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Management response to the annual report for 2025 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

Summary

In accordance with Executive Board decision 2013/13, the present document provides the Management response to the annual report for 2025 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2026/19](#)). The management response addresses the key elements of the annual report, including the progress of the evaluation function on key performance indicators and the implementation of the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/27](#) and [E/ICEF/2023/27/Corr.1](#)).

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

* [E/ICEF/2026/9](#).

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



I. Overview

1. The present document has been prepared by the management of UNICEF in response to the Annual report for 2025 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2026/17). It includes comments on progress within the evaluation function in 2025 and the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2023/27 and E/ICEF/2023/27/Corr.1).

2. Management welcomes the synthesis of findings presented for the final year of the 2022–2025 quadrennium and acknowledges the balanced assessment of performance under a significantly constrained and evolving operating environment. Ensuring that evaluation continues to generate credible, timely and actionable evidence will remain essential to strengthening accountability, informing decision-making and delivering improved and equitable outcomes for children in the next quadrennium.

II. Key developments in the evaluation function

A. Background

3. Management welcomes the report's comprehensive overview of the evaluation function's performance during the final year of the 2022–2025 quadrennium in line with the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (2023). Management acknowledges both the progress made in advancing the strategic repositioning of the evaluation function and the significant challenges encountered in an increasingly constrained and evolving operating environment.

4. Management recognizes the importance of sustaining momentum in implementing the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF, including continued attention to performance monitoring, strengthening evaluation quality and utility, and contributing to the development of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029. At the same time, management notes that the broader organizational context marked by financial constraints and reform efforts under the Future Focus Initiative has required adjustments across UNICEF, including within the evaluation function.

5. In this context, management appreciates the efforts undertaken by the Evaluation Office to adapt its operating model, including through prioritization and efficiency measures, while continuing to deliver relevant and credible evaluative evidence. The introduction of a more risk-informed and prioritized approach to evaluation planning, as reflected in the Plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 (E/ICEF/2026/5), along with the development of the first fully costed annual Evaluation Office workplan (UNICEF/2026/EB/5), is particularly noted as an important step towards greater transparency and aligning limited resources with areas of highest strategic value.

6. Management also welcomes the Evaluation Office's proactive engagement in supporting organizational decision-making during the Future Focus Initiative, including through the provision of advisory inputs and continued collaboration with other oversight functions. These efforts have contributed to maintaining a focus on learning, accountability and evidence-informed decision-making during a period of significant change.

7. Overall, management encourages the continued focus on strategic prioritization, efficiency and relevance to ensure that the evaluation function remains fit for purpose and able to effectively support the UNICEF mandate in a constrained resource environment.

B. Noteworthy evaluations contributing to organizational results

8. Management welcomes the analysis presented on the influence and use of evaluation across the quadrennium, and in particular the findings of the 2025 Study of Influential Evaluations, which provides valuable insights into how evaluation contributes to decision-making, organizational learning and results for children.

9. Management recognizes the four pathways identified through which evaluation drives impact – informing institutional reform and strategic positioning, guiding programme redesign and scale decisions, shaping national policy and systems development, and strengthening accountability and learning in fragile and high-risk contexts. The examples provided across these areas illustrate the breadth and relevance of evaluation contributions at global, regional and country levels.

10. Management appreciates the strong collaboration between the Evaluation Office and programme and technical divisions, which has supported the uptake of evaluation findings in areas such as human resources, innovation, primary healthcare, water, sanitation and hygiene, and early childhood development. These examples demonstrate the value of timely, well-targeted evaluations in informing strategic adjustments, strengthening programme design, and supporting evidence-based policy dialogue with national partners.

11. Management also welcomes the emphasis on country-level evaluations and their role in informing programme refinement, particularly in complex and fragile contexts. The examples cited in the report highlight how evaluation evidence is being used to strengthen sustainability, improve coordination with national systems, and enhance the effectiveness of resilience-oriented programming.

12. The findings related to humanitarian response and preparedness are also noted, including the importance of continued attention to readiness, risk analysis, and integration across humanitarian and development programming. Management remains committed to addressing these areas through ongoing organizational efforts to strengthen preparedness and response capacity.

13. Management concurs with the conditions identified for maximizing evaluation influence, including alignment with planning and budgeting cycles, early engagement of intended users, and structured follow-up on recommendations. These factors are critical to ensuring that evaluation remains relevant and actionable, particularly in a context of constrained resources and organizational change.

14. Going forward, management encourages continued focus on strengthening the strategic use of evaluation, ensuring that limited resources are directed towards high-priority areas where evidence can most effectively inform decision-making, support accountability, and improve outcomes for children.

