at the same time suggesting changes and improvements which could result in mutual benefits for both parties. The Project complements these macro policy dialogues with further knowledge sharing at levels of directors and middle management in China, on the topics of the future of work and social protection. The Project has facilitated exchanges between China and the EU through the inclusion of European public officers and experts in project activities, which has contributed to strengthening the good technical level relationships between both partners. MOHRSS representatives participating in the interviews have in several occasions mentioned their interest to continue the knowledge exchange process with the EU partners in the context of the ILO Project. The two major cooperating partners in Projects' Outputs 2.1 and 2.2 are based in the European Union (See Figure below).

► **European based academic expertise benefiting the Project Policy Exchanges with China (Universities located in European Union map).**

► **Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance of United Nations University (UNU-EGOV),** Guimarães, Portugal (OP 2.1) on Digital Social Security



► **United Nations University MERIT Maastricht School of Governance,** Netherlands (OP 2.2) on Measurement and Policies for Social Protection for Workers in Non-Standard Forms of Employment

The Project’s partnerships on implementation

The Project has established effective working relationships with other multilateral organizations: the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) China, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It has also shared information several times with other organisations such as the World Bank office in Beijing, the German Embassy and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) who are equally active in the field of social protection in China.

The evaluation understands that the Project’s lead technical role and moderation of the UN policy dialogue on Social Protection, formed the basis of a relationship with the United Nations system coordination in China that is valued by both parties. The policy dialogue also represented an effective method of sharing knowledge and synergizing the goals, objectives and initiatives of all organizations. Through the interviews with representatives of the abovementioned organizations, the evaluation establishes that the Project design is coherent and does not overlap, but complements the work of other organizations working on similar issues in China. The Project contributed to the formulation of the UNSDCF 2021-2025, and its Output 2 where social protection and ILO’s contribution through the EU CHINA Project, figures prominently (see page 11 for more details.)

Colleagues from other organizations acknowledged the importance of communication tools to keep each other updated, and congratulated the timely sharing of working documents, invitation to events, communication items such as the project newsletter, including the bi-monthly Social Protection Policy monitoring tool, among others, which enrich the partnerships among the organizations. At an unofficial level, the importance of informal meetings (i.e. lunch and calls among colleagues) was highlighted of highly beneficial for information sharing not only with the ILO but also with MOHRSS, including the use of diverse communication tools to adapt the Project to the communication needs of the country i.e. the use of WeChat groups and chats.

Project progress and effectiveness

Project’s progress towards its planned objectives

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Project has been able to deliver its objectives with only short delays in some outputs. During the first half of implementation the Project has delivered in its outputs as follows:

Output	Project progress by output based on document revision
Output 1.1	A gap analysis study was undertaken to review national social security regulations in light of international standards. The research showed identified some gaps and some possible avenues for the ratification of C102 Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952. During the period under evaluation, the Project contributed to a process of capacity development of national experts and policy makers to improve their knowledge and understanding on the relevance of C102 as well as its role on the overall improvement of the social security system in China. This was done by developing complementary technical studies and notes, comments and observations and feedback provided to report drafting teams and by several rounds of discussions online and face to face with MOHRSS.

<p>Output 1.2</p>	<p>The Project organized an online training on actuarial services targeting social security actuaries in China. The objectives of the training were to improve the participants' knowledge of international standards and practices in actuarial work in social security and to enhance technical capacity of MOHRSS to organize actuarial services.</p> <p>In addition, during the period in evaluation, the Project organized three e-coaching sessions on actuarial valuation. The actuarial sessions undertaken aimed at improving participants' understanding of actuarial models used for the valuation of social security pension systems, actuarial reporting and application of actuarial techniques through introducing international practices and case studies and on the role of actuaries and the organisation of actuarial services in social security administrations.</p> <p>Finally, the initiated the design of a Training of Trainers curriculum and resource book on principles and techniques of actuarial services on social security pensions for actuaries of the Social Insurance Administration of MOHRSS. This is done in collaboration with Zhejiang University.</p>
<p>Output 2.1</p>	<p>The Project launched a study on the digital transformation of social insurance administration and services to ensure social security coverage in China. It will be undertaken by the Information Centre of MOHRSS in collaboration with the Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance of United Nations University (UNU-EGOV) and in association with the International Social Security Association (ISSA). Work on the study was being initiated during the period when the evaluation was being carried out.</p>
<p>Output 2.2</p>	<p>In 2020 the Project launched a research on assessing China's social security coverage of non-standard workers, the research included a survey of their current social security coverage and their prioritization of needs for additional coverage. The research is still ongoing by the time of evaluation. Under this output a review of international literature was produced by the Maastricht School of Governance at the University of Maastricht, Netherlands. A collection of good practices in Europe and Canada was done by a European consultant. The ILO statistical department also transferred knowledge of international best practices in the measurement of platform workers and their social security coverage. A team of experts from CALSS conducted focus groups and round tables with government officials, representatives of platform companies and platform workers in four provinces. Two surveys were implemented. One covered 3,145 Chinese workers in NSFE, 70% of which were platform workers. Another surveyed companies. The project staff had several meetings with CALSS to review methodologies, and results. Two national consultation workshops were realized.</p>
<p>Output 2.4</p>	<p>In collaboration with the ITCILO and MOHRSS, the project has designed an innovative education campaign encouraging the development of innovative digital technology projects for the education and information of workers in non-standard forms of employment about their entitlements to social security and to promote their access to social security benefits. This campaign takes the form of a hackathon with an online phase and a face-to-face event planned for Hangzhou, China in November 2021.</p>

The evaluation finds that the activities undertaken match the commitments of the Project with the donor, as agreed in the Project document. The epidemic has not allowed the project to implement the study visits to the EU and the international conference as planned to happen during the second and fourth quarter of 2020 respectively.

Project's obstacles and the risk assessment

The Project's risks and mitigation plan was well designed as per the conditions of the Project during the inception period, and provides evidence of the mitigation plans in place.

Notwithstanding, the Project's implementation period covers unprecedented changes in society and the labour market. The impact of the pandemic during the first part of 2020 was the major obstacle of the Project. Under the circumstances, the Project had to quickly adapt its plans to new implementation modalities. Some of the trainings that were initially intended to happen in a face-to-face format, had to be converted to an online format (i.e. the actuarial training) and the re-planning resulted in implementation delays.

On a different subject, the evaluation noted that the costs with language translation and interpretation were initially underestimated. In general, social protection policy works involves technical vocabulary that requires specialized professional translation and interpretation. The amount and value of work months for these items incurred since the inception period exceeded the initial plans. As a result, the project dedicated more internal and external resources than expected to these tasks.

