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Annual report for 2019 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

Summary

The present report provides an overview of the UNICEF evaluation function in 2019. It provides an update on the implementation of the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2018/14) and the plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021 (E/ICEF/2018/3).

In addition, the report presents a detailed analysis of the performance of the evaluation function at all levels of the organization and contains a summary of the key findings of several corporate evaluations.

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

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* E/ICEF/2020/6.

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I. Introduction

1. In September 2019, the Secretary-General issued an urgent call to the international community to mobilize for a Decade of Action in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. With only 10 years remaining to meet the Goals, efforts are not advancing at the speed or scale required. Bold, innovative action is required at all levels to deliver on the promise to leave no one behind.

2. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out a clear vision, yet the challenges to realizing it remain daunting. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic poses global challenges on a scale not seen since the Second World War, and with unprecedented consequences for every society on Earth. Humanitarian emergencies continue to exact a heavy toll on the most vulnerable, fuelled by complex, often overlapping drivers that interact in unpredictable ways. Mass migrations, inequality, economic uncertainty and climate change are affecting even the most prosperous and hitherto optimistic societies. In this context of unparalleled complexity, Governments and their partners require the best available evidence on what works to deliver results.

3. For the UNICEF evaluation function, answering the Secretary-General's call to action requires renewed focus around three main areas. First, it means increased support for national evaluation capacity development and country-led evaluation of national policies and programmes, including strengthening voluntary national reviews to facilitate the sharing of successes, challenges and lessons learned in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Second, working with partners in the context of the United Nations reform, it means continued acceleration of joint evaluations with sister United Nations agencies, with a stronger focus on the country level in support of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) processes. Finally, it means developing agile, innovative data-collection and analysis tools in support of adaptive management and continuous improvement, while connecting with a wider range of stakeholders for the better use of evaluations.

4. Against this backdrop, the UNICEF evaluation function remains on track in implementing the revised evaluation policy (E/ICEF/2018/14) and the plan for global evaluations (E/ICEF/2018/3), with appreciable results in 2019. In line with the policy, efforts have focused on strengthening the key drivers identified in the evaluation theory of change, including financial and human resources, governance and quality assurance, guidance and tools, capacity development within UNICEF and with partners, systems for monitoring performance and partnerships for evaluation.

5. With regard to resources, the recent trend of increased expenditure on evaluation continued in 2019, with evaluation accounting for 0.86 per cent of programme expenditure, compared with 0.80 per cent in 2018. The Evaluation Pooled Fund, now in its second year, has contributed significantly to this improved performance. However, expenditure still falls short of the benchmark established by the Executive Board in its decision 2018/10, in which it called for evaluation to account for 1 per cent of programme expenditure by the end of 2019.

6. The number of evaluations undertaken continues to increase and an independent assessment confirmed that UNICEF is performing better than ever in terms of the quality and coverage of evaluations. The organization has improved its performance in integrating gender equality into evaluations and corporate evaluations are also devoting increased attention to humanitarian response.

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

8.   The next section of the report examines efforts by the UNICEF evaluation function to improve oversight and learning in a fast-changing world. Section III sets out UNICEF contributions to the United Nations reform agenda, including system-wide and joint evaluations and strengthening national evaluation capacity. Section IV analyses evaluation coverage and quality and looks at new and emerging themes covered by UNICEF evaluations in 2019. Section V describes measures taken in 2019 to strengthen the key drivers identified in the evaluation policy, including governance, quality assurance and guidance and tools. Section VI discusses efforts undertaken in 2019 to improve evaluation use and learning. Section VII provides a brief overview of corporate evaluations undertaken in 2019. Finally, section VIII reviews priorities for the following year.

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

II.   UNICEF evaluation in a changing world

10.   A central purpose of evaluation is to provide timely and appropriate evidence for the purposes of oversight and learning. To meet this need in rapidly evolving contexts, evaluation must be agile and responsive, drawing on innovative tools and approaches that enable the rapid generation, dissemination and use of high-quality evidence. Emerging technologies provide promising opportunities to unlock new sources of real-time data and facilitate more efficient and inclusive modes of information exchange. Innovative approaches to evaluation, including the dynamic participation of citizens, provide richer, more timely analysis and improve the uptake of recommendations. New evaluation products and tools enable the organization to choose from a wider variety of instruments geared towards different needs, including real-time decision-making, oversight and learning, and addressing new areas that have emerged or become more salient in recent years, such as public-health emergencies, addressing climate change and linking humanitarian and development programming. UNICEF made important strides in these categories in 2019.

A.   Innovative technologies for evaluation

11.   In evaluating the UNICEF response to the Level 2 crisis in Cameroon, real-time data collected though U-Report are being combined with third-party field monitoring to collect information from an expanded group of stakeholders, including the affected population. The Evaluation Office is exploring additional ways in which U-Report can be utilized to support data collection as part of broader efforts to receive direct feedback from diverse population groups at the country level.

12.   In order to make evaluation evidence more accessible to policymakers and the public, the Evaluation Office, in partnership with the Office of Research-Innocenti, is developing the Global Development Commons, a digital evidence platform centred around child-focused policy and programming. Using a combination of crowdsourcing and more traditional approaches of harnessing evidence, the Commons brings together evaluation and research evidence from UNICEF, other United Nations and multilateral agencies, Member States, academia and a variety of different communities, providing ready access to vital evidence as countries consider scaling up child-focused interventions in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.

B. Innovative approaches to evaluation

13. Humanitarian response continues to account for a large share of UNICEF work and the number of humanitarian evaluations conducted by the organization continues to increase accordingly. The designs and methods utilized in these evaluations likewise reflect the complexity faced by UNICEF, partners and affected populations in emergency situations. The use of real-time evaluation methods enabled more timely generation of evidence and more meaningful participation of stakeholders at key stages.

14. For example, the real-time evaluation of the UNICEF response to Cyclone Idai in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe generated vital evidence to guide ongoing recovery efforts in the affected countries and to inform the organization's preparedness for and response to similar sudden-onset crises in the future. The real-time evaluation utilized participatory approaches to validate the findings with stakeholders, discuss real-time action plans and craft longer-term recommendations, which made the evaluation more relevant and useful. Overall, the evaluation found that UNICEF played a critical role in all three government-led emergency responses. Achievements included the rapid and effective containment of cholera, contributions to initial needs assessments and initiatives to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. Recommendations touched on early warning, information management and monitoring and the length of surge deployments and programme cooperation agreements, and called for greater attention to equity and gender equality.

15. UNICEF has placed particular emphasis on developing and implementing an expanded menu of evaluative products that support decision-making at the earliest stages, when evidence is especially vital. Evaluability assessments can strengthen programme planning and design, including through improvements that ensure that programmes can be effectively evaluated in the future.

16. For example, the evaluability assessment of child protection in humanitarian action provided evidence on the degree to which UNICEF work is informed by sound programme logic and has established adequate systems to measure and verify results. The evaluability assessment found that the organization's corporate monitoring mechanisms were mostly functional but needed to be further streamlined, and that while UNICEF was working to improve systems and indicators, data aggregation from the field to headquarters levels remained constrained, hampering the validity and comparability of data. Among other measures, UNICEF should develop a comprehensive programme-impact pathway and an associated results framework, with indicators at different levels for child protection in humanitarian action. Similarly, the evaluability assessment of UNICEF work on adolescent development, participation and empowerment identified the need to unpack the programme pathways for empowering adolescents. Other recommendations included improving coherence between sectoral interventions and enhancing the use of programmes led by young people.

C. New evaluation products and tools

17. When applicable, the Evaluation Office has undertaken evaluative activities specifically designed to support oversight and learning in fast-evolving decision-making processes. The Office commissioned a humanitarian landscape analysis as part of a broader review to understand the context in which UNICEF operates, identifying recent trends and challenges and what it takes to be a successful leader for children in various types of humanitarian crises. The analysis, which focused on complex emergencies, produced a catalogue of current thinking and good practices

that UNICEF can use to make informed decisions as it reviews its own humanitarian action. The analysis emphasized the need for improved engagement with affected populations and local civil society. It called for strengthened capacities within the organization for negotiation with authorities that control access to civilians in need of assistance and protection, and for UNICEF to bolster its rights-based advocacy to hold duty bearers to account.

