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Annual report on the evaluation function, 2023

Report of the Director, Evaluation Office

Summary

This report provides information on the performance of the evaluation function at centralized and decentralized levels and the contribution to coherence among evaluation functions across the United Nations and to national evaluation capacity development. It also presents the 2024 programme of work and budget for the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO).

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to: (a) take note of the annual report on the evaluation function, including the programme of work and budget of IEO in 2024, and related management commentaries; (b) welcome the progress and achievements of the evaluation function; (c) welcome the contributions to United Nations interagency evaluation efforts, and fostering national evaluation capacity development; (d) encourage IEO to continue investing in innovative practices, including artificial intelligence, and (e) encourage UNFPA to continue to enhance the capacity of the decentralized evaluation function and humanitarian evaluations, and to increase investments in the evaluation function.

I. Introduction

Aligned to the vision of the Summit for the Future, evaluation was positioned as a catalyst for accelerating the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and UNFPA strategic plan

1. With the 2030 Agenda at midpoint, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is off track. Progress on more than 50 per cent of targets of the SDGs is weak and insufficient; on 30 per cent, it has stalled or gone into reverse¹. Up to four billion people² – mainly women and girls – are still excluded from progress. Sounding the alarm, the United Nations Secretary-General’s ‘Our Common Agenda’ report calls for stronger solidarity between people, countries and generations, and a renewal of multilateralism to deliver on existing commitments and fill gaps in global governance. In this context, the Summit of the Future aims to be an action-oriented pact for the future, focusing on sustainable development and financing for development; international peace and security; science, technology, innovation and digital cooperation; youth and future generations; and transformation of global governance.

2. Aligned with this dynamic vision, the evaluation function has evolved to become more strategic, agile and responsive to changes in the external and internal contexts, to provide the most relevant and timely evaluation evidence for decision-making and action. Given complex global humanitarian issues and implications of megatrends, including climate change, IEO has also sharpened a focus on humanitarian evaluation.

3. IEO has been fostering a culture of learning and experimentation, encouraging innovation and embracing digital transformation, including through innovative efforts to pilot the ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) in select centralized evaluations and meta-synthesis, in addition to convening and chairing the first United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) group on AI.

4. IEO has been working on setting global benchmarks for the meaningful engagement of youth in evaluation. To amplify young voices and nurture their leadership potential in evaluation, IEO convened and chaired the first UNEG group on engaging young and emerging evaluators in the United Nations system. IEO also developed lessons and guidelines for youth engagement in evaluation processes, while co-leading ‘Youth in Evaluation’, a global initiative supporting governments, civil society, academia, multilateral organizations and the private sector in engaging youth in evaluation. By strengthening multi-stakeholder and intergenerational partnerships in evaluation, IEO is advancing multilateral cooperation for greater evaluation capacities and systems that can transform global governance.

A. Independent peer review of the evaluation function guided the revision of the evaluation policy

5. During 2023, UNFPA undertook an independent peer review of the evaluation function. The review found that the evaluation function had significantly strengthened since the 2019 Evaluation Policy was approved. The review commended the evaluation function’s high value within UNFPA and by the Executive Board for contributing to informing corporate-level strategies, enhancing programmes and informing country programme formulation and implementation. It attributed this success to adaptability of the evaluation function, its professionalism, as well as the presence of a strong enabling environment that fosters a culture of evidence-based discourse and decision-making.

6. In terms of areas for improvement, the peer review highlighted two priorities for the evaluation function: (a) strengthening the evaluation of humanitarian action; and (b) expanding the coverage and maximizing the relevance, quality, and learning from decentralized evaluations. In response to the peer review recommendation, IEO restructured its existing human resources into three specialized teams on: (a) decentralized evaluation, focusing on strengthening effective decentralised evaluation systems; (b) humanitarian evaluation, to enhance the management of evaluations in complex humanitarian settings; and (c) communication, knowledge management and artificial intelligence, to enhance the relevance, efficiency and use of evaluation.

¹ United Nations. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: [Special Edition](#).

² Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 11. [UN 2.0](#). Forward-thinking culture and cutting-edge skills for better United Nations system impact.

7. In February 2024, the Executive Board endorsed the 2024 Evaluation Policy. This updated policy, resulting from a transparent and consultative process, is intended to make the evaluation function even more fit for purpose, thereby accelerating the delivery of UNFPA strategic plans. A key marker of this commitment is the rebranding of the Evaluation Office to the Independent Evaluation Office, recognizing the independent position and function of the Evaluation Office and reinforcing the credibility of the evaluation function. Early in 2024, actions were already started to implement the revised policy.

8. Following extensive consultation, IEO developed the multi-year costed evaluation plan 2024-2027, approved by the Executive Board in February 2024. Under the plan, IEO will manage 39 centralized evaluations and evaluative exercises – focused on adding value by providing relevant, purposeful and high-quality evidence that directly address the evidence and learning needs across the strategic priorities of UNFPA.

B. Leveraging ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence to increase effectiveness and efficiency of the evaluation function while minimizing potential risks

9. IEO is pioneering the use of generative AI to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, timeliness and utility of evaluations. In early 2024, IEO developed and rolled out a pioneering strategy for a generative AI-powered evaluation function. The strategy upholds the United Nations principles for the use of AI while offering strategic and operational effectiveness and ethical principles to leverage AI in evaluation in a responsible way. The strategy also provides approaches to minimize the risks and harms of using AI in evaluation.

10. The strategy is based on a needs assessment that identified which aspects of the evaluation process can be optimized using AI. In this effort, IEO collaborated closely with the UNFPA Information Technology Solutions Office (ITSO), and engaged, within UNFPA, with IEO staff, regional monitoring and evaluation (M&E) advisors, country M&E staff/focal points, the Policy and Strategy Division (PSD), the Technical Division (TD), the Innovation Unit, the Legal Unit, and the Ethics Office, as well as external experts in AI and digital transformation. In this context, IEO has been piloting the use of AI in the desk review of the evaluation of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025, and the third interagency meta-synthesis to support the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy.

11. To ensure the ethical use of AI, relevant clauses have been added to staff and consultant terms of reference. These clauses cover obligations to uphold the ethical use of AI, promote the use of vetted AI tools that follow data privacy and ethical guidelines, prior approval on the use of AI tools, transparency and disclosure on the use of AI, and the verification of accuracy of the results generated. All evaluation materials and reports that utilize AI will include a disclaimer for transparent disclosure of these tools.

