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Annual report on the evaluation function, 2024

Report of the Director, Independent Evaluation Office

Summary

This report provides information on the performance of the evaluation function at centralized and decentralized levels, as well as the contribution to coherence among evaluation functions across the United Nations and to national evaluation capacity development. It also presents the 2025 programme of work and budget for the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO).

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to: (a) take note of the annual report on the evaluation function, including the programme of work and budget of IEO in 2025, and related management commentaries; (b) welcome the progress and achievements of the evaluation function and the continued adaptability and responsiveness of the evaluation function to local contexts and new and emerging global challenges; (c) welcome the contributions to United Nations inter-agency and system-wide evaluation efforts, and fostering national evaluation capacity development; (d) encourage IEO to continue investing in innovative practices, including artificial intelligence; and (e) encourage UNFPA to continue to enhance the capacity of the decentralized evaluation function and humanitarian evaluations, and to increase investments in the evaluation function.

I. Introduction

The catalytic role of evaluation in accelerating the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UNFPA Strategic Plan, aligned to the Pact for the Future and 2024 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development faces unprecedented challenges, from escalating conflicts and deepening inequalities to complex, interconnected crises. In response, the global community has embraced multilateralism with renewed vigour. The Pact for the Future, along with the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations, charts a critical path for global cooperation, accelerating transformative action towards a sustainable future for all. This vision is echoed in the 2024 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, which calls for a more effective and accountable United Nations development system to drive progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Evaluation plays a crucial role in realizing this shared vision.

2. In line with the Pact and QCPR, evaluation at UNFPA is evolving to be more strategic, responsive, dynamic, and forward-looking. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), guided by the new Evaluation Policy, endorsed by the Executive Board in 2024, is driving this transformation by strengthening evaluation capacities at all levels, with a focus on decentralized and humanitarian evaluations. To foster a more accountable United Nations development system, IEO actively supports and collaborates with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group's system-wide evaluation office (SWEQ), the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition, and the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations (IAHE) Steering Group. IEO also undertakes numerous inter-agency and joint evaluation initiatives.

3. IEO is at the forefront of integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into evaluation in an ethical and responsible manner, aligning with the digital transformation envisioned in the Global Digital Compact. Guided by a pioneering strategy to maximize AI's benefits while mitigating risks, IEO leadership fosters collaboration and inclusion in the digital sphere, advancing the vision of the Compact.

4. IEO is championing youth engagement in evaluation and empowering the next and future generation of evaluators, echoing the Pact's call for stronger youth engagement at all levels. It convenes and chairs the UNEG working group on young and emerging evaluators, and spearheads initiatives to amplify young voices and cultivate their leadership potential in evaluation.

5. By consistently delivering high-quality, relevant and timely evaluative evidence, and through its focus on inclusion, innovation, and collaboration, IEO-led evaluations are informing the development of the UNFPA strategic plan for 2026-2029. This also includes fostering multi-stakeholder and intergenerational partnerships to strengthen evaluation capacity and systems, advancing multilateral cooperation and transforming global governance.

Implementation of the new evaluation policy

6. The new Evaluation Policy reiterated basic principles and norms that underpin the evaluation function, including independence, impartiality and transparency as well as strengthening professionalism and national evaluation capacities.

7. In line with the new Evaluation Policy, the Evaluation Office has been rebranded as the 'Independent Evaluation Office,' along with a new acronym: IEO. IEO has adopted its own logo and branding, consistent with UNFPA guidelines. This rebranding elevates the positioning and visibility of IEO, clearly demonstrating the independence of the evaluation function, thereby fostering greater credibility and trust in UNFPA evaluations.

8. In 2024, IEO implemented key initiatives to enhance the independence, quality and coverage of decentralized evaluations. This included revising monitoring and evaluation (M&E) personnel job

descriptions and evaluation reporting lines, developing an approach to gradually integrate project-level evaluations into the evaluation quality assurance and assessment system, and revising guidance for costed evaluation plans, with a focus on optimizing planning of country programme and project-level evaluations. A new tracking tool was developed to monitor decentralized evaluations, and the new Evaluation Handbook was rolled out through a cross-regional evaluation capacity development workshop.

9. To strengthen humanitarian evaluation, IEO expanded the capacity of the newly established humanitarian evaluation team by adding a Humanitarian Evaluation Specialist. This additional expertise enabled IEO to scale up its support, providing quality assurance for all ongoing country programme evaluations (CPEs) with humanitarian components and select evaluations of major humanitarian projects. Furthermore, IEO started to centrally manage select humanitarian CPEs.

