



# Independent Peer Review of UNFPA's Evaluation Function

The Peer Review was undertaken following a request from the Director of the Evaluation Office. The review process began in January and was completed in June 2023. UNFPA presented the report and management response to the Executive Board in July 2023.

## Acknowledgements

The Peer Review Panel wishes to express its appreciation to the Director of the UNFPA Evaluation Office, Marco Segone, and his staff for their unstinting support to the peer review process. Their professionalism and responsiveness enabled the Panel to complete its work in record time. The participation of monitoring & evaluation staff from the regional and country offices greatly enriched the work of the Panel. The active engagement and interest of the Executive Board, Executive Director and senior management is appreciated, as are the contributions of the various divisions and departments within UNFPA. The Panel learned a great deal from the peer review process, and we trust that UNFPA experienced the process as an enriching one.

## Peer Review Panel

- Lori Bell, Chair of the Panel, UNEG Vice Chair and Head of Evaluation Office, UNHCR
- Gabriela Renteria Flores, Chair, EvalYouth Global Network
- Honourable Kabir Hashim, Member of the Parliament of Sri Lanka and Chair, Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation
- Urs Nagel, Regional Evaluation Adviser, UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office
- Derek Mueller, Deputy Head of Evaluation and Controlling Service, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- Angela Bester, Senior Evaluation Consultant to Panel

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## Acronyms

APRO	Asia Pacific Regional Office
CPD	Country Programme Documents
CPE	Country Programme Evaluations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EQAA	Evaluation Quality Assurance and Assessment
GBV	Gender-based violence
IAHE	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee
QBEP	Quadrennial Budgeted Evaluation Plan
RBM	Results-Based Management
RPE	Regional Programme Evaluations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations Joint Programme on AIDS
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

## Executive Summary

1. The [United Nations Evaluation Group \(UNEG\)](#), a professional network of United Nations (UN) evaluation offices, together with members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) Network on Development Evaluation ([EvalNet](#)), have developed an approach for assessing the extent to which individual evaluation functions within the UN system meet the professional norms and standards adopted by both communities of practice. UNEG/OECD-DAC Peer Reviews have been undertaken at least once for all the larger UN agencies. The Peer Review of the evaluation function of UNFPA was conducted during the first quarter of 2023 and was the first exercise of this type. The Panel, comprised of six evaluation experts, assessed inter alia the extent to which the UNEG norms of independence, credibility and utility are embedded in the organization's evaluation practices. In addition, the [Terms of Reference](#) (TOR) required the Panel to consider: (i) the extent to which the evaluation function in its current form was relevant, given the changes in the internal and external environment of the UNFPA; and (ii) whether the current financial and human resources investments were adequate for an evaluation function serving a mid-sized UN agency working within the humanitarian-development peace nexus.

2. After a thorough desk review, and both face-to-face and virtual interviews with a wide range of stakeholders (both internal and external), the Panel concludes that the evaluation function in UNFPA has continued to strengthen since the approval of the 2019 evaluation policy. The evaluation function is highly valued in UNFPA and by the Executive Board for its contribution to corporate level strategies, enhancing programmes in the areas of three transformative results, and informing country programme documents (CPDs). The Evaluation Office is respected across the organization for its professionalism and its added value in providing evaluative evidence to inform decision-making in UNFPA. Although relatively small, the evaluation function has managed to cultivate a high profile in the UN development system through its commitment to system-wide, inter-agency and joint evaluations. In terms of key areas for improvement, the Panel finds that evaluation of humanitarian action needs more attention and there is potential to strengthen the relevance, quality and learning from decentralized evaluations.

3. The [recommendations](#) of the Panel aim to further enhance the evaluation function and ensure that it adds value to UNFPA in pursuit of the organization's transformational results. The Panel is mindful that these recommendations have cost implications, but these costs should be seen as necessary investments towards strengthening the evaluation function's overall performance. Many of the recommendations are for implementation by the Evaluation Office, while others will require the agreement and support of UNFPA's senior management in headquarters, and in regional and country offices. Some recommendations can be implemented in the short term (next six months) while others will require a longer period to implement. The Panel urges UNFPA to complete the implementation of the recommendations within the period of the current UNFPA strategic plan.

### Utility

4. The Panel concludes that, although the Evaluation Office has prioritised the utility and use of evaluations, this remains an area that needs further strengthening. The Panel found several examples of centralized evaluations contributing to corporate strategy. The use and uptake of joint evaluations is less clear, but indications are that the joint evaluations led by UNFPA are more likely to be used than those led by other agencies. System-wide and inter-agency evaluations form a significant proportion of the centralized evaluation portfolio and are encouraged by the Executive Board. These reports, however, appear not to be promoted or used widely within UNFPA. While the cost of joint and system-wide

evaluations to UNFPA is much lower than agency specific evaluations, value for money needs to be understood in the usefulness and uptake of these evaluations for UNFPA’s policy and programming purposes.

5. The *Strategy to Enhance the Use of Evaluation through Communications and Knowledge Management* (2022-2025), developed to enhance the use of evaluations, is an important addition to the *Evaluation Strategy* (2022-2025). It has a strong focus on the role of the Evaluation Office and while the Strategy considers both products and engagement processes, the emphasis is largely on global evaluations and their individual use. Strategic focus 2 “national capacity and systems strengthening” is weakly developed, again with significant attention to global efforts but an unclear theory of change as to how these efforts (and others) will enable national actors and governments to undertake and use evaluations at country level. The engagement of national actors in, for example, Country Programme Evaluations (CPEs) is not mentioned in the Strategy nor are concrete activities at country level suggested. As such the Strategy is framed more as an Evaluation Office rather than organizational strategy. Finally, given the critical importance of evaluation use, the Panel sees little rationale for having two separate evaluation strategies – and indeed some risk to internal coherence.

6. UNFPA’s senior management have expressed commitment to a learning culture in the organization (UNFPA adaptive management model, for example). The role of the Policy and Strategy Division in following up and promoting the use of evaluation evidence is seen as good practice – as is the adaptive management framework adopted by the organization. However, building and sustaining a learning culture requires a more deliberate engagement on the use of evaluations at all levels of the organization, with senior management following up commitment with action. Beyond self-reporting, there is no mechanism for holding management accountable for evaluation use. Furthermore, a learning organization is one that provides space for innovation. From the evidence available to the Panel, innovation is not explicitly embedded in the organization’s culture – nor in the evaluation workplan. Although there was a formative evaluation of the UNFPA Innovation Initiative in 2017, there is no formal requirement for the evaluation of innovations before scale-up<sup>1</sup>. Finally, the Panel believes that there is scope for the evaluation function itself to be more innovative in its methodologies and approaches, and adaptive to meet growing evidence needs.

7. The selection of planned centralized evaluations cited in the current Quadrennial Budgeted Evaluation Plan (QBEP) is based on a clear set of criteria and strategic consultations with management. It does not, however, sufficiently reflect the strategic shift in UNFPA with respect to an expanded humanitarian response portfolio. The Panel concludes that this is due in part to factors such as a lack of clear triggers for humanitarian evaluations in the Evaluation Policy, the lack of an effective strategy for mobilizing resources for evaluations of humanitarian responses, and the limited humanitarian evaluation capacity in the Evaluation Office. Finally, there are few examples of rapid evaluative reviews and/or evaluation synthesis that are responsive to the needs of senior management for evaluative evidence on an urgent/ad hoc basis.

8. Country Programme Evaluations (CPEs) and Regional Programme Evaluations (RPEs), while rated as good quality in the quality assessments, appear to have a perfunctory use in the design of country and regional programme documents, and have limited strategic value for senior management in headquarters. The trigger of a new programme cycle may be insufficient, and the strategic framing of such exercises warrants further reflection towards enhancing use.

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<sup>1</sup> Although one of the triggers for evaluation in the current policy is a pilot/innovation where an evaluation could support replication and scale up, the Panel did not find any examples of such evaluations.

9. Country-level project evaluations remain on the fringes of the evaluation function. They are not quality assessed, are not visibly part of the global evaluation workplan, and are not published. The Panel was unable to ascertain much about their use beyond the fulfilment of donor requirements. This represents a missed opportunity for organizational learning and is contrary to [UNEG Norms and Standards](#) vis-à-vis transparency (publication).

10. Recommendations:

- Map and strengthen evaluation coverage;
- Improve the utility of CPEs and RPEs; and
- Further strengthen efforts to track evaluation use/uptake within UNFPA (including project evaluations).

## Independence

11. The structural independence of the centralized evaluation function is firmly established. The Evaluation Policy is unambiguous about the independence of the Director of Evaluation<sup>2</sup> and his office, and the institutional arrangements and lines of accountability support this independence. The Panel finds that the Executive Board and UNFPA's senior management play an important role in supporting the behavioural independence of the Evaluation Office.

12. However, the absence of a provision for rotation within the (monitoring and) evaluation job group (Evaluation Office, regional and country offices) is counter to UNFPA's human resources policy, creating barriers to professional development, and a potential risk to behavioural independence. The Panel highlights that rotation is also beneficial in fostering innovation practices and cross-fertilization of knowledge.

13. Furthermore, the lines of accountability of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff in UNFPA regional and country offices do not support organizational and behavioural independence of the decentralized evaluation function. This impediment to the independence of decentralized evaluation is acknowledged within UNFPA. However, measures put in place to strengthen the credibility of decentralized evaluations do not address the core problem, namely that the lines of reporting of staff in the decentralized offices compromise the independence of decentralized evaluations. This problem is particularly acute for the management of CPEs – currently managed by M&E officers and focal points in country offices.

14. Recommendations:

- The job classification and job descriptions of Evaluation Advisers in headquarters and regional offices, as well as of country level M&E staff, should be revisited.
- Strategic CPEs should be managed by the regional office. This will require increasing evaluation capacities at the regional office level.

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<sup>2</sup> A relatively small point, but the next policy could state explicitly who makes the decision on the dismissal of the Director of the Evaluation Office.

## Credibility

15. The Panel concurs that centralized evaluations are of sufficient quality, as indicated by the formal quality assessments and users within UNFPA. The evaluation management expertise in the Evaluation Office, the appointment of suitably qualified service providers and the adequacy of the budgets for centralized evaluations are key factors in ensuring the quality of evaluations. The independence of the Evaluation Office has contributed to the credibility of centralized evaluations. One area of weakness is the lack of inclusiveness of evaluation reference groups – which are rarely or only minimally inclusive of external experts and stakeholders other than the partner UN agency i.e., in the case of joint evaluations.

16. CPEs and RPEs, though formally assessed as being of good quality through the Evaluation Quality Assurance and Assessment (EQAA) system, do not enjoy the same level of credibility as centralized evaluations. While the Evaluation Office still formally clears the TORs and consultant selection for CPEs and RPEs, should other types of decentralized evaluations become more visible, this will become unmanageable for the Evaluation Office with risks to evaluation quality. True decentralization of this quality assurance role to Regional Office level will be needed going forward – again implying increased capacities at that level.

17. The lack of independence of the decentralized evaluation function undermines the credibility of decentralized evaluations. Other key factors affecting credibility are: insufficient CPE budgets which impact negatively on the ability of country offices to attract the best evaluation experts; and country office staff not always having the relevant evaluation management expertise or time available to lead the function. Again, in most instances there is no information about the membership of the evaluation reference groups, thus detracting from the credibility of these evaluations.

18. The tools introduced by the Evaluation Office to enhance the quality and credibility of evaluations have served the evaluation function well. The CPE Guide and Toolkit have undoubtedly improved the quality of CPEs. The EQAA system has served as a valuable tool for measuring the quality of evaluation reports, although consistently high scores and differences with another UN partner ratings suggest a review of the tool and the rigour of the assessments may be useful.

19. Recommendations:

- UNFPA should strengthen evaluation quality assurance and the quality assessment system (expanding coverage to all decentralized evaluations).
- A higher budget threshold for CPEs and RPEs should be established to ensure that funding is sufficient for the conduct of quality evaluations.

## Enabling environment

20. The UNFPA evaluation function operates within a strong enabling environment, which provides a firm foundation for further strengthening of the evaluation function. The Evaluation Policy has been an important framework for giving practical effect to the independence of the Evaluation Office, along with the support of UNFPA leadership and senior management respecting the independence of the Evaluation Office. There are gaps in the Evaluation Policy including, for example, the accountability of regional directors and country representatives in the evaluation function. While the *Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025* sets out a theory of change for strengthening the evaluation function,

the absence of explicit assumptions, a risk assessment and risk mitigation measures is an important limitation.

21. Clarity on the division of labour between the Evaluation Office and other divisions in headquarters has greatly assisted the Evaluation Office carry out its functions independently, yet collaboratively. The clear distinction between the evaluation and audit functions has been important in the UNFPA context, as evaluation previously formed part of the audit function. However, there are unexplored opportunities for synergy between the two functions, for example, to strengthen accountability for evaluation use and compliance with evaluation processes. The division of labour between the Evaluation Office, and the Policy and Strategy Division on centralized evaluations is clear, and collaboration between these two offices has been important vis-à-vis policy development, implementation, and evaluation. However, the division of labour between these two offices is unclear in the case of the decentralized evaluation function, as both provide technical support and guidance to decentralized offices.

22. Evaluation capacities in decentralized offices are not adequate for an effective decentralized evaluation function. Regional M&E Advisers have many other responsibilities, including planning, which take up a significant proportion of their time. Country office M&E staff are primarily engaged in monitoring and reporting, and in the case M&E focal points, evaluation is not their primary area of expertise. The reporting lines of staff in decentralized offices also compromise the independence and credibility of decentralized evaluations. The ring-fencing of funding for CPEs and RPEs has, to some extent, created an enabling environment for decentralized evaluations. However, the size of budgets ring-fenced has generally been insufficient for contracting suitably skilled evaluators, thus undermining the quality and usefulness of decentralized evaluations.

23. The Evaluation Office is heavily invested in building global partnerships for advocacy and influential evaluation, as demonstrated by the time dedicated to these global partnerships. Relatively less attention has been given at regional and country level by UNFPA management to building partnerships at country level to strengthen capacities for country-led evaluations. The theory of change could be clearer in how these global partnerships strengthen capacity at the country level.

24. Senior management sets the tone from the top, promoting a culture of learning and adaptive management in UNFPA. There is good corporate guidance. The Panel observes that this is a journey in progress with full socialization in the organization still to be achieved.

25. The organizational budget dedicated to the centralized evaluation function, given current coverage targets, is adequate. However, the new or revised evaluation policy will need to include coverage targets for humanitarian evaluations, which will require additional human and financial resources. Improving the quality and use of decentralized evaluations commissioned by regional and country offices will also require additional financial and human resources.

26. Recommendations:

- Clearer coverage targets, triggers and standard costs for different types of evaluations (including humanitarian) should be established.
- Institutional and human resource capacities for humanitarian evaluations should be strengthened.
- Coordination and synergies between the evaluation function and the audit function should be strengthened.

- The theory of change and UNFPA’s strategy for national evaluation capacity development and system strengthening needs to be developed and discussed by senior management to ensure that the next policy and strategy more fully reflects organizational commitment and accountabilities at all levels for its implementation.

## **Good practices**

27. The Panel identified good practices in UNFPA that it commends to other evaluation functions in the UN development system, in the spirit of mutual learning that underpins UNEG peer reviews.

### ***Role of headquarters divisions in building a culture of evaluation and learning***

28. In UNFPA, the link and collaboration between the evaluation function and the Policy and Strategy Division is embedded in the functions of the division and the Evaluation Policy. The Policy and Strategy Division is responsible for promoting the use of evaluations for managing and strengthening organizational performance. The Panel was struck by the strong collaboration and synergies between the Evaluation Office and the Policy and Strategy Division. Also, the quarterly engagement between the Evaluation Office and the Programmes Division is an effective means of infusing evaluative information and thinking into discussions on programmes, and for the Evaluation Office in turn to identify potential issues for future evaluations. In support of the results-based management (RBM) system, the UNFPAs Adaptive Management Framework is highly commendable.

### ***Ring-fencing funds for country-level evaluations***

29. The inevitable budgetary pressures facing the decentralized offices of UN agencies, means decentralized evaluation budgets are susceptible to being reduced or redirected to other activities deemed to be a higher priority. The ring-fencing of budgets for decentralized evaluations is a way of ensuring a minimum level funding for decentralized evaluations. While the Panel notes that the amounts allocated for decentralized evaluations may not have been adequate in all instances, the practice of ring-fencing of budgets provides at least a firm minimum budget allocation that can be topped up.

### ***High quality products for communication and engagement***

30. The Evaluation Office’s documents/products prepared for communication and engagement are high quality and visually appealing. The evaluation brief and presentation that accompany the evaluation report as part of the communications package, are highly readable and accessible to persons not familiar with technical aspects of UNFPA’s work.

### ***Engagement of youth***

31. UNFPA’s engagement of youth in evaluations is highly commendable. The inclusion of young, emerging evaluators in CPEs is an important vehicle for developing national evaluation capacities, as it provides young evaluators with learning experiences that might otherwise not be available to them. It also makes for more diverse evaluation teams that benefit from the perspectives of young people. The 2021 evaluation of UNFPA’s support to adolescents and youth was noteworthy/innovative in that it incorporated youth engagement at all levels of the evaluation process – as key informants, young evaluators, advisors, and decision-makers.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 About the Peer Review

1. This Peer Review of the evaluation function of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) was conducted under the provisions of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN Organizations. The Peer Review was conducted at the request of UNFPA, fulfilling a commitment in the 2019 Evaluation Policy for an independent review of the performance of the policy within five years. This is the first UNEG-OECD DAC peer review of UNFPA's evaluation function and the first review of the 2019 Evaluation Policy.

2. The Peer Review Panel, established in accordance with UNEG provisions, comprised:

- Lori Bell, Chair of the Panel, UNEG vice-Chair and Head of Evaluation Office, UNHCR
- Gabriela Renteria Flores, Chair, EvalYouth Global Network
- Honourable Kabir Hashim, Member of the Parliament of Sri Lanka and Chair, Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation
- Urs Nagel, Regional Evaluation Adviser, UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office
- Derek Mueller, Deputy Head of Evaluation and Controlling Service, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Angela Bester was the Senior Evaluation Consultant to the Panel.

3. Marco Segone, Director of UNFPA's Evaluation Office, and his team facilitated the Panel's access to documents and meetings with stakeholders. The Panel greatly appreciated their efficiency in supporting the peer review process. The Panel is grateful to all persons it met during the review, for their frank contributions and suggestions for strengthening the evaluation function in UNFPA.

4. The views expressed in this report are those of the members of the independent Peer Review Panel in their individual capacities.

## 1.2 Purpose and scope

5. As set out in the TOR ([Annex 1](#)), the main purpose of the UNFPA Peer Review is to strengthen the UNFPA evaluation function so it contributes effectively to organizational decision-making, learning, and accountability for results and programme effectiveness. It is undertaken in the context of a planned evaluation policy update scheduled for the second half of 2023.

6. The Peer Review assessed the evaluation function – centralized and decentralized – to determine whether it is sufficiently independent, credible and used for learning and accountability purposes. In addition to an assessment against the UNEG Norms and Standards, the Peer Review considered the following two central questions, as set out in the TOR:

- i. the extent to which the evaluation function was still relevant to the changes in the external environment and within UNFPA; and
- ii. (ii) whether the current investment in terms of financial and human resources were adequate for an evaluation function serving a mid-size UN agency working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus<sup>3</sup>.

7. The review considered the on-going reforms within UNFPA, notably the efforts to achieve the three transformative results articulated in the agency's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 - Outcome 1: the reduction in unmet family planning needs has accelerated; Outcome 2: the reduction of preventable maternal deaths has accelerated; and Outcome 3: the reduction in gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices has accelerated. The Panel also considered important shifts in UNFPA, namely, its increasing engagement in humanitarian response; an increasing proportion of overall global earmarked funding; and increasing organizational attention to diversity and inclusion and addressing the furthest behind first.

8. The scope of the review covered the entire evaluation function – centralized and decentralized<sup>4</sup>, and support to strengthening national evaluation capacity development. The review covered the period starting from 2019, which coincides with the approval of the current 2019 Evaluation Policy.

9. The primary audience and users for the review are the Evaluation Office, Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Advisers in Regional Offices, Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points in country offices, UNFPA Senior Management, other oversight actors in UNFPA and the Executive Board. The final report is published on the websites of the UNFPA Evaluation Office and UNEG to inform external stakeholders and the broader evaluation community of the main findings and conclusions of the review. It is accompanied by UNFPA's management response to its recommendations.

### 1.3 Approach, Process and Limitations

10. The review followed the process set out in the *2022 UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function in UN Organizations*. The UNEG Peer Review Working Group is the custodian of the peer review modality and provides oversight to ensure that each peer review follows good international evaluation practice. The Panel was formed in November/December 2022 and the senior evaluation consultant appointed in December 2022. The TOR were also finalized in this period ([Annex 1](#)). The staff of the centralized and decentralized evaluation function completed a self-assessment<sup>5</sup> against the UNEG Norms and Standards in December 2022. The self-assessment tool was developed by UNEG and is designed to provide a snapshot of the level of maturity of the evaluation function.

11. Between December 2022 and January 2023, the evaluation consultant conducted a review of documents provided by the Evaluation Office. The document review and the self-assessment informed

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.chabertlin.org/en/publications/triple-nexus-to-go-2/>

<sup>4</sup> Centralized refers to evaluations commissioned by the independent evaluation office (global strategic evaluations), while decentralized refers to other types of evaluations commissioned by management.

<sup>5</sup> The UNEG Maturity Matrix for Peer Review operationalizes the UNEG Norms and Standards into an assessment rubric that covers 52 assessment factors across 12 norms. <http://blogs.unevaluation.org/document/detail/3133>.

the preliminary assessment report, issued in January 2023, which gave the Panel an overview of the UNFPA evaluation function and issues for further exploration.

12. The Panel undertook a data collection mission in New York, from 29 January to 4 February 2023. Coinciding with the UNFPA global evaluation retreat, the mission gave Panel members the opportunity to meet face-to-face with staff from the decentralized evaluation function. The Panel also met with members of the UNFPA Executive Board, senior management, and staff of divisions in UNFPA and the Evaluation Office. Staff attending the UNFPA global evaluation retreat participated in a world café exercise conducted by the Panel which provided important insights into the functioning of the entire evaluation function. Following the mission, the Panel interviewed stakeholders it could not meet during the mission, and a sample of external team leaders from a sample of evaluations the Panel had assessed. The list of persons interviewed is available in [Annex 2](#). The list of documents reviewed is available in [Annex 3](#).