12. To enhance the digital skills and capacity on the ethical use of AI, IEO organized prompts engineering training to support its staff to use chatbots powered by generative AI. IEO was also part of an organization-wide pilot project that gauges increased productivity by the use of AI tools (Google's Duet AI) and initiated and co-chaired a new UNEG working group on the subject.

C. Advocating for influential evaluation during the Decade of Action (Eval4Action campaign)

13. The adoption of United Nations resolution 77/283 on Strengthening Voluntary National Reviews through country-led evaluation in April 2023 further emphasized the use of evaluative evidence to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. Aligned with this call, the Eval4Action campaign continued to advance the advocacy for influential evaluation and develop national evaluation capacities. The campaign is co-led by IEO, EvalYouth and the Global Parliamentarian Forum for Evaluation (GPFE). In four years, the campaign has gauged 170 partners globally, owing to a highly inclusive, intergenerational and empowering approach.

14. Aligned to the United Nations Secretary-General's call for stronger youth engagement in Our Common Agenda, the campaign is promoting youth leadership in evaluation and advocating greater youth voice and participation in evaluation processes. In 2023, the campaign continued to advocate for the adoption of the Youth in Evaluation manifesto, which has garnered approximately 1,000 signatures. In April 2023, the campaign launched the Youth in Evaluation standards at the inaugural Youth in Evaluation week. The standards are tailored to governments, international organizations, voluntary organizations for professional evaluation (VOPEs), academia, youth organizations and the private sector. The first virtual Youth in Evaluation Week

featured 50 events worldwide and drew over 1,700 participants to global, regional and national advocacy events and capacity building sessions.

D. Adapting evaluations to emerging challenges

15. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, IEO retained valuable lessons from the pandemic period, which informed a new training package on adaptive evaluations. A series of webinars targeting decentralized evaluation managers were delivered. Centralized and regional-level evaluations now embrace a hybrid approach, seamlessly blending remote and on-site methods for data collection. Key changes in evaluation processes and approaches include expanded investment in preparatory and inception phases, increased reliance on desk-based research, and leveraging existing secondary data sources. This makes it possible to have more focused country data collection missions, prioritizing engagement with hard-to-reach and key population groups.

16. This adaptability proved crucial in a context marked by multiplying and intersecting humanitarian emergencies. The decision to expand the evaluation of COVID-19 pandemic response to evaluate UNFPA organizational resilience with a formative approach exemplifies the adaptability of the evaluation function to a dynamic and rapidly changing context.

II. Performance of the evaluation function

17. The UNFPA evaluation function is assessed against ten key performance indicators. As in previous years, this section provides an overview of results achieved in 2023 and takes stock of progress made over time.

Table 1
Trends in key performance indicators, 2014-2023

<i>Key performance indicator (%)</i>	<i>Description</i>	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	<i>Overall assessment</i>
1. Financial resources invested in evaluation function	Expenditures for evaluation as a percentage of total programme expenditures	0.45	0.69	0.91	0.83	0.96	0.98	0.83 0.94*	0.83 0.874**	0.80	0.80	Stable trend due to significant increase in UNFPA total expenditure
2. Human resources for monitoring and evaluation	Percentage of country offices staffed with either a monitoring and evaluation focal point or officer	100	95.9	99.2	96.7	96.6	96.1	97.0	99	100	100	Achieved
3. Evaluation coverage	Percentage of country offices that have conducted a country programme evaluation once every two cycles	-	-	-	80	90	97	97.3	96.5	95	97.3	Achieved (target of 90 per cent)
4. Evaluation implementation rate	Percentage of programme-level evaluations implemented as planned	-	-	60	55	92	92.7	88.9	94.4	100	100	Achieved (target of 90 per cent)

5. Quality of evaluations	Percentage of programme-level evaluations rated 'good' or 'very good'	50	77	92	95	80	100	100	100	100	96	90	Achieved (target of 90 per cent)
6. Evaluation reports posted on evaluation database	Percentage of completed programme-level evaluation reports posted on evaluation database	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	Achieved
7. Management response submission	Percentage of completed programme-level evaluation reports with management response submitted	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	Achieved
8. Implementation of management response	Percentage of management response actions completed	76.5	78.0	78.5	84.4	89.5	84	90.0	95.0	95.0	95.0	94.0	Achieved (target of 90 per cent)
9. Use of evaluation in programme development	Percentage of new country programme documents whose design was clearly informed by evaluation	-	-	-	-	79.8	100	100	100	100	100	100	Achieved (target of 95 per cent)
10. Engagement in centralized interagency and joint evaluations	Percentage of joint and interagency evaluations out of total centralized evaluations	-	-	-	-	-	54	57	57	61	61	58	Achieved (target of 50 per cent)

* Original budgeted allocation for the evaluation function (at central and decentralized level) against the total UNFPA programme expenditure for 2020.

** Original budgeted allocation for the evaluation function (at central and decentralized level) against the total UNFPA programme expenditure for 2021.

Source: Evaluation Office and UNFPA Policy and Strategy Division.

18. UNFPA has made significant strides in enhancing evaluation systems, processes, and capacities. This continuous investment is yielding notable results across all key performance indicators, with several surpassing established targets. Evaluation implementation and coverage in particular, have registered the largest gains since 2018, as did the use of evaluation in programme development.

19. Mirroring UNFPA overall income growth, evaluation spending has seen a significant increase, tripling between 2014 and 2023. In 2023, evaluation spending reached 0.80 per cent of total programme expenditure. This stable trend demonstrates the continued commitment of UNFPA to strengthen the evaluation function. Human resources dedicated to monitoring and evaluation have remained stable. A consistent 57 per cent of offices report having at least one dedicated M&E specialist, while the remaining 43 per cent have appointed a focal point.

20. Evaluation coverage for country programme evaluations (CPEs) has reached 97.3 per cent, a marked improvement from 80 per cent in 2017. All planned CPEs were implemented in 2023, compared to 60 per cent in 2016. Evaluation quality remained high, with 90 per cent of CPEs and 100 per cent of centralized evaluations externally rated as 'good' and above. An independent external evaluation quality assessment also revealed a

positive trend in integrating gender equality and women's empowerment in evaluation, surpassing the United Nations System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) target, with a score of 10.7. In line with the commitment to the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS), all completed evaluation reports included some analysis of the extent to which the programme being evaluated considered persons with disabilities.

