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### United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

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Item 8 of the provisional agenda\*

### **Annual report for 2020 on the evaluation function in UNICEF**

#### *Summary*

The present report provides an overview of the UNICEF evaluation function in 2020. It provides an update on the implementation of the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2018/14](#)) and of the plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021 ([E/ICEF/2018/3](#)).

In addition, the report presents a detailed analysis of the performance of the evaluation function at all levels of the organization, with particular emphasis on the response of the evaluation function to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. It contains a summary of the key findings of several corporate evaluations.

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

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\* [E/ICEF/2021/9](#).

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



## I. Introduction

1. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has triggered an unprecedented global crisis, the reverberations of which will be felt for years to come. In addition to the direct health impacts, the related economic crisis is pushing more families into poverty and placing tremendous strain on already overburdened social and health services. For children, the consequences of the crisis are especially profound, exacerbating existing exclusions and inequities and severely challenging the international community's commitment to leave no child behind.

2. Responding to the crisis requires new ways of doing business while remaining focused on delivering results. Learning from experience has become profoundly important in this rapidly evolving environment, with countries engaged in a process of respond, learn, and then respond better. For the UNICEF Evaluation Office, the central challenge has been adapting its work so that it can continue to contribute to learning and accountability while supporting the organization and partners to analyse the short- and long-term impacts of the crisis and provide evidence on what works to address them. This has required innovative thinking, including on new ways to gather, analyse and share evidence with a wide variety of stakeholders in real time.

3. Despite the enormous challenges encountered in 2020, the UNICEF evaluation function remains on track in implementing the revised evaluation policy (E/ICEF/2018/14) and the plan for global evaluations (E/ICEF/2018/3), with appreciable results achieved in 2020. While the COVID-19 pandemic required the evaluation function to adjust its workplan, the function was able to continue strengthening the key drivers identified in the evaluation theory of change, including financial and human resources, governance and quality assurance, guidance and tools, capacity development within UNICEF and with partners, systems for monitoring performance and partnerships for evaluation.

4. Overall, the trends in evaluation performance in 2020 remained positive. The number of evaluations undertaken continues to increase, as does the coverage of evaluations. The organization continues to improve its performance in integrating gender equality into evaluations and in 2020 made efforts to ensure that disability considerations were included as well. The diversification of evaluative products has also been key in providing faster real-time evaluative evidence that offices are using to facilitate adaptive management.

5. However, the proportion of total programme resources spent on evaluation declined, from 0.86 per cent in 2019 to 0.64 per cent in 2020. The reduction in the allocation from the Evaluation Pooled Fund had an impact on the overall spending for the function. In addition, restrictions put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic also affected evaluation spending as offices transitioned to online data collection. It is anticipated that evaluation spending will improve as lockdowns are lifted. Overall expenditure still falls short of the benchmark of 1 per cent of programme expenditure by the end of 2019, as established by the Executive Board in its decision 2018/10.

6. The present report outlines the ways in which the UNICEF evaluation function has progressed in the implementation of the revised evaluation policy and the plan for global evaluations.

## II. UNICEF evaluation in a changing world: adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic

7. In March 2020, the Evaluation Office issued a technical note on the response of the UNICEF evaluation function to the COVID-19 crisis. This note highlighted the

need for the function to comply fully with the precautionary measures established by the organization and host governments to protect staff, teams, consultants and partners, and the communities in which they work. The technical note also suggested the use of innovative approaches for data collection, rapid review and synthesis, and the use of virtual data-collection approaches and tools, secondary data and available real-time data, including monitoring data such as U-Report. The Evaluation Office also established a resource hub to support knowledge-sharing and open exchange across the UNICEF evaluation community on the implications of the COVID-19 crisis for evaluative work.

## **A. Innovative technologies for evaluation**

8. As technology advances, a wider variety of evaluative instruments are becoming available, geared towards specific needs, including real-time decision-making, oversight and learning, as well as towards addressing areas that have emerged or become more salient in recent years. The Innovation, Learning and Uptake (ILU) Section of the Evaluation Office is exploring these innovations for the purpose of augmenting the quality of evaluations. Its specific objectives are threefold: (a) to accelerate and innovate both in terms of data collection and evaluation design and methodologies; (b) to exploit and harness the digital landscape in order to provide greater transparency and access to evaluative products; and (c) to increase the use and uptake of evaluations, both internally and by external partners.

9. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ILU Section launched a multiregional mobile phone population survey, called the Community Rapid Assessment, to track behaviours and their drivers during the pandemic in real time. The objective was to provide timely, high-quality community-sourced data to inform COVID-19 programme and policy decisions at the country level. This included a behavioural and public trust component, which needed to be standardized in the COVID-19 tools. Findings thus far have provided a rich and much-needed picture of the behavioural component of the outbreak at the individual and community levels. In making use of time-series data, the assessment has also provided further opportunities to examine country- and region-specific trends over time. And because the assessment is a real-time exercise, analysis, visualization and interpretation of findings are already being used in several country-level forums to guide programme changes. The lessons stemming from the assessment also proved that a lightweight approach of collecting population data can be deployed during such emergencies and pandemics.

10. Mobile phone data were also used in the UNICEF evaluation of the complex high-threat Level 3 emergencies in Nigeria and are currently being employed in a joint evaluation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the third phase of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation. These real-time data, collected through U-Report, are being combined with third-party field monitoring to gather information from an expanded group of stakeholders, including the affected population. In addition, the corporate evaluation of UNICEF approaches to social protection programming in humanitarian situations, including cash-based programming, utilized U-Report in Malawi as part of its data-collection strategy.

11. The Evaluation Office is exploring additional ways in which U-Report can be utilized to support data collection as part of broader efforts to receive direct feedback from diverse population groups at the country level.

## B. Innovative approaches to evaluation

12. From the earliest stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF offices have adapted to the changing environment, adjusted ongoing work, identified new evidence needs and devised solutions to implement some of the evaluative activities necessary to support the response. In addition, when applicable, the Evaluation Office has undertaken evaluative activities specifically designed to support oversight and learning in fast-evolving decision-making processes. A few of these exercises are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

13. **Evaluative evidence for continuous learning and adaptive management.** In May 2020, UNICEF developed and launched a learning evaluation of its COVID-19 response. In contrast to a typical corporate evaluation, which tends to have a strong accountability focus, this exercise explicitly emphasized learning. Drawing on elements of real-time evaluation and developmental evaluation, the learning evaluation was designed to provide “good-enough” evidence to support UNICEF decision makers with information to adapt the organization’s approach to new circumstances throughout the pandemic response. Priority learning questions were identified by UNICEF management through interviews, discussion and finally, ranking. In a round of data collection and analysis that lasted eight weeks, the evaluation team examined questions through stakeholder consultation, document review and a “fly-on-the-wall” approach in which the embedded evaluators listened in on meetings and calls, attending as observers rather than as participants.

14. Priority learning questions examined issues including: (a) the functioning of the coordination structure put in place to manage the corporate response; (b) ways in which staff were reimagining programming in the new COVID-19 environment; and (c) headquarters engagement and technical support to country offices.

15. **Real-time assessment of the ongoing UNICEF response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the country level.** At a time when countries were grappling with the socioeconomic consequences and secondary costs of the pandemic, and COVID-19 containment measures were already starting to impact UNICEF work, the evaluation function, in coordination with the UNICEF COVID-19 secretariat and regional offices, conceived the real-time assessment of the UNICEF response to COVID-19 at the country level (phase 1). The real-time assessment was designed as a forward-looking reflection on how UNICEF country offices were responding to the pandemic as it unfolded. It aimed to analyse how effectively country offices were adapting and implementing the response and to explore issues of quality, with a view to distilling lessons learned for the ongoing emergency as well as for future emergencies. The real-time assessment (phase 1) was rolled out between August 2020 and February 2021 and was customized across seven regions and 43 countries. Its findings effectively informed discussions and reflections, especially at regional and country levels. The geographical scope of the assessment further offered a valuable opportunity for cross-country and cross-regional learning.

