



Independent evaluation of UNFPA support to the integration of the principles of 'leaving no one behind' and 'reaching the furthest behind'

2018-2024

Key highlights



Evaluation purpose, objectives and scope

Purpose

Providing evaluative evidence and learning to enhance UNFPA support to the implementation of the principle of leaving no one behind (LNOB)

Scope

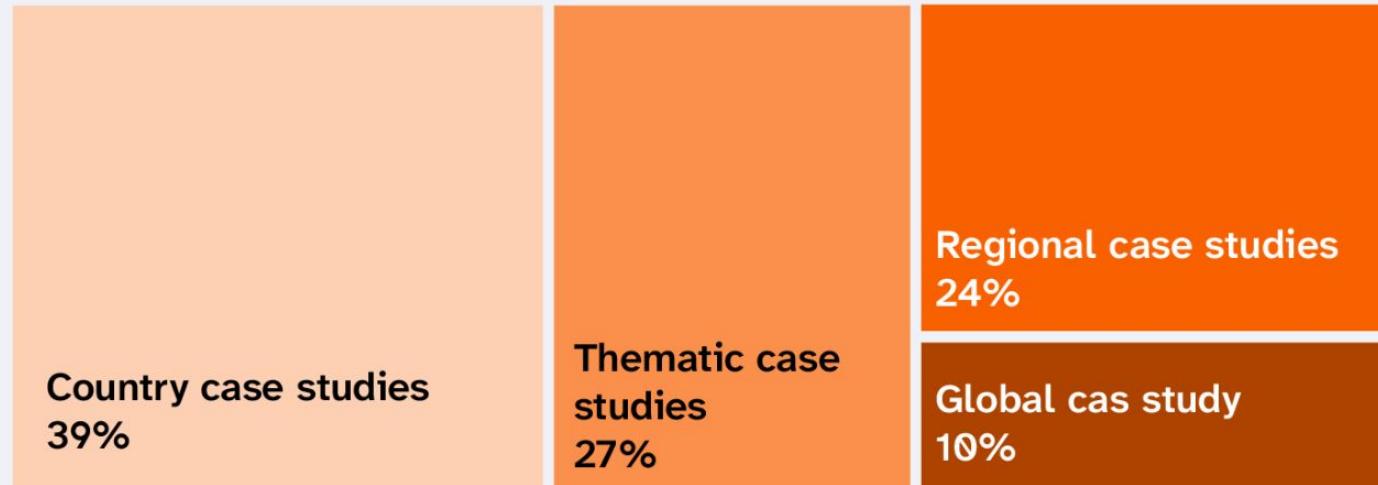
- **Temporal:** 2018-2024 and two strategic periods (UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and Strategic Plan 2022-2025)
- **Geographical:** global evaluation covering all six UNFPA regions
- **Thematic:** all thematic areas, in both development and humanitarian settings

Objectives

- Assess the **conceptualisation, integration, and implementation** of LNOB across all areas and levels of UNFPA's work
- Facilitate **learning, capture good practices and generate knowledge** from UNFPA's experience in efforts to integrate LNOB
- Provide **actionable inputs for the implementation** of the current UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025, inform the upcoming Latin America and Caribbean Regional Programme, Strategic Plan 2026-2029, as well as improve contributions to 2030 Agenda
- Integrate **practical and innovative ways to engage** persons who represent UNFPA-identified furthest behind factors in various roles throughout the evaluation

