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### United Nations Children's Fund

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### Plan for global thematic evaluations 2014-2017

#### *Summary*

The plan for global thematic evaluations 2014-2017 has been prepared in line with the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2013/14](#)) and in accordance with relevant Executive Board decisions. The plan presents the guiding principles and objectives for global thematic evaluations in UNICEF, as well as a prioritized list of topics, along with details of the resource framework, the approach to implementation, key risks and the reporting arrangements.

#### *Elements of a decision*

The Executive Board may wish to (a) welcome the preparation of a plan for global thematic evaluations, aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014-2017; and (b) endorse the plan for global thematic evaluations 2014-2017.

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\* [E/ICEF/2014/1](#).



## I. Introduction

1. Evaluation at UNICEF supports the organization in fulfilling its mandate of promoting and protecting children's rights around the world. By supporting organizational learning and accountability, evaluation helps UNICEF to strengthen its work in achieving results for children. As the recently revised evaluation policy of UNICEF notes, evaluation challenges the organization to consider three key questions: Is the right thing being done? Is it being done well? Are there better ways of doing it?<sup>1</sup>

2. The evaluation function needs to address the right issues in the right ways; for this reason, it is important to plan evaluation activities carefully. As stated in the revised evaluation policy, the Evaluation Office has responsibility for preparing "a global evaluation plan, laying out strategic priorities for evaluation and identifying major global thematic evaluations to be undertaken independently by the Evaluation Office; designing and managing global evaluations in line with international standards of best practice; and providing timely dissemination of the results for action by management and other stakeholders."<sup>2</sup>

3. The evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office are, in most cases, large-scale global thematic evaluations. These are wide-ranging exercises intended to take a global view of UNICEF work in a particular subject area or theme; they intend to provide, in each case, findings, conclusions and recommendations of strategic relevance. The plan for global thematic evaluations provides a framework for undertaking these major thematic evaluations. The plan is closely aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014-2017, and aims to support and inform the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

4. This document presents the plan for global thematic evaluations of UNICEF for 2014-2017, listing the global thematic evaluations to be undertaken by the Evaluation Office over the next four years. The following sections outline the context of the plan; present its guiding principles and objectives; and provide a prioritized list of evaluation topics, along with details of the resource framework, the approach to implementation, key risks and the reporting arrangements.

## II. Context

5. In line with the revised evaluation policy, the Evaluation Office contributes to oversight of UNICEF work in a number of ways: conducting evaluations; engaging in partnerships to undertake evaluations and promote evaluation capacity development; developing and maintaining systems for managing evaluation results, including evaluation results generated by evaluations conducted at regional and country levels; and guiding and supporting the development of the evaluation function across the organization.

6. This document is concerned with the global thematic evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office and does not cover the other activities undertaken by the Office. Also not included in this plan are evaluations undertaken by other offices

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<sup>1</sup> The overall approach of UNICEF to evaluation is set out in the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF, approved by the Executive Board in June 2013. See E/ICEF/2013/14.

<sup>2</sup> See paragraph 35 of the revised evaluation policy.

across UNICEF, notably the relatively large number of evaluations conducted at regional and country levels, which address different requirements.<sup>3</sup>

7. UNICEF is subject to various kinds of review, audit and inspection. The Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI) conducts audits that assess the effectiveness and adequacy of internal controls within the organization. Management also conducts reviews, including performance reviews built into the programme cycle.

8. In addition to regular external audit by the United Nations Board of Auditors, UNICEF is subject to various external reviews and inspections. For example, the Joint Inspection Unit conducts reviews across the United Nations system; these reviews often touch on UNICEF activities. Bilateral agencies also conduct reviews and performance assessments.<sup>4</sup>

9. These various kinds of evaluations, reviews, audits and assessments have been taken into account in preparing the plan for global thematic evaluations so that the duplication of assessments and evaluations conducted by others can be avoided.

### III. The plan for global thematic evaluations 2014-2017: objectives and principles

#### Objectives

10. The purpose of the plan for global thematic evaluations 2014-2017 is to provide a coherent framework within which useful evaluation evidence can be generated systematically on the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the organization's work under the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014-2017, as well as providing evidence, as far as possible, of impact and sustainability.

#### Principles

11. The key evaluation principles set out in the revised evaluation policy — utility, credibility and independence — must guide the selection and delivery of global thematic evaluations.