Capacity development of national partners

The Project was effective with adapting its methods to the meeting and travel restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. It continued to develop the capacity of stakeholders through a variety of innovative online methods and tools. Besides the training activities organized by the Project, capacity development has been undertaken through pilot research activities in which partners from MOHRSS or related institutions, including at a provincial level have actively participated either by (with the technical guidance of the ILO) undertaking research activities in their own (i.e. CALSS), or by providing comments to reports and participating in surveys and focus groups. The Project partners appreciate the expertise and flexibility of the Project management in CO-Beijing and its willingness to provide technical solutions based on evidence to the identified social security issues.

Many interviewees emphasised the value added that study visits to the EU would have brought to the project. Despite that, employers' and workers' representatives benefited by other means, including the project's production of videos, podcast and communication items with a specific focus and a language targeted to their needs. Having said that, the relatively low involvement of social partners so far, has reduced the ability to develop and implement more tailor-made research and advocacy targeting these stakeholders. Enhanced participation levels from all stakeholders could allow the Project team to engage each one more meaningfully.

Project's work on non-discrimination and gender equality

The Project targets specifically women in its Objective 2, under its work on non-standard forms of employment. Further to this, the Project has a special focus on migrant workers, which have seen an increase over the recent years. At the intersection of the two the Project team reported that in 2009-19, nearly 22 million women joined China's migrant workforce. Under objective 1, the Project is promoting to establish compatibility under national law with the maternal health benefits as per the requirements of the C102. Actuarial trainings have included gender considerations for actuarial valuation and projections. Moreover, the current study on assessment of China's social security coverage explicitly requires to provide disaggregated data on women access to social security, their needs and challenges, depending on their hukou and labour market situation.

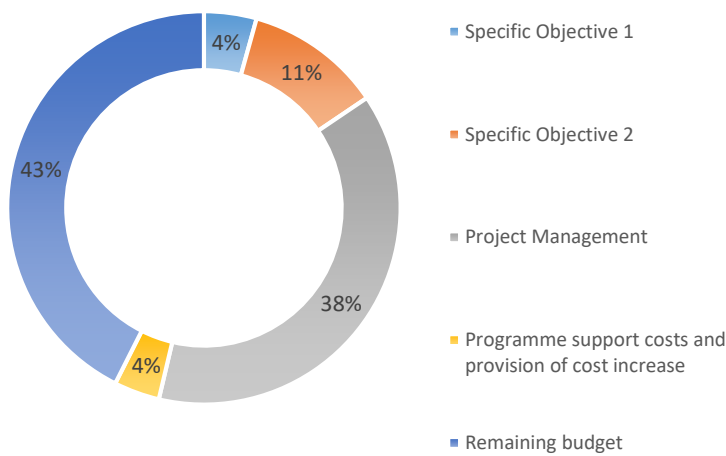
Efficiency of use of resources

Financial delivery by type

The evaluation undertook a comparison of the expenditures planned in the initial financial plan and the commitments up to 31 March 2021. The period of evaluation covers 21 out of 36 months of the project implementation period (58% of the project time), which was used as an indicator of expenditure. Although at the time of the evaluation, 1.78 million USD were

received by the ILO, the evaluation is based on the total project budget. Moreover, the evaluation acknowledges the financial and in-kind contributions of MOHRSS to the activities undertaken of the Project. **The financial support provided by the Chinese’ government to the Project activities is substantial.** It refers to financing or cost-sharing of the logistics of seminars, the allocation of specialized staff within the government to work with the Project, the realisation of meetings at Social Insurance Administration offices (including with stakeholders such as Beijing Municipality and representatives of platform companies nationally and several meetings in the Provinces), and the funding of the travel of its own staff to participate in the Project activities, amongst others. Notwithstanding, the following analysis does not consider the MOHRSS’s contributions to the project.

► **Project’s actuals & encumbrances to March 2021**



The budget initially adopted demonstrated a good balance among the Project outputs and the Project management arrangements. There have been 3 budget revisions in February 2020, September 2020 and January 2021 respectively, which follows the revisions in the work plan agreed with the national stakeholders and the EU. The Project expenditures were as shown in the figure after the budget revisions and up to March, 2021. Expenditures for objective 1 are considerably lower than the planning. This was mostly explained by the fact that the Project has readapted its planning after consultation with the PMC and concentrated its first half of the implementation in objective 2. The resources of activities which were postponed were relocated under Objective 2 after agreement of PMC.

There was an increase in staff costs, explained by the statutory increase in the salary scale for locally-recruited staff in China.

Finally, the evaluation recommends that the Project team, in consultation with the donor and subject to provisions in the grant agreement, realised a revision of the budget to follow a results-based management (RBM) approach. A RBM approach will allow the budget for each result or output to incorporate and reflect directly the cost of the totality of activities concurring to that particular deliverable. These activities and their funding are currently dispersed between different outputs. It is recommended that the TOC produced by the Project management team be used as a basis for the RBM budgeting. A budget based on a RBM perspective will enable the final evaluation to make a more meaningful analysis of resource allocation by category of results achieved, not by groups of activities.

Project’s strategic use of its human resources

The Project team in the ILO CO-Beijing is composed of a Project Manager, a National Project Coordinator and a Project Administrative Assistant. The Project is also supported by a Senior Actuarial Specialist and a Senior Technical Specialist at the Regional Decent Work Country Team, both based in the ILO’s Regional Office in Bangkok.

Furthermore, the Project is supported by the network of technical specialists in the subject-area from the ILO’s headquarters’ Social Protection Department (SOCPRO) in Geneva. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new way of working through online meetings. This has the positive side effect to allow the project to draw more extensively and cost effectively on collaboration from a vast and dispersed pool of ILO social security specialists. Moreover, the project has established collaborations with several external stakeholders, from the EU and from Asia.

Besides the above, the MOHRSS has allocated human resources to support the Project activities and enable the smooth and strategic coordination of Project activities. It should be noted that the project managed smoothly a long period of

absence on remote work and then on maternity leave of its project assistant from August 2020 to October 2020 and from December 2020 to April 2021, temporarily replaced then by an internal assistant from ILO office.

Based on the above, the evaluation finds that the existing human resources have been allocated appropriately. In addition, based on the review of the project's workplan, its focus on advocacy and campaigning as well as the emphasis of the EU on visibility and the ILO's support to knowledge and experience sharing, the Project would have benefited from a dedicated communications officer (with emphasis on social media), through the recruitment of a national staff.

The ILO's SOCPRO and Regional Office for Asia Pacific's support to the Project

The support of ILO Social Protection Department (SOCPRO) and the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ILO ROAP) has been rated by the Project team as extremely positive and by stakeholders as beneficial for the Project implementation.

The Specialist at the DWT at ILO ROAP participates in the project's steering committee. He holds regular discussions with the Project's management, has provided support on specific outcomes and ensures that the knowledge produced by the Project is shared with other countries within the region. The Project covers the main areas of interest in the subject from within the Asia Pacific region. China is moving fast on increasing social protection coverage, and therefore the results of the Project have the potential to be shared and even replicated within the region. Collaborations between the Project and the regional office, has allowed the Project's work on non-standard forms of work to be shared with several countries in the region. The experiences of South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia have benefited the project and these countries have also shown interest on learning more from the Project's results.

