



Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services

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UNFPA – Evaluation

United Nations Population Fund

Multi-year costed evaluation plan, 2026-2029

Summary

The multi-year costed evaluation plan for 2026-2029, prepared in line with the evaluation policy of UNFPA (DP/FPA/2024/1), presents the strategic approach to evaluation planning and details proposed centralized and decentralized programme evaluations to be carried out during 2026-2029, together with information on estimated costs, key risks and reporting arrangements.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to:

- (a) *welcome* the relevance and utility of the multi-year costed evaluation plan for 2026-2029;
- (b) *acknowledge* the transparent and participatory process undertaken in developing the multi-year costed evaluation plan for 2026-2029; and
- (c) *approve* the multi-year costed evaluation plan for 2026-2029.

Contents

I.	Background, purpose and scope	3
II.	Intentionality and use of evaluations	3
III.	Strategic approach to the planning of evaluations.....	4
	A. Principles, norms and selection criteria of evaluations included in the plan	4
	B. Consultative process followed to develop the plan.....	4
	C. Responsiveness to evolving needs	5
IV.	Centralized evaluations	6
V.	Decentralized programme-level evaluations	7
VI.	Human and financial resources	8
VII.	Potential risks	8
VIII.	Reporting	8

I. Background, purpose and scope

1. The multi-year costed evaluation plan, 2026-2029 is prepared in line with the UNFPA Evaluation Policy, the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2026-2029, as well as General Assembly resolution 79/266 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR), and General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system, and the funding compact.
2. The purpose of the plan is to provide a coherent framework to guide the conduct and use of evaluations at UNFPA. The plan provides a basis for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of planned centralized and decentralized programme evaluations. Centralized evaluations included in the plan will be presented to the Executive Board or relevant stakeholders, in compliance with the Evaluation Policy.
3. The plan should be viewed as flexible and responsive to the changing context in which UNFPA works. It will be implemented with due consideration to internal dynamics, including organizational reforms and evolving business models, as well as external factors such as humanitarian needs and United Nations system-wide reforms. Therefore, it will be revised, if necessary, to ensure its continued relevance to the organization and towards the achievement of the four outcomes of the Strategic Plan, 2026-2029. To facilitate a balanced approach between the strategic coverage and the utility of evaluation, the plan covers four years. Firm proposals for evaluations are presented for 2026-2027, while indicative proposals for evaluations are presented for 2028-2029, to be validated in 2027.
4. The plan covers two categories of evaluations and other evaluative exercises, as defined in the evaluation policy:
 - (a) *Centralized evaluations*, commissioned by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO);
 - (b) *Decentralized programme-level evaluations*, commissioned by country offices and regional offices, as well as headquarters business units.
5. UNFPA is fully committed to continue supporting system-wide evaluation mechanisms as well as inter-agency and joint evaluations with other United Nations organizations, both at centralized and decentralized levels. As such, this plan also includes these typologies of evaluations.

II. Intentionality and use of evaluations

6. Evaluation results are used to improve organizational and United Nations system-wide performance toward the fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and the accelerated implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and other internationally agreed development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals.
7. UNFPA seeks to strengthen accountability for results and ensure that evaluation findings contribute to informed, evidence-based decision-making and feed into organizational learning for more effective programming. Results should inform the development and implementation of operational and normative plans and policies, including the implementation and midterm review of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2026-2029, the design of the next UNFPA strategic plan for 2030-2033, as well as the development of country and regional programme documents.
8. The use of evaluation evidence is a critical element of the evaluation process and a shared responsibility between management and the Independent Evaluation Office. To facilitate its use, an evaluation must be relevant, timely, targeted, and efficiently communicated. The Independent Evaluation Office purposefully conducts evaluations in a participatory and consultative manner, by establishing reference groups to enhance the use of evaluation results from the onset of each exercise while ensuring its independence, objectivity and credibility. Additionally, formal management responses to all completed evaluations are requested and knowledge products are shared and disseminated through various knowledge-management platforms.

III. Strategic approach to the planning of evaluations

A. Principles, norms and selection criteria of evaluations included in the plan

9. The guiding principles emanate from the Evaluation Policy, relevant decisions of the General Assembly and the Executive Board, the commitment of UNFPA executive management to nurturing a culture of evaluations, and the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards and code of conduct for evaluations.

