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## **United Nations Children's Fund**

Executive Board

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Item 10 of the provisional agenda\*

### **Draft revised evaluation policy of UNICEF**

#### *Summary*

The draft revised evaluation policy of UNICEF has been developed in accordance with Executive Board decision 2018/10. It presents the purpose and rationale for the revision; outlines evaluation purposes, principles and a theory of change; sets out key procedures and accountabilities for the governance of the function; establishes expectations for the coverage and use of evaluations; describes contributions to evaluation partnerships and national evaluation capacity development; highlights resource requirements; and concludes with a note on the implementation, reporting and periodic review of the policy.

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

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

## I. Overview

1. UNICEF has updated its evaluation policy to ensure that the UNICEF evaluation function and its partners can deliver timely, focused and rigorous evaluative evidence in support of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. The present draft revised evaluation policy represents the third revision since the first evaluation policy was approved by the Executive Board in 2008. It builds upon the current policy approved in 2018. The revised policy will guide UNICEF until the next update in 2028.
3. As the recent independent peer review of the UNICEF evaluation function and other reviews have concluded, the UNICEF evaluation function remains fundamentally fit for purpose. However, as the independent peer review underlined, five years of experience implementing the present policy have revealed several areas requiring refinement. Specific developments such as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and other global shocks, the new Strategic Plan goals, external review findings, and evolving global evaluation norms and standards have provided further impetus for an update.
4. The present draft therefore represents an incremental, though crucial, revision focused on these areas most in need of refinement rather than a fundamental overhaul of the 2018 policy. Highlights include greater clarity on the definition, purposes and underlying principles of evaluation, on coverage standards, and on the adequacy and predictability of human and financial resources necessary to enable the function to fulfil its role. The commitment to allocating 1 per cent of the programme budget to evaluation remains in place. So, too, do the matrix management structures governing the decentralized function, though with greater clarity on the means of communication and collaboration necessary for ensuring that evaluation staff at decentralized level are able to exercise the independence essential to the integrity of the function while also remaining maximally relevant and useful in their work. The commitment of evaluation to actively seeking coordination and collaboration with the complementary functions of audit, research, data analytics, monitoring, and knowledge management is also retained and strengthened, as is the commitment to joint, inter-agency and system-wide evaluation.
5. This document has been presented to the Global Evaluation Committee of UNICEF and revised to address feedback from colleagues across the organization. It is now being presented to the Executive Board for its discussion and feedback. Next steps will be to continue briefing colleagues internally on the continuity with and change from the 2018 policy and to further refine the document with this feedback and that of the Executive Board and Audit Advisory Committee. The revised document will be presented to the Executive Board once again for its approval. Once the policy is approved, complementary guidance will be developed to ensure consistent and meaningful implementation of the policy, and to present the qualitative and quantitative key performance indicators that will be monitored and reported on during the five-year policy period.

## II. Goal and purposes of evaluation in UNICEF

6. Evaluation in UNICEF helps the organization and its partners achieve the best results possible for children through independent, credible, ethically generated, timely and accessible evaluative evidence. Evaluation assists UNICEF in realizing the mandate of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the organization's

mission statement.<sup>1</sup> The UNICEF evaluation policy is aligned with the Charter of the United Nations,<sup>2</sup> the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,<sup>3</sup> the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,<sup>4</sup> humanitarian principles,<sup>5</sup> and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

7. The policy also aligns with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and international good practices. It is applicable across the organization's operational contexts while affording necessary flexibility within a decentralized organization. It builds on and supersedes the previous evaluation policy<sup>6</sup> and is complemented by implementation guidance.<sup>7</sup>

8. In fulfilment of its overarching goal, the UNICEF evaluation function is grounded in four complementary purposes.

(a) **Development effectiveness and humanitarian response.** Evaluation provides insights at all stages of the programme process, from inception to conclusion. Identifying what works and what does not – and why and for whom – is crucial to ensuring the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of interventions. It allows decision makers to identify the most appropriate approaches, correct course, and measure results against intended goals. Evaluation provides both retrospective and real-time insights in ways useful for present and future action. It has the capacity to inform efforts at any scale, from pilot initiatives to large programmes and organizational policies;

(b) **Oversight and accountability.** Stakeholders with oversight roles require that evaluations provide an independent, impartial perspective on the work of UNICEF, the integrity of its risk identification and management processes, and its adherence to ethical standards. Evaluation additionally entails management accountability to act on recommendations;

(c) **Organizational learning.** Aggregating and sharing good practices and credible evaluative evidence supports organizational learning on how to achieve the best results for children. Together with other functions, evaluation helps the organization replicate successes, learn from mistakes, innovate solutions, and ensure continuous organizational improvement;

(d) **Empowerment of community, national and regional stakeholders.** The human rights-based approach and principles of aid effectiveness require that stakeholders at all levels have access to information and skills to interpret and interrogate the policies and programmes affecting their lives. This is recognized in General Assembly resolution 69/37 and realized through evaluation capacity development initiatives. It also requires examining inclusion, respect, resource access and power dynamics, especially for the most vulnerable.

9. These purposes are mutually reinforcing. For example, strong links exist between programme effectiveness and accountability, since achieving programme goals requires, inter alia, examining adherence to the plan, cost-effectiveness and risk management. Empowering local stakeholders enhances policy and programme effectiveness while achieving accountability to affected populations. Evaluation

<sup>1</sup> See [https://sites.unicef.org/about/who/index\\_mission.html](https://sites.unicef.org/about/who/index_mission.html).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, 24 October 1945, Chapter IX, Article 55 c.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women](http://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html).

<sup>5</sup> General Assembly resolutions 46/182 and 58/114.

<sup>6</sup> See E/ICEF/2018/14.

<sup>7</sup> Corporate implementation framework for the UNICEF evaluation policy 2018; UNICEF Procedure on the Implementation of the 2018 UNICEF Evaluation Policy.

syntheses blend learning objectives with accountability by enabling external experts to contrast UNICEF approaches with global good practice.

