

Annual Report of the Evaluation Function, 2023

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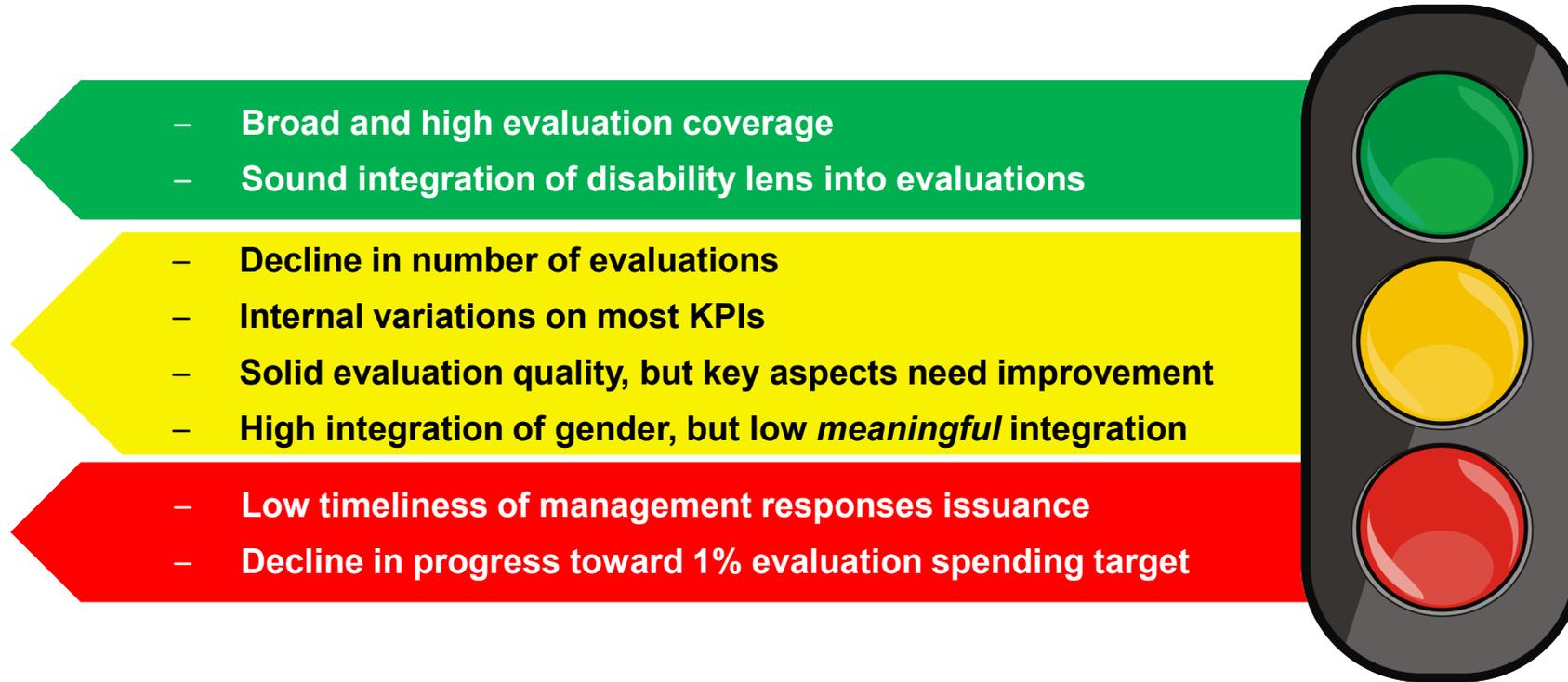
UNICEF Executive Board – Informal briefing – 23 May 2024

Item 10: Annual report for 2023 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