18.　As part of the efforts to enhance the availability of baseline data, the Evaluation Office is piloting a readiness assessment tool, designed to identify gaps, challenges and opportunities to enhance the organization's role in a particular area of work. The first pilot, which involves assessing UNICEF readiness to scale up work on climate change and children, will be completed in the second quarter of 2020.

19.　Evaluation in UNICEF is responding to the need for improved methods of assessing the organization's contribution to results achieved through child-focused public policy, particularly in middle- and high-income countries. For example, the process-tracing approach was used to inform the UNICEF contribution to the "Yo Me Apunto" strategy of the Government of Costa Rica.

III.　UNICEF evaluation in a reforming United Nations

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

21.　In 2019, UNICEF partnered with other United Nations agencies to promote evaluation coherence and a stronger focus on system-wide evaluation. In this connection, several joint evaluations were undertaken at the global and country levels. At the global level, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) completed two joint corporate evaluations in 2019, assessing the joint programmes on child marriage and the abandonment of female genital mutilation (FGM). A joint evaluation synthesis with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in collaboration with the World Bank and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, entitled "Making evaluation work for the achievement of SDG 4, target 5: equality and inclusion in Education", was completed in June 2019, in time for the high-level political forum on sustainable development, held in July 2019. UNICEF worked with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the joint evaluation of country-based humanitarian pooled funds. UNICEF actively worked with sister agencies as part of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group to assess the collective response of the humanitarian community to the recurring droughts in Ethiopia in the period 2015–2018, and to commence an evaluation of the joint response of the humanitarian community to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique and a joint evaluation of collective humanitarian efforts in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

22.　At the country level, UNICEF participated in several joint thematic evaluations with sister United Nations agencies. In Jordan, for example, UNICEF, UNFPA and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) conducted an evaluation of Hemayati, a joint programme promoting the health and well-being of women and girls. In Zambia, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, UNICEF and the World Food Programme commissioned an evaluation of the joint programme on social protection. The United Nations Development Programme, UNFPA, UNICEF and the joint United Nations office in Cabo Verde commissioned an evaluation of a project to combat anaemia in

children and pregnant women. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNICEF and the World Health Organization collaborated in Algeria on the evaluation of the national strategy for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

23. As evaluations of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and UNSDCFs are more frequently prioritized, UNICEF regional offices have played key roles in supporting them. UNICEF co-chaired the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific (UNEDAP) and hosted a training on evaluation in the United Nations context, which was aimed at enhancing the evaluation capacity of United Nations staff in the region and created an opportunity to discuss the joint evaluation guidelines and lessons learned from UNDAF evaluations. Over the past five years, UNEDAP has provided quality assurance for all UNDAF evaluations in the region and helped several United Nations country teams to scope their evaluations. Building on experiences in the East Asia and the Pacific region, UNICEF is initiating in the Eastern and Southern Africa region a closer network of evaluation focal points from the regional offices of United Nations agencies, with a view to fostering collaboration and developing the evaluation capacity of United Nations staff supporting UNDAF/UNSDCF evaluations at the country level.

24. UNICEF further strengthened its participation in the United Nations Evaluation Group in 2019, engaging in working groups on professionalization, ethics, humanitarian evaluation, system-wide evaluation, gender, the Sustainable Development Goals and national evaluation capacity development. The Evaluation Office seconded a senior staff member to the Office of the Deputy Secretary-General to support ongoing work on independent system-wide evaluation.

25. Strengthening national evaluation capacity is a vital aspect of the 2030 Agenda and an explicit objective of the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF. Evaluations of national policies, strategies and programmes contribute to building national capacities and the scaling up of programmes that work. Evaluations conducted jointly with Governments are particularly important in this regard. An example of such an evaluation, undertaken in 2019, is the multi-country evaluation of home-visiting for young child health and well-being in Europe and Central Asia (involving Armenia, North Macedonia and Serbia, as well as Kosovo[1]), which had strong government participation, including in the adoption of recommendations.

26. In response to the call for accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and as required by the revised evaluation policy, UNICEF has strengthened its contribution to country-led evaluations. Examples of such support in 2019 include:

(a) Summative evaluation to assess the implementation of the State Programme on Justice for Children in Kyrgyzstan, 2014–2018, at the request of the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan;

(b) Country-led impact evaluation of the Thailand child-support grant, which generated findings and recommendations that proved influential in informing government and key development partner decisions to expand coverage of the grant;

(c) Country-led evaluation of the Botswana Vulnerable Groups Feeding Programme, a supplementary feeding programme for all children aged 6 to 59 months;

(d) Evaluation by the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court of the human rights training and application of normative principles and standards by judges and magistrates in the Eastern Caribbean area;

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[1] In the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

(e)   Country-led evaluation of the Brazil-UNICEF Trilateral South-South Cooperation Programme, resulting in a strengthened partnership for capacity development;

(f)   Country-led evaluation of the School Food Service of the Full-Time School Programme of the Government of Mexico;

(g)   Formative evaluation of the strategies and approaches implemented to build a child protection system in Gabon (2012–2017).

27.   In 2019 the Evaluation Office partnered with a wide range of actors working to enhance the capacity to evaluate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, the International Institute for Environment and Development and EvalSDGs,[2] UNICEF provided joint support for integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national planning across a range of contexts. A guidebook on evaluation to connect national priorities with the Goals has subsequently been developed and is being used to engage more national actors.

28.   UNICEF is providing more evaluative evidence for the purposes of strengthening the voluntary national reviews, which are aimed at sharing successes, challenges and lessons learned in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, UNICEF and the Economic Commission for Africa hosted the second annual forum on "Strengthening National Evaluation Capacities for the Africa We Want: Towards evidence-based SDG and Agenda 2063 reporting". The forum, held in Addis Ababa with the participation of high-level government officials, civil society representatives, parliamentarians and development partners, addressed the specific evaluation needs of 17 African countries that are preparing their reviews for presentation at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in July 2020. UNICEF and the Economic Commission for Africa also produced a guidebook on embedding evaluation in voluntary national reviews.

29.   In cooperation with United Nations agencies and EvalSDGs, the Evaluation Office organized side events at the 2019 high-level political forum, focusing on evidence from country-led evaluations in Chile and Mexico.

30.   The Evaluation Office contributed substantively to the work of EvalPartners,[3] continued acting as the co-chair of EvalSDGs and provided secretariat support to the Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation.

31.   Finally, the Evaluation Office organized sessions and panel discussions on evaluation and the Sustainable Development Goals at key conferences including the African Evaluation Association Conference in Abidjan, the National Evaluation Capacities Global Conference and the Regional Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation, held at the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan.

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[2] A network of policymakers, institutions and practitioners that advocate for the critical role of evaluation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

[3] EvalPartners, formed by the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation and the United Nations, is a partnership of civil society organizations and voluntary organizations for professional evaluation that strive to influence policymakers, public opinion and other key stakeholders to recognize effective evaluation as necessary for any important decision.
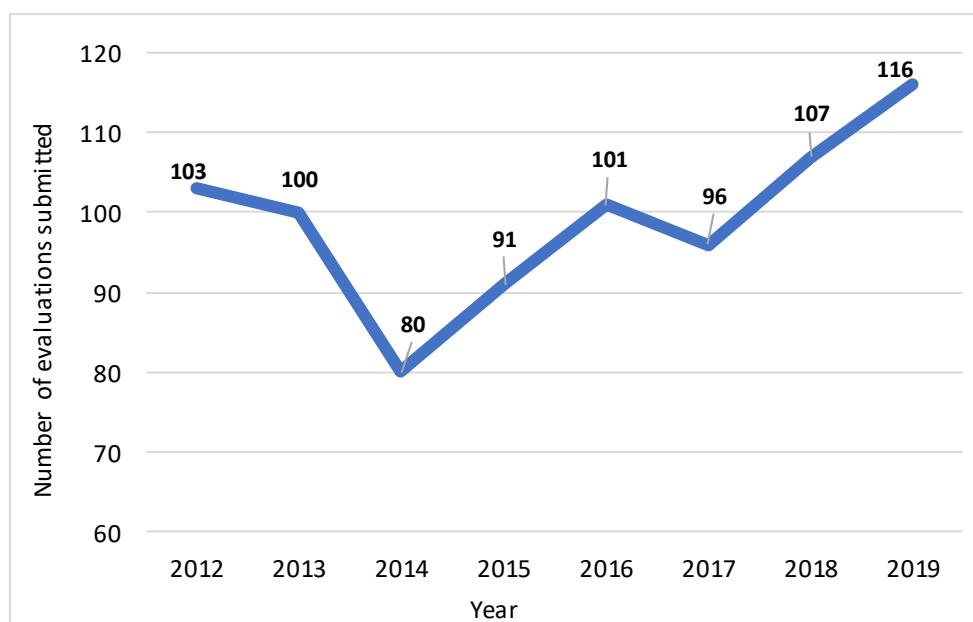
IV. Evaluation coverage and quality under the new evaluation policy

32.   This section analyses evaluation coverage and quality and looks at new and emerging themes covered by UNICEF evaluations in 2019.