21. Additionally, management response compliance remained universal, and the annual implementation rate of actions continued to be very high (94 per cent). Notably, 100 per cent country programme documents submitted to the Executive Board considered evaluation findings, demonstrating a substantial improvement from 79.8 per cent in 2018.

22. In recognition of the growing significance of collaboration and joint efforts in achieving collective results, IEO continued to actively participate in and contribute to interagency and joint evaluations. Overall, 58 per cent of centralized evaluations were conducted either as joint or interagency exercises, demonstrating the IEO commitment to coherence and a collaborative approach. This active engagement fosters not only joint accountability but also facilitates interagency knowledge sharing and collective learning, ultimately contributing to enhanced programme and operational efficiency.

23. Taken together, there has been significant performance across all key performance indicators. These achievements were made possible through a multifaceted approach that prioritized effective collaboration with relevant business units and regional offices, and dedicated capacity development initiatives. Targeted guidance and tailored methodological frameworks fostered effective implementation, while robust quality assurance measures and technical support ensured good quality outputs.

24. Despite the remarkable progress, the application of evaluation practices within decentralized units are inconsistent, often due to capacity limitations. Many country offices lack dedicated M&E staff, relying on focal points covering multiple tasks, limiting the breadth and depth of evaluation activities. In several offices, M&E staff are not positioned at the appropriate professional level. Additionally, national expertise combining evaluation skills with expertise in UNFPA technical areas is scarce in several countries, necessitating additional funds for the hiring of international consultants. Challenging contexts, like humanitarian crises and insecurity, add another layer of complexity. While CPE quality has improved, strategic framing of such exercises warrants further refinement to inform strategic direction and priorities. In view of the ever-increasing crisis situations and the growing humanitarian portfolio, there is also a need for increased capacities to manage and conduct humanitarian evaluations.

25. As reflected in the 2024 evaluation policy, a major step forward in 2024 will be the gradual inclusion of all typologies of decentralized evaluations (including project level and humanitarian evaluations) in the revamped evaluation quality assurance and assessment system. This crucial step will incrementally increase the volume of evaluations undergoing rigorous quality assurance. Maintaining the current momentum will require the continuous adaptability of the evaluation function, including enhanced capacities at the regional and country levels. Recognizing this, IEO will implement a phased approach to ensure all decentralized evaluations undergo a quality assessment.

Key performance indicator 1: financial resources

26. The 2024 evaluation policy established a target between 1 per cent and 1.6 per cent of the overall programme expenditure to be invested in the evaluation function.

27. Continuing the pattern from prior period, investment in evaluation continued to steadily increase, at both decentralized and centralized levels. In 2023, expenditure in the evaluation In 2023, expenditure in the evaluation function amounted to \$9.8 million representing 0.80 per cent of the total UNFPA programme expenditure. Of the total expenditure, \$4.3 million was spent at the centralized level while \$5.5 million was spent at the decentralized level (see table 2).

Table 2
Expenditures in the evaluation function, 2014-2023

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total UNFPA programme budget expenditure*	820.2	798.6	763.5	752.9	872.3	933.8	1 027.9	1 086.4	1 218.3	1 295.7
Total expenditure of the evaluation function	3.69	5.52	6.94	6.30	8.40	9.13	8.53(a) 9.64(b)	9.03(a) 9.48(b)	9.7	9.8
<i>Independent Evaluation Office</i>	2.38	2.63	3.71	3.36	4.23	3.9	3.2(a) 4.31(b)	3.88(a) 4.33(b)	4.3	4.3
<i>Decentralized evaluation function</i>	1.31**	2.89	3.23	2.94	4.17***	5.23	5.33	5.15	5.4	5.5
Total expenditure of the evaluation function as a percentage of UNFPA programme budget expenditures	0.45%	0.69%	0.91%	0.83%	0.96%	0.98%	0.83%(a) 0.94%(b)	0.83%(a) 0.87%(b)	0.80%	0.80%

* Total UNFPA programme budget expenditure is generated from UNFPA statistical and financial reviews. The Independent Evaluation Office budget is derived from the UNFPA financial system while the budget for the decentralized function includes the budget for decentralized evaluations, internal and national evaluation capacity development activities, and staffing costs

(a) with COVID-19-related reduction

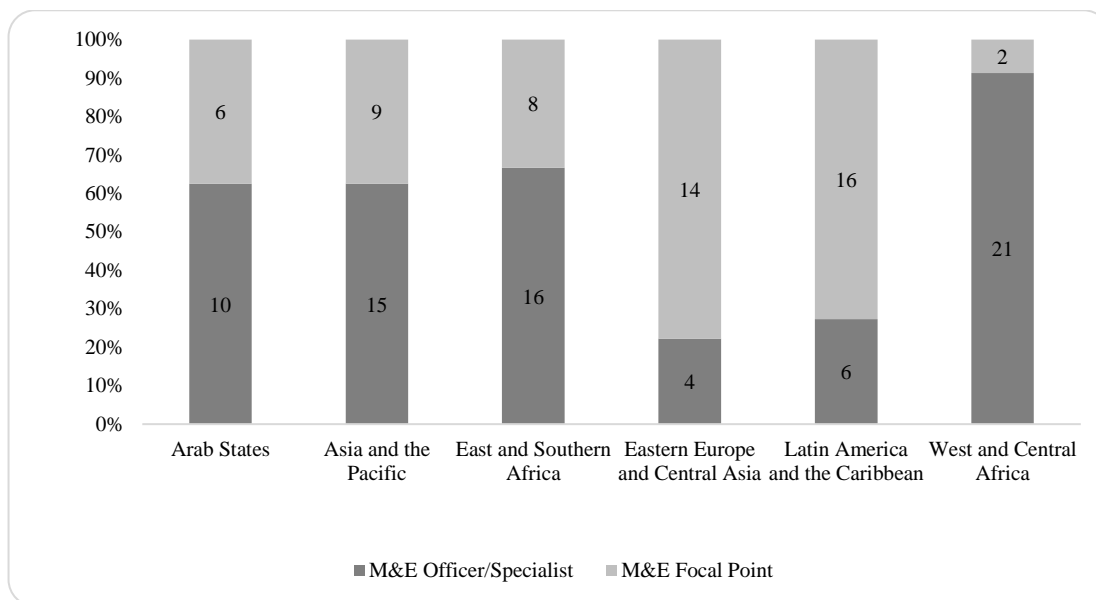
(b) without COVID-19-related reduction

Key performance indicator 2: human resources

28. IEO maintained a stable staff size of 11 approved posts: one general service position, nine professional staff, and the Director. To bolster its capacity in humanitarian evaluations, IEO secured a humanitarian evaluation expert on secondment from UNHCR for six-month period. Now, 60 per cent of IEO professional positions are held by women, and 60 per cent are from programme countries, demonstrating the IEO commitment to diversity.