Reference document: E/ICEF/2024/20

Overview of Key Performance Indicators

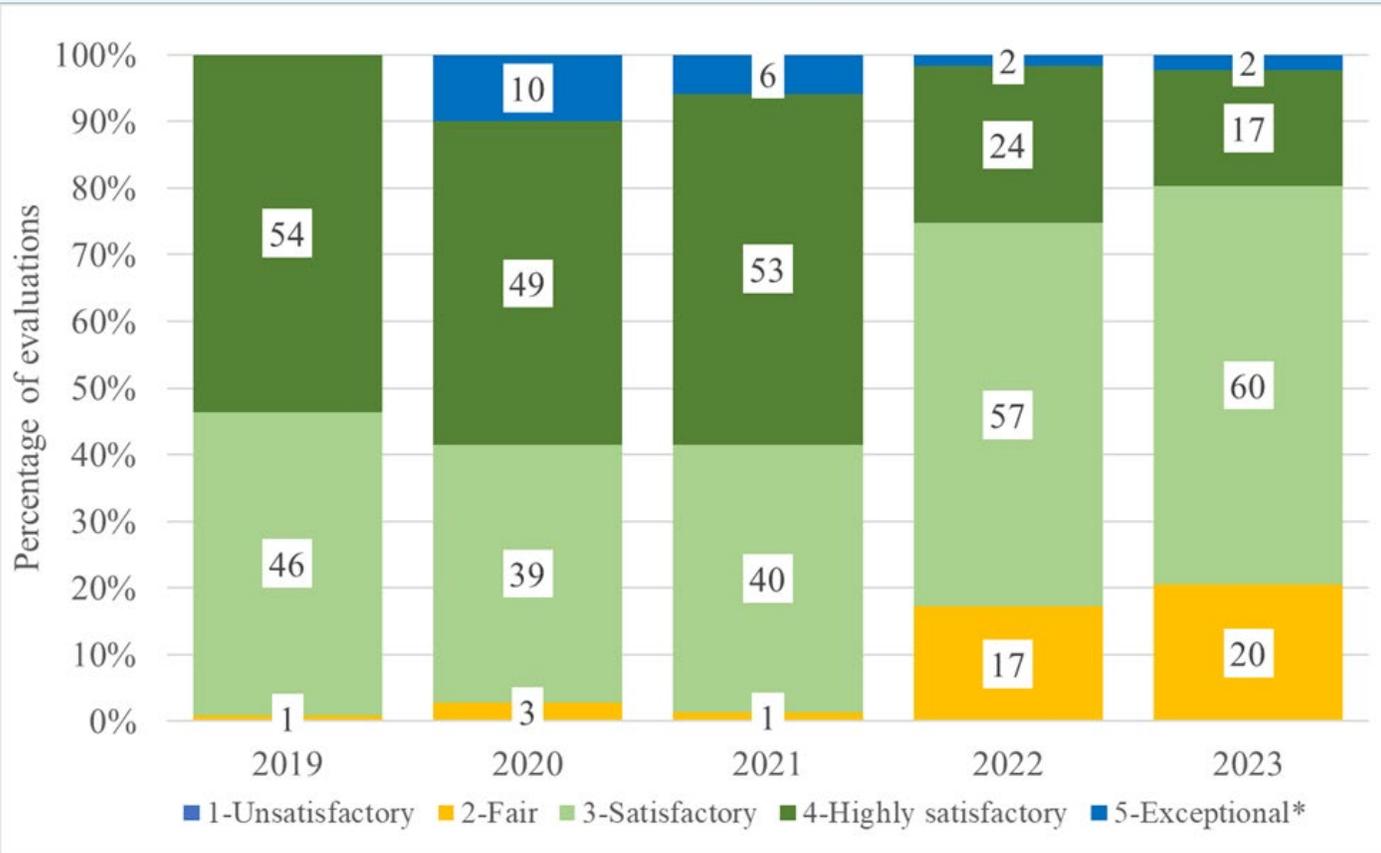
Mixed Results



Overview of Key Performance Indicators

Evaluation quality

UNICEF evaluation quality ratings, 2019-2023



- Multi-country, regional, multisectoral and joint evaluations were rated lower than other evaluations
- Mean and median quality scores remained constant
- Key gaps in specific areas (e.g., recommendations)