13. The Panel shared the draft Panel report with the Evaluation Office for comment in April 2023, and took these comments into consideration, as appropriate, in finalizing the report. The Panel also held a peer exchange with evaluation staff to create an additional learning opportunity. In May 2023, the Panel presented the draft report to the UNFPA senior management and, at the time of the final Peer Review Report, UNFPA management was formulating the management response and preparing to discuss it with their Executive Board.

14. The main limitation of the review was the compressed timeline<sup>6</sup>. The Panel was required to review a large volume of documents and the preliminary assessment report had to be completed prior to the New York mission. Not all documents could be reviewed in detail prior to the mission. The Panel met most of the stakeholders requested – although responses to requests for interviews to the evaluation tracer-studies were quite limited.

15. Finally, while a number of Peer Reviews have been done virtually over the past three years, in response to travel constraints related to COVID-19, the UNFPA Panel members believe that a face-to-face mission had considerable added value over a purely remote approach, as it allowed for a higher quality interaction with stakeholders and a better whole-of-team deliverable from the Panel.

## 1.4 Structure of the report

16. The report first sets out the UNFPA institutional context within which the evaluation function operates. This is followed by discussion of the main features of the UNFPA evaluation function – centralized and decentralized. The subsequent sections discuss the findings of the Panel in its assessment of the UNFPA evaluation function in terms of the criteria of independence, credibility, and utility. The Panel also reports on findings on its assessment of roles and responsibilities, the enabling environment for the evaluation, the evaluation function’s partnerships and contribution to national evaluation capacity development. The final section of the report presents the Panel’s conclusions and makes recommendations for UNFPA’s consideration.

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<sup>6</sup> As indicated in UNEG Peer Review guidelines, the normal timeline from inception to final report is 10 months to 1 year.

## 2. UNFPA institutional context

### 2.1 UNFPA at a glance

#### Box 1: Snapshot of UNFPA

**Mission and mandate:** UNFPA, established in 1969, is the UN sexual and reproductive health agency. Its mission is to ‘...deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth safe and every young person’s potential fulfilled.’ It was established in the same year that the UN General Assembly declared, “parents have exclusive right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children”.

**Governance:** An Executive Board created by General Assembly resolution 48/162 of December 1993, governs UNFPA. The Executive Board comprises representatives of 36 countries on a rotating basis and is responsible for ensuring that UNFPA’s activities and operational strategies are consistent with the overall policy guidance set out by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The Executive Board meets three times a year to approve UNFPA programmes, including country programmes, and administrative and financial plans and budgets; examine new programme initiatives; and submit an annual report to ECOSOC that may include recommendations for improving field-level coordination. The Board approves the Evaluation Policy and is the custodian of the policy. The Board approves the QBEP, takes formal decisions on the annual performance report on the evaluation function. The Board also verbally comments on reports and management responses of centralized evaluations. The Board receives Country Programme Evaluation reports and costed evaluation plans as part of the package of documents for commenting on the draft Country Programme Document.<sup>7</sup>

**Organization:** UNFPA is headquartered in New York. It has six regional offices: Arab States, Asia & Pacific, East & Southern Africa, Eastern Europe & Central Asia, Latin America & the Caribbean, and West & Central Africa, and sub-regional offices in Kingston and Suva. UNFPA operates in over 150 countries. As at 2021, the agency had a staff complement of 3149 globally<sup>8</sup>. Several recent relevant organizational changes include: In 2019, in response to a corporate [evaluation of UNFPA's capacity in humanitarian action](#), UNFPA elevated its Humanitarian and Fragile Contexts Branch to a fully-fledged Humanitarian Response Department; and in 2013, following an OIOS review, the independent Evaluation Office was established. Prior to this, responsibility for conducting corporate evaluations was with the Division of Oversight Services.

**Activities:** UNFPA supports reproductive health care for women and youth; health of pregnant women; access to modern contraceptives; training of health workers to help ensure skilled attendants supervise childbirths; prevention of GBV; abandonment of female genital mutilation; prevention of teenage pregnancies; and efforts to end child marriage. UNFPA also supports humanitarian actions – delivering safe birth supplies, dignity kits and other life-saving materials to survivors of conflict and natural disasters. The agency supports countries in population censuses, data collection and analysis to inform development planning, and contributes to advancing the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) agenda and the achievement of SDGs, particularly those that address the rights of women and girls.

**Finance:** The UNFPA total budget has grown steadily in recent years, reaching of US\$ 1.5 billion in 2021. Of this, one-third comes from Regular Resources, while two-thirds is represented by Other Resources through voluntary or earmarked contributions from governments and private sector.

<sup>7</sup> Thematic (centralized) evaluations are presented at the January session, while the annual report on the evaluation function and outstanding thematic evaluations are presented at the June session. The third session in September is preserved for other board matters, and CPDs (with accompanying CPEs) are discussed at any of the Executive Board’s three sessions.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Chief Executives Board, Human Resources database, accessed 23 March 2023 <https://unsceb.org/hr-organization>.

## 2.2 UNFPA strategy

17. The period covered by the Peer Review straddles two strategic plans of UNFPA. The [Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#) sets out three transformative results UNFPA aimed to achieve by 2030, namely: (i) *ending unmet need for family planning*; (ii) *ending preventable maternal death*; and (iii) *ending GBV and harmful practices*. The ‘bullseye’ goal was to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health, realize reproductive rights, and reduce child mortality to access progress on the International Conference on People and Development (ICPD) agenda<sup>9</sup>. The Strategy focused on women and young people, especially adolescent girls, making use of UNFPA’s population expertise and evidence, and delivering in both development and humanitarian settings. This strategic plan was to be the first in a cycle of three plans towards the 2030 Agenda.

18. The [UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025](#) builds on the previous Strategic Plan and retains the three transformative results. It seeks to accelerate action which hereto has been insufficient for the achievement of the transformative results. The Plan emphasizes the centrality of data to ensuring actions taken across the three transformative results are evidence-informed, signalling the importance of the evaluation function in generating evidence to inform decisions.

19. The 2022-2025 Strategic Plan was developed against the background of major crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and escalating conflicts in various parts of the world. It sets out key strategic shifts needed within UNFPA, including: a focus on “populations left behind”; emphasizing “reaching the furthest behind first”; expanding the humanitarian response capacity to better safeguard the lives of women and youth, especially adolescent girls; mainstreaming resilience, prevention, preparedness and early action, emphasizing complementarity between humanitarian, development and peace-responsive interventions; and shifting the focus of funding the ICPD agenda to financing the ICPD agenda<sup>10</sup>.

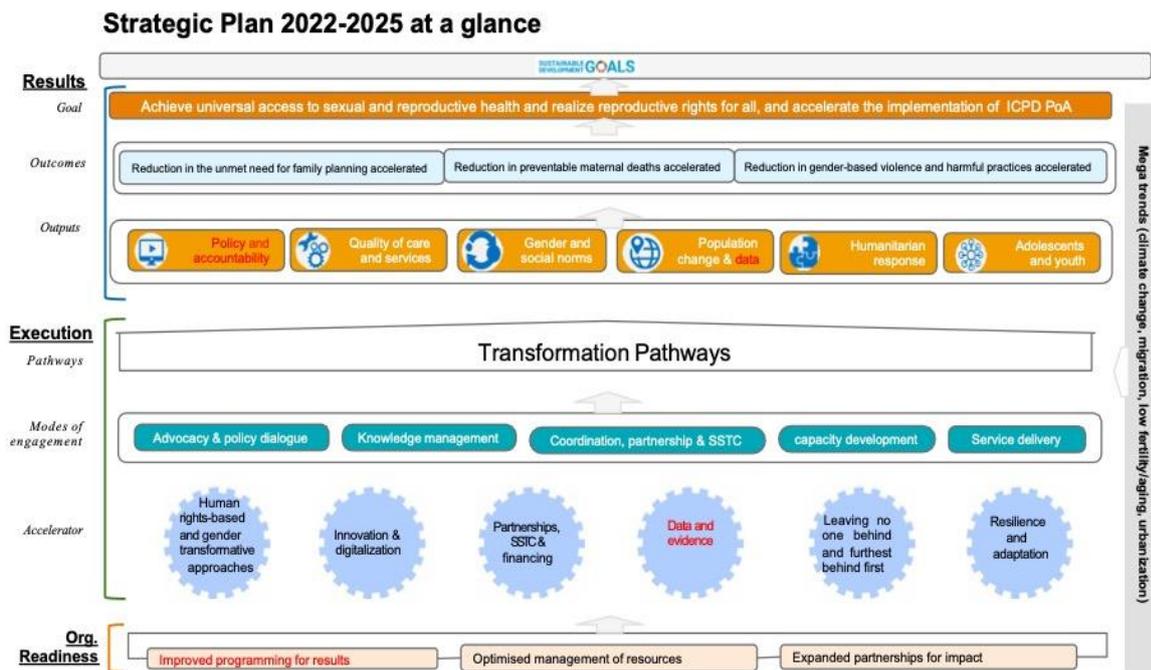
20. To contribute to the three transformative outcomes, UNFPA has identified six interconnected outputs: (i) policy and accountability; (ii) quality of care and services; (iii) gender and social norms (iv) population change and data; (v) humanitarian action; and (vi) adolescents and youth. The Strategy identifies six accelerators for supporting achievement of the outputs: (i) human rights-based and gender transformative approaches; (ii) innovation and digitalization; (iii) partnerships, south-south & triangular cooperation and financing; (iv) data and evidence; (v) leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first; and (vi) resilience and adaptation, complementarity development, humanitarian and peace-responsive efforts. Figure 1 gives a diagrammatic overview of the Strategic Plan.

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<sup>9</sup> UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025, p.5.

Figure 1: Overview of UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025



Source: Presentation by Director, Evaluation Office, 13 January 2023

21. The UNFPA Strategic Plan identifies the number of priorities for monitoring and evaluation, with an emphasis on<sup>11</sup> monitoring to track progress, including monitoring outcome-level, and impact-level indicators to measure progress towards achieving the three transformative results. As these indicators are shared with other UN organizations, the Strategic Plan places emphasis on joint M&E approaches. Strengthening capacities of UNFPA staff and supporting joint M&E of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF) at country level are also a priority. Real-time monitoring to provide data for decision-making, learning and adaptability is another priority. There is one priority that explicitly focuses on evaluation. A summative evaluation of the Strategic Plan is required and is expected to draw on thematic evaluations, CPEs, internal assessments, and annual reviews.

22. The Strategic Plan expresses commitment to organizational learning. Regarding evaluation, the Plan states that UNFPA will pursue evaluation designs that maximize organizational learning and strengthens the agency’s capacity in human rights-based, gender-responsive and disability inclusive evaluations<sup>12</sup>. Related to this is the commitment to strengthening RBM in UNFPA with an emphasis on learning and adaptive management, as well as collective accountability for results.

### 2.3 UNFPA financial resources

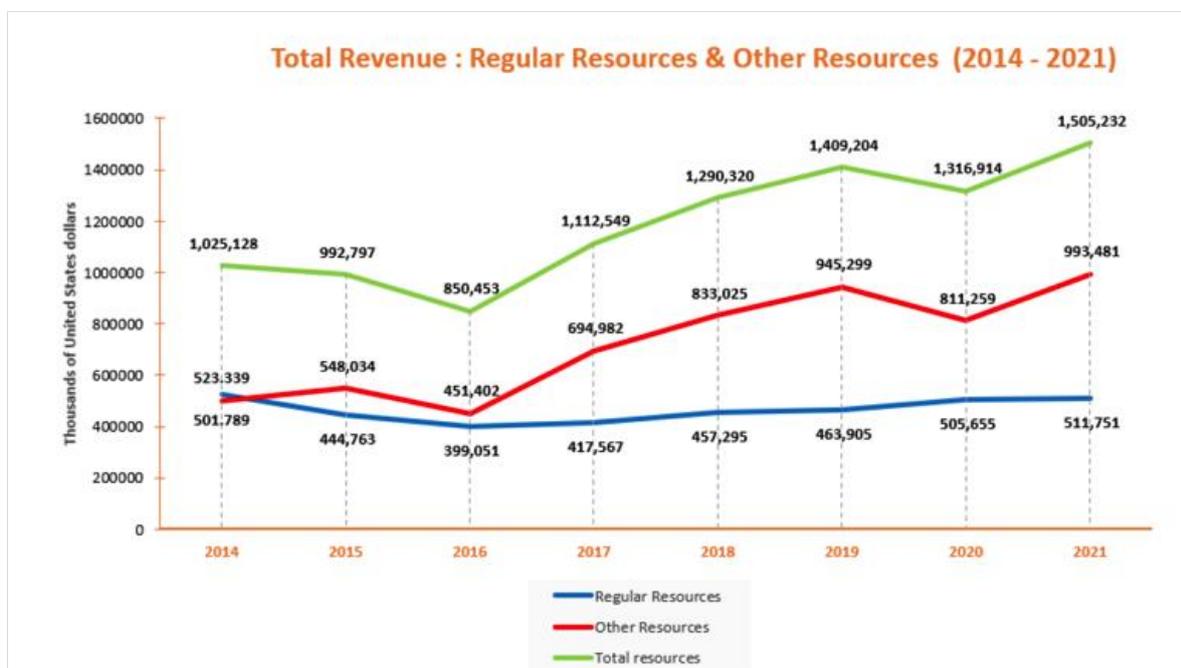
23. Relative to other programmes and funds such as UNDP and UNICEF, UNFPA is small in terms of its financial resources. Its Regular Resources budget has remained consistent since 2014, at about US\$500 million per annum (Figure 2). Since 2017, there has been an increase in the size of UNFPA’s overall budget, driven by the increase in Other Resources, largely raised for humanitarian operations. The total budget for UNFPA in 2021 was the highest in since its establishment, and UNFPA is

<sup>11</sup> UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025, p.23-24.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.20.

beginning to resemble a medium-sized agency in terms of its budget. This increase in the budget, and trend towards earmarked donor funds, has implications for the evaluation function.

Figure 2: UNFPA Revenue 2014-2021



Source: Review of management and administration in the UNFPA. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit. 2022

### 3. UNFPA's Evaluation Function

#### 3.1 Evolution and background

24. The first Evaluation Policy (2009) sought to: (a) increase the use of results in decision-making by management; (b) improve programme effectiveness; (c) strengthen national evaluation capacity; (d) contribute to the systematic utilization of evaluation findings; and (e) support organizational learning.

25. The evaluation function under the 2009 Evaluation Policy was not fully independent. Rather, overall responsibility and control were vested in the Executive Director. The Evaluation Committee, chaired by the Executive Director, approved the evaluation plans, and monitored implementation of plans, follow-up on recommendations, and the use of evaluation findings. The Programme Division coordinated evaluation planning and was responsible for fostering evaluation professionalism, and coordination of joint evaluations. The Evaluation Branch within the Division of Oversight Services was responsible for conducting centralized evaluations and providing oversight of all evaluations, including monitoring and assessing the quality of evaluations. Country offices were responsible for conducting country-level evaluations within their programme framework. Regional offices were responsible for ensuring evaluations were undertaken within the regional programmatic framework; ensuring their quality and use; and providing technical advice on M&E to country offices. Regional offices reported annually to the Executive Committee on the quality of evaluations within the region.

26. The revised Evaluation Policy (2013) followed an independent review of the 2009 Evaluation Policy by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), at the request of the Executive Director. The most significant change in the 2013 Evaluation Policy related to the independence of the evaluation

function, through the establishment of the Evaluation Office. The Division of Oversight was split into the Evaluation Office and the Office of Audit and Investigation Services. The Evaluation Office was made the custodian of the UNFPA evaluation function, reporting functionally to the Executive Board, and reporting administratively to the Executive Director. The Evaluation Office was responsible for presenting the biennial budgeted evaluation plan to the Executive Board for approval. The 2013 Evaluation Policy sets out the functions of the Evaluation Office in detail, while the role of the Programmes Division is narrower than in the 2009 policy, responsible for coordination of management responses, monitoring and reporting on follow-up action, and promoting a culture of RBM.

### 3.2 Previous assessments

27. There were two assessments of the 2013 Evaluation Policy, the recommendations of which were taken into consideration in the development of the 2019 Evaluation Policy.

#### **Independent External Strategic Review of the Evaluation Function (2018)**

28. The *Independent External Strategic Review of the Evaluation Function*<sup>13</sup>, commissioned by the Evaluation Office, found that the 2013 Evaluation Policy was fundamentally sound but required updating to take into consideration the changes in the internal and external context. Key findings included:

- a. *Organizational and behavioural independence* were safeguarded, but improvements were needed in the Evaluation Office's accountability reporting, and its relationships with UNFPA management, and regional and country offices.
- b. *Credibility, performance, and value*: Corporate and decentralized evaluation processes were found to be transparent and inclusive to a large extent, and the quality assurance system contributed to credible evaluations. However, the review did not assess in detail the consistency in practising these norms across the evaluation function. It considered the performance of the evaluation function as reasonable and commendable.
- c. *Utility and quality of evaluations*: While the evaluation function pays due regard to utility, communication effectiveness, including effectiveness of written reports, was identified as an area for improvement, and the EQAA system could be improved.

29. Key recommendations from the evaluation were:

- a. The Evaluation Policy should be updated to reflect changes in the context and alignment with the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021.
- b. Improving reports to the Executive Board – emphasis on strategic information to inform decision-making.
- c. Reframing evaluation: Consider how evaluation also contributes directly to mission-related outcomes for rights holders, so that evaluation is not only about accountability, decision-making and learning.

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<sup>13</sup> Davies, I. 2018. Independent External Strategic Review of the Evaluation Function of UNFPA, May 2018. The 2013 Evaluation Policy stipulated that the policy be reviewed at regular intervals and revised if necessary.

- d. Decentralized evaluation: Evaluation Office as custodian of the evaluation function should progressively address the nature and organization of evaluation at country level.
- e. Quality: Improve quality of evaluation reports
- f. Improve the EQAA system to differentiate evaluations of country programmes vs. broad, thematic institutional evaluations; decentralize quality control of TOR for consultants to regional offices. Improve criteria in quality assessment, especially those relating to design and methodology, and structure and quality of reporting.

## MOPAN (2019)

30. The Multilateral Organisations Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) conducted an assessment of UNFPA in 2017/2018<sup>14</sup> which found that the evaluation function had become increasingly robust, and that UNFPA had built on this to strengthen lesson learning and knowledge management functions. It also found that the evaluation function was operationally independent of other management functions; demonstrated commitment to joint and system-wide evaluations; used syntheses of evaluations to learn lessons, feed into UNFPA Strategic Plans and scale up programmes; and that systems were in place to track management responses. It identified coverage as an area for improvement, noting the evaluation resources had not reached the 3 per cent target, and that not all planned evaluations were carried out. As can be seen from Table 1, the ratings for UNFPA were positive, ranging from highly satisfactory to satisfactory.

**Table 1: Summary of ratings for Key Performance Indicator 8**

<b>KPI 8: The organisation applies evidence-based planning and programming</b>	
<b>Item</b>	<b>MOPAN score</b>
8.1 Evaluation function	Highly satisfactory
8.2 Evaluation coverage	Satisfactory
8.3 Evaluation quality	Highly satisfactory
8.4 Evidence-based design	Satisfactory
8.5 Poor performance tracked	Highly satisfactory
8.6 Follow-up systems	Highly satisfactory
8.7 Uptake of lessons	Satisfactory

Source: MOPAN 2019

### 3.3. Evaluation Policy 2019

31. The 2019 Evaluation Policy took on board the recommendations made by the Independent External Review, including alignment with the internal and external changes in context. The Policy reflects the significant changes in the environment: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the use of rigorous, timely evaluative evidence to support progress on the sustainable development goals (SDGs); the alignment of the evaluation policy with the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and supporting the mission of UNFPA; greater emphasis on system-wide and joint evaluations in alignment with the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) call for UN coherence; and attention to national evaluation capacity development as requested by the UN General Assembly. The 2019

<sup>14</sup> MOPAN United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Performance Assessment 2017-2018, May 2019.

Evaluation Policy also reflects the revised 2016 UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation. The Policy places strong emphasis on the use of evaluations and sets parameters for the allocation of financial resources for the evaluation function: minimum 1.4 per cent to maximum 3 per cent of total programme expenditure<sup>15</sup>.

32. The Evaluation Policy sets out clearly three main purposes of evaluation, namely, accountability, evidence-based decision-making, and contribution to learning. It defines evaluation (using UNEG definition) and distinguishes evaluation from other oversight activities of audit and investigation, citing the UNFPA Oversight Policy (DP/FPA/2015/2), though it does not set out explicitly the differences between the two disciplines. Referring to the scope of evaluations, the Policy stipulates that evaluations cover activities funded from regular and other resources.

33. The Policy identifies two main categories of evaluations namely, centralized evaluations and decentralized evaluations, the differences between which are illustrated in [Table 2](#). The Panel understands that most decentralized evaluations are those conducted or commissioned by Regional Offices and country offices. The Panel did not see any reports on decentralized evaluations commissioned and managed by other business units in UNFPA headquarters, but understands that these are conducted from time-to-time. For example, an evaluation commissioned and managed by the Humanitarian Response Department is currently underway. The Panel notes that, while the definition of decentralized evaluations in the Evaluation Policy includes global programme evaluations managed by headquarters business units, the *Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025* and the annual performance reports of the evaluation function limit decentralized evaluations to those managed by Regional and country offices.

**Table 2: Comparison of centralized and decentralized evaluations**

	<b>Centralized evaluations</b>	<b>Decentralized evaluations</b>
Who commissions and manages the evaluation	Evaluation Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regional Office – RPEs</li> <li>Country Office – CPEs and country-level project evaluations</li> <li>Business units at headquarters may also commission and manage evaluation of the unit/division programmes</li> <li>Evaluation Office approves TOR</li> </ul>
Who conducts the evaluation	External independent evaluators, typically companies. Evaluation Office may also conduct evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External evaluators</li> <li>Evaluation pre-qualifies external evaluators for CPEs</li> </ul>
Types of evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional, global programme, thematic</li> <li>Joint evaluations (typically with one other UN agency)</li> <li>System-wide evaluations</li> <li>Evaluability assessments and baseline studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Country Programme Evaluations</li> <li>Country-level project evaluations</li> <li>Evaluations of Regional Intervention Action Plans</li> <li>Evaluations of global programmes</li> </ul>
Focus of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess issues of corporate strategic significance that contribute to achievement of strategic goals</li> <li>Organization-wide issues, for example, RBM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UNFPA’s support to the country or region and progress towards expected outputs and outcomes set out in Country Programme Document or Regional Interventions Action Plan</li> </ul>

<sup>15</sup> UNFPA Evaluation Policy 2019, p. 31.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least one evaluation focused on each of the three Strategic Outcomes of UNFPA during the implementation of the Strategic Plan's four-year cycle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serve as inputs to design of next country programme or Regional Interventions Action Plan</li> </ul>
Presentation of evaluation reports and management responses	<p>Evaluations and management responses presented to Executive Board</p> <p>In case of joint programmes, reports and management responses are presented to the Joint Steering Committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Country Programme Evaluation reports accompany draft Country Programme Document submitted to Executive Board, excludes management response</li> <li>Regional evaluations and management responses presented to UNFPA Senior Management</li> </ul>

Source: Peer Review Panel's construction based on documents reviewed

34. The Policy sets out criteria, in order of priority, to guide the selection of centralized and decentralized evaluations (also see section 3.6 of the Panel's report). The criteria are the same as those reflected in the 2013 Evaluation Policy. The selection process is described in the QBEP, and appears, both on paper and in practice, to be consultative.