10. A theory of change illustrating how UNICEF aims to achieve these purposes is contained in the annex. The remainder of the present document stipulates the policy provisions necessary to ensure that the evaluation function is optimally positioned to successfully achieve the goal of helping the organization and its partners achieve the best results possible for children.

### **III. Rationale for a revised policy**

11. The UNICEF evaluation policy is periodically updated as the operating context of the organization evolves. The previous policy indicated that an independent peer review would be conducted in 2022 to examine the adequacy of the 2018 policy for the current environment, followed by a corresponding review and revision of the policy. Both exercises relied on numerous evidence sources, including confidential consultations, desk reviews and surveys.

12. The peer review concluded that much of the 2018 policy remained relevant while identifying three overarching forces prompting adjustments. The first was the external context. COVID-19 emphasized the need for better real-time information and holistic analysis. Emergent technological innovations enabled new data sources and analytical approaches. In addition, the normative environment in which UNICEF operates required greater attention to oversight and greater engagement with climate change, gender, disability, race and inequality, and other issues. Critically, the imminence of the Decade of Action underscored the urgent need to regain and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, a goal further jeopardized by the pandemic and thus requiring a heightened focus on evidence-driven decision-making, including evaluative evidence.

13. Evolving global good practice constituted the second impetus. Revised evaluation policies issued by peers demonstrated improved approaches in defining evaluation's purpose, coverage expectations, planning and quality assurance, uptake and use, governance and risk management. These exercises drew upon updated evaluation guidance from the global community, such as the UNEG guidelines on ethics and on integrating disability.

14. Third, the organizational context within UNICEF evolved. An updated accountability framework<sup>8</sup> aligned evaluation with oversight under the "three-lines" approach. Evaluation is a "second-line" function alongside audit, investigation and ethics. The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025<sup>9</sup> maintained evaluation and related evidence functions as a change strategy while intensifying evaluation's role in examining new programming areas, supporting policymaking and budgeting, and engaging in joint and system-wide evaluations. The findings of a 2022 evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the Strategic Plan<sup>10</sup> underscored the need to synchronize the work of the evidence functions towards the shared end goal of supporting the organization in its work in a holistic, integrated manner.

### **IV. Definition of evaluation and evaluation types covered by the policy**

15. UNICEF evaluation is rooted in the UNEG definition. Evaluation is an independent assessment, conducted as systematically and impartially as possible, of

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<sup>8</sup> See [E/ICEF/2022/24](#).

<sup>9</sup> See [E/ICEF/2021/25](#).

<sup>10</sup> See [E/ICEF/2023/3](#).

a body of under way or completed work (e.g., an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, portfolio, operational area, or institutional partnership). It relies on rigorous methods to ascertain both expected and unexpected results, as well as the processes, contextual factors and causal relationships along the results chain, in relation to evaluation criteria such as relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.<sup>11</sup> An evaluation must provide credible, useful evidence-based information. It is a technical, social and ethical exercise within which stakeholders have rights of inclusion, including access to the findings, recommendations, and lessons for timely consideration in their decision-making processes and governmental and civic roles.

16. The definition is operationalized in many ways, as portrayed in table 1 (see section V.B.). Development effectiveness purposes require summative evaluations that examine the contribution of UNICEF and partners at the outcome level after a substantial intervention implementation period. Definitive assurance to stakeholders of the ultimate value of their investment depends on impact evaluations that assess short-, medium- and long-term benefits in the lives of children.

17. UNICEF also needs early, formative, forward-looking exercises to keep pace with a changing operating environment, emerging issues and stakeholders' feedback needs. Accordingly, the function embraces exercises that apply an early evaluative lens, such as evaluability assessments, formative evaluations and real-time evaluations. It also produces evaluation syntheses, as well as institutional effectiveness evaluations that examine internal operations, support functions and corporate initiatives.

18. All such evaluative exercises are covered by this policy. Not included in the definition, and therefore not covered under the evaluation policy, are other analytical exercises that are neither independent nor evaluative. Such exercises include studies, research, monitoring, data analyses, and self-directed organizational reviews such as after-action reviews, lesson-learning exercises and Global Effectiveness Reviews. Evaluation nonetheless seeks active collaboration with these functions to meet the organization's holistic evidence needs.

## V. Guiding principles

19. Consistent with international best practice in evaluation, several principles help operationalize the broad definition of evaluation and thus underpin the specific details of this policy.

(a) **Compatibility of independence with relevance and utility.** UNICEF maintains an independent and impartial evaluation function at all levels, with management affording it the necessary latitude and resourcing to accomplish its mission. Independence, together with meaningful stakeholder consultation, is vital for ensuring that the most strategically relevant evaluation topics are pursued and that evaluation findings and recommendations are ultimately based solely on the best available evidence thus as credible and useful as possible. In these ways independence is mutually compatible with relevance and utility, not mutually exclusive of these other goals;

(b) **Shared leadership and accountability for evaluation.** Implementing the evaluation policy and fostering a strong evaluation culture are whole-of-organization responsibilities that rely on strong partnership between the evaluation function and the rest of the organization. This partnership starts with senior leaders who support

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<sup>11</sup> In humanitarian contexts, appropriateness, coverage and connectedness are also routinely explored.

the function and thoughtfully implement the policy, and is accompanied by clearly defined, role-appropriate accountabilities towards this end;

(c) **Efficiency in evaluation.** Resources invested in UNICEF must be employed as efficiently as possible, and evaluation analyses efficiency in both its financial and non-financial dimensions. The drive for efficiency extends to the evaluation function itself, starting with evaluation planning processes that prioritize the most strategic relevant and necessary topics using rigorous independent analysis as well as consultation. In addition, the evaluation function must be vigilant of its own efficiency, both with respect to its human and financial resources and its efforts to collaborate with other evidence functions;

