

MOPAN  
2017-18 ASSESSMENTS

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**Organisational Performance Brief**

**United Nations Population Fund  
(UNFPA)**

**Published May 2019**

## Key findings

### **UNFPA has a clear, results-oriented strategy and vision.**

Through simple but effective devices such as the “bull’s eye”, UNFPA clearly sets out what it aims to achieve, for whom and how. The 2018-21 Strategic Plan outlines roles and responsibilities at different levels of operation, as well as the rationale behind its work in specific areas of the world. Country offices are at the heart of implementation, with a focus on strengthening national health systems. An Integrated Resource and Results Framework (IRRF), refined from the first iteration in the 2014-17 Strategic Plan, draws clear linkages between UNFPA’s contributions and achievement of the agency’s central goal towards which all its results-based management (RBM) systems are oriented.

**The form and content of UNFPA’s objectives are well-aligned with relevant global frameworks.** UNFPA can be considered the custodian of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, which also constitutes its main goal. The 2018-21 Strategic Plan is positioned as the first of three working to implement the 2030 Agenda, with approximately 60% of UNFPA’s outcome and impact indicators drawn directly from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNFPA also draws extensively on the UN General Assembly’s Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) and the UN Secretary-General’s Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health for its strategic vision and plan. In addition, the agency plays a co-ordinating role in the Common Chapter agreement with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

### **More specifically, UNFPA is committed, both in principle and practice, to “Delivering as One” in line with the broader UN system.**

The agency also seeks to make efficiency gains and add value through its unique place in this system. Whether this is achieved through the prioritised use of shared premises, leadership in joint procurement, or its role heading the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Area of Responsibility under the Global Protection Cluster, UNFPA is well-positioned to further enhance the coherency and efficiency of delivery through combined efforts with the UN system. Implementation of an increasingly common approach with its fellow UN agencies also enables UNFPA to ensure that some of its good practices – for example RBM systems and green procurement practices – inform those adopted by the wider system.

## UNFPA KEY FACTS

**MISSION:** The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is the United Nations (UN) sexual and reproductive health agency. Created in 1969, its mission is to deliver a world “where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled”. UNFPA calls for the realisation of reproductive rights for all and supports access to a wide range of sexual and reproductive health services – including voluntary family planning, maternal health care and comprehensive sexuality education.

**GOVERNANCE:** UNFPA is a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly. UNFPA reports to the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services) Executive Board of 36 UN Member States on administrative, financial and programme matters. The Executive Board oversees UNFPA activity, provides intergovernmental support and meets three times a year.

**STRUCTURE:** UNFPA’s daily operations are led by the Executive Director together with an Executive Committee consisting of two Deputy Executive Directors, and Division and Regional Directors. The organisation is headquartered in New York and has 6 regional offices, several sub-regional offices and 119 country offices working in over 150 countries. UNFPA has over 4 000 personnel worldwide, three quarters of whom are regular staff. The majority work in regional or country offices.

**FINANCE:** UNFPA is entirely supported by voluntary contributions from donor governments, intergovernmental organisations, the private sector, and foundations and individuals. It does not receive funding from the UN regular budget. Contributions to UNFPA totalled USD 1 068 million in 2017, of which USD 350 million was allocated to the organisation’s core resources and USD 718 million was earmarked for specific programmes or initiatives.

**RBM systems and tools are increasingly well-entrenched across the organisation and provide clear linkages from inputs and activities to outcomes and strategic results.** Lessons learnt from the previous strategic cycle indicated a need for the IRRF and Theory of Change (ToC) to incorporate clear lines of sight to management and development results and to reflect the global transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the SDGs. UNFPA's policy and guidance requires country programmes and thematic funds to have results frameworks in place that link to strategic-level outcomes through the agency's Global Programming System (GPS) and Strategic Information Systems (SIS). This integrated system, although in the process of revision toward a single user-friendly interface, effectively links expenditure to programme and strategic outcomes and results, which are centred around the goal at the heart of UNFPA's "bull's eye".

**Building upon an increasingly robust evaluation function, UNFPA has been strengthening lesson-learning and knowledge management.** Although resources and coverage remain areas for improvement, UNFPA's evaluation function has improved significantly and has become the backbone of a broader learning culture in the organisation. UNFPA makes all evaluation reports publicly available and requires management responses for each corporate and programme level review. Management responses use a template with a clear action plan, responsible parties and timeline, with the Programme Division tracking completion of these actions. UNFPA measures the degree to which interventions draw on evaluative evidence and lessons from previous interventions. These lessons learnt have been used effectively to inform scaling-up and future iterations of programming, for example in the Maternal Health Thematic Fund.

**UNFPA has strong financial systems and controls.** UNFPA has taken a significant step forward in improving financial management over the 2014-17 strategic period and now consistently achieves unqualified audits. Internal audit ratings of risk and controls have improved and internal and external audit functions are aligned to international best practice. The agency also tracks and reports on recommendation implementation. Concerted efforts in recent years have resulted in the implementation of a high percentage of recommendations, with the Executive Board linking improved internal controls to overall better risk management.