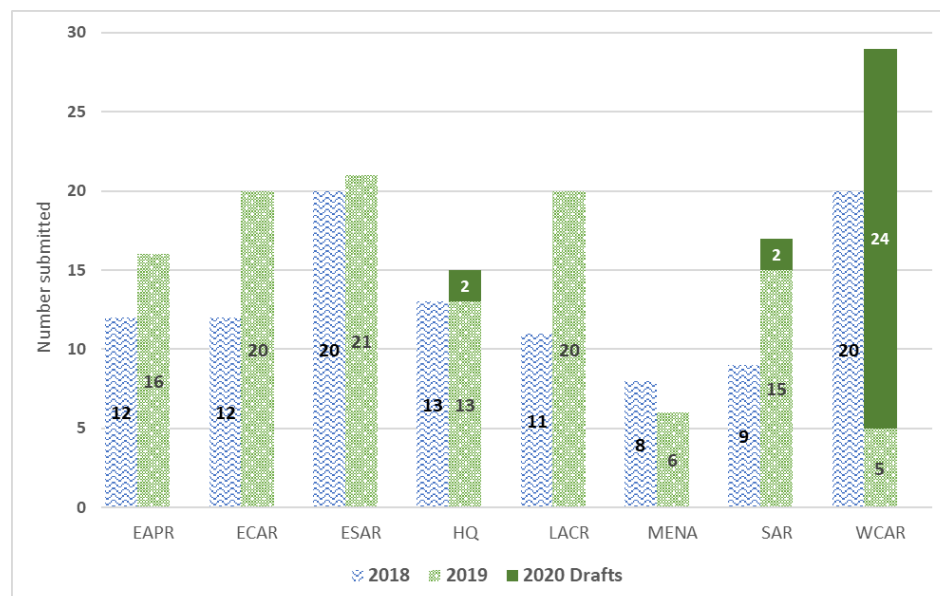### A.   Evaluation submission and coverage

33.   The number of evaluations undertaken continues to increase annually, with a total of 116 completed by the end of the annual evaluation cycle, compared with 107 in 2018 (see figure I). Several others are scheduled for completion in the coming months. Most regions saw increases in the number of evaluations undertaken in 2019, due in part to improved evaluation planning at the country level as well as additional resources provided through the Evaluation Pooled Fund (see figure II).

Figure I
Evaluation submission, 2012–2019

Source: Evidence Information Systems Integration (EISI).

Figure II
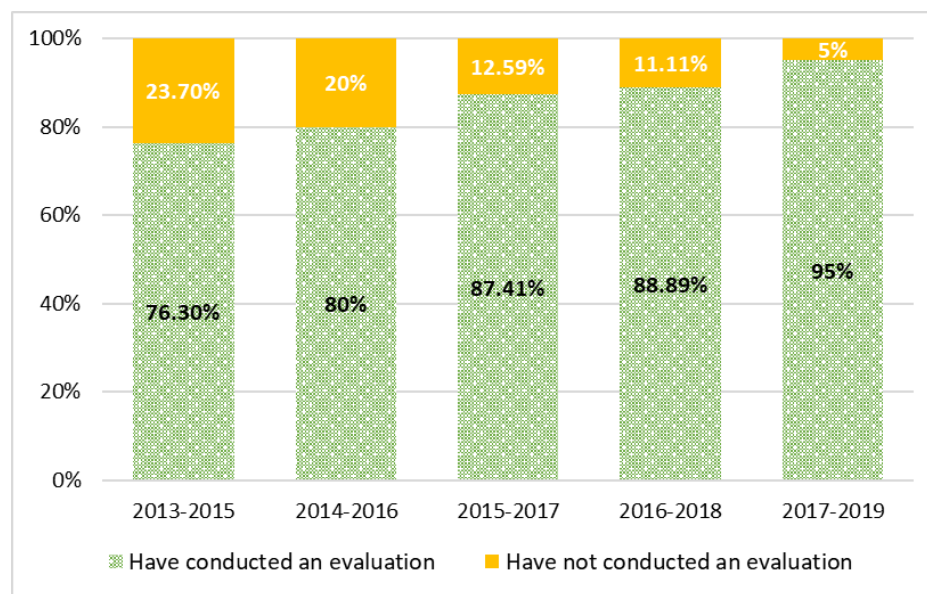**Evaluation submission by region**

Legend: EAPR: East Asia and the Pacific Region; ECAR: Europe and Central Asia Region; ESAR: Eastern and Southern Africa Region; HQ: headquarters; LACR: Latin America and Caribbean Region; MENA: Middle East and North Africa Region; SAR: South Asia Region; WCAR: West and Central Africa Region.
Source: EISI.

34. The geographical coverage of evaluation also continued to improve in 2019. This metric assesses whether a country office has undertaken an evaluation in the past three years.

Figure III
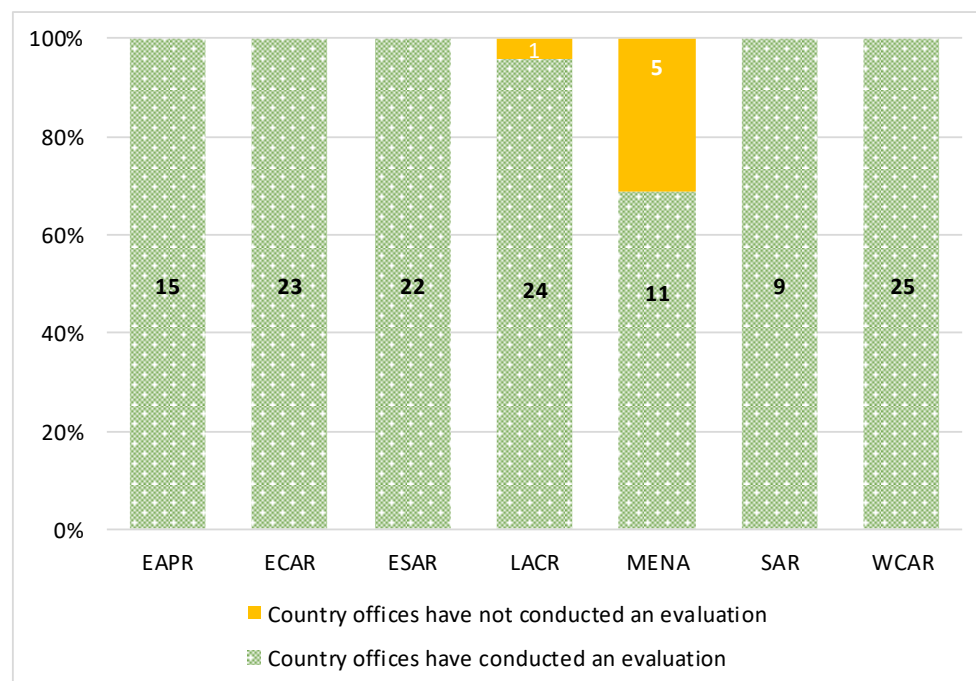**Geographical evaluation coverage, 2013–2019**[a]

[a] Based on the evaluations submitted after the close of the cycle (2020 drafts).
Source: EISI.

35.   Country offices that have not submitted an evaluation since the database was created in 2008 are concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa region (Islamic Republic of Iran, Libya, Saudi Arabia), with one country in the Latin America and Caribbean region (the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela). The country offices in Oman and the Syrian Arab Republic last conducted an evaluation in 2016. The country offices in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Libya and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have commenced evaluations that will be reported on in 2021.

