



## 1994–2025: STAGES OF UNICEF–UZBEKISTAN COOPERATION

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Since the establishment of UNICEF’s country office in Tashkent in 1994, cooperation between Uzbekistan and UNICEF has evolved from service delivery to deep systems strengthening across health, education, child protection, and social protection. Drawing on country programme documents (CPDs), country office annual reports (COARs), national survey evidence (notably MICS 2000, 2006, and 2021–22), and recent legislation, this article periodizes the partnership into five phases: (1) foundation and data systems (1994–2004), (2) policy bridging and early systems work (2005–2009), (3) lifecycle and equity orientation (2010–2015), (4) alignment with broad reforms and learning outcomes (2016–2020), and (5) institutionalization and scale-up (2021–2025). Across phases, we trace measurable gains—especially child survival and pre-primary expansion—alongside persistent challenges in learning quality and inclusive services. The analysis concludes with lessons on sequencing reforms, evidence use, and institutional design that are salient for the 2026–2030 CPD cycle.

Uzbekistan ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in July 1994, the same year UNICEF formally opened its country office—anchoring a cooperation that now spans three decades. During this period, the partnership progressed from delivering essential services and building data systems to supporting comprehensive policy and institutional reforms. The aim of this article is to map that evolution, identify signature results, and surface forward-looking implications.

Methodologically, this is a documentary review and interpretive policy analysis. We synthesize successive CPDs (2005–2009 draft; 2016–2020; 2021–2025; and the 2026–2030 draft), country office annual reporting, and national survey data (MICS 2021–2022) to delineate shifts in priorities, financing, and modalities. We also assess salient legislation—including the 2024 Law “On the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence,” effective 15 May 2025—to understand institutional trajectories in child protection and social policy.

The first decade prioritized establishing a country presence and aligning national practice with CRC principles. Early efforts focused on maternal and child health, immunization, nutrition, and WASH, while strengthening national data systems—culminating in deployment of Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) that would become the backbone of trend analysis for child well-being. By the end of this phase, the baseline for many indicators was set, enabling later accountability for results.

Two features stand out. First, the partnership’s early investment in population-representative data (MICS 2000, 2006) created shared metrics and a technical community inside government. Second, a normative agenda took shape that would later expand into major legislative reforms (e.g., the 2008 Law on Guarantees of Children’s Rights), foreshadowing a move from projects to policies.

The 2005–2009 draft CPD marks a transition from primarily service delivery to more explicit systems work. It formalized sectoral priorities and articulated upstream policy objectives while preserving support to essential services. This period also consolidated monitoring frameworks that would later mature into full Results and Resources Frameworks (RRFs) in subsequent CPDs.

While granular budget figures are less prominent in public summaries for this cycle, the programmatic intent is clear: introduce policy instruments, build government capacity, and pilot models suitable for national scale. The cooperation began to position evidence (including MICS) not only for reporting but for policymaking and budget deliberations.

The 2010–2015 Programme of Cooperation (PoC) institutionalized a lifecycle framing—from early childhood through adolescence—while reinforcing equity for the most vulnerable. An independent evaluation at the end of the cycle documents contributions across sectors and consolidates learning on which upstream strategies travel best to scale. The subsequent CPD (2016–2020) was already being designed with these findings in mind.

This phase also saw steady improvements in child survival. By 2014, trend data from global child mortality estimates and national surveys showed sustained declines in under-five and infant mortality—a pattern that would continue into the next decade.

Approved in 2015, the 2016–2020 CPD synchronized UNICEF's work with a national reform agenda, including expansion of early childhood education (ECE) and modernization of social protection delivery. Portfolio evaluations—such as the end-cycle Education Programme evaluation—explicitly addressed quality and learning outcomes, signaling that access gains must be matched by proficiency. The 2020 COAR captures COVID-19 adaptations, including continuity of learning and accelerated social assistance via emerging digital systems.

A signature systems achievement in this period was the design and nationwide roll-out (2020) of the Single Registry for Social Protection—a digital gateway for social benefits that simplified applications and improved targeting. UNICEF's technical role, in collaboration with government and partners, is well documented in agency and government sources.

The current CPD (2021–2025) codified a shift to systems strengthening, with an indicative budget of US\$16.375 million in regular resources and US\$20.34 million in other resources. The program is organized around goal areas consistent with UNICEF's Strategic Plan and aligned with the national development strategy. Country Office Annual Reports detail results in social work professionalization, education reform, and integrated child protection services.