35. The roles and responsibilities set out in the Policy do not differ greatly the 2013 Evaluation Policy, except to reflect the Oversight Policy of 2015 whereby the evaluation function was separated from oversight and audit.

36. A significant improvement of the 2019 Evaluation Policy is that it sets out in detail (much better than the 2013 Evaluation Policy) the evaluation procedures, quality assurance and quality assessment, the enhancing the use of evaluations, system-wide evaluations and partnerships, and national evaluation capacity development. It also commits UNFPA to commission an independent review of the policy's performance within five years.

### 3.4 Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025

37. The Evaluation Office developed the *Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025* to give practical effect to the Evaluation Policy within the timeframe of the UNFPA Strategic Plan. The Strategy aims to make the evaluation function more robust and responsive to the organization's need for quality evidence in support of achieving the three transformative results of the Strategic Plan. It aims to better position the evaluation function and create coherence of evaluation-related activities within UNFPA. Ultimately, it aims to nurture an organizational culture that seeks and learns from evaluative evidence and applies adaptive or agile management principles. The Evaluation Strategy is complemented by the UNFPA's [Adaptive Management](#) Model, a framework published in 2022.

38. The Evaluation Strategy identifies seven priorities and key actions to strengthen the evaluation operations, establish a common vision on intended outcomes, and serve as the basis for assessing and adjusting the evaluation function in the context of a rapidly changing environment. The Panel's report assesses how the evaluation function has implemented these priorities and the main areas of work outlined in the Evaluation Strategy.

## Box 2: Key priorities of UNFPA Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025

### Priorities

1. *Demand-driven evaluation processes and products*: Being responsive to needs of stakeholders to enhance use and utility of evaluations, and at same time ensure accountability. Involves consultative processes in evaluation planning ([QBEP](#)).
2. *Diversification and innovation of evaluation processes and products*: Evaluation processes (methodologies and approaches) generate value, perhaps more than the report itself. Need for innovative approaches to meet needs and requirements of diverse stakeholders and in varying contexts.
3. *Quality and credibility of evaluations*: Quality of evaluations goes beyond complying with UNEG norms and standards for quality and includes user satisfaction and contribution of evaluation to UNFPA's efficiency and effectiveness.
4. *Enhanced use and utility of evaluations*: Adoption of a strategic approach to communication and knowledge management to facilitate enhanced use of evaluations. Includes streamlining and enhancing knowledge platforms to provide targeted evaluative information for decision-making, accountability and learning, expanding outreach at regional and country levels.
5. *Human rights approach to evaluation, especially gender, youth, social and environmental standards and disability inclusion*: Leveraging internal and UN frameworks e.g., UN SWAP, UN and UNFPA Disability Inclusion Strategy, participatory evaluation approaches to ensure LNOB and reaching the furthest behind first.
6. *Evaluation capacity development*: Strengthening individual and institutional capacities, while enhancing culture of evaluation and enabling environment for evaluation.
7. *Global evaluation advocacy and partnerships to accelerate influential evaluation at national level*: Co-partnering with EvalYouth Global Network, Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation as co-leaders on Decade of Evaluation for Action.

### Theory of change

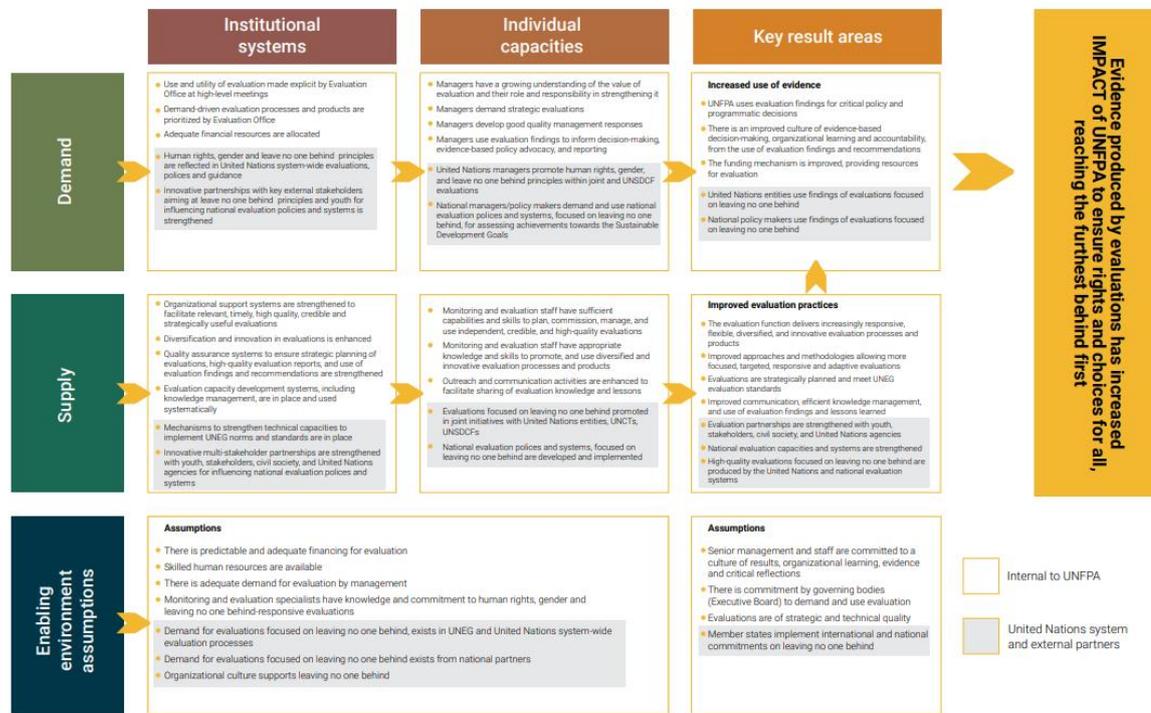
39. The Evaluation Strategy includes a theory of change (TOC), which details how the evaluation function will be made more robust, innovate, and responsive to change and challenging contexts. The TOC proposes a system-wide approach to strengthening institutional and individual capacities, addressing both demand (demand-driven evaluation processes and products, strengthening use and utility of evaluations) and supply (technical capacities of evaluators and evaluation managers, quality assurance and quality assessment systems) for evaluation. Two key results areas are increased use of evidence and improved evaluation practices.

40. Importantly, the TOC explicitly identifies the assumptions in the enabling environment, including the availability of adequate finance, skilled human resources, commitment of senior management to a culture of results, organizational learning and use of evaluative evidence, and commitment by governing bodies, notably, the Executive Board, to demand and use evaluation results. One weakness of the TOC is that it does not include an assessment of the risks to these assumptions and measures to mitigate these risks. Some of the assumptions are so important that they should be addressed directly in the TOC (e.g. adequate financing for evaluation). A second weakness is that the TOC is not presented in the more classical set of if/then statements.

41. For reasons unclear to the Panel, there is a separate and specific strategy and TOC for enhancing evaluation use. Also, the pillar on national evaluation capacities and systems strengthening is weakly

developed. For example, the link between National Evaluation Capacity Development and the achievement of the SDGs appears insufficient. If UNFPA truly wishes to strengthen national capacity for evaluation, efforts beyond those of the Evaluation Office are needed on a global level.

**Figure 3: Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025 Theory of Change**



Source: UNFPA Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025

### Monitoring and evaluation framework

42. The Evaluation Strategy includes an M&E framework that sets out the outcomes, outputs, indicators, and targets to be achieved by over the implementation period. The framework identifies four areas: effective centralized evaluation system; effective decentralized evaluation systems; UN coherence; and national evaluation capacity development within which results are to be achieved. Progress against targets is to be presented in the Annual Report submitted to the Executive Board and senior management.

43. The framework has a more comprehensive list of indicators than those reported on since 2019 and makes a clear distinction between performance indicators for centralized and decentralized evaluations. For example, there are indicators for measuring the implementation rate and quality of centralized evaluations, which have not been reflected in annual reporting. The 2022 Annual Report was not yet available for the Panel to assess the reporting against the targets in the strategy.

### 3.5 Strategy to enhance the use of evaluations through communications and knowledge management (2022-2025)

44. The Evaluation Office has developed a separate strategy to enhance the use of evaluations through communications and knowledge management. The Strategy has been developed from the

perspective of centralized evaluations but, according to the document, the principles also apply to decentralized evaluations. The Strategy is organized around the following areas:

- The outcomes to be achieved;
- The target audience;
- The tailored communication plan with a minimum communications package for evaluations;
- Knowledge management approaches (channels, platforms and products) to increase accessibility of evaluations;
- Roles and responsibilities of evaluation staff with respect for communication and knowledge management; and
- Measuring success through a results framework.

45. The Strategy includes actions to facilitate the use of decentralized evaluations, namely:

- Early planning for strategic communication for decentralized evaluations;
- An audience focused approach;
- Minimum communications package;
- Timely access to evaluation results for decision-making;
- Relevant, diversified, and innovative evaluation products for different audiences;
- Facilitating use of UNSDCF evaluations; and
- A results-based framework to measure success.

46. To further support the decentralized evaluation function, the Evaluation Office has prepared a guidance document on strategic communication for decentralized evaluations. The guidance document provides practical guidance to country offices on planning for communication, a suggested minimum communications package, and links to the Strategy to Enhance Use of Evaluation through Communication and Knowledge Management to develop a results framework for measuring the success of the CPE communication plan.

47. The primary purpose of the Strategy is to enhance the utilization of evaluation products. It does not include communication about the Evaluation Office or the evaluation function in terms of the importance of evaluation for UNFPA and the added value the evaluation function to the organization. Furthermore, most of the emphasis is placed on communicating individual evaluations. No mention is made of the development of evaluation synthesis or evidence summaries which might be more response to ad hoc management demands for analysis. The last published evaluation synthesis, covering the whole of UNFPA's strategic framework, was in 2019<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Getting to zero: Good practices from synthesis of UNFPA country programme evaluations.

### 3.6 Evaluation plans and coverage

48. The Evaluation Office is responsible for preparing the QBEP for the evaluation function, covering centralized evaluations plus CPEs and RPEs. This four-year plan serves as a framework to guide the commissioning, management, and use of strategic evaluations within the organization. The plan also provides the basis for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of planned evaluations. While the QBEP is a four-year plan, the three outer years of the plan are indicative and may be revised if required. Other types of decentralized evaluations are not included in the QBEP.

49. The evaluation policy and QBEP set out selection criteria for evaluation, in order of priority, for evaluations<sup>17</sup>:

- Strategic relevance of the subject: cover issues of corporate or strategic significance, a programmatic priority, part of annual priorities of UNFPA;
- Risks associated with the subject: political, economic, funding, structural or organization that present a high risk for non-achievement of results, or subject where management needs evidence for decision-making;
- Potential for joint or UN system-wide evaluation;
- Significant investment in terms of UNFPA portfolio of activities;
- Feasibility for implementing the evaluation;
- Potential for replication and scaling-up;
- Knowledge gap, e.g., will help to fill a significant knowledge gap in a particular thematic area of UNFPA's work; and
- Formal commitment to stakeholders: part of donor requirements in co-financing arrangements.

50. The Panel's engagement with key stakeholders in UNFPA confirmed a consultative approach in the development of the QBEP. In developing the QBEP 2022-2025, the Evaluation Office considered the gaps in coverage of the previous Transitional Evaluation Plan (2020-2023) when assessed against priorities of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025. It then drew up a list of potential evaluations, based on the selection criteria, conducted a sensitivity analysis, and engaged in a series of bilateral consultations at various levels of UNFPA.

51. For 2022-2025, the Evaluation Office identified 24 centralized evaluations, of which 12 are system-wide evaluations (mainly UNAIDS and Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations [IAHE]); two are joint evaluations with other UN entities (UNICEF); and 10 are UNFPA specific<sup>18</sup>. The planned evaluations include an evaluation of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025, and system-wide meta-syntheses. Compared to other UN agency centralized evaluation plans, UNFPA is notable for having

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<sup>17</sup> These criteria are further elaborated with guiding questions.

<sup>18</sup> UNFPA Quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan 2022-2025, p.7.

significantly more joint evaluations and fewer agency specific global thematic/strategic evaluations that obviously relate to the strategic framework.

52. Regional and country offices are responsible for preparing costed evaluation plans for decentralized evaluations within their respective regions or countries. The Policy and Strategy Division advises regional and country offices on the planning and resourcing of decentralized evaluations<sup>19</sup>. A total of 57 CPEs are planned between 2022-2025, including 13 in 2022 and 7 in 2023. The remaining 37 evaluations are planned for the two outer years of the QBEP. All six RPEs are scheduled for 2024<sup>20</sup>.

53. The Evaluation Office has issued guidance for regional and country offices to prepare costed evaluation plans<sup>21</sup>. The Evaluation Office and regional offices review the draft costed evaluation plans of country offices in the Programme Review Committee as part of the quality assurance process, prior to submission of CPDs and associated CEPs to the Executive Board. The Evaluation Office is also responsible for reviewing the costed evaluation plans of regional offices.

54. The evaluations completed (reported) from 2019-2022 are shown in [Table 3](#). Completed centralized evaluations have remained relatively constant over the period (numbers are small) while, in the case of country and regional programme evaluations, the number of completed evaluations is significantly higher (dipping in 2020 perhaps a reflection of slow-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

55. The Peer Review enquired about other types of evaluations commissioned by country and regional offices. The Evaluation Office has recently made efforts to compile country evaluation plans (mandatory annexes to CPDs submitted for the approval of the Executive Board). The analysis (see Table 3 below for 2022) shows a significant number of project and programme evaluations conducted by country offices that have previously been somewhat invisible to the Evaluation Office, the reports have not been subjected to the EQAA process, nor have these reports been published. It is unclear if management responses have been prepared for these decentralized project evaluations.

**Table 3: Evaluations completed 2019-2022**

Year	Centralized Evaluations	Regional and Country Programme Evaluations (Decentralized)	Decentralized Evaluations Other
2019	5	22	NA
2020	5	18	NA
2021	6	19	NA
2022	4	18	15 <sup>22</sup>

Source: Evaluation Office

<sup>19</sup> UNFPA Evaluation Policy 2019, see section 24 (a).

<sup>20</sup> UNFPA Quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan 2022-2025, p.9.

<sup>21</sup> UNFPA Evaluation Office, 2018. Guidance on preparing costed evaluation plans.

<sup>22</sup> A number of these are global programme evaluations (Spotlight initiative), conducted in multiple countries. This number is likely to be an underestimate as it only represents known project evaluations at the beginning/ planning stage of the CPD cycle.

### 3.7 Financing the evaluation function

56. Total expenditure on the evaluation function has increased significantly, more than doubling from US\$ 3.7 million in 2014 to US\$ 9 million in 2021 (see [Table 4](#)). The increase is reflected in increases to the Evaluation Office as well as increases in expenditure on the decentralized evaluation function (including an estimation of senior staff time spent on evaluation at country level). Expenditure in 2020 and 2021 was lower than budgeted, and lower than in 2019, undoubtedly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw a reduction in international travel.

57. Total expenditure on the evaluation function as a percentage of total programme expenditure in 2021 was 0.83 per cent which is below the target range of 1.4 to 3 per cent set out in the evaluation policy. UNFPA has grown from a small agency to a mid-size agency, as reflected in the increase in its revenue, which has raised questions about the appropriateness of the target set for the financial performance of the evaluation function. Further, the Joint Inspection Unit of the UN System (JIU) establishes a slightly lower bottom range target of 0.5% - 3.0% for evaluation functions in the UN. Within these parameters, UNFPA's evaluation expenditure of 0.83% is acceptable and on par with the actual expenditure other agencies.

**Table 3: Financial Resources Invested in Evaluation 2014-2021**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total UNFPA programme expenses*	820.2	798.6	763.5	752.9	872.3	933.8	1027.9	1086.4
Total expenditure of evaluation function	3.69	5.52	6.94	6.3	8.4	9.13	853(a)	9.03(a)
							9.64(b)	9.48(b)
<i>Evaluation Office</i>	2.38	2.63	3.71	3.36	4.23	3.9	3.2(a)	3.88(a)
							4.31(b)	4.33(b)
<i>Decentralized evaluation function</i>	1.31**	2.89	3.23	2.94	4.17***	5.23	5.33	5.15
Total expenditure of evaluation function as a percentage of total UNFPA programme expenses	0.45%	0.69%	0.91%	0.83%	0.96%	0.98%	0.83%(a)	0.83%(a)
							0.94%(b)	0.87%(b)

Source: UNFPA Evaluation Function Annual Report 2021

**Notes:**

\* Total UNFPA programme expense is generated from UNFPA statistical and financial reviews. The 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 that include, for example, estimates of not only M&E staff but also management staff in COs for evaluation related tasks.

\*\* Decentralized staffing costs are not available for 2014; the figure (\$1.31 million) therefore reflects only the budget for evaluations.

\*\*\* The majority of increase from \$2.94 million in 2017 to \$4.17 million in 2018 is mainly due to the enhancement in better capturing the totality of investment in decentralized evaluation.

(a) with COVID-19 related reduction

(b) without COVID-19 related reduction

### 3.8 Centralized evaluation function

58. The Evaluation Office, according to the Evaluation Policy, is the custodian of the evaluation function in UNFPA making it the 'owner' of the policy, Evaluation Strategy, and the various guidance and tools it has produced in support of the evaluation function. The Evaluation Office, through its Director, is responsible for preparing the QBEP, preparing and presenting the annual report of the evaluation function to the Executive Board, as well as results of centralized evaluations it has commissioned and managed. The Evaluation Office is the custodian of the EQAA system and maintains the roster of evaluation consultants. It also provides technical leadership to the evaluation function, develops methodological guidance and provides training and capacity building in evaluation to the

decentralized evaluation function. It is also responsible for actively disseminating the results of evaluations within UNFPA and beyond, and for maintaining a publicly accessible repository of evaluations. Establishing and nurturing global partnerships and contributing to national evaluation capacity development are another important function of the Evaluation Office.

59. The Evaluation Office has 11 staff positions. Senior (P5) Evaluation Office staff manage the large or complex corporate evaluations and joint/system-wide evaluations, whilst evaluations are primarily undertaken by independent companies. Senior level evaluation staff are also responsible for supporting the regions, and each senior Evaluation Adviser acts as a regional focal point. Senior professional level staff positions for communications and capacity building are consistent with the Evaluation Office’s strategy to emphasise the use of and drive to improve the quality of evaluations.

**Table 4: Staff composition of Evaluation Office**

Position	Grading	Number
Director	D1	1
Evaluation Advisers	P5	4
Communications and Knowledge Management Specialist	P4	1
Evaluation Capacity Building Specialist	P4	1
Evaluation Analyst	P3	1
Evaluation Analyst	P2	1
Communications Analyst	P2	1
Administration/Finance Associate	G7	1

Source: Evaluation Office

### 3.9 Decentralized evaluation function

60. The decentralized evaluation function comprises all evaluations commissioned by management e.g., by the six UNFPA regional offices, UNFPA country offices and headquarters divisions. Regional M&E Advisers are responsible for providing overall support to the M&E function at regional and country levels. Their specific duties include:

- Developing costed evaluation plans for regional programme and thematic evaluations;
- Advising on the evaluability of regional and country programmes;
- Providing technical support and quality assurance to country offices in planning, management, conduct and follow-up and use of evaluations, and this includes supporting country offices to prepare costed evaluation plans; and
- Providing guidance and quality assurance in preparation of management responses to decentralized evaluations.

61. Regional M&E Advisers report to the Deputy Regional Director or Regional Director, depending on the particular arrangements in the regional office<sup>23</sup>. The positions are graded at P5 level, indicating the need for seniority for this role. The responsibilities of Regional M&E Advisers are much

<sup>23</sup> Of the five job descriptions reviewed, three positions reported directly to the Regional Director and two positions reported to the Deputy Regional Director.

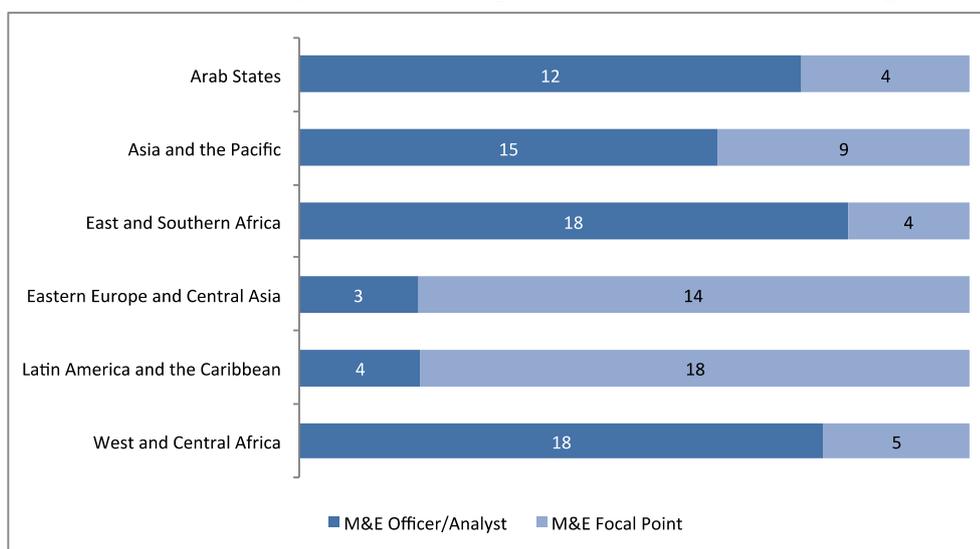
broader than evaluation. They are required to contribute to the development of the Regional Programme, by bringing M&E evidence to inform programming; provide oversight of regional and country programmes; contribute to monitoring and analysis of reports on programmes implemented at country and regional levels; and quality assure results, evidence-based planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation. Regional M&E Advisers are also responsible for monitoring the implementation of management responses of regional evaluations.