10. IEO contributed to the revision of the terms of reference for the Oversight Compliance and Monitoring Committee to include monitoring of the implementation of centralized evaluation recommendations; these updated terms of reference came into effect in September 2024. Similarly, IEO is collaborating with the Programme Division to revise the *UNFPA Guide on Development, Follow-up, Monitoring and Reporting on Management Responses to Evaluations*.

Leveraging ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence to increase effectiveness and efficiency of the evaluation function while minimizing potential risks

11. IEO efforts in integrating AI into evaluation were guided by its pioneering strategy for Gen-AI powered evaluation function,¹ released in 2024. IEO prioritized responsible AI use in select pilot initiatives to enhance efficiency, effectiveness and timeliness of evaluations while mitigating potential risks.

12. Central to these pilots was a rigorous approach to ethical AI implementation. This included strong human oversight, undertaking multiple verification rounds, triangulating AI outputs with other data sources, adhering to data protection protocols and avoiding over-reliance on AI-generated insights. Transparency was prioritized through comprehensive methodological notes and disclaimers in reports, clearly outlining the role of AI and the ethical measures taken. To ensure the pilots adhered to a responsible AI approach from the outset, all contracts with external evaluators included ethical AI clauses.

13. Beyond internal efforts, IEO took significant steps to disseminate its experience with AI among United Nations agencies and the broader evaluation community, particularly in the Global South. This included co-convening the UNEG data and AI working group to foster knowledge exchange; actively contributing to the development of the UNEG paper on ethical principles for AI use in evaluation; and engaging in more than 25 sessions, panels, and consultations to cultivate a global discourse on AI in evaluation. This collaborative engagement cross-fertilized IEO innovation widely, fostering mutual learning and enriching the broader landscape of AI in evaluation.

Advocacy for youth engagement in evaluation to drive progress towards the Pact for the Future

14. The Eval4Action campaign expanded its efforts to promote influential evaluation, strengthen national evaluation capacities, and advocate for greater youth participation in evaluation. This work aligns with the vision of the Pact for the Future and the United Nations resolution 77/283, which focuses on strengthening voluntary national reviews through country-led evaluation.

15. Eval4Action's flagship initiative, Youth in Evaluation, achieved a significant milestone by gathering 1,200 signatures for its manifesto advocating for meaningful youth engagement in evaluation. The second annual 'Youth in Evaluation' week in 2024 further amplified this message, fostering dialogue and raising awareness about the importance of intergenerational solidarity for transformative evaluation. The week featured nearly 50 events held in nine languages across six regions, with the majority youth-led, with a strong emphasis on participation from the Global South.

¹ The strategy is available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/admin-resource/genai-powered-evaluation-function-unfpa>.

16. The campaign also saw progress in recognizing and promoting best practices for youth engagement in evaluation. Overall, 45 organizations, including 17 United Nations agencies, completed self-assessments based on the Youth in Evaluation standards, leading to the recognition of six “Youth in Evaluation Super Champions.” IEO received the Youth in Evaluation Super Champion award for its exceptional efforts in meaningfully engaging young people.

II. Performance of the evaluation function

17. The performance of the evaluation function is assessed against ten key performance indicators. This section provides an overview of results achieved in 2024 (see table 1 below) and takes stock of progress made over the last decade.

Table 1
Trends in key performance indicators, 2015-2024

<i>Key performance indicator</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>	<i>Overall assessment</i>
1. Financial resources invested in evaluation function	Expenditures for evaluation as a percentage of total programme expenditures	0.69	0.91	0.83	0.96	0.98	0.83 0.94*	0.83 0.87**	0.80	0.80	0.79	Stable trend (target of 1.0 - 1.6 per cent)
2. Human resources for monitoring and evaluation	Percentage of country offices staffed with a monitoring and evaluation focal point or officer	95.9	99.2	96.7	96.6	96.1	97.0	99.0	100	100	98.0	Achieved (target of 95 per cent)
3. Evaluation coverage	Percentage of country offices that conducted a country programme evaluation once every two cycles	-	-	80.0	90.0	97.0	97.3	96.5	95.0	97.3	95.8	Achieved (target of 90 per cent)
4. Evaluation implementation rate	Percentage of programme-level evaluations implemented as planned	-	60.0	55.0	92.0	92.7	88.9	94.4	100	100	100	Achieved (target of 90 per cent)
5. Quality of evaluations	Percentage of programme-level evaluations rated at least 'satisfactory' ^(a)	77.0	92.0	95.0	80.0	100	100	100	96.0	90.0	90.9	Achieved (target of 90 per cent)
6. Evaluation reports posted on evaluation database	Percentage of completed evaluation reports posted on evaluation database	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	Achieved (target of 100 per cent)
7. Management response submission	Percentage of completed evaluation reports with management response submitted	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	88.9	Not achieved (target of 100 per cent)
8. Implementation of management response	Percentage of management response actions completed	78.0	78.5	84.4	89.5	84	90.0	95.0	95.0	94.0	98.0	Achieved (target of 90 per cent)