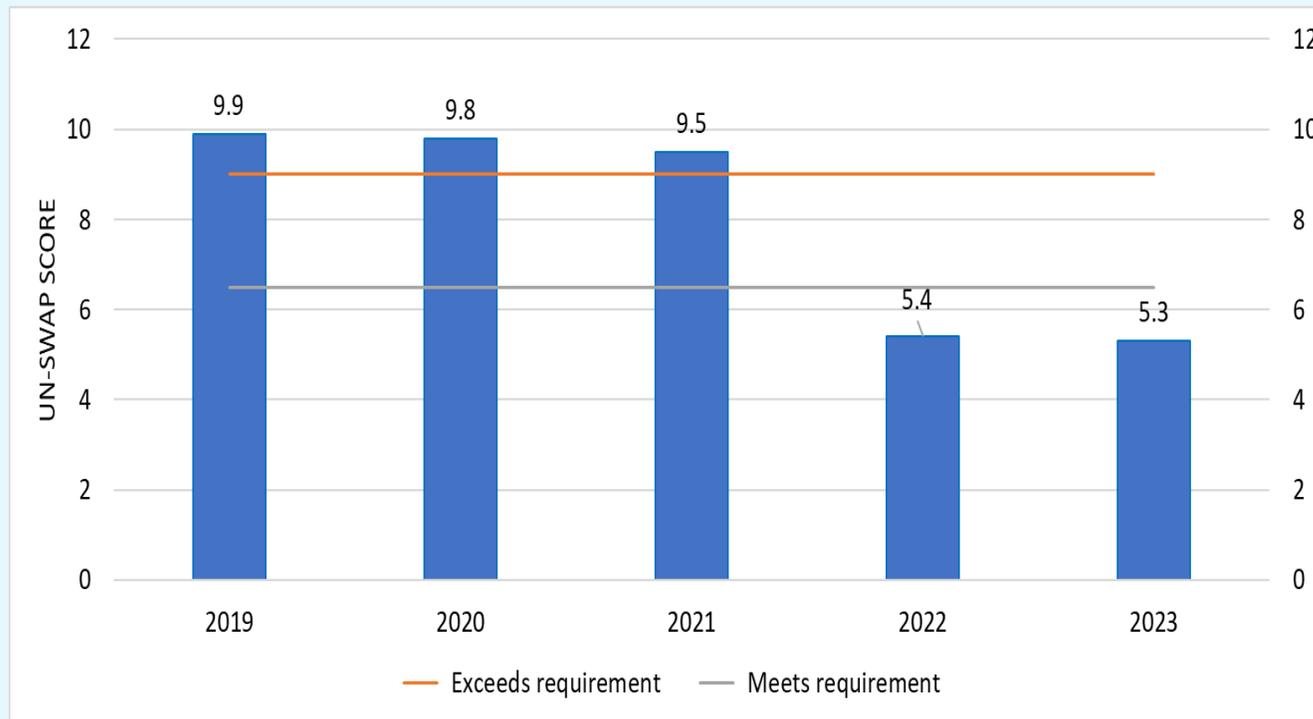
Potential explanations

- Stricter application of quality criteria since new firm contracted for quality assurance in 2022
- Emphasis in previous policy on increasing the number of evaluations, broadening coverage, and increasing evaluation spend ("quantity over quality"?)
- Increasing number of donor-driven evaluations
- Management of many evaluations by "multi-hatted" staff
- Lack of uniformity of practice, and of an integrated and harmonized community of evaluation practice, until recently
- Lengthy vacancies in 4 Regional Evaluation Adviser positions

Overview of Key Performance Indicators

Gender in evaluations

UNICEF evaluation UN-SWAP ratings, 2019-2023



- *Degree* of integration of gender lens remained very high
- Extent to which gender lens was *meaningfully* integrated remained unacceptably low
- Weakness generally began with weak integration during evaluation design and planning stage

