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Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF

Summary

The revised evaluation policy of UNICEF has been revised 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.

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

* E/ICEF/2023/24.

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 revised evaluation policy represents the third revision since the first evaluation policy approved by the Executive Board in 2008. It builds upon the previous policy,¹ based on an extensive process of systematic analysis and broad-based consultations with key stakeholders, including UNICEF colleagues, the Executive Board, and the Audit Advisory Committee. It aligns with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and international good practices, including for the evaluation of humanitarian assistance, for ensuring that evaluations are independent, impartial, credible and useful and that evaluation processes are transparent and fully engaged with stakeholders. It is applicable across the organization’s operational contexts while affording necessary flexibility within a decentralized organization.

3. The policy 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.

4. Complementary guidance will be developed to ensure consistent and meaningful implementation of the policy, and to present the key performance indicators that will be monitored and reported on during the five-year policy period.

5. The revised policy will guide UNICEF until the next update in 2028. Its implementation will be monitored and reported on in annual reports on the evaluation function. In addition, in keeping with Executive Board decision 2023/12, a midterm evaluation will be commissioned to assess the extent to which the measures put in place to strengthen the independence of the function have proved adequate in achieving their intended objectives.

II. Goal and purposes of evaluation in UNICEF

6. Evaluation in UNICEF helps the organization and its partners to 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.² The UNICEF evaluation policy is aligned with the Charter of the

¹ See [E/ICEF/2018/14](https://sites.unicef.org/about/who/index_mission.html).

² See https://sites.unicef.org/about/who/index_mission.html.

United Nations,³ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,⁴ the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,⁵ humanitarian principles,⁶ and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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

(a) **Maximizing results for children in development and humanitarian settings.** 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) **Contributing to 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) **Fostering 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 continually improve;

(d) **Empowering 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 scrutinize the policies and programmes affecting their lives. It also requires examining inclusion, respect, resource access and power dynamics, especially for the most vulnerable. This commitment is recognized in General Assembly resolution 69/37 and realized through UNICEF evaluation capacity development initiatives, which aim to equip partners in programme countries with the tools to engage in evaluation – and to holistically measure outcome- and impact-level results for children.

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

9. 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 fulfil its purposes.

³ United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, 24 October 1945, Chapter IX, art. 55 c.

⁴ See www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women.

⁵ See www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html.

⁶ General Assembly resolutions 46/182 and 58/114.

III. Rationale for a revised policy

10. 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.

11. The independent peer review of the UNICEF evaluation function concluded that the function remains fundamentally fit for purpose. However, it also identified three overarching forces prompting the need for adjustments. The first centred on developments in the organization's external context. The coronavirus disease 2019 (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.

12. Evolving global good practice constituted the second impetus. Revised evaluation policies issued by peers demonstrated improved approaches in defining the purpose of evaluation, 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.

13. Third, the organizational context within UNICEF evolved. An updated accountability framework⁷ underscored the role of evaluation as a "second-line" oversight function under the "three-lines" approach alongside audit, investigation and ethics. The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025⁸ maintained evaluation and related evidence functions as a collective change strategy.

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

14. UNICEF evaluation is rooted in the UNEG definition. Evaluation is an independent assessment, conducted as systematically and impartially as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, portfolio or operational area, undertaken by an entity either individually or, together with partners, through joint, inter-agency, system-wide and country-led evaluations. Evaluation 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.⁹ An evaluation must provide credible, useful evidence-based analysis. 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 decision-making processes.

⁷ See [E/ICEF/2022/24](#).

⁸ See [E/ICEF/2021/25](#).

⁹ In humanitarian contexts, appropriateness, coverage and connectedness are also routinely explored.

15. The definition is operationalized in many ways, as portrayed in the table in section VI.B. Development and humanitarian effectiveness purposes require summative evaluations that examine the contribution of UNICEF and partners at the outcome or impact 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.

16. UNICEF also needs early, formative, forward-looking exercises to keep pace with a changing operating environment, emerging issues and 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.