62. UNFPA country offices are responsible for commissioning and managing country-level evaluations, including CPEs, project or programme evaluations, and thematic evaluations related to the work of the country office. CPEs are commissioned as part of the process of developing the next CPD and input to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). CPEs must be conducted at least once every two programme cycles, and more than once if the quality of the previous CPE was unsatisfactory. They may also be triggered by a major change in the country context.

63. The evaluation function in the country office has an M&E officer/analyst or, in the case of country offices with small programmes, a focal point is appointed. The emphasis of these positions is on monitoring programmes and contributing to planning. They commission and manage evaluations, with the support of the Regional M&E Adviser (mainly on CPEs) and, where appropriate, from the Evaluation Office. M&E positions in country offices are typically national staff who, depending on the requirements, report to the Head of Programmes or the country Representative.

64. Overall, 99 per cent of country offices have an M&E officer/analyst or M&E focal point. Of these 56 per cent are M&E officers/analysts and 44 per cent are M&E focal points<sup>24</sup>. There is considerable variation across the regions – in the Latin America and Caribbean region and Eastern Europe and Central Asia region the majority are M&E focal points. A possible reason for this is that the countries in these regions are predominantly middle-income countries with small programmes where a dedicated M&E officer may not be feasible.

**Figure 4: Distribution of country office monitoring and evaluation staff across the regions**



Source: UNFPA Evaluation Office

65. The Evaluation Office provides guides (e.g., the Evaluation Handbook) and the CPE toolkit. It also provides guidance on specific aspects such as *Guidance on disability-inclusive evaluation (2020)*,

<sup>24</sup> UNFPA Evaluation Office Annual Report 2021, p.6.

*Guidance on integrating social and environmental standards in evaluation (2022)*, and *Guidance on integrating the principles of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind in UNFPA evaluations (2022)*. The latter three guidance documents are applicable to all evaluations.

66. The Evaluation Office provides guidance to regional and country offices on the preparation of costed evaluation plans. The guidance document (2018) is aimed at improving the quality of evaluation plans prepared by regional and country offices. It explains the application of the selection criteria, the types of evaluations that may be included in the evaluation plans and makes the point that monitoring activities must be excluded from evaluation plans. The Guide provides a template for completion of the plan, as well as a copy of the template used by the Evaluation Office to assess the costed evaluation plan. The guidance document is brief (11 pages) and does not provide detailed guidance on how to prepare the plan – who should be involved, what information is needed to prepare for a planning session, who should be consulted internally and externally, or how the costing should be done.

67. RPEs and CPEs are subject to the EQAA system. The results of the quality assessments for 2021 show all decentralized evaluations as rated as good or very good quality. Project evaluations at country level are not quality assessed, and as far as the Panel could ascertain, they do not form part of the central repository of evaluations shared internally and published on the evaluation website.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Independence

#### **UNEG Norm 4: Independence (of Evaluations & Organizational)**

Independence of evaluation is necessary for credibility, influences the ways in which an evaluation is used and allows evaluators to be impartial and free from undue pressure throughout the evaluation process. The independence of the evaluation function comprises two key aspects - behavioural independence and organizational independence.

Behavioural independence entails the ability to evaluate without undue influence by any party. Evaluators must have the full freedom to conduct their evaluative work impartially, without the risk of negative effects on their career development and must be able to freely express their assessment. The independence of the evaluation function underpins the free access to information that evaluators should have on the evaluation subject.

Organizational independence requires that the central evaluation function is positioned independently from management functions, carries the responsibility of setting the evaluation agenda and is provided with adequate resources to conduct its work. Organizational independence also necessitates that evaluation managers have full discretion to directly submit evaluation reports to the appropriate level of decision-making and that they should report directly to an organization's governing body and/or the executive head. Independence is vested in the Evaluation Head to directly commission, produce, publish and disseminate duly quality-assured evaluation reports in the public domain without undue influence by any party. (UNEG Norms and Standards, p.11)

#### **4.1.1 Organizational and behavioural independence**

*The central evaluation function vested in the Evaluation Office is independent, both in terms of organizational independence and behavioural independence. The decentralized evaluation function is not organizationally independent, and this presents a challenge to behavioural independence of the decentralized evaluation function.*

68. The Evaluation Office is independent of the operational, management and decision-making functions of UNFPA, with the Director of the Evaluation Office reporting directly to the Executive Board for the performance of the evaluation function. This structural/ organizational independence is set out in the Evaluation Policy, the UNFPA Oversight Policy (2015) and is confirmed in the Panel's engagement with evaluation staff, stakeholders within UNFPA, and Members of the Executive Board. The Oversight Policy accords the Director free and unrestricted access to the Board, the Oversight Advisory Committee (now named the Oversight and Audit Committee), the UN Board of Auditors, and any other entity with fiduciary oversight or governing function pertaining to UNFPA.

69. The Executive Director appoints the Director of the Evaluation Office following consultations with the Executive Board. The Director position (D1) is a fixed term contract for five years, renewable once. The incumbent is required to leave the position and the organization after completion of service. The Executive Director has the authority to renew the Director's contract and dismiss the Director after consultations with the Executive Board. The Oversight Policy is silent on the grounds for dismissal of the Director, and presumably the grounds would be the same applicable to other senior positions in UNFPA. The Director has authority to appoint all staff within the Evaluation Office.

70. The Panel notes that the Director position is the only one in the evaluation function that requires ‘out-rotation’ of the incumbent after a certain period. The P5 Evaluation Advisers in the Evaluation Office, for example, are non-rotational fixed-term positions renewable every two years, with no limitation on the number of times the contract can be renewed. While the UNFPA human resource policy encourages mobility<sup>25</sup>, in practice the system permits incumbents to stay in their positions indefinitely. This, in the view of the Panel, raises the question whether staff who have been in the same position for many years are able to remain behaviorally independent and objective vis-à-vis their relationship with management.

71. The independence of the Evaluation Office also allows decisions on what will be evaluated, and the budget for the evaluation function. The Director is responsible for developing the QBEP for centralized and decentralized evaluations, based on inputs and consultation with the Executive Board, senior management, UNFPA offices and stakeholders. Key informants confirmed that the Director determines the final selection of centralized evaluations, guided by the selection criteria set out in the Evaluation Policy. The selection does not take place in a political vacuum, as Executive Board members have interests in particular topics or issues, and can be expected to advocate for these in the selection of evaluations. The Panel found that the Director has struck a good balance between safeguarding the independence of the Evaluation Office and being responsive to the Executive Board.

72. The Director authorizes the clearance for the release of reports of centralized evaluations. The Executive Board is presented with evaluation summaries prepared by the Evaluation Office, rather than the full evaluation report prepared by the external evaluation team. The full report, however, is published on the UNFPA website. The Panel was informed that this approach was necessary to ensure that the language used was appropriate for the Executive Board. The Director also submits an annual report on the evaluation function, directly to the Executive Board. The annual report includes reporting against evaluation function performance indicators and a brief statement on the proposed work plan for the next year, based on the QBEP.

73. Financial independence of centralized evaluations and the Evaluation Office seems clear. The budgets for these are formalized in the UNFPA Integrated Budget. Budgets for decentralized RPEs and CPEs are indicative and ring-fenced in the overall regular resources for country, regional and global programmes, and may only be used for evaluations<sup>26</sup>. The Resource Management Policy makes provision for carrying forward unspent funds for oversight functions, including the evaluation function, subject to presenting a request and explanation to the Resources Management Committee. Funds, whether committed or not, may be carried forward and there is no rule on the percentage that is permitted to be carried forward. According to the Finance Division, this provision formalizes past practice, is only applicable to the oversight functions, and is intended to give additional flexibility to these functions. The Panel believes that the policy of not allowing an automatic carry over is reasonable i.e., from a resource management perspective, there should be a defensible justification for why funds allocated for evaluation activities in one year were not spent/committed as planned.

74. There is a clear separation between the evaluation and audit functions. This is important given that, prior to 2013, the evaluation function was in the Division of Oversight Services. The mandates of the two functions do not preclude them from coordinating their activities. Both functions report to the

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<sup>25</sup> Policies and Procedures Manual Policy on Personnel of UNFPA. 2022. “Rotation is a key element in the human resources strategy of UNFPA...Rotation is mutually beneficial to the organization and to its staff. It contributes to a more effective and high-performing organization by staffing UNFPA country, sub-regional, regional and headquarters offices with the best-qualified staff on a systematic and managed basis”.

<sup>26</sup> UNFPA Quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan 2022-2025.

Oversight and Audit Committee and are governed by the Oversight Policy 2015. The Panel determined that the Committee has evaluation competencies within its membership. The Charter of the Office of Audit and Investigations (paragraph 62) stipulates that the Office for Audit and Oversight Services coordinate its work with other oversight functions in UNFPA, including the Evaluation Office.

75. The 2019 Evaluation Policy is silent, however, on coordination with other oversight functions in UNFPA, although the Evaluation Strategy 2022 states that the evaluation function complements other oversight functions in UNFPA. The Oversight Policy does not stipulate how the evaluation and audit functions can coordinate their activities and collaborate for more effective oversight. Simply sharing plans of proposed evaluations and audits of country offices for example, can help to ensure that country offices are not overburdened with missions from headquarters<sup>27</sup>.

76. The decentralized evaluation function is not organizationally independent. The Regional M&E Advisers report to the regional office management structure, and M&E Officers and focal points report into the country office management structure – in some cases several levels below the Regional Director/Representative. Furthermore, there is no ‘dotted’ reporting line between the Regional M&E Advisers and the Evaluation Office, nor is there a reporting line from country-level staff to the Regional M&E Adviser or Evaluation Office. The Evaluation Office attempts to mitigate the impact of this arrangement by providing technical guidance to the decentralized function, reviewing and approving the TOR for decentralized evaluations and prequalify the independent consultants for CPEs.

77. The Panel finds that the current institutional arrangements for the decentralized evaluation function are not satisfactory. Advisers/officers/focal points do not work exclusively on evaluation, but also perform planning, programming, monitoring and reporting functions, and any other work, which their superiors request of them. The extent to which M&E staff at the decentralized level can devote time to evaluation work is dictated by the priorities of the decentralized office. The Panel was informed that the proportion of time spent on evaluation activities varied, and on average ranged from only 5 per cent to 25 per cent of the time of a Regional M&E Adviser. The situation is worse in country offices that do not have full-time M&E officers and/or where staff may not have all the necessary evaluation competencies. Furthermore, without a direct reporting line from the country office M&E officer/focal point to the Regional M&E Adviser, the latter can only provide guidance and quality assurance to country office evaluations.

78. The Panel heard anecdotal information about the country office M&E officers being pressured by managers and government partners (deliberately and sometimes through lack of understanding of the evaluation process) when they disagree with evaluation findings. Officers managing country level evaluations have little protection against undue influence. An added complication that M&E focal points often end up managing evaluations of the programmes they are responsible for implementing. Evaluation reference groups which include external partners are a safeguard for independence. However, while they are established for CPEs, as required by the UNFPA CPE Handbook, the composition of these groups is not reflected in the CPE reports. The Panel was therefore not able to determine whether external partners were included.

79. Similar to Evaluation Adviser positions in the Evaluation Office in headquarters, Regional M&E Adviser positions are non-rotational fixed term contracts with no limitation on the number of times they are renewed. Incumbents may occupy the positions for many years and, as for staff at headquarters, this raises questions about their ability to remain behaviourally independent and

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<sup>27</sup> The Panel reviewed the audit and evaluation workplans for 2022. In the same year both country audits and Country Programme Evaluations were conducted in Libya, Ghana and Haiti.

objective vis-à-vis management. Without mobility, career paths become very limited for staff in the evaluation function – and a constraint for professional development and growth.

#### **4.1.2 Engagement with the Executive Board and senior management**

##### **Executive Board**

80. The Executive Board appreciates the value of the evaluation function and is especially interested in the system-wide evaluations - as they resonate with Member States' interests in the UN reform agenda. The Executive Board supports the independence of the Director and Evaluation Office. Members of the Executive Board confirmed that the Director has unfettered access to the Board. The Panel reviewed the decisions of the Executive Board between 2019 and 2023, and found that statements of the Board were generally positive, expressing its appreciation for the work of the Evaluation Office and encouraging UNFPA to increase its investment in the evaluation function. Interviews with a selection of Member States suggested that evaluation topics should be more forward looking and responsive to emerging global challenges and new programmatic areas for UNFPA. In this regard, they are keen that UNFPA undertake more evaluations of their work in humanitarian contexts. In addition, there were suggestions from interviewed Member States that there should be more guidance to Member States on their role in evaluation governance.

##### **Senior management**

81. The Director of the Evaluation Office reports administratively to the UNFPA Executive Director and appears to have good access to the Executive Director and Senior Executive leadership team and their support for the evaluation function. The Panel observed a practical demonstration of the Executive Director's support and championing of the evaluation function, during its data collection mission in New York. The Panel finds that the Executive Director provides the political support and enabling environment as required by the Evaluation Policy and "leads from the top" when it comes to promoting agile management and evidence-based decision-making.

82. The Director participates in senior management meetings, ex officio, which provides an opportunity to share evaluation evidence to inform decision-making. It also provides an opportunity for the Director (and Evaluation Office) to hear first-hand, the issues that occupy the minds and time of the senior management of UNFPA. Senior management feedback to the Panel indicates that the Director is highly visible in his engagement at this level of the organization.

83. The Policy and Strategy Division has the mandate to strengthen RBM and organizational effectiveness within UNFPA and has a direct interest and involvement in the evaluation function. According to the Evaluation Policy, the Division advises country and regional offices on the planning, resourcing, quality assurance and implementation of decentralized evaluations. The Division works with the Evaluation Office to support UNFPA units to ensure evaluation plans are implemented properly. It monitors the implementation of management responses to evaluations, provides guidance to UNFPA units on the use of evaluation findings and lessons, and prepares the organizational management response to the annual report on the evaluation function presented to the Executive Board. The Division also conducts capacity building on RBM, theories of change, performance indicators, etc.

84. Staff of the Policy and Strategy Division confirmed regular interaction with the Evaluation Office, and acknowledged the important input that evaluations provide to UNFPA's strategic planning and CPDs, and to strengthening RBM in UNFPA. Senior management of the Policy and Strategy Division meet on a quarterly basis with the Evaluation Office to discuss evaluation matters.

85. The Panel’s discussion with staff from the Technical Division revealed a good level of engagement between the Technical Division and the Evaluation Office on thematic evaluations. The Evaluation Office consults the Technical Division on the draft TOR and the draft evaluation reports to ensure that the evaluations are relevant, and that the information prepared by evaluation consultants is accurate. The Division is respectful of the independence of the Evaluation Office but feel that they should be better engaged in all phases of an evaluation, including the selection of evaluation topics in the QBEP.

## 4.2 Credibility

### UNEG Norm 3: Credibility

Evaluations must be credible. Credibility is grounded on independence, impartiality and a rigorous methodology. Key elements of credibility include transparent evaluation processes, inclusive approaches involving relevant stakeholders and robust quality assurance systems. Evaluation results (or findings) and recommendations are derived from or informed by the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of the best available, objective, reliable and valid data and by accurate quantitative and qualitative analysis of evidence. Credibility requires that evaluations are ethically conducted and managed by evaluators that exhibit professional and cultural competencies.

*The quality, and hence the credibility, of UNFPA evaluations has improved since 2018. While feedback from key informants and the post-hoc quality assessments are positive, there are issues/gaps that require attention to ensure the credibility of evaluations as the evaluation function enters the next phase of its evolution.*

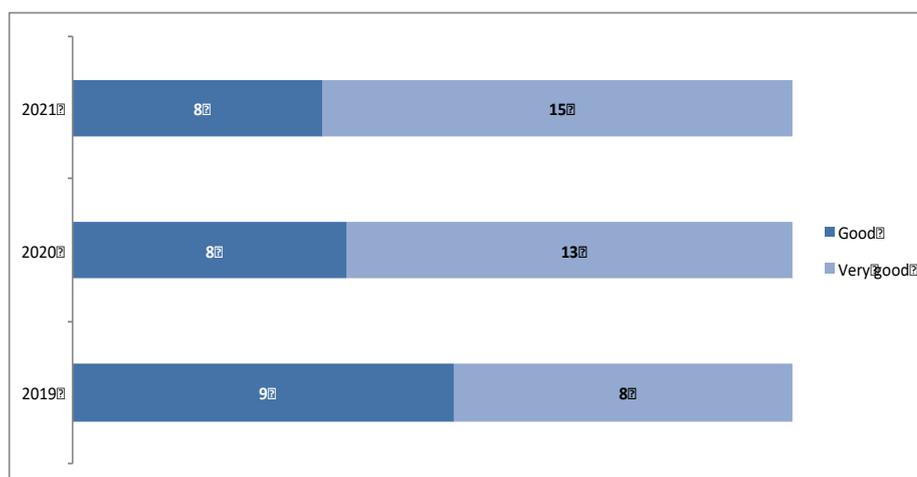
86. The Evaluation Policy 2019 identifies steps in the evaluation process to ensure the credibility of evaluation results. The Evaluation Office has implemented several measures to improve the overall quality of evaluations and aspires to improve the quality beyond mere compliance with UNEG Norms and Standards. The technical guidance and tools, capacity building for centralized and decentralized staff, ring-fencing of budgets for country programme evaluations, and the use of internal quality assurance and external quality assessments, are among the measures which the Evaluation Office has taken. These measures seem to have contributed to improved quality of evaluations. The Panel notes that of the 61 evaluations quality assessed between 2019 and 2021, 60 per cent were rated as ‘very good’ and 40 per cent were rated as ‘good’ (Figure 5).

87. Of the 61 evaluations submitted for review, none were rated fair or unsatisfactory. This is somewhat unusual and contrasts with the assessments of the period 2014-2018 when, of 81 evaluations 16 were assessed as fair and 2 were assessed as unsatisfactory. The positive ratings for the 2019-2021 period may reflect real improvement but may also in part reflect changes in the quality assessment framework<sup>28</sup>. Consistently high ratings over the period may also suggest that the standards should be revisited to determine if they are still appropriate. Finally, it should be reiterated that many decentralized evaluations (excluding CPEs) do not go through EQAA or ex-post quality assessment.

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<sup>28</sup> The meta-analysis of quality assessments (January 2022) prepared by DeftEdge, the service provider for quality assessments states that the large increase in the number of evaluations assessed as ‘very good’ in 2021 may be partly due to changes in the evaluation assessment grid.

**Figure 5: Quality assessments of programme-level evaluations 2019-2021**



Source: Annual Reports of UNFPA Evaluation Function, 2019, 2020 and 2021

88. The Panel received mostly positive feedback on the evaluation function from senior managers and staff within UNFPA, as well as selected members of the Executive Board. While feedback on centralized evaluations was similarly generally positive, this was not the case with decentralized evaluations. Even though RPEs and CPEs were externally assessed as ‘very good’ or ‘good’, internally in UNFPA there is scepticism about the quality of CPEs and their added value beyond compliance with requirements for the preparation of CPDs. The Peer Review Panel was unable to ascertain the use of RPEs and was struck by the apparent absence of other types of evaluations commissioned by Regional Offices<sup>29</sup>.

89. The credibility of decentralized evaluations at the regional and country level will almost inevitably raise scepticism, as the manager of decentralized evaluations is not organizationally independent. The technical guidance, the pre-qualifying of independent evaluation teams, and the use of evaluation reference groups undoubtedly go some way towards ensuring the quality and credibility of CPEs. However, it leaves much of the burden of guarding the independence of the CPE to an M&E officer or M&E focal point who, in many instances, will have less authority than those officers whose programmes are being evaluated. As previously reported, a number of decentralized project evaluations are not subject to ex post quality assessment or published<sup>30</sup>. Regional M&E Advisers may intervene and support, but this depends on whether the country office M&E staff bring these issues to their attention.

90. The Panel also heard concerns about the size of the budget allocations for CPEs and the quality of evaluation teams. CPE teams are usually individual contractors assembled for the specific evaluation, who in most cases have not worked together previously. While the Panel is not in a position to comment on the quality of evaluation teams, the budget allocated to these evaluations is highly variable (on average US\$ 60,000 – see Figure 6) and lower than the amount of US\$ 70,000 recommended in the Evaluation Office guidance on the preparation of Costed Evaluation Plans. The average CPD evaluation budget is low compared to those commissioned by other UN agencies<sup>31</sup> suggesting that insufficient

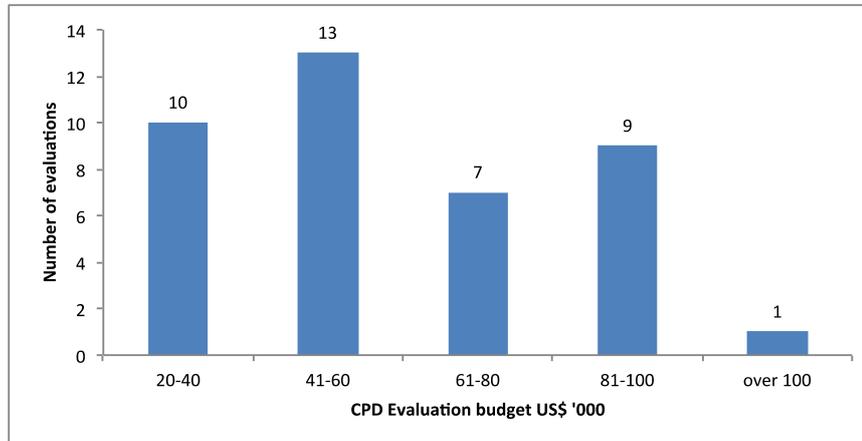
<sup>29</sup> Although the Panel identified during interviews at least one multi-country evaluative activity that could have been classified as an evaluation. The Panel was informed RPEs are conducted but are not published on the website.

<sup>30</sup> This is contrary to UNEG Norms and Standards with respect to transparency and public disclosure.

<sup>31</sup> CPD evaluations in UNHCR and UNICEF, for example, typically involving teams of 3-5 experts and budgets of +US\$ 150,000.

expertise is being brought to these strategic exercises. RPEs face similar challenges to those experienced in CPEs. The QBEP 2022-2025 indicates that each region plans to conduct one RPE, with an estimated budget of US\$ 430,000 for the six regions<sup>32</sup>. This represents an average budget of just over US\$ 70,000 – again likely inadequate for a strategic evaluation covering multiple countries.