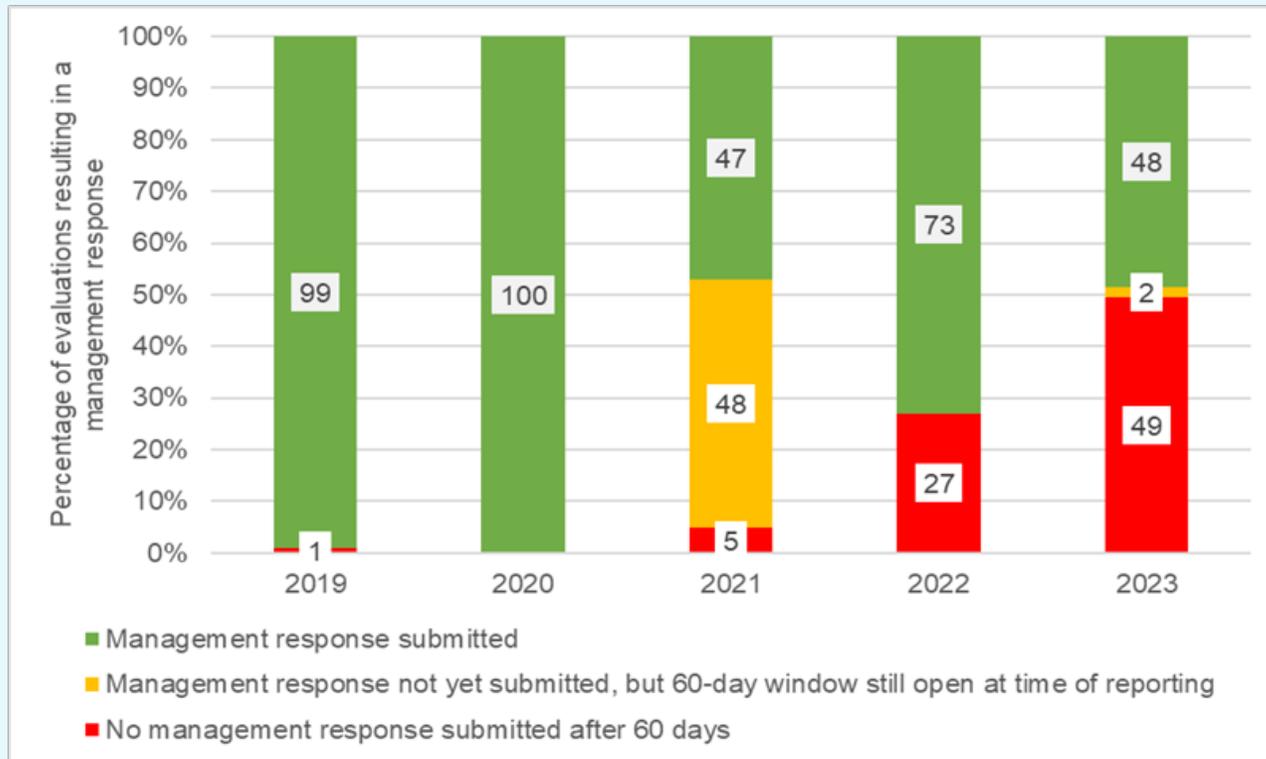
Potential explanations

- Stricter application of UN-SWAP criteria since new firm contracted for quality assurance in 2022
- Lack of uniformity of practice, and of an integrated and harmonized community of evaluation practice, until recently
- High-quality guidance on gender in evaluation exists, but had not been reintroduced and refreshed in some time
- Lengthy vacancies in 4 Regional Evaluation Adviser positions

Overview of Key Performance Indicators

Timeliness of management response

Timeliness of management response, 2019-2023



- Timely issuance of management response and action plan a necessity but insufficient condition for meaningful action on recommendations that leads to improvement
- Half of evaluations led to timely issuance; half did not