(d) **Decentralization necessitates organizational coherence.** Decentralized organizations like UNICEF face challenges in moving efficiently with common purpose and at scale. Evaluation staffing, finance and governance must enable each level to generate evaluative evidence that meets their learning needs while also contributing to broader organizational accountability and learning needs. Evaluation staff at decentralized level bridge these needs, and must therefore be accorded the independence to fulfil this role, under Evaluation Office leadership, while continuing to closely collaborate and consult with their respective offices;

(e) **Stakeholder engagement and capacity-building.** The commitment to institutional capacity development in evaluation is applied through partnering that promotes local ownership and values local knowledge. Local ownership helps to meet Strategic Plan principles of equity, leave no one behind, anti-racism and non-discrimination, and gender equality. Self-advocacy requires local stakeholder presence in evidence-based forums where socially distinct voices can balance those of external experts. Counterparts in government and civil society need the evidence expertise to hold UNICEF, other partners and themselves accountable;

(f) **Evaluation as an ethics-driven undertaking.** Mandatory ethical protection approaches must be employed and monitored in areas such as conflict of interest, engaging with children, confidentiality and preserving the dignity of affected people. Emerging opportunities such as artificial intelligence and social media data must be pursued with all attendant safeguards. Detailed guidance applies the principle of ethical action across the evidence functions.<sup>12</sup> Like all evaluation procedures, these safeguards are subject to external review. Transparency, a specific aspect of ethics in evaluation, requires that all evaluation plans, evaluation reports and evaluation quality reviews be publicly available<sup>13</sup> and subject to periodic reviews.

## VI. Evaluation procedures

### A. Evaluation planning

20. Evaluation planning must ensure that the most strategically important topics are prioritized at the right time. UNICEF must identify a balanced portfolio of topics stakeholders perceive to be most salient and those the evaluation function deems to be necessary from its independent, impartial, evidence-driven perspective. Integrated planning ensures that UNICEF conducts an optimum number of evaluations, delivers these on time, and respects users' absorptive capacity.

<sup>12</sup> 12 Among others, the UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis (2021), accessible at: [www.unicef.org/evaluation/documents/unicef-procedure-ethical-standards-research-evaluation-data-collection-and-analysis](http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/documents/unicef-procedure-ethical-standards-research-evaluation-data-collection-and-analysis). Also, the Data Protection and Privacy Policy.

<sup>13</sup> All completed evaluations, quality assessments and management responses are made publicly available in a timely manner unless withheld under the provisions established in relation to the UNICEF audit function by Executive Board decision 2012/13. The annual report on the evaluation function notes if any evaluations have been withheld or redacted.

### Developing and updating costed and resourced multi-year plans

21. A multi-year evaluation plan is required of each UNICEF country and regional office, and of most global offices. It must include robust cost estimates and potential funding sources. These plans are reviewed and updated periodically.

(a) Costed evaluation plans are prepared by country offices for national, subnational and trans-border needs, and are approved by the Executive Board concurrently with country programme documents;

(b) Regional costed evaluation plans are prepared by regional offices for multi-country initiatives, regional programmes and institutional effectiveness themes, and are approved at UNICEF headquarters as part of the regional office management plan;

(c) The costed corporate-level plan for global evaluations in support of the quadrennial strategic plan is prepared by the Evaluation Office and approved by the Executive Board.

22. Evaluation is a vital element of results-based management. It plays an important role in strategic and ongoing planning processes. The strategic planning function and programme managers are responsible for creating sufficient space for evaluation within planning and decision-making processes such as management team meetings and periodic reviews.

23. Independence is critical in evaluation planning. Evaluation specialists have the final voice in deciding which planned activities are evaluative exercises covered by the policy and which are not. The Evaluation Office consults key stakeholders during the development of the plan for global evaluations but makes the final choices on what to include. Likewise, the Evaluation Office must approve the regional-level costed evaluation plans, and the regional level (the regional evaluation adviser in consultation with the regional director) must approve country-level costed evaluation plans. Each of these approvers can require adjustments to ensure adherence to this policy. Any subsequent changes to plans must be similarly approved.

### Planning principles

24. Identifying a balanced plan of demand- and evidence-driven evaluations requires stakeholders to consider the following criteria, among others:

(a) **Clarity of intended use for strategic decision-making**, which is often connected to guiding commitments within national development plans, the Strategic Plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals;

(b) **Size and scale**, with larger programmes, offices, policies, strategies and initiatives warranting heightened attention;

(c) **Periodicity of efforts** to avoid extended periods without evaluative attention;

(d) **Innovativeness**, with newer pursuits requiring early evidence before scale-up;

(e) **Credibility assurances**, in that a sufficiently credible analysis can be reasonably achieved;

(f) **Learning potential**, especially opportunities to fill known evidence gaps;

(g) **Complementarity** with partners' evaluation plans;

(h) **Adaptation to rapidly changing and emergency contexts** that are affecting the timetable and quality of programming;

(i) **Evaluation requirements** of financing partners or other counterparts.

25. Draft evaluation plans are approved only when they demonstrate strategic focus and feasibility along the following dimensions:

(a) **Coverage accountabilities** established in table 1 are met and the content cumulatively meets the programme effectiveness, accountability, learning and empowerment purposes;

(b) **Timeliness** is assured, with findings being available by essential decision-taking moments;

(c) **Resources** have been identified and will be set aside based on a complete costing approach;

(d) The **comparative strengths** of different types of evaluative exercises have been capitalized on and their sequencing leads to increased depth and synergy of generated knowledge over time;

(e) Concerted effort has been made to **coordinate or collaborate with other evidence functions**;

(f) **Efficiency is maximized** as multi-country or thematic evaluations replace uncoordinated individual activities, and when global evaluations are synchronized to minimize the demands on field offices;

(g) **Ethical safeguards** can be applied and enforced.

## B. Evaluation coverage

26. Adequate evaluation coverage is key to meeting the evaluation purposes. Table 1 outlines the expectations for evaluation coverage at country, regional and corporate levels.