The Project has also shared information with colleagues at headquarter levels, and solicited their views in the preparation of Terms of Reference, preparation and peer review of technical documents and reports. Furthermore, ILO Social Protection specialists from headquarters have also participated in a number of Project events, including the UN policy dialogue co-organized by the project. Indeed, the project has benefited from the collaboration of several technical specialists from different departments of the ILO, including ILO STATS, RESEARCH, IN WORK, Global Employment Injury Programme, ILO Enterprises Department, and ILO Standards Department.

Synergies with other Projects/organizations and its relations with the Project's efficiency

As already mentioned, the Project has developed work in synergy with some agencies of the UN system. The Project team holds informal meetings with several organizations and keeps the organizations informed through regular communication media such as Newsletters, Policy Monitors, webinars and informal meetings. The UNDAF and the UNSDCF define clearly areas of competence and work of each agency. Most interviewed organizations mentioned that they do not currently have on-going Projects on the issue, but some indicate that they intend to strengthen their partnerships with the ILO.

The Project's monitoring and reporting

The Project is governed by a Project Steering Committee (PSC) composed of ILO and EU, which meets annually. During the meetings of the PSC the activities and achievements of the Project are reviewed. As per the evaluation's review, all information related to these meetings is well documented and available. In addition to statutory meetings, there are regular technical meetings with the EUD. Another governance body is the Project Management Committee (PMC) composed of ILO and MOHRSS. PMC meetings are also held annually. These meetings are well documented and aim at the planning and operational coordination of the project's implementation.

In addition to the reports of the governance meetings, the evaluation reviewed the first progress report to the EUD, which compares progress to indicators milestones. The report provides sufficient and detailed information on the deliverables and their progress, which are based on appropriate monitoring. The project's progress report records in a qualitative and quantitative manner on gender equality. The above mentioned reports also document the corrective measures taken as a response of emerging requests from Project partners and other challenges encountered by the Project.

Support from national partners

The Project has received adequate political, technical and administrative support from national partners, especially MOHRSS. Interviewed partners feel ownership of the project, and consider themselves as implementers and beneficiaries of the Project. They recognized the good professional and personal relationships established. Partners mentioned that the Project has maintained good communications with them at regular intervals. The MOHRSS has been participating in all Project activities with great interest and even allocated financial and human resources to support the Project when needed.

EUD representatives have provided very good support to the Project, through productive and committed engagement in Project monitoring and activities.

The evaluation considers however that despite the efforts by the Project, there is still room for more productive engagement with workers and employers, given their potential interest in the main themes of the project. It should be possible to engage social partners more systematically in the Project activities, for instance through the production of communication items directed to the specific audience group, with an appropriate language and different themes of interest for each stakeholder.

Sustainability and impact of the Project

In a broad sense, the Project is very likely to achieve its Theory of Change (TOC)'s overall objective of:

- Strengthening China's institutional capacity to improve its social protection system, in support of the realisation of international standards and the EU 2020 Strategy.

As well as its established specific objectives:

- To contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits
- To contribute to the extension of the coverage of social security to workers in non-standard forms of employment, with a special attention to migrant workers and women

However, it would be important that the objectives of the Project are reframed in the reporting documents in a more SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Reasonable, Time-Bound) manner in order for a final evaluation to be able to assess the Project's concrete and specific achievements in relation to the TOC.

Furthermore, whilst the Project's TOC targets the ratification of C102, this is unlikely to happen under the current Project's timeline. The ratification of a convention does not depend only directly from the Project. Ratifications are political endeavours, and cannot be completely influenced by the Project's implementation, thus the ratification or not during the Project's timeframe should not be used as an indicator of the Project's performance. A final evaluation should rather look at the processes undertaken by the Project towards the ratification. Having said that, the process of the ratification of the C102 will have a longstanding impact on social protection in China, and if this is possible, the Project's impact will be of great significance for the future of Social Protection in China, as well as represent the bases for future Project development on the subject-matter in China and have an impact on the overall target of achieving decent jobs for all women and men.

On a positive side, Project partners are interested to use and work on the institutionalization of approaches, tools and methods introduced by the Project. Because of that the evaluation observed that the Project interventions will clearly have an impact even beyond the ILO direct involvement has been finalized.

Additionally, there is great interest by national stakeholders to undertake more research on new forms of employment. Representatives from the Project's beneficiary provinces agreed that the issue is a long-term research topic. On the basis of this overall positive evaluation of the Project, and considering its limited duration (36 months), and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems important to consolidate the good achievements so far. The EUD expressed interest to continue the longstanding cooperation with China on the issue of Social Protection. The Project has set the bases for future and enhanced cooperation, including with the EU.

Conclusions

The evaluation finds that the Project continues to be relevant and strategic to achieve China's objectives under the 13th Five-Year Plan and the new 14th Five-Year Plan, as well as the ILO's targets, the EU agreed objectives, and UN global goals. The sample of interviewed stakeholders showed a high level of satisfaction with the relevance and strategic fit of the Project interventions. Furthermore, the Project has become even more relevant after the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. According to interviewees, not only the crisis increased the importance of well-established social protection systems towards achieving more resilient societies but the extension of social security to workers in non-standard forms of employment became a more important concern globally and in China. Thus, the Project shows great scope for demonstration, replicability and for sustainability of its results.

The evaluation also finds that the problem identification is coherent with national needs and development objectives. The Project design is also coherent and does not overlap, but complements the work of other organizations working on similar issues in China. Both the ILO and the EU contribute to the establishment of synergies, as some of the partners are strongly linked and interested on the role and relationship of the EU with China and on the manner that the ILO Project could promote the EU-China cooperation results at an international level.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Project was able to deliver through innovative approaches. The evaluation finds that the activities undertaken match the commitments of the Project with the EUD as agreed in the Project document, with exception of the study visits to the EU and the international conference planned to happen during the second and fourth quarter of 2020, which were disturbed and delayed by the pandemic.

Concerning the Project's financial resources, the budget as initially adopted demonstrated a good balance among the Project outputs and the Project management arrangements. The initial budget plan was reviewed in agreement with EUD and MOHRSS after the inception period. The evaluation recommends that in consultation with the donor and subject to provisions in the grant agreement, that the budget be reviewed and follows a RBM approach.

In what relates to sustainability, the Project is likely to achieve its overall objective of strengthening China's institutional capacity to improve its social protection system, in support of the realisation of international standards and the EU 2020 Strategy as well as its established specific objectives to contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits and to contribute to the extension of the coverage of social security to workers in non-standard forms of employment, with a special attention to migrant workers and women.

Finally, the evaluation finds that Project partners are interested to use and work on the institutionalization of approaches, tools and methods introduced by the Project. It was clear from the review that the Project interventions will have an impact after the ILO engagement in the country as part of the specific Project is finalized.