17. 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 cooperation with these functions to meet stakeholders' holistic evidence needs.

V. Guiding principles

18. Several principles help to operationalize the broad definition of evaluation and thus underpin the details of this policy. Some of these are based in the UNEG norms and standards for evaluation, while others are based in general good practice in organizational management as a means of applying UNEG norms and standards to the organizational context of UNICEF. Whereas UNEG norms and standards are well established,¹⁰ how these interact with the broader principles to contextualize evaluation within UNICEF are described here.

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

(c) **Efficiency in evaluation.** The organizational drive for efficiency within UNICEF extends to the evaluation function itself, starting with evaluation planning processes that prioritize the most strategically relevant topics using rigorous independent analysis together with consultation. More broadly, the evaluation

¹⁰ See <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>.

function must be vigilant of its own efficiency with respect to its human and financial resources and its internal and external partnerships;

(d) **The need for organizational coherence in a decentralized organization.** Decentralized organizations face particular challenges in operating efficiently with common purpose. Evaluation staffing, finance and governance must enable each level to generate evaluative evidence that meets learning needs while also contributing to broader organizational learning – and accountability. Evaluation staff at the 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 within their respective offices;

(e) **Stakeholder engagement and capacity-building.** Local ownership is a key aim of the Strategic Plan that extends to the evaluation function. Government and civil society partners need the evidence expertise to hold UNICEF, their other partners and themselves accountable, including at the outcome and impact level. Evaluations must therefore engage meaningfully and inclusively with these stakeholders. The UNICEF commitment to national evaluation capacity development is intentionally designed to equip these stakeholders with the tools they need to fulfil these roles in in a fully empowered manner;

(f) **Evaluation as an ethics-driven undertaking.** Ethical 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 approached with all attendant safeguards. Detailed guidance serves to embed relevant ethical principles in all evidence functions, including evaluation.¹¹ Transparency, a specific aspect of ethics in evaluation, requires that all evaluation plans, evaluation reports and evaluation quality reviews be publicly available¹² and subject to periodic reviews.

VI. Evaluation procedures

A. Evaluation planning

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

Developing and updating costed and resourced multi-year plans

20. 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;

¹¹ Policies on data use and ethics in evidence generation being prepared elsewhere in UNICEF will be finalized in consultation with the evaluation function.

¹² 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.

(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.

21. Evaluation is a vital element of results-based management. 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 at all levels of the organization.

22. Independence is critical in evaluation planning. The Evaluation Office consults key stakeholders during the development of the plan for global evaluations but makes the final judgments on what to include. Evaluation specialists have the final voice in deciding which planned activities are evaluative exercises covered by the policy and which are not. 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

23. Identifying a balanced plan of evaluations entails the following criteria, among others as appropriate:

(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 produced;

(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) **Regular and meaningful attention to issues of gender, disability and climate**, both as cross-cutting themes in all evaluations and as dedicated evaluation themes;

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

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

(a) **Coverage accountabilities** established in the table below 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-making 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) 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

25. Adequate evaluation coverage is key to meeting the evaluation purposes. The table below outlines the expectations for evaluation across the organization.

UNICEF evaluation coverage norms

<i>Evaluation category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Contextual considerations</i>	<i>Management arrangements</i>
MANDATORY SCHEDULING			
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. <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.	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.