12. In addition, the following aspects are also important to consider:

(a) *Coverage*: to reflect UNICEF activities in terms of geography, sectoral or thematic focus, and resource allocations or expenditure;

(b) *Interest, demand and relevance*: to address key issues identified by UNICEF management, staff and stakeholders;

(c) *Risk*: to address issues where UNICEF may be facing high levels of risk, including through novel, innovative or contentious work, as well as operations in

<sup>3</sup> In line with the revised evaluation policy, each office is responsible for preparing its own integrated monitoring and evaluation plan, designed to reflect the needs of its own particular programming context, objectives and work. This reflects the decentralized management structure of the organization.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network, which last assessed UNICEF in 2012; DFID, which included an assessment of UNICEF in its Multilateral Aid Review (2011); and the Netherlands, who conducted a Review of UNICEF Development Effectiveness: 2009-2011 (OECD DAC Evaluation Network, 2013).

unstable environments; and where interventions involve many stakeholders and long delivery chains;

(d) *Additionality*: this concerns the need to deliver evidence and analysis that adds to the existing stock of knowledge, and avoids duplication.

#### IV. Evaluation products, priorities and sequencing

13. Under the plan for global thematic evaluations, it is expected that the Evaluation Office will deliver four major evaluations and two smaller evaluations each year, as well as two evaluation synthesis studies. Supporting activities will include preparation of relevant scoping studies, and annual preparation of a methodological review. Further details of the scope and cost of these products is presented in section V and an annex.

14. Table 1 below presents in summary form the broad topics prioritized for evaluation, and the sequencing of the global thematic evaluations during the four years covered by the plan. The evaluations listed are expected to be delivered in the designated year, and are usually initiated the previous year.

15. All evaluations listed will be commissioned and managed by the Evaluation Office, with the exception of *joint evaluations*, which will be undertaken in collaboration with other agencies, typically through arrangements involving shared costs and joint management. A recent example is the joint evaluation of the joint programme by UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund on the elimination of female genital mutilation/cutting, for which a joint management response has been prepared.

Table 1  
Topics proposed for global thematic evaluations, 2014-2017

		2014	2015	2016	2017
1	<b>Major evaluation</b>	Child protection: combating violence against children	Health: strengthening national health systems and capacity	Health: H4+ joint programme on maternal, newborn and child health (joint)	Health: supporting global and regional initiatives
2	<b>Major evaluation</b>	UNICEF alignment with the Millennium Development Goals	Preventing stunting: improving equitable use of nutritional support and care.	Education: Girls' education and gender equality	Social inclusion: supporting policy and systems improvements
3	<b>Major evaluation</b>	Policy dialogue and advocacy work for children at national level	WASH: supporting access to safe drinking water and hygienic practices	Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES)	Research evidence: support for generation and use of knowledge

4	<b>Major evaluation</b>	Education: early learning and development standards (ELDS) and school readiness	Education and Peacebuilding programme	HIV and AIDS: improving equitable use of proven HIV prevention and treatment interventions	Gender equality: implementation of Gender Action Plan
5	<b>Evaluations</b>	Evaluability of the Strategic Plan	Support for national capacity development	Transformative agenda (joint) <sup>†</sup> : improved coordination of humanitarian action	Resilience: sustaining development gains in the face of shocks and crises
6	<b>Evaluation</b>	Communication for development: support for normative change	Partnerships: implementation of the partnership strategy	Integration and cross-sectoral linkages	Global and Regional Programme: results achieved under the Strategic Plan
7	<b>Evaluation synthesis</b>	Nutrition: review of evaluation results	Social protection: review of evaluation results	WASH: review of evaluation results	HIV and AIDS: review of evaluation results
8	<b>Evaluation synthesis</b>	Syria: lessons learned synthesis of existing evaluations (joint) <sup>†</sup>	Innovation: results of evaluations of new technologies and approaches	Review of UNICEF development effectiveness, 2012-2015 (meta-evaluation and synthesis)	Child protection: support for national systems and capacity development: results of evaluations
9	<b>Methodological studies</b>	Methods for evaluation of innovation	Methods for evaluation of policy	Methods for participatory evaluation involving young people	Methods for evaluation of normative work

<sup>†</sup> Conducted jointly with the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) group.

