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Annual report for 2022 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

Summary

The present report provides an overview of the UNICEF evaluation function in 2022, analysing performance and highlighting some examples of agility, innovation and adaptation, as well as advances in two areas previously cited by the Executive Board as requiring accelerated progress: impact evaluation and national evaluation capacity development.

The report also identifies challenges and solutions where possible, drawing upon findings and recommendations of the independent peer review of the UNICEF evaluation function, the evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the UNICEF positioning to achieve the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, and through consultations undertaken to inform the review and revision of the current UNICEF evaluation policy.

The report concludes with forward-looking reflections, including on emerging activities to support the organization's increasing focus on identifying results for children at the impact and outcome levels.

Elements of a decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section VI.

* [E/ICEF/2023/9](#).

Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.



I. Overview

1. The year 2022 was pivotal in the evolution of the evaluation function, involving several significant strategic shifts in the first year of implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 to ensure that the function is fit for purpose for this quadrennium and beyond. A vision paper aimed at forging a “next-generation” evaluation function was finalized in early 2022, at which time an independent peer review of the evaluation function was also commissioned that informed a review and revision of the evaluation policy later in the year that is being presented to the Executive Board alongside the present report. An evaluation of the UNICEF positioning to achieve the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, the first exercise of its kind in the United Nations system, provided further impetus for change within the function.
2. The contribution of evaluation to the UNICEF oversight and accountability structure was also clarified and significant progress made in the use of innovative evaluation approaches, national evaluation capacity development, and impact evaluation – all areas previously cited by the Executive Board as requiring accelerated progress.
3. With respect to the key performance indicators established for the evaluation function, 2022 witnessed mixed progress. On one hand, the year saw the highest number of evaluation submissions on record, and evaluation quality remain high overall, even though a reduction in quality was recorded as a result of the selection of a new external firm to undertake quality assurance and the introduction of a stricter assessment framework. Other key milestones were achieved, including an increase in the percentage of evaluations covering both gender equality, humanitarian action and/or disability inclusion; and in the number of evaluations of humanitarian action and joint evaluations.
4. On the other hand, despite progress in the overall strategic direction of impact evaluation, the number of impact evaluations remained low. In addition, the integration of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the scope of analysis of evaluations declined. Most centrally, the significant progress towards the target of 1 per cent of the overall budget spent on evaluation reversed significantly.

II. Background and operational context

5. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, while still a significant feature of the UNICEF operational context, posed less of a constraint to the work of the evaluation function in 2022. Yet even as one global crisis began to wane, another entered a more acute phase: the crisis in Ukraine intensified in scope and scale, demanding the organization’s urgent response and shaping the work of the evaluation function in significant ways. Ongoing Level 3 emergencies in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Yemen also demanded urgent attention.
6. Within this context, the organization embarked on the first year of implementation of its new Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. Unprecedented in its ambition, it places heightened emphasis on results for children at the impact and outcome levels, which requires in turn that the organization be able to measure progress at these levels. Consecutively, the Executive Board has increasingly emphasized the importance of measuring impact- and outcome-level results in its decisions 2021/3, 2021/10, 2022/5 and 2022/13. Additional areas of increased Executive Board attention, such as national evaluation capacity development and accountability and oversight, also guided the priorities of the evaluation function in 2022.
7. The year 2022 was also pivotal in the evolution of the evaluation function more broadly. The independent peer review generated important insights for the function in

the policy realm and beyond. The review of the evaluation policy took these and other inputs into account in the revision process, and a draft revised policy will be presented to the Executive Board at the current annual session.

8. Another important factor affecting the evaluation function's work in 2022 was the overall organizational resourcing environment, which is discussed in section IV.E.

III. Key developments in the evaluation function

A. COVID-19

9. As the intensity of the COVID-19 pandemic waned and organizational operations gradually normalized, UNICEF and partners were able to benefit from important insights and learning from in-depth evaluative exercises on the response. The evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 response to the COVID-19 pandemic assessed how UNICEF responded to the first truly global humanitarian crisis. UNICEF also contributed to the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the COVID-19 Humanitarian Response, which sought to assess the collective preparedness and response of Inter-Agency Standing Committee member agencies in meeting the humanitarian needs arising from the pandemic. Both exercises helped to inform the ongoing response to the pandemic as well as in preparing UNICEF and its partners for future health emergencies.

B. Ukraine

10. As the crisis in Ukraine intensified, the Evaluation Office diverted resources to support the evaluative needs of the country office. This included the temporary remote deployment of a staff member to support the timely establishment of the necessary information management systems to monitor, report and eventually evaluate the response to the refugee outflow in neighbouring countries. The evaluation drew heavily on secondary data and applied natural language processing technology to analyse information from untapped, disparate institutional data sources such as meeting minutes and human resources monitoring tools, thus avoiding an unnecessary burden on field staff involved in the emergency response. The new prototype country data generator tool for evaluation developed through this process resulted in interactive visual products, which are being adapted for use across the organization.

11. In addition, country-level evaluation capacity was enhanced with the creation of a P-5-level chief of evaluation specialist position in the Ukraine Country Office. This led to the conduct of an operational review of the Ukraine response, supported by evaluation staff at the headquarters and regional office levels.

C. Strategy and vision

12. As the organization began to implement the new Strategic Plan, the Evaluation Office conducted the "Evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the UNICEF positioning to achieve the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025", the results of which were presented to the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2023 (E/ICEF/2023/3). Twelve critical recommendations were identified to improve readiness, thereby maximizing the likelihood that UNICEF will achieve its ambitious goals and measure its progress. All recommendations were accepted by UNICEF in its management response (E/ICEF/2023/4) and reflected in Executive Board decision 2023/3, which also requested UNICEF to further elaborate an action plan to implement the 12 recommendations. The annual report for 2022 of the Executive Director of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2023/10) further highlights the findings.

13. A vision paper for a “next-generation” evaluation function for UNICEF was also finalized in early 2022. In addition to presenting the overall vision – namely, “to consistently leverage rigorous, strategically prioritized evaluative evidence for UNICEF and its partners to realize the rights of every child in the Decade of Action” – the paper outlines preliminary plans for translating these principles into practice. A key component of the vision is ensuring better coherence and harmonization across the evaluation function. Significant measures have been taken in this regard, including routine meetings across all three levels of the function to discuss issues of shared strategic interest and potential joint work planning. The first in-person global evaluation meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic also took place in November 2022.

14. Building upon this internal visioning exercise, and as mandated by paragraph 68 of the revised evaluation policy of 2018 ([E/ICEF/2018/14](#)), the Evaluation Office embarked on two further reviews of the UNICEF evaluation function in 2022: an independent peer review of the evaluation function and a review and revision of the evaluation policy.

15. The peer review, led by an external panel and supporting consulting team, aimed to provide UNICEF with an independent, impartial and evidence-based assessment of the current state of the UNICEF evaluation function and the extent to which it is optimally positioned to serve its learning and accountability role within the organization. As noted in the update presented to the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2023 ([E/ICEF/2023/6](#)), the peer review acknowledged the significant progress that UNICEF has made since the last peer review in 2017, offering concrete recommendations for improvement within the function itself and in the wider organization. These include ensuring accountability and monitoring for roles and responsibilities, including funding and reporting lines, which can limit consistent achievement of independence, credibility and utility. Further risks identified concern limitations of the use of evaluations and limited interactions between the evaluation function and other UNICEF knowledge functions. The need for the Evaluation Office to be more empowered and supported by an enabling environment, including UNICEF leadership and management within other functions, was also identified. A copy of the final report and management response will be posted on the United Nations Evaluation Group and UNICEF websites.

16. In parallel with the peer review process, a review and revision of the 2018 evaluation policy of UNICEF also commenced. The objective was to critically assess the extent to which the current policy has helped the function to effectively fulfil its role and whether it remains fit for purpose. Led by the Evaluation Office in consultation with key stakeholders, the process was guided by a methodical, pragmatic and evidence-based approach. While the core elements of the 2018 policy have been retained, some have been revised in order to strengthen the ability of the function to fulfil its role effectively.

17. Linked to these exercises and in keeping with the increased focus of the Executive Board on accountability and oversight, the evaluation function had its key oversight role identified within the organization’s updated accountability system ([E/ICEF/2022/24](#)), including providing independent assurance of the systemic adherence to good practices and the validity of claims of results and good management. The accountability role of the Evaluation Office is implemented by the function across the organization, including contributions to oversight processes at national, regional and global levels. A wide range of evaluative roles and contributions towards the organization’s learning objectives are also noted.

D. Impact- and outcome-level evaluations

18. In response to decisions of the Executive Board to increase global emphasis on impact- and outcome-level evaluations, as well as the recommendation of the 2021 MOPAN assessment to produce “more robust evaluative evidence on the efficiency and sustainability of UNICEF’s programming”, the Evaluation Office finalized its impact evaluation strategy and action framework for the period 2022–2025. Developed through extensive internal and external consultations, the strategy serves as a practical reference for UNICEF in its efforts to inform national plans and child-focused policies with robust evaluative evidence at the outcome and impact levels. It outlines interlinked strategic pillars to (a) increase initiation and coverage of impact evaluations; (b) diversify methods and innovate; and (c) improve learning and programmatic synergy, as well as partnership and resourcing requirements.

E. Partnerships

19. Noting the importance placed on increased inter-agency collaboration by the Executive Board (E/ICEF/2021/3), work commenced in 2022 to prioritize strategic evaluation partnerships, beginning with development of a dedicated strategy. UNICEF continues to co-chair EVALSDGs,¹ actively partners in the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on inter-agency humanitarian evaluations,² and jointly undertakes many other inter-agency evaluations beyond the humanitarian sector. In 2022, UNICEF also explored becoming a formal partner in the Global Evaluation Initiative³ and will further identify its added value to other international partnerships for national evaluation capacity development and evidence synthesis activities in 2023.