**Figure 6: Budgets for Country Programme (CPD) Evaluations 2021-2022**



Source: Evaluation Office, January 2023

91. Transparency and inclusiveness of evaluation processes are key elements of credibility. A rapid scan of evaluation reports, as well as the Panel’s engagement with evaluation managers and team leaders of a sample of evaluations suggest that UNFPA evaluations engage with a broad range of stakeholders within the organization, other UN agencies government, civil society, and development partners, depending on the nature of the evaluation. However, the formal external quality assessment of evaluation reports completed in 2021, indicated that more needs to be done - stakeholder engagement in the evaluation process being addressed partially or not at all in 9 out of 22 evaluations. The formal quality assessment suggests that a comprehensive stakeholder mapping and/ or better description of the stakeholder consultation process in the evaluation report is needed.

92. A well-functioning, inclusive evaluation reference group contributes to the credibility of evaluations. Such a group can help to ensure that the evaluation covers the main issues relevant to key stakeholders, contributes knowledge and expertise to ensure the relevance of the evaluation approach, facilitates access to information sources, and provides comments on the main evaluation outputs (TOR, inception report and draft report). The Panel reviewed evaluation reports (2019 to 2022) and found that all but two centralized evaluations clearly mentioned having an evaluation reference group. UNFPA participants, including from regional offices (and country offices as may be appropriate) are represented in centralized evaluations, and in the case of joint evaluations, the relevant UN agencies. Government partners are, in some instances, represented in reference groups where the country may be a case study for the evaluation. Overall, however, reference groups for centralized evaluations are predominantly internal UNFPA stakeholders. While this may reflect the nature or topic of the evaluation, the quality and credibility of evaluations could benefit from greater diversity in the reference group.

93. With respect to decentralized evaluations, the UNFPA Evaluation Handbook stipulates that reference groups should be established for CPEs and should include the relevant UNFPA country office, government partners, non-governmental organizations, development partners and national experts, and other relevant stakeholders, including representatives of marginalized groups. The Panel reviewed CPEs published between 2019 and 2022, and found that all but one stated that a reference group had

<sup>32</sup> UNFPA Quadrennial Budgeted Evaluation Plan 2022-2025, p.11.

been established. However, only two of the 34 reports provided information on the membership of the reference groups. The Panel (and readers of the evaluation reports) are therefore not able to assess the inclusiveness or diversity of country-level evaluation reference groups, nor how they contribute to the evaluation process. A similar situation prevails with RPEs. Of the four RPEs reports reviewed by the Panel, only one contained information on the membership of the evaluation reference group. No information is available on the use of reference groups for project evaluations.

94. The self-assessment by UNFPA evaluation staff, and the external quality assessment review, identified evaluation methodology as an area for improvement. The Panel notes that the Evaluation Office is trying more innovative methodologies and approaches, such as the developmental evaluation on RBM, but detects some ambivalence towards innovation by some Evaluation Office staff. From the key informant interviews, there appears to be a level of frustration with the standard CPE methodology, where evaluation questions are determined mechanically by the OECD/DAC criteria, and less by the issues that emerge from a thorough analysis of the country context and the needs of evaluation users. CPEs are seen to reinforce the traditional ‘downstream’ project model of UNFPA, not supporting the organization’s shift to ‘upstream’ work nor the increase in the humanitarian portfolio. RPEs follow a similar methodology to CPEs and, in the view of the Panel, display similar limitations.

95. Evaluation Office staff have many years of experience in evaluation within UNFPA and/or gained in other UN agencies. The Panel found them professional and competent, a view largely held by senior managers and counterparts in other UNFPA divisions. They have, however, expressed concern that the Evaluation Office (and similarly regional and country office M&E staff), does not have the requisite capacity and expertise to conduct or manage humanitarian evaluations. The Panel notes that the Evaluation Office has not conducted evaluations of humanitarian responses since 2019, apart from participating in the system-wide evaluations under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the system-wide evaluation of the COVID-19 global humanitarian response plan (currently underway). The QBEP 2022-2025 makes provision for other system-wide humanitarian evaluations (still to be determined), but none solely on UNFPA’s humanitarian response. The Humanitarian Response Department anticipates that there will need to be more and more humanitarian evaluations required going forward (donor requirements). There are currently no policy requirements for real time reviews or evaluations of large-scale emergency responses. The UNFPA emergency procedures are currently under review, which could be an opportunity to embed real time learning.

96. Discussions with evaluation staff (HQ, regional and country offices) and the self-assessment identified the need to further strengthen evaluation capacities in the country offices, especially for M&E focal points who, in most instances, do not have substantive experience in managing evaluations. The limited evaluation capacities in country offices, particularly those that do not have dedicated M&E staff, impacts negatively on the credibility of CPEs. Key informants also raised questions about the technical competencies of Regional M&E Advisers. However, based on the information available to the Panel, it seems that the problem is one of band-width and not necessarily lack of technical capacities in evaluation, as they spend less than 25 per cent of their time on evaluation functions. Regional M&E Advisers are thinly stretched and not able to give dedicated attention to their quality assurance functions and providing the necessary technical support to country offices.

97. The meta-analysis of quality assessments<sup>33</sup> provides the Panel with useful insights into specific areas where the quality of evaluations (centralized and decentralized) can be improved. The report

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<sup>33</sup> DeftEdge, 2022. UNFPA EQA synthesis 2021: Independent review of UNFPA evaluation report quality and selected trends, January 2022.

concluded that, although there has been a marked improvement in the overall quality of evaluations since 2019, there are areas that have not improved, namely, the robustness of data analysis, stakeholder analysis and engagement of key stakeholders in the validation of findings and development of recommendations. The report recommended UNFPA push the quality of evaluations by paying further attention to these areas, as well as greater precision and conciseness of executive summaries, more robust methodologies, and consistent attention to ethical considerations in all phases of the evaluation.

98. The meta-analysis report also recommended adjustments to the quality assessment template, including raising the threshold for ‘very good’ evaluations, revisiting the weightings given to assessment sections, more emphasis on good presentation of reports, adherence to UNEG ethical practice for evaluations, and lowering the page limits to facilitate use of reports. In the Panel’s view, these are important considerations in improving the quality of evaluations.

### 4.3 Utility

#### UNEG Norm 2 Utility

In commissioning and conducting an evaluation, there should be a clear intention to use the resulting analysis, conclusions or recommendations to inform decisions and actions. The utility of evaluation is manifest through its use in making relevant and timely contributions to organizational learning, informed decision-making processes and accountability for results. Evaluations could also be used to contribute beyond the organization by generating knowledge and empowering stakeholders (UNEG Norms and Standards, p.10).

*The Evaluation Office has introduced measures to enhance the utility and use of evaluations. While large-scale centralized evaluations have been used to introduce changes in UNFPA’s corporate strategies and programmes, there is also a need for rapid evaluations (e.g., of humanitarian action) or evaluative synthesis to inform more immediate decisions and feed into a continuous learning process. CPEs appear to have limited use beyond development of the CPD, and, similarly, the use of RPEs appears to be limited. Other types of decentralized evaluations tend to be donor demand driven, thus serving needs for accountability, but their contribution to learning in UNFPA is localized at best, given that such evaluations are not shared or disseminated within the organization beyond the commissioning office.*

99. The 2019 Evaluation Policy, the Evaluation Strategy, and the *Strategy to Enhance Use through Communication and Knowledge Management 2022-2025* place great emphasis on the utility and use of evaluations. The Panel found that the Evaluation Office is very proactive in communicating results for each centralized strategic evaluation and persuasive evidence on the use of these evaluations exists. The *Developmental Evaluation on RBM at UNFPA (2019)* is a case in point. According to senior managers in other divisions, the evaluation contributed to strengthening RBM within UNFPA, with senior management taking on board the recommendations of the evaluation. Emanating from the recommendation on strengthening learning and adaptation, the Policy and Strategy Division developed a framework for learning and adaptive management. The *Evaluation on the UNFPA Capacity for Humanitarian Action (2019)* informed the establishment of the Humanitarian Response Department, and all recommendations of the evaluation were taken on board and implemented. The output on humanitarian action in the UNFPA Strategic Plan is attributed to the influence of the evaluation.

100. There is clear evidence of use of global programme evaluations. The *Joint Evaluations of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the abandonment of female genital mutilation (Phase I, II and III)* assisted in positioning the issue of female genital mutilation in the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-

2025, and for the first time the issue was reflected prominently in the Strategic Plan. These evaluations were conducted in compliance with the donor agreement to inform the next phase of the programme. Key informants also mentioned the *Evaluation of the UNFPA response to the Syria crisis* as an example of a useful evaluation. The evaluation recommendations prompted the review of the functions of the Syria regional response hub, the setting up of a comprehensive monitoring system, and systematized annual assessment of the response.

101. While feedback on the use of centralized evaluations was mostly positive, there were calls for better engagement between the Evaluation Office and divisions, to ensure that evaluations are relevant and responsive to their needs. The QBEP does not cater for the short, sharp punctual evaluations that divisions need in addition to the comprehensive conventional evaluations. Divisions also identified the need for closer collaboration between evaluators and technical/programme staff to ensure that evaluation products were useful and technically accurate, and for recommendations that bring fresh ideas and not just telling them what they already know. The Panel notes that the Evaluation Office does engage with the Technical Division in the evaluation process. Improving the quality of recommendations has been identified as necessary in successive quality assessment reports.

102. Between 2019 and 2022, three regional programmes and two sub-regional programmes were evaluated, primarily to inform the development of the next regional or sub-regional programmes. The Arab States Regional Programme (2022-2025) references the 2021 evaluation of the regional programme, and similarly, the evaluation of the East and Southern Africa regional programme (2021) informed the Regional Programme 2022-2025. Unlike CPEs, RPEs do not form part of documentation submitted to the Executive Board and seem not to go beyond the respective regional offices with no, or very limited, discussion of lessons and recommendations at headquarters. Use of these regional evaluations depends on the interest of the Regional or Deputy Regional Director.

103. The Director's annual reports to the Executive Board on the evaluation function include a section on the use of centralized evaluations to foster change. There is no reference to the use of decentralized evaluations to foster change, suggesting that the primary use of CPEs is to inform the development of the next country programme and the UNSDCF, whilst RPEs are used to inform the development of the next regional programme<sup>34</sup>. The lack of strategic foresight in CPEs has been mentioned in preceding sections of the Panel's report. Senior management acknowledged that the synthesis of CPEs (2012-2018), conducted by the Evaluation Office in 2019, provided useful insights on common issues and trends. However, there have been no other syntheses published since then.

104. The Panel was informed that there are many project and programme evaluations conducted at country-level, usually to comply with the funding agreement of donors. These evaluations are not easily visible to the Evaluation Office, are not quality assessed, nor do they form part of the UNFPA evaluation public repository. This is understandable as posting evaluations that have not been quality assessed represents a reputational risk. Yet these evaluations have cost money and represent untapped potential for learning, provided they are of good quality.

105. The implementation of management responses to evaluation recommendations is an important element of evaluation use. The Policy and Strategy Division is responsible for monitoring the implementation of management responses of centralized and decentralized evaluations. There are challenges with the management response system in UNFPA. Formulating management responses that involve more than one division or unit is complex and it is not easy to meet management response

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<sup>34</sup> It may also reflect that it is the Policy and Strategy Division that has an overview of use of decentralized evaluations (uptake of recommendations), rather than the Evaluation Office.

deadlines when multiple units are involved. While the implementation of management responses for centralized evaluations seems to be managed tightly, this is not the case with decentralized evaluations. For decentralized evaluations, the Regional M&E Advisers are responsible for quality assessment and monitoring of management responses and the quality of management responses varies across the different regions. As far as the Panel could ascertain, there is no audit of the implementation of management responses, and this is something that UNFPA may wish to consider.

106. The Evaluation Office developed the *Strategy to Enhance Use through Communication and Knowledge Management (2022-2025)* to improve the use of both centralized and decentralized evaluations. Although the Strategy identifies internal and external audiences, the Panel observed that, in practice, activities are focused strongly on external communication such as promoting individual evaluation products through knowledge management platforms, webinars, social media, videos and evaluation briefs. These may not be the most effective ways to reach busy senior managers and decision-makers within UNFPA. Regular engagement between the Evaluation Office and divisions in UNFPA is probably a more effective way of promoting the use of evaluations. According to the Evaluation Office, Evaluation Advisers present results of evaluations during meetings, and use available opportunities to insert evaluation perspectives and evidence in meetings.

107. Internal advocacy for the evaluation function is left largely to the Director of the Evaluation Office. The *Strategy to Enhance Use through Communication and Knowledge Management* lists a range of communication and knowledge management responsibilities of all Evaluation Office staff, including undertaking formal communications on evaluations, strategic participation at decision-making and learning events, and incorporating a culture of communications and knowledge management at each stage of the evaluation process. These responsibilities are reflected in the new job descriptions (P3 and P4). The job descriptions of other staff, for example, P5 Evaluation Advisors<sup>35</sup> are yet to be updated to align with the *Strategy to Enhance Use through Communication and Knowledge Management*

108. The *Strategy to Enhance Use through Communication and Knowledge Management* includes actions to facilitate the use of decentralized evaluations, and the Evaluation Office has developed a guidance document on strategic communication of decentralized evaluations. The Evaluation Office thus far has supported three countries to develop communication strategies for promoting the use of evaluations. The Strategy is unclear about the responsibilities of Regional M&E Advisers. It states that they play a major role in dissemination, communication and use of centralized, regional, joint and system-wide evaluations and a role in contributing to developing strategies to disseminate, communicate and facilitate use of country-level evaluations and UNSDCF evaluations. However, it does not state precisely what the role is, nor give any indication of accountability. The same pertains to country-level M&E officers/focal points.

### 4.3 Roles and responsibilities

*The delineation of roles and responsibilities between the Evaluation Office and other divisions in headquarters is clear and understood, bar some grey areas between the Evaluation Office and the Policy and Strategy Division, and Regional and Country Offices on matters pertaining to the decentralized evaluation function. There is scope for building synergies between the Evaluation Office*

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<sup>35</sup> It was explained to the Peer Review that significant revisions of job descriptions are only feasible when recruitment of the position is undertaken – which has not occurred for the P5 positions in the periods since the new strategy was adopted.

*and Internal Audit, as well as with divisions in UNFPA. There is a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities at the decentralized level which potentially undermine the quality of evaluations and the effectiveness of the decentralized evaluation function.*

109. The 2019 Evaluation Policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of the respective bodies, offices and UNFPA divisions in the evaluation function – the Executive Board, the Executive Director, the Oversight and Audit Committee, the Evaluation Office, the Policy and Strategy Division, senior management, and the Regional Offices. The Panel found that headquarters parties were generally clear in their understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities and those of others in evaluation. There is a very clear delineation between the evaluation function and audit function, and as stated earlier, building synergies between the two functions could be mutually beneficial. The Oversight and Audit Committee could play a stronger role, in this regard.

110. Roles and responsibilities for the decentralized evaluation function are less clear than those for the centralized evaluation function. According to section 24 (a) of the Evaluation Policy, the Policy and Strategy Division advises regional and country offices on planning, resourcing, quality assurance and implementation of decentralized evaluations. This role of supporting decentralized evaluations is part of the Division’s mandate of strengthening RBM in UNFPA. The Evaluation Office also supports the decentralized function through technical guidance, guidance on budgeting for evaluations, capacity building, quality assessment, and communicating results of evaluations. However, in the section of the current policy on senior management responsibilities, there is no requirement for evaluations to be submitted to the Policy and Strategy Division or Evaluation Office for quality review/assurance or assessment. Furthermore, from the Panel’s interaction with stakeholders at headquarters, there appears to be different understandings about the respective roles and responsibilities of the Evaluation Office and Policy and Strategy Division in supporting the decentralized evaluation function.

111. As previously highlighted, reporting lines of Regional M&E Advisers and country-level M&E staff are problematic for independence and the effectiveness of the decentralized evaluation function. Regional M&E Advisers and M&E officers/focal points report to the senior staff within their respective offices and not to the Evaluation Office. Subsequently, the extent to which they are able to fulfil their evaluation responsibilities depends on senior staff prioritising evaluation and providing the requisite support for evaluation (reminder that Regional M&E Advisers and M&E officers/focal points spend only 5-25% of their time on evaluation). The Evaluation Policy sets out a comprehensive list of evaluation-related functions that regional offices (i.e., Regional M&E Advisers) are expected to perform, and in the Panel’s view, this can reasonably be expected to occupy most of their time. As these advisers are not able to devote a significant proportion of their time to evaluation, the country offices are unlikely to receive systematic good quality support, guidance and oversight.

112. The Evaluation Policy is silent on the role of Regional Directors in the decentralized evaluation function. While it outlines the role of regional offices, it does not state explicitly the role and responsibilities of Regional Directors and Deputy Regional Directors. The Evaluation Policy also does not clarify the role and responsibilities of Country Representatives and Deputy/Assistant Representatives. This gap should be addressed in the revision of the Evaluation Policy.

113. The Evaluation Office is responsible for building evaluation capacity internally in UNFPA, and participates in the UNFPA Learning Advisory Board which meets five times a year. Regional Offices are also responsible for building evaluation capacities in country offices. The Learning Unit in the Human Resources Division is developing a staff curriculum on evaluation and one on RBM. The Evaluation Office is contributing to the development of the curriculum. The Learning Unit is in the final stage of launching a 10-hour self-paced e-learning course on evaluation but is not involved in the

development of materials for national evaluation capacity development as this is outside its mandate. At the same time, building national evaluation capacity is an important pillar of UNFPAs evaluation policy and strategy. Therefore, given the importance this work, the Panel sees the potential for more synergies and coherence between internal and external capacity development efforts – particularly with respect to learning content and taking into consideration other on-going efforts (notably UNEG) to develop evaluation training programmes.

## 4.4 Enabling environment

*There is a strong enabling environment for evaluation, as reflected by the support of the Executive Board, Executive Director and senior management of UNFPA. The financial resources for centralized thematic evaluations appear adequate and technical expertise in the Evaluation Office is strong. However, the policy does not provide for coverage targets for humanitarian evaluations, funding for humanitarian evaluations appears not to be readily available, and humanitarian evaluation expertise appears insufficient to meet the increasing demand for humanitarian evaluations. The enabling environment for the decentralized evaluation is much less well defined than the centralized evaluation function. In addition to independence issues, funding – through ring-fencing – is insufficient, as are technical evaluation capacities in country offices. UNFPA is making some progress in inculcating a results-based culture and has a considerable way to go in developing a learning and adaptive culture for the future.*

### Support of Executive Board and senior management

114. The Executive Board strongly supports the evaluation function, as demonstrated by the Board decisions reaffirming the value of evaluation as a tool for accountability and learning, and the importance of high-quality independent evaluative evidence for strategic planning. The Board in its meetings requests UNFPA to ensure that adequate resources are provided for evaluation and encourages UNFPA to increase its investment in the evaluation function, within the 1.4 – 3 per cent target<sup>36</sup>. The Executive Director is a strong champion of the evaluation function, demonstrated in her interaction with evaluation staff and confirmed by other senior managers in the organization. It is clear to the Panel that the evaluation function is highly appreciated by the Executive Board and senior managers of UNFPA.

### Funding

115. The expenditure of the Evaluation Office has increased steadily since 2014, and remains on a relatively secure footing. The expenditure on the overall evaluation function, as a percentage of the UNFPA total programme expenses increased from 0.45 per cent in 2014, to 0.83 per cent in 2021. The percentage is below the 1.4-3.0 per cent target range, and this an issue of debate within UNFPA. While the Executive Board encourages UNFPA to reach the 1.4 per cent target, as set out in the Evaluation Policy, the Evaluation Office suggests that the target be revised based on an updated financial analysis of the cost of a fully-fledged evaluation function against the UNFPA total income. With the current increase in the size of the UNFPA budget, a percentage of 1.4 per cent would yield a much larger budget for the evaluation function, and this would mean more evaluations to be conducted, and perhaps more

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<sup>36</sup> Decisions of the Executive Board, 2019 to 2022.

staff to manage the evaluations. It would also mean more evaluations that divisions would have to respond to. System wide, the budget guidance for evaluation is 0.5-3.0 (JIU 2014)<sup>37</sup>.

116. The Panel identified another issue related to funding related to sources. UNFPA resources are categorized as core and “other” or earmarked resources. In principle, evaluations of the work of UNFPA financed by core resources, for example CPEs, should be funded by core resources. Similarly, interventions/areas of the organization’s work that are funded by other resources should be funded by that earmarked funding. Most, if not all, of UNFPA’s humanitarian work, is funded by earmarked resources. No mechanisms exist for ensuring that funds are set aside from these resources for the management and conduct of humanitarian evaluations.

117. The budget for the decentralized evaluation function appears insufficient. The 2021 expenditure on the decentralized evaluation function was US\$ 5.15 million, compared to US\$ 3.88 million for the Evaluation Office. The total expenditure for the decentralized evaluation function includes costs of decentralized evaluations, internal and national evaluation capacity development activities and staffing. Funding for CPEs is ring-fenced and can only be used for CPEs, and this provides certainty about the funding for CPEs. As illustrated in [Figure 5](#) in the Panel’s discussion on the credibility of evaluations, financial investment in CPEs is very modest. Although country offices have the authority to top up the ringfenced budgets, the Panel did not have information to ascertain whether country offices indeed topped up these budgets.

### **Human resources**

118. The Evaluation Office has strong technical capacities in evaluation, but with the increased focus on humanitarian work, it may be necessary to augment the existing capacity with humanitarian evaluation expertise. Regional M&E staff also need to have experience in both humanitarian and development evaluation.

119. As mentioned previously, country-level M&E staff do not work exclusively on evaluation. The job descriptions of country-level staff are heavily slanted towards planning/programming, monitoring and reporting on performance, and include other activities such as resource mobilization and quality assurance of implementation of field activities. Where evaluation is mentioned, it is in relation to preparing the TOR for CPEs. The competency requirements for country-level M&E specialists do not include evaluation-specific expertise. This raises questions about the capabilities of country-level M&E staff to commission and manage evaluations.

120. Regional M&E Advisers are responsible for providing technical support, guidance and oversight, and complementing the toolkits and manuals of the Evaluation Office. However, they appear somewhat stretched in providing technical evaluation support and guidance to country offices, as a large proportion of their time is spent on supporting regional programming and planning, monitoring and reporting. In the Panel’s view, UNFPA is not putting enough priority on evaluation as one of the Regional M&E Advisers’ primary functions - who are well placed to support CPEs and country offices, given their proximity to country offices and their understanding of the region and country contexts.