29. At the regional level, UNFPA has six regional monitoring and evaluation advisors at the P5 level. Five out of six regional M&E advisers are women, and five out of six are from programme countries. At the country office level, the staffing profile differs across regions. Overall, 57 per cent of country offices were staffed with an M&E officer; however, there are considerable variations across regions, largely reflecting constraints faced by smaller country offices, notably in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Figure 1
Human resources for monitoring and evaluation, 2023, by region

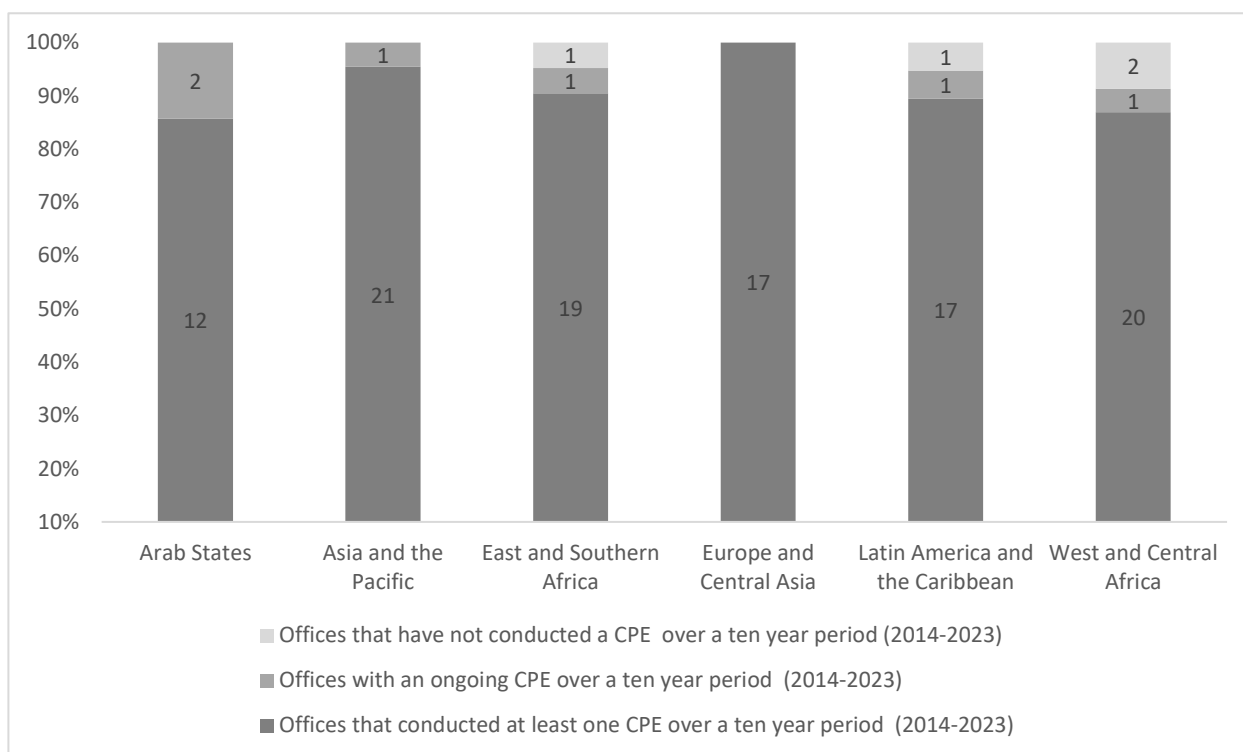


Source: Evaluation Office
 Abbreviation: M&E: monitoring and evaluation

Key performance indicator 3: coverage of decentralized programme level evaluations

30. To ensure a robust base of evaluative evidence to inform programming, the Evaluation Policy calls for country offices to conduct a CPE at least once every two programme cycles. This performance indicator saw a steadily rising trajectory over the past ten years (2014-2023), culminating in 97.3 per cent of country offices completing, or on track to complete, at least one CPE during two programmes cycle. This upward trend, exemplified by several offices significantly increasing their CPE frequency within each cycle, underscores UNFPA commitment to evidence-based action and its dedication to continuous programme improvement.

Figure 2
Evaluation coverage by region, 2014-2023 (*)



* This captures a ten-year interval (2014-2023) of completed and ongoing country programme evaluations

Key performance indicator 4: implementation rate of planned decentralized evaluations

31. Overall, the implementation rate of evaluations improved significantly, with 100 per cent of planned evaluations implemented in 2023. Demonstrating adaptability to evolving programme contexts, two CPEs were postponed, aligning them with the extensions of the country programme. In addition, two offices opted to synthesize existing evaluation evidence due to having conducted a CPE in the previous cycle.

32. While the number of completed CPEs have decreased, compared to 2022, this variability is expected due to varying country programme cycles, affecting the number of CPEs conducted in each region annually. The observed fluctuation is therefore a natural consequence of the country programme cycle and does not indicate a decline in evaluation commitment.

Key performance indicator 5: quality of evaluation reports

33. Rigorous external assessment is fundamental to ensuring the credibility and quality of evaluations. Recognizing this, all completed centralized evaluations and CPEs underwent an independent quality assessment to gauge the reliability of their findings, conclusions, and recommendations. While there was room for further improvement, the quality of evaluations remains robust, with 90 per cent of reports externally rated as ‘good’ or higher. As in 2022, only one report was assessed as ‘fair’, and none were deemed ‘unsatisfactory’.

34. The overall progress on this performance indicator can be attributed to the robust support provided to country offices by IEO and regional M&E advisors. This includes methodological guidance, technical, advisory and capacity development support, and a dedicated funding mechanism that safeguards resources specifically for CPEs.

Figure 3
Quality of evaluations, by region, 2023



Source: Independent assessment of the quality of evaluation reports

Key performance indicator 6: rate of completed evaluation reports posted on the evaluation database

35. All completed CPEs and centralized evaluations, together with their external quality assessment, were made publicly available on the Evaluation Database. Centralized evaluations are featured on the IEO website and – to further facilitate its use – shared with all staff and the wider evaluation community, including UNEG members.