16. **Rapid assessment of the COVID-19 crisis impact and prospective social protection responses.** While numerous global studies are examining the epidemiological and economic dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic at a macro level, relatively little research explores the medium- to long-term household-level issues of specific interest to UNICEF, particularly in countries where UNICEF plays a leading role in the social protection sector. The rapid assessment examined issues of particular relevance for women and children, providing a baseline of data as well as immediately actionable strategy analysis and recommendations at country, regional and global levels. After the completion of the rapid assessment, subsequent iterations began to offer the potential to assess more comprehensively the medium-term dynamics of the pandemic and related policy responses.

17. **Education response to COVID-19: rapid evidence synthesis on teaching and learning.** This synthesis was undertaken to consolidate existing data sources related to COVID-19 education responses and to generate new insights into what works to improve teaching and learning in education systems during the COVID-19 crisis. The synthesis looked at how to achieve improved learning outcomes in emergency situations when schools are closed. It also identified good practices and examples of innovation that support improved learning and the reopening of better schools. These included ways to mitigate learning gaps in the curriculum, create safe environments, and strengthen system resiliency. The synthesis contributes to important lessons learned in priority areas such as teaching and learning, early childhood education, teacher development and school leadership, assessments of learning outcomes, and parental and community engagement.

18. In addition, over the past year, the evaluation function has emphasized developing and implementing an expanded menu of evaluative products that support decision-making at the earliest stages, when evidence is especially vital. For example, rapid evidence reviews can strengthen programme planning and design, including through improvements ensuring that programmes can be effectively evaluated in the future.

### C. New and emerging topics

19. The Evaluation Office introduced a new tool in 2020 designed to assess the status of new or growing areas of work in UNICEF. The readiness assessment was designed as a diagnostic tool to present evidence-based conclusions and recommendations using primary and secondary data. The pilot readiness assessment focused on climate and the environment, exploring issues of improvement, scalability and requirements for sustainability. Evidence from this assessment has directly informed the design of the Climate, Energy, Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Action Plan being prepared by the UNICEF Programme Division.

20. In addition, a thematic evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming commenced in 2020 and will be finalized in April 2021.

## III. UNICEF evaluation in a reforming United Nations

21. This section sets out the UNICEF contributions to the United Nations reform agenda, including system-wide evaluations, joint evaluations and strengthening national evaluation capacity.

22. During 2020, the Evaluation Office continued to support the implementation of joint exercises with a clear focus on promoting evaluation coherence in support of system-wide evaluation. This included joint efforts for a system-wide evaluation of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF is a member of the Advisory Committee of the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund and has participated in the related lessons learned and evaluability assessment exercise. The organization has also seconded a senior staff member to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to support system-wide evaluation efforts and continues to provide inputs to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) as a member of the system-wide evaluation and the COVID-19 Response Working Group.

23. At the global level, UNICEF concluded the evaluability assessment of the common chapter of the 2018–2021 strategic plans, jointly with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNFPA, and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). In addition, UNICEF conducted a set of five joint humanitarian evaluations. In partnership with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNICEF

concluded a joint humanitarian evaluation of the evaluation pooled fund and an inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to Cyclone Idai, which was jointly managed with OCHA (chair), the International Organization for Migration, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). An inter-agency humanitarian evaluation on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls was also concluded during 2020, in coordination with OCHA, UNFPA, Care, WFP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Additionally, together with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNICEF conducted an independent evaluation of the United Nations system response to AIDS from 2016 to 2019.

24. Finally, an iterative evaluation of the UNHCR-UNICEF Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children commenced in 2020. The overarching aim of the Blueprint initiative is to achieve measurable, transformative change for refugee and returnee children and their families in three key sectors (education, water, sanitation and hygiene and child protection). The independent, iterative evaluation accompanies the implementation of the Blueprint, and will continuously analyse emerging results to generate evidence to inform ongoing implementation and strategic decision-making throughout the Blueprint pilot phase. It will also identify more broadly the lessons learned and good practices in partnership initiatives between UNHCR and UNICEF to inform the revised global Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations in 2022. The evaluation will be completed in 2022.

25. At the country level, two evaluations were jointly managed with one or more United Nations agencies. In Togo, UNICEF worked with UNFPA, UN-Women and WHO to jointly manage an evaluation of how the Muskoka Initiative, 2012–2018, supported the efforts of the Government of Togo to accelerate the improvement of maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health in the country while emphasizing nutrition, through a strengthened health system. In Guinea-Bissau, UNICEF and UNDP jointly managed an evaluation of the Mobilizing Rural Youth and Adolescents to Serve as Peacebuilding Leaders project. The project sought to develop leadership skills among rural adolescents and youth on peacebuilding.

26. The organization further strengthened its participation in UNEG in 2020, co-chairing the peer review and partnerships working groups as well as the evaluation capacity development, humanitarian evaluation and evaluation coordination subgroups. UNICEF also played a key role in the running of the virtual 2020 evaluation practice exchange.

27. UNICEF worked with five governments to conduct evaluations of their national programmes. This included collaborating with the Government of the Central African Republic to evaluate its approach to community-led total sanitation from 2013 to 2018, with the Government of Zambia on its country-led midterm evaluation of the Seventh National Development Plan, 2017–2021 and with the Government of Fiji on its evaluation of the social cash transfer programmes in Cook Islands, 2013–2018. In addition, UNICEF supported the Government of Uganda on its midterm evaluation of the National Strategy for Ending Child Marriages and Teenage Pregnancy and supported the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on an evaluation of the Quality of Bilingual Intercultural Education Modality.

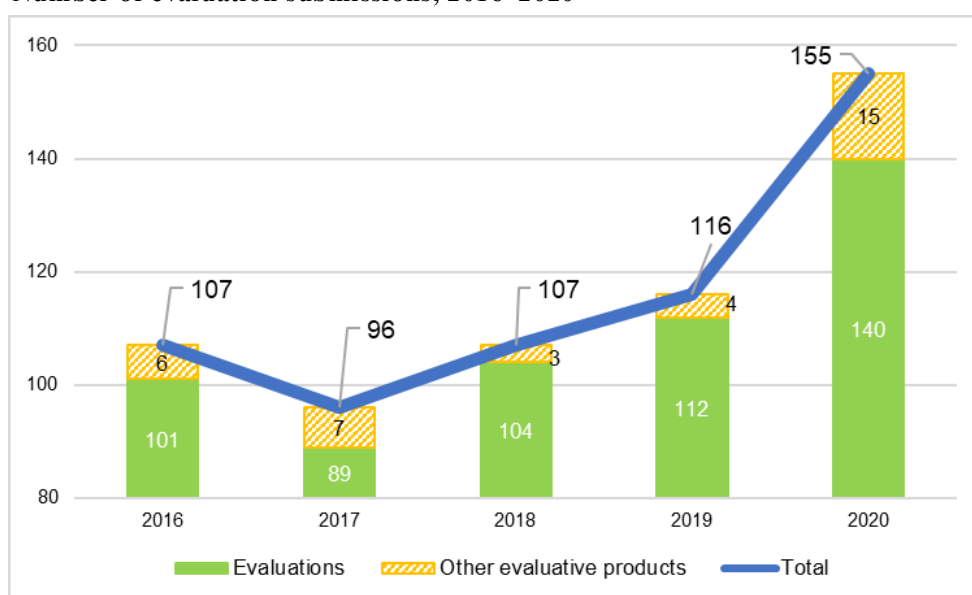
#### **IV. Evaluation coverage and quality under the new evaluation policy**

28. Section IV analyses evaluation coverage and quality and looks at new and emerging themes covered by UNICEF evaluations in 2020.

## A. Evaluation submission and coverage

29. Investments in evaluation planning and capacity-building are paying off. The number of evaluations undertaken continues to increase annually, with a total of 155 evaluative products completed by the end of the 2020 evaluation cycle. This includes 140 evaluations and 15 other evaluative products (six evaluability assessments and nine rapid evaluative reviews). This is a significant increase compared with the 116 evaluations and evaluative products in 2019 (see figure I) and represents the highest number of evaluations submitted since tracking began. Most regions saw increases in the number of evaluations undertaken in 2020, due in part to the need for evaluative evidence to inform the UNICEF response to the COVID-19 pandemic (see figure II). The diversification of evaluative products has also been key in providing faster real-time evaluation evidence that offices are using to facilitate adaptive management.