Figure IV
Geographical evaluation coverage by region, 2017–2019[a]

Legend: EAPR: East Asia and the Pacific Region; ECAR: Europe and Central Asia Region; ESAR: Eastern and Southern Africa Region; LACR: Latin America and Caribbean Region; MENA: Middle East and North Africa Region; SAR: South Asia Region; WCAR: West and Central Africa Region.
   [a] Based on the evaluations submitted after the close of the cycle (2020 drafts).
Source: EISI.

1.   **Thematic distribution**

36.   Of the 116 evaluation products submitted in 2019, 112 were full evaluations, three were evaluability assessments and one was a review. All 112 evaluations were subjected to an independent evaluation-quality assessment and further analysed regarding the extent to which they addressed various parameters, such as gender equality and humanitarian action, as well regarding their thematic focus. On the basis of this analysis, the distribution of evaluations by Goal Area of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, shows the highest number in Goal Area 1 and the lowest number in Goal Area 4, partially mirroring the distribution of programme expenditure in the preceding year. The evaluation function will continue to work towards a distribution that reflects the pattern of the organization's programme expenditure.

Table 1
Thematic distribution of evaluations

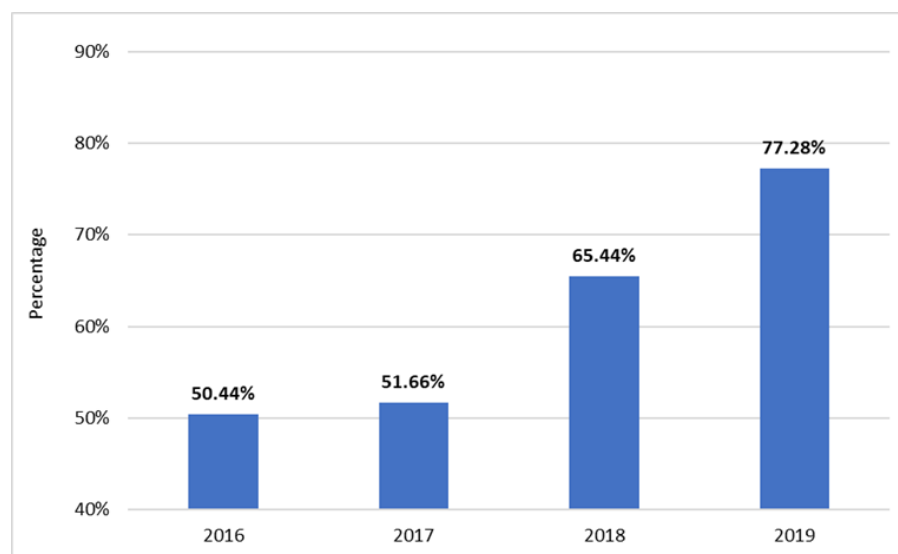| Goal area	Evaluations in 2019		UNICEF programme expenditure 2018 (%)
	Number of evaluations	%	
Every child survives and thrives	34	30.36	39.03
Every child learns	21	18.75	22.10
Every child is protected from violence and exploitation	19	16.96	12.20
Every child lives in a safe and clean environment	8	7.14	18.75
Every child has an equitable chance in life	10	8.93	7.92
Multiple goal areas	20	17.86	–
Total	**112**	**100**	**100**

Source: Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS).

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

37.   The coverage of cross-cutting themes (gender and humanitarian action) shows an improvement over the previous year. Seventy-five per cent of the evaluations (84) incorporated gender-equality principles, compared with 51 per cent (54) in 2018. This can be attributed to investments made by the Evaluation Office and regional offices in 2019 to enhance the capacity of staff on gender-equality analysis in evaluation. In addition, UNICEF conducted an analysis of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, assessing the quality, implementation and results of the organization's two successive Plans (see section V).

38.   Furthermore, there has been an improvement in evaluation performance under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. The UNICEF aggregate average score for the 2019 portfolio is 9.27 (77 per cent), which is classified as "exceeds requirements". This is an improvement over last year's score of 6.15 ("approaching requirements") and continues the overall trend of improvement since 2015, which can be attributed to strengthened gender-equality analysis and reporting in evaluations.

Figure V
Performance under the System-wide Action Plan, 2016–2019
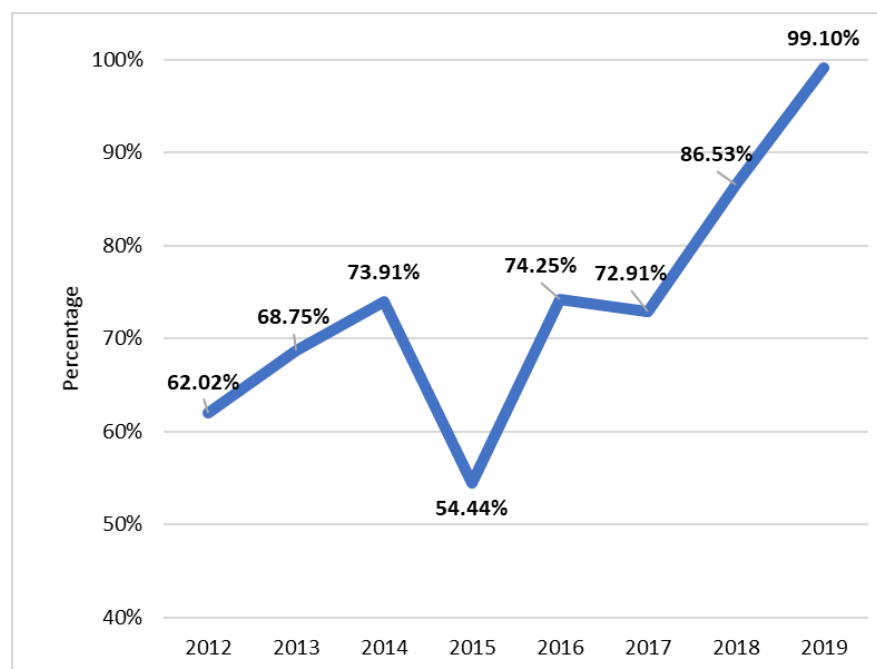

Source: GEROS.

39.   Twenty-eight per cent of evaluations (31) covered the cross-cutting priority of humanitarian action, compared with 30 per cent (32) in 2018. In view of the importance of humanitarian response in UNICEF work, the evaluation function will work to enhance the coverage of humanitarian evaluations.

3.   **Evaluation quality**

40.   Investments in improving quality-assurance mechanisms at all levels are beginning to bear fruit. Evaluation quality has improved annually since 2012. Of the 112 evaluations independently assessed for quality in 2019, 99 per cent were rated as "satisfactory" or "highly satisfactory", up from 87 per cent in 2018.

41.   The Evaluation Office will continue to strengthen technical support to offices on quality assurance. In addition, the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS) will be used as a learning platform where offices can exchange good practices.

Figure VI
Evaluation-quality trend, 2012–2019

Source: GEROS.

4. Evaluation level and type

42.   In 2019, 1 evaluation was at the output level, 98 were at both the output and outcome levels, 9 were at the outcome level and 4 were at the impact level. Thirty-seven evaluations were formative and 20 were summative, while 54 were both summative and formative.

Table 2
Level and type of evaluations conducted in 2019

Evaluation level	Number of evaluations	Percentage
Output	1	0.89%
Outcome	9	8.04%
Output and outcome	98	87.50%
Impact	4	3.57%
Evaluation type		
Formative	37	33.04%
Summative	20	17.86%
Summative and formative	54	48.21%
Meta evaluation	1	0.89%

Source: GEROS.

B.   New and emerging topics

43.   Several recent evaluations addressed topics that are new or have emerged more prominently in UNICEF programming in recent years, including mental health,

children with disabilities and linking humanitarian and development programming. As noted in the introduction, evaluations are also assessing programmes that bring together multiple issues as they address the Sustainable Development Goals.