Table 1  
UNICEF evaluation coverage norms

<i>Evaluation category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Contextual considerations</i>	<i>Management arrangements</i>
<b>MANDATORY SCHEDULING</b>			
Country programme evaluations	Minimum once every two programme cycles.  May be conducted earlier if circumstances warrant.	Country programme evaluations feed into the pending country programme document and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).	Managed by the regional evaluation adviser or the multi-country evaluation specialist.
Evaluation of emergency responses	<u>Short-term emergencies</u> (duration less than three years): Level 1 (L1) to be included in country programme evaluations. Levels 2 and 3 (L2/L3) to be stand-alone evaluations.	Both real-time and summative evaluations acceptable, as are joint and inter-agency evaluations.	Country offices conduct L1 evaluations. Regional offices conduct L2. The Evaluation Office conducts L3.



	<u>Protracted emergencies</u> (duration three or more years): L1 every three to five years; L2 and L3 every three years. All must be stand-alone exercises.		
Global evaluations	<u>Strategic Plan Goal Areas</u> (five in total): Minimum two per Goal Area per Strategic Plan cycle  <u>Strategic Plan change strategies/enablers/cross-cutting priorities</u> (19 in total): Minimum 3 from among the 19 subjects per Strategic Plan cycle. Minimum one gender-centred evaluation.  <u>Institutional effectiveness</u> : Minimum four per Strategic Plan cycle.	Evaluations of multi-partner global initiatives within the Goal Area are acceptable.  Evaluations at outcome or impact level may cover more than one Goal Area and can count towards each.  Syntheses may not be employed to meet these requirements.	Managed by the Evaluation Office.  Regional/national evaluations may be undertaken simultaneously to increase the evidence base.
Country office-level thematic evaluations, including cross-cutting themes  Regional-level multi-country evaluations	<u>Small country programmes</u> : Minimum three per country programme cycle.  <u>Medium and large country programmes</u> : Average at least one evaluation per year of the cycle.  <u>Regional-level thematic/multi-country evaluations</u> : Minimum three per Strategic Plan cycle.  <u>Regional-level institutional effectiveness evaluations</u> . Minimum one per Strategic Plan cycle.	Each evaluation must examine key interventions or higher-level performance (policy; country programme; national).  Formative and summative evaluations are both welcomed.  Participation in global or multi-country evaluations are credited against country office accountabilities if a stand-alone country report is issued.	Managed by the country or regional evaluation specialist.  Stakeholder presence in management arrangements encouraged.
<b>CONTINGENT SCHEDULING</b>			
Evaluability assessments	Authorized when validation is needed of programming plans, including the ability to conduct future evaluations.	Recommended for programmes and initiatives with a significant risk profile, and those on the costed evaluation plan.	Managed by evaluation staff, not programme staff.

Evaluation syntheses, meta-evaluations	Authorized when relevant content exists in many evaluations.	For delivery at critical learning or policy formulation moments.	May be led by programme specialists, with evaluator support.
Impact evaluations	Authorized when attribution via a credible counterfactual is desirable and feasible.	Strongly recommended for pilot programme validation before going to scale, and for programme evaluations.  May be employed to meet mandatory schedule requirements.	Managed by evaluation staff, often in partnership with expert firms or academia.
United Nations system-wide evaluations	Coverage and frequency determined by the secretariat of the independent system-wide evaluation mechanism (ISWE)	Conducted by ISWE with agency support.	Led by ISWE.
United Nations joint programme evaluations, UNSDCF evaluations, and Strategic Plan common chapter evaluations (country, regional and global levels)	Coverage and frequency determined by inter-agency mechanisms.	Joint evaluations may be credited against country- or regional-level thematic requirements.  May not be used for UNICEF country programme evaluation requirements.	Managed under United Nations Development Coordination Office procedures.
Country-led evaluations	Coverage and frequency determined by partner Governments.	May be counted as a UNICEF evaluation if independence criteria are met (see section XI).	Led by national partners.
<b>OTHER EXERCISES</b>			
Review exercises examining policies, plans and strategies	Coverage and frequency determined by commissioning office.	Not counted as an evaluation.	May be led by sectoral or other specialists.
Evaluation capacity-building strategies/ activities	Coverage and frequency determined with partners.	Not counted as an evaluation.	Participatory design and management with partners.

## **C. Management and conduct of evaluations**

27. Each evaluation activity must be designed and managed in line with international evaluation standards, and in line with the principles described in this policy.

28. Delivering a credible evaluation requires that a UNICEF evaluation specialist manage the exercise with an optimal degree of independence while also coordinating with the head of office and others. Most evaluations are conducted by qualified external consultants, with the manager overseeing their work and ensuring high performance standards. UNICEF staff members may be embedded within evaluation teams or conduct the evaluation with the consent of the regional evaluation adviser or the Evaluation Office, as applicable.

29. Governance arrangements must foster stakeholder engagement. Governments, implementing partners and civil society counterparts are included at all appropriate moments through reference groups, advisory groups or expert panels. The involvement of vulnerable groups, children and young people follow UNICEF ethical guidelines. UNICEF staff, including national staff, must also be involved.

30. Quality assurance is a vital element at all stages of the process. It is a multi-part real-time approach to ensure that evaluation processes and outputs meet professional standards and the requirements established in the terms of reference. An appropriate quality expectation is set for each activity and pursued in the design, implementation and analysis phases. Quality expectations will be high, and commensurate with stakeholder needs and timelines.

31. All UNICEF evaluations must follow prevailing ethical best practice at all stages. A preliminary ethics screening is mandatory, undertaken by an external body if deemed necessary by the regional evaluation adviser or the Evaluation Office, including but not limited to emergency settings, sensitive topics, and data gathering from children and vulnerable groups. Ethic reviews at key junctures are employed to ensure that these exercises remain in compliance.

32. Balancing the independence, utility and shared accountability principles generates complex challenges. UNICEF employs the following guidelines to achieve the best results:

(a) The evaluation manager and the team leader conducting the evaluation must be different individuals;

(b) Consultants work under the supervision of the manager and must respond adequately to any concerns, and the manager may modify outputs to achieve an acceptable quality level;

(c) After stakeholders have been given ample opportunity to comment on draft outputs, acceptance of the final products rests with the evaluation manager.