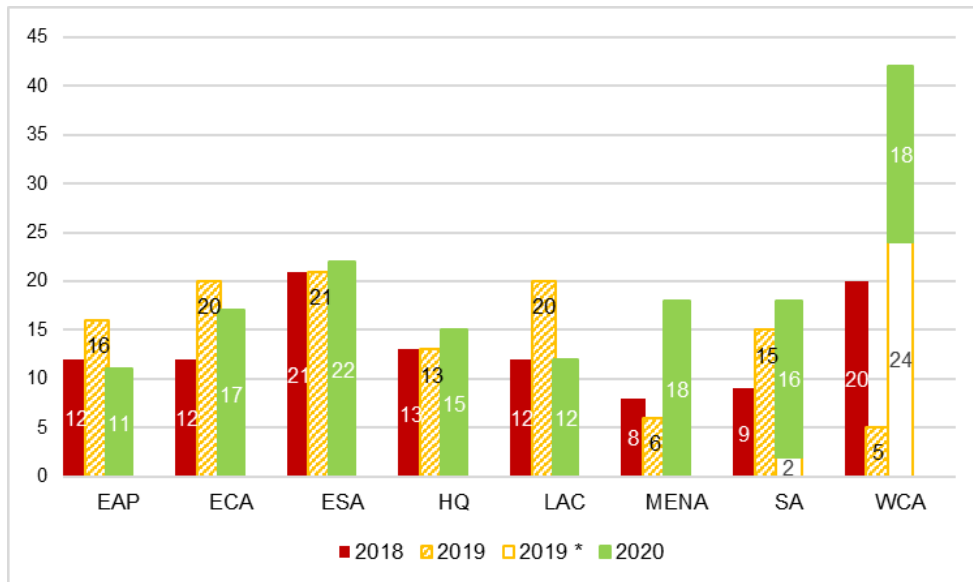
Figure I  
Number of evaluation submissions, 2016–2020



Source: Evidence Information Systems Integration (EISI).

30. Regionally, the West and Central Africa region submitted the highest number of evaluations (42, which includes 24 that were part of the 2019 work programme and were submitted after the close of the 2019 Global Evaluation Report Oversight System (GEROS) assessment cycle). West and Central Africa was followed by the Eastern and Southern Africa region with 22 evaluations. The South Asia region and the Middle East and North Africa region submitted 18 products each, while the Europe and Central Asia region and UNICEF global headquarters submitted 17 and 15 evaluations, respectively. The Latin America and Caribbean region submitted 12, and the East Asia and Pacific region submitted 11, as presented in figure II.

Figure II  
**Number of evaluation submissions by region, 2018–2020**



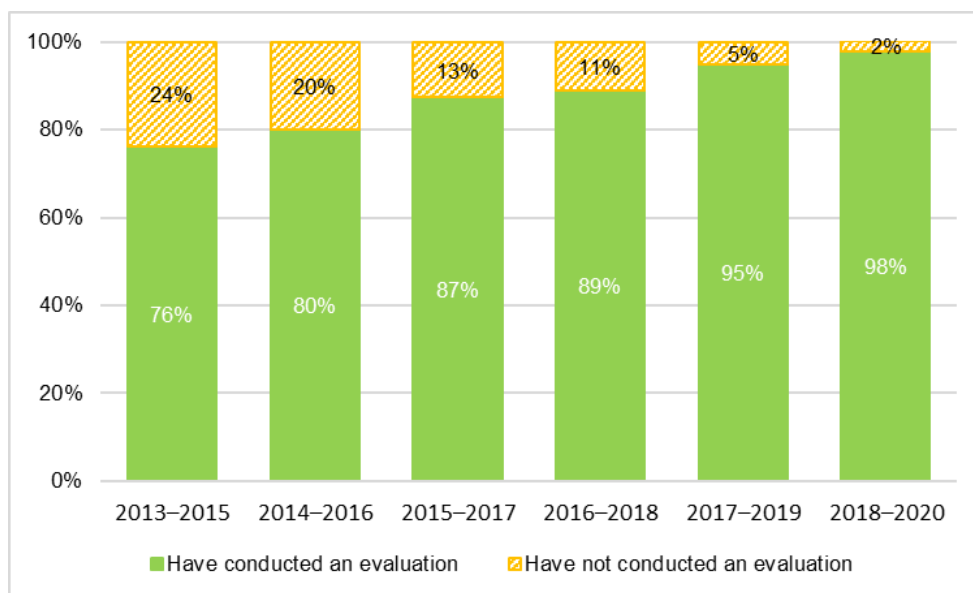
\* Part of the 2019 work programme but finalized in 2020.

Legend: EAP: East Asia and the Pacific; ECA: Europe and Central Asia; ESA: Eastern and Southern Africa; HQ: headquarters; LAC: Latin America and Caribbean; MENA: Middle East and North Africa; SA: South Asia; WCA: West and Central Africa.

Source: EISI.

31. The number of country offices that have undertaken an evaluation in the past three years also continued to rise in 2020.

Figure III  
**Percentage of UNICEF country offices that have conducted an evaluation in a three-year period, 2013–2020**



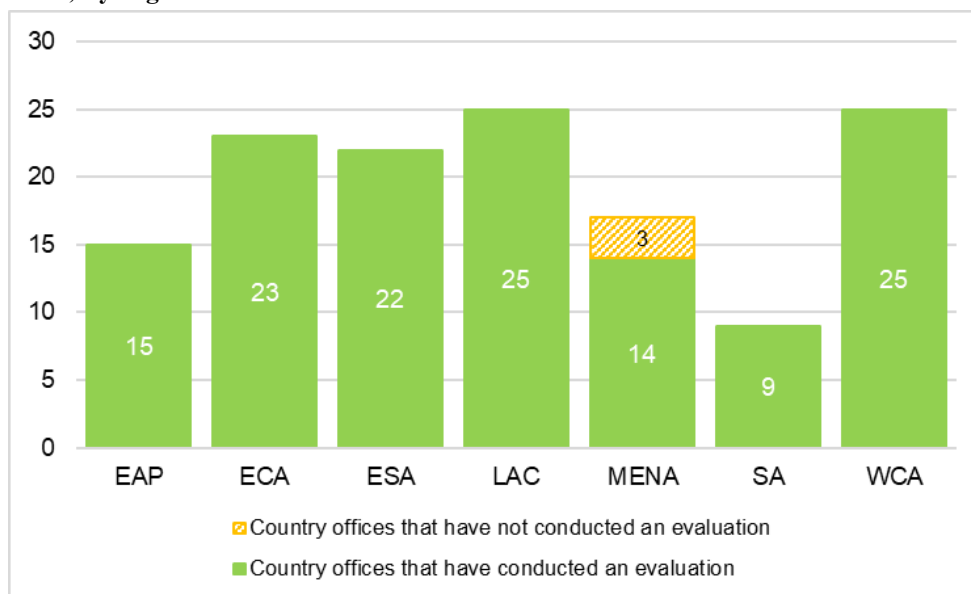
Source: EISI.



32. There was a reduction in the number of offices that have not conducted evaluations as offices implement the geographical coverage provisions of the evaluation policy. Over the 2018–2020 period, 133 offices (98 per cent) completed at least one evaluation. Three offices (2 per cent) did not conduct an evaluation over the same period. These countries are in the Middle East and North Africa region (Islamic Republic of Iran, Oman and Saudi Arabia). Evaluations have commenced in these countries and will be concluded in 2021. Overall, regional geographical coverage continues to improve.

Figure IV

**Number of UNICEF country offices conducting an evaluation between 2018 and 2020, by region**



*Legend:* EAP: East Asia and the Pacific; ECA: Europe and Central Asia; ESA: Eastern and Southern Africa; LAC: Latin America and Caribbean; MENA: Middle East and North Africa; SA: South Asia; WCA: West and Central Africa.

