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Plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029: draft for review

Summary

The draft plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 provides an overview of the highest-priority corporate evaluations intended to support the most critical learning and accountability needs of UNICEF and its partners in the coming quadrennium. Anchored in the 2023 Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/27](#) and [E/ICEF/2023/27/Rev.1](#)) and the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029, and aligned with the current operating context of UNICEF, the draft plan also describes the process for identifying the topics slated for evaluation. It further presents a strategic road map for implementing the evaluations planned, including key operational shifts and a brief assessment of foreseen risks, to ensure that all planned evaluations are independent, credible, timely and actionable – and thus optimized to maximize the positive impact of UNICEF and its partners in the lives of the children it serves.

The process for developing the draft plan has, as always, been rooted in a blended approach entailing independent analysis and extensive consultation. Both elements of the process have been significantly strengthened this quadrennium, however. The independent analysis element of this process has been enhanced by a risk-based planning methodology to prioritize evaluations of highest criticality based on strategic significance and evidence gaps as well as overall organizational risk profile. The consultation process has been expanded and deepened, both by pursuing a whole-of-organization approach from the outset and by offering more internal and external stakeholders more opportunities to provide feedback on the plan and its eventual implementation. In addition, a review of the implementation of the plan for global evaluations, 2022–2025, including key lessons and good practices emerging during the current quadrennium, has shaped the document.

The draft plan resulting from this process represents a smaller, more focused, better prioritized set of evaluations than has been the case in previous quadrennia, in tandem with the numerous constraints affecting UNICEF and its partners more broadly. In addition, the evaluation themes put forward reflect a more strongly

* [E/ICEF/2025/27](#).

intersectoral, intersectional and outcome- and impact-focused evaluations, in keeping with key currents articulated in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029.

The draft plan is presented to the Executive Board for its information and inputs. Additional feedback is being simultaneously sought by the UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee, National Committees for UNICEF, and key external evaluation partners, while internal stakeholders have been invited to provide further feedback on an ongoing basis in parallel to these external consultations. A final plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 that incorporates these numerous sources of feedback will be presented to the Executive Board for its discussion and decision at its first regular session of 2026.

I. Introduction

1. The role of the evaluation function within the UNICEF accountability system is to provide timely, credible and actionable information on the performance of the organization's policies and programmes to support accountability, learning and evidence-based decision-making. This role is fulfilled by conducting highly strategic independent evaluations; by ensuring compliance and assuring quality; by tracking the implementation of recommendations; and by alerting leadership to emerging issues. The evaluation function also leads and contributes to joint, inter-agency and system-wide evaluations.

2. The Plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 is a structured four-year road map laying out the organization's highest-priority corporate-level evaluations. Anchored in the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (2023) and closely aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029, the Plan identifies a balanced portfolio of corporate evaluations prioritized and sequenced to optimize organizational learning, accountability and strategic decision-making for the quadrennium in line with the results architecture of UNICEF and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. It complements the organization's country- and regional-level evaluation plans with a suite of evaluations covering global programmatic themes, humanitarian action and overall institutional effectiveness that require the attention of the entire organization.

3. The principles of independence and inclusive consultation play equally vital roles in evaluation planning processes, from the initial analysis to identify potential topics through to the final determination of topics to be evaluated. The draft plan has therefore been developed through a blended approach entailing robust independent analysis and extensive in-depth consultation at all three levels of the organization. It is now submitted to the UNICEF Executive Board for its information and inputs. Based on this feedback, and on the continued internal feedback of colleagues as well as that of the Audit Advisory Committee, National Committees for UNICEF and external evaluation partners, a final Plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 will be presented to the Executive Board for discussion and decision at its first regular session of 2026. In keeping with Executive Board decision 2025/14, a costed annual workplan of the Evaluation Office for 2026 will be presented as an annex to the final quadrennial Plan.

4. The approach to developing this draft plan represents a significant evolution in the UNICEF evaluation planning process. The independent analysis component of this process has been strengthened through the introduction of a risk-based planning methodology that ensures the prioritization of evaluations with the greatest potential impact on child rights, organizational learning and strategic performance. It has been further strengthened by a systematic, artificial intelligence-driven mapping of evidence gaps in UNICEF, enabling further prioritization according to where knowledge needs are greatest. The consultation component of the process has likewise been strengthened, namely through the involvement of the decentralized levels of the evaluation function, and of the organization more widely, from the outset of the process, through an expanded range of consultations with more stakeholders, and through a more consistent approach to these consultations.

5. The draft plan has been developed amid a rapidly changing global context marked by escalating conflicts and humanitarian crises, worsening development outcomes for children, a climate crisis and technological disruption. It is also marked by an increasingly constrained resource environment, leaving UNICEF in a state of unprecedented strain – and corresponding change management to adapt to this new operating context – as it enters its next quadrennium. The draft plan takes these developments into account in two main ways. First, it contains a far smaller number of evaluations than prior quadrennial plans, in recognition of the reduced capacity of the organization to absorb an extensive volume of new evaluations – especially as the organization’s operating environment is still volatile and the future shape and direction of UNICEF is uncertain, with corporate energy redirected to adapting to this environment through the Future Focus Initiative; and especially as numerous recommendations emanating from previous evaluations have still not been acted on. Second, the plan takes current realities into consideration by ensuring that, as UNICEF navigates the uncertain terrain of the next quadrennium, evaluation – as a key risk management tool – accompanies the organization on its change management journey with timely, relevant, credible and useful learning.

6. Owing to these same uncertainties, the draft plan has also been designed to be an agile, adaptive instrument that anticipates potential mid-cycle adjustments to accommodate unforeseen developments, including emergencies, emerging strategic priorities (including ad hoc demand-driven evaluations), and further opportunities for inter-agency collaboration. Any adaptations will be presented to the Executive Board in a timely manner.

