



**UNEG**  
United Nations Evaluation Group

Working  
Paper

# UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator: Guidance for Peer Learning Exchange

Issued by the UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights

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## Background to the UN System-wide Action Plan

1. The United Nations System Wide Action Plan<sup>1</sup> (UN SWAP) is a unified gender equality framework, designed to promote accountability, a common understanding, enhanced coherence, systematic self-assessment, and a steady targeted and progressive approach to which UN system agencies can aspire and adhere in their work on gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEEW) at the corporate level. The UN SWAP has a specific performance indicator for evaluation that falls under the oversight category. UNEG developed and endorsed [UN SWAP EPI Technical Guidance and Scorecard](#),<sup>2</sup> which Evaluation Offices/units should use to report on progress. The guidance recommends that UN entities conduct an external (when possible) meta-review/evaluation of up to 30 finalised evaluations that they have managed and/or conducted during the previous year<sup>3</sup> that assesses the level of integration of gender dimensions in their evaluations. Entities are required to use the [EPI Scorecard](#),<sup>4</sup> a reporting tool organized around four scoring criteria that capture the overall elements related to mainstreaming gender equality in evaluation and in line with UNEG [norms](#), [standards](#) and [guidance](#), as reflected in the evaluation reports conducted by entities in a given year. The four criteria are:
  1. GEEW is integrated in the evaluation scope of analysis and evaluation indicators are designed in a way that ensures GEEW related data will be collected.
  2. GEEW is integrated in evaluation criteria and evaluation questions are included that specifically address how GEEW has been integrated into the design, planning, implementation of the intervention and the results achieved;
  3. A gender-responsive methodology, methods and tools, and data analysis techniques are selected.
  4. Evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations reflect a gender analysis.
2. Since its inception, UN SWAP Secretariat has encouraged peer review of reporting processes. The UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights developed this peer learning exchange guidance as a means for facilitating and strengthening the conduct of UN SWAP EPI, either as part of the wider UN SWAP peer review (at an entity level) or focused on the EPI. This process and the learning that will result from it will help inform the anticipated independent assessment of UN SWAP in 2017 and any other external reviews of the UN SWAP EPI that take place.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details go to: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/promoting-un-accountability>

<sup>2</sup> A revised version of the Scorecard was issued in 2014; see: <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1452>

<sup>3</sup> January to December is the recommended time period, although some agencies run different reporting cycles. If a different time period is reported against, this should be made clear in all UN SWAP reporting.

<sup>4</sup> A revised version of the Scorecard was issued in 2014; see: <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1452>

3. The UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights is promoting the peer learning exchange of the EPI to be carried out on an ongoing basis and with support and facilitation provided by the working group. The present document outlines the recommended steps for specifically reviewing the EPI and should be adapted to the context (i.e. wider peer review or peer learning exchange on the EPI).

## UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator Peer Learning Exchange

### *Purpose of the peer learning exchange*

4. Integrating gender dimensions in evaluation is still a relatively new area of practice. Institutional and methodological challenges exist and a shift in the way evaluations are conducted is required. The development and testing of new gender-responsive approaches and methods must also be undertaken and fully implemented. Peer learning exchange involves two entities reviewing each other's evaluation reports (or a sample of) against the UNEG endorsed [EPI Evaluation Scorecard](#), comparing results of the entities self-assessed EPI report, assessing the entities UN SWAP EPI reporting procedure alignment with the [UNEG Technical Note](#), and providing feedback (based on the UNEG/OECD DAC professional peer review<sup>5</sup>). The purposes of the peer learning exchange on the EPI are:

- Support UNEG members to increase their knowledge and ownership of the UN SWAP EPI reporting process.
- Strengthen and provide quality control for annual reporting on UN SWAP evaluation performance indicator and the corresponding remedial plan of action.
- Provide an alternative to conducting an external assessment of integration of gender equality in evaluations for those entities with limited resources.
- Share experiences concerning gender equality and the empowerment of women within the UN system and regarding the UN SWAP as an accountability mechanism.
- Promote cross-agency learning about integration of gender equality in evaluation processes and accountability mechanisms and functions.
- Inform any reviews or evaluations of the UN SWAP EPI reporting process within entities, including constraints and opportunities.

Box 1 describes the peer learning exchange, adapted from UNEG and OECD-DAC<sup>6</sup> guidance.