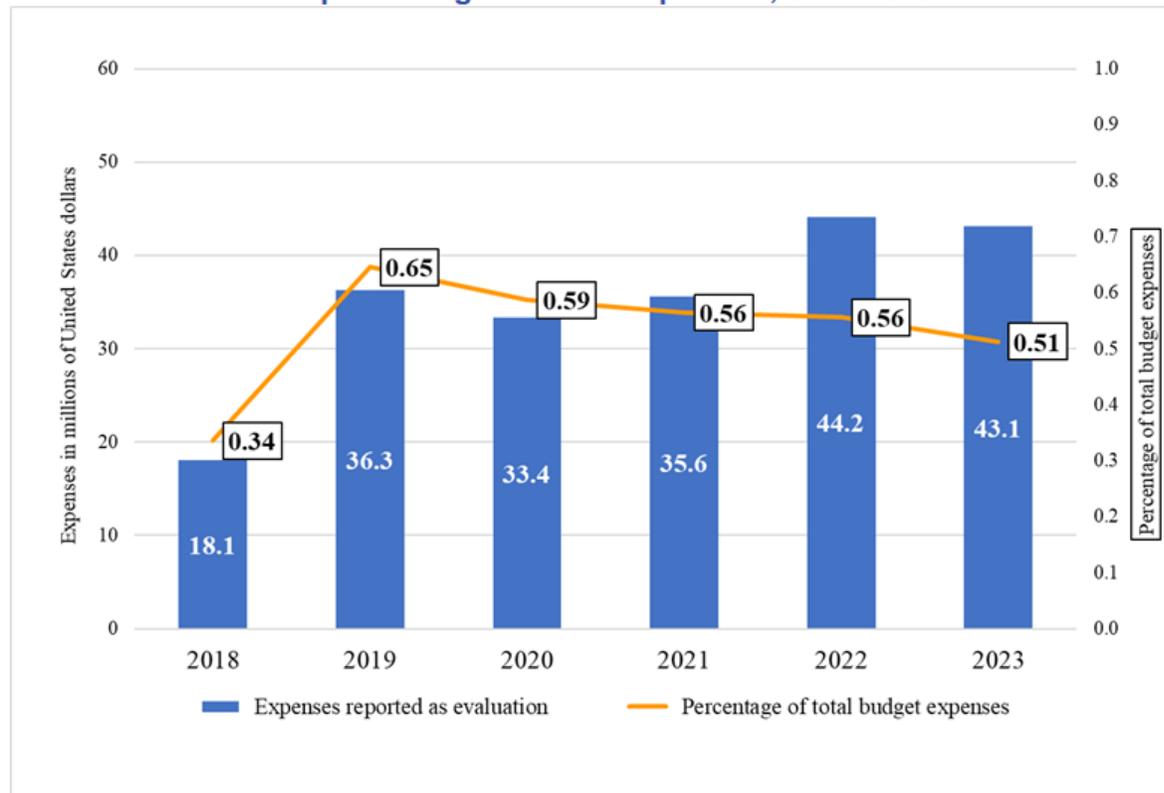
Potential explanations

- *We don't know for certain.* Supply-side and user-side issues must be explored in more depth
- Potential supply-side issues: Timely completion of evaluations; effective communication of evaluation results; recommendation quality; lack of mechanism for on-going monitoring and reporting on management response status
- Potential user-side issues: Offices adjusting to post-COVID reinstatement of 60-day deadline for responses; absorptive capacity issues; staff mobility; lack of evaluation focal point in key offices; lack of mechanism for on-going monitoring and reporting on management response status

Overview of Key Performance Indicators

Evaluation expenditure

UNICEF expenditure reported as evaluation, in millions of United States dollars and as a percentage of total expenses, 2018–2023



- Evaluation spending exceeded the 1% target at headquarters level
- Spending continued to decline at decentralized level
- Larger offices (i.e., budgets of over USD 80 million) tend to spend less in percentage terms than did medium-sized and smaller offices
- Until recently, inaccurate coding of activities had in some offices provided an overly optimistic picture

Potential explanations

- Broader organizational constraints related to restricted vs unrestricted resources
- Not all forms of evaluation spending being consistently counted across the organization
- Until late 2023, no formal mechanism in place for informing Regional Offices and Country Offices of evaluation spending (and underspending) patterns

Overview of Key Performance Indicators

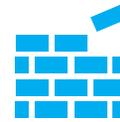
Actions undertaken in 2023-2024 to address issues and strengthen performance

- **Implementation of Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (2023) as key facilitator** of improvement by optimizing the function to succeed in fulfilling its role
- **Policy implementation strategy and policy procedure documents** (both forthcoming in 2024) as means of ensuring clarity and consistency in policy implementation
- **Enhanced mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on evaluation expenditure** and ensuring adequate and predictable resources
- **More regular dialogue** between Evaluation Office and others responsible for the success of the function (Regional Directors and Regional Evaluation Advisers, Office of the Executive Director, Executive Board members, Audit Advisory Committee)



Forensic analysis of root causes underlying issues

Foundational elements for improvement



Focused internal capacity development and team-building with global evaluation community of practice

- **Deep dive into Global Evaluation Report Oversight System (GEROS)**, using machine learning, for detailed trend analysis
- **Internal discussion within global evaluation team** to explain trends
- **Qualitative engagement with users** to understand challenges from their perspective

- **Enhanced suite of internal trainings**, including a refresher webinar on Guidance on Gender Integration in Evaluation (2019)
- Development of first **UNICEF Evaluation Handbook** (planned in 2023 for completion in 2024)
- **Global Evaluation Meeting** (November 2023)
- **Quarterly Evaluation Townhall meetings** with global evaluation team
- **Induction of Regional Evaluation Advisers** on revised policy and new ways of working (11-14 June 2024)

Change takes time: These actions will need time to yield results.