242

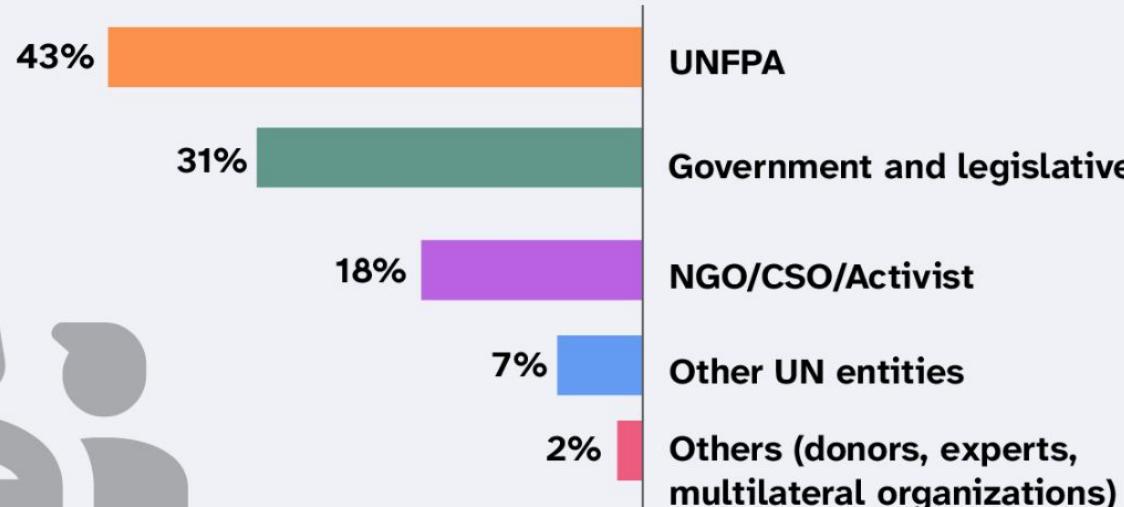
documents reviewed



378

people interviewed

71% women 28% men
1% Non-binary/Trans



61

survey respondents

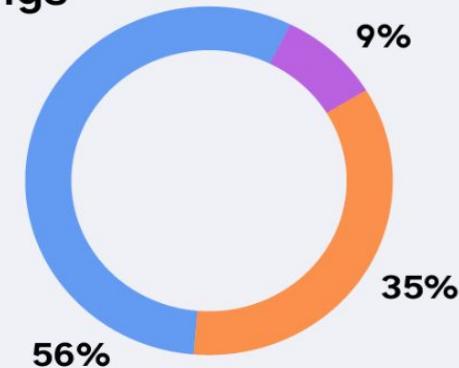
56% women 44% men

Gender, age, disability and sexual orientation were the FB factors that survey respondents mostly identify with



50% of all UNFPA country offices participated in the online survey, of which almost half were humanitarian or HDP continuum settings