44.   The Evaluation Office and the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office are undertaking an analysis designed to provide evidence on good practices and potentially scalable initiatives related to adolescent mental health. Good practices are being drawn from other regions, including from the evaluation of the Metamorphosis Programme in Belize, which assessed mental-health issues as part of the child protection agenda. UNICEF Ukraine conducted an evaluation of the provision of psychosocial support and protective services through child- and youth-friendly spaces and community-protection centres in the eastern part of the country. The evaluation found that UNICEF had contributed to the psychological well-being of school-aged children in conflict-affected areas, reducing negative behaviours and levels of distress among children in schools. Recommendations focused on training and certification on such services and supporting the Government to assess service-delivery models.

45.   Evaluations are beginning to cover the organization's contribution to linking humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming. A formative evaluation of UNICEF engagement in peacebuilding for young people found that their priorities were not always apparent in the design of relevant programmes due to a lack of systematic participation in decision-making, and that sectoral patterns of thinking and operation further inhibited creativity in finding solutions. Recommendations include the need for UNICEF to anchor its peacebuilding approach and the participation of young people in broader strategic planning and programming by country offices and partners. Furthermore, the UNICEF Programme Division should develop monitoring frameworks that would enable effective tracking, reporting and learning from peacebuilding outcomes associated with young people.

46.   The evaluation of UNICEF disaster risk reduction programming in education in East Asia and the Pacific examined efforts to help national Governments to mainstream disaster risk reduction and resilience in education systems. The evaluation showed that progress has been uneven and that UNICEF faces challenges in strengthening in-house leadership and results management for disaster risk reduction in education, and suggested it could more effectively employ well-developed approaches such as child-centred disaster risk reduction, risk-informed education programming and school-safety frameworks. The findings suggest that UNICEF needs to develop capacity to address complex and multisectoral Sustainable Development Goal programming in the region.

47.   A formative evaluation of inclusive education for children with disabilities undertaken by the Evaluation Office points to increased attention to this area of work among UNICEF country offices, including through the provision of policy guidance, teacher development and early childhood education. However, a clearer conceptual framework for disability-inclusive education is required to achieve better alignment with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to establish a common understanding across UNICEF programmes, while allowing for local innovation and adaptation. While increasing school enrolment for children with disabilities is necessary, programmes should focus on whether educational outcomes are being attained. An evaluation of a programme for the provision of accessible learning materials for children with visual and hearing impairment in primary schools in Uganda found that children with visual impairment were able to perform better in national exams. It recommended scaling up innovations and technology for children with visual impairments alongside investment in stronger education systems, including teacher training.

48.   In an effort to reduce violence against children in Latin America and Caribbean, a multi-country evaluation of UNICEF-led interventions was undertaken in 2019. This evaluation integrated a gender focus throughout the evaluative process, giving specific recommendations on gender-related matters. The evaluation highlighted important results in advocacy and legal frameworks but showed that UNICEF needed to improve its strategic positioning on the topic in the region through a more systematic approach and stronger monitoring and evaluation systems. It highlighted the importance of the participation of adolescents in the design and implementation of initiatives to reduce violence against children.

V.   Maintaining strong governance for evaluation in UNICEF

A.   Governance

49.   Governance of the evaluation function continues to be strengthened based on the provisions of the revised evaluation policy.

50.   The evaluation governance arrangements outlined in the revised evaluation policy continue to provide the required oversight and guidance. These include the Executive Board, the Audit Advisory Committee and the Evaluation Advisory Panel. The Executive Board reviewed and decided on evaluation reports at all of its sessions in 2019. The Committee reviewed evaluation performance indicators, workplans, budgets and staffing, and engaged both central and decentralized components of the evaluation function as part of its oversight role.

51.   The Evaluation Advisory Panel membership was expanded in 2019 to enable stronger attention to issues related to the overall technical capability of the function. The membership terms have been adjusted, providing a rolling turnover of panel members to ensure continuity. Key areas of focus included how to enhance methods for rapid evaluations and evaluation use and how to strengthen mechanisms and processes for quality assurance.

52.   The Global Evaluation Committee continued to provide a key link between the evaluation function and the rest of the organization, especially regional and country offices. The terms of reference for the Committee were updated in line with the revised evaluation policy, making clear the role of the Committee in advising the Executive Director on evaluation recommendations and enhancing demand for and the use of evaluation within the organization.

53.   The revised evaluation policy has brought more clarity to the oversight of the evaluation function, for which the Director of Evaluation has overall responsibility. Regional offices, through regional directors and regional evaluation advisers, are increasing coordination and synergies across the UNICEF evaluation function and with United Nations partners at the regional and country levels. The Evaluation Pooled Fund has provided additional capacity through multi-country evaluation-specialist positions, which bring greater oversight of the evaluation function at the country level.
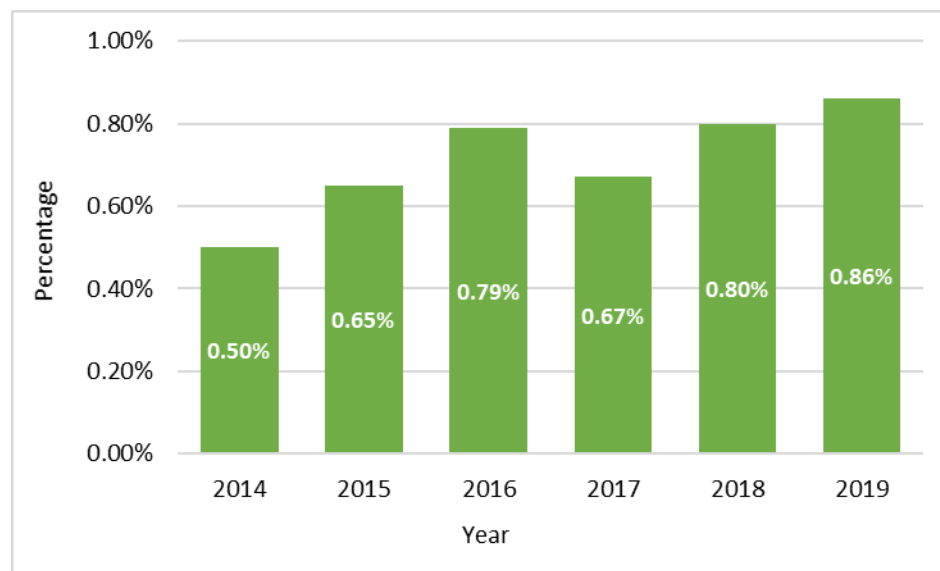
B.   Resources

Financial resources

54.   Expenditure on evaluation increased in 2019 from 0.80 per cent of the overall programme expenditure in 2018 to 0.86 per cent in 2019. However, as noted above, this still falls short of the benchmark of 1 per cent established by the Executive Board (see figure VII). The Evaluation Pooled Fund has been instrumental in facilitating the

increase in evaluation expenditure and related evaluation coverage. Regional variations in reaching the 1 per cent target are evident, with the Middle East and North Africa region substantially off target and the West and Central Africa region requiring additional effort.
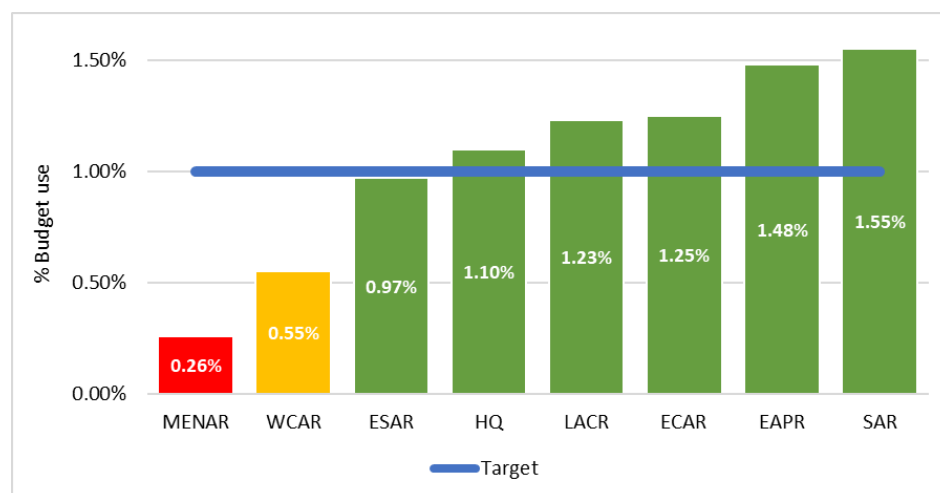
Figure VII
UNICEF expenditure on evaluation as a percentage of total programme expenditure, 2014–2019

Source: Insight.