*Source:* EISI.

## 1. Thematic distribution

33. A total of 140 evaluations submitted in 2020 underwent evaluation quality-assessment. Analysis of this portfolio by Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, shows the highest number in Goal Area 1 and the lowest number in Goal Area 4, partially mirroring the distribution of programme expenditure in the preceding year. The evaluation function will continue ensuring that evaluations conducted mirror UNICEF priorities and spending.

Table 1

**Thematic distribution of evaluations, 2020**

Goal area	Evaluations in 2020		Percentage of UNICEF programme expenditure in 2019
	Number of evaluations	Percentage of all evaluations	
Every child survives and thrives	26	18.6	38.2
Every child learns	19	13.6	20.4
Every child is protected from violence and exploitation	18	12.8	12.5

Goal area	Evaluations in 2020		Percentage of UNICEF programme expenditure in 2019
	Number of evaluations	Percentage of all evaluations	
Every child lives in a safe and clean environment	12	8.6	19.6
Every child has an equitable chance in life	14	10.0	9.3
Multiple goal areas	51	36.4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

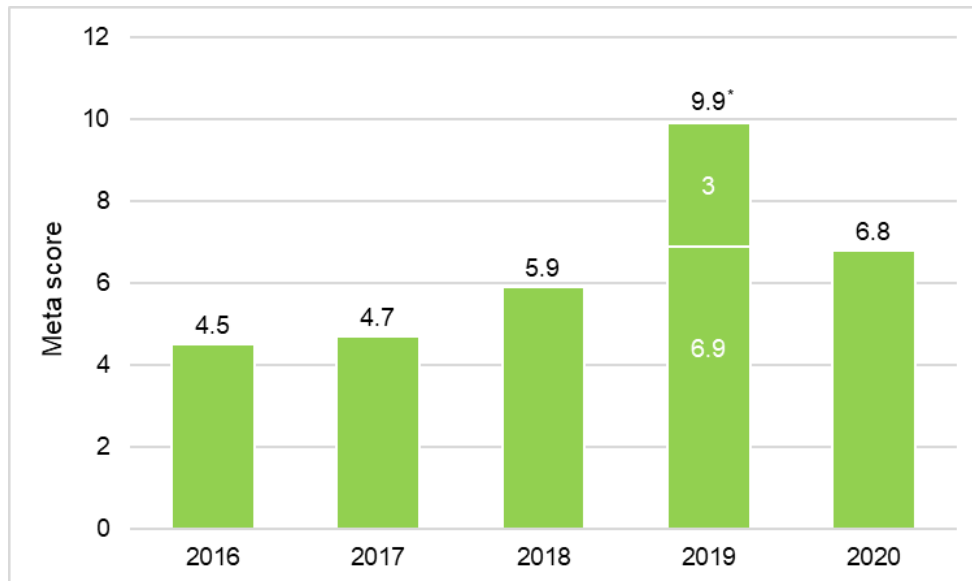
Source: Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS).

## 2. Cross-cutting priorities of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021: gender equality and humanitarian action

34. The Evaluation Office continued providing evidence in support of integrating gender into its evaluations and assessments. Evidence from the 2020 Development Effectiveness Review provides trend analysis from the period 2009–2019, showing an increase in the percentage of evaluations reporting improvements towards achieving gender equality. These findings support those of the 2019 evaluation on the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, which showed an important contribution to gender equality across the Goal Areas of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. Without factoring in the effect of the evaluation of the Gender Action Plan, in 2020, performance under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women was consistent with that of 2019 (“meets requirements”).

Figure V

### Performance under the System-wide Action Plan, 2016–2020



\* The score increased to 9.9 in 2019 after UNICEF conducted the corporate evaluation *Realizing potential: evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plans*.

Meta score key: 0–3.49: Misses requirements; 3.50–6.49: Approaches requirements; 6.50–9.0: Meets requirements; 9.01–12: Exceeds requirements

Source: GEROS.

35. Like all United Nations agencies, UNICEF has committed to reporting on its performance regarding the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. The expectation is that reporting on the implementation of this strategy will enable an assessment of the extent to which disability inclusion is mainstreamed within the

organization's work. The reporting will also spotlight good practice and will identify key gaps and needs, for example regarding development of staff knowledge and capacity, technical resources and assistance. Reports from United Nations entities inform the report of the Secretary-General on disability inclusion in the United Nations system.

36. In support of this agenda, the Evaluation Office committed to ensuring that disability considerations are included in evaluations. The Evidence Information Systems Integration (EISI) platform now has disability markers for offices to use to indicate the extent to which disability is covered in the evaluation. In addition, quality assessments of GEROS have been updated to include questions on how evaluations incorporate disability. Strengthening disability inclusion in evaluations will help UNICEF and the United Nations system to promote institutional accountability and learning and contribute to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the core commitment to leave no one behind.

37. In 2020, working closely with the disability section in UNICEF and using various normative frameworks, the Evaluation Office assessed how well humanitarian evaluations undertaken by UNICEF have reflected disability issues over the past 10 years. The assessment showed that only one third of humanitarian evaluations conducted in the past 10 years had taken disability into account. To help to address this gap, the Evaluation Office has included some specific evaluation questions related to disability in the humanitarian evaluation guidance note, which will be issued in 2021. The Evaluation Office will also continue to provide the necessary support to country offices to address the gap and will assess compliance through GEROS.

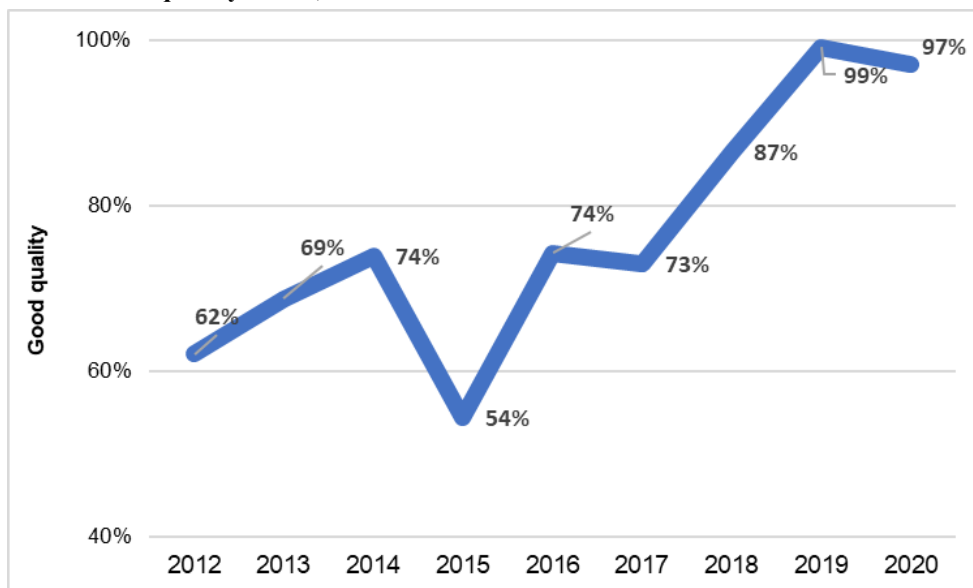
38. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Evaluation Office commissioned a rapid review to understand how the UNICEF education response fostered inclusive education. The rapid review found that children with disabilities were not always included in headquarters guidance documents. Documents that did address issues relating to children with disabilities took a disability-inclusive stance. Regional guidance documents sometimes conceptualized a specific disability-inclusive COVID-19 response, but at other times considered children with disabilities as part of a larger group of vulnerable children. Country responses varied widely. Six of the eleven countries included in the review did not have available published documents explaining how children with disabilities were included in programme response. Five countries provided evidence of disability-inclusive responses to COVID-19.

39. Compared to 2019, there was an increase in the proportion of evaluations covering the cross-cutting theme of humanitarian action. Thirty-one per cent of evaluations (44) covered this theme, compared to 28 per cent (31 evaluations) in 2019. Coverage of humanitarian action in UNICEF evaluations will continue to be prioritized, given the increased spending on humanitarian action.