Lesson learned

▶ Non-discriminatory policies are not immediately inclusive policies

- ▶ Although respondents to the evaluation mentioned that the Social Protection system in China does not discriminate in principle against gender or vulnerable groups, it is important to consider the special needs and labour market transition of women vis-à-vis men. For instance, the time that women spend in unpaid care work is not always reflected in contributory pension schemes.
- ▶ The Project being evaluated, promotes the inclusion of women in non-standard forms of employment in the contributory pension and health systems, so that challenges brought about by labour market transitions of women and/or their increasing engagement in non-standard jobs can also impact their benefits both in terms of health and pension.
- ▶ Allowing women to have their own social protection benefits, regardless of the employment status of their husband, is a way of promoting gender equality in a broader sense, as it allows females to be more independent and to being able to take care of themselves and their families.

Emerging Good Practices

▶ **The involvement of contributing partners at technical levels under long-term cooperation agreements with recipient countries is beneficial for project implementation and relationship building. Furthermore, longstanding Project commitments and/or a series of interlinked Projects have more potential for a longstanding, sustainable impact, than short-term interventions**

- ▶ Relations between the EU and China have developed fast since the diplomatic ties were established in 1975. This relationship has been gradually strengthening over the years and intensified by the rapid economic growth of China, which placed EU and China as two of the three largest economies and traders in the world.
- ▶ Relationships between EU and China are based in cooperation and mutual benefit, with Chinese counterparts strongly interested in knowledge exchange. Within this context, the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation plays a strong role on guiding the EU-China comprehensive strategic partnership.
- ▶ The Project represents an outcome of this relationship and its implementation has been benefited by the previously established good relationship of both partners.
- ▶ Chinese counterparts recognized their interest to receive expertise from European Countries. The evaluation finds that the Project is an enabler of this knowledge sharing exercise, while at the same time, EU is interested in fair competition, and therefore aims at supporting China on its national endeavours to achieve decent work for all.
- ▶ Furthermore, the Donor involvement in technical activities has been seen as positive by Chinese counterparts, who are willing to learn from the EU experience.
- ▶ The EU longstanding commitment to support China to establish and improve a well-functioning social security system through a series of interlinked Projects shows that longstanding financial and technical engagements can result in more sustainable results for recipient countries than stand-alone Projects.
- ▶ The Projects co-implemented by the EU in China, have demonstrated not only the willingness to collaborate from both side, but also a common commitment to achieve decent work.
- ▶ The evaluation finds that the current Project success is linked to the previous Projects and that the results should be seen interlinked with previous and future Projects on the issue.

▶ **Increasing awareness of the conditions of workers in non-standard works of employment is central to the agenda of the Future of Work and contributes to human centred COVID-19 recovery**

- ▶ The Pandemic has increased the number of workers in non-standard forms of employment. Around the world millions of workers were forced to re-shape their careers and to find more flexible working arrangements, which allow them to cope with the unexpected challenges in the labour market. Current trends, show that the Future of Work we were expecting is already here and that the employer-employee relationship is changing rapidly. The ILO is therefore adapting its methods, towards achieving decent work for workers in non-standard forms of work.
- ▶ The evaluation finds, that the Project is pioneer in working on social protection for these type of workers and that with the advances of the EU and China on the subject matter, the Project has the potential to contribute to creating valuable knowledge, which could be used to create a better impact through other ILO projects currently linked to the digital economy, for instance the work the ILO-ITU partnership on Digital Jobs for Youth in Africa, and other relevant Projects in the Asia Pacific.

Recommendations

▶ R1: Projects M&E: The risk and assumptions matrix should be updated to reflect the learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic and monitoring indicators should be reflect the ToC assumptions

- ▶ Timeline: Short term
- ▶ Importance: Low
- ▶ Resource implications: None
- ▶ Called upon to act: Project management team in coordination with the donor
- ▶ The evaluation suggest a revision of the risks and assumptions matrix, which could reflect the arising challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and forecasted changes in the labour market.
- ▶ In general terms, indicators mentioned in the log frame should demonstrate that data gathered is disaggregated by gender. Besides, Theory of Change assumptions could be embedded in the monitoring system to appraise the influence of changes in the conditions of success on project realizations.

▶ R2: The Project should work on further enhancing social dialogue and tripartite participation in its activities

- ▶ Timeline: Short term
- ▶ Importance: Medium
- ▶ Resource implications: Some resources need to be allocated to advocacy activities and/or capacity development of Workers and Employers
- ▶ Called upon to act: Project management team in coordination with MOHRSS and tripartite stakeholders
- ▶ The evaluation finds that the Project could do more to integrate social dialogue in the project. This could be done through more strategic communication campaigns and tools, which could better fit the knowledge needs of all relevant stakeholders including tripartite partners, while at the same time respecting the governance system of the social protection system in China.
- ▶ Adapting social dialogue to the particular context is key to ensuring full ownership by the parties involved and sustainability of the process.
- ▶ Employers' and workers' representatives can benefit from further enhanced capacity development activities though different means, including videos, pod-cast and communication items with specific focus on their needs and status and a targeted language.

Annex A: Evaluation TOR

Terms of Reference (TOR) of Mid-term Evaluation

Project Title	Improving China's Institutional Capacity towards Universal Social Protection
Technical Cooperation code	CHN/18/01/EUR
Administrative Unit	ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia
Technical Backstopping Unit	Senior Social Protection Technical Specialist in DWT-Bangkok
Donor agency	European Union
Project duration	1 July 2019 - 30 June 2022
Budget	EUR 2,300,000
Period covered by the evaluation	1 July 2019 to March 2021 (21 months)
Date of Evaluation	April – June 2021

Introduction and rationale for evaluation

The project “Improving China’s Institutional Capacity towards Universal Social Protection” is a three-year project, of a value of up to EUR 2.3 million. It aims at providing technical support to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) to promote effective application of international labour standards in China’s pursuit of universal, adequate and sustainable social security coverage. The project is funded by the European Union’s Partnership Instrument, aimed at promoting policy cooperation between the EU and priority countries in areas of mutual interest.

The project's objectives are two-folds:

- To contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits. Support will be given to Government of China to further align its social security measures with international social security standards and to consider the ratification of relevant standards such as ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102).
- To contribute to the extension of social security coverage to workers in non-standard forms of employment, with a focus on digital platform workers and special attention to migrant workers and women.

The Department of International Cooperation of MOHRSS is the national counterpart of the project. By the designation of MOHRSS, the Social Insurance Administration of MOHRSS is the executive department responsible for project implementation.

The ILO and MOHRSS jointly launched the project by signing an MOU on project implementation in December 2019 and agreed on a three-year work plan with each year focusing on one theme: (1) universal social security coverage; (2) digital transformation of social security; and (3) adequacy and sustainability of social security.