9. Use of evaluation in programme development	Percentage of new country programme documents whose design was clearly informed by evaluative evidence	-	-	-	79.8	100	100	100	100	100	100	Achieved (target of 95 per cent)
10. Engagement in centralized joint and inter-agency evaluations	Percentage of joint and inter-agency evaluations out of total centralized evaluations ^(b)	-	-	-	-	54.0	57.0	57.0	61.0	58.0	58.8	Achieved (target of 50 per cent)

* Original budgeted allocation for the evaluation function (at central and decentralized level) against the total UNFPA programme expenditure for 2020.

** Original budgeted allocation for the evaluation function (at central and decentralized level) against the total UNFPA programme expenditure for 2021.

^(a) The indicator formulation was updated to align with the rating scale of the new quality assessment system launched in 2024.

^(b) The indicator covers centralized evaluations and other centrally managed evaluative exercises such as evaluability assessments, evaluation syntheses and summaries that are conducted jointly or through an inter-agency modality.

Source: Independent Evaluation Office and Programme Division.

18. UNFPA has made significant strides in enhancing evaluation systems, processes, and capacities. This continuous investment is yielding notable results across all key performance indicators, with several surpassing established targets.

19. Reflecting the organization's growing income, expenditures for the evaluation function doubled between 2015 and 2024, reaching their highest absolute level. As of 2024, they account for 0.79 per cent of total programme expenditures. This stable trend demonstrates the continued commitment of UNFPA to the evaluation function.

20. Specialized human resources for M&E remained high, with 98 per cent of offices staffed with a monitoring and evaluation focal point or officer. Evaluation coverage for CPEs remained strong. In compliance with the Evaluation Policy, 95.8 per cent of country offices conducted at least one CPE within two programme cycles, compared to 80 per cent in 2017. For the third consecutive year, all the regional programme evaluations (RPEs) and CPEs were implemented as planned, compared to 60 per cent in 2016.

21. Despite a more rigorous quality assessment system being introduced, UNFPA was able to maintain a high evaluation quality. All centralized evaluations and 90.9 per cent of decentralized evaluations (RPEs and CPEs) were rated at least 'satisfactory' by external reviewers. This was made possible through the roll-out of the new Evaluation Handbook, targeted capacity development initiatives and increased evaluation expertise in regional offices. Adhering to the highest standards of transparency, UNFPA continued to publish all completed centralized and decentralized programme-level evaluations in the public evaluation database.

22. After consistently achieving 100 per cent, the submission rate of management responses declined to 88.9 per cent. However, the implementation rate of management responses continued its positive trend, reaching 98 per cent implementation, marking the highest achievement over the years. All country programme documents (CPDs) submitted to the Executive Board were clearly informed by evaluation, against a baseline of 79.8 per cent in 2018. UNFPA was also actively involved in and contributed to joint and inter-agency evaluations: 58.8 per cent of centralized evaluations and other evaluative exercises were conducted either as joint or inter-agency initiatives.

23. While considerable progress has been made, further efforts are needed to enhance the decentralized and humanitarian evaluation function. Thirty-six per cent of country offices still rely on M&E focal points, limiting the effectiveness of evaluation activities. In addition, there is a scarcity of qualified national evaluators with expertise in UNFPA mandate areas, while resource constraints make hiring international consultants increasingly difficult, especially for humanitarian evaluations. Escalating crises add complexity and highlight the need for better approaches to measure UNFPA performance across the humanitarian-development-peace continuum.

24. Increased regional capacity for technical guidance and quality assurance is also needed to meet the 2024 Evaluation Policy's extended coverage of project-level evaluations. Although CPEs are generally implemented as planned, their timely completion remains a challenge, impacting the integration of context-specific evaluative evidence into country programmes. UNFPA will address these challenges through continued implementation of the new Evaluation Policy, which was designed to strengthen decentralized and humanitarian evaluations.

Key performance indicator 1: financial resources

25. The 2024 Evaluation Policy established a target between 1 per cent and 1.6 per cent of the overall programme expenditure to be invested in the evaluation function.

26. Building on the positive trend of the past decade, investment in evaluation continued to grow at both decentralized and centralized levels. In 2024, total expenditure on the evaluation function reached \$10.04 million, representing 0.79 per cent of UNFPA's total programme expenditure. Of this amount, \$4.46 million were spent for centralized evaluations, while \$5.58 million were spent for decentralized evaluations (see Table 2). Although this proportion remains below the target set by the 2024 Evaluation Policy, the total real-term expenditure on evaluation increased by approximately 2.5% compared to 2023.