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<sup>37</sup> “The range of funding between 0.5% and 3% of organizational expenditure is worth consideration depending on the mandate of the organization, the size of the organization, types of evaluations, and role of the function in institutionalization and support to strengthening decentralized evaluation, national capacities for evaluation, and partnerships in evaluation.”

## Results-based management and learning culture

121. UNFPA has a strong commitment to RBM, has a dedicated RBM function and adviser in the Policy and Strategy Division, and provides training in RBM. There is an understanding within the Division of how evaluation contributes to RBM and strategic planning. UNFPA has introduced an RBM Seal to motivate units and offices to practice RBM in their work. The Division understands the link between evaluation and organizational learning, adaptation, and course correction, and has developed a [framework for learning and adaptation](#). This commitment to RBM, learning and adaptation has, according to stakeholders in headquarters and decentralized offices, not yet been fully institutionalized.

## 4.5 Partnerships and national evaluation capacity development

*The Evaluation Office demonstrates a strong commitment to partnership within the UN system through joint evaluations, system-wide evaluations, and inter-agency humanitarian evaluations. Efforts towards national evaluation capacity development are primarily at the level of global partnerships, and it is unclear to the Panel how these translate into action for country-led evaluations.*

122. System-wide and joint evaluations form about 50 per cent of the Evaluation Office's portfolio. The Director of the Evaluation Office is a strong proponent of system-wide and joint evaluations, and this is very much aligned to the Executive Board's encouragement to UNFPA to contribute to the UN' reform agenda through system-wide evaluations. The Evaluation Office participates in joint evaluations primarily with UNAIDS and UNICEF, and these joint evaluations flow from the joint programmes that UNFPA has with these agencies. Not all system-wide or joint evaluations are presented to the Executive Board, but there is a process within UNFPA to identify recommendations that could or should be implemented by UNFPA. Joint evaluations in which UNFPA is the lead agency seem to generate more interest within UNFPA than those where it is not the lead agency. Notwithstanding some of the limitations of system-wide and joint evaluations as vehicles for accountability, they have the advantage of keeping UNFPA's agenda in the focus of other larger agencies and leveraging the partnerships with these agencies to position UNFPA as a key player. They also provide an opportunity for agencies to learn together and understand each other's work. From a cost efficiency perspective, system-wide and joint evaluations potentially lower UNFPAs financial and transactional costs and serve to increase the number of evaluations that UNFPA can do for the same budget.

123. The Evaluation Office has been responsive to General Assembly resolutions calling on entities in the UN development system to strengthen national evaluation capacities on request of Member States. The Panel notes that, increasingly, CPE teams include a young/emerging evaluator thereby contributing to building national evaluation capacities. UNFPA has also developed a training programme on career development for young and emerging evaluators, with materials accessible in six languages, and supports young and emerging evaluators to participate in conferences.

124. UNFPA has established partnerships for global advocacy for influential evaluation in support of the SDGs with the Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation and the EvalYouth Global Network, and as co-leaders of the Decade of EVALUATION for Action or Eval4Action. An intended outcome of these partnerships is to strengthen national evaluation systems and capacities towards delivery of the SDGs. The Evaluation Office has, under the Eval4Action, signed up over 160 partners and conducted a digital campaign. It has not had a face-to-face event over the last three years, primarily because of COVID-19 travel restrictions. According to the Evaluation Office, the budget is very modest compared to other global initiatives, but they have managed to advocate for the involvement of youth in evaluation and are working on standards for youth involvement. The Evaluation Office has also

engaged regional partners in consultations to promote evaluation at country level. The Evaluation Office supports the Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation to strengthen capacities of parliaments and parliamentary staff on the demand for and use of evaluation for evidence-based decision-making. The support has enabled parliamentarians to participate in training programmes and conferences, and enabled the Forum to conduct a global mapping of national evaluation policies.

125. Global advocacy and partnerships for influential evaluation is clearly strategic priority of the Evaluation Office, as reflected in the *Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025*, and in the amount of time invested in global partnerships. The Panel was informed that over 25 per cent of the time of Evaluation Office communications staff and a significant amount of the Director's time is spent on the Eval4Action campaign. The Panel appreciates the importance of global partnerships for advancing the evaluation agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but questions whether there is an appropriate balance between these activities and other priorities and functions of the Evaluation Office. There is also room for a more deliberate operationalization of its national capacity development objectives through the conduct of UNFPA evaluations, especially at the country level.

126. The Evaluation Policy commits UNFPA to pursue partnerships with evaluation units of government departments, civil society organizations and academia to ensure credible and timely country-led evaluations of national programmes related to UNFPA's mandate. The Panel did not find evidence of UNFPA supporting country-led evaluations nor of partnerships around evaluation at this level, and this may be as a result of the limited evaluation capacity in UNFPA country offices.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

127. The Panel reviewed the evaluation function of UNFPA, focusing on the extent to which the UNEG norms of independence, credibility and utility are embedded in the organization's evaluation practices. This is in line with peer reviews of evaluation functions of other bodies within the UN. In addition, the TOR required the Panel to consider (i) the extent to which the evaluation function in its current form was relevant, given the changes in the internal and external environment of the UNFPA, and (ii) whether the current financial and human resources investments were adequate for an evaluation function serving a mid-sized UN agency working within the humanitarian-development peace nexus.

128. The Panel concludes that the evaluation function in UNFPA continues to strengthen. It is highly valued in UNFPA and by the Executive Board for its contribution to corporate level strategies, enhancing programmes in the areas of three transformative results, and informing CPDs. The Evaluation Office is respected across the organization for its professionalism and its added value in providing evaluative evidence to inform decision-making in UNFPA. Though the evaluation function is relatively small, it has managed to cultivate a high profile in the UN development system through its commitment to system-wide, inter-agency and joint evaluations. Evaluation of humanitarian action needs more attention and there is potential to strengthen the relevance, quality and learning from decentralized evaluations.

129. The recommendations of the Panel aim to further enhance the evaluation function and ensure that it adds value to UNFPA in pursuit of the organization's transformational results. The Panel is mindful that these recommendations have cost implications, but these should be weighed against the benefit to UNFPA of an evaluation function that adds value to the organization. Most of the recommendations are for implementation by the Evaluation Office, but will require the support of UNFPA's senior management in headquarters and the regional and country offices. Some recommendations can be implemented in the short term (next six months), while others will require

longer to implement. The Panel urges UNFPA to complete implementation of the recommendations within the period of the current strategic plan.

130. This following section sets out the Panel's main conclusions on each of the UNEG norms and the enabling environment and recommendations for enhancing the evaluation function in respect of these.

## 5.1 Conclusions and recommendations on Independence

131. The structural independence of the centralized evaluation function is firmly established. The Evaluation Policy is unambiguous about the independence of the Director of Evaluation<sup>38</sup> and the Evaluation Office, and the institutional arrangements and lines of accountability support this independence. The Executive Board and UNFPA senior management play an important role in supporting the behavioural independence of the Evaluation Office.

132. However, the Peer Review identifies the lack of a provision for rotation within the (monitoring and) evaluation job group (Evaluation Office, regional and country offices) as counter to UNFPA's human resources policy, creating barriers to professional development, and a potential risk to behavioural independence.

133. Furthermore, the lines of accountability of M&E staff in UNFPA regional and country offices do not support the organizational and behavioural independence of the decentralized evaluation function. UNFPA acknowledges this impediment to independence of the decentralized evaluation and measures have been put in place to strengthen the credibility of decentralized evaluations. However, these measures do not address the core problem, namely, the lines of reporting of staff in the decentralized offices. This issue is particularly acute for the management of CPEs which are currently managed by M&E officers and focal points in country offices.

### **Recommendation 1. The job classification and job descriptions of Evaluation Advisers in headquarters and regional offices, as well as of country level M&E staff, should be revisited.**

- a. As practised in other UN agencies, UNFPA should consider re-competing non-rotational positions at the end of the standard tour of duty (5 years in headquarters), with the incumbent eligible for renewal once for the same position. Rotation within the M&E job group (headquarters/regional offices) should be encouraged together with other mobility modalities, for example, inter-agency loans, towards strengthening staff learning, career pathways and behavioral independence.
- b. Reporting lines within the regional offices and country offices should be revised. Regional M&E Advisers should report directly to the Regional Director on evaluation matters, with a secondary (dotted) reporting line to the Evaluation Office<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> A relatively small point, but the next policy could state explicitly who makes the decision on the dismissal of the Director of the Evaluation Office.

<sup>39</sup> The Evaluation Office could, for example, participate in recruitment panels in the capacity of substance matter expert and provide feedback on annual performance reviews of staff with evaluation responsibilities.

- c. Country Office M&E officers/focal points should report directly to the Representative and possess at least basic evaluation competencies (i.e., as a requirement in their job descriptions).

*[Responsibility: Division of Human Resources, Evaluation Office, Policy and Strategy Division]*

**Recommendation 2. To ensure adequate quality and independence, strategic CPEs should be managed by the regional office.** This will require increasing the evaluation capacity at the regional office level. UNFPA may wish to consider the following options for increasing evaluation capacity:

- a. Increasing the evaluation capacity of the current Regional M&E Adviser with an additional position of Evaluation Specialist at P3/4 level.
- b. Separating the evaluation functions from the other functions of the Regional M&E Adviser and creating a new stand-alone P5 Regional Evaluation Adviser position.
- c. Increasing the planning and programming advisory capacity in the regional office to enable the Regional M&E Advisor to focus on the evaluation function.
- d. A combination of these options.

*[Responsibility: Office of the Executive Director, Division of Human Resources, Evaluation Office, Policy and Strategy Division, Department of Management Services]*

## 5.2 Conclusions and recommendations on Credibility

134. The Panel concurs that centralized evaluations are of sufficient quality as indicated by the formal quality assessments and users within UNFPA. The evaluation management expertise in the Evaluation Office, the appointment of suitably qualified service providers, and the adequacy of the budgets for centralized evaluations are key factors in ensuring the quality of evaluations. The independence of the Evaluation Office has contributed to the credibility of centralized evaluations. One area of weakness in centralized evaluations is that evaluation reference groups are not sufficiently inclusive of external experts and stakeholders, other than the partner UN agency in the case of joint evaluations.

135. Decentralized evaluations, though formally assessed through the EQAA system as being of good quality, do not enjoy the same level of credibility as centralized evaluations. While the Evaluation Office still formally clears the TORs and consultant selection for CPEs and RPEs, should other types of decentralized evaluations become more visible, this will become unmanageable for the Evaluation Office with risks to evaluation quality. True decentralization of this quality assurance role to regional office level will be needed going forward.

136. The lack of independence of the decentralized evaluation function undermines the credibility of decentralized evaluations. Other key factors effecting credibility are the insufficiency of budgets for CPEs that, in turn, impacts negatively on the ability of country offices to attract the best evaluation experts. Further, staff in country offices do not always have the relevant evaluation management expertise or time available to lead the function. At the regional and country level, in most instances, there is no information about the membership of the evaluation reference groups, thus detracting from the credibility of the evaluation.

137. The tools which the Evaluation Office has introduced to enhance the quality and credibility of evaluations have served the evaluation function well. The CPE Guide and the CPE toolkit have undoubtedly contributed to improvement in the quality of country programme evaluations. The EQAA system has served as a valuable tool for measuring the quality of evaluation reports, although consistently high scores and differences with another UN partner ratings suggest a review of the tool and the rigour of the assessments may be useful.

**Recommendation 3. UNFPA should strengthen evaluation quality assurance and the quality assessment system.** This entails:

- a. Reviewing the quality criteria used and the performance of the service provider<sup>40</sup> in assessing evaluation deliverables to improve the robustness of the assessments and raise the quality bar.
- b. In future, all evaluations, including country-level project evaluations, should go through the external evaluation quality assessment system. If recommendation 2 is implemented, capacity should be sufficient at Regional Office level for the clearing of TORs and evaluation teams for country managed evaluations.
- c. Ensuring that evaluation reference groups are established for all evaluations, that they include both internal and external experts and stakeholders, and that their composition be indicated in the acknowledgements section of the final report.

*[Responsibility: Evaluation Office, Regional Offices]*

**Recommendation 4. A higher budget threshold for CPEs and RPEs should be established to ensure that funding is sufficient for the conduct of quality evaluations.**

*[Responsibility: Evaluation Office, Policy and Strategy Division, Department of Management Services]*

### 5.3 Conclusions and recommendations on utility

138. The Panel concludes that, although the Evaluation Office has prioritised the utility and use of evaluations, this remains an area that needs further strengthening. The Panel found several examples of centralized evaluations contributing to corporate strategy. The use of joint evaluations is less clear, but indications are that the joint evaluations led by UNFPA are more likely to be used than those led by other agencies. System-wide evaluations form a significant proportion of the centralized evaluation portfolio and are encouraged by the Executive Board. These reports, however, appear not to be promoted and used widely within UNFPA or among system partners. While the cost to UNFPA of joint and system wide evaluations is much lower than agency specific evaluations, value for money needs to be understood in the usefulness and uptake of these evaluations for UNFPAs policy and programming purposes.

139. The *Strategy to Enhance the Use of Evaluation through Communications and Knowledge Management (2022-2025)*, developed to enhance the use of evaluations, is an important addition to the *Evaluation Strategy (2022-2025)*. It has a strong focus on the role of the Evaluation Office and, while

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<sup>40</sup> This could involve, for example, sending a sample of reports out for second reviews with a different company.

it considers both products and engagement processes, the emphasis is largely on global evaluations and their individual use. Strategic focus 2 “national capacity and systems strengthening” is weakly developed, again with significant attention to global efforts but an unclear theory of change as to how these efforts (and others) will enable national actors and governments to undertake and use evaluations at country level. The engagement of national actors in, for example, CPEs is not mentioned in the strategy nor are concrete activities at country level suggested – as such the strategy is framed more as an Evaluation Office strategy, rather than organizational. Finally, given the critical importance of evaluation use, the Panel sees little rationale for having two separate evaluation strategies – and indeed some risk to internal coherence.

140. There is an expressed commitment from the senior management of UNFPA to a learning culture in the organization (UNFPA adaptive management model, for example). The role of the Policy and Strategy Division in following up and promoting the use of evaluation evidence is seen as good practice. Building and sustaining a learning culture requires a more deliberate engagement on the use of evaluations at all levels of the organization, with senior management following up commitment with action. Beyond self-reporting, there is no mechanism for holding management accountable for evaluation use. A learning organization is also one that provides space for innovation. From the evidence available to the Panel, innovation is not explicitly embedded in the organization’s culture. Although there was a formative evaluation of the UNFPA Innovation Initiative in 2017, there is no formal requirement for the evaluation of innovation before scale up<sup>41</sup>. Finally, the Panel believes there is scope for the evaluation function itself to be more innovative in its methodologies and approaches.

141. The selection of planned centralized evaluations cited in the current QBEP does not sufficiently reflect the strategic shift of UNFPA to expand its humanitarian portfolio. The Panel concludes that this is because of the lack of an effective strategy for mobilizing resources for evaluations of humanitarian responses, and the limited humanitarian evaluation capacity in the Evaluation Office. Also, the criteria for the selection of evaluations have not changed since 2013, so they do not reflect the increased significance of humanitarian responses in UNFPA’s work. There is also a lack of rapid evaluative reviews and/or evaluation synthesis that could be responsive to the needs of senior management for evaluative evidence on an urgent issue.

142. CPEs and RPEs, even though rated as good quality in the quality assessments, appear to have a perfunctory use in the design of country and regional programme documents, and have limited strategic value for senior management in headquarters. The trigger of a new programme cycle may be insufficient, and the strategic framing of such exercises warrants further reflection towards enhancing use. Country-level project evaluations remain on the fringes of the evaluation function. They are not quality assessed, are not visibly part of the official portfolio of evaluations, are not published and the Panel was unable to ascertain much about their use beyond the fulfilment of donor requirements. This represents a missed opportunity for organizational learning and is contrary to UNEG Norms and Standards vis-à-vis transparency.

### **Recommendation 5. Map and strengthen evaluation coverage.**

- a. In the next policy, reconsider and revise the criteria used for the selection of evaluation topics and triggers for evaluations to ensure that the coverage and types of evaluations

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<sup>41</sup> Although one of the triggers for evaluation in the current policy is a pilot/innovation where an evaluation could support replication and scale up, the Panel did not find any examples of such evaluations.

commissioned are responsive to the needs of the primary users of UNFPA evaluations and coverage of the overall organizational strategy (including humanitarian outcomes).

- b. UNFPA should also consider expanding the range of targeted evaluation products to include lighter cross-evaluation evidence synthesis/summaries in response to ad hoc management needs for analysis.
- c. Management should update and share costed evaluation plans annually to ensure that all the organization's evaluation work is supported, quality assured and contributes to organizational learning. The Evaluation Office should consolidate and publish the centralized and decentralized evaluation plan – as well as all evaluations with their management responses.

*[Responsibility: Evaluation Office, Humanitarian Response Department, Department of Management Services, Policy and Strategy Division, Regional Offices]*

**Recommendation 6. Improve the utility of CPE and RPEs by:**

- a. Strengthening the strategic scoping and key evaluation questions;
- b. Increasing flexibility in costed evaluation plans so that these evaluations are triggered by changes in country or regional context and not only by the routine of the programme cycle (see also recommendation 6);
- c. Allocating an adequate level of resources (see also recommendation 4);
- d. Instituting dissemination and engagement plans which need to be customized to the context and evidence needs; and
- e. Building stronger dimensions of national engagement and capacity development through CPE processes.

*[Responsibility: Policy and Strategy Division, Evaluation Office, Regional Offices]*

**Recommendation 7. Strengthen efforts to track evaluation use/uptake within UNFPA.**

- a. Review and report on evaluation follow up for all centralized and decentralized evaluations e.g., Annual Report on the Evaluation Function;
- b. Routine spot checking of management self-reported implementation; and
- c. Analyze the extent to which joint and system-wide evaluations are contributing to coverage of UNFPAs strategic plan and to change within UNFPA.

*[Responsibility: Evaluation Office, Office of Audit and Investigation, Policy and Strategy Division]*

## **5.4 Conclusions and recommendations on Enabling Environment**

143. The UNFPA evaluation function operates within a strong enabling environment, which provides a firm foundation for it to be further strengthened. The Evaluation Policy has been an important

framework for giving practical effect to the independence of the Evaluation Office, along with the support of UNFPA leadership and senior management respecting the independence of the Evaluation Office. There are gaps in the Evaluation Policy, for example, the accountabilities of regional directors and country representatives in the evaluation function. While the Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025 sets out a theory of change for strengthening the evaluation function, the absence of explicit assumptions, a risk assessment and risk mitigation measures is a major limitation of the theory of change.

144. Clarity on the division of labour between the Evaluation Office and other divisions in headquarters has greatly assisted the Evaluation Office in carrying out its functions independently, yet collaboratively. The clear distinction between the evaluation and audit functions has been important in the UNFPA context, as evaluation previously formed part of the audit function. However, there are unexplored opportunities for synergy between the two functions, for example, to strengthen accountability for evaluation use and compliance with evaluation processes. The division of labour between the Evaluation Office and the Policy and Strategy Division on centralized evaluations is clear, and collaboration between these two offices has been important in the virtuous circle of policy development, implementation, and evaluation. However, in the case of the decentralized evaluation function, the division of labour is unclear, as both provide technical support and guidance to decentralized offices.

145. Conditions are less enabling for the decentralized evaluation function. Evaluation capacities in the decentralized offices are not adequate for an effective decentralized evaluation function. Regional M&E Advisers have many other responsibilities, including planning, which take up a significant proportion of their time. Country office M&E staff are primarily engaged in monitoring and reporting, and in the case M&E focal points, evaluation is not their primary area of expertise. The reporting lines of staff in decentralized offices also compromise the independence and credibility of decentralized evaluations. The ring-fencing of funding for CPEs and RPEs has to some extent created an enabling environment for decentralized evaluations. However, the size of budgets ring-fenced has generally been insufficient for contracting suitably skilled evaluators, thus undermining the quality and usefulness of decentralized evaluations.

146. The Evaluation Office is heavily invested, in terms of time, in building global partnerships for advocacy and influential evaluation. Relatively less attention has been given at the regional and country level by UNFPA management to building partnerships at country level to strengthen capacities for country-led evaluations. The theory of change could be clearer in how these global partnerships strengthen the capacities at the country level.

147. Senior management sets the tone from the top, promoting a culture of learning and adaptive management in UNFPA. However, this appears not yet to be fully socialized in the organization.

148. The organizational budget dedicated to the centralized evaluation function, given current coverage targets, is adequate. However, the new policy will need to include coverage targets for humanitarian evaluation which will require additional resources, both human and financial. Improving the quality and use of decentralized evaluations commissioned by regional and country offices will require additional financial and human resources.

**Recommendation 8. Clearer coverage targets, triggers and standard costs for different types of evaluations (including humanitarian) should be established.** Based on this:

- a. The adequacy of financial resources allocated to the evaluation function at different levels of UNFPA should be reassessed; and

- b. Additional mechanisms considered for ringfencing funding (e.g. creation of a pooled fund, earmarking as a percentage of total project budget, etc.) including for UNFPAs humanitarian work.

*[Responsibility: Evaluation Office, Policy and Strategy Division, Department of Management Services, Humanitarian Response Department]*

**Recommendation 9. Institutional and human resource capacities for humanitarian evaluations should be strengthened.** This includes:

- a. Ensuring coherence between the next Evaluation Policy and Emergency SOPs vis-à-vis humanitarian reviews and evaluations;
- b. Agreeing to and establishing a funding mechanism for humanitarian evaluations from other resources; and
- c. Strengthening human resource capacities for humanitarian evaluations in the Evaluation Office, regional offices and country offices.

*[Responsibility: Evaluation Office, Humanitarian Response Department, Department of Management Services, Policy and Strategy Division, Regional Offices]*

**Recommendation 10. Coordination and synergies between the evaluation function and the audit function should be strengthened.**

- a. The Oversight Policy of UNFPA should give greater clarity on the aims and principles for coordination between the evaluation and audit functions, and the role of Oversight and Audit Committee in facilitating coordination between these two functions defined.
- b. The Office for Audit and Oversight Services could consider introducing in its compliance audits key aspects of the Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Strategy. This could include auditing the establishment of appropriate posts and job descriptions, reporting lines, quality assurance processes, establishment of evaluation reference groups, and the publication of all evaluations and implementation of management responses.

*[Responsibility: Oversight and Audit Committee, Evaluation Office and Office for Audit and Investigation]*

**Recommendation 11. The theory of change and UNFPA's strategy for national evaluation capacity development and system strengthening needs to be developed and discussed by senior management to ensure that the next policy and strategy more fully reflects organizational commitment and accountabilities at all levels for its implementation.**

*[Responsibility: Evaluation Office, Policy and Strategy Division]*

## 6. Good practices

149. The Panel identified good practices in UNFPA that, in the spirit of the mutual learning that underpins the UNEG peer reviews, it recommends to other evaluation functions in the UN development system.