7. The plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 is more than simply a list of evaluations. It is also an institutional commitment to deepening evaluative inquiry and strengthening evidence-informed action, all to help UNICEF and its partners better realize the rights of and achieve ever-better results for every child. It reflects a commitment to deliver the highest standards of evaluation practice – independent, credible, timely and useful – at a moment when global accountability and shared learning have never been more urgent.

II. Adaption to the new context and its challenges – and opportunities

8. Even prior to the unprecedented challenges currently facing the organization, progress in achieving the child-focused Sustainable Development Goal indicators had been in jeopardy. Within this context, the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 lays out three main institutional shifts that will define a new direction for the organization and, despite the challenges around it, sustain and potentially even accelerate progress for children. These shifts are: a sharpened focus on five high-Impact Results across the life cycle of the child; a move away from output- and activity-driven programming towards outcome- and impact-level change at scale; and the adoption of differentiated, context-specific programming strategies based on risk profiles, country capacities and needs.

9. At the same time, as the global development and humanitarian financing landscape has become more constrained and unpredictable, expectations for demonstrable results – *cost-effective* results – have grown in tandem. For UNICEF, financial constraints have not only engendered pressures to “do more with less”, but rather also to be as strategically focused, as prudent and as effective as possible – based on robust evidence of what works for whom and under what conditions, greater precision and greater intentionality, and greater ability to demonstrate impact, sustainability, efficiency and return on investment of the resources it receives. The central role of evaluation in this landscape is recognized in the draft UNICEF

Strategic Plan, 2026–2029, which identifies the evaluation function as a key support to organizational change, adaptation, and future relevance and effectiveness more explicitly than in previous Strategic Plans. The function’s heightened role as a key source of learning, accountability and risk management – in its dual role as both an evidence function and an oversight function – has also been underscored by the Executive Board.

10. Technological advances, meanwhile, have enhanced the function’s ability to fulfil its role in more rigorous, more cost-efficient and timelier ways than ever before. Artificial intelligence, machine learning and digital analytics offer new avenues for evaluative insight, enabling faster feedback loops, deeper data synthesis and more predictive foresight. The draft plan reflects a commitment to leverage these tools while ensuring appropriate safeguards for ethics, privacy and equity.

11. The draft plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029, in addition to adapting to broader challenges in the organization’s global operating context, reflects these numerous contextual developments. The plan is both a road map and a strategic prioritization instrument based on strategic significance, learning and accountability potential, and alignment with institutional priorities. Evaluations will concentrate efforts where the stakes are highest – where risks are greatest, investments are most significant, or programmatic innovation is under way, and where evaluative evidence is scarcest and most needed. This includes evaluating such complex and emerging domains as climate resilience, digital innovation for learning, adolescent development and humanitarian responses in fragile settings.

12. The plan is designed to help UNICEF navigate this period of profound transformation. As the United Nations approaches its eightieth anniversary in October 2025 and the international community nears the final years of the 2030 Agenda, the global development and humanitarian system – and the intergovernmental processes themselves – are under considerable strain, scrutiny and uncertainty. In this scenario, UNICEF has, through the Future Focus Initiative and other initiatives, been reshaping itself to be leaner, more agile, better-localized and more “future-fit”. By guiding UNICEF to generate the right evidence at the right time, the plan identifies those evaluations that will best position and help UNICEF to remain as relevant and future-fit, as credible and cost-effective, and as child-centred as possible at a time when children need it most.

III. Review of progress in the implementation of the Plan for global evaluations, 2022–2025, and lessons learned

13. The evaluation function, like UNICEF more broadly, is in a continuous process of self-reflection, learning and improvement. This process takes place throughout the implementation cycle – for example, through internal discussions and through feedback received from evaluation users, and more formally in annual meetings of the evaluation function. Towards the end of the quadrennium, the function reflects on a few simple questions – i.e. *What was the function able to accomplish in the quadrennium and what was it unable to accomplish, and why? What did the function do well and what did it do less well, and why? What worked well and what worked less well, and why?* The answers to these questions yield valuable insights on lessons to be learned and good practices to be brought to scale. Key takeaways of this stock-taking exercise are folded into the preparation of the subsequent quadrennial plan for global evaluations.

14. Annual reports and individual evaluation reports presented to the Executive Board throughout the current quadrennium have attested to the high level of relevance, quality, credibility, timeliness and utility of many evaluations. Numerous presentations of evaluation users across the organization have also pointed to the positive contributions that evaluations made to their work in their own presentations to the Executive Board this quadrennium. In these cases of positive influence on decision-making, a range of good practices helped to ensure evaluations' uptake. These include immediate engagement of the most relevant stakeholders, clear and consistent communication, honest expectation-setting, adaptability to emerging circumstances, and candid dialogue between evaluation managers and evaluation users based on relationships of mutual trust and active listening.

15. A range of further achievements helped the function to achieve better results more broadly by enhancing evaluations' timeliness, relevance and cost-efficiency as well as their rigour. These achievements included significant momentum in three areas of high strategic priority for evaluation as an accelerator of results for children: impact evaluation, national evaluation capacity development and evaluation synthesis. They also included technological and methodological advances, such as the use of artificial intelligence to systematically analyse large volumes of documents, geospatial mapping to better see programme coverage and gaps, probabilistic forecasting analysis to extrapolate likely programme outcomes based on trend data, and the development of a first-ever risk-based evaluation planning tool to ensure that the most critical evaluations are prioritized in the forthcoming quadrennium.

16. Other achievements include "softer" process improvements, such as a greater integration and harmonization of practice across the global evaluation function, the increasing reliance on youth advisory panels to shape evaluations, more regular monitoring of key performance indicators, and the introduction of data analysis to understand reasons for performance shortfalls as a means of informing remedial action. These strategic investments of time, effort and team talent (and in some cases financial resources) yielded significant dividends that stand to enhance the function's ability to positively influence the work of the organization for the foreseeable future. Their contribution to the maturation of the evaluation function in UNICEF has been recognized by both the latest Annual report of the Audit Advisory Committee in 2024 and the Executive Board,¹ as well as in the forthcoming UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029.