## **D. Quality assessment**

33. Quality assessment is an ex-post review of the final report of an evaluative exercise. It provides end users an impartial perspective on quality, provides feedback to evaluation managers that encourages learning and improvement, and strengthens accountability to stakeholders with oversight roles. Quality trends are summarized annually, with recommendations presented for action.

34. The UNICEF quality assessment mechanism, the Global Evaluation Report Oversight System (GEROS), is managed by the Evaluation Office. All evaluative exercises covered by this policy are quality-assessed in GEROS, with assessments

being conducted by external experts. The system is periodically refined to ensure that quality assessment processes remain well tailored to the broad suite of evaluative exercises that UNICEF undertakes.

## **VII. Maximizing evaluation use**

35. Every evaluative exercise is undertaken with the aim of being meaningfully used. Use depends on an organizational culture in which stakeholders know their roles, understand what evaluation contributes, engage with evaluation across the programming cycle, and receive support to meet their accountabilities. The evaluation function and the wider organization share accountability for ensuring meaningful use.

36. Attaining meaningful use depends on early decisions that ensure relevance, timeliness, quality, credibility and utility. Planning for use is therefore crucial. An uptake strategy that considers eventual uses and users is developed before the evaluation starts and refined as it proceeds. Empowerment opportunities should be sought, and longer-term policy applications should be carefully considered.

37. The evaluation function is responsible for ensuring that evaluations have clear, fit-for-purpose and well-managed mechanisms for communicating evaluation takeaways. Programme leaders and communication specialists – including those specialized in reaching vulnerable populations – should be engaged in early uptake planning. UNICEF commits to sharing evaluation results in forms best suited to stakeholder groups based on optimal communication channels. Special accountability is recognized to help affected populations amplify their voice at all key junctures.

38. The evaluation function is accountable for providing actionable recommendations, and evaluation users are responsible for use. Having been engaged throughout the process, users' formal accountability begins with a management response articulating an overall reaction to the evaluation, an indication of whether each recommendation is accepted, partially accepted, or not accepted (and if not, then why), and an action plan specifying measures to be taken when and by whom. The response can go beyond the recommendations' scope, given stakeholders' expert knowledge of usage possibilities. Those accountable for actions must stay current with these commitments and note responses to obstacles and opportunities. Management responses will be led by the most operational unit; most management responses to institutional effectiveness evaluations should be coordinated by the Office of the Executive Director to ensure broad organizational uptake.

39. The evaluation function will maintain a system for managers to report on implementation of management responses and for the Evaluation Office to undertake periodic assessment of progress and obstacles. The Evaluation Office will also revisit major evaluations two to five years after their conclusion to determine their overall impact and derive lessons for improving utilization. It will monitor and report on management response implementation and broader usage trends to oversight structures. These leaders and forums have the authority to address barriers to and non-compliance with utilization expectations, and to accelerate positive momentum.

40. Use extends beyond individual evaluations, e.g., through evaluation syntheses produced by the evaluation function. These may contain thematic recommendations for UNICEF or, in the case of joint work, for multiple agencies. Syntheses support the learning purpose by filling evidence gaps and comparing UNICEF experience to the state of global knowledge. Linking with the UNICEF Global Knowledge Management Mid-Term Strategy (2021–2022) and its successor document and the active knowledge management structures of many UNICEF divisions/units is a crucial amplifier of this approach.

41. Flexible adaptations are possible under extenuating circumstances. Emergency settings may, for example, prioritize more timely and less formal but acceptably rigorous methods, real-time formative findings over summative findings, and an intensified communication loop with the affected populations. However, stakeholder consultation and management response accountabilities will always be in effect, even if rigour, deadlines and the expected detail are relaxed.

## **VIII. Complementarity with other UNICEF evidence functions**

42. Evaluation is one of several distinct yet complementary functions, including audit, research, monitoring, data and analytics, and knowledge management and organizational learning, that together form an evidence ecosystem. Though independent, the evaluation function is committed to seeking strong linkages to these complementary functions in a whole-of-organization, whole-of-child manner wherever appropriate and feasible. Collaborative engagements can include the creation of holistic evidence plans to deliver a sequenced array of complementary evidence products for the organization and its partners.

43. Other joint interests include capacity-building in areas such as social statistics, ethics, fundraising, methodological innovation, and staff professional development. Wherever possible, collaboration should extend to creating evidence units and/or evidence committees in UNICEF offices.

44. Collaboration with the results-based management function is central for development effectiveness and accountability. Evaluation-generated insights support programme leaders in establishing theories of change, assessing programme evaluability, validating results and assessing programme efficiency. Programme management data facilitates accountability analysis within the institutional effectiveness and country programme evaluation portfolios. Complementary audit and evaluation approaches offer related perspectives on risk management and efficiency.

45. Evaluation must retain its independence even as it actively collaborates. The final choice on which evaluations to conduct, as well as their focus, will remain with the Evaluation Office at the global level and, at the regional and country levels, with the evaluation manager in consultation with the head of office.

## **IX. Evaluation governance**

46. The governance arrangements that support the implementation of the evaluation policy are outlined below.

### **A. Executive Board**

47. As the governing body of UNICEF, the Executive Board relies on a strong evaluation function to support its oversight of the organization in three main ways:

(a) As a user of UNICEF evaluations, the Executive Board requires independent, evidence-based analysis. At each session, the Executive Board receives a presentation on one or more evaluative exercises deemed to be of strategic value to its members, together with the corresponding management response. This process conveys information on organizational accomplishments and challenges, including the enabling and constraining role of governance arrangements in organizational performance as applicable, thus facilitating well-informed Executive Board decisions;

(b) The Board's oversight role includes setting the conditions for the success of the evaluation function. It approves the budget of the Evaluation Office within the

integrated budget and approves the global and country-level costed evaluation plans. It endorses the evaluation policy and considers annual reports on its implementation and on the status of the function. In many sessions, it adopts decisions conveying expectations and guidance to improve the performance of the function;

(c) The Executive Board and the Executive Director are co-guarantors of the function's ability to succeed. The Executive Board consults with, and is consulted by, the Director of Evaluation on matters affecting key aspects of the function. The Executive Board is consulted by the Executive Director on the appointment and termination of the Director of Evaluation.