### **3. Evaluation quality**

40. Out of the 140 evaluations independently assessed by an external firm using GEROS, 136 evaluations (97 per cent) were assessed as being of good quality (rated "exceptional", "highly satisfactory" or "satisfactory"). More precisely, 12 per cent (17 evaluations) were rated "exceptional", 47 per cent (66 evaluations) were "highly satisfactory", 38 per cent (53 evaluations) were "satisfactory" and 3 per cent (4 evaluations) were "fair". No reports were rated "unsatisfactory". The slight recent decline in good quality (figure VI) can be attributed to adjustments in the tool that introduced stricter assessment criteria.

Figure VI  
Evaluation-quality trend, 2012–2020



Source: GEROS.

41. GEROS gave several UNICEF evaluations the highest-quality ratings: the evaluation of country programme of cooperation between the Government of Madagascar and UNICEF (2015–2019); the evaluation of the country programme of cooperation between the Government of Uzbekistan and UNICEF (2016–2020); the assessment of the school-wide positive behaviour intervention and support initiative in Jamaica; the evaluation of the UNICEF youth economic engagement programme in Jordan; the multi-country summative evaluation of child-friendly school programmes in Guinea-Bissau; and the evaluation of the parenting education programme in Sao Tome and Principe.

#### 4. Evaluation level and type

42. In 2020, five evaluations were at the output level, 108 were at both the output and outcome levels, 12 were at the outcome level and 15 were at the impact level. Forty-seven evaluations were formative and 34 were summative, 57 were both summative and formative, while two were meta-evaluations.

Table 2  
Level and type of evaluations conducted in 2020

<i>Evaluation level</i>	<i>Number of evaluations</i>	<i>Percentage of all evaluations</i>
Output	5	3.6
Outcome	12	3.6
Output and outcome	108	77.1
Impact	15	10.7

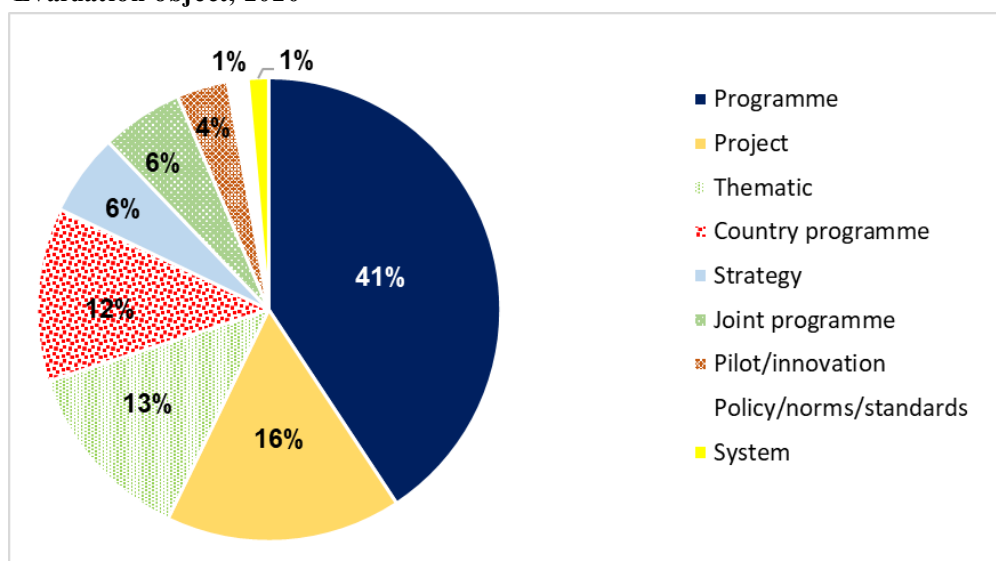
  

<i>Evaluation type</i>	<i>Number of evaluations</i>	<i>Percentage of all evaluations</i>
Formative	47	33.6
Summative	34	24.3
Summative and formative	57	40.7
Meta-evaluation	2	1.4

Source: GEROS.

43. Of note is the increasing proportion of country programme evaluations that were conducted. These evaluations informed new country programme documents that were being designed.

Figure VII  
Evaluation object, 2020



Source: GEROS.

## V. Maintaining strong governance for evaluation in UNICEF

### A. Governance

44. The 2018 revised evaluation policy contains clear provisions on evaluation governance arrangements. The Evaluation Office continued to provide the required oversight and guidance, including by working with several key stakeholders: the Executive Board, which reviewed and decided on evaluation reports at all of its sessions in 2020; the Audit Advisory Committee, which continued its engagement

with both central and decentralized levels of the evaluation function regarding evaluation performance indicators, workplans, budgets and staffing; the Global Evaluation Committee, which continued to enable a constructive dialogue with senior management at UNICEF; and the Evaluation Advisory Panel, which supported the Director of Evaluation in matters related to the overall technical capability of the function.

45. The revised evaluation policy has also strengthened the oversight of the Director of Evaluation, who has overall responsibility for the evaluation function. This responsibility includes the successful implementation of a “matrix” management arrangement, whereby regional offices, through regional directors and regional evaluation advisers, are supporting the evaluation function in UNICEF. The offices also work with other United Nations agencies to support evaluation.

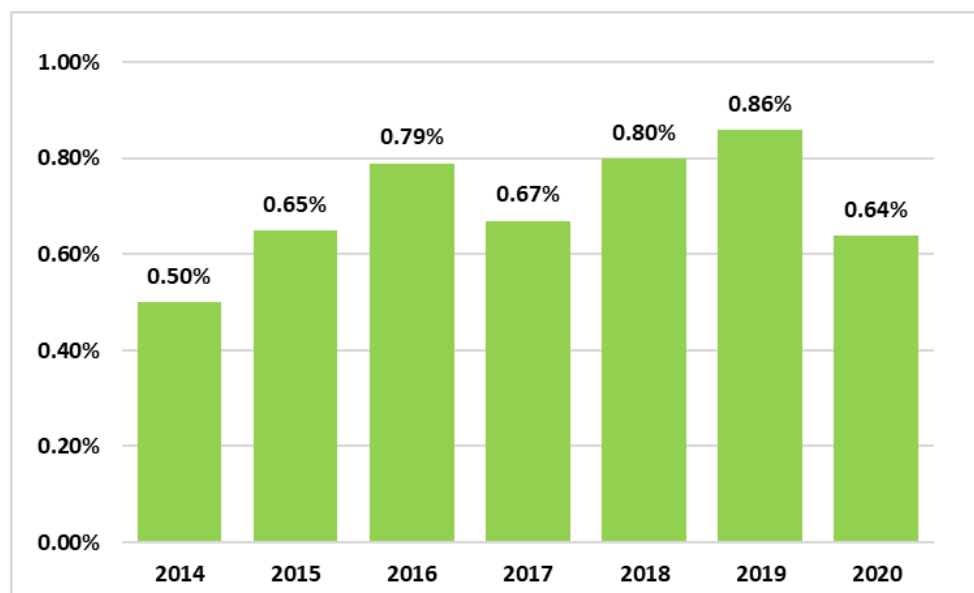
46. UNICEF placed multi-country evaluation specialists in all regions thanks to the resources made available through the Evaluation Pooled Fund. This network of specialists has proved to make a tangible difference in the capacity of the function at the field level, as demonstrated by the performance results described in the present report. These results were achieved despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the reduction in the allocations of the Evaluation Pooled Fund.

## **B. Resources**

### **1. Financial resources**

47. The proportion of total programme resources spent on evaluation in 2020 was 0.64 per cent, a decline from the 0.86 per cent recorded in 2019. This reduction can be viewed as partly related to the significant reduction in Evaluation Pooled Fund allocations. The supplementary pooled funding has been key in boosting evaluation spending in recent years, as funds are earmarked specifically for evaluation. The reduction in the 2019 allocation thus had a negative impact on the overall spending for the function. In addition, restrictions introduced in response to COVID-19 also impacted evaluation spending as offices transitioned to online data collection. It is anticipated that evaluation spending will improve as lockdowns are lifted. Furthermore, the recent recruitment of 16 multi-country specialists has reduced the need for travel, as evaluations were conducted by specialists in-country.