Key performance indicator 7: evaluations with management responses

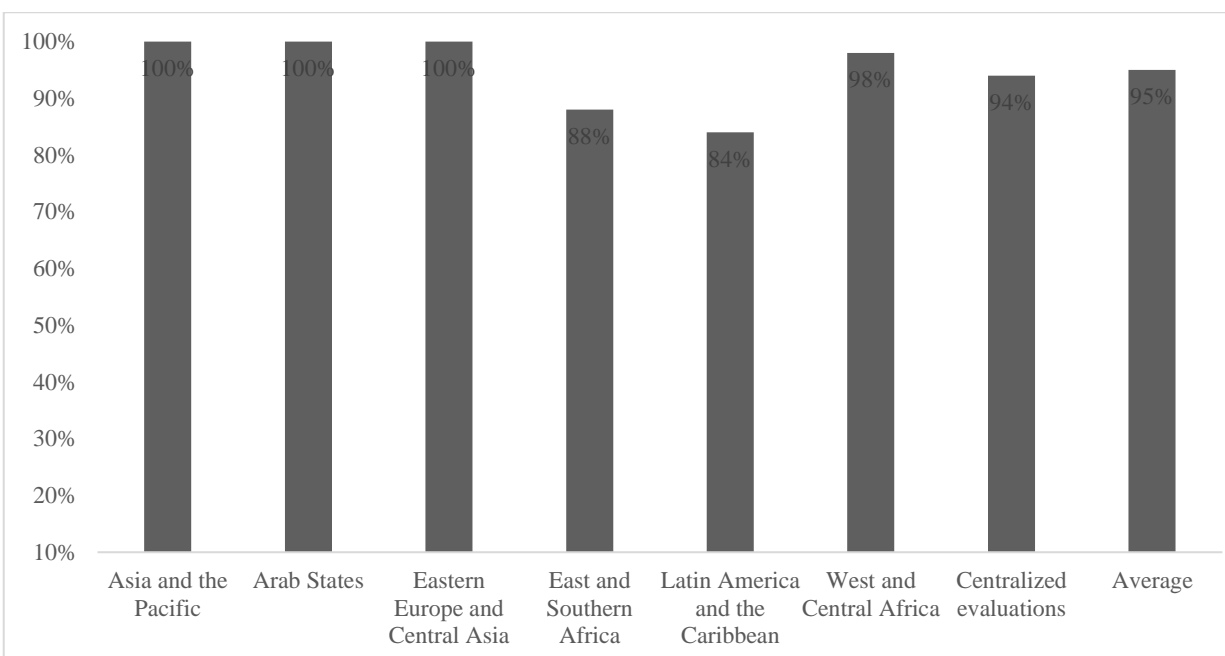
36. Effective follow-up to evaluations is important to ensure that the learning and knowledge generated is applied and internalized into ongoing and new programming. It is also central for ensuring accountability and transparency on how programme and organizational challenges identified in evaluations will be addressed, by whom and by when. In 2023, continuing the trend, 100 per cent of all completed evaluations produced a management response, demonstrating the consistent achievement of the target since 2018.

Key performance indicator 8: implementation of management responses

37. The Policy and Strategy Division (PSD) monitors the implementation of evaluation recommendations for both centralized and decentralized evaluations. Thanks to numerous measures that PSD has put in place over the years – including (a) the addition of two evaluation follow-up indicators in the corporate dashboard; and (b) a more individualized follow-up approach – UNFPA achieved the annual implementation rate of 94 per cent in 2023 – four percentage points over the Strategic Plan target.

38. Further, the implementation rate of centralized recommendation actions, which, for many years, lagged behind the regions’ and the organization’s overall rates, also maintained a very robust implementation rate of 94 per cent.

Figure 4
Implementation of evaluation management response/key actions, 2023



Source: UNFPA management response tracking systems

Key performance indicator 9: Use of evaluation in programme development

39. Evaluations continued to serve as a powerful driver for action and decision-making, particularly in informing new country programmes. This progress was maintained in 2023, as by the interdivisional Programme Review Committee that assessed that all new country programme documents submitted for Executive Board approval were informed by evaluative evidence. This marks a remarkable improvement over 2018, when only 78.9 per cent of country programme documents met this standard. However, while significant progress has been made, further efforts are still needed to systematically respond to evaluative evidence, particularly in areas where UNFPA needs to do more or work differently to achieve the three transformative results.

Key performance indicator 10: Percentage of centralized joint and interagency evaluations

40. In this era of heightened importance of collaboration and joint work to achieve collective transformative results, IEO continued to be actively involved in and contributed to interagency and joint evaluations: 58 per cent of centralized evaluations were conducted either as joint or interagency exercises in 2023/2024. In doing so, UNFPA not only supports joint accountability but also promotes system-wide learning for collective results while also enhancing joint programme effectiveness and efficiency.

E. Centralized evaluations

41. In accordance with the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, IEO continued to deliver a variety of evaluations that added value, depth and insights across UNFPA strategic plan outcome and priority areas.

42. As of December 2023, the implementation rate of centralized evaluations was 100 per cent, with all evaluations completed or on track, as per schedule. The status of planned centralized evaluations is presented in table 3 below.

Table 3
Implementation status of planned centralized evaluations and other evaluative studies, 2023-2024

#	Title	Status	Management response issued	Presentation to Executive Board/ steering committees
1	Evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth	Completed	Yes	Presented to the Executive Board at the 2023 annual regular session
2	Evaluation of UNFPA support to population dynamics and data	Completed	Yes	Presented to the Executive Board at the 2023 annual regular session
3	Formative evaluation of the organizational resilience of UNFPA in light of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic	Completed	Yes	Presented to the Executive Board at the 2024 annual regular session
4	<u>Joint</u> evaluation of integration of HIV into primary health care	Completed	Co-sponsors to develop a management response	To be presented to the UNAIDS Board in December 2024 along with other evaluation items.
5	<u>Joint</u> evaluation of UNICEF-UNFPA Programme to End Child Marriage	Completed	Yes	Presented to the Joint Programme Steering Committee in 2023
6	<u>Interagency</u> meta-synthesis of evidence of SDG – Partnership pillar	Completed	No*	Presented at side-event of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (July 2023) and the SDG Summit (September 2023)
7	<u>Interagency</u> meta-synthesis to support the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy (part 2 on peace and resilience building)	Completed	No*	Presented at the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2023
8	<u>Interagency meta-synthesis</u> on SDG 5	Completed	No*	To be presented to the interagency launch event in 2024
9	<u>Interagency</u> evaluation of Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being (SDG 3)	On track	Not yet	To be completed in 2024
10	Evaluation of UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025	On Track	Not yet	To be presented to the Executive Board at the 2025 first regular session
11	Mid-term evaluation of the UNFPA Supplies Partnership programme (2022-2030)	On Track	Not yet	To be presented to the Supplies Partnership Steering Committee in 2025

* Management responses are only issued for evaluations, and not meta-analyses and evaluability assessments.