Global evaluations	<p><u>Strategic Plan Goal Areas</u> (five in total): Minimum two per Goal Area per Strategic Plan cycle.</p> <p><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.</p> <p><u>Institutional effectiveness</u>: Minimum four per Strategic Plan cycle.</p>	<p>Evaluations of multi-partner global initiatives within the Goal Area are acceptable.</p> <p>Evaluations at outcome or impact level may cover more than one Goal Area and can count towards each.</p> <p>Syntheses may not be employed to meet these requirements.</p>	<p>Managed by the Evaluation Office.</p> <p>Regional/national evaluations may be undertaken simultaneously to increase the evidence base.</p>
Country office-level thematic evaluations, including cross-cutting themes	<p><u>Small country programmes</u>: Minimum three per country programme cycle.</p> <p><u>Medium and large country programmes</u>: Average at least one evaluation per year of the cycle.</p> <p><u>Regional-level thematic/multi-country evaluations</u>: Minimum three per Strategic Plan cycle.</p>	<p>Each evaluation must examine key interventions or higher-level performance (policy; country programme; national).</p> <p>Formative and summative evaluations are both welcomed.</p> <p>Participation in global or multi-country evaluations are credited against country office accountabilities if a stand-alone country report is issued.</p>	<p>Managed by the country or regional evaluation specialist.</p> <p>Stakeholder presence in management arrangements encouraged.</p>
Regional-level multi-country evaluations	<p><u>Regional-level institutional effectiveness evaluations</u>. Minimum one per Strategic Plan cycle.</p>		
CONTINGENT SCHEDULING			
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.	Led by national partners.
OTHER EXERCISES			
Monitoring, research, data analysis and review exercises examining policies, plans and strategies, including Global Effectiveness Reviews	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

26. Each evaluation activity must be designed and managed in line with UNEG norms and standards, and in line with the principles described in this policy.

27. Delivering a credible evaluation requires that a UNICEF evaluation specialist manage the exercise with an optimal degree of independence while also consulting 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.

28. 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.

29. Quality assurance is a vital element at all stages of an evaluation. It is a multi-part real-time approach to ensure that processes and outputs meet the highest standards and the expectations stipulated in the terms of reference. An appropriate quality expectation is set for each activity and pursued in the design, implementation and analysis phases, commensurate with the evaluation purposes and timelines.

30. All UNICEF evaluations must follow ethical best practice at all stages. A preliminary ethics screening is mandatory, and undertaken by an external body as necessary, e.g., when emergency settings, sensitive topics, or data gathering from children and vulnerable groups so require. Ethics reviews at key junctures are employed to ensure that these exercises remain in compliance.

31. Balancing the independence, utility and shared accountability principles generates complex challenges. UNICEF relies on the following minimum guidelines to reconcile these principles in the management of evaluations:

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

(b) Independence rests with the UNICEF evaluation function, with external consultants being hired to bring additional expertise and capacity to support it in this role; accordingly, external 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

32. 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.

33. 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.

VII. Maximizing evaluation use

34. Every evaluative exercise is undertaken with the aim of being meaningfully used. Use depends on an organizational culture in which stakeholders value learning and the application of lessons to achieve better results in pursuit of the organizational mandate, understand what evaluation contributes, engage with evaluation across the programming cycle, know their roles and accountabilities and receive support towards this end. The evaluation function and the wider organization share accountability for ensuring meaningful use.

35. 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.

36. 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.

37. 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, if desired. 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 relevant operational unit; management responses to institutional effectiveness evaluations should, at the request of the Director of Evaluation, be coordinated by the Office of the Executive Director to ensure broad organizational uptake.

38. All exercises indicated in the table in section VI.B. will require a management response, with the exception of those identified as "other exercises," which will not require a management response, as well as evaluation syntheses and meta-evaluations and those evaluations conducted by or with partners (e.g., joint, inter-agency and system-wide evaluations and country-led evaluations), which will entail a management response wherever warranted and feasible, as determined together with partners.

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 within current governance arrangements in order to accelerate positive momentum.

40. Use extends beyond individual evaluations, e.g., through evaluation syntheses produced by the evaluation function, which 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 cooperating with these complementary functions in a whole-of-organization, whole-of-child manner wherever appropriate and feasible.

43. Even as it seeks to actively collaborate, evaluation must retain its independence. Final choices on whether, when and how evaluation is able to engage must 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. Moreover, within any given scenario it will be the judgment of the evaluation function whether and when an independent evaluative exercise is required as opposed to other types of exercises not covered by the policy.