10. The development of the plan is guided by principles and norms as outlined by the Evaluation Policy, notably:

(a) *Universally shared values* of equity, justice, gender equality and respect for diversity underpin all evaluations. Further, evaluations take into consideration factors and characteristics often associated with discrimination and exclusion, including gender, age, culture, ethnicity, race, language, religion, disability, location, migration status, socio-economic status and health status. Evaluations also examine the intersections and intersectionality across factors affecting a person's development;

(b) *Stakeholder engagement and capacity development*. The commitment to national capacity development in evaluation is realized through partnerships that promote local ownership and values local knowledge, including of young people. Local ownership helps to meet strategic plan principles of equity, leaving no one behind, non-discrimination, and gender equality. Evaluations adopt inclusive approaches, including meaningful engagement of young people, people with disabilities, and indigenous and marginalized communities, and integrate social and environmental dimensions;

(c) *Efficiency in evaluation*. The drive for efficiency extends to the evaluation function itself, starting with evaluation planning processes that prioritize the most strategic, relevant and useful topics through rigorous analysis and consultation. It also relates to its human and financial resources and its efforts to collaborate with other complementary functions. To remain relevant, evaluations are adaptive and innovative, and utilize advanced technologies, such as responsible and ethical artificial intelligence, and other innovative methods and approaches.

11. The following selection criteria, in the order of priority set in the Evaluation Policy, were used to guide the selection of centralized and decentralized evaluations: (a) clarity of intended use for strategic decision-making; (b) risk associated with the subject, including periodicity of efforts to avoid extended periods without evaluative attention; (c) potential for system-wide, inter-agency or joint evaluation or strategic contribution/synergy with United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) evaluations; significant investment; (d) feasibility for implementing the evaluation; (e) knowledge gap; (f) formal commitments to stakeholders; and (g) innovation, with potential for replication and scaling-up.

B. Consultative process followed to develop the plan

12. The Independent Evaluation Office followed two key steps to identify strategic evaluation priorities concerning the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2026-2029:

(a) Building on the multi-year costed evaluation plan (2022-2025), an evidence-gap analysis was conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office, assessing the coverage of centralized evaluations undertaken during 2018-2025 against the corresponding strategic plans;

(b) Consultations presenting the draft plan were held with the UNFPA Executive Committee and senior management at headquarters and regional levels, the Oversight Advisory Committee, and the Executive Board. Consultations were also undertaken with other United Nations organizations, to identify possible joint, inter-agency and system-wide evaluations.

C. Responsiveness to evolving needs

13. The current global landscape is defined by a rapidly changing geopolitical dynamic, financial instability, UN80-driven transformations, and a humanitarian reset within the United Nations system. This complex and unpredictable environment is driving a fundamental shift in how development and humanitarian work is conducted. Against this backdrop, system-wide initiatives like the 2024 QCPR, the United Nations 80th anniversary reform efforts, and the humanitarian reset, together with the business model review of UNFPA, are determining how to deliver more efficiently and impactfully to people everywhere. In this context, the following evolving approaches have guided the development of the plan, aiming to ensure the evaluation function adapts in order to provide the strategic insights and learning required to ensure the delivery of UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2026-2029:

- (a) *The 'Evaluation Forward' initiative.* This initiative seeks to redefine the approach to centralized evaluations, including those in humanitarian contexts and meta-syntheses. By piloting new management modalities, the initiative aims to enhance the relevance, timeliness, quality, cost-efficiency and rigour of evaluations. This approach marks a strategic and operational shift for the Independent Evaluation Office, transitioning from a model of primarily outsourced evaluations to one of active leadership and co-authorship with external thematic experts, if needed. The initiative will also introduce a much shorter evaluation reporting format (i.e., maximum length of 8,500 words) and increase the utilization of artificial intelligence across evaluations;
- (b) *United Nations coherence in evaluation.* UNFPA is committed to continuing to strategically engage in joint, inter-agency or system-wide evaluation initiatives. Under this plan, 19 centralized evaluations and evaluative exercises (representing 45 per cent of the total) have been identified as United Nations joint, inter-agency or system-wide evaluations;
- (c) *Humanitarian evaluations.* The proliferation of increasingly severe and complex humanitarian and protracted crises has required an increasing number of UNFPA field offices to engage in humanitarian responses. To address the specific requirements of assessing performance and lesson learning of the organization's humanitarian responses, a two-pronged strategy will be applied. On the one hand, an enhanced focus on UNFPA performance in humanitarian settings will be pursued, including by evaluating 'level 3' emergencies after they have been deactivated. On the other hand, all centralized evaluations will analyse the humanitarian-development-peace continuum. In addition, the Independent Evaluation Office will deepen its engagement in inter-agency evaluations managed by the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group;
- (d) *Use of existing evaluative evidence through meta-syntheses and real-time evidence summaries.* The Independent Evaluation Office will conduct meta-syntheses from multiple centralized and decentralized evaluations to offer more comprehensive evidence and lessons around systemic and cross-cutting issues, including at an inter-agency level. In parallel, the office will produce real-time evidence summaries that provide quick, concise and high-level overviews of the best available evidence on a specific topic to inform decision-making;
- (e) *Use of innovation to enhance evaluation.* Given the evolving external and internal needs for evaluative evidence, as well as methodological challenges brought about by these changes, the Independent Evaluation Office will continue to diversify and adapt its evaluation methodologies and approaches to address the rapidly evolving contexts. This will lead to more diversified, innovative, responsive and relevant evaluations at country, regional and global levels that respond to the accountability and learning needs;
- (f) *Scaling up responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence and other digital technologies in evaluation.* This will include embedding artificial intelligence tools across evaluation phases and tasks, leading to significant efficiency gains across the evaluation lifecycle.