Innovation in evaluation approaches

43. With the aim of exploring ways of adding more value from evaluation results to organizational decision-making and learning in a complex, dynamic and challenging environment, IEO has embraced innovative methods, utilizing approaches that are participatory, inclusive and utility-focused.

44. The formative evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth, presented to the Executive Board in 2023, successfully engaged young people throughout the evaluation. To facilitate the rich learning from this innovative experience, IEO, members of the Youth Steering Committee and the EvalYouth Global Network documented key lessons learned in the publication, *Meaningful youth engagement in evaluation: Multiplying the transformative power of evaluation, Lessons from UNFPA experience*, to benefit other United Nations agencies and partners. This publication is accompanied by a short film that chronicles the insights and experiences of young and senior professionals involved in the evaluation. In addition, a guidance note on the meaningful engagement of young people in evaluation was developed and launched in 2024.

45. Drawing on the valuable lessons from engaging adolescents and youth in an evaluation process, IEO in 2024 will launch the initial phase of a formative evaluation on UNFPA support to integrating the principles of 'Leave No One Behind' and 'Reaching the Furthest Behind'. This evaluation will embody a firm commitment to principles of 'leaving no one behind', social inclusion and gender equality and to amplifying the voices of marginalized groups. To this end, it will actively seek to ensure the meaningful inclusion, representation and participation of those furthest left behind throughout every stage of the evaluation process.

F. Use of evaluations to foster change

46. Beyond the implementation rate of management responses to evaluations, the functional quality (or the added value) of the evaluation function can be measured through the changes evaluations have triggered (or lack thereof) in UNFPA strategies, policies, programmes or practices. This section provides synopsis of the strategic use of selected centralized and decentralized evaluations.

Centralized evaluations

Formative evaluation of the UNFPA engagement in the reform of the United Nations development system (2017-2022)

47. A key recommendation of the evaluation, completed in 2022, was that UNFPA should provide stronger strategic direction for its engagement with the United Nations development system (UNDS) reform, ensuring deeper institutionalization at all levels of the organization. In response, the UNFPA Interdivisional Working Group on UNDS reform developed a strategy aimed at leveraging a reformed UNSD for the achievement of the ICPD Programme of Action and the SDGs. Currently in its draft stage, the strategy is envisioned as a living document, to be updated in 2024 to align with the outcomes of the Summit of the Future and the new 2024 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR). Furthermore, UNFPA issued an internal guidance note for country and regional offices to implement the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF), reinforcing its commitment to the principle of mutual accountability. Additionally, ongoing efforts ensure the alignment of internal policies, including humanitarian ones, with both system-wide priorities and UNDS reform.

48. UNFPA has also acted in response to evaluation recommendations regarding its work in multi-country environments. This includes increasing regular resource allocation for the Caribbean and Pacific regions. Additionally, UNFPA has strengthened its presence in the Pacific by establishing or upgrading posts in Samoa, Micronesia, Kiribati, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Furthermore, UNFPA has scaled up its support for small island developing States (SIDS), particularly in the Caribbean. This response involved dialogues with multi-country offices and aligns with the evaluation's recommendation to enhance support for SIDS.

Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls.

49. The evaluation informed the development of the updated Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action, 2023-2027. This new policy reflects a significant step forward in the integration of gender equality considerations into humanitarian action. In particular, the roles and responsibilities outlined in the 2023 IASC Gender Policy are

aligned to the priority areas identified in the recommendations of the IAHE. Furthermore, the emphasis on systematic planning and monitoring of gender-related results at both global and country levels, responds to the IAHE call for robust M&E mechanisms within humanitarian settings.

Decentralized evaluations

50. Across regions, evaluations have spurred positive change across programmatic and operational areas. Findings from evaluations have shaped strategic orientation of new country programmes and facilitated the optimization, streamlining and scaling-up of impactful interventions.

51. The Europe and Central Asia regional office prioritized the utilization and effective communication of the recommendations and findings of decentralized evaluations to ensure that the insights gained from these evaluations lead to positive changes and improvements in programmes and projects on the ground. This includes development of mandatory, context-specific communication plans tailored to the specific audience. Recommendations are strategically integrated into short- and long-term plans aligned with specific objectives of the project and country plans. Evaluation of the regional projects, covering half the region, for example, prompted knowledge-sharing sessions showcasing effective approaches to tackling social norm change, a regional priority. The results of the evaluation informed the development of strategies for the second phase of the regional projects and resource mobilization for replicating successes in specific countries, such as Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Finally, findings were documented and showcased at global fora such as the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), expanding the knowledge base and contributing to organizational guidance development.

52. In India, based on the recommendations of the CPE, the country office worked on mainstreaming the humanitarian response, strengthened partnerships with faith-based organizations to address social norms and harmful practices, reviewed gaps in the health system's response to the gender-based violence and developed state-specific strategies. In Nigeria, beyond to inform the development of the new country programme, the CPE was used to scale-up the establishment of forensic centres; replicate the GBV information management system in humanitarian and development settings; rationalize the number of implementing partners (from 54 to 34); and streamline the geographical footprint (from 18 to 14 states).

G. Decentralized evaluation system

Systems to improve the quality, credibility and use of decentralized evaluations

53. To enhance IEO effectiveness and efficiency to support the decentralized evaluation function, a dedicated team was created. The team will prioritize methodological development, coherent technical assistance and capacity development for M&E staff. Aligned with the 2024 evaluation policy, IEO also revamped its quality assessment system, setting stricter standards for the quality of evaluations, ensuring greater relevance and utility.

54. Reflecting its commitment to improving the quality and impact of CPEs, IEO launched a new evaluation handbook. Designed to substantially improve the methodological rigor and utility of CPEs, the handbook clearly structures the evaluation process and offers practical guidance for both M&E officers managing CPEs and the consultants conducting them. The handbook strengthens alignment with the UNFPA Strategic Plan priorities, facilitating a deeper analysis of country programmes' theories of change and ensuring that CPEs explicitly assess UNFPA contributions to transformative results. Though primarily focused on CPEs, the methodological framework and tools of the handbook are devised to be applied to other types of evaluations, including project-level evaluations. Concurrently, to enhance the humanitarian evaluation capacity, IEO drafted a humanitarian evaluation compendium, which was finalized in early 2024. The compendium is designed to complement the evaluation handbook by providing specific guidance on evaluating humanitarian action.