Figure VIII
Expenditure on evaluation 2019 by region, percentage of total programme expenditure

Legend: EAPR: East Asia and the Pacific Region; ECAR: Europe and Central Asia Region; ESAR: Eastern and Southern Africa Region; HQ: headquarters; LACR: Latin America and Caribbean Region; MENA: Middle East and North Africa Region; SAR: South Asia Region; WCAR: West and Central Africa Region.
Source: Insight.

Human resources and capacity-building

55.   Enhancing UNICEF internal capacity to plan, manage and conduct evaluations is central to the effectiveness of the function. In line with commitments made in the revised evaluation policy, UNICEF, in collaboration with the United Nations Staff College, is developing an evaluation training programme for staff and partners. As illustrated in figure IX, this blended learning programme includes facilitated online learning via an interactive platform, followed by face-to-face training. The programme will engage participants in real-world experience based on ongoing evaluative work with Governments. Concurrently, the Evaluation Office is developing orientation modules on the latest developments in evaluation for senior leaders and programme managers, highlighting the contribution expected for an effective evaluation function. In addition, a self-paced evaluation course is being designed to support the work of all staff in UNICEF.

56.   As part of efforts to build understanding of the role of evaluation in UNICEF and to enhance capacity, in 2019 the Evaluation Office hosted the second Global Evaluation Learning Day for key partners in the evaluation community. The event was opened by the President of the Executive Board, with members of the Executive Board, Member States and representatives of United Nations agencies, foundations and academia in attendance.

Figure IX
Evaluation capacity development strategy

C.   **Guidance, tools and quality assurance**

57.   The Evaluation Office has continued to develop and improve tools and guidance to enhance the efficiency of the function. After the completion of the first phase of development, the Evidence Information Systems Integration platform was rolled out in 2019. This platform integrates UNICEF systems for planning, analysing, reporting and archiving evidence-generation activities for the research and evaluation functions. In 2020, further upgrades will be implemented to ensure that the tool is fully integrated into country programme planning processes.

58.   Guidance was developed on gender-equality analysis in 2019. The guidance on gender-equality integration in evaluation is intended to give direction to evaluators in their work as well as to ensure that stakeholders understand the critical role of gender-responsive evaluations as a core component of the programme cycle.

59.   The Evaluation Office undertook key actions to enhance quality assurance for evaluations. The second review of GEROS was undertaken to guide improvements in the post-facto quality assessment of all evaluations in UNICEF. The review concluded that GEROS was providing clear and independent assessments of the quality of evaluation reports, and had contributed to the current upward trend in the quality of UNICEF evaluations. The recommendations included revising the review template to make it more responsive to emerging needs, especially at the country level, and improving the accompanying consultation process. It was also recommended that the process of creation and use of the meta-evaluations be more user-friendly. To improve knowledge management, GEROS needs to go beyond its current accountability focus and become a platform for learning and sharing knowledge.

60.   The Evaluation Office commissioned an assessment of quality-assurance processes at the start of and during an evaluation. Upon completion, recommendations from this assessment will be considered for implementation in 2020.
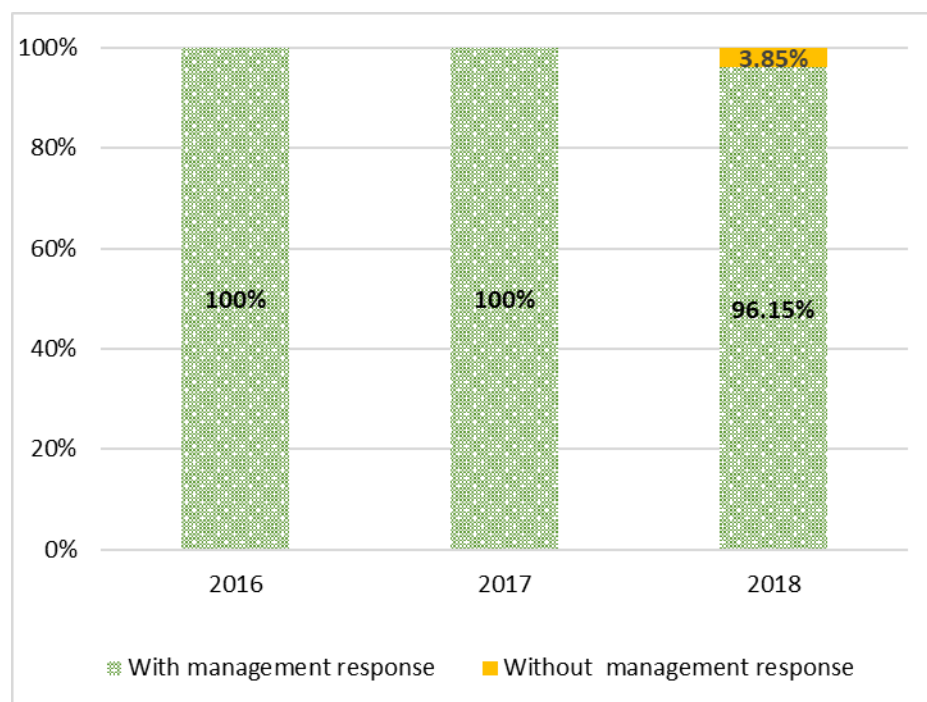
VI. Evaluation in support of a learning organization

A. Strengthening the implementation of management-response actions

61.   Evaluation management responses are systematically tracked by UNICEF and the data show that all evaluations submitted in 2017 and 96 per cent of evaluations from 2018 had a management response. For 2019 evaluations, the majority of which were submitted in the last quarter of the year, 35 per cent already had a management response at the time of writing this report. Complete data on management-response submissions for 2019 will be available in the second quarter of 2020 and will be communicated in the next annual report.

Figure X
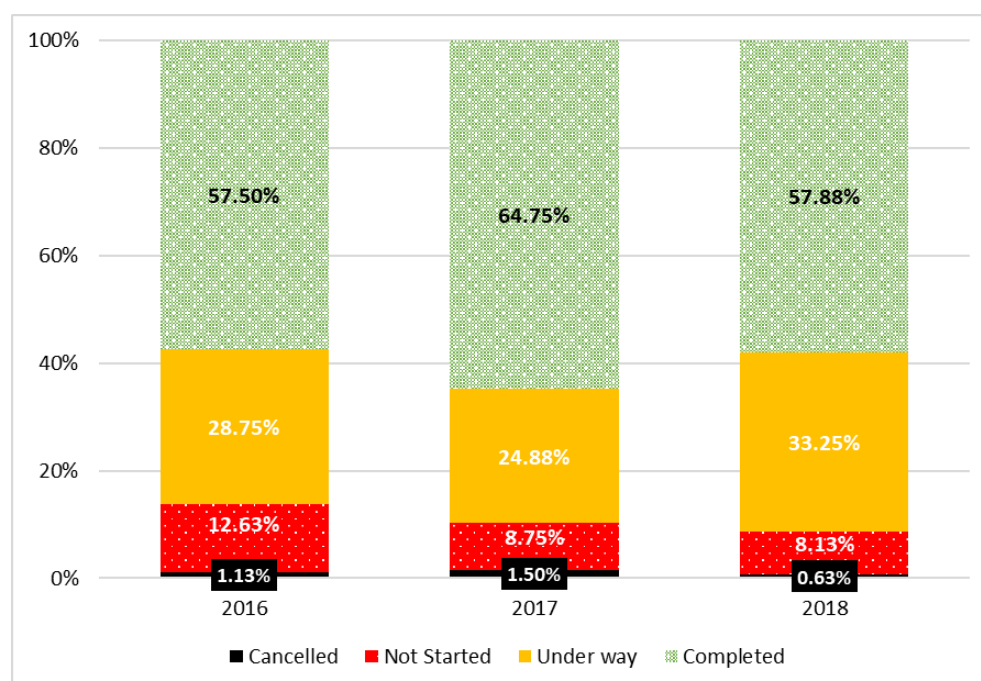**Evaluations submitted with a management response, 2016–2018**

Source: EISI.