Qualitative results

Significant advances in parallel to performance tracking and performance improvement efforts

- ✓ Finalization of the **Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF** and endorsement by the Executive Board, and preparatory work leading up to its implementation beginning January 2024
- ✓ After delays in 2022, getting back on track in meeting evaluation **commitments in the Plan for Global Evaluations 2022-2025**
- ✓ All **Level 3 emergencies** evaluated and **duration of humanitarian evaluations** almost halved
- ✓ Significant **increase in demand-driven evaluations**, especially in relation to the key enablers and change strategies of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025
- ✓ **Methodological advances** for enhanced timeliness, cost-efficiency and robustness of evaluations – e.g., use of AI / Natural Language Processing to analyse large volumes of internal, unstructured and administrative data sets
- ✓ Four **Regional Evaluation Adviser vacancies** filled, with full team now in place in all seven UNICEF regions
- ✓ **Expansion of joint and inter-agency evaluation work**, support to the newly established System-Wide Evaluation Office, and leadership in the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition (46 UN agencies, governments and civil society)
- ✓ Support to **UN General Assembly resolution 69/37** to incorporate evaluation into Voluntary National Reports
- ✓ **Successful scale-up of innovative national evaluation capacity development** with government leaders and policy makers
- ✓ **Acceleration of work on impact evaluation** to help UNICEF and its partners make the best possible strategic choices
- ✓ **Evaluation synthesis** to map evidence gaps and provide UNICEF and partners an overview of our outcome-level results aggregating recurring lessons and recommendations



Transformative shifts in 2023

National Evaluation Capacity Development with senior policymakers

OBJECTIVE is practical, realistic and tailored to this unique audience:

Build familiarity, appreciation, confidence and conviction for evaluation among primary duty-bearers for children's rights, leading to stronger commitment to engage with us in asking and answering the question, "How are we really doing for children?"

PEDAGOGY is innovative:

- 2 weeks, on site, joint delegations of government and UNICEF staff counterparts
- Practical application to real-world policy problems, and
- Localization to context (pedagogical as well as and linguistic)
- Sustainability through: clinical support before, during and after workshop; establishment of country-to-country networking and "alumni group" networks; empowerment of partners to carry forward this course and custom-tailored follow-up workshops in their countries

DELIVERY is multilingual:

- Arabic
- English
- French
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Spanish

Cohort 1 Sep 2022	Cohort 2 Oct 2022	Cohort 3 Mar 2023	Cohort 4 Jul 2023	Cohort 5 Aug 2023	Cohort 6 Oct 2023	Cohort 7 Feb 2024	Cohort 8 Apr 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bhutan • Cambodia • China • Laos • Malaysia • Mongolia • Pakistan • Papua New Guinea • Philippines • Thailand • Vietnam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bangladesh • Cambodia • Ethiopia • Fiji • India • Indonesia • Kenya • Malaysia • Nepal • Somalia • South Africa • Vietnam • Zimbabwe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armenia • Ethiopia • Kazakhstan • Kyrgyzstan • Moldova • South Africa • State of Palestine • Tajikistan • Turkmenistan • Uzbekistan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Azerbaijan • Albania • Bulgaria • Croatia • China • Georgia • Montenegro • Kazakhstan • South Africa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iraq • Jordan • Lebanon • Maldives • State of Palestine (Gaza) • United Arab Emirates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brazil • Eritrea • Eswatini • Ethiopia • Kenya • Libya • Malawi • South Africa • Zimbabwe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angola • Brazil • China • Lesotho • Liberia • Mongolia • Mozambique • Namibia • North Macedonia • South Africa • Sri Lanka • Uganda • Ukraine • Zimbabwe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algeria • Burkina Faso • Benin • Cameroon • Chad • Congo • Côte d'Ivoire • Dem Rep Congo • Guinea-Bissau

PARTICIPATION is expansive and growing:

81 delegations from 63 countries, 182 graduates, including:

- 43 Deputy Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Directors General and Parliamentarians
- 26 Deputy and Assistant Directors
- 37 Chiefs and Heads of Department

PARTNERSHIP with national schools of government is key:

Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore
 Hertie School of Governance, Germany
 School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute, Italy
 Abu Dhabi School of Government, United Arab Emirates
 National School of Government of the Republic of South Africa
 École Nationale d'Administration, Benin

RESULTS are tangible:

- Increased number of national evaluation policies
- Increased number of country-led evaluations
- Continuous demand from repeat clients
- Rapid expansion to other regions and partners



Why this modality? Why now?