20. Resulting from long-standing support for the UNICEF evaluation function from the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany, the Evaluation Office, in collaboration with the Programme Group (Goal Area 5), the UNICEF Innocenti-Global Office of Research and Foresight and the Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, with the support of the Public Partnerships Division, developed and signed a \$9 million agreement to launch a comprehensive evidence generation partnership on adaptive social protection for children in fragile contexts.

21. UNICEF also remains engaged in broader evidence ecosystem strengthening partnerships beyond evaluation.

F. National evaluation capacity development

22. In response to MOPAN recommendations and recent Executive Board decisions⁴ calling for accelerated progress in strengthening national evaluation capacity, the Evaluation Office rolled out and revitalized several important initiatives in 2022. These include the launch of the Executive Course for Evaluation Leaders (ExCEL), a two-week in-person course delivered by the National University of Singapore. Two cohorts were held in 2022 in Singapore and a third was co-led with the School of Transnational Governance of the European University Institute in March 2023. These brought together delegations from 29 countries, with a total of 101 participants, of whom 65 were senior-level government partners. Each delegation prepared its own action plan, which included initiatives for national evaluation bills, laws, policies and

¹ See <https://evalsdgs.org/>.

² See <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluations>.

³ See www.globalevaluationinitiative.org/.

⁴ See E/ICEF/2022/27.

plans; development or revision of national evaluation guidelines; awareness-raising campaigns; plans for new evaluations; and follow-up activities related to national evaluation capacity development.

23. ExCEL aims to enhance understanding of evaluation concepts and approaches, build confidence to use evaluations and a community of evaluation champions among senior government officials, and strengthen evaluation partnerships, both within and among countries. As part of post-training support, 70 ExCEL deep-dive webinars, open to ExCEL graduates and their national colleagues, are being delivered, in a variety of areas to ensure maximum tangible positive impact of the course. The ExCEL momentum will continue in 2023, as well that of the online Intermediate Moderated Programme for Evaluation Systems Strengthening.

24. Innovative national evaluation capacity development initiatives are also occurring at the regional level. For example, the West and Central Africa Regional Office evaluation team and local partners jointly formed a consortium of 26 universities in French-speaking Africa, through which partners co-created a regional one-year master's programme in evaluation. Deans, evaluation professors and senior-level students collaborated in a six-month dialogue leading to the development of 18 evaluation modules. Roll-out of the curriculum, aimed at over 1,000 students, is planned for mid-2023. The initiative also spurred articles and blogs on evaluation-related issues by African professors and students, enhancing the diversification of voices informing the current discourse on national evaluation capacity development.

G. Innovations for a next-generation evaluation function

25. Ongoing technological and methodological advances also shaped the work of the evaluation function in 2022. Alongside innovations in the use of real-time data in Ukraine, the Europe and Central Asia evaluation team, in collaboration with the UNICEF Office of Innovation, launched several digital randomized controlled trials to estimate impacts of digital solutions for regional programme delivery. The team also explored big data in mental health, applying behavioural insights models to evaluate interventions.

26. The evaluation function also began utilization of longitudinal secondary data sources to examine outcomes of the evaluation of the Level 3 UNICEF humanitarian response in Afghanistan and started exploring the use of artificial intelligence to synthesize thematic learning and conduct social listening analysis using big data. In addition, work led by the Evaluation Office on developing real-time high-frequency data through mobile telephone surveys has been rolled out to regions to support rapid programmatic insights and evidence for cross-sectoral programming.

27. In response to recommendations from the Executive Board and MOPAN to do more to “catalyse transformational and systemic change at the outcome level”,⁵ work commenced on a systematic meta-synthesis of evidence from UNICEF evaluations conducted during the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and the first year of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. This aims to provide an overview of the outcomes and impacts of UNICEF-supported interventions for children and adolescents, to identify and analyse key factors enabling or hindering organizational performance and identify recurring recommendations requiring organizational action. The synthesis uses applied artificial intelligence to tag and search terms across evaluation reports.

28. Simultaneously, as part of ongoing efforts to further strengthen organizational evaluation capacity, the Evaluation Office has produced a suite of methodological briefs and webinars, covering such topics as process-tracing and contribution

⁵ Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network, “Annual Report, 2021”, MOPAN, Paris, 2022.

analysis, among others. At the decentralized level, the West and Central Africa Regional Office evaluation team, partnering with other regions, developed methodological guidance on participatory evaluative approaches for working with children, including innovative photo-voice methodologies. Resources are being consolidated through a “methods library” on the Evaluation Office internal SharePoint portal.

H. Human resources

29. The year 2022 also saw the recruitment of key staff, including the recently created Principal Adviser evaluation position and a new chief of institutional effectiveness evaluations. In addition, with a view to enhancing cross-functional mobility, including across the evidence functions, the Evaluation Office hosted and took part in several stretch assignments.

30. The Evaluation Office also finalized a new long-term agreement with 24 organizations, which significantly expands the pool of quality evaluation firms from the Global South, as well as brings specific skills in areas such as impact evaluation and evaluability assessments.

IV. Performance overview: ongoing progress and key lessons of the evaluation function

A. Number of evaluation submissions and geographical coverage

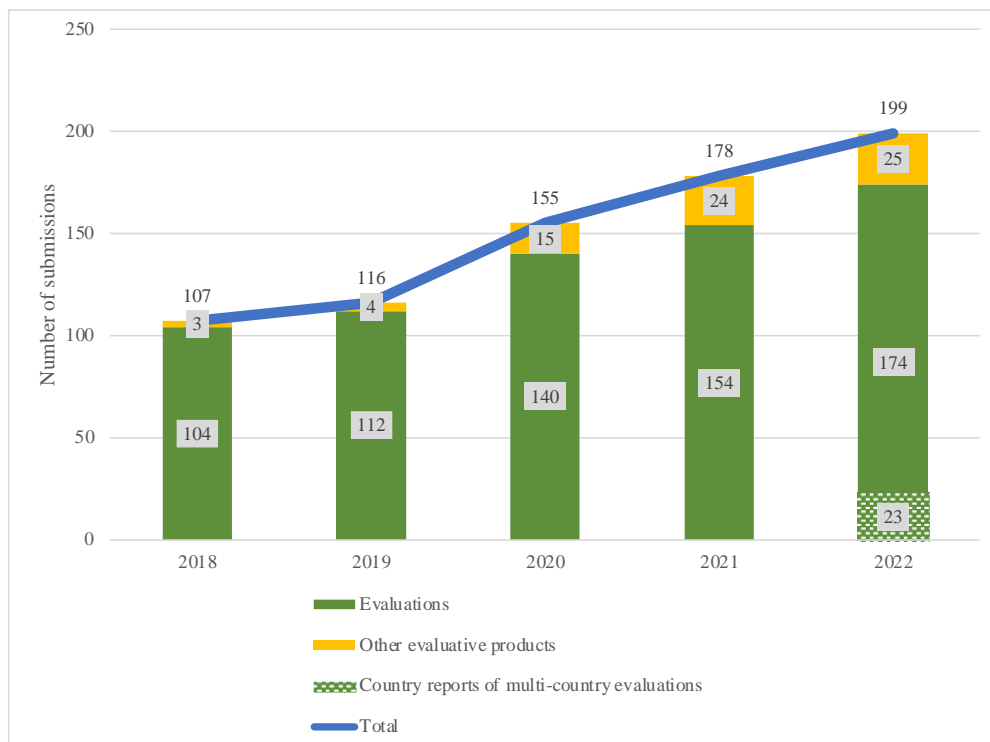
31. In 2022, there was an increase of about 12 per cent in the number of evaluation submissions, while geographical coverage remained at approximately the same level as in 2021. Building on the momentum from previous years, the evaluation function produced the highest number of submissions on record.

32. Evaluations are conducted at all three levels of the organization, with the large majority undertaken at country level. Of the 199 evaluative products submitted in 2022,⁶ 5 were conducted at headquarters level, with 194 conducted at the decentralized level.

33. As figure I shows, 21 more evaluative products were generated in 2022 than in 2021. This increase is partly because 39 evaluative products initiated during the global pandemic were only completed in 2022 and partly because more multi-country evaluations that generated country-specific evaluation reports took place in 2022.

⁶ An additional headquarters-led inter-agency evaluation was completed in 2022, but not yet uploaded to EISI or quality-assessed at the time of drafting. This is not accounted for in subsequent figures or other citations of the number of evaluations completed in 2022.

Figure I
Number of evaluation submissions, 2018–2022



Source: Evidence Information Systems Integration (EISI).

34. This increase is also due to a slight uptick in the number of other evaluative products. Ten evaluability assessments were conducted in 2022, compared with six in 2021. These exercises sought to enhance programme planning and design by gauging the extent to which programmes are prepared to be meaningfully evaluated in the future. There were no reviews in 2022. Fifteen real-time assessments were submitted, one more than in 2021. Eleven of these were related to COVID-19, with the others devoted to the Central American hurricane response, adolescent pregnancy, young people living with HIV/AIDS and employability.

35. As table 1 and figure II convey, these two trends – increased submissions and more diversified evaluative products – occurred at all levels of the function in 2022.