Figure VIII  
UNICEF expenditure on evaluation as a percentage of total programme expenditure, 2014–2020



Source: Insight Evaluation Function Performance Dashboard.

48. At the regional level, attaining the 1 per cent policy target continues to be a challenge, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, which has some of the largest humanitarian programmes undertaken by UNICEF. The evaluation office is exploring how best to assist regions to increase evaluation expenditure. This includes reflecting the costs of Level 3 evaluations in the country where they were conducted and boosting human resource capacity, as well as ensuring that offices correctly tag and track their evaluation expenditures.

Table 3  
Expenditure on evaluation in 2020 by region: expected expenditure and percentage of total programme expenditure

<i>(In millions of United States dollars)</i>				
<i>Region</i>	<i>Programme expenditure</i>	<i>Expected evaluation expenditure</i>	<i>Actual evaluation expenditure</i>	<i>Evaluation expenditure percentage</i>
MENA	1 732.1	17.3	3.6	<b>0.21</b>
WCA	1 482.7	14.8	7.3	<b>0.50</b>
ESA	1 457.6	14.6	10.4	<b>0.71</b>
LAC	382.1	3.8	3.0	<b>0.79</b>
HQ	1 392.9	13.9	11.6	<b>0.83</b>
SA	807.2	8.1	6.9	<b>0.85</b>
ECA	337.4	3.4	3.5	<b>1.04</b>
EAP	453.9	4.5	4.8	<b>1.05</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8 046.0</b>	<b>80.5</b>	<b>51.1</b>	<b>0.64</b>



*Legend:* EAP: East Asia and the Pacific; ECA: Europe and Central Asia; ESA: Eastern and Southern Africa; HQ: headquarters; LAC: Latin America and Caribbean; MENA: Middle East and North Africa; SA: South Asia; WCA: West and Central Africa.

*Source:* Insight Evaluation Function Performance Dashboard.

## 2. Human resources and capacity-building

49. In 2020 UNICEF, in collaboration with the United Nations Staff College, made significant progress on the blended learning programme, which includes facilitated online learning at the intermediate level through an interactive platform, followed by a two-week face-to-face advanced evaluation training for staff and partners. The online course is being rolled out, while the curriculum for the face-to-face trainings is being designed with the National University of Singapore. It is anticipated that trainings can begin as soon as travel restrictions are lifted.

50. The learning programme has now expanded its scope, with a range of skills-enhancing activities being offered to the evaluation community. In addition to the initial courses, the programme now includes two self-paced courses, one on evaluation policy and governance for evaluation staff, and another on foundational technical skills in evaluation for all staff.

51. Because of the pandemic, the 2020 Global Evaluation Meeting and Global Evaluation Day were postponed to the end of 2021. However, a series of learning events are being planned on lessons learned by the evaluation function as it adapted to the dramatically different contexts and circumstances.

52. To foster increased use of evaluations in programme planning and policymaking, the Evaluation Office carried out a joint study with the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti on the best of UNICEF research and evaluation in 2020. This study shortlisted eight evaluations assessed to have been the most influential in supporting governments to enhance their programmes and policies for children. From these eight evaluations, a panel selected the three most influential.

## C. Guidance, tools and quality assurance

53. The Evaluation Office has continued to develop and improve tools and guidance to enhance the efficiency of the function. The EISI platform now includes notification features for offices that provide updates on entries that have been created, and this has improved the accuracy of information stored on the platform. Enhancement in evaluation planning and implementation of management responses can be attributed to these new features. Discussions are under way for the integration of the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan into EISI, which will result in an electronic version of the Plan.

54. The Evaluation Office undertook key actions to enhance quality assurance for evaluations. The latest updates to the GEROS system were informed by the 2019 comprehensive GEROS review. Some of the key changes/improvements to the GEROS template include a weighting system and an adjusted rating scale with an outstanding/exceptional category being introduced. Filters have also been incorporated so that different types of products can be processed through GEROS. In addition, new questions on innovation, lessons learned and use of visual aids were added, with reviewers providing feedback.

55. The Evaluation Office is also preparing a UNICEF quality assurance procedure for the entire evaluation function in response to a recommendation from the assessment of quality assurance mechanisms at the centralized and decentralized



levels. Finally, the Evaluation Office established a process, for which it hired external peer reviewers, to support the Director of Evaluation in providing quality assurance of corporate evaluations.

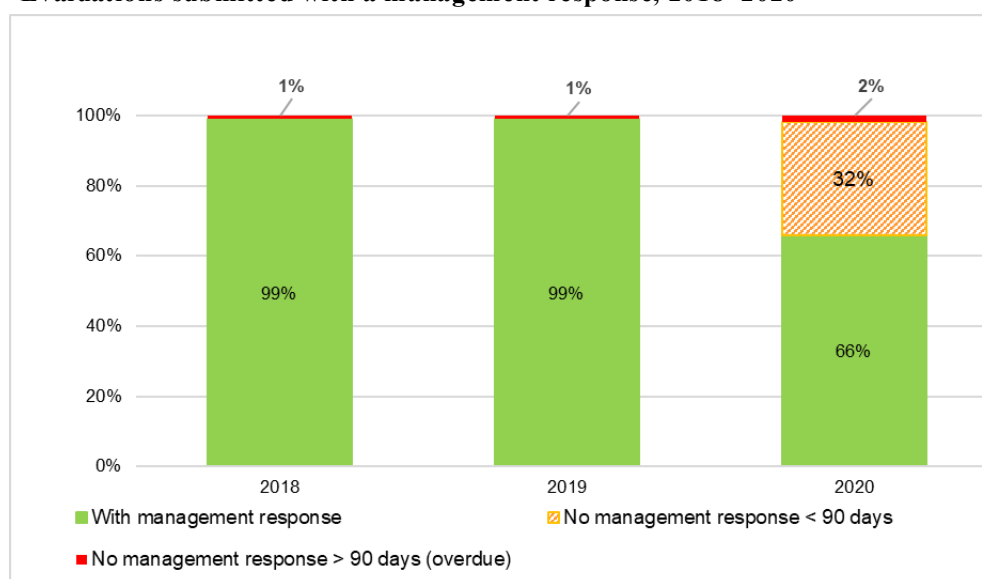
## VI. Evaluation in support of a learning organization

### A. Strengthening the implementation of management-response actions

56. The Evaluation Policy requires that a management response be prepared for every completed evaluation and calls for it to be submitted within 60 days of the evaluation being submitted to EISI. This period has, however, been extended to 90 days given the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of 2020, management responses had been submitted for 110 evaluations conducted in 2019. This is a 2 per cent increase over what was observed in the fourth quarter of 2019, at which time 100 evaluations (96 per cent) conducted in 2018 had a management response. Out of 140 evaluations conducted in 2020, management responses have been submitted for 92 of them (66 per cent). While 48 evaluations (34 per cent) still lack a management response, it should be noted that 45 of these were submitted in December and January and were still within the 90-day window for submitting management responses at the time the present report was written. Thus, only five evaluations (three from the 2020 cycle and one each from 2019 and 2018) have overdue management responses (more than 90 days have elapsed).