**UNFPA has recently made major strides in systems and practices to manage risk and has now established a culture of risk awareness at all levels.** Although further work is needed to ensure systematic implementation of risk management systems across all programmes, recently developed tools and processes, including a Global Risk Mitigation Table in SIS and the Risk Treatment Working Groups, bode well for continued improvement in this area.

**Despite its increasing role in the humanitarian sphere, there is room for UNFPA to improve its performance in this area.** UNFPA has made significant advances by further mainstreaming GBV concerns into broader humanitarian programming. The agency has become a respected and significant humanitarian actor, not only through its leadership of the GBV Area of Responsibility under the Global Protection Cluster and by providing GBV-related programming, but also by offering population data analytics to support interventions. That being said, UNFPA's systems and administrative processes are not fully suited to the rapid response needed in humanitarian contexts. Similarly, although UNFPA's allocation framework is well-suited to classifying countries' needs in a development setting, it has in some cases hindered humanitarian interventions in middle-income countries. Interviews and documentation indicate that UNFPA has made efforts to address this issue, including by relocating some of its humanitarian operations to Geneva and identifying bottlenecks to agile implementation, but there is still room for improvement.

**Administrative delays negatively affect programme implementation and partnerships.** Delays are often incurred by challenging external factors and there are noted efficient practices. However, meta-studies of country evaluations indicate that both programme implementation and partnerships are often negatively affected by delays caused by cumbersome internal processes. In some cases, delayed disbursement due to complex administrative procedures forced implementation of programmes into unreasonably short timeframes. Disbursement delays also negatively affect some joint programming and were cited as an persistent issue by some partners. Overall, delays have been cited as an issue affecting UNFPA's ability to deliver efficiently.

**Human resources has improved steadily to become a strong asset for the organisations.** The Human Resources (HR) Branch has been revamped with a focus on international best practice and has consolidated efforts to establish a vibrant development culture. The Performance Appraisal and Development System, which includes both a 360 degree and external partner component, has a high compliance rate and has a recently streamlined rebuttal process. UNFPA ensures that it has a strong pool of talent to draw from by maintaining and providing focused training and coaching to potential future leaders. This has translated into a reduction in the time needed to recruit new managers.

**However, challenges remain in matching the right staff to the context and some human resources are overstretched.** UNFPA aligns its activities to the needs of a given context. In certain cases, particularly in some middle-income countries, this means a focus on policy and advocacy-oriented work. Staff indicated, however, that the organisation did not always have adequate representation at a sufficiently senior level to carry out this work effectively. Similar issues were noted with regard to the level of expertise and resources to support the implementation of RBM systems and with representation in humanitarian co-ordination settings at the country level. While the provision of HR Strategic Partners for regional offices is a positive development, these staff struggle to keep up with the level of transactional HR work and thus cannot fully fulfil their strategic role. More broadly, as a smaller agency in the UN system, UNFPA cannot match the career advancement opportunities of larger agencies, which affects their ability to retain skilled staff.

**While population data analytics and census capacity constitute a clear comparative advantage, these could be leveraged to greater effect.** UNFPA's expertise in population data analysis represents a unique offering to partners. There is a growing demand for the agency's geospatial approaches, census expertise and population data, which have been used to positive effect in Afghanistan, Ecuador and Peru. However, the organisation may be a victim of its own success, as growing demand and ambitious goals call into question whether resources and skilled staff are sufficiently well aligned to achieve the organisation's objectives.

**UNFPA translates its work and expertise into accessible communications products that support essential fundraising and advocacy.** UNFPA's ability to communicate the issues it covers and the work it does to address them, using clear and powerful messages, is highly effective. The organisation is active on all forms of social and traditional media and has an excellent website that includes a compelling web-based version of its flagship *State of the World Population* publication. By providing dedicated pages with readily accessible information, UNFPA ensures that its donors are well-catered for with information on the results achieved by their funding. UNFPA's financial resilience in the face of a challenging 2017 demonstrates the effectiveness of the agency's approach to attract funding through the use of powerful stories about their work. Interviews emphasized that the organisation is staffed by committed people who have a strong focus on UNFPA's mission and frequently recalled the "10-year-old girl" – a symbol of the target population of their work.

**Despite some success in establishing an enabling environment and linking humanitarian to longer-term objectives, sustainable programme delivery continues to be a challenge in development contexts.** Although UNFPA has demonstrated some success in ensuring that humanitarian interventions are linked to longer-term developmental efforts, there is evidence of challenges relating to sustainability. Some interventions have not included clear exit strategies or approaches for handing over initiatives to local partners. While capacity development is understood as an essential component for sustainable delivery, there is evidence that UNFPA's approach in this area has room for improvement, despite some successes both in terms of building institutional capacity and improving the enabling environment for development by contributing to policy and social norm change in its thematic areas.

### THE THREE ZEROES

UNFPA, in partnership with government, civil society, and other partner, seeks to achieve:

- ZERO unmet need for family planning
- ZERO preventable maternal deaths
- ZERO gender-based violence or harmful practices.