- Development
- Humanitarian
- Humanitarian and development

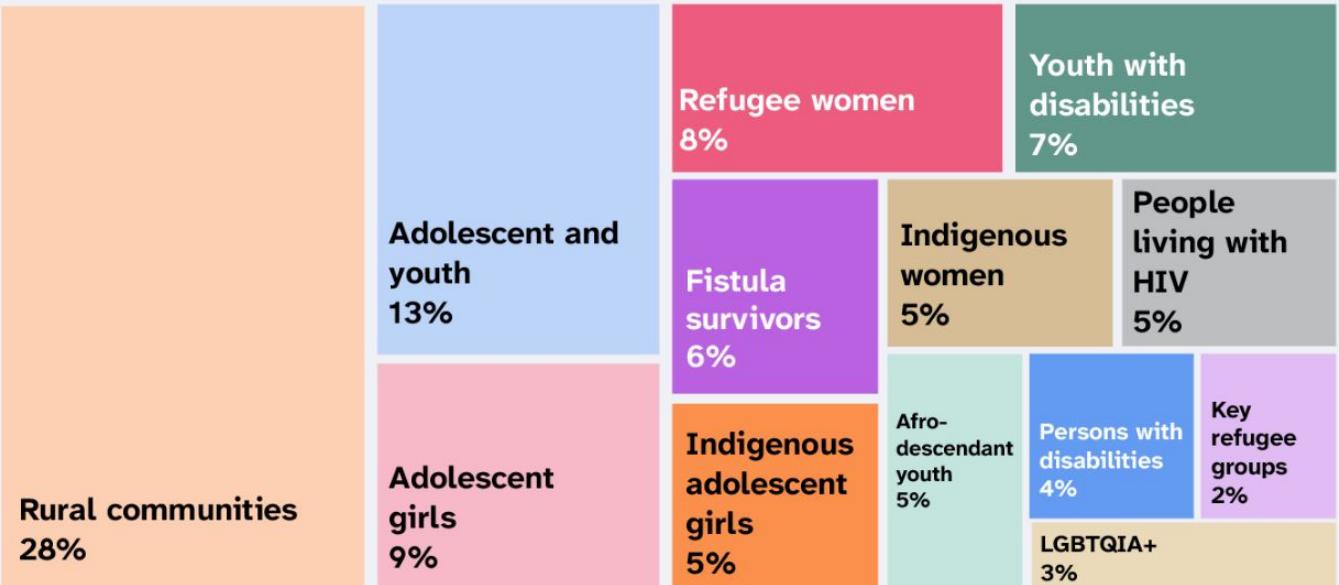


306



participants in
26 focus group discussions

75% women 24% men
1% Non-binary/Trans



Conclusions



1

UNFPA has taken meaningful steps to integrate the principle of LNOB across its strategic, programmatic and operational work, with growing evidence of internalization at country and regional levels. However, sustaining this momentum will require strengthened institutional ownership, clearly defined roles and robust accountability mechanisms.

- LNOB is **widely understood** across the organization **as an accelerator** for achieving the transformative results and SDGs
- Many offices apply LNOB through alternative frameworks indicating **growing internalization**
- LNOB implementation often **depends on individual focal points**, without sufficient authority, resources or cross-functional support
- **Systemic approach** requires clear institutional ownership; defined roles and accountability mechanisms; integration across planning, budgeting, technical guidance and oversight
- LNOB must be a **shared organizational responsibility**

2

UNFPA's advancement of LNOB is supported by a forward-looking strategic framework that provides a strong foundation for driving the agenda forward. However, to realize the full potential of LNOB within the organization will require more consistent and improved resource allocation to support its effective implementation, as well as a clearer approach to workforce diversity and values clarification to foster an inclusive and enabling internal environment.

- Framing LNOB as central to transformative results has **strengthened strategic alignment**
- Commitments in key strategies are **not yet fully reflected in financial or staffing allocations**, limits effective implementation and may reduce long-term impact
- Embedding LNOB **requires investment in inclusion**, values, and diverse staffing
- Staff highlight the **need for values clarification**, particularly around LGBTQIA+

3

UNFPA adds unique value in advancing LNOB through two key areas: its convening role, which enables the furthest behind to be heard at the highest levels; and its role in generating and supporting the use of population data, which enhances the visibility and inclusion of those at risk of being left behind.

UNFPA is widely recognized for reaching the most marginalized, **adding distinct value** through:

Convening power and normative role

- Brings **civil society voices** (especially from excluded groups) into high-level policy dialogue
- **Links upstream advocacy with downstream programming** to enable transformative change

Leveraging data for LNOB

- Strengthens generation and use of **disaggregated data**
- Supports **tracking of SDGs and transformative results**, guiding targeted equity-driven action
- Strategic **opportunity to promote system-wide dialogue** on realistic, ethical, and cost-effective data collection and explore innovative approaches to fill data gaps

4

LNOB implementation across various contexts presents both opportunities and challenges, with UNFPA's strong collaboration with civil society emerging as a key strength. To ensure LNOB remains relevant, UNFPA must evolve and adapt to varying needs, particularly in high-need and humanitarian settings, empowering communities and shifting power dynamics towards locally led solutions.

- UNFPA's **partnerships with civil society** is a key strength in advancing LNOB, though depth and form of engagement vary by context; esp. valuable in UMICs
- Application of LNOB is **more complex in humanitarian settings** and requires tailored guidance for life-saving prioritizations and formalized responsibilities
- Staff report **insufficient corporate flexibility and support** to manage contextual external challenges (e.g. shrinking civic space, political sensitivities, data gaps) effectively
- Engagement with user-led organizations supports **localization** but introduces operational and reputational risks; clearer guidance on risk tolerance and funding flexibility is needed
- LNOB must be adapted to each setting - not as a one size fits all; shift to enable **locally led, context-responsive solutions**

5

The integration of LNOB principles is inherent in UNFPA's work, primarily through responsive programming. While this approach is effective, it does not always foster transformative change, which requires longer-term, user-led and partnership-driven efforts.