Table 1
**Number of evaluations and other evaluation products submitted, by location,
 2021 and 2022**

Location	Evaluations		Of which, country reports of multi- country evaluations	Evaluability assessments		Reviews		Real-time assessments		Total evaluative products	
	2021	2022	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
EAP	12	23	1	1	2	0	0	2	3	15	28
ECA	19	16	3	1	3	0	0	2	3	22	22
ESA	23	24	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	28	24
HQ^a	7	4	0	2	1	2	0	3	0	14	5
LAC	22	27	7	0	0	0	0	1	9	23	36
MENA	20	21	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	21	21
SA	25	18	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	28	20
WCA	26	41	12	1	2	0	0	0	0	27	43
Total	154	174	23	6	10	4	0	14	15	178	199

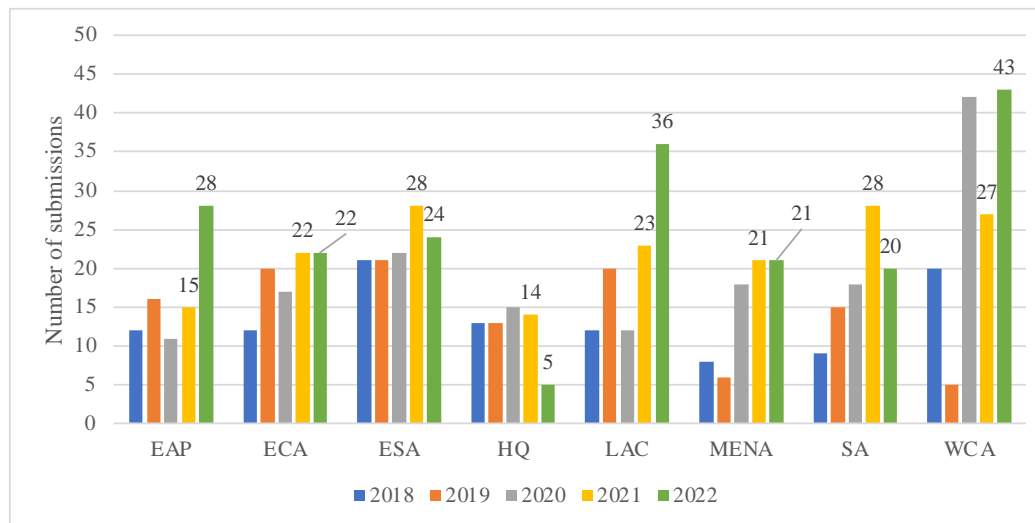
^a An additional headquarters-led inter-agency evaluation was completed in 2022, but not yet uploaded to EISI or quality-assessed at the time of drafting. This is not accounted for in subsequent figures or other citations of the number of evaluations completed in 2022.

Legend: EAP: East Asia and the Pacific; ECA: Europe and Central Asia; ESA: Eastern and Southern Africa; HQ: headquarters; LAC: Latin America and Caribbean; MENA: Middle East and North Africa; SA: South Asia; WCA: West and Central Africa.

Source: EISI.

36. Submissions increased significantly in the East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean and West and Central Africa regions. In the latter, however, there were several country reports of multi-country evaluations – also true to a lesser extent, in the Latin America and Caribbean region. While the Middle East and North Africa and Europe and Central Asia regions submitted the same number of evaluative products as last year, there was a slight decline in the Eastern and Southern Africa region, and a significant reduction in the South Asia region, as well as at headquarters. Possible reasons for this reduction at headquarters level are explored in section V.

Figure II
Number of evaluation product submissions at decentralized level by location, 2018–2022

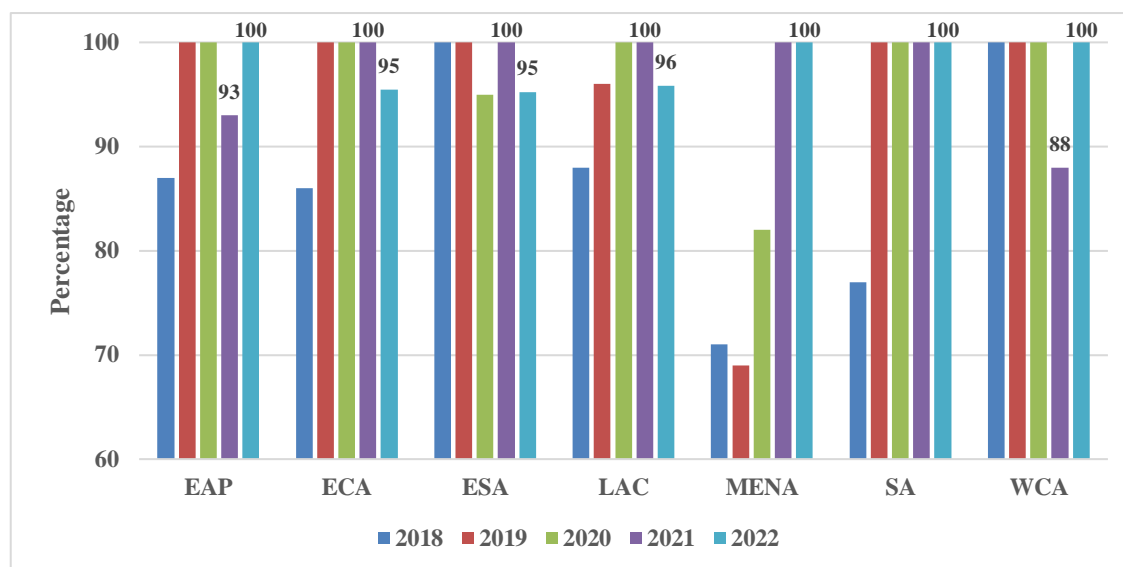


Legend: EAP: East Asia and the Pacific; ECA: Europe and Central Asia; ESA: Eastern and Southern Africa; HQ: headquarters; LAC: Latin America and Caribbean; MENA: Middle East and North Africa; SA: South Asia; WCA: West and Central Africa.

Source: EISI.

37. As shown in figure III, overall geographical coverage (country and regional offices that have conducted an evaluation in the past three years) remained almost the same in 2022 (98 per cent) as in 2021 (97 per cent). This was possible thanks to multi-country evaluations, whereby offices pool financial and human resources, allowing evaluations to be conducted in contexts with limited resources. Two of the seven regions remained at 100 per cent coverage (Middle East and North Africa and South Asia), while two regions increased coverage to 100 per cent in 2022 (East Asia and the Pacific, up from 93 per cent, and West and Central Africa, up from 88 per cent). In three regions, coverage dropped slightly from 100 per cent: to 95 per cent in Europe and Central Asia and Eastern and Southern Africa, and to 96 per cent in Latin America and Caribbean.

Figure III
Evaluation coverage rates, by region, 2018–2022



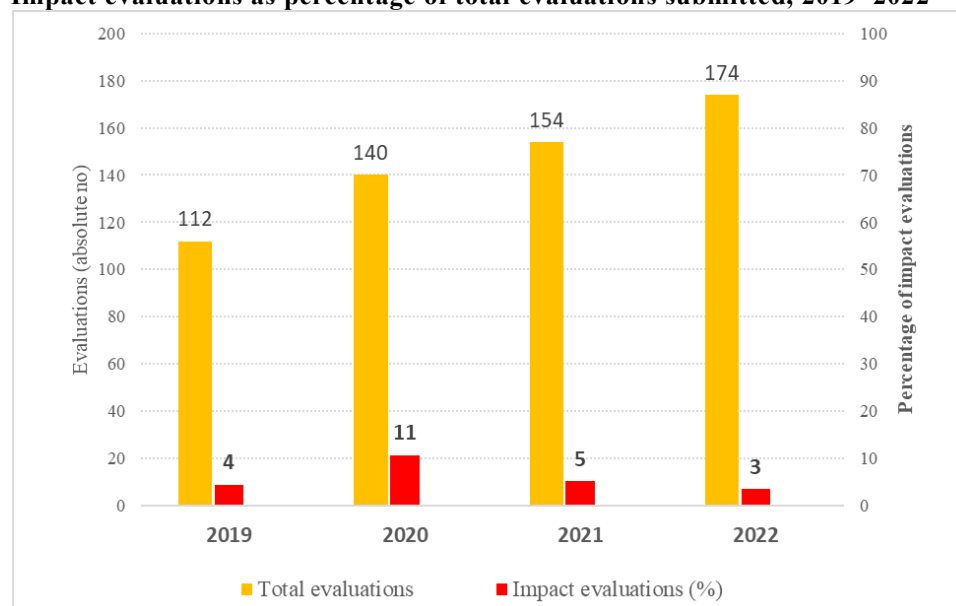
Legend: EAP: East Asia and the Pacific; ECA: Europe and Central Asia; ESA: Eastern and Southern Africa; HQ: headquarters; LAC: Latin America and Caribbean; MENA: Middle East and North Africa; SA: South Asia; WCA: West and Central Africa.

Source: EISI.

B. Evaluating impact and collective contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals

38. As figure IV shows, the overall coverage of UNICEF programme interventions with impact evaluations which rigorously assess the effectiveness of innovative and scalable interventions remains low. In total, 3 per cent of all evaluations were produced with credible counterfactual design in 2022. As observed over the past four years, impact evaluation evidence in the area of social protection continues to dominate the thematic distribution in 2022, with two thirds of impact evaluations being in this programmatic area. Findings from social protection impact evaluations have been influential in scaling up effective child grants programmes. Capacity to conduct more robust impact evaluation is being strengthened across the evaluation function, to help develop a rigorous evaluative evidence base in other programmatic areas including child protection and nutrition, but further resourcing is needed.

Figure IV
Impact evaluations as percentage of total evaluations submitted, 2019–2022



Source: Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS).

39. Evaluations produced in 2022 continue to show a well-distributed mix of backward-looking (summative) and forward-looking (formative) exercises, though with fewer exclusively formative exercises. Nearly half (47 per cent) of evaluations were both summative and formative, while about one third (32 per cent) were exclusively formative. One in five (20 per cent) was purely summative, and there was one meta-evaluation.