62.   To date, 87 per cent of actions from evaluations conducted in 2016 have been or are being implemented (58 per cent completed and 29 per cent under way); 90 per cent of actions from 2017 have been or are being implemented (65 per cent completed and 25 per cent under way); and 91 per cent of actions from 2018 have been or are being implemented (58 per cent completed and 33 per cent under way).

63.   The Evaluation Office is encouraging offices that have not begun implementing their management responses to do so expeditiously and has established a system to prompt offices with overdue management-response actions to submit them in a timely manner.
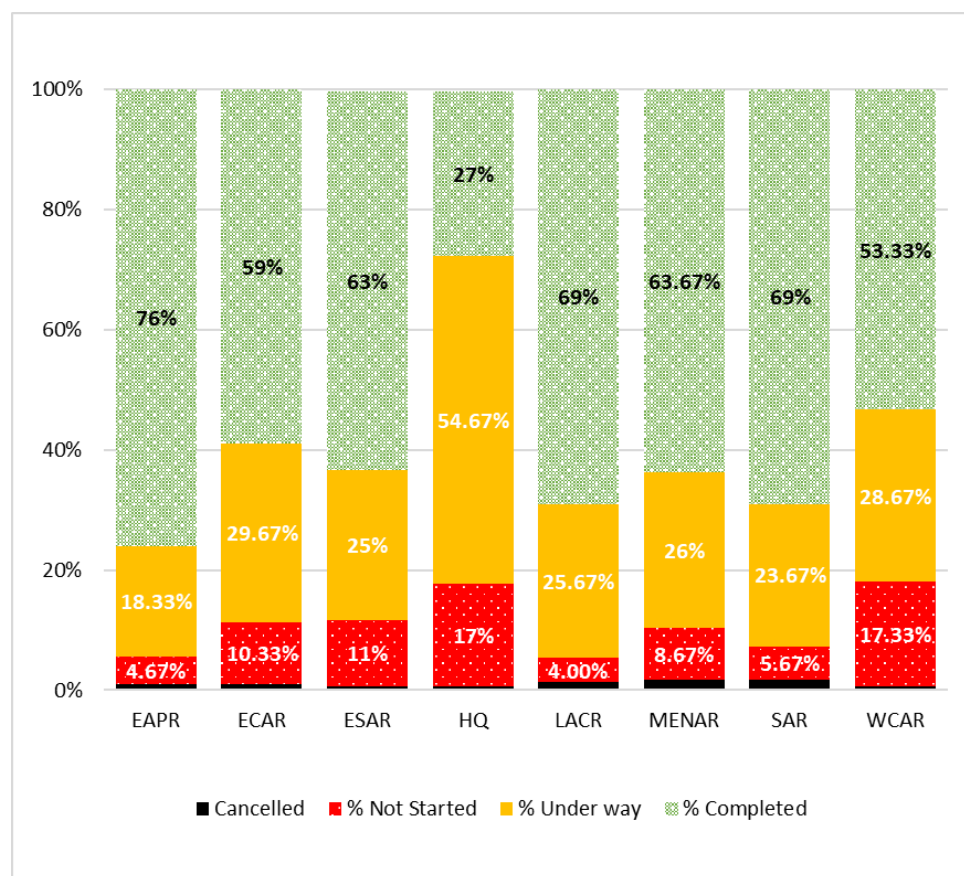
Figure XI
Implementation of evaluation management-response actions, 2016–2018

Source: EISI.

64.   For the period 2016–2018, the implementation of management responses has been slowest for headquarters and West and Central Africa, with 17 per cent of actions yet to start (see figure XII). In Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe and Central Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, the percentage of management responses not yet started are 11 per cent, 10 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively.

Figure XII
Implementation of management-response actions, 2016–2018, all regions

Legend: EAPR: East Asia and the Pacific Region; ECAR: Europe and Central Asia Region;
  ESAR: Eastern and Southern Africa Region; HQ: headquarters; LACR: Latin America and
  Caribbean Region; MENA: Middle East and North Africa Region; SAR: South Asia Region;
  WCAR: West and Central Africa Region.
Source: EISI.

B. Further strengthening evaluation use and influence

65. Additional tools and methods to share evaluation evidence were developed in 2019 in an effort to increase the utilization of evaluations.

66. Webinars have been a useful means of sharing guidance, experience and lessons from evaluations. In 2019, six webinars were held on topics that included evaluation and complexity in the Sustainable Development Goal era (in partnership with EvalSDGs); unintended consequences and trade-offs: evaluating in the nexus of environment, climate and development; and transforming the way we communicate evaluations.

67. To help improve the use of evaluation reports, the Evaluation Office has increasingly employed the use of infographics, which provide succinct visual representations of information, making reports more user-friendly and accessible. Examples include:

    (a) Global evaluation of UNICEF drinking water supply programming in rural areas and small towns: selected findings;

(b) Formative evaluation of the Out-Of-School Children Initiative;

(c) Evaluation of UNICEF girls' education portfolio (2009–2015);

(d) Evaluation of innovation in UNICEF work.

68. While it can sometimes be difficult to see the influence of evaluations on policy or programming, there were promising examples of influential evaluations in 2019:

(a) Recommendations from the evaluation of the UNICEF Malawi community-led total sanitation and hygiene programme led to a shift in the country office strategy, moving away from community-led total sanitation towards market-based sanitation solutions and refining their targeting to focus on fewer partners in fewer districts. The Country Office is using evidence generated by the evaluation to influence the national sanitation policy;

(b) The Thailand Child Support Grant impact evaluation has been used by such high-level policy committees as the National Child and Youth Development Committee to inform policy changes related to the grant. The Minister of Social Development and Human Security presented the key results of the evaluation and the targeting assessment to the Cabinet in March 2019. The Cabinet subsequently approved the expansion of the grant to children under six years of age and increased the scheme's poverty threshold;

(c) The evaluation of innovation in UNICEF, completed in 2018, is still having a notable effect on the organization. The evaluation assessed the extent to which UNICEF was fit for purpose to employ innovation as a key strategy to achieve the goals defined in the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. A key effect of the evaluation was the development, in June 2019, of the organization's first strategy on innovation. Work on a new organizational structure for innovation and a portfolio-management approach to prioritize investments is well under way;

(d) The evaluation of UNICEF strategies and programme performance in the area of child protection systems strengthening has contributed to the revision of the UNICEF child protection strategy, which dates from 2008. On the basis of one of the recommendations, new programme guidance has been created, including options for systems-strengthening interventions for different contexts.

69. In 2019, the Evaluation Office initiated a second study on influential UNICEF evaluations to analyse the factors that support or hamper influence in relation to policy change, improved programming and organizational learning. Early findings show that influential evaluations were that took a participatory approach, had a multi-stakeholder reference group, were completed in a timely fashion and co-developed recommendations with concerned counterparts.

70. UNICEF has developed a new concept for a series of evidence briefs synthesizing information on what works for children in UNICEF-led programme areas. The "What Works" series will draw upon evidence-based results, literature reviews and programme evaluations to illustrate lessons learned, future challenges and opportunities for the organization to explore. Scheduled for roll-out in the second quarter of 2020, the series will be accompanied by learning symposiums, intended to stimulate conversations between UNICEF programme experts and policymakers.

VII. Corporate evaluations

71. The plan for global evaluations sets out the programme for corporate evaluations over the period of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. Implementation of the plan is on track (see annex for details on the programme of work for 2019 and 2020 and on additional work, such as joint evaluations, that emerged after the endorsement of the plan by the Executive Board). An evaluation on early learning is being folded into another on teaching and learning (from early years to secondary education). Adjustments in the evaluation business model have contributed to more-timely completion of corporate evaluations, ensuring that they are delivered on schedule.

72. The formative evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to health-systems strengthening illuminated the challenges of operating in this area. Through the evaluation, UNICEF recognized the need for a new model to better articulate and distribute accountability for health-systems strengthening.

73. An evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian settings concluded that UNICEF had successfully advocated for the importance of education as a crucial part of any humanitarian response and was effective in the cluster lead-agency role. UNICEF education solutions were assessed as more appropriate to situations of natural disasters, but poorly suited to complex emergencies and protracted crises. Recommendations touched upon the need to strengthen country-level leadership accountabilities for education in humanitarian settings and to lead an effort to address the learning crisis by developing targeted education solutions.