The COVID-19 outbreak at the end of 2019 has led to a situation of social lockdown and economic disruption, in particular in the first half of 2020. In this context, China’s social security regulatory framework was responsive in helping sustain the economy and employment and help workers during the pandemic. But the necessity to respond to COVID-19 has probably delayed some of the policy initiatives envisaged in the medium term plans. Policy developments over pandemic period have increased the relevance of project objectives and its deliverables.

In light of that context, the project periodically reviewed the work plan with EUD and MOHRSS and developed contingency measures to adjust some of the activities. The project has the following major achievements so far:

Start of the research on assessment of China’s social security coverage and measures to close gaps and improve portability.	Implementation of Course on Actuarial principles and e coaching services online and start of material development for the training of trainers	Updated study on compatibility of Chinese social security law and practice with C102	Policy briefs and pod casts on extension of coverage of social security and social security responses to COVID-19	Conducted bimonthly Social Security Policy China Monitor
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The Project Steering Committee (PSC) composed of ILO and EU representatives was tasked with strategic oversight of the project implementation, including review of the project progress and reports. The Project Management Committee (PMC) was established with representatives of ILO and MOHRSS to review project progress, discuss and endorse the project work plan. By the end of 2020, two PSC meetings and two PMC meetings were organized.

In accordance with the ILO-EU agreement, two evaluations are required during the project implementation, one at the mid-term and the other at the end of the Action. Considering the impact of COVID pandemic on feasibility of evaluation and its implications on implementation of project activities, the mid-term evaluation is scheduled a few months after the mid-point of the project life from April to June 2021. The final evaluation will be independent evaluation. The mid-term evaluation will be an internal evaluation managed by the project team and conducted by a combination of an internal ILO certified evaluator and an independent national evaluator.

The mid-term evaluation will be conducted to review the project performance, using the OECD/DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability).

EU has a monitoring framework PIMS, that provides specific indicator and measurement criteria on which progress report was done.

The evaluation will examine cross cutting concerns including how gender dimension has been effectively mainstreamed in the project design and implementation. The findings and recommendations of the evaluation will enhance learning within the ILO and among key stakeholders and help guide the project team in adjusting the project’s approach and scope for implementation during the project’s remaining period.

The evaluation will be coordinated by the project team of CO-Beijing. Consultants will be recruited to implement the evaluation.

Purpose, Scope and Clients of the Evaluation

1. Purpose

The purpose of this mid-term evaluation is to review the project progress, achievements and challenges, inform the ILO, project partners and the donor of key lessons learned, and propose recommendations for any improvement or adjustment needed for the remaining project implementation period. Specifically, the mid-term evaluation will focus on the following aspects:

Assessment of the project design and activities, implementation strategy and approaches, capacities of implementing partners, challenges and how these challenges are addressed; and to what extent that these contribute to the achievement of project objectives.

Drawing key findings and lessons learned and proposing improvement and adjustment needed to ensure that the project remains relevant to the needs of the target groups and contributes to knowledge development.

Assessment of impact of COVID on the project implementation and how the project responded to mitigate the impact.

2. Scope

The evaluation will cover the period from July 2019 to March 2021, to create an accurate and comprehensive picture of the project implementation, generating findings on evaluation criteria and documenting good practices and lessons learned. The evaluation will integrate gender equality and non-discrimination as a cross-cutting concern throughout its methodology and all deliverables including the final report.

3. Clients

The clients and users of this mid-term evaluation include the ILO project team, management and specialists at country, regional and headquarters levels, donor, MOHRSS and other project partners in China.

Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation will examine project implementation against the hereunder criteria by addressing the following questions. The evaluator will develop a more detailed analytic framework of questions and sub-questions to carry out the evaluation.

RELEVANCE and strategic fit of the project	- To what extent the project objectives/outcomes are relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries? Specifically: Direct recipients: MOHRSS, particularly the Department of International Cooperation and other technical departments (old-age insurance, rural social insurance, etc.), Social Insurance Administration, and Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security (CALSS), including their provincial branches National Healthcare Security Administration
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	<p>Workers and employers’ organizations (CEC and ACFTU)</p> <p>Other stakeholders including local academia, EU Institutions (DG EMPL and EEAS), EU member state embassies labour and social officers in China (two way policy dialogue)</p> <p>Ultimate beneficiaries:</p> <p>All women and men residing in China, especially those with irregular social protection coverage and particularly workers in new forms of employment, migrant workers and women, will benefit from social protection measures during and beyond the project duration.</p> <p>Residents of other countries that will use the knowledge developed through the Project to ensure the social and financial sustainability of their social security system.</p> <p>- Were project methodologies and approaches in line with the project partners’ priorities, capacities and expectations?</p> <p>- To what extent have the project’s interventions so far contributed to promoting extension of social security coverage and improvement of adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits?</p> <p>- Should the project design and methodology be modified to improve its relevance in the second half of the project? If so, how?</p> <p>- To what extent has the project been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and what adjustments has the project made?</p>
COHERENCE	<p>- The extent to which the project has work in collaboration with other ILO projects</p> <p>- The extent that the project has added value and collaborate with others who are doing similar work in China and not duplicating the efforts with others</p> <p>- The extent the project has yielded the expected results and that it has adhere to ILO norms and standards (ILS, social dialogue and tripartism)</p>
Project PROGRESS and EFFECTIVENESS	<p>- To what extent has the project been making progress towards its planned objectives?</p> <p>What have been achieved so far?</p> <p>What are the major constraints so far?</p> <p>- To what extent has the project secured the commitment of the project partners and built up national ownership?</p> <p>- How do the national project partners explain the delay in delivery?</p> <p>- Have the project approaches appropriately matched the capacity (including political space) of the project partners for their action?</p> <p>- What measures are required to improve the capacity of project partners in the second half of the project?</p> <p>- To what extent has the project promoted non-discrimination and gender equality? What approaches have been adopted to ensure the interests of workers including women and other socially and economically disadvantaged groups of workers are fully taken into account in developing project outputs and carrying out project activities?</p>
EFFICIENCY of resource use	<p>- Have resources (funds, human resources, time, expertise etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve outcomes?</p>
EFFECTIVENESS of management arrangements (including monitoring and evaluation)	<p>- Has the project received adequate political, technical and administrative support from its national partners?</p> <p>- Was there a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities by all parties involved?</p> <p>- How effective is communication between the project team, the ILO and the project partners, as well as the donor?</p>

	- What should be improved in the second half of the project?
SUSTAINABILITY And IMPACT of the project	- How effectively has the project built necessary capacity of people and institutions (of national partners and implementing partners)? How effectively has the project built national ownership and capacity? - How likely the project will achieve its objectives in the second half of the project and what elements need to be taken into account to ensure sustainability of outcomes? - To what extent has the project contributed to the EU-China policy dialogue?