17. At the same time, one of the main insights gained during the current quadrennium is that, in the face of finite human and financial resources within the function and limited absorptive capacity across the organization, there can be a trade-off between evaluation volume, on the one hand, and the strategic relevance, quality, timeliness and utility of evaluations on the other. During the current quadrennium, the Evaluation Office produced a total of 60 evaluative products (including 12 slated for completion in 2025); this outstrips the 44 evaluations planned for in the Plan for global evaluations, 2022–2025. Compared to the 47 evaluations delivered in the 2018–2021 quadrennium, this represents an increase of 28 per cent and is owed to the growing number of demand-driven evaluations.

¹ Executive Board decision 2022/5 – Plan for global evaluations, 2022–2025; decision 2023/12 – Continual evaluation function financing; [E/ICEF/2023/27](#) – Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF; decision 2024/12 – Adequate and predictable funding of the evaluation function; and [E/ICEF/2024/AB/L.6](#) – increase in the Evaluation Pooled Fund and call for country-level funding.

18. High evaluation volume is a neutral indicator in itself. If all such evaluations are of equally high relevance, timeliness, quality, credibility, utility and use, or if this volume is driven in part by increasing demand for evaluation, high volume can be a positive indicator. However, if any of these other indicators decline because of increasing volume – even if this volume is partially fuelled by increasing demand – there is reason for concern. As consecutive annual reports on the evaluation function of UNICEF indicated, quality remained high overall – and improved over the quadrennium. However, quality was not uniformly high and the integration of a gender lens into evaluations remained unacceptably insufficient. Moreover, timeliness of management responses did suggest that the volume of evaluations was outstripping the organization’s action on them.

19. Most critically, not all evaluations planned for in the quadrennium were completed, and among those that were, timeliness of completion varied. Of the 44 evaluations planned for the quadrennium, 26 were completed between 2022 and 2024, 12 are scheduled for completion by the end of 2025, and 2 are expected to be completed in early 2026. Of the four remaining evaluations, two have been postponed and two have been cancelled due to financial constraints, changing priorities and organizational contexts and challenges related to fragmented and poorly interoperable internal data systems for planning, monitoring and reporting – highlighting the absence of a coherent data strategy and policy. Fourteen of the 26 completed evaluations were finalized on time and the remaining 12 evaluations were delayed by anywhere from 1 to 17 months (with an average delay of 10 months) due to changes in the original scope of the evaluations, the need to align with Strategic Plan development discussions, delays in the fieldwork and data collection, financial constraints, and evolving organizational context.

20. Volume was not the only cause of these delays – nor was it the sole cause of variable quality, utility or use across the organization. Factors beyond the function’s remit played a role as well. Chief among these was the unpredictable availability of adequate financial resources, particularly delays in allocations from the Evaluation Pooled Fund. In addition, the unique status of evaluation as both an oversight function and an evidence function embodying a dual learning and accountability role entails a lack of sanctions for inaction or insufficient action on evaluation recommendations in comparison to the mechanisms in place for audits and investigations.² Delays on the part of internal and external evaluation counterparts constituted another bottleneck, as did the intrinsic unpredictability of Level 3 emergencies, which, by policy, must be evaluated. Most critically, qualitative analysis conducted during the quadrennium suggested that in some cases an emphasis on compliance with evaluation coverage and financial targets had inadvertently had the effect of inflating evaluation volume in some cases, leading to evaluations that, while helping to achieve established targets, were of limited value for the human and financial resources consumed.

21. At the same time, analysis undertaken during the quadrennium revealed several aspects within the evaluation function itself, beyond volume alone, that contributed to a lack of timeliness, quality or utility. These included: lengthy periods of time to design and scope evaluations and to produce (often lengthy) evaluation reports; extensive reliance on external firms whose work required heavy quality assurance; and specific aspects of evaluation reports (e.g. executive summaries, recommendations) that required additional quality assurance to bring them to an

² The management response system is crucial for evaluation utility and accountability, but inconsistent follow-up and limited enforcement have weakened evaluations’ credibility and influence. The 2023 United Nations Evaluation Group peer review highlighted the need for a systematic approach to track, report and verify actions taken in response to recommendations. This requires not just technical fixes, but a cultural shift towards greater accountability and results orientation across all organizational levels.

acceptable calibre. The siloing of evaluation portfolios within the Evaluation Office, meanwhile, prevented more intersectoral and intersectional approaches between and among the Goal Areas as well as more holistic approaches to evaluation that harness the full range of evaluative offerings (e.g. impact evaluation, formative and forward-looking evaluations, traditional thematic evaluations, evaluation syntheses) in a joined-up, user-focused fashion. Persistent strategic communications challenges in conveying evaluation insights and recommendations in clear, compelling, user-focused ways contributed to delays and to a lack of universal uptake of evaluations.

22. Finally, the fragmented nature of evaluation planning, with headquarters, regional offices and country offices producing evaluation plans largely in parallel to each other rather than conjointly, resulted in a disparate patchwork of fragmented and sometimes duplicative evaluations as well as lost opportunities for cost-efficiencies and internal collaboration. This fragmentation of efforts extended beyond the function itself: evaluation uniquely resides within a larger ecosystem of accountability-focused oversight functions as well as learning-focused evidence functions, and although the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (2023) and forthcoming UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 both underscore the need for collaboration and cross-fertilization with these other functions, little progress had been made during the first half of the quadrennium. Significant advances were made in the latter half of the quadrennium, however, leading to a range of good practices that must be scaled up in the next quadrennium. Joint evidence mapping, joint planning and joint exercises remain the next frontiers towards a more integrated, user-focused approach between and among evaluation and these other functions.