- LNOB programming often reflects **responsive approaches** that address immediate needs but do not challenge systemic exclusion
- Some examples of **transformative programming** which addresses root causes through a rights-based, intersectional lens
- **Barriers** to transformative programming:
 - Short-term donor funding cycles
 - Difficulty measuring long-term societal change and attribution of impact
 - Constraints of UN funding and risk mitigation systems
- Meaningful transformation requires **collaborative, cross-sector partnerships** and the **leadership of user-led civil society**
- Scaling transformative LNOB efforts requires **realistic planning** aligned with institutional capacities and funding models

6

The LNOB Operational Plan is an important positive step for UNFPA, promoting inclusion and empowerment, but UNFPA needs clearer guidance on the additional focus on factors and stronger integration with human rights-based approaches to fully address structural inequalities.

- LNOB Operational Plan is widely viewed as **thoughtful, inclusive and HR based** and as a positive and timely development addressing both programmatic and operational priorities
- **Factor-based** lens offers a more nuanced, **intersectional** approach to exclusion, complementing group-based approach to address structural drivers
- **Opportunities** to strengthen LNOB Operational Plan:
 - Enhance understanding of how factors and groups can be applied in complementary ways
 - Clarify how the LNOB Plan connects with existing guidance on specific populations to support coherence at country level
 - Deepen the integration of the Plan with UNFPA's HRBA and broader efforts to address structure inequalities
 - Clarify LNOB's purpose - whether as an end goal or a means to broader rights realization

Recommendations



1

UNFPA should strengthen institutional accountability to LNOB by embedding it across corporate systems, roles and decision-making processes – ensuring it is prioritized as a core accelerator and enabler of its Strategic Plan and the achievement of the UNFPA's transformative results.

Priority: High

Due by: July 2026

Lead unit: LNOB Team, Programme Division

Additional units: Office of the Executive Director, Division for Human Resources, Division of Management Services, Media and Communications Branch, Regional Offices

Key actions

1. Embed LNOB priorities into business unit work plans and performance management systems
2. Mainstream LNOB considerations into corporate planning, budgeting and results and accountability frameworks
3. Promote visible leadership commitment to prioritizing LNOB as a core organizational objective across all levels and functions
4. Review and strengthen the institutional LNOB structure including regional focal points to provide enhanced support and resources for LNOB work and the focal point structure at the country level
5. Enhance cross-functional coordination and internal knowledge-sharing platforms to support coherent and consistent implementation (see also Recommendation 3)
6. Incorporate LNOB into onboarding and staff development (see also Recommendation 2)

2

UNFPA should seek to enhance diversity and embed LNOB values within its own staffing structures and human resource practices to ensure greater alignment with its organizational goals of inclusion and human rights.

Priority: High

Due by: July 2026

Lead unit: Division of Human Resources

Additional units: LNOB Team, Programme Division, Ethics and PSEA, Regional Offices

Key actions

1. Define LNOB-specific values, distinct from overarching UNFPA values derived from the competency framework and develop a global HR statement. Disseminate the statement across all offices and integrate it into HR training and onboarding processes
2. Make values clarification an ongoing commitment, with a series of activities and events beyond webinars and training sessions. Ensure that HR actions outlined in the LNOB Operational Plan are reviewed and implemented where possible
3. Conduct a mapping across country and regional offices to assess current efforts to actively encourage recruitment from left-behind groups, focusing on removing barriers for recruitment across various organizational areas
4. Develop a comprehensive HR recruitment policy to prioritize recruitment of individuals from left-behind groups. This policy should be reviewed and revised after five years, with additional mandatory requirements introduced based on the outcomes of a subsequent mapping;
5. Conduct a mapping of all offices to identify physical barriers to accessibility, along with an internal review to capture other barriers. A plan should be developed to address these barriers

3

UNFPA should enhance internal integration of LNOB throughout all of its policies and external communications to ensure a clear, consistent and cohesive approach to LNOB.