Table 2
Evaluations conducted in 2021 and 2022, by type

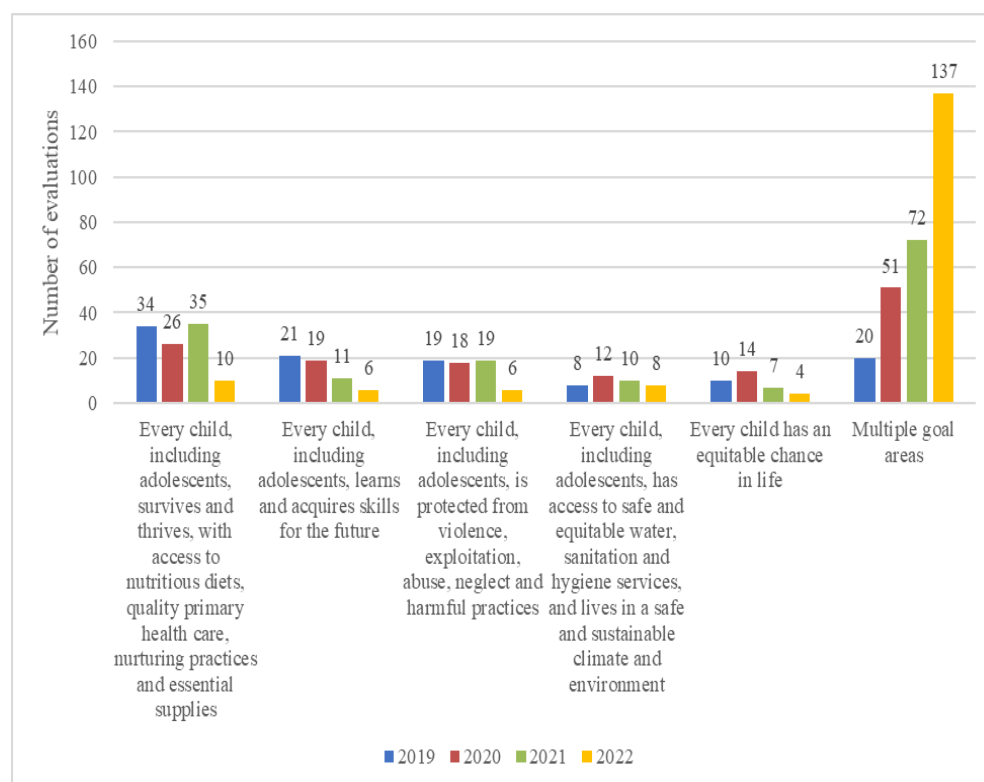
Evaluation type	Number of evaluations		Percentage of all evaluations	
	2021	2022	2021	2022
Formative	53	56	34	32
Summative	19	35	12	20
Summative and formative	81	82	53	47
Meta-evaluation	1	1	1	1

Source: GEROS.

1. Goal Area distribution

40. Since 2019, there has been a steady year-on-year increase in the number of evaluations covering multiple Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan (from 20 in 2019 to 137 in 2022) as regional and country offices shift to more strategic evaluations at the decentralized level that mirror the plan for global evaluations, 2022–2025 (E/ICEF/2022/3), which was designed to ensure broad coverage across all Goal Areas.

Figure V
Thematic coverage of evaluations, 2019–2022^a



^a The Goal Areas in the previous UNICEF Strategic Plan were slightly different: 1. Every child survives and thrives; 2. Every child learns; 3. Every child is protected from violence and exploitation; 4. Every child lives in a safe and clean environment; 5. Every child has an equitable chance in life.

2. Joint and inter-agency evaluations

41. In 2022, a total of 36 UNICEF evaluation staff members from across the organization actively participated in 20 United Nations Evaluation Group working and interest groups, covering a wide range of topics and sectors. UNICEF remains committed to the United Nations Evaluation Group through supporting new and updated guidance, advancing learning, and sharing good evaluation practices with the wider United Nations evaluation community.

42. Furthermore, since 2018 the number of evaluations that are managed jointly with one or more United Nations agencies has increased. Of the 14 (10 in 2021) evaluations managed jointly with other United Nations agencies in 2022, four each took place in East Asia and the Pacific and Europe and Central Asia, three in Eastern and Southern Africa, one each in Latin America and Caribbean and the Middle East and North Africa, and one at the global level. West and Central Africa and South Asia did not conduct any joint evaluations in 2022.

43. In 2022, UNICEF continued to support Governments to use evaluative evidence in their voluntary national reviews as well as for country-led evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, UNICEF supported the Government of Nigeria in conducting country-led evaluations of the effectiveness and impacts of Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 4 in Nigeria. The Evaluation Office, as a member of a multi-stakeholder EvalPartners task force, and at the request of the Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations, supported the drafting of a United Nations General Assembly resolution on strengthening voluntary national reviews through evaluation. The Evaluation Office also co-hosted, with the World

Food Programme and other members of the EvalPartners task force, a virtual voluntary national review lab at the 2022 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on the topic “How country-led evaluations can deliver the evidence-based VNRs intended for the SDGs”. In June 2022, for the second consecutive year, UNICEF – together with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the International Institute for Environment and Development, the International Development Evaluation Association, the German Institute for Development Evaluation and EVALSDGs – organized an online workshop on “Evaluation to connect national priorities with the SDGs”. This year’s workshop was tailored for government officials across Asia.

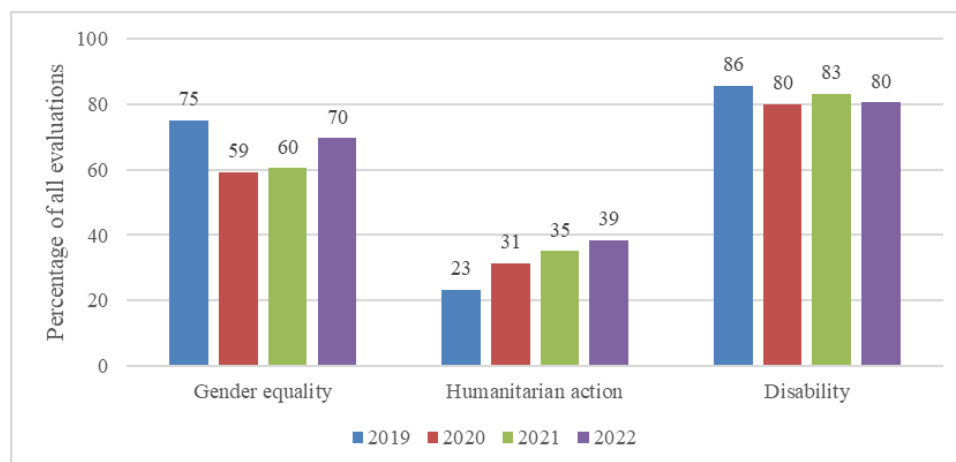
3. Evaluation coverage of disability, gender equality and humanitarian action

44. UNICEF pays particular attention in its evaluations to ensure coverage of disability, gender equality and humanitarian action. Disability coverage has remained mostly steady at around 80 per cent to 86 per cent since 2019, with a small decrease of 3 per cent in 2022 compared with 2021. Evaluation teams continue to be briefed on how evaluation design, findings and recommendations must consider disability across all policies and programmes. Evaluators are asked to conduct focus group discussions with persons with disabilities and/or their families and to produce disability-disaggregated data to ensure that no one is left behind.

45. In 2022, UNICEF made notable progress towards the achievement of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy indicator 10, which measures the extent to which disability inclusion is considered in all phases of evaluations. The Evaluation Office undertook a meta-synthesis of disability inclusion in development and humanitarian evaluations from 2016 to 2021 and developed guidance on disability-inclusive approaches for the function throughout the evaluation process. As a result, UNICEF is now among the very few agencies whose indicator 10 rating has moved upward from “approaches requirements” to “meets requirements”. The guidance has been presented widely to positive acclaim, both internally, and externally through the Global Action on Disability network and on social media. These efforts are expected to redress the slight decline noted in 2022.

46. As shown in figure VI, while the percentage of evaluations covering disability has slightly declined and returned to the 2020 value, there was a 10 per cent increase in the percentage of evaluations in 2022 covering gender equality and a 4 per cent increase in the percentage of evaluations covering humanitarian action as a cross-cutting theme. The evaluation function continues to uphold standards of conduct of evaluation teams to engage affected populations, informing them of their rights and entitlements and involving them as key stakeholders in the development of recommendations.