## **B. Executive Director**

48. Executive Directors, like other directors and representatives, require timely and independent evaluative evidence in support of their oversight, learning and programme effectiveness roles. Executive Directors lead by example in enabling the function's independence, promoting the policy, and supporting and supervising the Director of Evaluation. They foster a culture of learning, critical self-reflection, evidence-based decision-making, continuous improvement and accountability. They ensure that the necessary human and financial resources are secured and encourage meaningful management responses. The Director of Evaluation reports to the Executive Director and has confidential access as and when requested. The Executive Director consults the Executive Board and the Audit Advisory Committee on the appointment and termination of the Director of Evaluation.

49. Executive Directors are advised by the Audit Advisory Committee, an external body that includes an evaluation expert, on the oversight of the function and the implementation of the policy. They are also advised by the Global Evaluation Committee, an advisory body chaired by the Deputy Executive Director, Management, and with membership of all other Deputy Executive Directors, relevant directors and all regional directors, and charged with considering relevant matters, discussing management's role in evaluation, and suggesting ways in which to improve the positive impact of the function in the work of the organization. Progress in implementing the policy is reported in meetings of the Global Management Team.

## **C. Directors**

50. Consistent with the principle of shared accountability, directors are responsible for mainstreaming the policy across their functional networks and employing its results within their work. Directors with programme budgets enable evaluations by establishing baselines, undertaking programme reviews, mobilizing stakeholders to utilize evaluation findings, preparing management responses, and seeking funding.

51. All divisions contribute to shaping evaluation planning priorities through holistic thinking that leads to the integrated application of evaluation and other evidence sources. Divisions with ongoing working relationships with evaluation will assign focal points to help develop understanding of evaluation's role and user needs. Evaluation will likewise assign a specialist to become the division's expert partner.

## **D. Regional directors**

52. Regional directors are accountable for socializing and implementing the policy within their regions. They promote a positive evaluation culture, including knowledge of the policy and attention to its requirements. They help establish the evaluation agenda by identifying evaluation priorities and ensuring their incorporation in planning processes and strategy documents. They monitor the use of completed

evaluations and support representatives and other stakeholders in the resulting responses such as policy advocacy.

53. Regional directors are critical for ensuring that the independence of evaluation is secured and that the function's impact is positive. They ensure that all country offices and the regional office are adequately staffed and that the evaluation lead has access to the head of office. They monitor evaluation allocations and spending in line with the policy's resourcing expectations. The regional director supervises the regional evaluation adviser within a matrix reporting relationship with the Director of Evaluation. Together with the Director of Evaluation, they are responsible for maintaining a close bilateral partnership to ensure the full and meaningful implementation of the policy within the matrix management model.

54. The regional director is supported by the Regional Management Team, which ensures that at least one standing committee monitors the region's evaluation performance and use of evaluation results. The Regional Management Team adopts a regional evaluation strategy that the regional office and the representatives implement.

## **E. Country office representative**

55. Representatives are accountable for ensuring that the policy is implemented at country level. They lead in meeting the country-level commitments contained in the regional evaluation strategy, in the costed evaluation plan, and in other agreed platforms. They ensure implementation by supporting participatory prioritization processes, integrating evaluation evidence into programme reviews, allocating sufficient financial and human resources, endorsing quality standards and ethical safeguards, preparing and implementing management responses, and using evaluation results for decision-making and improved programming.

56. The representative has a direct reporting line with the evaluation function lead in the office and establishes a matrix reporting relationship for them with the regional evaluation adviser. They ensure that staff with evaluation management responsibilities have professional development opportunities, and that evaluation is considered in staff performance reviews.

57. Representatives work with the United Nations country team to integrate evaluation evidence into the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and inter-agency work. They support efforts to strengthen evaluation capacities of the Government and other national partners.

## **F. Director of Evaluation**

58. The Director of Evaluation provides leadership and support to ensure that the function meets professional norms and standards and the commitments of the policy. Directors are appointed by the Executive Director in consultation with the Audit Advisory Committee and the Executive Board. They are appointed for a five-year term, renewable not more than once, and are ineligible for appointment to another role within UNICEF. They report directly to the Executive Director and meet directly with the Executive Board at the request of the latter.

59. The Director of Evaluation advises UNICEF management and the Executive Board on the function and on strategic evaluation findings so that these groups can exercise their full institutional roles with the maximum relevant information. Directors of Evaluation represent the function in all senior forums and to the Executive Board. Together with the Executive Board and the Executive Director they ensure that the independence of the functions is maintained. They manage the

functionally independent corporate Evaluation Office and liaise with key partners to arrive at common standards and coordinated action. They are accountable for establishing and periodically updating the evaluation policy together with key stakeholders, and for monitoring its achievements. They prepare the plan for global evaluations in consultation with stakeholders and ensure that the actual exercises achieve the necessary credibility and utility. They ensure that evaluation meets all ethical standards and exercise fiduciary stewardship over resources allocated to the function. They invigorate the timely uptake of evaluation results and establish an assessment system on the quality of UNICEF evaluations. They support offices to properly staff the function and, with the regional directors, supervise the regional evaluation advisers.

## **G. Regional evaluation adviser**

60. The regional evaluation adviser is a P-5-level position situated in every regional office. The regional evaluation adviser provides leadership and support to the regional evaluation function, including to country-level staff. Consistent with the 15 technical and managerial roles of a regional post, the regional evaluation adviser is supervised within a matrix management structure. The regional director provides management oversight and guidance, and the Director of Evaluation provides technical and strategic guidance and supervision.