# Performance at a glance

UNFPA is a well-performing organisation on a positive trajectory. After strong performance in the 2014 MOPAN assessment, the agency has given attention to operational and programme improvements resulting in a high level of functionality in 2018 with a view toward continuous improvement.

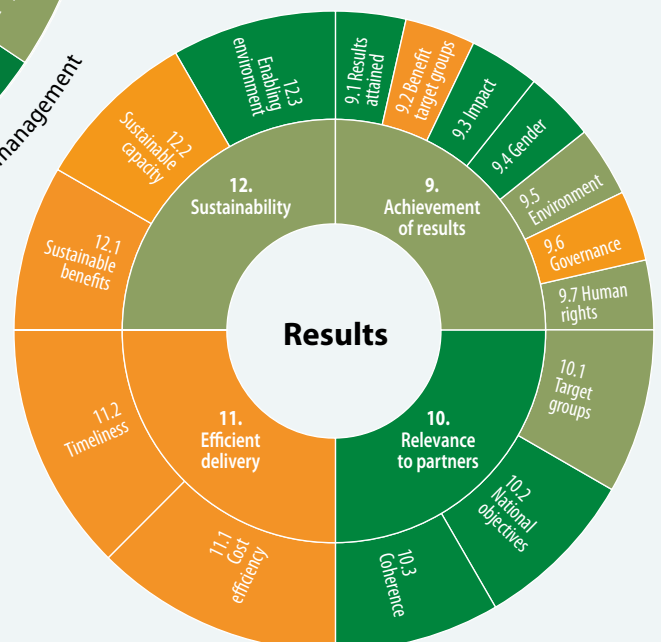
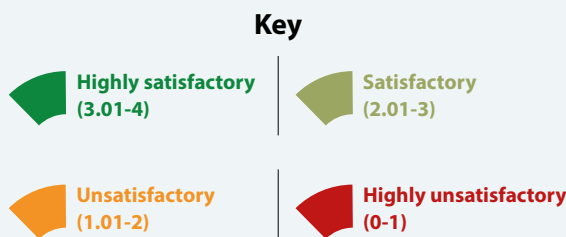
UNFPA had a difficult year in 2017 due to funding challenges, an internal restructuring process and

increased demands for its support and services. The sudden death of the organisation’s Executive Director was an additional blow. UNFPA rose to meet these challenges, proving to be responsive, engaged and well-performing. The agency has taken a leadership role in humanitarian action and nurtured its normative and knowledge-brokering roles. Its staff stand firmly committed to the organisation’s values and goals – a testament to a strong corporate culture based on shared understanding of mission, risks and results.

## PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY



However, internal inefficiencies exist that impact implementation. Whether UNFPA can match its ambitions with appropriate resources, for example in humanitarian work, also remains to be seen. Many initiatives have recently been put in place to address identified issues; however, more time is needed to see whether these permeate into programme implementation. That said, the organisation is clearly not afraid of change or challenge, and the shifts in policy and process over the 2014-17 Strategic Period suggest that UNFPA will continue to adapt to become increasingly fit for purpose.



## About this assessment

The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) is a network of 18 countries<sup>1</sup> that share a common interest in assessing the effectiveness of the major multilateral organisations they fund, including UN agencies, international financial institutions and global funds. The Network generates, collects, analyses and presents relevant and credible information on the organisational and development effectiveness of the organisations it assesses. This knowledge base is intended to contribute to organisational learning within and among the organisations, their direct clients and partners, and other stakeholders. Network members use the reports for their own accountability needs and as a source of input for strategic decision-making.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is one of the 14 organisations assessed by MOPAN in 2017-18. This was the third MOPAN assessment of UNFPA; the first was conducted in 2010 and the second in 2014. Japan and Switzerland championed the assessment of UNFPA on behalf of the Network.

### Organisations assessed by MOPAN in 2017-18:

- ADB
- GEF
- IFAD
- OHCHR
- UNESCO
- UNHCR
- WFP
- FAO
- GPE
- IOM
- UN Women
- UNFPA
- UNRWA
- WHO

1: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States – and two observers, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates.

2: The online survey was conducted among partners of UNFPA in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Jordan, Lebanon, Mexico, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Tunisia and Turkey.

3: Available at [www.mopanonline.org](http://www.mopanonline.org)

This brief accompanies the full assessment, published in May 2019, which can be found on MOPAN's website at [www.mopanonline.org](http://www.mopanonline.org). UNFPA's management response is available on that website as well.

The assessment of performance covers UNFPA's headquarters and regional and country field presence. It addresses organisational systems, practices and behaviours, as well as results achieved during the period 2016 to mid-2018. It relies on three lines of evidence: a document review, interviews with staff and small groups, and an online partner survey.<sup>2</sup>

### MOPAN's evidence lines for UNFPA

- Review of 159 documents
- 65+ staff interviews / focus groups
- 120 partners surveyed in 13 countries

The MOPAN 3.0 methodology entails a framework of 12 key performance indicators and associated micro-indicators. It comprises standards that characterise an effective multilateral organisation. More detail is provided in MOPAN's methodology manual.<sup>3</sup>