Figure IX

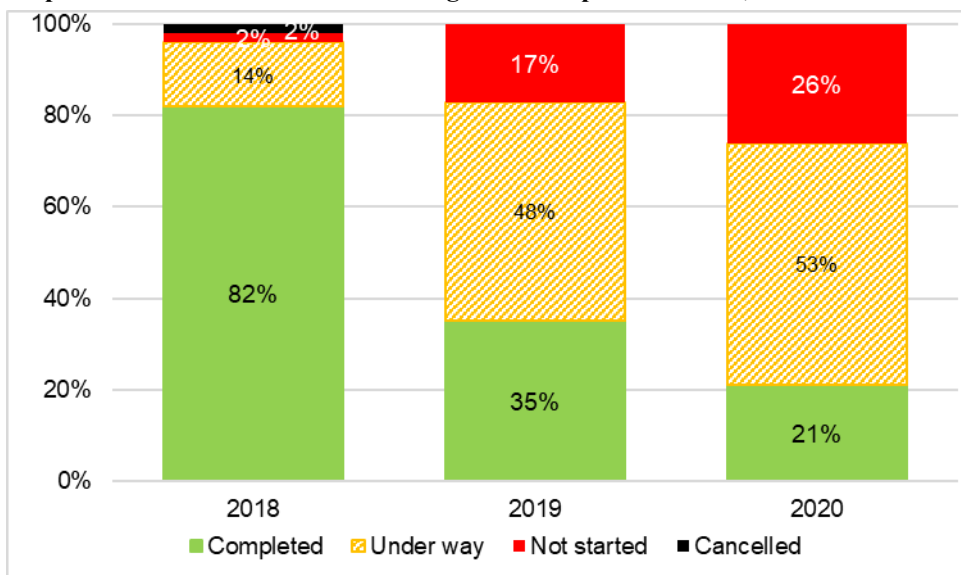
**Evaluations submitted with a management response, 2018–2020**



Source: EISI.

57. Complete data for 2020 will be available in the second quarter of 2021, as most evaluations were submitted towards the end of January, before the evaluation cycle closed. At the end of February 2021, implementation of management response actions for evaluations completed in 2018 was at 96 per cent (82 per cent completed, 14 per cent under way, 2 per cent not started and 2 per cent cancelled), compared with 2019 actions, which were at 83 per cent (35 per cent completed, 48 per cent under way and 17 per cent not started). Implementation of some management response actions has been delayed due to lockdown measures, as in most cases UNICEF offices had been implementing recommendations with partners and host governments.

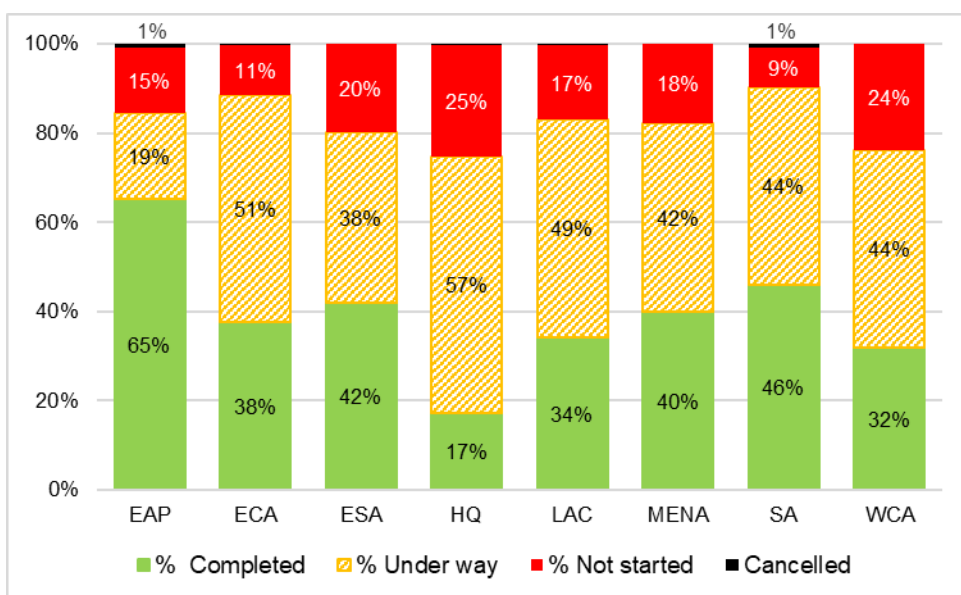
Figure X  
Implementation of evaluation management-response actions, 2018–2020



Source: EISI.

58. For the period 2017–2019, the implementation of management responses has been slowest for headquarters, West and Central Africa, and Eastern and Southern Africa, with 25 per cent, 24 per cent and 20 per cent of actions, respectively, yet to start (see figure XI). In the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia and South Asia, the percentage of management responses not yet started are 18 per cent, 17 per cent, 15 per cent, 11 per cent, and 9 per cent, respectively.

Figure XI  
Implementation of management-response actions, 2018–2020, by region



Legend: EAP: East Asia and the Pacific; ECA: Europe and Central Asia; ESA: Eastern and Southern Africa; HQ: headquarters; LAC: Latin America and Caribbean; MENA: Middle East and North Africa; SA: South Asia; WCA: West and Central Africa.

Source: EISI.

## B. Further strengthening evaluation use and influence

59. To make evaluation evidence more accessible to key stakeholders and partners, the Evaluation Office, in partnership with the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti and seven university partners, the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the *Lancet* COVID-19 Commission, launched the Global Development Commons, a digital-evidence platform devoted to child-focused policy and programming.

60. The platform also serves as a learning-exchange hub and the knowledge management broker for the *Lancet* COVID-19 Commission. A series of crowd-sourced webinars and learning exchanges proved to be a useful means of sharing guidance, experience and lessons from evaluations. More importantly, because the platform's content largely depends on external partners, evaluations can be complemented with external contributions from UNICEF partners on the ground.

61. In 2020, the platform hosted three webinars: two youth-based webinars featuring youth changemakers, and one inaugural policy dialogue co-hosted with the *Lancet* COVID-19 Commission and featuring evaluative work from the UNICEF social protection syntheses. The platform was also promoted by the Executive Director at the virtual 2020 Vatican Youth Symposium in an effort to engage young people to contribute learning about what works for children to the platform.

## VII. Corporate evaluations

62. The plan for global evaluations sets out the programme for corporate evaluations over the period of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. Implementation of the plan is on track, including a review of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was finalized in early 2021. (See annex for details on the programme of work for 2020 and 2021 and on additional work, such as joint evaluations, that emerged after the endorsement of the plan by the Executive Board.)

63. The evaluation of approaches to social protection programming in humanitarian situations, including cash-based programming, was initiated in the first quarter of 2020. The draft reports – including one global synthesis and four country cases – were delivered in December 2020 and are expected to be finalized by end of the second quarter of 2021. The corporate evaluation of UNICEF work in urban settings was completed in December 2020 and was presented to the UNICEF Executive Board at its first regular session of 2021, in February. The evaluation featured significant observations on UNICEF urban programming and performance, and several recommendations that were agreed to by senior management.

64. The evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, was completed in December 2020 and presented to the UNICEF Executive Board at its first regular session of 2021. This was the first evaluation of a UNICEF strategic plan, conducted with these primary purposes: (a) assessing the use of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, as a tool for guiding and for managing UNICEF activities; (b) facilitating learning from UNICEF experience; and (c) providing actionable strategic and planning process recommendations for the upcoming strategic planning cycle. The evaluation provided critical evidence to inform the design of the new strategic plan; the seven recommendations were all agreed to by senior management.

65. The Development Effectiveness Review, 2016–2019 synthesized findings from UNICEF evaluations from 2016 through 2019. In addition to the systematic meta-analysis of evaluation documents, the 2020 Review presented a trend analysis of UNICEF performance based on a set of assessment criteria: relevance of the intervention; achievement of objectives; cross-cutting themes; sustainability;

efficiency; and use of evaluation and monitoring to improve effectiveness. Overall, it was observed that UNICEF programmes have been consistently well suited to the needs and priorities of children, demonstrating good programme performance, with a strong commitment to partners and national priorities. Important progress was also observed in gender equity and equity for marginalized and vulnerable children. The review recommended greater organizational ambition in relation to gender equity and greater engagement and consultations with community members to more effectively serve marginalized groups. Findings indicated that the scalability of UNICEF-supported programmes depends on the sustainability of funding, particularly access to reliable financing from governments, the private sector and civil society. Additionally, although evaluation systems have consistently improved over the past 10 years, the effectiveness of monitoring and results-based management systems remains a challenge, particularly at the country-office level. Finally, the review noted that it is important to define baseline evidence and analyses on some change strategies to inform the evaluation of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021.