IX. Evaluation governance

44. The governance arrangements surrounding evaluation are, in their structure and in the roles and responsibilities assigned to each body or individual, intended to support the implementation of the evaluation policy in accordance with UNEG norms and standards – including, and especially, the independence, credibility and utility of the function at all levels of the organization.

A. Executive Board

45. As the governing body of UNICEF, the Executive Board relies on a strong evaluation function 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. The Executive Board 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

46. Executive Directors require timely and independent evaluative evidence in support of their oversight and strategic guidance 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.

47. Executive Directors are advised by the Audit Advisory Committee on the oversight of the function and the implementation of the policy. They are also advised by members of the Global Management Team, during whose meetings progress in implementing the policy will be reviewed and discussed at least once a year.

C. Directors

48. 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.

49. 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

50. 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 to 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 their implementation, as necessary.

51. 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. They supervise 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.

52. 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

53. 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.

54. 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. The representative also ensures that staff with evaluation management responsibilities have professional development opportunities, and that evaluation is considered in staff performance reviews.

55. Representatives work within 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

56. 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.

57. 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 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 progress. They prepare the plan for global evaluations in consultation with stakeholders and manage the functionally independent corporate Evaluation Office to ensure that evaluations 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

58. 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.

59. 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.

60. 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 strong designs and innovative methods. They reinforce evaluation capacity development efforts at the regional and country levels. They supervise country-level evaluation staff in a matrix management arrangement and support their skills development and career growth. They manage the use of regionally allocated funds and monitor overall resource adequacy and predictability.

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

61. Every country office must have a leader for evaluation who provides management and technical skills for the UNICEF evaluation agenda. 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, for optimal independence they must have direct access to the head of office on evaluation-related issues no matter their supervisor. They work in a matrix management relationship with the regional evaluation adviser.

62. The accountabilities of the country evaluation lead strongly resemble the roles of the regional evaluation adviser, with adaptations to reflect their specific operating contexts. The key differences are their greater hands-on engagement with evaluation teams and in national evaluation capacity development efforts, their direct role in supporting demands for country-led evaluations as well as joint and inter-agency evaluations at country level. They rely on management to identify evaluation priorities, support a culture of evaluation, and make required funds available.

X. Evaluation partnerships

63. 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 partnerships that are best suited to achieving results for children, and gauges its level of investment on the potential value proposition of the partnership.

64. 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.

65. Collaboration with UNEG partners at the 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 country-level 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 level the partners will examine United Nations contributions to development results and will strive for consistently high 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

66. The UNICEF commitment 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, 69/237 on building country-level capacity to evaluate development activities, and 77/283, encouraging countries to conduct Sustainable Development Goal evaluations to strengthen their voluntary national reviews and use evaluative evidence for their decision-making.

67. UNICEF invests in national evaluation capacity development as a core means of empowering country-level stakeholders with the tools to engage meaningfully in evaluation – and to measure joint results for children, including outcome- and impact-level results, in the most holistic manner possible. Evaluation support must focus on the evaluation priorities of Governments and other actors, which typically 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.

68. UNICEF support to country-led evaluations focuses on national programmes related to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal targets. As UNICEF does not commission or manage country-led evaluations, the provisions of the present policy do not apply. However, wherever feasible 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.

69. Developing a critical mass of national experts and evidence-sensitized managers for rigorous evaluation – including at the impact level – requires capacity-building with 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.

70. 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.¹³ The designation of national evaluation capacity development as a priority of the resident coordinator function also heralds heightened United Nations engagement.¹⁴

XII. Resources

71. Adequate, predictable and sustainable resourcing of the evaluation function is fundamental for delivering maximum positive impact, and for doing so with the required level of independence.

A. Human resources

72. Evaluation is a specialized function whose practitioners require technical, strategic and interpersonal skills appropriate to their staff level. The function will be staffed with specialists who meet the requirements embodied in the UNEG competency framework.