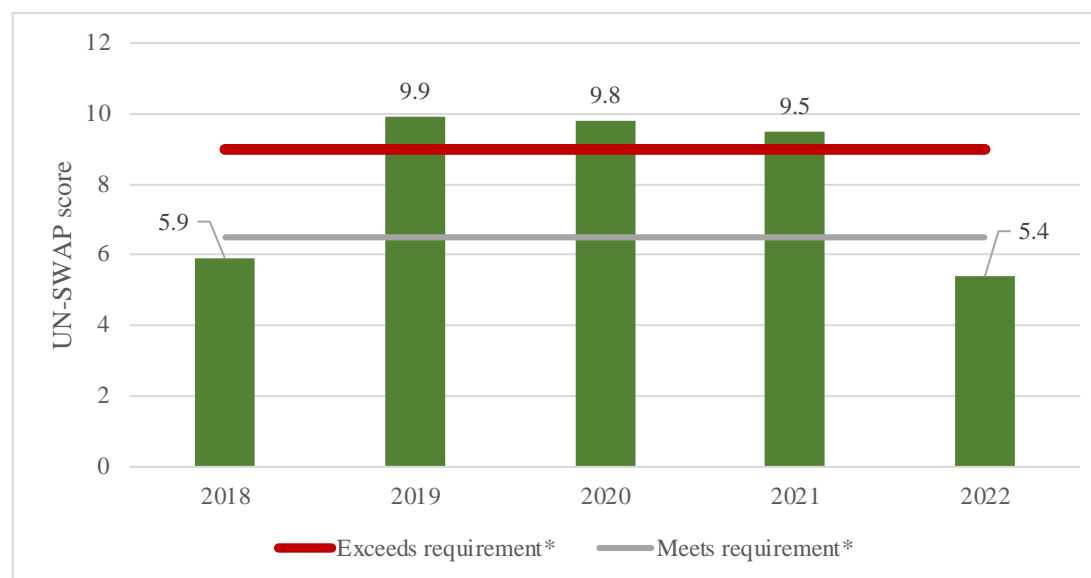
Figure VI
Percentage of evaluations covering disability, gender equality and humanitarian action, 2019–2022



Source: GEROS.

47. While in the past few years there has been consistent improvement in the integration of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the scope of analysis of evaluations (evaluation objectives, criteria, questions/indicators in the evaluation framework), in 2022 the organization’s performance under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women deteriorated. The overall performance of evaluations saw a sharp increase in 2019 thanks to the evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021 and reached “exceeds requirement” until 2021. However, the overall performance of the 2022 evaluation portfolio was just below “meets requirement”, as shown in figure VII below.

Figure VII
Evaluation performance under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2018–2022^a



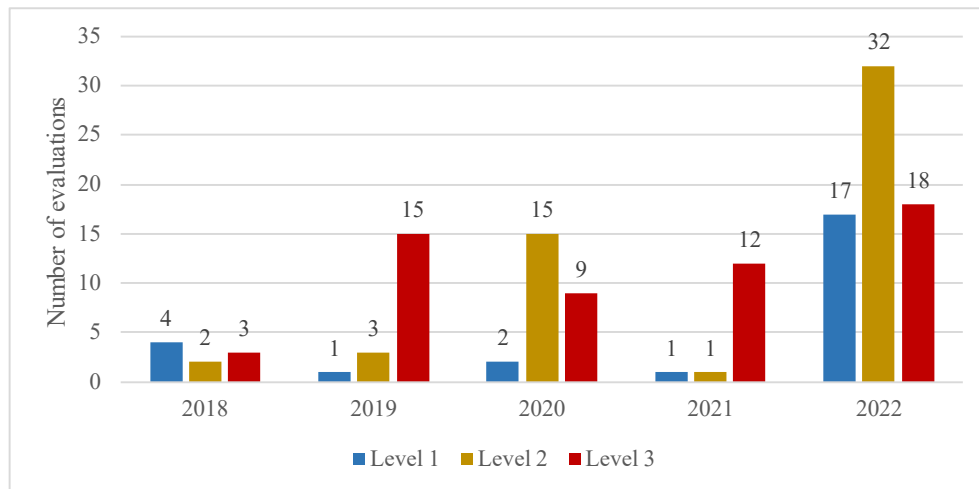
^a Evaluation reports must have a minimum UN-SWAP score of 9 to reach “exceeds requirement” or 6.5 for “meets requirement”.

Source: GEROS.

48. The function remained focused on the evaluation of declared emergencies in 2022. As figure VIII indicates, many more evaluations of humanitarian action were conducted than in previous years, including 18 evaluations in countries currently involved in responding to Level 3 emergencies, compared with 12 in 2021. There was also a significant increase in evaluations of Level 2 emergencies (33 compared with 1 in 2021 and 15 in 2020).

Figure VIII

Number of humanitarian evaluations conducted by emergency level, 2018–2022

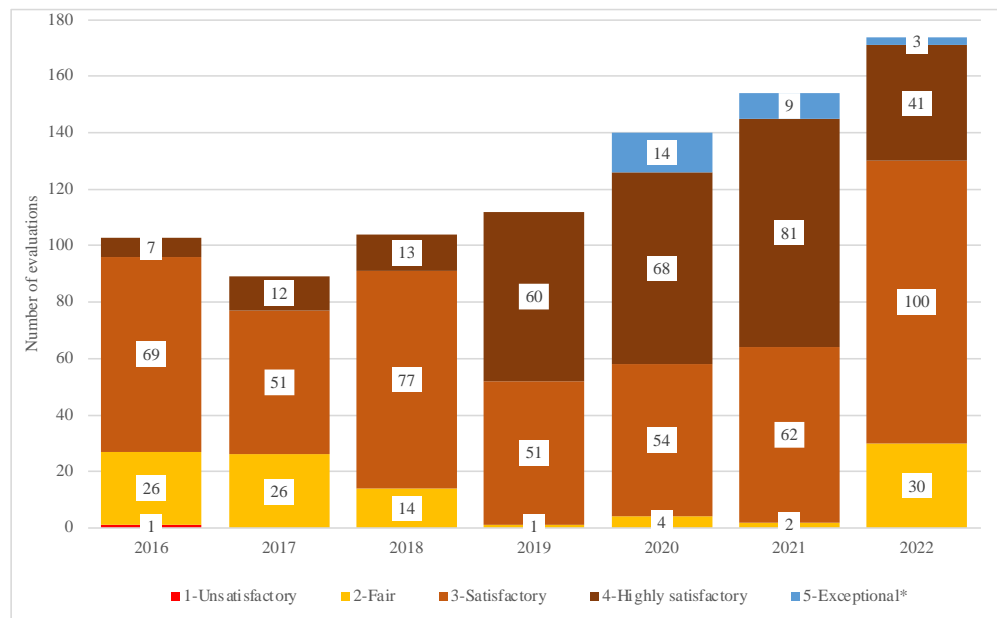


Source: GEROS.

C. Evaluation quality

49. While evaluation quality remained consistently high in the 2019–2021 period, a reduction was recorded in 2022. Of the 174 evaluations that were independently assessed by an external firm using GEROS, 3 were rated “exceptional”, compared with 9 in 2021; 41 were “highly satisfactory”, compared with 81 in 2021; and 100 were “satisfactory”, compared with 62 in 2021. Thirty evaluations were rated “fair”, compared with two in 2021. No evaluation received a grade of “unsatisfactory”, a positive trend that has continued since 2017.

Figure IX
Overall evaluation quality ratings, 2016–2022^a



^a The “exceptional” category was introduced in the 2020 cycle following a GEROS review.

Source: GEROS.

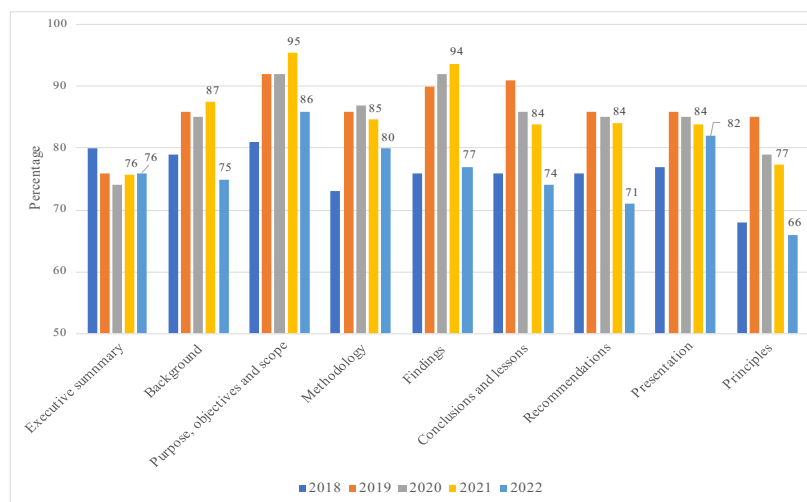
Table 3
Mean and median scores of evaluation quality ratings, 2016–2022

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Mean score	2.80	2.84	2.92	3.53	3.66	3.63	3.13
Median score	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00

50. This downward trend in quality is largely due to a stricter assessment framework introduced in 2022 and piloted by a new external firm contracted to assess UNICEF evaluation reports. Tightened quality assessment will help ensure that all evaluations progressively meet higher standards and the function continues to improve.

51. A more detailed breakdown in figure X below shows that the stricter assessment led to a reduction in scores across all key elements of evaluation reports.

Figure X
Average evaluation quality rating score by report section, 2018–2021



D. Evaluation management response submission and implementation

52. Of the 165 evaluations conducted in 2022 that required a management response, 121 were submitted on time (73 per cent). Forty-four management responses (27 per cent) have passed the 60-day window and are now overdue, a significant increase from 5 per cent in 2021. However, trends for earlier years (2018–2020) show that nearly all evaluations do eventually generate a management response.