16. The evaluations listed above will provide evaluation evidence focusing on the seven outcome areas and seven implementation strategies set out in the Strategic Plan. Priority is given to outcomes in the following areas under the Strategic Plan: health; HIV and AIDS; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); nutrition; education; child protection; and social inclusion; as well as the cross-cutting themes of gender equality and humanitarian action. Of the 16 topics proposed for major evaluations, 12 focus directly on these areas.

17. The Strategic Plan sets out seven implementation strategies: capacity development; evidence generation, policy dialogue and advocacy; partnerships;

South-South and triangular cooperation; identification and promotion of innovation; support to integration and cross-sectoral linkages; and service delivery. The plan for global thematic evaluations addresses each of these areas, with the exception of South-South cooperation and service delivery, which are topics more appropriate for evaluation at country and regional levels.

18. In 2015, the international community will take stock of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and take decisions on the post-2015 agenda. An evaluation of UNICEF support for the MDGs will inform decisions to be taken at UNICEF on its work in the post-2015 context. This evaluation, to be undertaken in 2014, will assess the alignment of UNICEF strategies, programmes and partnerships with the MDGs and consider how far global targets were reflected in the work of the organization and its partners.

19. Important discussions will take place in 2017 concerning the preparation of the next Strategic Plan or any extension of the ongoing plan. To inform these discussions, the Evaluation Office will undertake, in 2016, a review of UNICEF development effectiveness. This would comprise a meta-evaluation drawing on UNICEF evaluations completed in the period 2012-2015, and will build on and update the recently published Review of UNICEF Development Effectiveness: 2009-2011.<sup>5</sup> An independent assessment along these lines would complement various self-reviews undertaken by UNICEF management, including the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, to be submitted to the Executive Board at its annual session in 2016.

20. The Global and Regional Programme is included as a topic for evaluation. This programme is new and represents an area of potential risk. Accordingly, an evaluation would not only review the range and quality of global and regional public goods generated by the programme, but also assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the funding arrangements.

#### **What is not included?**

21. The focus throughout the plan for global thematic evaluations is on (a) the substantive results areas; and (b) the implementation strategies set out in the Strategic Plan. This is already an ambitious agenda. To avoid overstretching and spreading resources too thinly, the plan does not include specific evaluations of organizational effectiveness or of management and operational excellence as described in the “management efficiency and effectiveness” section of the Strategic Plan. Although the Evaluation Office has successfully conducted useful evaluations of particular units such as the Supply Division,<sup>6</sup> such division-specific assessments are not included in the present plan.

22. In this respect, it may be noted that OIAI routinely undertakes audits of UNICEF divisions and functions. In recent months, major assessments of management efficiency and effectiveness have been undertaken in processes facilitated by the UNICEF Change Management Office and several teams of external consultants. While well-designed evaluations could usefully complement these audits and reviews, greater additional value is provided by keeping the focus

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<sup>5</sup> Commissioned by the Evaluation Office of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this review was published by the OECD DAC Evaluation Network (2013).

<sup>6</sup> Evaluation of the UNICEF supply function (2007).

of the plan for global thematic evaluations on programme results and intervention strategies.

23. Although country case studies will be a key element of many global thematic evaluations, country programme evaluations have not been included in the plan. Country offices are systematically audited by OIAI; and UNICEF is introducing a strengthened approach to midterm management reviews of country programmes. Country programme evaluations risk duplicating the efforts of others and, again, the focus on thematic results and intervention strategies in the work of the Evaluation Office offers greater added value.

## V. Resource framework

24. The Executive Director approved an increase in financial allocations to the Evaluation Office for the period 2014-2017. Regular resources (RR) allocations to the Evaluation Office for this period total \$18.2 million (\$7.1 million for management under the institutional budget and \$11.1 million under the Global and Regional Programme), while other resources (OR) total \$6.9 million.

25. The budget of the Evaluation Office funds not only the programme of global thematic evaluations, but also other activities for which the Office has responsibility. These include its support and oversight role, in particular efforts to strengthen and professionalize the UNICEF evaluation function and underlying systems across the organization; and the participation of the Evaluation Office in partnerships and networks, primarily inter-agency activities aimed at strengthening and harmonizing evaluation within the United Nations system, as well as initiatives to develop national evaluation capacity.