Methodology

The evaluation will be carried out in accordance with ILO standard policies and procedures, comply with evaluation norms and follow ethical safeguards. The evaluation will address the overall ILO evaluation criteria as defined in the *ILO Policy Guidelines for results-based evaluation: principles, rationale, planning and managing for evaluations (4th edition 2020)*. The evaluation will also take into account the gender issues into the evaluation process as guided by *the ILO guidance note 3.1: Integrating gender equality in monitoring and evaluation (3rd version 2019)*. The ILO adheres to the United Nations system evaluation norms and standards as well as to the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards. The evaluation will be carried out in a participatory manner to ensure the involvement of key stakeholders in particular national project partners and the donor, in all phases of the evaluation, including preparation, interviews, report preparation and dissemination. The evaluation will be carried out from April to June 2021, with a final report being available by 30 June 2021.

The following methods will be used as a minimum to collect information:

1. Desk review:

Review and analysis of documents related to the project, including:

- Project Documents: ILO-EU agreement, ILO-MoHRSS MOU, and work plans
- 1st Annual Progress Report submitted to the donor by ILO as per PARDEV reporting guidelines
- Project outputs: work-in-progress studies, actuarial training materials, policy/research briefs, podcasts, technical notes, policy monitors
- Project documentation: PSC and PMC meeting reports, working-level meeting memos, and relevant correspondence
- Other relevant documents such as the Decent Work Country Programme Document, UNSDCF of 2021-2025

The desk review will suggest a number of initial findings that in turn may point to additional or fine-tuned evaluation questions.

2. Interviews

List of contacts for interviews will be provided by the evaluation manager in the beginning of the evaluation.

The evaluator will undertake group/individual discussions with the ILO project staff and management in CO-Beijing, and with the ILO specialists in Bangkok and Geneva via virtual channels.

The evaluator will conduct interviews with project partners based on semi-structured questionnaires.

Main outputs

The main outputs of the evaluation will be comprised of:

1. Refined evaluation questions

Upon review of the available documents and an initial discussion, through skype interviews, with relevant ILO officials/specialists in Beijing, Bangkok and Geneva, the evaluator will develop a detailed analytic framework of questions and sub-questions, based on the evaluation questions defined in this ToR, and consistent with Results-Based Management (RBM) and the OECD/DAC criteria.

2. Evaluation report

Report as per the proposed structure in the ILO evaluation guidelines (see Checklist 5: Preparing the evaluation report) should include:

- Title page (standard ILO template)
- Table of contents
- Executive summary
- Body of the report
- Project background
- Evaluation background

- Methodology
- Main findings
- Gender issues assessment
- Tripartite issues assessment
- International labour standards assessment
- Conclusions
- Lessons learned and emerging good practices
- Recommendations
- Appendices

The main evaluation report should be concise and not exceed 15 pages excluding annexes (supporting data and details can be included in annexes).

A PowerPoint presentation with the preliminary findings and recommendations to be presented with ILO and key stakeholder group

All draft and final outputs, including supporting documents, analytical reports and raw data should be provided in electronic version compatible with WORD for Windows. Ownership of the data from the evaluation rests jointly with the ILO and the ILO consultants. The copyright of the evaluation report will rest exclusively with the ILO. Use of the data for publication and other presentation can only be made with the agreement of ILO. Key stakeholders can make appropriate use of the evaluation report in line with the original purpose and with appropriate acknowledgement.

Management arrangements

An international evaluator (an ILO experienced evaluator) will be selected to undertake desk reviews, conduct interviews, develop evaluation outputs and present the preliminary findings of the evaluation to the stakeholder meeting. The evaluator will be responsible for delivering the above evaluation outputs using a combination of methods mentioned above. The international evaluator will be assisted by a national consultant to assist with data collection and analyse the data from the methods listed above, use qualitative data analysis techniques, and meet with ILO staff and Chinese partners.

A national consultant will be hired to assist the international evaluator in collecting information, data, documents and reports; translating documents from Chinese to English to be reviewed; facilitating desk review, interviews and formulation of evaluation outputs; and providing interpretation to the international evaluator for meetings with Chinese partners. In addition, the consultant will translate the draft and final evaluation report into Chinese, and participate in the stakeholders' meeting.

The evaluation manager is Mr Luis Frota, Project Manager, ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia. He will ensure the evaluation takes place according to the ToR and select the evaluator for the approval of the director of ILO Beijing.

The evaluation manager will facilitate organization of the programme of the evaluator for interviews and ensure that ILO constituents and all relevant stakeholders are consulted throughout the evaluation process. The project team in Beijing will handle all administrative/contractual arrangements with the evaluator and provide any logistical and other assistance as may be required.

The evaluation manager will provide the necessary support to the evaluator and discuss any technical, methodological or organizational matter that may arise with the evaluator

Time frame and work plan for the evaluation:

The evaluation process will encompass the approximate duration of 3 months, from 1 April to 30 June 2021. The total effort is expected to be 17 days of international evaluator and 13 days of national consultant to complete the full assignment.

Phase	Responsible person	Tasks/Activities	Working days of evaluators		Proposed time frame
			International	National	
Inception	Evaluators/evaluation manager	Brief by evaluation manager Desk review of project related documents Refine evaluation questions	3	3	By 10 April 2021
	Evaluators	Interviews with the ILO project team and ILO specialists	6	6	By 30 April 2021

Interviews (on-site or virtual)	(List of stakeholders and their contact information will be provided by the ILO)	Interviews with project partners including national partners and MOHRSS/SIA in participating provinces Interview with EUD			
		Debriefing: present preliminary findings to ILO and key stakeholder group	1	1	
Report drafting	Evaluators	Prepare draft evaluation report and translation	5	2	By 20 May 2021
	Evaluation manager	Organize review of the draft report (by ILO and partners) and consolidate comments			By 10 June 2021
	Evaluators	Finalize the report in both English and Chinese	2	1	By 30 June 2021
Total			17	13	

Selection of the evaluators

The international evaluator will be selected from the roster of internal ILO staff who have been trained on conducting internal evaluation, with the assistance of ILO Evaluation Office. Interest and availability of the ILO evaluator should be secured.

The evaluator should have experience with conducting international evaluations. She/he should have a proven track record in the evaluation of similar complex projects. Experience in the field of social protection will be an advantage.

The national consultant will be hired through a public bidding process. A call for expression of interest will be published online. At least three CVs should be received and screened.

The national consultant should have experience with conducting/assisting in evaluations. She/he should have a proven track record in the evaluation of similar complex projects. Experience in the field of social protection will be an advantage. Proficiency in both English and Chinese is required.

Both international evaluator and national consultant should be able to work with reasonable time flexibility considering possible time differences between their locations and China.

Legal and Ethical matters

The evaluation will comply with UN Norms and Standards. It must not reflect personal or sectorial interests. The evaluator must have professional integrity and respect the rights of institutions and individuals to provide information in confidence and to verify statements attributed to them. Evaluations must be sensitive to the beliefs and customs of local social and cultural environments and must be conducted legally and with due regard to the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its findings.