66. Two inter-agency humanitarian evaluations that commenced in 2019 and were finalized in 2020 covered the inter-agency response to Cyclone Idai, and gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. An evaluation of the response to the Yemen crisis was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be undertaken in 2021.

67. The evaluation of the response to Cyclone Idai was the first to assess the contribution of the new scale-up activation mechanism since its adoption by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in 2018. The evaluation found that the scale-up activation, joint preparedness and strong collaboration with governments, combined with timely joint aerial assessments, ensured that immediate humanitarian needs were anticipated correctly and contributed to the overall success of the response. As intended, the scale-up activation helped to augment in-country capacities and mobilize human and financial resources in the early stages of the response.

68. The evaluation also identified several opportunities for improving future collective responses in similar contexts. These include better use of anticipatory/early action triggers and cash-based interventions, greater engagement with local civil society organizations and the private sector, and more coordinated management of monitoring and assessment data. The report also highlighted some missed opportunities, such as delays in meeting early recovery needs of the affected populations. In particular, the transition to early recovery response was challenged by a lack of joint planning and inadequate funding mobilized for early recovery needs.

69. The inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls was the first thematic evaluation undertaken by the inter-agency humanitarian team. The evaluation revealed that, since 2017, the IASC has made notable progress in integrating gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls into its humanitarian responses, especially in protracted crises. Success factors included developing the IASC Gender Accountability Framework, cluster-level and agency-specific guidance on gender mainstreaming, and greater availability of gender advisors through the Gender Standby Capacity Project and cluster-lead-agency surge mechanisms. Investments in the guidance, training and availability of expertise in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls helped humanitarian actors to more systematically consult affected women and girls and increase collection and reporting of sex- and age-disaggregated data.

70. The evaluation also identified several opportunities for improving future collective responses, such as more rapid deployment of gender experts in sudden-onset emergencies, more predictable gender capacities at the cluster and humanitarian country-team level, increasing funding for programming for gender equality and the

empowerment of women and girls, and improving coordination and accountability for mainstreaming of this area of programming at the country and global levels.

71. The global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises will be presented to the UNICEF Executive Board at its annual session of 2021. This was the first UNICEF global thematic evaluation focused specifically on protracted-crisis contexts. With the average length of a crisis now over nine years, the evaluation contained lessons applicable across UNICEF and the wider water, sanitation and hygiene sector on linking humanitarian and development programming. The evaluation found that UNICEF had been largely successful in meeting water-coverage targets, but that progress in sanitation and hygiene lagged behind. Moreover, while service-coverage standards were adequate, increased emphasis was needed on equity and quality. Finally, further work is needed to implement the UNICEF transformational agenda on linking humanitarian and development programming at the country level to adapt programming as crises endure and evolve. The evaluation recommended that UNICEF improve data collection and use, strengthen local partnerships, and reclaim UNICEF thought leadership in the sector.

72. See the annex for the programme of work for 2020 and 2021.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

73. The COVID-19 pandemic and the global crisis that ensued challenged the evaluation function to generate evidence more quickly. The function had to adapt and learn quickly about what was working for children in very difficult circumstances. In particular, the evaluation function was called upon to provide timely answers to programme managers as to whether their response to the crisis was appropriate and producing the expected results. A number of important lessons were learned, which will inform the work of the function going forward.

74. The Community Rapid Assessment demonstrated the utility in a crisis of lightweight, rapid, time-series data, real-time evaluations and rapid reviews, which have proved valuable for both learning and accountability. More generally, the pace of innovations in data-gathering to generate evaluation evidence accelerated significantly in 2020. New tools and methods were mainstreamed, while the range of evaluative products made available to country offices and partners was expanded. These efforts must be sustained post-crisis, as they will result in a stronger evaluation function.

75. Thanks to these adaptations, the function continued to perform exceptionally well in almost all key indicators despite the many challenges. The investment made in the past two years in the Evaluation Pooled Fund paid off, contributing to the submission of a record number of evaluations of high quality. The establishment of multi-country regional evaluation posts has clearly contributed to this achievement. However, the reduction by two thirds of the Evaluation Pooled Fund in 2020 is beginning to undermine the gains made. The Fund has been an important factor in moving towards the benchmark established by the Executive Board in its decision 2018/10, in which it called for evaluation to account for 1 per cent of programme expenditure. It is imperative that these resources are secured and made predictable for the next quadrennium.

76. With a growing body of evaluative products now in the public domain, greater use of evaluation evidence is also becoming a priority. Efforts were made in 2020 to engage the wider community in reflecting on the findings emerging from evaluative evidence, with the Global Development Commons platform being a prime example. There is now a need to transform the many tools at the disposal of the organization,

such as management responses and GEROS assessments, to foster a culture of evaluation-use for learning and development in addition to accountability.

77. There is an emerging interest in country-led evaluations and evaluations of country programmes, and in linking these to evaluations of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and Voluntary National Reviews of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The evaluation function is in a strong position to contribute to enhancing national evaluation capacity and strengthening system-wide evaluation with other United Nations agencies in support of the Decade of Action.

## **IX. Draft decision**

### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the annual report for 2020 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2021/18](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2021/19](#));
2. *Also takes note* of the global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises, 2014–2019, its summary ([E/ICEF/2021/20](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2021/21](#)).

## Annex

### Programme of work for 2020–2021

Table 1  
Evaluations and other evaluative products completed in 2020

<i>Initiated before 2020 and completed in 2020</i>	<i>Initiated and completed in 2020</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of UNICEF work for children in urban settings</li> <li>• Formative evaluation of UNICEF engagement with young people in peacebuilding</li> <li>• UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations</li> <li>• Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (joint)<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• Evaluability assessment of the common chapter of the Strategic Plans (joint)<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• Review of the UNICEF response to the Level 2 Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela crisis<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• Evaluation of the UNICEF response to the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan (Part 2)</li> <li>• Global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programming in protracted crises, 2014–2019</li> <li>• Independent evaluation of the United Nations system response to AIDS 2016–2019 (joint with the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS)<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• Development effectiveness review of UNICEF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique (joint)<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• Independent evaluation of the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations grant to the global education cluster: strengthening coordination of education in emergencies (2017–2019)<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• Readiness Assessment Climate and Environment</li> <li>• Evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021</li> <li>• Additional chapter on the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in the formative evaluation report on inclusive education for children with disabilities</li> <li>• Rapid evidence assessment on protecting children on the move (joint)<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> Emerged after endorsement of the plan for global evaluations by the Executive Board.

Table 2  
**Evaluations and other evaluative products under way in 2021**

<i>Initiated in 2020 and will be completed in 2021</i>	<i>Initiated in 2021 and will be completed in 2021</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of early childhood development and early stimulation and care</li> <li>• Evaluation of the UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming</li> <li>• Evaluation of the coverage and quality of the UNICEF humanitarian response in complex humanitarian emergencies, phase 2 – country evaluations: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Nigeria and Somalia</li> <li>• Formative evaluation of the UNICEF role as cluster lead (co-lead) agency<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to the Yemen crisis (joint)<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• Review of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>b</sup></li> <li>• Evaluation of approaches to social protection programming in humanitarian situations including cash-based programming</li> <li>• Rapid review of global social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic</li> <li>• Programme evaluation of UNICEF work on strengthening multi-sectoral prevention and response to violence, abuse and exploitation of children on the move in the Horn of Africa</li> <li>• Readiness assessment of business for results</li> <li>• Evaluation of Phase III of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation</li> <li>• Evaluation of UNICEF work in strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems</li> <li>• COVID-19 learning evaluation</li> <li>• Evaluation synthesis of United Nations system work towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6</li> <li>• Real-time assessment of the UNICEF response to COVID-19 at the country level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the global COVID-19 response (joint)</li> <li>• UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage: assessment of programme adaptations related to COVID-19</li> <li>• Baseline assessment of environmental and social standards at the country level</li> <li>• Evaluation of the UNICEF response to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> Emerged after endorsement of the plan for global evaluations by the Executive Board.

<sup>b</sup> Includes planned evaluation on early learning.