26. Global thematic evaluations will be funded from Global and Regional Programme resources, covering the costs of staff, travel, consultancies, and incidental costs relating to publications, workshops and similar items. As most of the major evaluations are undertaken by consultants commissioned by the Evaluation Office, it is primarily consultancy costs that need to be considered here. For this purpose, the Evaluation Office will budget about \$1.75 million in regular resources and \$1 million in other resources to fund global thematic evaluations: an annual total of around \$2.7 million.

27. In recent years, the Evaluation Office has allocated about \$450,000 to each major global thematic evaluation; around \$250,000 to each more narrowly scoped evaluation; and about \$50,000 for desk studies, such as the evaluations synthesis report presented annually to the Executive Board. The main costs are for consultancy fees and travel, based on the assumption that Evaluation Office staff closely scope, prepare and manage evaluations, including dissemination of evaluation results. In general, implementation is carried out by consultant teams, under the management of Evaluation Office staff.

28. Resources at this level allow establishment of an annual budget framework along the lines set out in table 2 below.

Table 2  
Resource framework for evaluations, 2014-2017

		<i>(In thousands of US dollars)</i>		
		<i>Funding source</i>		
<i>Item</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>RR</i>	<i>OR</i>	
1	Major evaluation	450	450	–
2	Major evaluation	450	450	–
3	Major evaluation	450	450	–
4	Major evaluation	450	–	450
5	Evaluation	250	250	–
6	Evaluation	250	–	250
7	Evaluation synthesis	50	50	–
8	Evaluation synthesis	50	50	–
8	Methodological review	50	–	50
9	Scoping studies	100	50	50
10	Contingency	200	–	200
<b>Total</b>		<b>2 750</b>	<b>1 750</b>	<b>1 000</b>

29. The resource framework is intended to be a general guide rather than a strict budgetary structure. While there is now greater predictability in the resources allocated to the Evaluation Office, it is expected that funding of \$1 million in other resources will need to be mobilized. Some flexibility is required to meet ad hoc demands that may arise in the course of any given year and for participation in joint evaluations. Contingency funds may be required to address emerging priorities where they are considered important and in line with the overall priorities of the plan for global thematic evaluations. The framework therefore includes contingency funding of \$200,000 in other resources.

30. Some thematic funding may become available to the Evaluation Office for evaluation of the humanitarian action of UNICEF, and for sectoral evaluations. If aligned with the overall objectives, principles and priorities of the plan, such allocations may allow some expansion of the resource framework.

## VI. Implementation

31. A consultative approach, engaging the stakeholders concerned, will be necessary to maximize the utility of the eventual results. The approach towards planning and delivery of relevant, high-quality evaluations is necessarily iterative and multilayered:

(a) At the most general level, the plan for global thematic evaluations reflects the priorities of the UNICEF Strategic Plan. It must present a broad scope of work, aligned with the Strategic Plan, and indicating broad coverage across its various outcomes and outputs. The key consideration is whether the topics selected appear significant, relevant and useful.



(b) Subsequently, at the level of annual workplans, further scoping work and consultation is required to identify evidence gaps, needs, demands and opportunities in particular areas, with a view to elaborating a relevant and feasible evaluation agenda. Scoping will identify areas of overlap and duplication, identify areas of high risk and provide an assurance of additionality.

(c) At the level of each individual evaluation, scoping and design work establishes a meaningful, feasible and economical approach.

32. Accordingly, a rolling approach is envisaged over the period of the plan. Within the overall framework, a detailed workplan will be prepared for the year ahead, making any refinements, modifications or substitutions of topics that may be required. Such a rolling approach provides the flexibility required to accommodate unanticipated high priority demands: for example, collaboration with other agencies in joint evaluations (such collaboration tends to be proposed at short notice).

33. Although the plan sets out priorities for global thematic evaluations, it will not spell out the methods to be followed for any given evaluation. Methods will be selected according to the requirements of the topic, as part of the scoping and design phases of specific evaluations.

## VII. Risks

34. Risks to delivery of the plan for global thematic evaluations include the following:

(a) *Mobilization of other resources falls short of targets.* A key assumption is that other resources can be mobilized each year at the level proposed. The Evaluation Office will increase its efforts for timely mobilization of other resources.