The project evaluation will operate under the guiding principles based on the norms for evaluation in the United Nations system, as follows: structural independence from the operational management and decision-making functions in the organization, clear intent to use evaluation findings, transparent approach, impartiality, minimum quality standards defined by the Evaluation Office, timeliness, usefulness of the findings and recommendations.

Annex: Relevant ILO evaluation guidelines and standard templates

ILO Policy Guidelines for results-based evaluation: principles, rationale, planning and managing for evaluations (4th edition 2020)
https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationpolicy/WCMS_571339/lang--en/index.htm

Protocol on collecting evaluative evidence on the ILO's COVID-19 response measures through project and programme evaluations, effective on 9 Oct 2020

Code of conduct form (To be signed by the evaluator)
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_746806.pdf

Checklist 5 Preparing the evaluation report
http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165967/lang--en/index.htm

Checklist 6 Rating the quality of evaluation report

http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165968/lang--en/index.htm

Template for lessons learned and Emerging Good Practices

http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_206158/lang--en/index.htm

http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_206159/lang--en/index.htm

Guidance note 7 Stakeholders participation in the ILO evaluation

http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165982/lang--en/index.htm

Guidance note 4 Integrating gender equality in M&E of projects

http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165986/lang--en/index.htm

Guidance Note 3.2: Adapting evaluation methods to the ILO's normative and tripartite mandate

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_721381.pdf

Template for evaluation title page

http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_166357/lang--en/index.htm

Template for evaluation summary

https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_166361/lang--en/index.htm

Annex B: Evaluation’s questions

Deliverable 1: Refined Evaluation Questionnaire

Internal Mid-term Evaluation: Improving China's Institutional Capacity towards Universal Social Protection

Evaluation Criteria	Reformulated question
<p>RELEVANCE and strategic fit of the project</p>	<p>To which extent did the Project design take into consideration the needs and priorities of each of the tripartite constituents in the country? The needs of other relevant line ministries? The needs of the workers affiliated to the Social Protection system?</p> <p>Have the outcomes and objectives of the Project the potential to contribute to the ILO’s overall objectives on Social Protection as mandated by the Governing Body in the relevant P&B documents? The Regional Strategy for Asia and other relevant documents mandating the ILO work on Social Protection? And the DWCP?</p> <p>Have the project methodologies and implementation approaches in line with the project partners’ priorities, capacities and expectations? If modifications to the implementation approach are required, which are these?</p> <p>Is the Project in line with the priorities established through National Development Plans, aligned to the UN 2030 Agenda, and corresponds to the objectives established within the UNSDC framework for China?</p> <p>To which extent the outcomes and objectives of the Project continue being relevant vis-à-vis the COVID-19 pandemic? How has the Project been adapted to new arising needs? What adjustments has the project made?</p>
<p>COHERENCE</p>	<p>Is the Project design coherent with the work of other International Organizations working in similar issues in China? How is the Project collaborating and creating synergies with other Projects (including national initiatives and the work being undertaken by other international organizations)?</p> <p>Is the problem identification coherent with national needs?</p> <p>Is the Project design appropriate and coherent to achieve the expected results? Is the Project’s design based on a coherent theory of change and Logical framework, including an assessment of risks and assumptions matched to the concerned subject matter?</p> <p>In which manner is the Project aligned to the ILO is crosscutting policy drivers: ILS, Social Dialogue, Greening and Gender equality and no discrimination?</p> <p>Have the project implementation approaches appropriately fit or being modified to fit the capacity (including political space) of the project stakeholders?</p> <p>To which extent has the project facilitated policy dialogues between the EU and China, through which means? How is the Project aligned to the overall EU policy on Social Protection and for China</p>

<p>Project PROGRESS and EFFECTIVENESS</p>	<p>To what extent has the project been making progress towards its planned objectives? What have been achieved so far? And what has been the specific contribution of the ILO to achieve these results?</p> <p>What obstacles have been encountered and what actions has the Project team taken to overcome these obstacles? Were these explicit in the Project's risk assessment? How have these obstacles affected delivery and how is this justified?</p> <p>How effectively has the project built necessary capacity of people and institutions (of national partners and implementing partners)? How effectively has the project built national ownership and capacity?</p> <p>To what extent has the project promoted non-discrimination and gender equality? What approaches have been adopted to ensure the interests of workers including women and other socially and economically disadvantaged groups of workers are fully taken into account in developing project outputs and carrying out project activities? Have these approaches been effective and well-perceived by national stakeholders?</p> <p>Has the Project been understood by national stakeholders, and have they been included in Project implementation? Was there an understanding and acceptance of the roles and responsibilities for all involved? How has the project implementation work by all stakeholders functioned in practice?</p> <p>How effectively has the project built necessary capacity of people and institutions (of national partners and implementing partners)? How effectively has the project built national ownership and capacity?</p>
<p>EFFICIENCY of resource use</p>	<p>-what is the level of financial delivery by the Project by type?</p> <p>-have human, financial and materials resources been used efficiently by the Project? Have these been allocated strategically to achieve outcomes? Including to promoting gender equality through the Project implementation?</p> <p>-Have synergies with other Projects/organizations influenced the efficiency of the Project? How? What has been the role of the Project?</p> <p>-How effective has been the support of the ILO SOCPRO and Regional Officer for Asia Pacific? Has the ILO HQ and regional structure been favourable to improve project's efficiency?</p> <p>-is the Project efficiency monitored? Have corrective measures been taken to ameliorate issues related to the management human, financial and materials Project resources?</p> <p>Has the project received adequate political, technical and administrative support from its national partners? Has the support been timely, objective and adequate to the presented needs?</p>
<p>SUSTAINABILITY And IMPACT of the project</p>	<p>How likely the project will achieve its objectives in the identified timeframe of the project and what elements need to be taken into account to ensure sustainability of outcomes?</p> <p>What tools proposed by the Project have been institutionalized by the country in order to be used after the ILO intervention?</p> <p>Are national partners interested to continuing working on topics related to the Project implementation? Do they have the appropriate knowledge and financial resources?</p> <p>Have there been any normative/legal changes that would support the Project's sustainability?</p>

Annex C: Protocol of interviews

Interview Protocol

About the Evaluators:

Hello, my name is Angelica Munoz and I am accompanied by Juan Zhang, together we are undertaking the internal midterm independent evaluation of the Project: Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection, which is funded by the EU and implemented by the ILO.

I am a certified internal evaluator, working at the ILO HQ in Geneva working on Skills Development related issues and have no previous relation to the Project. Juan is an external collaborator of the ILO, working specifically for this evaluation assignment.

About the Evaluation:

The evaluation is being undertaken as a regular process of the ILO, with the main objective of review the project progress, achievements and challenges, inform the ILO, project partners and the donor of key lessons learned, and propose recommendations for any improvement or adjustment needed for the remaining project implementation period.