Priority: Low

Due by: March 2026

Lead unit: LNOB Team and Programme Division

Additional units: Media and Communications Branch, Regional Offices

Key actions

1. Develop a workplan to ensure that LNOB is coherently, comprehensively and consistently integrated into all relevant organizational policies across all divisions
2. Define and communicate a clear vision for UNFPA to continue its strong and recognized role within the UN system for advancing LNOB, with a focus on leveraging its strong convening role and population data capabilities
3. Develop an outward-facing LNOB document that serves as a coherent guide for how UNFPA staff explain their approach to LNOB to all external partners
4. Develop a strong economic argument and value proposition for LNOB, highlighting the impact of including previously excluded population groups in development. This should include a concise, accessible briefing paper for the internal learning series (see Recommendation 4) and a more comprehensive external-facing document to support advocacy and resource mobilization efforts

4

UNFPA should develop a series of programmatic issue papers that are practical, short and informative as part of an internal LNOB learning series.

Priority: Medium

Due by: July 2026

Lead unit: LNOB Team

Additional units: Division of Human Resources,
Programme Division, Humanitarian Response
Division, Innovation Unit

Key actions

1. Develop a schedule for the learning series of issue papers that outlines topics and timelines. The LNOB learning series should be rolled out over the course of one year, with periodic updates
2. Collect all current learning documents and guidance on LNOB and, building on these, develop a series of short (2-4 page) issue papers
3. Disseminate the issue papers regularly and track feedback for continuous improvement
4. Monitor and assess the impact of the series, adjusting content as needed based on input from regional and country offices
5. Provide a platform for regional and country offices to share their experiences and learnings related to LNOB

5

UNFPA should build on its existing partnership strategy by identifying specific actions to leverage each partnership type more effectively in advancing LNOB. This should involve aligning actions with principles of inclusion, intersectionality and human rights. Key considerations include: (a) addressing the shrinking civil space; (b) harnessing UNFPA's strong convening power; and (c) recognizing the critical role of partnerships in driving transformative social norm change. These aspects should guide the operationalization of a feminist, LNOB-focused partnership approach, building on the existing strategy as a framework for action.

Priority: Medium

Due by: July 2026

Lead unit: LNOB Team and Division of External Relations

Additional units: Programme Division, Division of Management Services (Implementing Partners), Regional Offices

Key actions

1. Review the conceptualization of partners and how best concepts of equality and respect can be integrated, including by reviewing the use of the term 'implementing' partner
2. Review the existing partnership strategy as to how it can best be leveraged for LNOB across the four types of partners identified, adding specific key LNOB actions where possible
3. Further explore opportunities within the current partnership strategy to enhance flexibility and shift power (which may include increasing direct funding, or decision-making authority) to localized and user-led civil society organizations, while ensuring strong financial oversight and mitigating fraud risk
4. Develop a learning paper on UNFPA's unique added value as a convenor and bridge between civil society and government, starting with examples from this evaluation and associated case studies, and building into: (a) simple, clear, bullet-pointed actions for country offices; and (b) an engaging advocacy document for country and regional offices and headquarters to use for resource mobilization, highlighting UNFPA's key advantage in this area

6

UNFPA should revisit the LNOB Operational Plan to clarify the conceptual linkages, framing LNOB as a means to achieve broader objectives – particularly the transformative results and the SDGs- rather than being an end in itself. Following this, UNFPA should develop a clear dissemination plan for understanding key concepts of LNOB, and strengthen its knowledge management to capture best practices, tools and strategies.