61. The accountabilities of the regional evaluation advisers are summarized here and are fully described in complementary guidance. Under the regional director's supervision, regional evaluation advisers coordinate the regional evaluation strategy development and its transformation into action. They advise the regional director on country office evaluation plans, funding adequacy, staffing, and management arrangements. They support the uptake of evaluation findings by stakeholders and promote shared learning across borders. They inform the regional director and the regional management team of evaluation findings and issues in the function. They coordinate regional contributions into corporate discussions and represent the region in inter-agency mechanisms.

62. Under the Director of Evaluation's oversight, regional evaluation advisers manage the regional portfolio of evaluation activities and the regional component of global evaluations. They ensure high quality and adherence to ethical guidelines. They strengthen evaluation management processes across the region and encourage the use of stronger designs and innovative methods. They reinforce evaluation capacity development efforts at the regional and country levels. They supervise country-level evaluation staff via a matrix management arrangement and support their skills development and career growth. They manage the regional end of the pooled fund and monitor overall funding adequacy and budget certainty.

## **H. Country or multi-country evaluation specialist or staff assigned to manage evaluations**

63. Every country office must have a leader for evaluation who provides management and technical skills for the national evaluation agenda of UNICEF. The staffing options are detailed in section XII.A., human resources. Given the diversity in country office size and configuration, the leader's supervisor can vary. However, independence requires that they have direct access to the head of office on evaluation-related issues no matter their supervisor. They are in a matrix management relationship with the regional evaluation adviser for technical oversight.

64. The accountabilities of the country evaluation lead are summarized here and are fully described in complementary guidance. They strongly resemble the roles of the



regional evaluation adviser, with logical adaptations in partners, evaluation scale, etc. The key differences are the greater hands-on engagement with evaluation teams, the larger involvement with national evaluation capacity development, the support demands for country-led evaluations, and the certainty of inter-agency United Nations evaluation priorities and protocols. The country lead relies upon management support to determine evaluation priorities and to make the required funds available.

## **X. Evaluation partnerships**

65. UNICEF engages in evaluation partnerships to gain a holistic understanding of programming results and of individual actors' contributions, to ensure mutual accountability on joint strategies, and to increase cost-efficiency and lower transaction costs. Partnerships range from individual joint evaluations to long-term collaborations in broad strategic areas such as capacity development, impact evaluation and humanitarian evaluation. UNICEF prioritizes those partnerships that are best suited to achieving results for children and are practically feasible, and gauges its level of investment on the potential value proposition of the partnership.

66. Evaluation partners include United Nations agencies, international financial institutions, Governments, voluntary organizations of professional evaluators, civil society and non-governmental organizations, foundations, think tanks, academic institutions, evaluation consortiums, affected populations, and the private sector. Partnerships may involve an exchange of resources or non-financial technical and policy cooperation. Partnering modalities follow established UNICEF protocols on issues such as intellectual property, ethical safeguarding and pooled financing.

67. Collaboration with UNEG partners at global level focuses on supporting the independent system-wide evaluation function, conducting evaluations of joint programmes or humanitarian action, developing common technical guidance, assuring evaluation funding within development finance streams, and evaluation capacity-building. Regional and national collaboration concentrates on strengthening evaluation within the United Nations Development Cooperation Office-led evidence platforms, evaluating issues derived from the Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, and supporting national partners to achieve their capacity development and country-led evaluation goals. At each scale the partners will examine United Nations contributions to development results and will improve performance against the evaluation indicators established in the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

## **XI. National evaluation capacity development**

68. The commitment of UNICEF to national ownership and country-level leadership of development processes extends to evaluation. It derives from General Assembly resolutions 70/1 endorsing the 2030 Agenda and 69/237 on building country-level capacity to evaluate development activities. UNICEF expects national evaluation capacity development to be a goal of the entire development community, as exemplified by the Global Evaluation Initiative.

69. UNICEF invests in national evaluation capacity development as a core aspect of its evaluation role. Evaluation support must focus on the evaluation priorities of Governments and other actors. These often include: (a) developing national evaluation policies; (b) strengthening evaluation systems to be technically robust and emergency-resilient; (c) accentuating evaluation within voluntary national reviews and on Sustainable Development Goal progress reports; (d) increasing the quality and use of country-led evaluations; (e) increasing the capacity to employ evaluative evidence; (f) assisting private firms, academic institutions and others to become

competitive evaluation service providers; and (g) promoting an empowerment culture for accountability to affected populations.

70. UNICEF support for country-led evaluations focuses on national programmes related to achieving the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals. A country-led evaluation means that UNICEF does not commission or manage it, and that the provisions of the present policy do not apply. In this context, UNICEF will promote adherence to international evaluation norms and standards. A country-led evaluation that meets quality and independence standards and has benefited from UNICEF support may be counted as a UNICEF evaluation.

71. Governments, civil society and other national partners need stronger capacities for rigorous evaluation, including at the impact level. Developing a critical mass of national experts and evidence-sensitized managers requires capacitating centres of excellence positioned to train technical cadres and managers within Government, civil society organizations, academia and professional associations. Regionally or globally recognized training efforts for large national teams may be organized. Empowerment goals may guide efforts in 1) developing emerging evaluator talent pools; 2) accepting members of the affected populations into the evaluation team; and 3) blending national service providers into evaluation teams to increase domestic skills.

72. National evaluation capacity development work is undertaken with key partners wherever possible. UNEG has encouraged United Nations agencies to coordinate on national evaluation capacity development and to allocate adequate resources.<sup>14</sup> The designation of national evaluation capacity development as a priority of the resident coordinator function also heralds heightened United Nations engagement.<sup>15</sup>

## **XII. Resources**

73. Adequate, predictable and sustainable resourcing of the evaluation function is fundamental for delivering maximum benefits while maintaining the required level of independence.

### **A. Human resources**

74. Evaluation is a specialized function whose practitioners require technical, strategic and interpersonal skills aligned with their level and the UNICEF organizational context. The function will be staffed with specialists who meet the requirements embodied in the UNEG competency framework.