IV. Centralized evaluations

14. The list of centralized evaluations presented in table 1 below ensures a comprehensive coverage of the UNFPA strategic plan. Over four years, the Independent Evaluation Office will conduct 42 centralized evaluations and evaluative exercises – out of which 19 (45 per cent) will be system-wide, inter-agency or joint.

15. Table 1 below presents, in summary, the broad topics proposed for centralized evaluations by key components of the UNFPA strategic plan, and the sequencing of evaluations over the four years covered by the plan.

Table 1. Proposed centralized evaluations, 2026-2029

Strategic plan	2026	2027	2028	2029
Four outcomes	Evaluation of UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment	Evaluation of the Maternal and Newborn Health Fund (MNHF – Phase 4, 2024-2028)	End-line evaluation of the UNFPA Supplies Partnership programme (2022-2030)	Joint final evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate FGM
	Joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate FGM	Joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (Phase III – midterm review)	Evaluation of the UNFPA contribution to maternal and newborn health and well-being	Evaluation of UNFPA contribution to the fourth outcome of the strategic plan
			Evaluation of the UNFPA contribution to family planning	
Six outputs	Evaluation of the normative role of UNFPA		Evaluation of UNFPA leveraging sustainable financing and investment	
Humanitarian action and preparedness*	Evaluation of UNFPA approach to localization	Evaluation of UNFPA Emergency Policy and Procedures (EPP)		Evaluation of UNFPA engagement in protracted crises
	L3 humanitarian evaluation (DRC)	L3 humanitarian evaluation (TBD)	L3 humanitarian evaluation (TBD)	L3 humanitarian evaluation (TBD)
	CPE evaluation with a significant humanitarian component	CPE evaluation with a significant humanitarian component	CPE evaluation with a significant humanitarian component	CPE evaluation with a significant humanitarian component
OEE and crosscutting		Evaluation of UNFPA strategic communication for impact	Summative evaluation of the UNFPA strategic plans, 2018-2026	
			Evaluation of UNFPA digital transformation	Evaluation of UNFPA human resources management
	Synthesis of UNFPA evaluations on OEE/4 transformative results (TRs) (TBD)	Synthesis of UNFPA evaluations on OEE/4 TRs (TBD)	Synthesis of UNFPA evaluations on OEE/4 TRs (TBD)	Synthesis of UNFPA evaluations on OEE/4 TRs (TBD)
Systemwide evaluations and synthesis exercises	Interagency synthesis on the United Nations Youth Strategy (part 4)	Interagency synthesis (TBD)	Interagency synthesis (TBD)	Interagency synthesis (TBD)
	SWEO systemwide evaluation (TBD)	SWEO systemwide evaluation (TBD)	SWEO systemwide evaluation (TBD)	SWEO systemwide evaluation (TBD)
	IAHE systemwide humanitarian evaluation (TBD)	IAHE systemwide humanitarian evaluation (TBD)	IAHE systemwide humanitarian evaluation (TBD)	IAHE systemwide humanitarian evaluation (TBD)

* Humanitarian aspects are integrated into all centralized evaluations included in this plan.