23. The evaluation function made significant strides in strengthening evidence-based decision-making across UNICEF through the delivery of credible, timely and relevant evidence, despite these challenges. The quadrennium also yielded valuable insights, lessons and good practices that have directly informed the draft plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029. The incorporation of these key takeaways is imperative considering the organizational constraints that have since emerged. Some of these lessons, such as those surrounding the need for more independent risk-based analysis in identifying potential evaluation topics and for a more whole-of-organization approach to evaluation planning, have informed the process for developing the plan for the coming quadrennium. Other lessons, such as the need to ensure that the number of commitments enshrined in the quadrennial plan are feasible – feasible within the resources allotted to the function at the outset of the quadrennium (lest the evaluation plan, even if it excludes other critical evaluations owing to resource constraints, outstrip resources made available by the organization), feasible with respect to the need to adapt and accommodate demand-driven evaluations throughout the implementation cycle, and feasible in acknowledging the absorptive capacity constraints in the organization at a time of unprecedented disruption – have led to changes in the content of the plan and specifically in a significantly smaller, more highly prioritized set of evaluation commitments.

24. Yet other lessons, such as the need for more integrated approaches within the evaluation function and with other oversight and evidence functions, stronger strategic communications, a more cost-effective business model, and more pointed attention to evaluation uptake and follow-up, will inform implementation of the plan. The Evaluation Office will seek to reorient its work towards these priorities in the coming quadrennium.

IV. Guiding principles of the draft plan

25. The draft plan for global evaluations, 2022–2025 was developed through analysis, consultation and internal reflection. It is based on guiding principles that

address an evolving global context, a results-focused organization, and increasing demands for accountability, learning and return on investment.

26. Principle 1: Commitment to a rigorous, risk-based approach to prioritization. Resources for the evaluation function are finite, as is organizational capacity to engage in evaluations, so evaluations must be selected systematically, based on organizational risk exposure, potential learning value, strategic significance and alignment with the results architecture of the new UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029. Adherence to this principle ensures that the highest-stakes programs, systems and innovations receive timely and credible evaluative scrutiny.

27. Principle 2: Quality over volume. The emphasis in previous cycles on evaluation coverage and spending targets, coupled with the rise in demand-driven evaluations, compromised the relevance, timeliness, or usability of some evaluations. Moving forward, parsimony will be emphasized, including fewer but more consistently critical, influential and relevant evaluations that yield meaningful insights and promote organizational learning and change that has wide impact.

28. Principle 3: Intersectorality and intersectionality. The complex programming environment of UNICEF demands evaluations that transcend single-sector perspectives. Intersectorality recognizes that child rights outcomes often lie at the intersection of health, education, protection, climate resilience and social policy and promote whole-of-child evaluation strategies and learning across sectors. At the same time, intersectionality will be applied to understand how gender, geography, disability, displacement and socioeconomic status individually and jointly shape programme outcomes.

29. Principle 4: A holistic, integrated approach to evaluation. The evaluation function today offers many other evaluative exercises than traditional evaluations. The overall level of evaluative effort and the specific suite of evaluative exercises to be undertaken at different junctures during the quadrennium will be determined based on a review of needs, undertaken together with all relevant stakeholders by the Evaluation Office as a whole, rather than by individual portfolios.

30. Principle 5: Consultative and inclusive planning processes. The plan has been shaped by feedback received from the organization, along with external partners. This multi-tiered engagement has helped to identify shared evidence needs, build consensus on strategic directions and reinforce organizational ownership of the evaluation agenda. The process exemplifies the commitment of UNICEF to transparency, shared accountability and collaborative evidence generation, paying special attention to ensuring regional diversity in inputs and capturing the knowledge and operational realities of the decentralized structure of UNICEF.

31. Principle 6: Evaluation as a critical support to adaptive management. In this environment of uncertainty and volatility, the evaluation function must also be responsive and ensure dedicated attention to accompany UNICEF on its learning journey and support the organization in navigating these challenges. As the organization adapts its strategic posture and programming approaches, evaluations will be crucial in surfacing implementation insights, enabling course correction and identifying catalytic innovations.

32. Principle 7: Coherence and complementarity. The evaluation function must work cohesively across its portfolios, align with other oversight and evidence functions, and coordinate with external partners. A whole-of-function approach will maximize synergies, reduce duplication, and strengthen accountability. The restructuring of the Evaluation Office will break down silos and promote integrated, intersectoral, and intersectional evaluations, while enhancing collaboration with audit, research, monitoring, data analytics, and external partners.

33. **Principle 8: The evaluation plan as an agile, living instrument.** UNICEF is launching its 2026–2029 cycle in a time of extraordinary uncertainty and volatility – from fiscal constraints and climate disruption to geopolitical tensions and rapid technological change. In the face of these uncertainties, the function must be flexible, allowing for mid-cycle revisions based on emerging needs, risks and organizational imperatives. Agile delivery models, rapid synthesis and fit-for-purpose products will meet real-time demands while maintaining rigour and independence.

V. The framework for prioritizing evaluation topics

34. The draft plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 was developed using a blended approach of independent analysis and in-depth consultations. The revised 2023 evaluation policy committed to strengthening these elements in the planning process.

35. The process began with a greatly sharpened risk-based planning tool to strengthen the role of independent, unbiased analysis in pre-identifying potential topics for in-depth internal discussion during consultations. This tool, which was developed by and for the UNICEF evaluation function – the entire function, not the Evaluation Office alone, for the first time – based on a review and adaptation of similarly risk-based systems within UNICEF (i.e. the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations and of risk-based evaluation systems elsewhere in the United Nations system). The risk-based framework applied three interdependent criteria (i.e. strategic relevance, evidence gaps and risk exposure)³ – and a wide range of weighted sub-criteria and associated indicators within each of these three criteria. This process yielded a longlist of 135 topics for qualitative discussion and debate within the evaluation function. These internal qualitative discussions reduced the number of evaluations to bring into consultations to 55 topics.

