

**Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General
11 April 2025

Original: English

For decision

United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

Annual session 2025

10–13 June 2025

Item 12 of the provisional agenda*

**Management response to the annual report for 2024 on the
evaluation function in UNICEF***Summary*

In accordance with the Executive Board decision 2013/13, the present document provides the management response to the annual report for 2024 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2025/23](#)). The management response addresses the key elements of the annual report, including the progress of the evaluation function on key performance indicators and the implementation of the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/27](#) and [E/ICEF/2023/27/Corr.1](#)).

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

* [E/ICEF/2025/11](#).



I. Overview

1. The present document has been prepared by the management of UNICEF in response to the annual report for 2024 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2025/23](#)). It includes comments on progress within the evaluation function in 2024 in light of the ambitions of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/27](#) and [E/ICEF/2023/27/Corr.1](#)).
2. The evaluation function is commended for reversing trends in key performance indicators, and management notes the significant contributions of key evaluations, work to strengthen impact evaluation, and national evaluation capacity development. The collaborative effort between the evaluation function and UNICEF management has led to improvements, and management is committed to maintaining this positive direction. Close collaboration will continue around forthcoming work on the draft plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029, and the forthcoming independent evaluation of the revised evaluation policy.

II. Background and key developments

A. Background

3. A key organizational goal for 2024 was to effectively implement the revised evaluation policy. At the same time, the evaluation function and management sought to work closely to address the challenges identified in previous annual reports on the evaluation function.
4. This constructive way of working was embodied in the high-level representation of UNICEF during the co-hosting of the 2024 Global Impact Evaluation Forum with the World Food Programme. Another shared achievement during the year was as increase in evaluation expenditure overall, with headquarters again exceeding the 1 per cent target.
5. While the overall quality of evaluations remained satisfactory in 2024, the evaluation function must continue to address the persistent challenges of incorporating gender equality. Constraints in the availability of outcome-level evidence, including the outcome contributions of the evaluation function, is a concern that management shares with the evaluation function. It is expected that work to address this gap should be further strengthened under the next Strategic Plan cycle.
6. The success in scaling up strengthening of national evaluation capacity is welcomed, and UNICEF congratulates the 224 senior government officials from 70 countries who participated in professional training. Management also values the commitment of the Evaluation Office to exploring innovative data-driven solutions to improve the timeliness, relevance and efficiency of evaluations. It looks forward to the completion of key documents for evaluation policy implementation in 2025.

B. Key developments in the evaluation function

1. Noteworthy evaluations

7. There was a large set of noteworthy evaluations that were completed by the evaluation function in 2024, including evaluations of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025; UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans; UNICEF Reasonable Accommodation Fund; UNICEF internal communication and staff engagement function; UNICEF work in contributing to poverty reduction; and global evaluation evidence synthesis. Management is using these evaluations in developing the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029; informing the next Gender Action Plan;

promoting dynamic and collaborative staff engagement; and informing future evaluation planning.

8. Important contributions to humanitarian evidence included evaluations of Afghanistan, Malawi, northern Ethiopia, Ukraine and Yemen. These are informing improvements, such as integration of short-term aid with long-term recovery efforts; enhanced programme coherence; reassessment of emergency procedures; building of local resilience and reinforcing humanitarian-development-peace linkages; and decision-making by humanitarian coordination teams.

2. Impact evaluation

9. An increased number of impact evaluations conducted in 2024 is particularly commended, including in Georgia, Nepal and Peru. It is compelling to see that these pieces of high-quality work led to a 30 per cent expansion in programme coverage, scale-up decisions for 352,000 children, and an additional government allocation of \$8.6 million, respectively. The Impact Catalyst Fund is a vital tool to incentivize such impact evaluations at country level. The evidence generated by the 10 country offices that are set to conduct impact evaluations under two thematic windows will be a vital asset in striving to maximize results for children.

10. Management warmly congratulates the Evaluation Office on the success of the 2024 Global Impact Evaluation Forum at United Nations Headquarters in New York, which UNICEF co-hosted with the World Food Programme. The participation in the Forum of the UNICEF Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, underscores the shared commitment of UNICEF to maximizing the coherence, complementarity and efficiency of the evidence functions across the organization.

3. National evaluation capacity development

11. The continued achievements of the evaluation function in significantly advancing national evaluation capacity development are impressive. It is particularly welcomed that the Intermediate Moderated Programme for Evaluation Systems Strengthening (IMPrESS) trained 1,187 individuals from 67 countries, and that the Executive Course for Evaluation Leaders (ExCEL) trained 224 senior policymakers and 107 UNICEF staff from 70 countries. Intergovernmental collaboration and evaluation-focused bilateral agreements fostered through ExCEL are welcomed.

4. Innovations and other creative solutions

12. The Evaluation Office has pursued innovative and creative problem-solving as a means of maximizing the relevance, timeliness, quality, credibility, utility and efficiency of evaluations. In particular, as part of the organization-wide responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI), work is welcomed that improves data extraction, processing, analysis and sharing, and that produces stronger evidence syntheses from diverse data sets. AI-powered enhancements to the UNICEF Evidence Information System Integration search engine have been appreciated by evidence users.

13. It is also inspiring to see the work of the evaluation function to more systematically engage young people through the establishment of a Youth Advisory Board, and that the group played an active role in advising the global evaluations of the UNICEF Strategic Plan and Gender Action Plan. The recognition by the Eval4Action Campaign of UNICEF as a “super champion” among the United Nations agencies is highly rewarding and an important acknowledgement of youth engagement efforts.