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<sup>5</sup>See the UNEG framework for professional peer review: <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/945>

### **Box. 1 UNEG/OECD-DAC Peer Review**

Peer review is the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of an organization/activity by its peers, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed organization learn, improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles. The peer review process is conducted on a non-adversarial basis, relying on confidence between peers in the process. It is not intended to serve as a procedure for resolving differences - peer review does not imply a punitive decision or sanctions; it generally goes beyond fact-finding to include an assessment of performance, and is characterized by dialogue and interactive investigation. Peer review is a means of peer persuasion that can become an important driving force to stimulate organizations to change, achieve goals and meet standards.

All professional peer reviews contain the following structural elements:

- A basis for proceeding: including the necessary agreement for cooperation, and a clear question for assessment;
- A normative framework: an agreed set of principles, standards and criteria against which performance is to be reviewed;
- Designated actors and roles in carrying out the peer review; and
- A set of procedures for planning, assembling and testing the basis of evidence and findings, leading to the final result of the peer review – an exchange around the conclusions.

Strengths of a peer review are:

- It starts with a shared appreciation of the distinctive challenges of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, and the fact that all concerned are constantly striving to improve.
- It can adapt and apply the most pertinent professional principles, norms and standards in coming to an assessment.

The assessment should carry particular weight, both internally and externally, for the independence and professional credibility of its results.

## *Risks*

5. There are four main risks outlined in OECD-DAC guidance, which are that peer learning exchanges may be:
  1. Too detailed or ‘heavy’ to be justified – e.g. very burdensome on the organization being reviewed, or the agency that is conducting the review;
  2. Too light to be credible or useful;
  3. Perceived as too “cosy” an assessment among professional evaluation peers, or that a review entity exercises too much “professional courtesy” in its assessments; or
  4. Encountering and managing different views on UN SWAP evaluation indicator process and substance.

6. There are also other challenges, such as ensuring knowledge of the entities evaluation systems/processes, access to documents (in particular the TOR) and systems to inform the review, the general quality of the evaluation itself (ensuring it adheres to overall UNEG Norms and Standards in addition to the gender-related ones) and appropriately experienced staff to conduct the review.
7. This guidance, and the role of the UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights in supporting the exchange, will help to address these issues and strengthen the overall peer learning exchange process for UN SWAP EPI reporting.

### *Key questions*

8. The peer learning exchange of the EPI is focused on the evaluation reports and corresponding Terms of Reference, however, it is also suggested to look beyond these documents to provide a peer assessment of the institutional set-up to support gender-responsive evaluation, such as institutional gender policy and evaluation methodology guidance and tools. The UNEG Norms that are highlighted as guiding principles for the peer learning exchange are: Evaluation Ethics (N11), as it highlights that in accordance with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “evaluators must be sensitive to and address issues of discrimination and gender inequality;” and Contribution to Knowledge (N13), as this peer learning exchange exercise is a means for contributing to knowledge building and organizational improvement.
  - How do the evaluation reports and TORs perform according to gender-responsive evaluation criteria (as outlined in the [UNEG EPI Evaluation Scorecard](#))? Are they approaching, meeting, or exceeding UN-SWAP EPI requirements?
  - Is the entity following the [UNEG Technical Note](#) guidance for reporting on the UN SWAP EPI?
  - How could the entity improve gender-responsiveness in its evaluation reports and TOR (see [UNEG guidance](#))?

#### *Optional:*

- Has a realistic remedial plan of action that explains how the entity will improve upon its score been developed? Will this plan ensure that the score is improved or are there other activities that you might suggest?
- Will the entity likely meet or exceed the UN SWAP EPI by 2017 (2019 for technical agencies) given the institutional set-up for supporting gender-responsive evaluation (i.e. is an evaluation policy that addresses gender equality in place; is there guidance on gender-responsive evaluation, does the entity have a gender equality strategy, etc.)?
- What can we learn from the reviewing entities practices and how can we adapt them to our own context?