Figure XI
Timeliness of compliance with management response requirement, 2018–2022^a

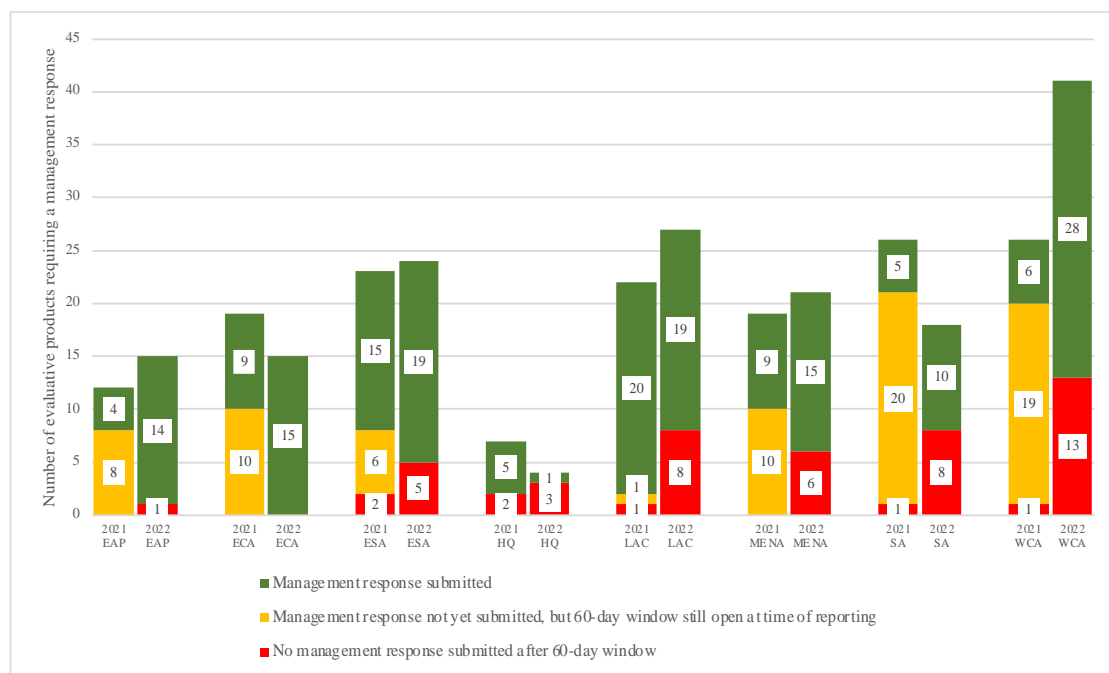


^a The time frame for submitting a management response was temporarily extended to 90 days in 2020 and 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: EISI.

53. As shown in figure XII below, one region has no overdue management responses at the time of reporting: Europe and Central Asia. The highest number of overdue management responses (13) are from the West and Central Africa region, followed by the South Asia region and Latin America and Caribbean region, with eight overdue management responses each, the Middle East and North Africa region, with six, and Eastern and Southern Africa, with five overdue management responses. Headquarters have three overdue responses each, while East Asia and the Pacific region has one overdue management response.

Figure XII
Timeliness of compliance with management response requirement, by location, 2021–2022^a

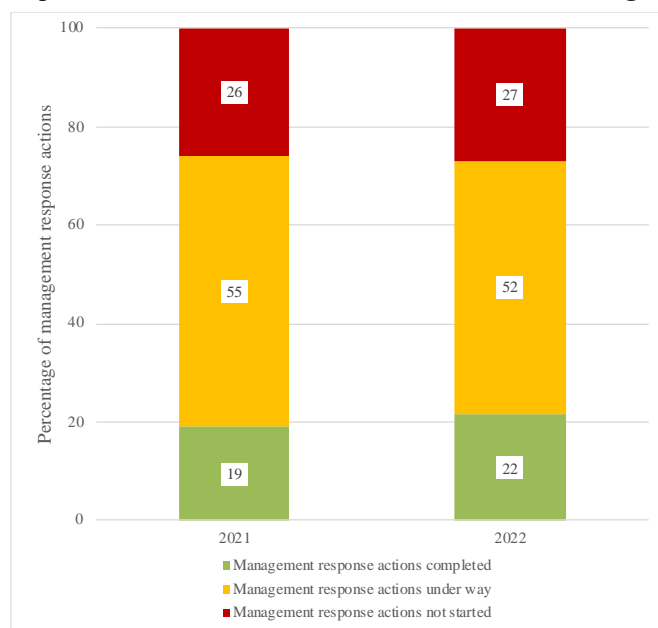


^a The time frame for submitting a management response was temporarily extended to 90 days in 2020 and 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Legend: EAP: East Asia and the Pacific; ECA: Europe and Central Asia; ESA: Eastern and Southern Africa; HQ: headquarters; LAC: Latin America and Caribbean; MENA: Middle East and North Africa; SA: South Asia; WCA: West and Central Africa.

Source: EISI.

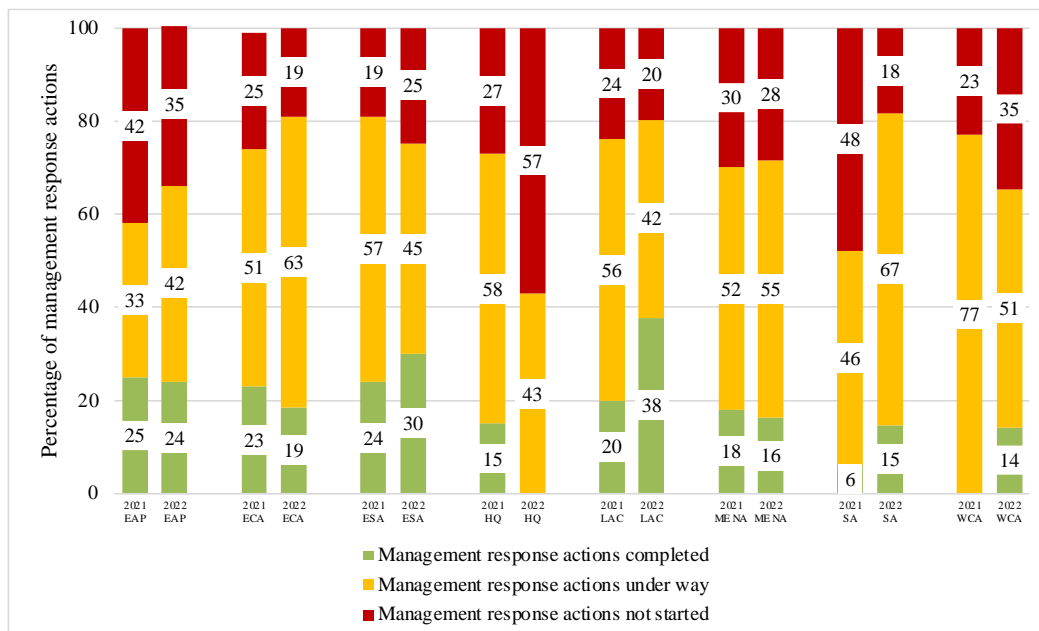
Figure XIII
Implementation status of actions identified in management responses, 2021–2022



Source: EISI.

54. Regionally, there are some variations between 2021 and 2022 in the pace of implementation of management response actions, as shown in figure XIV below.

Figure XIV
Implementation status of actions identified in management responses, by location, 2021–2022

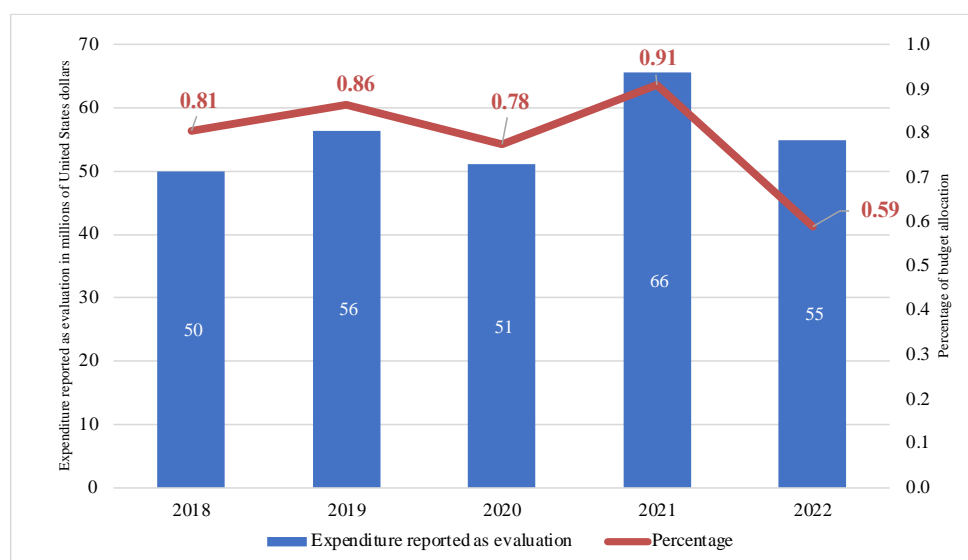


Legend: EAP: East Asia and the Pacific; ECA: Europe and Central Asia; ESA: Eastern and Southern Africa; HQ: headquarters; LAC: Latin America and Caribbean; MENA: Middle East and North Africa; SA: South Asia; WCA: West and Central Africa.
Source: EISI.

E. Financial resources and expenditure reported as evaluation

55. Figure XV shows trends in overall expenditure reported as evaluation during this period, using the current formula which includes all expenditure (actuals and commitments) reported as evaluation as a percentage of total budget allocations.