MICS 2021–2022 provides a robust mid-cycle evidence base. It confirms high net attendance in primary school and allows disaggregation of inequalities across regions and vulnerability groups. Complementing MICS, UNICEF's "30 Years" indicators brochure compiles trend series showing Uzbekistan among the countries that cut under-five mortality by over 75% since 1990; it also documents a rapid rise in pre-school coverage over the last five years, while candidly noting setbacks in learning quality (e.g., PISA 2022 proficiency).

Two landmark developments consolidate the child protection system:

- the establishment of the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) under the President in June 2023, with a mandate that includes coordination of child protection and care; and

- the Law "On the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence," adopted 14 November 2024 and in force from 15 May 2025, clarifying duties across state bodies and

introducing protective and preventive measures. These represent the legal and organizational backbone for multi-sectoral response and case management at scale.

In parallel, Uzbekistan's continued engagement with international norms (e.g., CRPD ratification in 2021) and constitutional amendments in 2023 reinforced child rights in the legal order—steps noted in UNICEF's 30-year review. Cross-cutting achievements and outstanding gaps

### **Measurable gains**

**Child survival:** Under-five, infant, and neonatal mortality have declined steeply since 1990, reflecting improvements in primary health care, immunization, and newborn care. While attribution is shared across the health system and partners, UNICEF's role in policy, supply chains, and home-visiting models is part of the causal fabric highlighted in country reporting and trend compilations.

**Early childhood education:** ECE coverage has expanded dramatically—supported by increased state financing and diversified service models. The CPD and UNICEF analyses emphasize equitable scale-up and quality, not only access.

**Social protection delivery:** The Single Registry digitized benefit administration nationwide, improving transparency and efficiency; UNICEF contributed to design and subsequent enhancements, including case management modules.

**Legal safeguards for children:** A comprehensive law against all forms of violence, effective in 2025, and a strengthened institutional architecture (including NASP and the Children's Ombudsperson framework) now provide clearer mandates and protective tools.

### **Persistent and emerging challenges**

**Learning outcomes:** Despite near-universal enrollment, the proportion of 15-year-olds reaching basic proficiency in PISA 2022 remains low, underscoring the need for sustained investments in teacher development, assessment, and inclusion.

**Equity and inclusion:** MICS disaggregation points to continued disparities for children with disabilities and rural communities; inclusive education reforms must translate into classroom-level support and accessible environments.

**Nutrition and early care practices:** Stunting has fallen but remains a concern for roughly a quarter-million children; exclusive breastfeeding trends show recent declines, requiring stronger enforcement of the Code on Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and community support for caregivers.

The design of successive CPDs reveals a consistent move toward results-based management with explicit RRFs. Budget structures show a modest but reliable "regular resources" (RR) core complemented by larger "other resources" (OR) raised for specific purposes; for 2021–2025 the CPD proposed US\$16.375m RR and US\$20.34m OR. Looking ahead, the 2026–2030 CPD projects US\$10.9m RR and US\$100m OR—signaling both fiscal ambition and the need for robust partner coordination and absorptive capacity.

On the government side, social spending for education has exceeded 5% of GDP in recent years, and creation of NASP comes with earmarked financing lines and a social protection fund—favorable macro-signals for sustainability of reforms co-developed with UNICEF.



### Lessons from 1994–2025

1. Sequence service delivery with systems reform. Early delivery platforms and surveys created legitimacy and data that later underwrote policy change—MICS and administrative digitization are emblematic.

2. Use evidence to steer equity. Regular survey cycles and CPD RRFs enabled course-correction toward vulnerable groups (children with disabilities, rural households), showing the value of disaggregated monitoring.

3. Institutional anchors matter. The 2023 establishment of NASP and the 2024/2025 child-protection law provide the mandates necessary for multi-sectoral response; without such anchors, upstream reforms risk fragmentation.

4. Quality is the next frontier. Expansion in access—especially ECE—must now be matched by learning gains; PISA results caution against complacency and justify continued focus on teacher support and assessment literacy.

### Conclusion

In three decades, UNICEF–Uzbekistan cooperation has moved from foundational services and data toward high-level systems reform backed by new legislation and institutions. The arc from 1994 to 2025 is one of consolidation: mortality has fallen, pre-primary access has surged, social protection delivery is digitized, and legal safeguards have strengthened. Yet the promise of these reforms will be fully realized only if the next CPD cycle can convert access into learning and inclusion—and if multi-sectoral child protection truly becomes a coordinated, case-managed system nationwide. With CPD 2026–2030 framing significant OR mobilization, the partnership now has both a mandate and a model for scale.

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