36. These 55 topics formed the basis of consultations at all three levels of the organization in June 2025. These included informal meetings between evaluation function team members and their main counterparts, individual bilateral conversations with most members of the Global Management Team, a series of structured virtual workshop-style consultations with any other colleagues who might wish to share their inputs in the process, and a meeting of the Global Evaluation Committee. These meetings, which solicited feedback from approximately 300 colleagues across the organization, were supplemented by an open-ended call for written comments, facilitated by a virtual whiteboard that will remain open until the draft plan is finalized in the fourth quarter of 2025. Taken together, these consultations proved exceedingly helpful in further refining, reducing and validating the longlisted evaluations into a highly prioritized shortlist. The result of this process is a shortlist of the most critical evaluations, categorized into three priority tiers, as follows:

(a) **Tier 1a:** These topics (18) represent the critical evaluations that are essential to avoiding the most serious risk consequences for the organization. These evaluations are considered “must-do” evaluations and will be able to be completed within the quadrennial institutional budget allocation and within existing human resources capacity after current organizational restructuring processes are completed.

³ Strategic relevance aligns with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029, cross-cutting commitments (e.g. gender, climate, digital efforts, disability inclusion) and policy or inter-agency mandates. Evidence gaps identified include mental health, anticipatory action and digital ecosystems. Risk exposure was assessed across financial, operational and programmatic dimensions, using risk-based models from the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations and the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services.

(b) **Tier 1b:** These topics (5) represent similarly critical evaluations that are essential to avoid the most serious risk consequences for the organization. Like Tier 1 evaluations, these evaluations are “must-do” evaluations. Unlike Tier 1 evaluations, however, these evaluations will need to be foregone as they cannot be covered under the quadrennial institutional budget allocation and within existing human resources.

(c) **Tier 2:** These topics (24) represent important, though less mission-critical, evaluations that may proceed if financial and human resources permit and upon completion of tier 1a and tier 1b priorities.

37. This number represents a decrease in volume of evaluation commitments of 48 per cent from the number of evaluations planned the 2022–2025 quadrennium if 23 evaluations are completed and a decrease of 59 per cent if 18 evaluations are completed.

38. The topics are expected to be further refined based on feedback received from the Executive Board, the Audit Advisory Committee, the National Committees for UNICEF, and external evaluation partners with whom coordination or collaboration will be sought in the coming quadrennium through joint or system-wide evaluations. As noted above, further feedback will also be culled in parallel from internal stakeholders through an open-source commenting whiteboard. After culling these various inputs, the decision on the final suite of evaluations for the quadrennium will rest with the Evaluation Office.

39. The following two sections present the proposed workplan for 2026 and for the full quadrennium, respectively.

VI. Evaluation topics and proposed workplan for 2026

40. The Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (2023) sets clear baselines to guarantee that the corporate portfolio of global evaluations comprehensively covers all facets of the Strategic Plan. This includes a minimum of 10 evaluations across the five Impact Results areas: (a) health, nutrition and development; (b) skills and learning; (c) multidimensional poverty; (d) protection from violence; and (e) protection from disasters and climate and environmental risks. Additionally, the change strategies, enablers and accelerators contained in the Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 require at least three evaluations, with one evaluation dedicated specifically to gender equality. A minimum of four evaluations of the foundational elements of institutional effectiveness are also required per cycle.

41. This first-year plan reflects a tighter, more strategic focus under the new risk-based planning approach and sets a strong foundation for adaptive learning and accountability throughout the quadrennium. A broader set of prospective evaluations for 2026–2029 is presented in the next section, but a more finalized list will be presented following the conclusion of ongoing consultations, including with the Executive Board.

42. These global evaluations are harmonized with regional and country-level evaluation coverage and are complemented by other evaluative exercises tailored to the needs of diverse contexts. These may include evaluability assessments, syntheses, real-time reviews and impact evaluations, especially in areas of high risk, innovation or evidence gaps. This flexible and layered approach ensures that the evaluation function can deliver its oversight and learning mandates while remaining responsive to priorities that emerge over the Strategic Plan period.

43. In line with Executive Board decision 2025/14, the UNICEF Evaluation Office will begin presenting costed annual workplans to the Executive Board at its first regular session each year, starting in 2026. The 2026 workplan anchors the first year

of the new quadrennium in a set of priority evaluations identified through a participatory, risk-informed planning process. As outlined in table 1, this includes tier 1a evaluations planned for completion in 2026, evaluations commissioned or to be initiated in 2025 and scheduled for completion in 2026, and formative or evaluability assessments intended to inform future evaluations in the next quadrennium. These evaluations address strategic priorities across Impact Result areas, humanitarian action and institutional effectiveness. A detailed cost estimate for the workplan will be provided in the next submission to the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2026. The scope of each of these evaluation topics is described in the remainder of this section.

Table 1
Corporate evaluations to be completed in 2026

Impact Result areas
Evaluation of UNICEF work on public finance for children ^a
Evaluation of UNICEF work on child protection systems strengthening for prevention of violence against women, boys and girls ^a
Evaluation of the Joint UNFPA-UNICEF Programme on Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation ^b
Evaluation of disaster risk reduction and climate ^b
Impact evaluation thematic window (Impact Catalyst Fund)^d
Evaluation of UNICEF work on ending violence against children in, around and through schools
Humanitarian evaluation^c
Evaluation of UNICEF staying and delivering and principled humanitarian action in complex and high-threat environments ^c
Institutional effectiveness
Evaluation of UNICEF risk-informed humanitarian, development and peacebuilding-resilience programming ^b
Evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Child Rights Mainstreaming
Evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of innovation hubs
Evaluation of the Manager Support Programme

^a Tier 1a evaluations.

^b Evaluation commissioned in 2025 and scheduled for completion in 2026.

^c Any new scaled-up Level 3 emergency response by UNICEF will be evaluated as part of the 2026 workplan.

^d Impact Catalyst Fund new thematic window will be launched in 2026, with all impact evaluations to be completed by the end of 2029.

A. Evaluation of UNICEF work on public finance for children

44. Building on the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 and its commitment to realizing children’s rights, a global evaluation of UNICEF work on public finance for children will examine the UNICEF contribution to public budgeting and planning through a cross-sectorial lens, especially in fragile and humanitarian settings. This evaluation will assess what UNICEF has achieved through its engagement with Governments and finance ministries to mobilize, allocate and use domestic resources, from budgeting through expenditure execution, to ensure critical investments in sectors like health, education, nutrition, social protection, disability support and child protection.