74. Three inter-agency humanitarian evaluations were initiated in 2019, covering the drought response in Ethiopia, the response to Cyclone Idai and gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The latter two are ongoing.

75. The evaluation of the drought response in Ethiopia assessed the response of the humanitarian community to recurring droughts during the period 2015–2018. The evaluation used a household survey to gather primary data on the views of affected communities with regard to the drought response. The evaluation found that the response was life-saving and successful in many respects thanks to the relevance of the assistance provided, close integration with the Government and strong international coordination through dedicated cluster coordinators. However, humanitarian organizations and donors responded too late. Humanitarian action was found to be ineffective in restoring livelihoods and strengthening the resilience of communities. Recommended actions for future responses include improving response monitoring, supporting early action through unearmarked multi-year funding and developing programmes to reduce drought risks.

76. In line with the Grand Bargain commitment to scale up cash-based programming and social protection programmes, in 2019 the Evaluation Office conducted a scoping exercise to specify the programmatic and geographical scope of a forthcoming evaluation of UNICEF social-protection programming in emergencies, including cash transfers.

77. The joint UNFPA-UNICEF evaluation of the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, phase I, assessed progress towards results, the sustainability of interventions and programme efficiency and effectiveness to support the design of the second phase of the programme. The evaluation found that the complementary capabilities of UNFPA and UNICEF supported a multisectoral approach that was vital to tackling the complex issue of child marriage. Recommendations included strengthening the evidence base and knowledge management, and improving monitoring and reporting systems, human resources investment and programme design.

78. The joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programme on the abandonment of female genital mutilation assessed the programme's contribution to accelerating the abandonment of FGM over the past 10 years. The evaluation proposed taking the joint-programme approach further, supporting (a) innovative solutions; (b) comparative-advantage strengthening; (c) a gender-responsive framework strategy; and (d) formal communication strategies for behavioural-change targets.

79. The evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan assessed the quality, implementation and results of the organization's two successive Plans and provided evaluative evidence to advance the UNICEF gender agenda. Recommendations included working on a revised corporate-policy architecture reflecting more closely the organization's mission in different contexts; supporting a new gender policy linking institutional change to gender-equality results; embedding gender equality into planning and programming; building capacity to ensure gender-equality awareness and technical competence; ensuring leadership and accountabilities for ownership; and repositioning the corporate gender unit to report directly to the programme and management functions.

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

VIII. Conclusion

81. Experience in 2019 suggests a number of lessons and priorities going forward.

82. First, there is a continued need to focus more strongly on the use of evaluation evidence. Although the programming context is becoming more complex and the organization is growing in terms of human and financial resources, expectations regarding continuous growth in the number of evaluations may need to be balanced with an emphasis on the substantive use of evaluation evidence for programme oversight and learning. In addition, efforts that strengthen the quality of evaluations must continue even as the coverage benchmarks of the evaluation policy are being pursued.

83. Similarly, as UNICEF continues to make efforts to meet its own obligations for oversight and learning, these must be balanced against the continued need to strengthen collaboration around country-led evaluations with Governments and other national partners and joint evaluations with sister United Nations agencies, in support of the Decade of Action.

84. While expenditure on evaluation continues to rise, the organization is still falling short of the benchmark set by the Executive Board. Further efforts are needed in 2020 to reach the target of 1 per cent of overall programme expenditure. Additional efforts are required to accelerate the implementation of management responses.

85. The progress made in mainstreaming gender equality in evaluations is due to intensified capacity support to country offices, which must be sustained through more training and quality assurance.

86. In a changing world, the evaluation function should continue to be agile, aim at bringing forward evidence of what works in a timely manner. Real-time evaluations and rapid reviews, which have proved useful for both learning and accountability, should continue. This will be especially relevant in the context of the unfolding crisis related to COVID-19, which is impacting all societies and UNICEF operations in unpredictable and unprecedented ways.

87. Going forward, priorities for the evaluation function in 2020 will include new areas for organizational learning, such as public-health emergencies and civil

registration. The Evaluation Office is planning to expand its digital and social media presence. Finally, in support of the Decade of Action, strong efforts will continue to support and shape the agenda on national evaluation capacity development, and to forge stronger links between country programme evaluations and UNSDCF evaluations, in collaboration with sister United Nations agencies.

IX. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the following documents presented to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2020:

(a) Annual report for 2019 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2020/12) and its management response (E/ICEF/2020/13);

(b) Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, its summary (E/ICEF/2020/14) and its management response (E/ICEF/2020/15).

Annex

Programme of work for 2019–2020

Initiated before 2019 and completed in 2019	Initiated and completed in 2019	Initiated in 2019 and will be completed in 2020	To be initiated in 2020	Comments
Evaluability assessment of child protection in conflict situations				Completed
Independent midterm review (2019) of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage				Completed
Evaluation of the UNICEF/ UNFPA joint programme on female genital mutilation/cutting				Completed
Evaluation of the coverage and quality of the UNICEF humanitarian response in complex humanitarian emergencies				Completed and presented to the Executive Board at its 2019 annual session
Evaluability assessment of adolescent participation and empowerment				Completed
Evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 response to the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo				Completed
Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the drought response in Ethiopia (contributor)				Completed
Evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 response to the crisis in South Sudan				Completed

Initiated before 2019 and completed in 2019	Initiated and completed in 2019	Initiated in 2019 and will be completed in 2020	To be initiated in 2020	Comments
	Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan			Completed
	Evaluation of UNICEF engagement of young people in peacebuilding[a]			Completed
	Independent real-time evaluation of the UNICEF response to Cyclone Idai in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe[a]			Completed
	Evaluation of inclusive education for children with disabilities			Completed
	Evaluation of UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations			Completed
		Evaluation of UNICEF work on children in cities		Under way
		Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (joint)[a]		Under way
	Evaluation synthesis: Making evaluation work for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 target 5: equality and inclusion in education (joint)[a]			Completed

Initiated before 2019 and completed in 2019	Initiated and completed in 2019	Initiated in 2019 and will be completed in 2020	To be initiated in 2020	Comments
		Evaluability assessment of the common chapter of the Strategic Plan (joint)[a]		Under way
		Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique (joint)[a]		Under way
		Independent evaluation of the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations grant to the global education cluster: strengthening coordination of education in emergencies (2017–2019)[a]		Under way
		Evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to enhancing humanitarian-development integration		Under way
		Review of the UNICEF response to the Level 2 Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela crisis[a]		Under way
		Evaluation of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programming in protracted crises		Under way
		Evaluation of early child development and early stimulation and care		Under way

Initiated before 2019 and completed in 2019	*Initiated and completed in 2019*	*Initiated in 2019 and will be completed in 2020*	*To be initiated in 2020*	*Comments*
		Evaluation of the United Nations system response to AIDS 2016–2018 (joint with UNAIDS)[a]		Under way
		Evaluation of the coverage and quality of the UNICEF humanitarian response in complex humanitarian emergencies, phase 2 – country evaluations: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Nigeria and Somalia		Under way
		Formative evaluation of the UNICEF role as cluster lead (co-lead) agency[a]		Under way
		Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to the Yemen crisis (joint)[a]		Under way
		Evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to improved teaching and learning[b]		Under way
		Evaluation of the enabling environment for WASH		To be substituted with a joint United Nations synthesis on Sustainable Development Goal 6 (joint)[a]
		Evaluation of approaches to social protection programming in humanitarian situations including cash-based programming		Under way

Initiated before 2019 and completed in 2019	Initiated and completed in 2019	Initiated in 2019 and will be completed in 2020	To be initiated in 2020	Comments
			Rapid evidence assessment on protecting children on the move (joint)[a]	Under way
			Development effectiveness review of UNICEF	Under way
			Evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021	Planning phase
			Evaluation of UNICEF work in strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems	Planning phase
			Programme evaluation: protecting children on the move in the Horn of Africa	Under way
			Evaluation of UNICEF work in public health emergencies	To commence in second half of 2020

[a] Emerged after endorsement of the plan for global evaluations by the Executive Board.
[b] Includes planned evaluation on early learning.