Figure XV
UNICEF expenditure reported as evaluation, in millions of United States dollars and as a percentage of total budget allocation, 2018–2022^a



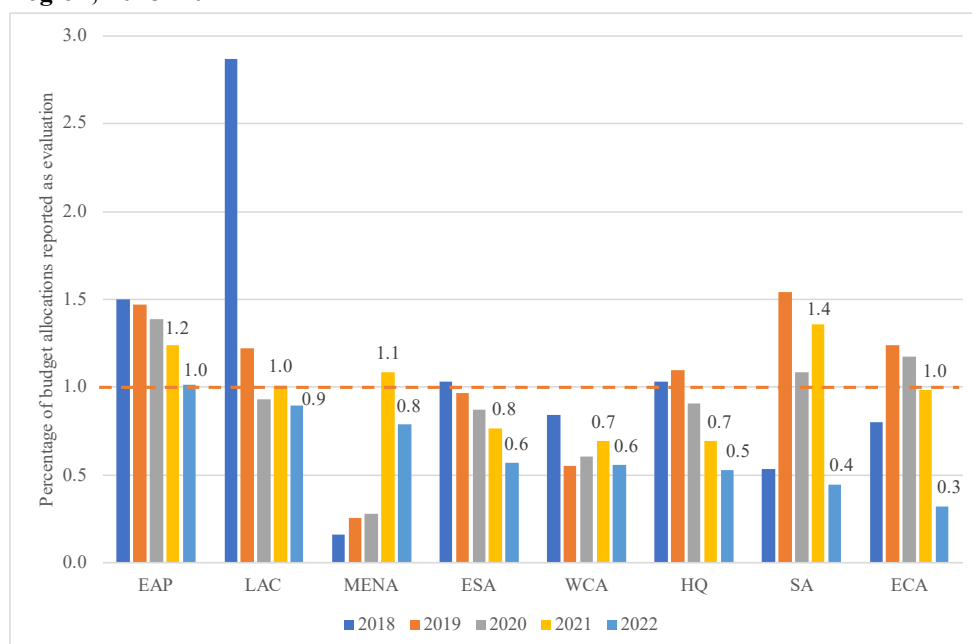
^a The bars and the amounts included inside show the expenditure reported as evaluation in millions of United States dollars for each year. The red line and numbers denote percentages of the total budget allocations reported as evaluation expenditure per year.

Source: Data for the numerator: activities reported as evaluation expenditure (actuals and commitments) retrieved on 31 December 2022; data for the denominator: total budget allocation retrieved on 31 January 2023.

56. Performance on expenditure reported as evaluation declined significantly in 2022 compared with 2021, to 0.59 per cent of overall budget allocation. This information is based on internal data recorded early in the new year. More recently, financial statements figures have been made available earlier in the year and could therefore be used to calculate this percentage more accurately. If the 2022 financial statement were to be used for programme expenditure, the percentage would rise to 0.66 per cent. As UNICEF financial statements are now available early in the year, the formula for this evaluation expenditure performance indicator can be revised to provide up-to-date figures as of time of reporting, starting from 2023.

57. Figure XVI below shows trends at the decentralized level. One region, East Asia and the Pacific, met the 1 per cent target, while Latin America and Caribbean and Middle East and North Africa came close to the target, with 0.9 per cent and 0.8 per cent, respectively, of total budget allocations spent on activities reported as evaluations. All other regions, including headquarters, were around the 0.5 per cent mark.

Figure XVI
Expenditure reported as evaluation as percentage of budget allocations, by region, 2018–2022



Legend: EAP: East Asia and the Pacific; ECA: Europe and Central Asia; ESA: Eastern and Southern Africa; HQ: headquarters; LAC: Latin America and Caribbean; MENA: Middle East and North Africa; SA: South Asia; WCA: West and Central Africa.

Source: Data for the numerator: activities reported as evaluation expenditure (actuals and commitments) retrieved on 31 December 2022; data for the denominator: total budget allocations retrieved on 31 January 2023.

58. However, an analysis of expenditure on activities reported as being evaluation activities is provided in table 4 below. This analysis revealed that in 2022, while 70 per cent of reported evaluation expenditure was actually spent on evaluations and other evaluation products and activities, a significant percentage (30 per cent) was spent on other types of activities.

Table 4
Activities reported as evaluation expenditure, by activity type, 2022

Activities	Expenditure (in United States dollars)	Percentage
Activities directly related to evaluation	38 073 275	70
Data and surveys	3 505 294	6
Planning and programme reviews	1 755 344	3
Monitoring	1 294 542	2
Research	264 703	1
Evidence generation	612 357	1
Systems strengthening	4 187 139	8
Other	5 128 126	9
Total	54 820 780	100

Source: Activities reported as evaluation expenditure (actuals and commitments) retrieved on 31 December 2022.

59. As noted above, some of the trends in 2022 regarding the percentage of budget allocations reported as evaluation expenditure may be due to the overall increase in budgets allocations in recent years. In order to remove this factor, which may skew the distribution of expenditure reported as evaluation, table 5 provides a more detailed breakdown.

Table 5
Activities reported as evaluation, excluding headquarters and offices with the largest budgets, 2022

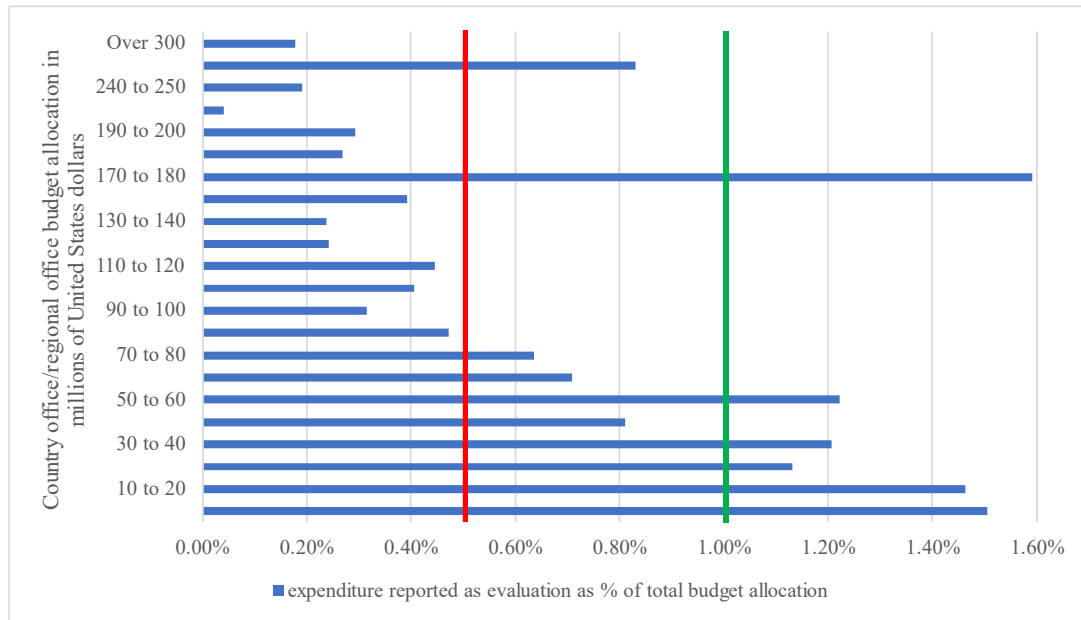
<i>Offices</i>	<i>Expenditure reported as evaluation (in millions of United States dollars)</i>	<i>Per cent of total budget allocations</i>	<i>Expenditure on activities directly related to evaluation (in millions of United States dollars)</i>	<i>Per cent of total budget allocations</i>	<i>Expenditure on other activities</i>	<i>Per cent of total budget allocations</i>
All country offices and regional offices (excluding headquarters)	46.3	0.60	30.9	0.40	15.4	0.20
Country offices and regional offices (excluding six offices with programme expenditure over \$250 million)	36.5	0.71	24.8	0.48	11.7	0.23

Source: Data for the numerator: activities reported as evaluation expenditure (actuals and commitments) retrieved on 31 December 2022; data for the denominator: total budget allocations retrieved on 31 January 2023.

60. The figures in the first row of the above table exclude headquarters offices and only reflect expenditure by country and regional offices. In this scenario, the percentage of expenditure reported as evaluation improves slightly, from 0.59 per cent to 0.60 per cent. The percentage of expenditure directly related to evaluation is at 0.40 per cent.

61. The second row excludes the six largest country offices with budget allocations over \$250 million, which often operate in complex programme environments (three out of six country offices excluded are involved in Level 3 emergency responses). In this scenario, expenditure reported as evaluation rises to 0.71 per cent, with expenditure for activities directly related to evaluation at 0.48 per cent of total budget allocations.

Figure XVII
Activities reported as evaluation expenditure, by size of total budget allocation, 2022

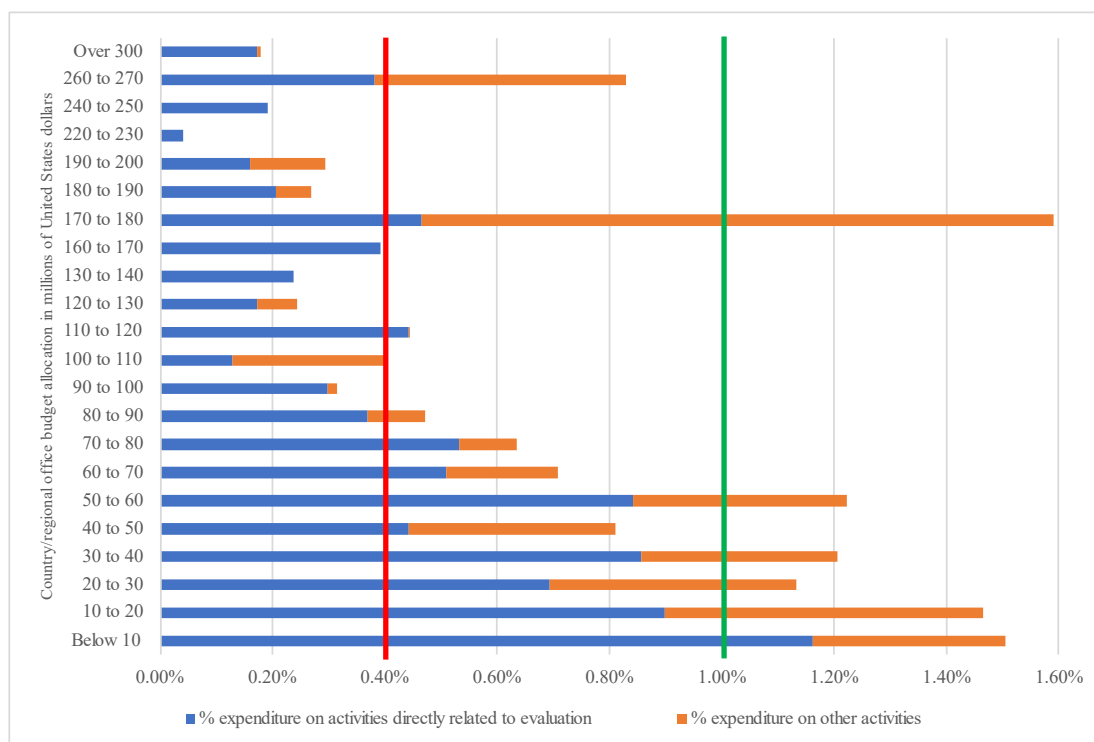


Source: Data for the numerator: activities reported as evaluation expenditure (actuals and commitments) retrieved on 31 December 2022; data for the denominator: total budget allocations retrieved on 31 January 2023.