B. Evaluation of UNICEF work on child protection systems strengthening for prevention of violence against women, boys and girls

45. Following a 2015 evaluation, UNICEF expanded its efforts to address violence against children, allocating over two thirds of its child protection budget to related programmes. Despite a 2025 evaluation being cancelled due to funding issues, the programme shifted focus to violence prevention, addressing social and behavioural drivers with a gender-transformative lens. A 2026 evaluation will assess UNICEF strategies and achievements in preventing violence against children, in line with the 2021–2030 Child Protection Strategy, the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, and the Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025.

C. Evaluation of the Joint UNFPA-UNICEF Programme on Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation

46. The UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices are conducting an independent evaluation of the UNFPA–UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. Since 2008, the programme has implemented interventions at various levels to eradicate female genital mutilation. This midterm evaluation will assess progress to date, aiming to provide insights for phase IV (2022–2030) and future evaluations. Starting in September 2025, it will support learning and accountability, analysing the effectiveness and impact of interventions, and assessing the programme’s influence on national ownership, policy development, and movement-building efforts.

D. Evaluation of disaster risk reduction and climate

47. The Evaluation of UNICEF work on disaster risk reduction and climate, implemented during the Strategic Plan 2022–2025 cycle, examines to what extent UNICEF has been successful in reaching its disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation objectives, including reducing the impact of disasters and climate change on children, building their resilience, and providing timely crisis assistance. The evaluation will incorporate both summative and formative evaluation approaches, documenting the contribution of UNICEF towards Sustainable Development Goal 13 (climate action) to date and potential for scaling up successful interventions.

E. Evaluation of UNICEF work on ending violence against children in, around and through schools

48. This impact evaluation window supports the commitment of UNICEF from the 2024 Bogotá Ministerial Conference on violence against children and its leadership in the Safe to Learn Coalition. It aims to protect 250 million children from violence in and around schools, addressing emotional, physical, sexual and online violence, including bullying and teacher-perpetrated abuse. The focus includes marginalized children, such as those with disabilities and in humanitarian contexts, and the heightened risks faced by adolescent girls. Addressing an emerging area of UNICEF programming, the evaluation will help to close data gaps and inform strategy and programme decisions in this cross-cutting and quickly evolving sector.

F. Staying and delivering and principled humanitarian action in complex and high-threat environments

49. This evaluation will address barriers to effective humanitarian response, focusing on access and funding constraints. It will build on previous assessments to

strengthen the UNICEF approach to access, evaluating how well the organization upholds humanitarian principles amid operational trade-offs. The evaluation will reflect on balancing proximity to Governments with reaching vulnerable populations and document good practices from various contexts to inform future strategies and provide actionable recommendations.

G. Evaluation of UNICEF risk-informed humanitarian, development and peacebuilding-resilience programming

50. This evaluation will assess UNICEF progress in applying a risk-informed, integrated approach across its humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work. It will examine how UNICEF addresses immediate needs and structural vulnerabilities in fragile contexts, in line with its dual mandate and humanitarian-development-peace nexus principles. Building on the 2021 formative evaluation, it will explore how commitments are translated into coordinated actions. The evaluation will review progress in risk-informed programming, resilience-building, conflict sensitivity and gender integration, and assess partnerships, localization and internal capacities. Recommendations will help UNICEF to strengthen its ability to reduce risks and respond adaptively in complex contexts. Completion is planned for 2026.

H. Evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of the Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Child Rights Mainstreaming

51. The Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Child Rights Mainstreaming aims to integrate child rights across all United Nations activities. This evaluability assessment and formative evaluation, commissioned by UNICEF and, if possible, other United Nations agencies, is a proactive and forward-looking exercise. It aims to provide credible evidence and recommendations to enhance child rights mainstreaming, supporting the implementation of the Guidance Note by evaluating the existing mechanisms and assessing the readiness of UNICEF and other relevant organizations to implement the Guidance Note.

I. Evaluability assessment and formative evaluation of Innovation Hubs

52. This evaluability assessment and formative evaluation will support UNICEF Global Hubs for Innovative Finance and Learning Innovations during a time of transition. It aims to define success, assess systems and capacities, and strengthen strategic foundations. As the Hubs evolve the evaluation will help keep goals clear, fit-for-purpose governance, and a strong culture of learning. It will be collaborative, helping managers and teams reflect, adapt and support meaningful result measurement, ensuring that the hubs remain credible, agile and impactful.

J. Evaluation of the Manager Support Programme

53. This evaluation will assess the effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of the UNICEF Managing People with Purpose Programme, launched in early 2024. The Programme aims to improve people management, inclusive leadership and organizational culture. The evaluation will review implementation, how well the Programme meets managers' needs, and the conditions affecting its success. The evaluation will provide evidence and recommendations for future improvements to strengthen the Programme and support the UNICEF goal of a more supportive and empowering work culture.

VII. Evaluation topics proposed for the period 2026–2029

54. This section provides an overview of the most critical evaluations identified for the next quadrennium, broken down by tier in tables 2 and 3. The remainder of the section summarizes the scope of each topic.