5. Partnerships

14. The range of strategic evaluation partnerships that have been developed by the evaluation function are highly appreciated. UNICEF recognizes the vital contributions of partners such as the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the German Institute for Development Evaluation, the Centre Africain d'Études Supérieures en Gestion and the Wellcome Trust in helping to advance high-quality evaluation evidence. It is particularly encouraging to note the success of the evaluation function in leveraging \$74 million in additional support for effective evaluation synthesis in partnership with other United Nations system entities.

15. Management notes the importance of regionally customized initiatives to embed evaluation competencies in public institutions and national diagnostics. It is pleased to see that 10 evaluations were jointly managed with other agencies, including of the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access initiative and the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All. The ongoing active involvement of UNICEF in global and regional networks is strongly encouraged, as is contributing to joint guidance documents and synthesis reports on critical topics.

III. Performance of the evaluation function

6. Number and coverage of evaluations

16. The continued stabilization in the number of evaluations to levels prior to the manifestation of the COVID-19 pandemic is appropriate. This resonates with the focus, enshrined in the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF, on prioritizing timeliness, strategic relevance, quality and credibility over outright quantity. A positive trend is the greater inclusion of evaluability assessments into standard evaluations, and management concurs that this moves UNICEF towards more integrated, holistic and balanced evaluations.

17. Stretched absorptive capacity of the corporate evaluation function to accommodate the requests and demands for evaluation from headquarters is a concern that management will pay close consideration to. It is worth recognizing the important efforts that have been made to demonstrate that timely and quality delivery can be maintained despite this demand, through adopting innovative and creative measures.

18. Uneven regional coverage of evaluations is noted, while the strategy to more often integrate countries into global or thematic evaluations in specific regions is a relevant approach to addressing this. In regions with reduced coverage, Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS) ratings improved somewhat, indicating a potential trade-off between quality and coverage. Nevertheless, management will look to address the report that 24 countries across various regions have not submitted evaluation reports in the past three years. This will include continued joint work with the evaluation function to encourage country offices to meet their obligations, and giving recognition to regions such as East Asia and the Pacific for maintaining full coverage of countries in accordance with policy.

7. Evaluation profile

19. The past year saw a continuation of a trend whereby a majority of evaluations focused on higher-order outcomes and impacts on the lives of children, which is welcomed. UNICEF evaluations in 2024 continued to be well balanced in terms of formative and summative forms, and an increase in multisectoral evaluation coverage is a welcome shift. Increased engagement in joint, inter-agency, system-wide and country-led evaluations is also welcomed.

20. A steady improvement in the percentage of evaluations systematically incorporating gender equality and the inclusion of persons with disabilities is positive. However, the quality of how gender equality is incorporated remains a concern, as does the insufficiency of incorporating it meaningfully into evaluations despite a modest increase in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) score for UNICEF evaluations to 5.6 in 2024. The persistent nature of this challenge is notable given the significant investment of time and effort by the evaluation function in 2023 and 2024 to improve performance. Management strongly encourages continued prioritization of efforts to meet UN-SWAP standards.

8. Evaluation quality and use

21. It is reassuring that the trend continues of no evaluations receiving an “unsatisfactory” rating, and that quality remained “satisfactory” or “highly satisfactory” overall. The variations in quality across the evaluation function, however, underline the importance of sharpening focus on consistency, quality and prioritization.

22. UNICEF recognizes that there is still work to do in ensuring timely management responses, although the percentage of management responses that are late (beyond the 60-day window) fell from 49 per cent in 2023 to 23 per cent in 2024. At the same time, among those management responses submitted, there has been a positive trend in the initiation of and follow-through on actions. In most cases, meaningful action that takes time to properly consider is preferable to quick-and-easy action.

9. Financing of the evaluation function

23. The annual report for 2024 on the evaluation function in UNICEF highlights positive increases in programme expenses spent on evaluation towards the 1 per cent target, both in absolute terms (\$47.9 million) and as a percentage (0.62 per cent). This has been driven by a renewed commitment of the evaluation leadership and regional and country leadership to work together over the course of the year to troubleshoot underinvestment. Management strongly urges this commitment to continue, alongside work to further strengthen accuracy in coding of activities.

IV. Conclusions

24. The stabilization or reversal in 2024 of previous declines in several key performance indicators is welcome, and it is encouraging to see that this progress was owed to a concerted effort by the evaluation function and UNICEF management to work together to address areas requiring improvement. Management particularly notes the significant contribution of the evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 to strengthening the development of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029.

25. Nevertheless, many challenges lay ahead, especially for maintaining or scaling the successes in 2024 in strategically important initiatives such as impact evaluation, national evaluation capacity development and evaluation syntheses within a constrained financial environment. Evaluation is encouraged to continue ensuring greater consistency of performance across the core of the function, strengthening the focus on outcome-level change, and addressing the persistent challenges of incorporating a gender lens within all evaluations.

26. Management deeply commends the evaluation function for its achievements in 2024, and looks forward to contributing to the draft plan for global evaluations, 2026–2029. It will work closely with the evaluation function during this period of unprecedented change for UNICEF to maximize the efficiency and impact of

evaluation evidence, recognizing the independent nature of the function's accountability role, and the need to deliver high-quality work within a sustainable financial framework.

V. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the annual report for 2024 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2025/23](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2025/24](#)).