V. Decentralized programme-level evaluations

16. The plan includes programme evaluations compiled from costed evaluation plans developed by country and regional offices, which were presented to the Executive Board as annexes to their programme documents.

17. Overall, 71 country programme evaluations (see table 2 below) and 6 regional programme evaluations (see table 3) are planned across all UNFPA regions. In addition to programme evaluations, UNFPA will engage in UNSDCF evaluations and project-level evaluations.

Table 2. Number of country programme evaluations by region, 2026-2029

Country programme evaluations	2026	2027	2028	2029	Total
Asia and the Pacific	4	3	1	4	12
Arab States	5	1	1	3	10
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	2	1	-	9	12
East and Southern Africa	5	3	2	2	12
Latin America and the Caribbean	4	3	1	3	11
West and Central Africa	5	4	2	3	14
Total	25	15	7	24	71

Table 3. Number of regional programme evaluations by region, 2026-2029

Regional programme evaluations	2026	2027	2028	2029	Total
Asia and the Pacific	0	0	1	0	1
Arab States	0	0	1	0	1
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0	0	1	0	1
East and Southern Africa	0	0	1	0	1
Latin America and the Caribbean	0	0	1	0	1
West and Central Africa	0	0	1	0	1
Total	0	0	6	0	6

VI. Human and financial resources

18. An effective evaluation function requires secure, predictable and adequate investment in financial and human resources.
19. The Independent Evaluation Office has 12 approved posts: 1 general service position, 10 professional staff, and the Director. At the regional level, UNFPA has six regional monitoring and evaluation advisors at the P5 level. At the country office level, there has been a progressive increase in the number of monitoring and evaluation staff across country offices over the last five years. As of December 2024, 98 per cent of country offices were staffed with a monitoring and evaluation staff.
20. The estimated overall cost for the implementation of the multi-year costed evaluation plan 2026-2029 is \$22.75 million. This includes the costs for the Independent Evaluation Office and centralized evaluations (\$15.17 million estimated to be covered by the integrated budget, 2026-2029, plus \$1.50 million by other resources) and the estimated costs for decentralized programme evaluations (\$6.08 million).
21. The estimated costs are aligned to the recently approved integrated budget, 2026-2029. However, the figures presented do not represent the totality of the estimated costs of the evaluation function – as was the case in the previous multi-year costed evaluation plans – since the evaluation function also includes the cost of other types of decentralized evaluations, the evaluation quality assessment system, and initiatives for internal and national evaluation capacity development. In the case of country and regional programme evaluations, the estimated costs are ringfenced as part of the overall regular resources for country and regional programmes.

VII. Potential risks

22. Potential risks to the delivery of the evaluation plan include:
 - (a) *Contextual factors*. These may require a reprioritization of evaluation themes to ensure continued relevance and usefulness of the planned evaluations. Shifting geopolitical dynamics, evolving United Nations system-wide reforms, financial instability or other inhibiting factors may influence the capacity to implement the plan as planned. Such constraints and limitations will be addressed through constant monitoring and a flexible and agile adaptation of the plans;
 - (b) *Financial and human resource constraints*. These may affect the implementation of the proposed plan, particularly if funding levels fluctuate or if organizational adjustments linked to the business model reviews impact capacities. To mitigate these risks, the Independent Evaluation Office is pivoting towards greater use of in-house capacity to conduct centralized evaluations while leveraging artificial intelligence and other innovative tools to increase efficiency. Close monitoring of financial and human resource planning will be maintained to safeguard the independence and integrity of the evaluation function;
 - (c) *Adjustments to the UNFPA strategic plan*. These changes might occur during the implementation of the strategic plan due to changes emanating from the midterm review of the plan or shifts in the resourcing environment. The rolling approach to evaluation planning will allow relevant adjustments to ensure the evaluation plan remains aligned with any significant changes in UNFPA strategic priorities. The relocation of the Independent Evaluation Office to Nairobi, Kenya, alongside the Programme Division, deepens engagement and ensures closer proximity to the field and alignment with areas where significant resources of UNFPA and priorities are concentrated.

VIII. Reporting

23. Progress in the implementation of the plan will be reported within the annual report on the evaluation function presented to the Executive Board each year.

24. The Independent Evaluation Office will incorporate the lessons learned from implementing this plan, including the level of resources concerning expected results, into the midterm review of the current plan – if needed – and in preparation for the next multi-year costed evaluation plan, 2030-2033.