Table 2

Highest-priority (tier 1a and tier 1b) evaluations identified for 2026–2029

<i>Evaluation topic</i>	<i>Year of completion</i>	
	<i>Tier^(a)</i>	<i>submission</i>
Impact Catalyst Fund		
Evaluation of UNICEF work on ending violence against children in, around and through schools ^(a)	1a	2026–2029
Evaluation of UNICEF work on preventing and early detection for child stunting, wasting and acute malnutrition	1b	2026–2029
Impact Result areas		
Evaluation of child protection systems strengthening for prevention of violence against women, boys and girls	1a	2026
Evaluation of UNICEF work on public finance for children	1a	2026
Evaluation of prevention and treatment of wasting	1b	2027
Evaluation of newborn care and survival: health, nutrition and WASH	1a	2027
Evaluation of innovation for effective and inclusive systems for digital education	1a	2027
Evaluation of achieving safely managed water and sanitation for all	1b	2027
Evaluation of mental health and psychosocial support ^(b)	1a	2028
Evaluation of UNICEF work on climate resilience and addressing environmental risks	1a	2028
Evaluation of immunization for zero-dose children	1b	2029
Evaluation of childcare support systems	1b	2029
Humanitarian		
Evaluation of staying and delivering and principled humanitarian action in complex and high-threat environments	1a	2026
Formative evaluation of UNICEF engagement in the humanitarian reset agenda	1a	2027
Evaluation of risk-taking, risk-sharing and risk management in humanitarian action	1a	2027
Change strategies, enablers, accelerators and institutional effectiveness		
Evaluation of organizational transformation and operating model reform	1a	2027
Evaluation of UNICEF digital transformation and technology for children	1a	2027
Evaluation of innovative financing to deliver results for children, including humanitarian resource mobilization	1a	2027
Evaluation of procurement and supply chain systems, including last-mile delivery in humanitarian contexts	1a	2028
Evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029	1a	2028
Evaluation of gender equality and empowerment of adolescent girls	1a	2028
Evaluation of organizational safeguarding and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse	1a	2029

Evaluation of child rights mainstreaming and rights-based programming	1a	2029
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^(a) Tier 1a evaluations are critical and can be completed within the quadrennial institutional budget allocation and existing human resources after restructuring. Tier 1b evaluations are also critical but cannot be covered within these resources, so they will need to be foregone.

^(b) Evaluations rolled over from the previous quadrennium.

Two evaluations from the 2022–2025 cycle were cancelled but are not included on the list for the 2026–2029 cycle: Evaluation of UNICEF work to support shock-responsive social protection systems and Evaluation of the impact of UNICEF work on inclusive social protection systems.

Table 3

Tier 2 evaluations identified for 2026–2029, pending additional resources

<i>Evaluation topic</i>	<i>Number of evaluation products</i>
Impact Catalyst Fund	3
Evaluation of the elimination of female genital mutilation	
Evaluation of child and adolescent mental health	
Evaluation of UNICEF work in foundational learning	
Impact Result areas	12
Evaluation of child protection in humanitarian contexts, with a focus on children affected by migration	
Evaluation of WASH in institutions	
Evaluation of hand hygiene and menstrual health hygiene	
Evaluation of water access, safety and sustainability	
Evaluation of shock responsive social protection	
Evaluation of disaster risk reduction and climate change programming in education	
Evaluation of engagement of young people in peacebuilding	
Evaluation of inclusive education programmes for children with disabilities	
Evaluation of UNICEF support in decentralized local governance systems on service delivery for children	
Evaluation of UNICEF work in sustainable energy	
Evaluation of the UNICEF sustainability and climate change action plan, 2023–2030	
Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation	
Humanitarian	3
Evaluation of youth engagement in humanitarian action	
Evaluation of humanitarian cash transfers	
Evaluation of humanitarian principles in UNICEF humanitarian action	
Change strategies, enablers, accelerators and institutional effectiveness	6
Inter-agency evaluation of joint programmes and pooled funding mechanisms (with other United Nations entities)	
Evaluation of the use of evidence, data and foresight for results	
Inter-agency evaluation of harmonized approach to cash transfers	
Evaluation of UNICEF support to national statistical systems	
Evaluation of policy advice and leveraging financing in UNICEF programming	
Evaluation of security coordination and management in UNICEF	

A. Impact Result areas

55. The Plan prioritizes evaluations across five Impact Result areas to generate evidence that strengthens equity-focused, system-level programmes for children. Key evaluations will address new-born survival through nutrition, access to health and WASH services, particularly in fragile contexts. An evaluation on mental health and psychosocial support will aim at guiding implementation adjustments to strengthen intersectionality across health, education and protection, and to allocate strategic investments to maximize effectiveness. Innovation and digital transformation is a key accelerator in the new Strategic Plan. The proposed evaluation will assess the impact of UNICEF-led digital education efforts, with a particular focus on scaled initiatives implemented across multiple countries. The aim is not only to understand the outcomes of these interventions, but also the trajectory of accelerated progress to these outcomes. An evaluation on public finance for children will assess UNICEF engagement with Governments and finance ministries to mobilize, allocate and use domestic resources for social sectors. Efforts to end violence against children focusing on the intersections of violence against women and children will be evaluated to guide protective strategies. Lastly, an evaluation will focus on assessing the cost-effectiveness of UNICEF work on climate resilience and addressing environmental risks.

B. Impact evaluation thematic windows (Impact Catalyst Fund)

56. The Impact Catalyst Fund (ICF) is a flagship initiative of the Evaluation Office aimed at building strategic global impact evidence across multiple countries through partnerships with the country offices. It focuses on high-value, innovative interventions which have potential for upscaling nationally, regionally and globally. Building on UNICEF commitment and leadership in violence against children, the first thematic window will generate rigorous impact evidence on violence against children, in, around and through school demonstrating UNICEF effectiveness to prevent learning losses and improve mental health, including adolescent girls and the most marginalized children. The second thematic window will provide evidence-based solutions to UNICEF investment on effective prevention programming and early detection for child stunting, wasting and acute malnutrition. Both windows will prioritize interventions in fragile and humanitarian setting and evaluate cost-effectiveness of interventions offering unique value for UNICEF advocacy for scale and impact.

C. Humanitarian

57. These evaluations will assess key achievements and key operational and strategic challenges in fragile and humanitarian contexts. One evaluation examines risk-taking, risk-sharing and risk-management in diverse setting and will help to align current risk management practices in humanitarian action with the broader organizational risk processes systems. Another (formative) evaluation will assess how UNICEF work in humanitarian action has both adjusted to the key asks spelled out in the United Nations “humanitarian reset” agenda and contributed to a new humanitarian modus operandi at the inter-agency level. Another evaluation analyses strategies for staying and delivering in high-threat environments, using humanitarian access as an entry point to assess alignment with humanitarian principles. In addition to the two evaluations on innovative financing and localization of supply co-managed with the institutional effectiveness portfolio, these five humanitarian evaluations will generate actionable insights to strengthen response capacity, uphold humanitarian principles and adapt practices in complex and evolving emergencies.