73. 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.

74. 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.

75. Independence requires that the evaluation lead must report to the head of office or have direct access in relation to evaluation issues. The lead must also have periodic opportunities to present to the management team. Independence, technical reinforcement and mentoring is supported by the matrix management structure.

¹³ 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).

¹⁴ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, “Management and Accountability Framework of the United Nations Development and Resident Coordinator System” (2021).

76. All staff with evaluation responsibilities 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.

77. 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

78. 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 decisions 2022/5 and 2023/12. This requirement applies to each office and division possessing a programme budget unless a modified goal is exceptionally established by the Director of Evaluation.¹⁵ The 1 per cent commitment is a rolling two-year average, which allows occasional single-year shortfalls, and will be calculated using a standard formula.¹⁶ Expenditure on all exercises indicated in the table in section VI.B. counts towards the 1 per cent target, with the exception of non-evaluation activities identified under "other exercises."

79. 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.

80. 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 available. The feasibility of the estimates and sufficiency of the set-asides will be examined in periodic review processes. Shortfalls in allocations will be remedied by the accountable office.

81. Budget certainty is critical for the plan for global evaluations. The core budget of the Evaluation Office comes through the institutional budget of UNICEF approved by the Executive Board on a quadrennial basis. Additional amounts must be provided

¹⁵ Guidance on achieving the 1 per cent commitment will define the expectations and exceptions.

¹⁶ Two formulae will be used to calculate the percentage of evaluation expenditure. The first formula, which will be used in reports to the Executive Board, will include only expenses, while the second formula, which will be used for internal progress monitoring, will also include open commitments. The latter formula will enhance accuracy by ensuring that ongoing activities which have been already committed but not yet expended can be captured in a timely manner. Each formula will use the same units of measurement in numerators and denominators, thus ensuring parity in its calculation.

by management to facilitate implementation of the plan and respond to emerging needs, based on close cooperation with the Evaluation Office to discuss identified funding gaps on an ongoing basis, and thus ensure continual progress towards the 1 per cent target. The evaluation function will assist with global fundraising strategies to define evaluation needs and to emphasize the necessity of core funding.

82. 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.

83. The activities of other evidence functions must be financed separately from evaluation, unless exceptionally authorized by the Director of Evaluation – that is, in the case where such efforts directly complement planned evaluation efforts.

XIII. Risks

84. Successful implementation of this policy depends on strong risk management approaches. The main potential risks foreseen for the period covered by the policy are identified in the theory of change provided in the annex. These include aspects of the broader organizational context in which the function operates (e.g., enabling environment for evaluation, concrete support by leadership, fulfilment of designated roles and responsibilities); resources (e.g., adequate and predictable financial and human resources commensurate with needs); the quality of engagement on the part of internal and external actors (e.g., joint, inter-agency and system-wide evaluation partners, complementary evidence functions in UNICEF, actors in the governance structure); and other areas. Review moments and planning processes will engage evaluation stakeholders to examine present, imminent and future risks. Risk mitigation measures will be identified in complementary guidance to this policy, monitored regularly, and reported on in annual reports on the evaluation function.

XIV. Policy reporting and review

85. 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.

86. 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.¹⁷ Subjects to be addressed include activities and achievements, major evaluation findings, management response status, work programme status, and organizational performance in relation to the commitments articulated in the policy and to the theory of change.

87. An independent review of the performance of the policy will be undertaken in 2027 preceding the next policy revision. In addition, in keeping with Executive Board decision 2023/12, a midterm evaluation will be commissioned to assess the extent to which measures put in place to strengthen the independence of the function have

¹⁷ As appropriate, emerging trends and deeper analysis will be presented on a biennial basis.

proved been adequate in achieving their intended objectives. These and any other reviews of the evaluation function will receive full cooperation.

XV. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the final proposal for the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/27](#));
2. *Endorses* the revised evaluation policy.

Annex

Theory of change for the evaluation function in UNICEF