55. Ensuring strategic evaluation planning and securing sustainable funding for decentralized evaluations remained a priority in 2023. All new country programmes submitted to the Executive Board were accompanied by costed evaluation plans, reflecting continued alignment with programme cycles. The established ring-fencing mechanism safeguarding sustainable financing proved its worth, enabling the planned implementation of all CPEs.

56. IEO also continued to facilitate the implementation of the strategy to enhance evaluation use through communications and knowledge management, including by developing the capacity of decentralized evaluation

managers and communication officers to facilitate strategic communication and use of evaluations, through trainings and real-time feedback mechanisms.

Internal evaluation capacity development

57. To equip the M&E staff in decentralized units with the competencies to effectively implement an evaluation, IEO, in collaboration with regional offices and PSD, hosted the first-ever cross-regional evaluation capacity building workshop in Türkiye. The workshop equipped M&E officers with practical methodological knowledge and the ability to train others. Beyond technical content, the workshop fostered invaluable peer learning across countries and regions, enabling participants to share perspectives, experiences and knowledge on challenges in managing and using results of complex evaluations. The cross-regional workshop was attended by 24 participants coming from country offices due for a CPE in 2024.

58. In addition, IEO delivered a series of webinars on adaptive approaches to evaluation, in which a total of 120 M&E staff participated. IEO further augmented this effort by releasing a guidance on adaptive evaluation, offering practical methods and tools to apply adaptive evaluation. The capacity development and guidance complement the A-Compass, the adaptive management model in UNFPA.

59. IEO, in collaboration with regional offices, also participated in a series of regional learning events and webinars to boost decentralized evaluation function. These sessions brought together over 100 heads of offices, programme staff, and M&E and communication officers from country offices.

III. Enhancing coherence in the United Nations system evaluation functions

60. As part of its commitment to UNDS reform, IEO is enhancing coherence among the evaluation functions across the United Nations system by actively engaging in and collaborating with other agencies through joint and inter-agency evaluations, the UNEG network, the Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation Group and the UNAIDS co-sponsor evaluation group.

H. Inter-agency and joint evaluations

61. In conformity with the United Nations Funding Compact and to facilitate a broader reach of its evaluation activities, UNFPA made all its centralized evaluations available on the UNEG website. Regarding joint or inter-agency evaluations, UNFPA continued to significantly exceed the Funding Compact target of collaborating in at least one joint evaluation, as 58 per cent (7 out of 12) of centralized evaluations were either joint or inter-agency evaluations.

62. IEO, alongside the UNICEF Evaluation Office, co-led an inter-agency meta-synthesis of United Nations evaluations, to extract and synthesize evidence and lessons learned linked to Priority 5 on peace and resilience building of the UN Youth Strategy. This inter-agency exercise, involving nine United Nations agencies, is the second in a series of meta-syntheses to support the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy. The report was launched at a side event during the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2023, which was attended by over 115 participants. The event utilized the lessons from the report to prompt a global discussion on enhancing youth engagement in peace and resilience building and advocating for increased opportunities for youth in accountability processes.

63. UNFPA continued to play an active role as a member of the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition, established by UNDP in 2022. In 2023, the Coalition grew to over 40 United Nations, bilateral and multilateral organizations and evaluation networks. As a member of the management group, IEO participated in three of the five active evaluation synthesis ‘pillars’ – on partnerships, people and peace - that were underway in 2023. The syntheses are aimed at offering evidence and lessons to accelerate progress towards the SDGs ahead of 2030. The first synthesis on partnerships was completed and presented at side events during the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the SDG Summit. In late 2023, the Coalition’s work was paused for a period of strategic reflection but it will proceed in 2024 with increased focus and realistic goals while a more sustainable governance model is established. In addition to work with the Coalition, UNFPA is also a member of the management group of the UN-Women-led synthesis of SDG 5 on gender equality.

64. IEO also participated in management group of the joint evaluation of HIV/AIDS integration in primary health care, and the evaluation of the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being (SDG 3).

I. System-wide Evaluation Office

65. IEO is fully committed to supporting independent, system-wide evaluation mechanisms. In 2023, the System-wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) was formally established, with the appointment of an Executive Director. The primary purpose of the Office is to: (a) conduct system-wide evaluations designed to complement the evaluation work of United Nations entities, focusing on activities that cannot be adequately addressed through existing accountability mechanisms; (b) manage evaluations of pooled funds and joint initiatives (in which a number of United Nations entities are working towards a common objective); and (c) promote increased collaboration on United Nations system-wide evaluations to improve the quality and availability of evaluation evidence on progress achieved to implement the SDGs.

66. The SWEO has an ambitious work plan but limited human resources. Recognizing the strategic importance of the Office, UNFPA has provided crucial support in the form of the secondment of a P5 senior evaluation specialist while the office transitions from extra-budgetary to core budget funding in 2025.

J. United Nations Evaluation Group and regional evaluation groups

67. IEO amplified its role in UNEG with an increasing number of leadership roles. IEO held the vice-chairship of UNEG, while co-chairing three working groups on: (a) data and artificial intelligence; (b) young and emerging evaluators; and (c) meta-synthesis.

68. The first-ever UNEG working group on young and emerging evaluators, proposed and chaired by IEO, resulted in the development of a joint UNEG and United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) partnership proposal on deploying young evaluators as United Nations Volunteers in the United Nations system. The partnership proposal was adopted by UNEG heads at its annual general meeting in early 2024, and 13 United Nations agencies joined it.

69. As part of its co-convening role for the UNEG group on the use of data and artificial intelligence, IEO is collaborating with United Nations agencies to develop UNEG-wide ethical principles for the use of artificial intelligence in evaluation.

70. IEO, as co-chair of the Synthesis working group, presented the work being done at the ‘What Works Global Summit’, learning from and contributing to the evidence synthesis community. IEO also actively participated in and contributed to the working groups of: (a) gender equality; (b) disability and human rights; (c) use of evaluation; and (d) humanitarian evaluation. At the regional level, UNFPA continued to actively contribute to the United Nations regional evaluation groups.