## Process

9. If a full-fledged peer review of the entire UN-SWAP is to be conducted, the below steps can be integrated into and adapted to this overall process for the specific review of the EPI. However, if a full-peer review of the UN-SWAP for the entity is not taking place, then the EPI focal point is encouraged to move ahead with organizing the peer learning exchange focused only on the Evaluation Performance Indicator following the below steps.
10. The peer learning exchange process needs to be flexible to accommodate the different types of entities of the UN system. The below outlines the steps each entity should take in order to engage in the peer learning exchange of the Evaluation Performance Indicator, ideally led by the Focal Point for the Evaluation Performance Indicator in close coordination with the entity UN SWAP Gender Focal Point. The UNEG Working Group will pair two entities to simultaneously conduct the review of evaluation reports and TORs. The following steps are recommended:
11. **Step 1:** Peer learning exchange lead in each UN entity (the EPI focal point in close coordination with the entity UN SWAP Gender Focal Point) should discuss a possible peer learning exchange with senior evaluation staff to ensure support for the review and use of results, explaining that the peer learning exchange process is central to the UN SWAP roll out and will enhance credibility of the report. The EPI Focal Point should also engage the entity Gender Focal Point (typically the main UN-SWAP focal point) in order to garner support and exchange ideas. Once the peer learning exchange has been approved (through senior management approval) the peer learning exchange lead should notify the UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights<sup>7</sup>. The Working Group will support the ‘partnering’ of entities by connecting the EPI Focal Points (or peer learning exchange leads) of each respective entity together – aiming to connect similar types of entities (i.e. based on type of entity; size of budget; size of evaluation office, stage in building an evaluation culture, etc.). The two entities will then communicate directly with each other moving forward.
12. **Step 2:** Once entities have been connected they should: a) identify who will be part of the peer learning exchange teams (there will need to be time allocated by both entities); b) establish a timeline for the peer learning exchange that ensures that the results are provided in a timely way that can be used by participating entities. Ideally, the peer learning exchange will inform the entities final score for the EPI and thus be completed prior to the deadline for UN-SWAP reporting (typically end of January). It is suggested to start the peer learning exchange process at least two months before this deadline.
13. **Step 3:** Hold an initial briefing meeting to brief the respective peer learning exchange team on UN SWAP EPI experience to date, including the self-assessed or meta-evaluation results

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<sup>7</sup> Please contact UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights sub-group on peer learning exchange: [Olivia Roberts](#), [Laurence Reichel](#), and [Sabrina Evangelista](#)

on progress to date against evaluation performance indicator. Online collaboration tools could be utilized to support 'remotely' conducted peer learning exchanges or entities that are close geographically can meet in person. In advance of this meeting, each entity should submit to its peer relevant documentation including: the evaluation reports and TORs to be reviewed; background information (e.g. evaluation policy, entity gender equality policy/strategy, etc.); previous years UN SWAP EPI reports.

14. **Step 4:** Following the [UNEG Technical Note](#) and [UNEG EPI Evaluation Scorecard](#), the review teams will assess the other entities evaluation reports (or a sample of) and TORs conducted during the specified year against the scorecard criteria and make their assessment. It is recommended that all evaluations be reviewed unless an entity has a large number of evaluations (e.g.  $\geq 30$ ), then a sample of 30% that is representative of the type of evaluations conducted during that year is recommended (i.e. 9 reports). However, the entities should agree on a feasible and equivalent number of reports to be reviewed, which will be different for each case.

**\*OPTIONAL:** It is recommended that the review team also review the key policy, strategy and guidance documents in order to provide comprehensive advice on where and how gender considerations could be better integrated and provide relevant recommendations for remedial actions.

15. **Step 6:** Review team drafts a short report (see Annex 1 report template) on observations, including the overall score (in accordance with the EPI technical note: missing, approaching, meeting or exceeding requirements) and alignment with UN SWAP EPI reporting guidance, progress since the last UN SWAP reporting period, and lessons learned for future reporting and action and highlights of good practice identified. UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights members are available for advice and/or to conduct a review of the draft peer learning exchange report.
16. **Step 7:** Hold joint validation meeting to present and validate the draft findings of the peer learning exchange to staff that have been involved in peer learning exchange process, including the Head of the Evaluation Office and the entity Gender Focal Point.
  - Review team's assessment of evaluation reports against the UN SWAP EPI Scorecard
  - Progress to date against evaluation performance indicator
  - Challenges and opportunities
17. **\*OPTIONAL Step 8:** It is recommended that the final peer learning exchange report is posted on the receiving entity website, and/or the internal UNEG member's space for the Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights. The aim of sharing this document is to facilitate learning of other entities from the peer learning exchange process.

## Role of the UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights

18. To support the Peer Learning Exchange process, the UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights will be available for the following:
  - Support contact between entities
  - Provide guidance on the peer learning exchange methodology to be used
  - Review the draft report and provide advice on remedial actions
  - Act as a repository for completed reports
  - Mediate concerning any dispute between the two peer learning exchange parties
  
19. This guidance was developed by the UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights sub-group on the peer learning exchange\* and piloted by UNESCO, UNEP, DPI and OHCHR in Dec 2015 – Jan 2016. The feedback from the pilot was integrated into this final guidance document.

\*For questions please contact UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights sub-group on peer learning exchange: [Laurence Reichel](#), and [Sabrina Evangelista](#)