(b) *Staffing fluctuations.* Evaluation Office staffing for delivery of evaluations includes 3.5 staff posts at the P-5 level funded by regular resources, supplemented by several professional staff posts funded by other resources. Staffing gaps would impede timely delivery of evaluations. Increased attention to human resource planning and recruitment, including the development of evaluation talent pools at various grades, would mitigate this risk.

(c) *The Strategic Plan is superseded.* Due to the continuing volatility in the resourcing environment, and with key orientations expected to emerge from the post-2015 discussions, the Strategic Plan may need to be revised in the course of its implementation. The rolling approach to evaluation planning described above would allow relevant adjustments in the Evaluation Plan to address any major changes in the strategic framework of UNICEF.

## VIII. Reporting

35. Progress in implementation of the plan for global thematic evaluations will be reported in the annual report of the Evaluation Office and in the annual report on the evaluation function presented to the Executive Board each year. The Executive Board will thereby be able to maintain oversight of the plan for global thematic evaluations through its lifetime.

## Annex

### Evaluation products

1. Under the plan for global thematic evaluations, it is expected that the Evaluation Office will deliver four major evaluations and two smaller evaluations each year, as well as two evaluation synthesis studies. Supporting activities will include preparation of relevant scoping studies, and annual preparation of a methodological review.

2. The “major evaluation” category includes the large-scale global thematic evaluations undertaken independently by the Evaluation Office. Each of these large-scale evaluations deals with an important topic or theme, and usually evaluates not only the relevance and coherence of the broad strategic framework and overall results achieved, but also the efficiency and effectiveness of country and regional implementation, assessing, where possible, the outcomes, impact and sustainability of UNICEF work. Such evaluations often take a case-study approach, looking closely at performance in several country programmes, and engage with key partners and stakeholders at country level. Case studies may be complemented by questionnaire surveys, providing a broader picture. Major evaluations are demanding of time and resources, taking 12-18 months to complete, at a rough average cost of \$450,000.

3. Recent examples of such global thematic evaluations include the evaluation of community-based approaches to the management of acute malnutrition; the evaluation of the role of UNICEF as lead agency in humanitarian clusters; and the evaluation of UNICEF work on life skills education.

4. The “evaluation” category covers evaluations of a more modest scope, typically looking at an issue or a programme of narrower scope than the broad thematic areas of UNICEF work. The methodology is more limited, with less emphasis on country case studies, while nevertheless aiming to assess results and determine the efficiency and effectiveness of country and regional implementation.

5. The “evaluation synthesis study” category covers a different kind of product from the evaluations described above. The synthesis studies review the evaluation evidence available on a particular topic or theme. Typically, they will review coverage and quality of the evaluation evidence base, draw together key findings and lessons from the evaluations reviewed, and present general conclusions and recommendations based on the analysis. While desk review is the main task involved, this may be supplemented by interviews and surveys.

6. Examples of such studies include a synthesis study of UNICEF evaluation results concerning the protection of children from violence, which was presented to the Executive Board in 2012, and the synthesis study reviewing evaluations of humanitarian action, presented to the Board in 2013.

7. The “evaluability assessments” category can also be considered here. These are systematic assessments of the extent to which to which programmes or other areas of work are ready for evaluation or may be modified to enhance their readiness for evaluation. A recent example is the evaluability assessment of the DFID-UNICEF programme of cooperation on humanitarian action.

8. All of these types of evaluation are expected to generate findings, lessons, conclusions and recommendations. The recommendations are generally directed towards UNICEF management; they require preparation of a formal management response.

9. The remaining category concerns “methodological studies”. The issues to be addressed by evaluation continue to develop and change, and evaluation methods likewise continue to evolve. Methodological work by the Evaluation Office is intended to develop suitable methods and guidance for addressing such evaluation challenges within UNICEF, drawing on international best practice.

10. Evaluations can include both summative and formative elements. Summative evaluations are usually conducted towards the end of an intervention to determine how far expected results have been achieved (and whether there are significant unintended consequences) for purposes of accountability and to inform the future design and delivery of similar interventions. Formative evaluations are conducted during implementation, with a view to helping to improve performance. Of course, many summative evaluations have a formative aspect insofar as they inform future phases of an intervention or guide new interventions of a similar kind; equally, formative evaluations may have summative elements assessing early phases of implementation.

11. Evaluations undertaken under the plan for global thematic evaluations will, in most cases, consider both summative and formative aspects.

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