71. IEO continued to support system-wide coordination and exchange of good practices on adaptation of the evaluation function to the COVID-19 pandemic as a member of the UNEG Working Group on COVID-19 and the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition, which brings together evaluation units from Member States, multilateral institutions and United Nations organizations. IEO also continued to co-manage the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) of the COVID-19 humanitarian response, which was finalized in early 2023.

K. United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and integration of disability inclusion

72. For the fifth consecutive year, UNFPA ‘exceeded requirements’ of the evaluation performance indicator on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, with a composite score of 10.7. Although there was variation in how disability was addressed, virtually all evaluations included some level of analysis on the extent to which the programme under review considered persons with disabilities.

L. Joint and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework evaluations

73. In the spirit of the United Nations reform agenda, UNFPA actively supported United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) evaluations in 11 countries by providing technical

assistance, quality assurance or financial support. In addition, 11 decentralized evaluations were jointly conducted with six United Nations agencies.

74. In addition to being involved in UNSDCF and joint evaluations, UNFPA offices actively engaged in and provided leadership to monitoring and evaluation groups of United Nations country teams in 15 countries.

IV. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development

75. In line with General Assembly resolutions 69/237 (building capacity for evaluation of development activities at the country level); 70/1 (endorsing the 2030 Agenda); and 71/243 (QCPR); as well as the evaluation policy, UNFPA continued its efforts to strengthen national evaluation capacities, together with major stakeholders, including United Nations entities.

76. IEO continued to be a member of global evaluation coalitions, including: (a) the EvalPartners Executive Committee representing the United Nations system together with WHO; (b) the EvalGender+ Management Group, representing the United Nations system together with UN-Women; (c) the Global Evaluation Initiative Implementation Committee, led by the World Bank; and (d) the Global Evaluation Forum organizing committee.

77. IEO continued to co-lead, together with the Global EvalYouth network and the Global Parliamentarian Forum for Evaluation, the Eval4Action campaign. In Asia and the Pacific, IEO and the UNFPA regional office supported the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association, EvalYouth Asia and the Asia Pacific Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation in implementing the regional evaluation strategy. This included: (a) organization of a biannual summit on professionalization of evaluation; (b) support for a consortium of academic institutions in monitoring and evaluation education, (c) development of a curriculum for academic courses on evaluation (d) publication of Asia Pacific Journal of Evaluation; (e) organization of the fourth winter school for young and emerging evaluators; and (f) organization of a regional dialogue on national evaluation policies and systems, during which eight countries presented their status on national evaluation policies and systems.

78. IEO also continued to support strategic initiatives and events to mobilize a range of stakeholders and share good practices and lessons learned on strengthening inclusive national evaluation systems. IEO supported the fifth Forum international francophone de l'évaluation organized by the Réseau francophone de l'évaluation, in which IEO organized a pre-conference workshop on career development in M&E for young people; and a panel, in partnership with UNDP and EvalYouth, on "Meaningful youth engagement in evaluation: A practical example from the United Nations." In addition, IEO, in partnership with UNICEF and the Green Climate Fund, led a panel at the Asian Evaluation Week organized by the Asian Development Bank and the Government of China, on "AI-powered evaluation: Maximizing efficiency while minimizing risks." IEO partnered with the Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar in the annual conference on evaluation research in the Global South, engaging in panels on "How AI can empower evaluation in the Global South" and on "Enriching meaningful engagement of youth in evaluation in the Global South."

Multi-stakeholder partnerships to enhance meaningful participation of youth in evaluation

79. In 2023, IEO continued to advance the meaningful participation of youth in evaluation and build the professional capacity of young and emerging evaluators. IEO, together with Eval4Action partners, supported the development and launch of standards for meaningful engagement of youth in evaluation. The process for self-assessment of the standards was developed and introduced to stakeholders through several awareness-raising programmes.

80. In partnership with the EvalYouth network and the World Bank-led Global Evaluation Initiative, capacity building of young evaluators was undertaken across four regions in English, French and Spanish. IEO also continued to support Global EvalYouth strategic priorities, including by supporting: (a) capacity building of young evaluators through training, technical sessions, pre-conference workshops and mentoring; (b) development of capacity building materials; (c) networking through participation in evaluation conferences and events; and (d) providing a platform to EvalYouth to co-lead various taskforces and steering committees, ensuring youth participation in planning and implementation of evaluation initiatives for youth.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships to enhance the demand for and use of country-led evaluation by national policymakers

81. In addition to the partnership with the Global Parliamentarian Forum for Evaluation (GPFE) to co-lead the Eval4Action campaign, IEO continued to support GPFE in its outreach to parliamentarians, strengthening the capacity of individual parliamentarians, regional parliamentary fora and parliamentary staff on demanding and using evaluation for evidence-based decision-making. IEO supported the evaluation training organized by GPFE in partnership with the International Program for Development Evaluation Training and the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association. IEO and the Sri Lanka country office supported the active participation of parliamentarians during National Evaluation Week in Sri Lanka. At this event, parliamentarians and parliamentary staff joined the panels and shared their experience on the use of evaluation for policymaking.

V. The Independent Evaluation Office programme of work in 2024

82. In 2024, IEO will continue its work in four key results areas.

A. Centralized evaluations

83. As detailed in its multi-year costed evaluation plan (2024-2027), IEO will manage 16 evaluative exercises in 2024/2025.

B. Decentralized evaluation system

84. IEO will continue supporting the strengthening of the decentralized evaluation system by delivering technical support, managing the revamped evaluation quality assessment and assurance system, and, together with the regional offices, develop capacities in evaluation. Through its new evaluation handbook, IEO will increase efforts to strengthen capacities in managing and conducting decentralized and humanitarian evaluations.

C. Enhancing coherence in the United Nations system evaluation functions

85. IEO will continue to engage in UNDS reform, the UNEG and other joint and interagency evaluation initiatives. It will also continue to engage with SWEO, the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) steering group and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in humanitarian action (ALNAP). IEO will continue its leadership role as UNEG vice-chair and co-lead of working groups, namely data analytics and AI, and engaging young and emerging evaluators.

D. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development

86. IEO will continue to co-lead the Eval4Action campaign, including by supporting the advocacy for the adoption and implementation of the standards on enhancing the meaningful engagement of youth in evaluation. It will also continue its engagement in multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development, including with EvalPartners, EvalYouth and GPFE.

E. Budget for the 2024 workplan

87. The total IEO budget for 2024 is \$4,518,545; this includes \$3,038,019 allocated for posts and capacity development and \$1,480,526 for operations and related operational costs.