During the next couple of weeks, we are going to be undertaking interviews with national partners in order to better understand how the Project.

Protocol

- Participation in this interview is voluntary. You do not have to agree to participate in this evaluation and you can change your mind and stop at any time.
- The questions will not involve sensitive or personal information, and you can refuse to answer any of the questions.
- If there is a question about which you do not have information, you can tell me, and if possible refer me to the most appropriate person within your institution, who could answer to the specific question.
- Your answers will not be audio recorded.
- I will not follow up on any of the questions so as not to influence your opinion, unless I need clarification or definition for my notes.
- Your answers will be combined with the answers of other participants and will be triangulated with the desk review to be used in the final report.
- Everything you share in this interview is confidential and the full notes of this interview will not be shared with the ILO Project.
- Your name will be shared in the final report as a person consulted, but nothing you say will be attributed to you personally in any document or report that results from this interview.
- If you agree to participate, I will ask you a series of questions that will take about 30 minutes of your time.
 - Do you consent to participate in this interview?
 - Do you have any questions about the Project and/or the evaluation or interview process before we begin?

Annex D: List of interviewed stakeholders

Name	Organization
Bai Xiaotong	Beijing Municipal Social Insurance Administration
Li Dan	Beijing Municipal Social Insurance Administration
Zhang Wentao	China Enterprise Confederation (CEC)
Weng Renmu	Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security (CALSS)
Margaux Verhaeghe	European Union Delegation, China
Martin Orth	European Commission, Brussels
Anna Brachtendorf	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)
Christian Steffen	German Embassy in Beijing
Guan Jiaying	Guangdong Provincial Department of Human Resources and Social Security
Dai Xiaochu	ILO office, Beijing
Luis Frota	ILO office, Beijing
Zhou Jie	ILO office, Beijing
Christina Behrendt	ILO HQ, Geneva
Kroum Markov	ILO HQ, Geneva
Nuno Cunha	ILO ROAP
Simon Brimblecombe	ILO ROAP
Jia Jie	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS)
Yao Xiaodong	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS)
Yan Wei	Sichuan Provincial Social Insurance Administration
Feng Limin	Social Insurance Administration (SIA)
Xu Yanjun	Social Insurance Administration (SIA)
Yu Cong	Social Insurance Administration (SIA)
Shi Rong	UNDP China
Xiang Wei	Zhejiang Provincial Department of Human Resources and Social Security
He Wenjong	Zhejiang University

Annex E: Project Management Structure

Project Management Committee (PMC)

Project Directors

Lv Yulin, Deputy Director-General, International Cooperation Department, MoHRSS

Claire Courteille-Mulder, Director, ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia

Project Executive Director

Xu Yanjun, Director-General Level Counsel, Social Insurance Administration, MoHRSS

Deputy Project Directors (DDGs of technical departments of MoHRSS)

Qi Tao, Deputy Director-General, Department of Old-age Insurance

Du Gang, Deputy Director-General, Department of Unemployment Insurance

Wang Yufei, Deputy Director-General, Department of Work Injury Insurance

Liu Conglong, Director-General, Department of Rural Social Insurance

Li Weimin, Deputy Director-General, Department of Social Insurance Fund Supervision

Zhang Jiahui, Chief Engineer, Information Center

Wang Junfang, Vice President, Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security

Project Office

ILO: Luis Frota, Chief Technical Advisor/Project Manager and Zhou Jie, National Project Coordinator

MoHRSS: Yao Xiaodong, Director, International Cooperation Department, Feng Limin, Director, Social Insurance Administration

Wang Xiaochen, International Cooperation Department and Han Meng, Social Insurance Administration

Expert Team

Valerie Schmitt, Deputy Director, Social Protection Department, ILO Geneva

Nuno Cunha, Senior Social Protection Specialist, Decent Work Team Bangkok

Jin Weigang, President, Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Security, MoHRSS

Zheng Gongcheng, President, China Association of Social Security

He Wenjong, Director, Social Security Research Center of Zhejiang University

Participating Provinces

1. Beijing Municipality

Yu Xue, Deputy Director-General, Beijing Social Insurance Administration

Chen Jijun, Liaison Officer, Beijing Social Insurance Administration

2. Jiangsu Province

Jin Song, Director-General, Jiangsu Social Insurance Administration

Xiao Weijie, Deputy Director-General, Jiangsu Social Insurance Administration

Shen Hao, Liaison Officer, Jiangsu Social Insurance Administration

3. Zhejiang Province

Xiang Wei, Director, Zhejiang Bureau of Human Resources and Social Security (HRSS)

Li Jun, Director-General, Zhejiang Social Insurance Administration
 Hou Jingjing, Liaison Officer, Zhejiang Social Insurance Administration

4. Henan Province

Wang Mingan, Deputy Director-General, Henan Social Security Bureau
 Cao Xiuxian, Director, Henan Social Security Bureau
 Li Ran, Liaison Officer, Henan Social Security Bureau

5. Hunan Province

Kong Xiangguo, Deputy Director-General, Hunan Social Insurance Administration Bureau
 Shi Shugao, Director, Hunan Social Insurance Administration Bureau
 He Wei, Liaison Officer, Hunan Social Insurance Administration Bureau

6. Guangdong Province

Chen Shaolin, Deputy Director-General, Guangdong Social Insurance Fund Supervision Center
 Gan Wenchuan, Director, Guangdong Social Insurance Fund Supervision Center
 Chen Lichan, Liaison Officer, Guangdong Social Insurance Fund Supervision Center

7. Guangxi Autonomous Region

Huang Haiping, Deputy Director, Guangxi Autonomous Region HRSS
 Wang Kongxian, Director, Guangxi Autonomous Region Social Insurance Administration Bureau
 Huang Yushen, Liaison Officer, Guangxi Autonomous Region Social Insurance Administration Bureau

8. Sichuan Province

Zhou Li, Director-General, Sichuan Social Insurance Administration Bureau
 Yan Wei, Director, Sichuan Social Insurance Administration Bureau

9. Guizhou Province

Wang Hongxia, Director-General, Guizhou Social Insurance Administration Bureau
 An Bo, Director, Guizhou Social Insurance Administration Bureau

10. Ningxia Autonomous Region

Li Shutang, Director, Ningxia Autonomous Region HRSS
 Li Ming, Director-General, Ningxia Autonomous Region Social Insurance Administration Bureau
 Lu Jun, Director, Ningxia Autonomous Region Social Insurance Administration Bureau

11. Xinjiang Autonomous Region

Fan Aiyin, Deputy Director-General, Xinjiang Autonomous Region Social Insurance Administration Bureau
 Pei Gang, Director, Xinjiang Autonomous Region Social Insurance Administration Bureau

Social Partners

All-China Federation of Trade Unions
 China Enterprise Confederation

Contact details

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