## **Role of headquarters divisions in building a culture of evaluation and learning**

150. In UNFPA, the link and collaboration between the evaluation function and the Policy and Strategy Division is embedded in the functions of the division and in the Evaluation Policy. The responsibility for promoting the use of evaluations for managing and strengthening organizational performance is vested in the Policy and Strategy Division. The Panel was struck by the strong collaboration and synergies between the Evaluation Office and the Policy and Strategy Division. Also, the quarterly engagement between the Evaluation Office and the Programmes Division is an effective means of infusing evaluative information and thinking into discussions on programmes, and for the Evaluation Office in turn to identify potential issues for future evaluations.

## **Ring-fencing funds for country-level evaluations**

151. With the inevitable budgetary pressures that decentralized offices of UN agencies experience, decentralized evaluation budgets are susceptible to being reduced or diverted to other activities deemed to be a higher priority. The ring-fencing of budgets for decentralized evaluations is a way of ensuring a minimum level of funding for decentralized evaluations. While the Panel notes that the amounts allocated for decentralized evaluations may not have been adequate in all instances, the practice of ring-fencing of budgets provides at least a firm minimum budget allocation that can be topped up.

## **High quality products for communication and engagement**

152. The documents/products the Evaluation Office uses for communication and engagement are of high quality and visually appealing. An evaluation brief and presentation accompany the evaluation report as part of the communications package, are highly readable and in language accessible to persons not familiar with technical aspects of UNFPA's work.

## **Engagement of youth in evaluations**

153. UNFPA's engagement of youth in evaluations is highly commendable. The inclusion of young, emerging evaluators in CPEs is an important vehicle for developing national evaluation capacities, as it provides young evaluators with learning experiences that might otherwise not be available to them. It also makes for more diverse evaluation teams, who can benefit from the perspectives of young people. Incorporating youth engagement at all levels of the evaluation process is a positive step forward for UNFPA. By including young people as key informants, evaluators, advisors, and decision-makers, evaluations benefit from a more diverse and representative range of perspectives.

# Annex 1. Terms of Reference of the Peer Review Panel

## UNEG-OECD/DAC Professional Peer Review of

### UNFPA's Evaluation Function 2022

#### 1. Introduction and objectives of UNEG Peer Reviews

The UNEG framework for professional peer reviews of the evaluation function of UN organisations was approved at the UNEG Annual General Meeting in 2011<sup>1</sup> as a way of assessing the independence, credibility, and utility of the evaluation functions of UNEG members. Relying on mutual trust among the organizations and professionals involved, peer reviews attempt to stimulate organizations to strengthen the quality, independence and utility of their evaluation functions by means of peer-led investigation, internal discussion and self-assessment, as well as dialogue with key stakeholders.

Peer reviews seek to answer a central question: ‘Are the UN agency’s evaluation policy, evaluation function and its evaluation products independent, credible and useful for learning and accountability purposes, as assessed by a panel of professional evaluation peers against the UNEG Norms and Standards and the evidence base provided?’

First developed in 2005 and updated in 2016<sup>2</sup>, UNEG evaluation norms and standards provide a clear framework for UNEG-OECD/DAC peer reviews. There are ten general norms that should be upheld in the conduct of any evaluation, four institutional norms that should be reflected in the management and governance of evaluation functions and a set of associated standards that support the implementation of these fourteen normative principles. Lines of inquiry related to these norms and standards form a key part of the peer review process.

UNEG-OECD/DAC peer reviews of evaluation functions are often carried out before a renewal, update or drafting of a new Evaluation Policy. In answering the broad question identified above, peer reviews have several additional aims:

- iii. To provide an independent and professional assessment of the extent to which the UNEG Norms and Standards have been embraced in the organization concerned. This assessment may lead to the formulation of potential improvements in evaluation policy and practice;
- iv. To strengthen the culture of evaluation, including the use of evaluative evidence by management, governing bodies and the organisation’s decentralized units (country and regional offices). This may lead to increased understanding of the current level of quality and needed improvements in evaluations being produced; better integration of the evaluation findings into performance management systems and processes; enhanced utility of evaluative evidence throughout the organization; and stronger evaluation planning and budgeting;

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<sup>1</sup> Detail of UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations (uneval.org)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914/>

- v. To provide a means to “evaluate the evaluators” against an established set of professional standards, thus ensuring a necessary degree of independence from management in assessing the performance of the evaluation function; and,
- vi. To strengthen internal evaluation capacity and build external confidence in the broader UN evaluation system, thus potentially reducing demands for external assessment of the organisation’s performance and effectiveness.

Peer reviews focus on three core issues that are central to the Norms and Standards and underpin all evaluation functions: independence, credibility and utility. The peer review should also assess the extent to which the evaluation function contributes to the accountability of the organization for the public resources entrusted to it, as well as its ability to support the strategic learning agenda of the organization.

The intended audiences for peer reviews are typically senior management, governing bodies, the Director of Evaluation and EO staff, as well as other evaluation users, including intended beneficiaries in UN Member Countries.

## **2. Background to the UNFPA peer review (including key points from any previous reviews/assessments of the evaluation function)**

The evaluation function in UNFPA has evolved considerably over the past decade. Since the endorsement of the first UNFPA evaluation policy in 2009 (DP/FPA/2009/4 (DP/FPA/2009/4))<sup>3</sup>, there have been many key milestones in the evaluation function, including a first revision of the policy in 2013 (DP/FPA/2013/5), which led to the creation of an independent, adequately funded and staffed Evaluation Office in 2013; the approval of the first Transitional Biennial Budgeted Evaluation Plan and the arrival of the first director of UNFPA’s independent Evaluation Office in 2014; the launch of the Evaluation Office’s revised quality assurance and assessment system and revised Management Response Tracking System in 2016, and the initiation of an evaluation strategy aligned to the new strategic plan 2018-2021.

In addition to this, since 2009, the external environment in which the organization operates has changed significantly, from the adoption of internationally agreed development frameworks to the onset of a global pandemic, the landscape in which evaluations are conducted has transformed greatly. In this context, there have been several independent reviews of the evaluation function since the first UNFPA evaluation policy in 2009 to inform the subsequent revisions of the UNFPA evaluation policy.

In 2012, the Executive Director of UNFPA, requested the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an independent review of the UNFPA evaluation policy. In its report on the review of the UNFPA evaluation policy (DP/FPA/2012/7)<sup>4</sup>, OIOS suggested a number of steps that could be taken to improve the existing policy, including: (a) more explicit links between evaluation activities and the mandate and goals of UNFPA; (b) better delineation of the scope of corporate and programme-level evaluation activities; (c) better articulation of the independence of evaluation; (d) a more explicit description of roles and responsibilities in evaluation; (e) addressing gaps related to planning and prioritizing evaluations, resources for evaluation, follow-up procedures, incorporating gender and human rights perspectives in evaluation, and capturing, storing, sharing and utilizing lessons learned and best practices; and (f) better recognition of and allowance for different country needs and contexts.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unfpa.org/admin-resource/2009-unfpa-evaluation-policy-0>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unfpa.org/es/review-unfpa-evaluation-policy-dpfpa20127>

In response to the review, UNFPA revised its evaluation policy, which was endorsed by the Executive Board in 2013 (DP/FPA/2013/5)<sup>5</sup>, to provide greater clarity about: (a) the concept, role and use of evaluation within the organization, including the institutional framework and the definition of roles and responsibilities; and (b) how the evaluation function and evaluations are planned, managed and resourced, thus providing a clearer and enhanced institutional basis for the evaluation function in UNFPA. The 2013 policy also required UNFPA to review the evaluation policy at regular intervals and revise it as needed, including prior to the conclusion of each UNFPA strategic plan.

In 2017-2018, UNFPA undertook a further external, independent strategic review of the UNFPA evaluation function as foreseen in the 2013 policy. The review concluded that the evaluation policy was fundamentally sound, but also highlighted the need to update the 2013 evaluation policy in order to align it with internal strategic frameworks, including the UNFPA strategic plan 2018-2021, and global normative and strategic instruments, such as the 2030 Agenda.

The 2017-18 MOPAN assessment report of UNFPA<sup>6</sup> highlighted that, “UNFPA has harnessed knowledge management as a key resource, bolstered by improved evaluation processes. Previously identified as a gap by some evaluations, knowledge management under the 2018 Knowledge Management Strategy is increasingly integral to UNFPA’s way of working. The organisation is building a repository of knowledge products, reflecting thoughtful consideration of lessons learned. The Evaluation Office has produced a range of useful tools including lessons-learned syntheses, reviews and meta-analyses. A recent external review of UNFPA’s evaluation function identified useful improvements that are being quickly implemented.”<sup>7</sup>

Two of the three evaluation-specific KPIs measured as part of the MOPAN assessment were deemed ‘highly satisfactory’ (evaluation function – 8.1; evaluation quality – 8.3), whereas evaluation coverage (8.2) was assessed as ‘satisfactory’. Related findings included the fact that UNFPA’s evaluation function “demonstrates a commitment to joint and system-wide evaluations” but that “evaluation resources are not yet at an ideal level and not all planned evaluations take place, which compromises coverage.”<sup>8</sup> The Evaluation Office’s use of syntheses of evaluative evidence as a way of “consolidating learning” and tracking of management responses to strengthen internal accountability were noted.<sup>9</sup>

Considering the MOPAN assessment and in response to the 2018 strategic review, UNFPA revised its evaluation policy to align with the Executive Board decision 2018/11, relevant General Assembly resolutions and the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR). The 2019 revised policy (DP/FPA/2019/1)<sup>10</sup> provides up-to-date definitions, principles, and norms and standards on evaluation, aligned to the 2016 UNEG norms and standards, and further clarifies the roles and responsibilities for the evaluation function at UNFPA. Moreover, the current policy highlights three priorities for the evaluation function: (a) enhanced focus on the use of evaluations; (b) greater UN coherence through joint evaluations, system-wide evaluations, UNEG and Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) initiatives and multi-stakeholder partnerships to strengthen national capacities to evaluate the SDGs; and (c) increased support to national evaluation capacity development through multi-stakeholder partnerships for country-led evaluation systems. In line with the previous evaluation policies, the

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/board-documents/main-document/en-evaluation\\_policy.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/board-documents/main-document/en-evaluation_policy.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/unfpa2017-18/UNFPA\\_Report.pdf](https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/unfpa2017-18/UNFPA_Report.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/Designed\\_Eval\\_Policy\\_FINAL\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/Designed_Eval_Policy_FINAL_WEB.pdf)

current policy also requires an independent review on the performance of the policy to be undertaken in five years.

The 2021 Annual Evaluation Report on the Evaluation Function reported progress on nine key performance indicators that, together, assess the strength of the evaluation function in UNFPA. They include financing for the evaluation function, human resources for monitoring and evaluation, evaluation coverage, evaluation implementation rate, quality of evaluations, posting of evaluation reports publicly, submission of management responses to evaluation recommendations, implementation of management responses and the use of evaluations in programme development. Seven of these nine KPIs were rated as “achieved” while KPI 1 on financing was deemed to have a “stable trend” and KPI 3 on evaluation coverage was rated as “almost achieved”.

### **3. Purpose, Subject, Scope and Limitations of the Peer Review**

The main purpose of the UNFPA Peer Review is to strengthen the UNFPA evaluation function so that it can effectively contribute to organizational decision-making, learning and accountability for results and programme effectiveness.

The Peer Review will determine if the evaluation function – both the centralized and decentralized levels - and its corresponding products are sufficiently independent, credible, and used for learning and accountability purposes. It will also assess the function and practice at both levels against UN norms and standards, as well as in relation to elements that are particular to UNFPA, such as youth engagement.

The Peer Review shall provide actionable recommendations that may be addressed to UNFPA’s Executive Director, Executive Board, Executive Committee, Oversight Advisory Committee, Evaluation Office and Regional Offices aimed at improving the overall quality, credibility and effectiveness of the evaluation function as a whole. More specifically, the recommendations should inform decision-making about the positioning of the evaluation function in UNFPA, its governance, resourcing (including both human and financial capacity), evaluation planning, evaluation use and quality assurance mechanisms, among other things.

The Peer Review will take into consideration the current reforms ongoing in UNFPA – notably the acceleration of efforts to achieve the three transformative results articulated in the UNFPA 2022-2025 Strategic Plan ending (end unmet need for family planning, ending end preventable maternal deaths, ending end GBV and harmful practices). Attention will also be paid to UNFPA’s role in humanitarian response, to the shift from ‘funding’ to ‘financing’ and increasing attention on diversity and inclusion, including among women and young people, and addressing the furthest behind first.

The scope includes the entire evaluation function: both centralized and decentralized evaluations, support to strengthening national evaluation capacity development and coherence in evaluation within the UN system. The Peer review will look at progress made in strengthening the evaluation function in UNFPA since the approval of the 2019 evaluation policy, and the finalization of the 2022-25 evaluation strategy with a view to providing strategic inputs into the updated/new evaluation policy, to be finalized before the end of 2023.

The primary users for this review are UNFPA Senior Management at all three levels and the Executive Board, as well as the staff of the Evaluation Office, Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Advisors at the Regional Offices and M&E Officers/Focal Points or evaluation managers at Regional/Country Offices. In addition, the review will be made publicly available through the website of UNFPA’s

Evaluation Office to help inform key external stakeholders such as implementing partners, major donors, and the broader evaluation community of the main findings and conclusions of the review.

### **Approach and methods for UNEG peer reviews**

The findings in UNEG peer reviews are typically based on a mix of secondary and primary data, comprising both desk review and key informant interview and focus group techniques from in-person engagement with members of UNEG evaluation offices and key stakeholders of the agency's evaluation function.

They also rely on an assessment of the evaluation function against the *Maturity Matrix* for UNEG evaluation functions which is operationalized through a set of 48 performance criteria organized according to the norms and standards. Taken together, these lines of evidence and the assessment framework provide a standardized normative framework for UNEG peer reviewers to answer the core question of the peer review mentioned above.

UNEG Peer Reviews typically include the following stages:

- i. **Preparation:** During this period, the focus will be on the finalization of the ToR for the peer review, the composition of the Panel, the recruitment of the consultant and the collection of key documents relevant to the peer review.
- ii. **Self-Assessment:** The agency being assessed undertakes a self-assessment of the evaluation function against the UNEG Norms and Standards, using the maturity matrix for UNEG peer reviews presented to the AGM in 2020. This self-assessment should be conducted by the evaluation entity being assessed involving the full range of evaluation officers subject to the assessment in both centralized and decentralized offices as appropriate. The UNFPA self-assessment will be completed following consultation within the EO and with regional colleagues.
- iii. **Preliminary Assessment:** The consultant supporting the panel should conduct an extensive document review and consult with the Evaluation Office to support the drafting of a preliminary assessment of the evaluation function, which will be discussed with Evaluation Office staff. The expert consultant who supports the Panel reporting to the Panel Chair should assess a sample of evaluation reports against the UNEG template for evaluation reports.<sup>11</sup> This will be supplemented by the external quality assessment that all UNFPA evaluation reports finalized during 2022 will undergo as part of the regular quality assurance system.
- iv. **In-person or virtual mission of the panel to UNFPA:** Equipped with the preliminary assessment, the Panel should conduct an initial visit (in person or virtual) to UNFPA. This should include a round of meetings, interviews and focus group discussions with staff, UNFPA senior management (at all levels of the organization) and members of the Board and other key external stakeholders.
- v. **Reporting and dissemination:** The Panel produces a final draft report and powerpoint for discussion with senior management and representatives of the

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/607>.

Executive Committee. This will also be the opportunity for a peer exchange session with the Evaluation Office. Once the report has been finalized, the agency produces a management response. The report and response are disseminated together by UNFPA as well as by the UNEG Peer Review Working Group on the UNEG website.

The timeline for the current exercise is as follows:

Phase	Timing
Preparation	October 2022
Self-Assessment	November 2022 -February 2023
Preliminary Assessment	December 2022 – February 2023
Panel meetings with UNFPA Headquarters	Early February 2023 (to coincide with the Global Evaluation Meeting)
Reporting	April – May 2023
Dissemination	June 2023 -

#### 4. Core assessment elements and areas [normative framework]

The assessment framework for the peer review is made up of a number of distinct elements, which combine to enable the Panel to answer the overall question posed common to all UNEG peer reviews. These elements include:

- i. The **UNEG Maturity Matrix for Peer Reviews** which operationalises the Norms and Standards into an assessment rubric including fifty-two assessment factors across twelve norms and pre-defined levels of maturity for each performance criterion;
- ii. a set of **general assessment areas** organized by central features of any UNEG Member evaluation function; and,
- iii. a set of **agency specific questions** which help strengthen the potential of the peer review to the agency’s management and Evaluation Office.

##### i. UNEG Maturity Matrix for Peer Reviews<sup>12</sup>

In 2020, UNEG updated the operational framework for peer reviews around the ten general norms that evaluation functions should exhibit in the conduct of any evaluation, as well as the four institutional norms that should be reflected in the management of the evaluation function. Operationalised into a set of forty-eight organisational and performance criteria for reviewers to assess, the assessment rubric is presented in the form of a maturity index, with four ‘levels’ or ‘benchmarks’ of maturity clearly defined for each of the performance criteria.

In proposing these benchmarks, the rubric is intended not only to produce a one-off assessment of the maturity of the evaluation function against the UNEG Norms and Standards but also a clear pathway for organizational strengthening which can support the professionalization activities of UNEG members

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/download/3591>

going forward. This is in support of the commitment that UN Evaluation Offices make when becoming members of UNEG.

## **ii. Key assessment areas**

Organized around the core normative standards for evaluation in the UN system - independence, credibility and utility - and building on the UNEG Maturity Matrix<sup>13</sup>, the key questions will look at the evaluation policy, strategy, governance and management of the function, evaluation planning and quality, evaluation follow-up, use and external influence, partnerships and positioning.

### **A. The Evaluation Policy:**

A.1. The extent to which the UNFPA Evaluation Policy (2019) conforms with UNEG Norms and Standards, internal (such as the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan) and external (such as delivering on Agenda 2030 and ICPD) contextual changes and requirements, and whether it needs to be updated in view of recent changes and ongoing transformation within UNFPA, the role of evaluation in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), and the move towards system-wide evaluations;

A.2. The extent to which the evaluation policy is consistent with, and is able to influence, other UNFPA policies, strategies, frameworks or strategic technical documents (notably those concerning strategic planning, programming and budgeting, oversight, results-based management and monitoring; research, data collection and analysis and knowledge management; enterprise risk management; and human resources);

A.3. The extent to which the theory of change developed in the corporate evaluation strategy is used to operationalise the Policy, is logical and comprehensive, includes validated assumptions and mitigated risks;

A.4. The extent to which the UNFPA's Evaluation Policy integrates gender equality, human rights, principles of LNOB/RFB, disability inclusion, humanitarian principles, equity, ethical principles and social and environmental standards, as well as adequately reflecting the recent developments in the field of evaluation (technical skills and knowledge, approaches and methods, data gathering and analysis).

### **B. Governance arrangements, including the following:**

B.1. The extent to which the roles and responsibilities, as defined in the Policy are appropriately defined and adequately operationalized, including the organizational relationships of the evaluation function with the Executive Board, Executive Director, Executive Committee, and UNFPA oversight structures;

B.2. The extent to which the arrangements for oversight of the evaluation function is in line with the UNEG Norms and Standards and how well they work in practice;

B.3. The extent to which the contractual arrangements for the post of Director of Evaluation, including recruitment, performance management and termination, contributes to the structural and behavioural independence of the function and the extent to which the Director of Evaluation has

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<sup>13</sup> See for example the DAC – UNEG document.

adequate access and opportunities to inform key corporate processes and decisions, including the deliberations of UNFPA's Executive Committee; and whether the institutional 'space' given to the role allows the post-holder and evaluation function more generally to exert influence where necessary.

**C. Management of the Evaluation Function, including the following:**

C.1. How far management arrangements and working procedures of the evaluation function at both centralized and decentralized levels in fulfilling the evaluation policy commitments and the achievement of the evaluation policy's objectives;

C.2. The development, provision and use of guidance, methods and tools to support and strengthen the management of all types of evaluations at central and decentralized levels and establish clear quality standards and a division of labour between the two levels;

C.4. The extent to which the evaluation function is able to respond effectively to crises (including both mandate-specific crises such as the Sahel emergency 2020, and cross-cutting emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic) and emerging organizational imperatives in a timely manner.

**D. Evaluation Planning, including consideration of the following:**

D.1. Relevance and appropriateness of the methods, process and criteria used for planning and selecting evaluation topics for both centralized and decentralized evaluations, while considering other exercises such as strategic planning, audits and reviews;

D.2. The extent to which topics selected for evaluation meet the strategic needs and demands of UNFPA's key stakeholders, balancing accountability and learning both at centralized and decentralized levels;

D.3. The balance of effort between: i) UNFPA corporate evaluation work and joint and system-wide evaluation work; and ii) between undertaking new evaluations in order to generate new evidence and synthesizing and disseminating existing evidence.

**E. Evaluation Quality at each level of the organization, including attention to the following:**

E.1. The quality and credibility of centralized and decentralized evaluations (as perceived by key users and stakeholders and as benchmarked against evaluation norms and standards) from the planning process through the conduct of the evaluations to the appropriateness of evaluation methods, and of evidence-based findings, conclusions, and recommendations;

E.2. The extent to which UNFPA centralized and decentralized evaluations integrate ethical considerations, gender, human rights, equity, and humanitarian principles as well as other social considerations (e.g. disability inclusion, LNOB principle, social and environmental standards, SES etc.) in line with relevant UNEG standards;

E.3. The appropriateness of the model used for the conduct and management of evaluations, including adequate systems to ensure the selection of professional, and competent evaluation teams,;

E.4. The adequacy of the evaluation quality assurance system for all centralized and decentralized evaluation types, including those at the project level, and the post-hoc quality assessment conducted on all evaluation reports.

**F. Evaluation follow-up and use, including the following:**

F.1. The type and degree of engagement of internal and external stakeholders from the evaluation planning process onwards to their use of evaluation evidence to develop new policies, strategies, programmes, and country programme documents and support learning, enhancing accountability and organizational improvement at the relevant levels;

F.2. Appropriateness of communication and dissemination approaches to support use internally and externally (persons of concern, member states, and partners), and to ensure the language, content and packaging is relevant and useful to stakeholders including ease of access of evaluation knowledge

F.3. Responsibilities for the follow-up of lessons and recommendations, including arrangements for preparation and implementation of a formal Management Response by the appropriate unit.