C. Moving the needle internally: strengthening the “hard-wiring” and “soft-wiring” of the function

15. Management welcomes the progress reported in strengthening the evaluation function through both “hard-wiring” and “soft-wiring” measures, as articulated in the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (2023). Management recognizes the importance of these complementary approaches in reinforcing the relevance, utility and independence of the function, particularly in a context of organizational change.

16. Management appreciates the significant advancements made in operationalizing the policy through strengthened guidance, tools and systems. The development of the UNICEF Evaluation Handbook, the continued refinement of risk-informed and prioritized evaluation planning, and the expansion of methodological and quality

assurance guidance are important steps towards enhancing consistency and rigour across the function. Management also notes progress towards greater transparency and alignment through costed evaluation planning and the preparation for the start of the independent external assessment.

17. At the same time, management recognizes the critical role of “soft-wiring” in strengthening coherence and effectiveness across a geographically dispersed and matrixed function. Strengthened engagement with regional counterparts and management teams is also noted as an important enabler of more integrated and responsive evaluation practice.

18. Management further welcomes the continued efforts to enhance the quality of evaluation methodologies, including the use of innovative approaches in fragile and constrained environments. The application of adaptive designs, remote data collection methods and new analytical tools has supported continuity of evaluative work while maintaining analytical rigour under challenging conditions.

19. Management appreciates the evaluation function’s contributions to broader United Nations system-wide learning, including methodological mapping and partnerships that advance innovation and shared public goods. Efforts to strengthen the inclusion of children’s voices and to improve knowledge dissemination are also welcomed as important steps towards enhancing the relevance and use of evaluation findings.

20. Going forward, management encourages continued prioritization of these efforts to ensure that improvements in guidance and methods are sustained and translated into tangible gains in the quality, relevance and use of evaluation across the organization, within the realities of a constrained resource environment.

D. Moving the needle externally: catalysing a broader movement of evidence-based accountability for children

21. Management welcomes the strategic focus on advancing impact evaluation, national evaluation capacity development and global evidence synthesis as complementary pillars to strengthen evidence-based accountability for children.

22. Management particularly underscores the importance of prioritizing efforts within a constrained resource environment, with a view to maximizing value and relevance for organizational decision-making. In this regard, management emphasizes the critical role of impact evaluations as the most robust source of evidence on what works, and encourages a continued and expanded focus on increasing the number and strategic use of impact evaluations to inform programme design, scale and resource allocation.

23. Management also recognizes the value of national evaluation capacity development and global synthesis in supporting broader system-level change and leveraging existing evidence. Continued attention to ensuring practical application, country ownership and methodological rigour across these areas will be important.

24. Going forward, management encourages a balanced but clearly prioritized approach across these pillars, with a strong focus on impact, efficiency and direct contribution to improved outcomes for children.

III. Performance overview: ongoing progress and key lessons for the evaluation function

A. Number of evaluation submissions and geographical coverage

25. Management welcomes the analysis of evaluation submission trends and coverage across the organization, and notes the continued emphasis on ensuring that evaluations are strategically relevant, credible and useful rather than driven by volume alone.

26. Management acknowledges the increase in evaluation submissions in 2025, including the growth in the number of country programme evaluations and expanded contributions from country offices previously lagging behind. This reflects positive progress in maintaining evaluation coverage and supporting country programme cycle requirements despite a constrained operating environment.

27. At the same time, management concurs that maintaining quality, relevance and prioritization remains paramount. In the context of resource constraints and varying regional capacities, it is important that evaluation efforts are focused on areas of highest strategic value, while addressing remaining coverage gaps in a targeted and pragmatic manner.

28. Management also welcomes the increased use of evaluability assessments as a means of strengthening the sequencing, readiness and effectiveness of evaluation investments.

29. Going forward, management encourages a continued balanced approach that sustains adequate coverage while reinforcing quality and strategic focus, ensuring that evaluation resources are used efficiently to generate meaningful insights that inform decision-making and improve outcomes for children.

B. Evaluation profile

30. Management welcomes the analysis of progress towards a more balanced and strategically aligned evaluation portfolio, as envisaged in the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (2023).

31. Management notes positively the continued shift towards outcome- and impact-level evaluations, as well as the increasing use of blended formative and summative approaches. These trends are important for strengthening both accountability and learning, particularly in complex and resource-constrained contexts. At the same time, management underscores the need to further prioritize and expand impact evaluations, given their critical role in generating robust evidence on results and informing scale and resource allocation.