D. Change strategies, enablers, accelerators and institutional effectiveness

58. These evaluations will review institutional reform, innovative financing and digital transformation and how these initiatives strengthen the organization's adaptability, scalability and impact. Enablers covered include assessments of procurement and supply systems, safeguarding mechanisms and digital and financial infrastructure, examining systems, governance and accountability. Accelerators such as gender equality and adolescent empowerment are evaluated through Gender Action Plan and Gender Policy implementation. Institutional effectiveness is a central theme of evaluations of the coherence of the Strategic Plan, child rights mainstreaming and reform alignment. Together, these will strengthen organizational learning, decision-making and resilience. These evaluations will generate critical evidence to inform mid-course adjustments, enhance delivery capacity and ensure that UNICEF remains fit-for-purpose in achieving sustainable, inclusive results for children in diverse contexts.

VIII. Other priorities

59. The Plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 not only articulates a workplan of evaluations; rather, it sets forth the overall strategic direction of the function for the coming quadrennium, including cross-cutting activities of high strategic priority. Similarly reflecting lessons from the past cycle, as well recent organizational changes, reforms, these will be expounded in the final Plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 and include the following:

(a) Strengthened joined-up strategic planning and functional coherence within the evaluation function at all three levels of the organization, starting with the co-development of the draft plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 and continuing with annual work-planning processes.

(b) Joint activities with United Nations development system entities and support to system-wide evaluations, including joint and inter-agency evaluations, particularly within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, United Nations Development System reform, and the UN80 initiatives.

(c) Enhanced leveraging artificial intelligence and technological innovation and expanding new methods, an effort which gained significant effort in the current quadrennium but must continue to be brought to scale – through internal resources – in the next.

(d) Accelerated use of evaluative synthesis for rapid, consolidated elevation of recurring themes, issues and lessons for internal use and for use by the wider development and humanitarian communities.

(e) Enhanced strategic communication and use of evaluation and strengthened mechanisms for follow-up of management responses, equipping evaluators at all levels with advanced skills in these areas vital for ensuring evaluation uptake.

(f) National evaluation capacity development, an area in which significant advances were made in the current quadrennium, with future efforts focused on ensuring the sustainability of gains to date.

(g) Strengthened quality assurance, quality assessment, and oversight, including more cost-efficient quality assessment modalities and entailing revisions to these to better account for the diversity of evaluation products and contexts, as well as enhancements to key performance indicators and evaluation metrics will enhance

strategic oversight, ensuring the function delivers value in a resource-constrained environment.

(h) Independent evaluation of the implementation of the plan for global evaluations of UNICEF, 2022–2025, as a means of harvesting lessons for the function and wider organization for application in the coming quadrennium in a more formal, objective and impartial manner.

60. Overall, these priorities reflect a forward-facing evaluation function, one that is strategic, technologically enabled and deeply embedded in the mission of UNICEF to protect and advance the rights of every child. Together, they will ensure that evaluation remains a robust driver of organizational decision-making – and, by extension, ever-better results for children.

IX. Implementation

61. The Plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 marks a strategic shift in the UNICEF evaluation function, prioritizing relevance, timeliness, quality and use over volume. The development approach reflects this new direction, which will be further reinforced through changes in structure and the business model. All programme-focused evaluations – including impact evaluations – will be consolidated under a single portfolio, while humanitarian and institutional effectiveness evaluations will retain their focus but coordinate more closely to support a systemic view of organizational performance. A renewed emphasis on sequencing, integration and synthesis will ensure that programmatic and institutional evaluations are mutually reinforcing.

62. These shifts are already enhancing coherence, planning, and delivery across organizational levels. Beginning in 2026, the Evaluation Office will submit annual costed workplans to the Executive Board, promoting accountability and enabling flexible adjustments to evolving priorities. Real-time scoping and adaptive design will support evidence needs in dynamic contexts. Implementation will also include resource shifts to strengthen strategic communications, stakeholder engagement, evaluation use and internal capacity. Greater alignment with other oversight and evidence functions will further support more integrated and effective evaluation planning and delivery.

X. Risks

63. The implementation of the Plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 faces a series of interconnected risks that could affect its delivery and impact. These include (a) significant resource constraints, some already manifested in the current Future Focus Initiative and others potentially to come; (b) the growing organizational focus on outcome- and impact-level change, as well as systems-level change, which poses additional complexities to the conduct – and cost – of evaluations; (c) broader institutional reorganization and downsizing, which, in addition to risking an outsized reduction of the evaluation function and hence its ability to fulfil its role, might reduce institutional capacity for engagement;⁴ (d) other external shocks that could delay evaluations or limit their quality; and (e) evaluations revealing performance gaps, especially in sensitive or high-risk areas, may face resistance from some stakeholders, affecting these evaluations' independence and utility. These risks underscore the need for proactive monitoring, adaptive planning, and strong organizational commitment to uphold the credibility and value of the UNICEF evaluation function.

⁴ This risk is exacerbated by the significant reduction of the knowledge management function in UNICEF.

64. To address these risks, the Plan assumes sustained leadership commitment to evaluation, and strong coordination among headquarters, regional and country offices. It also assumes stable access to external technical expertise and a supportive operational environment for evaluation implementation and data access.

65. Ongoing monitoring of risks and assumptions will be essential to ensuring the Plan's success, as will the adaptive strategies to address them. These will be reviewed and reported in annual reports on the evaluation function of UNICEF throughout the quadrennium.

XI. Reporting

66. The continued relevance and effectiveness of the UNICEF Plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 is crucial. Thus, there will be a clear internal commitment to monitor progress and conduct a mid-cycle review. Regular reporting through annual reports on the evaluation function presented to the Executive Board would serve as the primary accountability mechanism.