62. Figure XVII shows that regional and country offices (excluding headquarters to avoid the risk of negatively skewing the results) with a total budget allocations exceeding \$80 million use less than 0.5 per cent on activities reported as evaluation expenditure.

63. The outliers in the \$260 million–\$270 million and \$170 million–\$180 million brackets in the above figure were due to offices with high expenditure for activities not directly related to evaluation.

Figure XVIII
Expenditure for activities reported as evaluation as percentage of total budget allocations, 2022



Source: Data for the numerator: activities reported as evaluation expenditure (actuals and commitments) retrieved on 31 December 2022; data for the denominator: total programme expenditure (actuals only) retrieved on 31 January 2023.

64. Figure XVIII shows that the high expenditure for activities reported as evaluation for the two categories of offices with high budget allocations (\$260 million–\$270 million and \$170 million–\$180 million) can be explained by the high percentage of other (non-evaluation) activities that were reported as evaluation expenditure. Most offices with a total budget allocation over \$80 million spent about 0.4 per cent on activities directly related to evaluation.

V. Conclusions and way forward

65. The year 2022 was pivotal in the evolution of the evaluation function, involving multiple strategic shifts in the first year of implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 that will ensure that the function is fit for purpose for this quadrennium and beyond. A strategic vision for the function was finalized early in the year, with significant steps then taken to translate its aspirational goals into concrete action. These included more focused prioritization of the function’s evaluation partnerships, promotion of a better-integrated and more harmonized function across the three levels of the organization (including preliminary progress towards more integrated evaluation planning and implementation), an evolving focus on evaluation synthesis to provide aggregated insights into what works and what does not (and how and why), improvements to the evaluation quality assessment framework, the filling of long-standing human resource gaps, and standardization of performance expectations in the Evaluation Office in order to bring these in line with the vision.

66. Three further areas enshrined in the vision and cited in Executive Board decisions as requiring accelerated progress saw particularly strong advances: national evaluation capacity development, greater methodological innovation, and strengthening capacity for impact evaluation. On the opposite side of the evaluative

spectrum from impact evaluation, significant advances were made to further embed new and innovative ways of applying evaluability assessments and other forward-looking evaluative exercises, to help the organization and its partners (including the Executive Board) identify and manage risks, seize opportunities, and shift course as early and nimbly as possible. Chief among these exercises included the evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the UNICEF positioning to achieve the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, a first-ever exercise to provide the organization as a whole with an early perspective on its strengths and gaps in the first six months of its new Strategic Plan.

67. Together, these advances signalled an ongoing effort to ensure that the evaluation function, while retaining the independence essential to its role, evolves in tandem with the organization, its operating environment and its learning and accountability needs. Beyond these functionally driven initiatives, two further exercises involving the broader organization were instigated to help ensure that the evaluation function is optimally positioned to fulfil both its learning and accountability roles – thereby helping UNICEF and its partners (including the Executive Board) achieve the best results possible for children. These included an independent peer review of the UNICEF evaluation function and an internal review and revision of the UNICEF evaluation policy, both of which were required by the current UNICEF evaluation policy of 2018. The policy review and revision process relied heavily on the findings and recommendations of the independent peer review as well as a range of other inputs, including consultations, desk reviews, staff surveys and comparative analysis of other agencies' evaluation policies. The independent peer review issued recommendations to improve the evaluation function itself and its positioning in the organization, some of which bore implications for the evaluation policy and some for the evaluation practice and culture in the organization.

68. Beyond these broad areas of progress, the state of evaluation was mixed. This year saw the highest number of evaluation submissions on record and a continuation of the high geographical coverage achieved in recent years, including an increase in the number of humanitarian evaluations conducted, in the number of joint and inter-agency evaluations and of evaluations covering gender. At the same time, this numerical growth is only one indicator of the function's overall maturity: of greater importance is ensuring that all evaluations are optimally targeted to cover the most strategically important issues facing the organization, and that they are of high credibility and utility. The proportion of evaluations at the impact and outcome level also remain low. Although evaluation quality witnessed a slight reduction, it remained relatively high – an especially encouraging finding considering the introduction of a new and stricter quality assessment framework. Evaluation guidelines, and the existence of a specific funding target for evaluations all remained key areas of strength which were applauded in the independent peer review.

69. Areas requiring continued improvement include securing predictable and adequate resourcing for the function, including for impact evaluations, a priority highlighted by the Executive Board in its decision 2022/5. Resourcing for the function saw a significant reversal of the positive trend witnessed from 2018 to 2021. The independent peer review underscored the need to pay greater attention to this area and underscored management's responsibility for ensuring sufficient and predictable funds are provided for evaluation. The peer review also recommended that the 1 per cent target should be clarified, including how it is calculated and what is included. In a significant sign of progress in this area, discussions and agreements between the Office of the Executive Director, the Division of Financial and Administrative Management, and the Evaluation Office in early 2023 yielded significant progress in bringing final resolution to this ongoing challenge. Both the draft revised policy and its accompanying implementation guidance will reinforce this progress, and in 2023,

the formula will be revised to ensure consistency and accuracy, and guidance on which organizational expenditures can legitimately be classified as evaluation will be strengthened.

70. To restore the previous positive trend in progress towards the 1 per cent expenditure target, the Evaluation Pooled Fund must also be replenished to the levels that were seen at the beginning of the previous quadrennium. This will significantly reverse the declining headquarters expenditure and enhance the predictability and timeliness of funding. There is also a need for proper monitoring of expenditure at the decentralized level, ensuring that management responses are meaningfully implemented, and establishing stronger accountability mechanisms as well as clarifying roles and responsibilities for evaluation in country offices.

71. Further challenges remain. The independent peer review identified the need for greater clarity in ensuring accountability and roles and responsibilities, including funding and reporting lines, which can limit consistency of independence and credibility. It identified further risks, including limitations to management use of evaluations and limited interactions between the evaluation function and other UNICEF evidence and knowledge functions. The report concluded that while the Evaluation Office plays a role in addressing these limitations, it must be empowered and supported by other elements within the enabling environment, including UNICEF leadership and other functions, for tangible progress to be made.

72. Several other areas do fall squarely within the remit of the evaluation function. For example, the number of evaluations covering disability issues declined slightly in 2022. While there was an increase in the number of evaluations in 2022 covering gender, the quality of integration of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the scope of analysis of evaluations has declined. These issues will need careful monitoring to reverse these trends in 2023.

73. Of equal concern is the fact that only 4⁷ of the 13 evaluations indicated in the plan for global evaluations, 2022–2025 as due for completion in 2022 were delivered on time. All of these will now be completed in 2023, but the delays will likely have a cascading effect on the delivery of 2023 evaluations. One crucial factor affecting these delays was the timeliness and adequacy of financial disbursements, which delayed the start (and thus completion) of some evaluations. Other factors included the temporary deployment of key staff on surge and stretch missions in response to organizational priorities, long-standing human resource gaps and staff rotations.

74. Looking ahead, as recommended by the peer review (and the 2021 MOPAN assessment), the Evaluation Office will continue its work from 2021 and 2022 to actively strengthen coordination and collaboration with other evidence functions, including through cooperation on ethics in evidence generation, joint evidence gap mapping and evidence strategies, joint professional development initiatives, resource mobilization support and more.

75. Advances in other areas of progress made in 2022 will continue. UNICEF will shortly launch the Impact Catalyst Fund, a strategic initiative to support high-quality impact evaluations in the organization's priority thematic areas, while also continuing specific impact evaluation efforts begun in 2022, including in the areas of child marriage, mental health and psychosocial support and child malnutrition. In addition, the significant national evaluation capacity development momentum achieved in 2022 will continue.

⁷ An additional headquarters-led inter-agency evaluation was completed in 2022, but not yet uploaded to EISI or quality-assessed at the time of drafting.

76. The trends identified in this annual report are not surprising, as they merely add objective data to issues identified in the independent peer review and further echoed in the organizational consultations linked to the review and revision of the evaluation policy. Efforts to address them from a policy perspective will be reflected in the draft revised evaluation policy being presented to the Executive Board this session. In coming months, the Evaluation Office looks forward to working with UNICEF management to implement the recommendations of the peer review and, together with the Executive Board, to finalize a revised UNICEF evaluation policy that addresses outstanding challenges and thus helps both the function and UNICEF to be as positively impactful as possible for children in the years ahead.

VI. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the annual report for 2022 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/18](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2023/19](#));
 2. *Also takes note* of the evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 response to the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, its summary ([E/ICEF/2023/20](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2023/21](#)).
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