75. Country offices require evaluation capacity commensurate with their profile. Large country offices must establish at least one P-4-level evaluation specialist post or higher. Creating an evaluation or evidence unit that works with all sections is encouraged. Smaller offices should pool resources to fund a multi-country evaluation specialist for their collective needs. Smaller offices not covered by a multi-country evaluation specialist must designate an evaluation lead who may also lead in related evidence roles. The country representative ensures that the specialists or the lead has adequate time and independence to fulfil their evaluation duties. These should be separately defined in their workplan. The regional evaluation adviser, in consultation with the regional director, can advise country offices on the staff level(s) and configurations appropriate for their context.

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations Evaluation Group, “United Nations contributions to national evaluation capacity development and the evolution of national evaluation systems: an overview of General Assembly resolution 69/237”, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group, “Management and Accountability Framework of the United Nations Development and Resident Coordinator System”, 2021.

76. Each regional office will have a dedicated P-5-level regional evaluation adviser serving as head of a regional evaluation or evidence section. The headquarters-level Evaluation Office will be led by a qualified D-2-level director and at least one P-6/D-1-level deputy.

77. Independence requires that the evaluation lead must report to the head of office or have direct access on evaluation issues. The lead must also have a periodic opportunity to present to the management team. Independence, technical reinforcement and mentoring is supported by the matrix management structure which pairs management oversight from a supervisor with technical oversight from a higher level. Multi-country evaluation specialist and country-level evaluation leads will be in a matrix relationship with the regional evaluation advisers. Regional evaluation advisers will be in a matrix relationship with the Director of Evaluation.

78. All staff with evaluation responsibilities – which includes most programme staff – must have access to technical support. The regional evaluation advisers and the multi-country evaluation specialist will arrange peer support from across UNICEF, including from related evidence functions whose duties converge with evaluation. Access to quality-vetted individual consultants, firms and centres of excellence will be arranged at the regional or global levels. Vetted national-level technical talent pools, established jointly with other stakeholders, will support UNICEF work and national evaluation capacity development objectives.

79. UNICEF manages evaluation as a career stream with opportunities for movement and role growth. Vacancies will be managed to achieve a balance of internal moves and external recruitment. Training and mentorship will be geared to future positions as well as immediate requirements. The Evaluation Office will foster the development and delivery of trainings, stretch assignments, conferences, mentoring, communities of practice and other modalities. Evaluation specialists may, following due consideration of risks and benefits, join or lead evaluation teams as a further means of growing their skills. Stretch assignments and exchanges to deepen exposure to other evidence functions and planning and programming roles will be arranged. Reciprocity will be encouraged, and other sectors/functions can include evaluation in their human resource development plans.

## **B. Financial resources**

80. To meet the commitments of this policy, at least 1 per cent of the organization's programme expenditure will be spent on evaluation, as stipulated by Executive Board decision 2022/5. This requirement applies to each office and division possessing a programme budget unless a modified goal is exceptionally established by the Director of Evaluation.<sup>16</sup> The 1 per cent commitment is a rolling two-year average, which allows occasional single-year shortfalls.

81. The Office of the Executive Director, regional directors and other directors, and country representatives are responsible for ensuring the adequate and predictable resourcing of the evaluation function. The Evaluation Office and regional evaluation advisers are responsible for monitoring and reporting on evaluation expenditure on a quarterly basis.

82. Resource predictability is crucial. The costed evaluation plan, initially presented in the country/regional/Strategic Plan, must be periodically updated. To maximize predictability, core resources should supply as much of the requirements as possible, with shortfalls filled from other resources once they are available. The realism of the

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<sup>16</sup> Guidance on achieving the 1 per cent commitment will define the expectations, exceptions and means of calculation.

estimates and sufficiency of the set-asides will be examined in periodic review processes. Deficiencies in allocations are to be remedied by the accountable office.

83. Budget certainty is critical for the plan for global evaluations. The approved amounts must be provided by management to facilitate the plan. To help UNICEF achieve its financial goals, the evaluation function will assist global fundraising strategies to define evaluation needs and to emphasize the necessity of core funding.

84. UNICEF capitalized an evaluation pooled fund during the 2018–2021 Strategic Plan period and consolidated it within the 2022–2025 integrated budget. The evaluation pooled fund fills gaps and supports opportunistic investments in rigorous impact evaluations, innovation and capacity development. The continued replenishment of the fund at a sufficient level is a core element of the adequate and predictable resourcing of the function.

85. The activities of other evidence functions must be financed separately from evaluation, unless exceptionally authorized by the Director of Evaluation (i.e., in the case where such efforts directly complement evaluation efforts). The evaluation function, in addition to actively seeking substantive cooperation with these other functions, supports the efforts of these other functions to secure adequate and sustainable funding.

### **XIII. Risks**

86. The realization of this policy depends on strong risk management approaches. Review moments and planning processes will engage evaluation stakeholders to examine present, imminent and future risks. Risk mitigation measures will be instituted, monitored and reported on as per the theory of change provided in the annex.

87. The peer review and other exercises have identified a set of potential risks. These risks, and hypothetical responses, are summarized within complementary guidance to this policy.

### **XIV. Policy reporting and review**

88. The governance section discusses mechanisms to hold the function and wider organization accountable and to support its positioning within the organization. The Director of Evaluation will prepare necessary inputs for these processes. The resulting decisions will be communicated to stakeholders by the appropriate leaders and endorsed for action. On an ongoing basis, key performance indicators will be included in the corporate performance dashboard.

89. The implementation status of the policy will be reported by the Director of Evaluation to the Executive Board within the annual report on the evaluation function, accompanied by a management response.<sup>17</sup> Subjects to be addressed include activities and achievements, major evaluation findings, management response status, work programme status, and organizational performance against the commitments articulated in the policy and the theory of change.

90. An independent review of the performance of the policy will be undertaken in 2027 preceding the next policy revision. This and other reviews of the evaluation function and policy will receive full cooperation.

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<sup>17</sup> Certain subjects may be presented on a biennial basis to allow more certain trends to emerge and deeper analysis.

# Annex

## Theory of change for the evaluation function in UNICEF