Priority: Medium

Due by: March 2026

Lead unit: LNOB Team

Additional units: Programme Division, Regional Offices, Division of Human Resources

Key actions

1. Develop a comprehensive theory of change for LNOB
2. Use this theory of change to highlight certain parts of the LNOB Operational Plan that are most critical for implementation and consistent understanding across UNFPA
3. Develop further guidance around the practical application of both factors and groups simultaneously, rather than a binary approach of one of the other. This guidance should provide clear examples of how to apply both, and the benefits of using both
4. Develop a dissemination plan and the associated key concepts within the current LNOB Operational Plan
5. Create an online and working LNOB database of initiatives and create a community of practice within LNOB focal points to update and provide regular learning bulletins
6. Identify datasets from other agencies that are already in operation, are regularly updated and contribute to the UNFPA approach to LNOB and then develop strategies to liaise with those agencies on that data

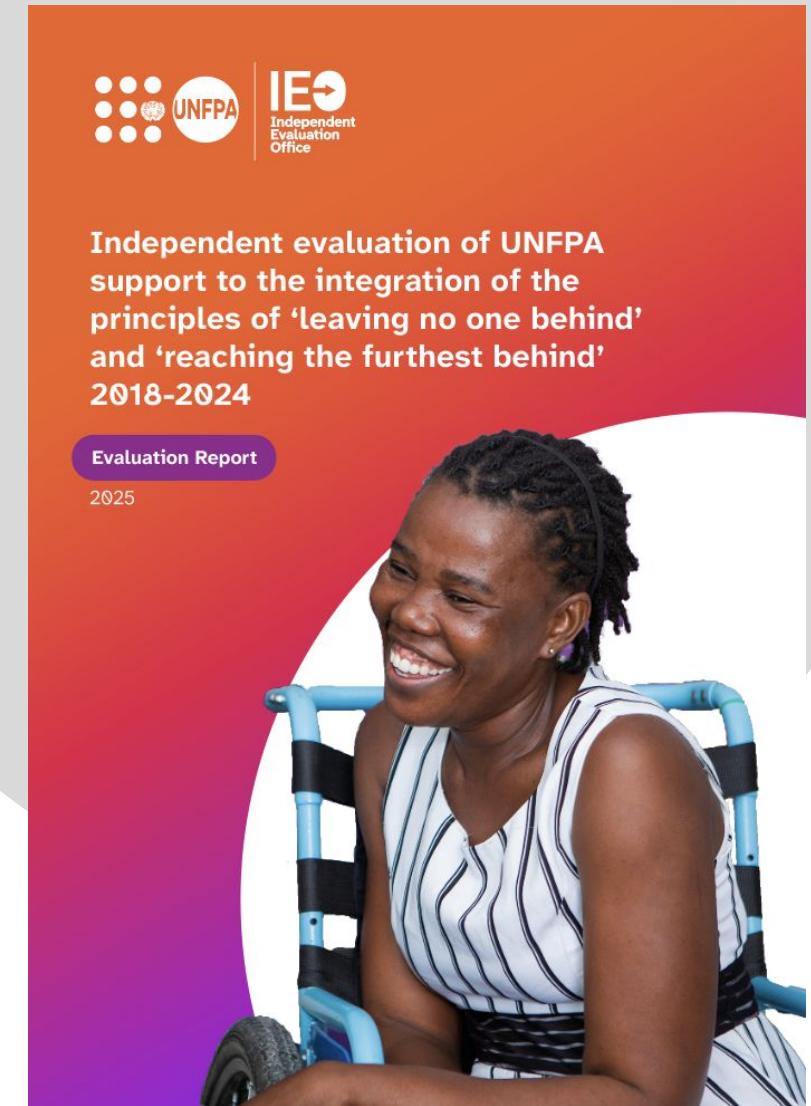
#LNOBeval

This evaluation and related products are available at
<https://www.unfpa.org/lnob-evaluation>

Available evaluation products

- Evaluation report
- Brief in English, French and Spanish
- Short video
- Management Response
- Volume II: Annexes
- Latin America and the Caribbean Case Study in English and Spanish

For further details, contact Karen Cadondon,
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