- The urgency of the moment for children, coupled with the potential of evaluation as a game-changer for children at country level
- The limited role of UNICEF and other partners to achieve results at scale without active engagement of well-capacitated governments as primary duty bearers for children's rights
- Low level of awareness and appreciation among policymakers and other senior leaders around evaluation (or evidence more broadly) and its potential

Why UNICEF?

UNICEF comparative advantage in:

- extent of its country presence and relationship of trust with policymakers
- its evaluation capacity (including at decentralized level), and
- its normative role to galvanize action

Transformative shifts in 2023

Impact evaluation and Evaluation synthesis

Impact evaluation

Evaluation synthesis

What it is and What it does

Through highly robust evaluation designs, **assesses the extent to which UNICEF-supported interventions are producing the most positive impactful results possible for children** (either alone or in combination with other interventions)

- Through systematic review of large numbers of evaluations, **provides a high-level overview of the state of the evidence on UNICEF's organizational performance** (what we are and aren't achieving and why)

Strategic value to UNICEF and partners

- Help UNICEF and its partners understand “what works and what doesn't” and thus make the **smartest possible choices** on whether to continue investing in an intervention “as is,” whether to continue doing so but in modified form, or whether to discontinue doing so
- Determine the **most cost-effective interventions (or combination of interventions)** in the face of finite resources
- Help determine the **innovations that merit scale-up**

- Enable **mapping of evidence coverage and gaps** – what we know and don't know – so that we know where to focus future evidence-gathering efforts
- Provide a **broad overview of outcome-level results and shortfalls**, and of how, why and when we succeed and failed, so that we can improve
- Elevate **recurring lessons and recommendations**, spurring action and helping reduce future recommendation (and evaluation) burden

Progress in 2023

- Completion of **5 impact evaluations**
- **Capacity strengthening** for impact evaluation
- First two calls for proposals of the **Impact Catalyst Fund**: (1) child marriage and social norms, and (2) adaptive social protection (in partnership with Germany)

- Launch of **first-ever comprehensive UNICEF evaluation synthesis** (completed in early 2024)
- Completion of a more focused **synthesis on UNICEF's contributions to SDG 5**
- Launch of the **SDG Evaluation Synthesis Coalition**

Looking ahead: Priorities for 2024 and beyond

Implementing the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF



Build on progress achieved in 2023 through:

- **sustained action to address root causes of performance shortfalls** illuminated in 2023 forensic analysis
- **deeper analysis of less-understood issues** (e.g., barriers to timelier and more meaningful management response)
- **expansion and consolidation of significant achievements** in impact evaluation, national evaluation capacity development, and evaluation synthesis, and articulation of longer-term sustainability plans for these initiatives



Ensure consistently meaningful implementation of the revised policy through:

- **completion and rollout of key documents** that accompany the policy (i.e., policy procedure and policy implementation strategy)
- **closer and more regular interaction** between Evaluation Office and (a) Regional Directors and Regional Evaluation Advisers, and (b) Office of the Executive Director, particularly to ensure independence is strengthened and evaluation expenditure is adequate and predictable
- **strategic communications** to better convey the takeaways of specific evaluations, key elements of the policy, and aspects of the function
- **development of indicators** to measure the qualitative health and maturity of the function and its enabling environment



Ensure consistently strong evaluation practice across the organization through:

- **development of more robust and streamlined evaluation planning processes** that identify the most strategically significant evaluations (while reducing the number of evaluations that are of lesser relevance, quality and utility)
- **drafting of the UNICEF Evaluation Handbook** and **more focused internal capacity-building** on key areas in need of strengthening
- **adaptation of the Global Evaluation Report Oversight System** to ensure adequate quality assessment of other types of evaluative exercises covered by the revised policy (e.g., evaluability assessment, impact evaluation, evaluation synthesis)
- **greater investment in frontier technologies and in internal capacity** for harnessing under-utilized data sources (e.g., administrative data)

Thank you.