32. Management also welcomes the balanced thematic coverage and the growing emphasis on multisectoral evaluations, which reflect the organization's integrated programming approach and evolving demands from national partners.

33. Management notes the generally strong integration of cross-cutting priorities, while recognizing the areas where progress remains uneven. In particular, management underscores the need to strengthen the systematic integration of gender equality and, where relevant, disability and humanitarian considerations, including through improved data availability, methodological guidance, and access to specialized expertise.

34. Going forward, management encourages a continued focus on prioritization, quality and strategic relevance across the evaluation portfolio, ensuring that limited

resources are directed towards evaluations that provide the greatest value in informing decision-making and organizational learning.

C. Quality of evaluations

35. Management welcomes the overall stability and improvement in evaluation quality across the quadrennium, noting that most evaluations continue to meet satisfactory standards, with a growing share achieving higher-quality ratings.

36. Management recognizes the factors that enable stronger evaluation quality, including adequate planning, clear scoping, and timely access to technical and leadership support. At the same time, management acknowledges the constraints that can affect quality, such as compressed timelines and limited capacity, particularly in a resource-constrained environment.

37. Going forward, management encourages continued emphasis on strengthening quality at the design and inception stages, including through clear methodological guidance, appropriate resourcing and realistic timelines. This will be important to further enhance analytical depth, methodological rigour, and the clarity and usefulness of evaluation findings and recommendations.

D. Evaluation management response submission and implementation

38. Management welcomes the analysis of management response timeliness and implementation trends, and recognizes their importance in strengthening the use of evaluation findings for decision-making and organizational learning.

39. Management notes the observed improvements in response patterns, while acknowledging that timeliness remains uneven, particularly in the context of broader organizational disruptions that have affected coordination and capacity. Management agrees that timely responses are an important discipline, while also recognizing that meaningful action on recommendations can, in some cases, begin prior to formal response submission.

40. Going forward, management will continue to reinforce expectations for timely management responses, while placing greater emphasis on prioritization, tracking and accountability mechanisms to ensure that evaluation recommendations are translated into concrete and sustained actions.

E. Evaluation expenditure

41. Management notes that, while reported evaluation expenditure has remained below the 1 per cent benchmark, progress in coding accuracy and portfolio management is improving transparency and comparability across offices and regions. The variance between expenditure and the number or scale of evaluations reflects differing evaluation complexities, timing and portfolio composition, rather than lack of commitment to evaluation.

42. Management recognizes the importance of sustained investment in evaluation to generate actionable learning and support evidence-based decision-making to ensure that evaluation remains a central instrument for learning, accountability and programmatic improvement across UNICEF.

IV. Conclusions

43. Management recognizes the significant achievements of the evaluation function during the 2022–2025 quadrennium, particularly given the challenges of leadership transitions, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operational context of UNICEF, and the organizational changes introduced by the Future Focus Initiative. Despite these, the function has been able to achieve coherence across its global and decentralized levels, and has advanced the implementation of the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF that emphasizes relevance, credibility, independence and utility.

44. Management notes with particular appreciation progress in strategic initiatives including impact evaluation, national evaluation capacity development and global evidence synthesis. The development of the Plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029 and its accompanying first-ever costed annual workplan for the Evaluation Office is more focused, prioritized and transparent than previous plans and provides a strong foundation for the new quadrennium.

45. Looking forward, management endorses the function’s stated priorities and emphasizes the critical need to:

(a) Ensure implementation of the highest-priority evaluations while mobilizing resources to support additional commitments;

(b) Intensify efforts on impact-level evaluations in particular, as well as outcome-level evaluations, as the principal source of robust and actionable learning for the organization;

(c) Strengthen evaluation quality, methodological rigour and practical utility through expanded guidance, tools and targeted capacity development;

(d) Reinforce the linkage between evaluation findings and decision-making through improved timeliness, monitoring of management responses, systematic tracking of evaluation use, and synthesis of recurring lessons;

(e) Continue leadership in national evaluation capacity development and support for country-led evaluations despite financial constraints;

(f) Increase transparency and efficiency in evaluation financing, planning and prioritization.

46. Management also acknowledges the importance of monitoring ongoing structural and governance changes within UNICEF and encourages and supports the evaluation function’s adaptive engagement with these developments. The forthcoming independent external assessment by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee offers an important opportunity to review progress, validate the health and maturity of the function, and identify areas for further strengthening. Management looks forward to working with the evaluation function to ensure that the insights from this assessment continue to advance the capacity of UNICEF to deliver results and accountability for children at scale.

V. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the Annual report for 2025 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2026/17) and its management response (E/ICEF/2026/18).