F.4. To determine whether, how, to what extent and when evaluation findings are being used for adaptation and decision-making

**G. Partnerships and positioning of the evaluation function:**

G.1. Extent to which partnerships in the framework of the UN Reform, e.g., by collaborating in joint and/or system-wide evaluation initiatives, including UNSDCF evaluations, have evolved effectively and meaningfully;

G.2. Extent to which multi-stakeholders collaborations with evaluation partners have been effective in facilitating national evaluation capacities, including of young evaluators, as intended in the evaluation policy;

G.3. Extent to which partnerships with external entities e.g., the UN Evaluation Group, IAHE, ALNAP, EvalPartners, the Global Evaluation Initiative, OECD-DAC, EvalYouth Global Network and other bodies have evolved effectively and meaningfully.

**H. Financial Resources of the Evaluation Function, including the following:**

H.1. Is the evaluation function (Evaluation Office, Regional and Country Offices) adequately financed to allow for the commissioning of high-quality credible, useful, and timely evaluations;

H.2. Does UNFPA adequately invest the necessary financial resources to support the delivery of high-quality centralized and decentralized evaluations; how appropriate and sustainable are evaluation funding mechanisms.

**I. Human resources for the Evaluation Function, including the following:**

I.1. Does the Evaluation Function (Evaluation Office, Regional and Country Offices) have adequate staffing in terms of knowledge, experience and skills, as well as gender and diversity, to allow for the conduct of the evaluation function at all levels and the commissioning of high-quality credible, useful, and timely evaluations;

I.2. Extent to which evaluation capacities are appropriate at all levels of the organizations and for various stakeholder groups to deliver the evaluation policy.

I.3. Extent to which evaluation teams are appropriately resourced (profiles, gender and diversity); and how do they relate to the rest of the organization.

**iii. Agency-specific areas of enquiring that UNFPA would like the peer reviewers to address:**

All the above areas of enquiring should be assessed taking into consideration the UNFPA unique context as described below.

UNFPA “graduated” from a small to a mid-size UN agency in the last few years, with its overall budget doubled from \$750 million/year to \$1.5 billion/year, mainly due to significant increase in humanitarian funds.

The current 2019 Evaluation Policy was conceptualized six years ago, when UNFPA was a small-size UN agency with a predominantly ‘development’ nature. Due to the ‘graduation’ to mid-size UN agency on the one side, and the rapidly changing external environment on the other side, the revised evaluation policy should reflect these changes and be conceptualized for a mid-size UN agency working in the development-humanitarian-peace nexus. Therefore, the Peer review should also assess the following:

- Extent to which the current evaluation function is still relevant to the evolving internal and external changes, in terms of:
  - Responsiveness to needs of key stakeholders, including Board and senior management, and capacity to innovative and being flexible to address new challenges and requests, and remain relevant
  - Typology of evaluations. The current evaluation policy governs programme-level evaluation only, while UNFPA is managing different types of evaluations (ie project-level evaluations). Should the policy govern all types of evaluations managed by UNFPA?
  - Coverage of CPE. The current policy requests COs to manage at least one CPE every two cycles. Is this enough for a mid-size UN agency, or should the policy request each country cycle to be evaluated?
  - Use of evaluation, including extent to which UNFPA CO programme countries use evidence and learning from centralized evaluations
- Are the current investment in terms of financial and human resources adequate for an evaluation function serving a mid-size UN agency working within the triple nexus? What should be the optimal structure, especially for the decentralized evaluation, to ensure good quality coverage? What should be the expenditure target, based on a financial analysis of a full fledge evaluation function?

## **5. Panel composition and conduct of the Peer Review**

The key actors involved in a UNEG peer review include: i) the Agency requesting the peer review [UNFPA]; ii) the Peer Review Panel which is responsible – supported by an expert consultant - for

conducting the Peer Review exercise and producing the peer review report; iii) the Peer Review Working Group which, representing UNEG, and supported by the EvalNet Secretariat, is the custodian of the peer review exercise and responsible for the overall quality of the report; and, a Peer Review Reference Group.

The primary responsibility for the peer review rests with the Panel, which is led by the Panel Chair and supported by expert evaluators from UN Evaluation offices, as well as OECD/DAC Member Evaluation Offices. Panels can also be supported by thematic experts that bring specific knowledge of aspects of the evaluation function.

The Panel is supported by an expert consultant who should be a senior professional with knowledge and experience of how UN evaluation functions work, strong drafting skills as well the ability to work with senior UN evaluators.

The Peer Review exercise is overseen by the UNEG Peer Review Working Group which in line with UNEG's responsibility as the custodian of the peer review modality is responsible for ensuring that the exercise proceeds according to good practice in international evaluation. The PRWG provides guidance and support at all stages of the exercise and also has a role in signing off on the quality of the reports in line with relevant standards.

In view of the need for the Panel to reflect the above criteria, the mandate of UNFPA and forward-looking areas of reform, such as the humanitarian sector and youth participation, the Panel will be comprised of evaluation experts from a variety of peer organizations that have a similar mandate and are similarly organized to UNFPA's evaluation function:

- UNEG Heads to chair the panel
- UNEG Senior Evaluation Specialist
- EvalYouth Representative
- OECD-DAC representative
- Representative from the Global South

A Reference Group made up of senior leaders internal to UNFPA will be struck as a way of ground-truthing the process, starting from the self-assessment phase.

## **6. Key documents to be consulted**

### **UNFPA Strategic Documents**

- UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025, including related Results Framework Integrated results and resources framework, and related annexes
- Executive Board Reports 2019-2022
- UNFPA Annual Reports 2019-2022
- UNFPA Oversight Policy 2015
- UNFPA RBM related documents

### **External Reviews of UNFPA Evaluation Function**

- External reviews of the evaluation function (MOPAN)
- Independent external strategic review of the evaluation function of UNFPA 2018

### **Key Documents for UNFPA Evaluation Function**

- UNFPA Evaluation Policy 2019
- UNFPA Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025
- UNFPA Strategy to enhance evaluation use through communications and knowledge management, 2022-2025
- Quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2022-2025
- Evaluation Office Annual Reports 2019-2022
- A sample of UNFPA centralized and decentralized evaluation reports and management responses
- Job descriptions of UNFPA Evaluation Staff
- UNFPA costed evaluation plans
- UNFPA CPDs and related white papers

### **UNFPA Evaluation Guidance**

- Evaluation Handbook: How to Design and Conduct a Country Programme Evaluation at UNFPA (2019)
- Country Programme Evaluation Management Kit 2021
- Evaluation Quality Assurance and Assessment: Tools and Guidance (updated 2020)
- Adapting evaluations to the COVID-19 pandemic 2020
- Guidance on disability inclusion in UNFPA evaluations 2020
- Guidance on integrating the principles of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind in UNFPA evaluations 2022
- Guidance on integrating social and environmental standards into evaluations 2022

### **6. Key people to be met**

- Executive Director and /or Chief of Staff, and/or DED-P and DED-M, and Chief, Executive Board Secretariat.
- Select members of the Executive Committee (e.g., Directors of PD, TD, DMS, DCS, HO,

- Selected Regional Directors and Country Representatives/Deputy Reps in countries where evaluations have recently been conducted.
- Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC).
- Staff from Technical Divisions of which partook in centralized/thematic evaluations that have been conducted.
- Staff from Policy and Strategy Division working on the Management Response Tracking System.
- Evaluation staff (Evaluation Office, Regional M&E Advisors, CO M&E focal points).
- External quality assessor of evaluation reports (DeftEdge).
- Other evaluation units that have worked on joint/systemwide evaluations (e.g., UNICEF).
- Select Executive Board members.
- Past Team Leaders/members of centralized and decentralized evaluations.

## **7. Resources**

UNFPA will provide funds for the purposes of recruiting a senior consultant to support the overall PR process. The initial estimated cost of this consultancy is 40-50,000 USD. Panel members are thanked for their contribution to the peer review and will be recognized as individuals and on the part of their organizations in the report.

## Annex 2. Persons interviewed

<b>Executive Board/ Member States</b>	
Ambassador Martin Kimani	Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Kenya to the United Nations, and Chairperson of UNFPA Executive Board
Bernhard Soland	Delegation, Switzerland
Sam Choritz	Secretary to Executive Board
<b>UNFPA Evaluation Office</b>	
Marco Segone	Director
Asela Kalugampitiya	National Evaluation Capacity Development Specialist
Bikem Ahiska	Communications Analyst
Deborah McWhinney	Evaluation Adviser
Faith Chilupula	Evaluation Analyst
Hicham Daoudi	Evaluation Adviser
Karen Cadondon	Evaluation Specialist
Louis Charpentier	Evaluation Adviser
Messay Tassew	Evaluation Capacity Building Specialist
Neha Kakara	Communications and Knowledge Management Specialist
Rita Magawa	Evaluation Analyst
Valeria Carou-Jones	Evaluation Adviser
<b>Regional and Country Offices</b>	
Clarisa Morales	Monitoring & Evaluation Focal Point, Honduras Country Office
Frisner Pierre	Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Haiti Country Office
Houda Ely	Strategic Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Mauritania Country Office
Iuliana Gutu	Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Turkey Country Office
Jennet Approva	Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser, EECARO
Khadija Zeeshan	Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist in Afghanistan Country Office
Laura Gonzalez-Garces	Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser, Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO)
Loveena Dookhony	Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser, West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO)
Marcos Carias	Deputy Representative, Honduras
Marija Dimitrovska	Programme Analyst, Pop & Dev, North Macedonia Country Office
Mosese Quasenivalu	Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Pacific Sub-Regional Office (PSRO)

Nahla Sakr	Monitoring, Evaluation and Partnership Officer (Arab States Regional Office, ASRO)
Ndeye Fatou Diop	Quality Assurance Specialist, Senegal Country Office
Reginal Chima	Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser, East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO)
Santiago Farjat	Programme Analyst, Monitoring and Evaluation, Bolivia Country Office
Zipporah Gathiti	Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Kenya Country Office
<b>UNFPA Headquarters</b>	
Andrew Saberton	Chief Financial Officer and Director, Management Services Division
Arturo Pagan	Deputy Director, Division for Human Resources
Bianca Jorkovic	Global Evaluation Follow-up, Policy and Strategy Division
Charles Katende	Chief of Policy Information and Planning Branch, Evaluation Focal Point, Policy and Strategy Division
Danielle Engel	Adolescents and Youth, Technical Division
Diene Keita	Deputy Executive Director (Programmes)
Elizabeth Benomar	HIV and AIDS, Technical Division
Estaban Olhagaray	Special Assistant to Deputy Executive Director (Management)
Francoise Ghorayeb	Programme Advisor, Humanitarian Response Department
Ib Petersen	Deputy Executive Director (Management)
Iva Goricnik Christian	Chief of Budget Sector, Management Services Division
Jessie Mabutas	Head of Internal Audit, Office of Audit and Investigations
Julitta Onabanjo	Director, Technical Division
Markus Volker	Head of Learning, Division for Human Resources
Mauricio Saavedra	Results Monitoring Adviser, Policy and Strategy Division
Max Diana	Deputy Director, Humanitarian Response Department
Nigina Mutean	Head of Innovation Unit
Oscar Sandino	Monitoring & Evaluation Officer, Humanitarian Response Department
Satvika Chalasani	Child marriage, Technical Division
Shoko Arakaki	Director, Humanitarian Response Department
Steve Cutts	Chairperson, Oversight and Audit Committee
Tharanga Godallage	Results-Based Management Adviser, Policy and Strategy Division
Vivienne Wang	Knowledge Management, Policy and Strategy Division
Wilfred Oyekanmi	Programme Specialist, Operations Support, Policy and Strategy Division
Willibald Zeck	Sexual & Reproductive Health Branch Chief, Technical Division

<b>Other external interviewers</b>	
Alexandra Chambel	Senior Evaluation Officer & Head of Unit, WFP
Ana Laura Rodríguez Gustá	Evaluator, Honduras
Heidrun Fritze	Advisor, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
Mona Fetouh	Chief of Evaluation Section, UNICEF Ukraine
Natalia Wiik Advisor	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
Tom Mogeni	Evaluation Team Leader (East and Southern Africa Regional Office Regional Programme Evaluation), Evaluation Consultant

## Annex 3. Documents consulted

The Peer Review Panel drew on a comprehensive set of documents to understand the UNFPA organizational context and the evaluation function. These include internal documents, as well as published documents and evaluation reports. The list below represents the cited directly in the Panel's report, as well as other key documents relevant to the Panel's review of the UNFPA evaluation function.

Davies, I. (2018). Independent External Strategic Review of the Evaluation Function of UNFPA, May 2018

DeftEdge (2022). UNFPA EQA synthesis 2021: Independent review of UNFPA evaluation report quality and selected trends, January 2022

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Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Annual Session 2021 – agenda item #13, UNFPA Management Commentaries on Annual report on the evaluation function, 2020. 2021

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Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) (2020). Independent assessment of the collective humanitarian response of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) member organizations: Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Drought Response in Ethiopia 2015 – 2018

Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) (2020). Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, Evaluation report

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) (2021). Joint evaluation of the UN Joint Programme on AIDS on preventing and responding to violence against women and girls, Evaluation report, UNAIDS, UNHCR, UNFPA, ILO and UNESCO Evaluation Offices.

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) (2022). Joint evaluation of the UN Joint Programme on AIDS's work on efficient and sustainable financing, Evaluation report, UNAIDS and UNFPA Evaluation Offices

Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) (2019) United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Performance Assessment 2017-2018, May 2019.

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UNFPA (2014) Oversight Policy: How all roles are articulated (simplified view)

UNFPA (2015). Policies and Procedures Manual, Oversight Policy 2015

UNFPA (2017). UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021

UNFPA (2019). MOPAN Management response, 2019.

UNFPA (2019). Results-based management principles and standards, The 3+5 Framework for Self-Assessment

UNFPA (2019). Transitional quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan 2020-2023

UNFPA (2019). UNFPA Evaluation Policy, 2019

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UNFPA (2020). UNFPA annual report on the evaluation function 2019, presented to the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

UNFPA (2021) Memorandum of Agreement MOA/USA/21/167/UNICEF Between DeftEdge Corporation United Nations Population Fund

UNFPA (2021). Developing Investment Cases for Transformative Results Toolkit

UNFPA (2021). Management Response on Annual Report on the evaluation function, 2020

UNFPA (2021). UNFPA Afghanistan 4<sup>th</sup> Country Programme 2015-2021, Final Evaluation Report

UNFPA (2021). UNFPA Annual report on the evaluation function 2020, presented to the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

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UNFPA East and Southern Africa Office (2021). UNFPA Regional Programme Evaluation, Final Report, 11 August 2021

UNFPA Evaluation Office (2018). Guidance on Preparing Costed Evaluation Plans

UNFPA Evaluation Office (2019). A Synthesis of UNFPA country programme evaluations, Volume 1, 2019.

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UNFPA Evaluation Office (2019). Evaluation Handbook: How to design and conduct a country programme evaluation at UNFPA

UNFPA Evaluation Office (2019). Evaluation of the UNFPA capacity in humanitarian action (2012-2019), Evaluation report

UNFPA Evaluation Office (2019). Evaluation of the UNFPA response to the Syria crisis (2011-2018) Volume 1, Evaluation report

UNFPA Evaluation Office (2020). ) Guidance on disability inclusion in UNFPA evaluations: Integrating disability inclusion dimensions in UNFPA evaluation methodology and Evaluation Quality Assurance and Assessment (EQAA)

UNFPA Evaluation Office (2020). Evaluation Quality at UNFPA: Principles and their application

UNFPA Evaluation Office (2020). Formative evaluation of UNFPA approach to South-South and triangular cooperation, Evaluation report

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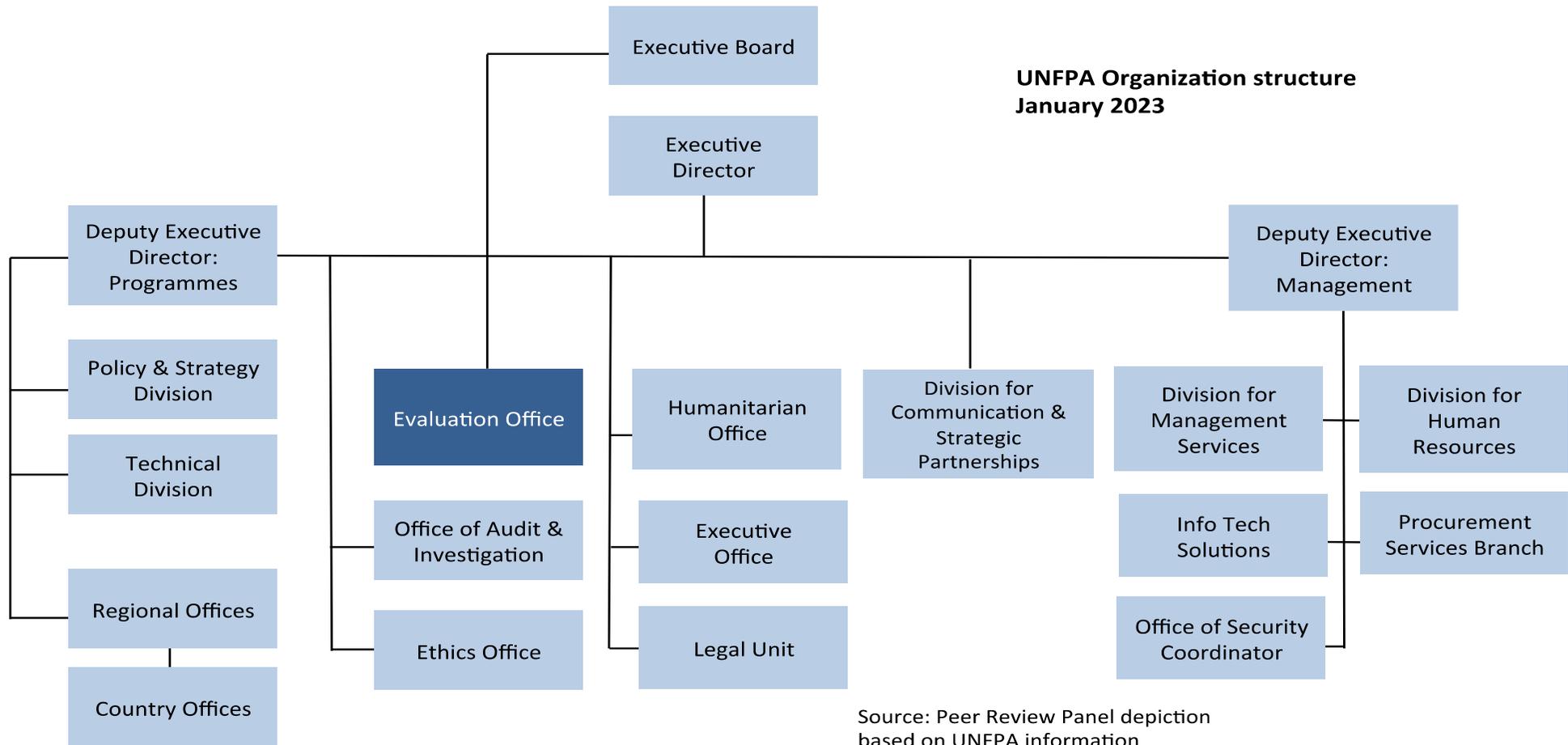
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United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Management Commentaries to Annual report on the evaluation function, 2021, 2022.

## Annex 4. Evaluation Office positioning in UNFPA



## Annex 5: Completed evaluations (2019-2022)

### Centralized evaluations

Year	Evaluation title	Evaluation type
2019	Developmental evaluation of results-based management at UNFPA	Developmental Evaluation
2019	Evaluation of the UNFPA response to the Syria crisis (2011-2018)	Thematic Evaluation
2019	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Drought Response in Ethiopia 2015 - 2018	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation
2019	Evaluation of the UNFPA capacity in humanitarian action (2012-2019)	Corporate
2020	Evaluation of the UNFPA support to the HIV response (2016-2019)	Thematic
2020	Formative evaluation of UNFPA approach to South-South and triangular cooperation	Formative Evaluation
2020	Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls	Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation
2021	Evaluation of UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment (2012-2020)	Thematic Evaluation
2021	Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change Phase III (2018-2021)	Joint Evaluation
2021	Joint evaluation of the UN Joint Programme on AIDS on preventing and responding to violence against women and girls	Joint Evaluation
2022	Joint Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme on AID's work on efficient and sustainable financing Report	Joint Evaluation
2022	Mid-term evaluation of the Maternal and Newborn Health Thematic FundPhase III 2018-2022	Mid-term Evaluation

### Regional Programme Evaluations

Year	Region	Evaluation Title
2021	East and Southern Africa	UNFPA Regional Programme Evaluation for East and Southern Africa Regional Office (2018–2021)
2021	West and Central Africa	Rapport d'évaluation finale due programme regional 2018-2021 due Bureau Regional Afrique de l'Oest et du Centre
2021	Caribbean	Evaluation of the 6th sub-regional programme of the UNFPA Sub-Regional Office for the Caribbean 2017-2021
2021	Arab States	Evaluation of the UNFPA Regional Interventions Action Plan for Arab States 2018-2021
2022	Pacific Island Countries and Territories	Evaluation of the UNFPA Pacific Island Countries and Territories 6th Sub-Regional Programme (2018-2022)

## Country Programme evaluations

2019	2020	2021	2022
Armenia	Cameroun	Afghanistan	Bolivia
Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye	Cote d'Ivoire	Albania	Cabo Verde
Bangladesh	El Salvador	Algeria	Central African Republic
Bosnia, Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo	Ethiopia	Brazil	Ecuador
Colombia	Indonesia	Gambia	Ghana
Eswatini	Lao PDR	Haiti	India
Guatemala	Maldives	Honduras	Jordan
Guinee Bissau	Morocco	Iran	Libya
Madagascar	Panama	Iraq	Nigeria
Maldives	Somalia	Kyrgyzstan	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
Myanmar	Syria	Mongolia	Pakistan
Paraguay	Timor-Leste	Morocco	Palestine
Philippines	Uganda	Mozambique	Papua New Guinea
Sierra Leone	Uzbekistan	Sao Tome	Sri Lanka
South Africa		Somalia	Tanzania
Tajikistan		Thailand	Togo
Türkiye		Zimbabwe	Ukraine
Turkmenistan			
Venezuela			
Zambia			

# Annex 6. Evaluation Strategy Theory of Change

## Theory of change to strengthen UNFPA evaluation function