Table 2
Expenditures on the evaluation function, 2015-2024

	<i>(in millions of \$)</i>									
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total UNFPA programme budget expenditure*	798.6	763.5	752.9	872.3	933.8	1 027.9	1 086.4	1 218.3	1 295.7	1 274.7
Total expenditure of the evaluation function	5.52	6.94	6.30	8.40	9.13	8.53 ^(a) 9.64 ^(b)	9.03 ^(a) 9.48 ^(b)	9.7	9.8	10.04
Independent Evaluation Office	2.63	3.71	3.36	4.23	3.9	3.2 ^(a) 4.31 ^(b)	3.88 ^(a) 4.33 ^(b)	4.3	4.3	4.46
Decentralized evaluation function	2.89	3.23	2.94	4.17**	5.23	5.33	5.15	5.4	5.5	5.58
Total expenditure of the evaluation function as a percentage of UNFPA programme budget expenditures	0.69%	0.91%	0.83%	0.96%	0.98%	0.83% ^(a) 0.94% ^(b)	0.83% ^(a) 0.87% ^(b)	0.80%	0.80%	0.79%

* Total UNFPA programme budget expenditure is generated from UNFPA statistical and financial reviews. IEO budget is derived from the UNFPA financial system, while the budget for the decentralized function includes the budget for decentralized evaluations, internal and national evaluation capacity development activities, and staffing costs.

**The majority of the increase (from \$2.94 million in 2017 to \$4.17 million in 2018) can be attributed to improved costing methods, which more accurately capture the full scope of investment in decentralized evaluations.

^(a) with COVID-19-related reduction.

^(b) without COVID-19-related reduction.

Key performance indicator 2: human resources

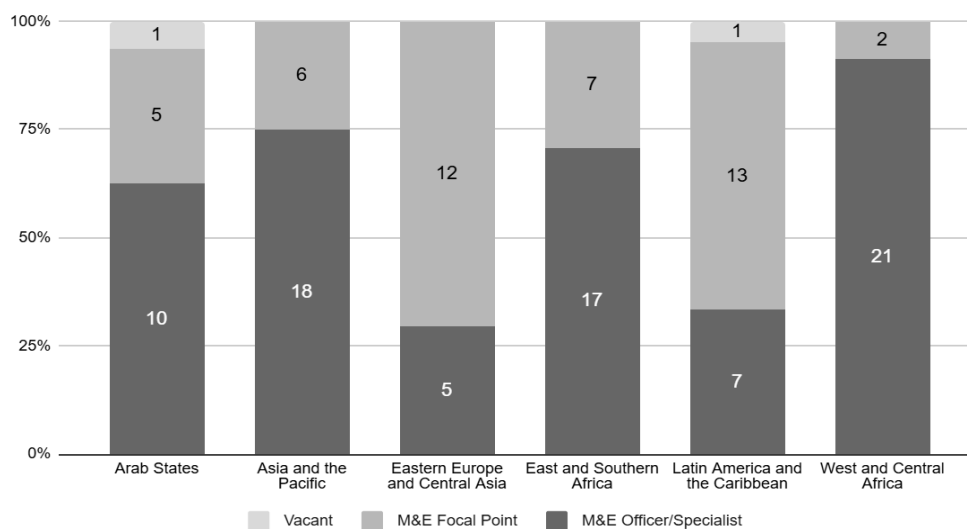
27. IEO expanded its staff size to 12 approved posts: one general service position, ten professional staff, and the Director. To strengthen the humanitarian evaluation team, IEO recruited a new humanitarian

evaluation specialist at P4 level. An evaluation advisor continued to be seconded to the SWEO to support its consolidation. Eight of the 12 posts are held by women (67 per cent) and five (42 per cent) by staff from programme countries.

28. At the regional level, UNFPA has six regional planning, monitoring, and evaluation advisors (RPMEAs) at P5 level. Five out of six regional advisers (83 per cent) are women and from programme countries. At the country level, the staffing profile differs across regions. As of December 2024, 98 per cent of country offices were staffed with either a M&E officer or M&E focal point. Forty-six per cent of M&E personnel in country offices were women, while 54 per cent were men.

29. The proportion of offices with dedicated M&E officers has steadily grown over time to 64 per cent, which marks a 16 per cent increase from 2018. The M&E officers continued to be concentrated in regions with larger country offices, such as Africa and Asia and the Pacific. In contrast, M&E focal points are based primarily in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where country offices have relatively smaller budgets.

Figure 1
Country-level human resources for monitoring and evaluation in 2024, by region

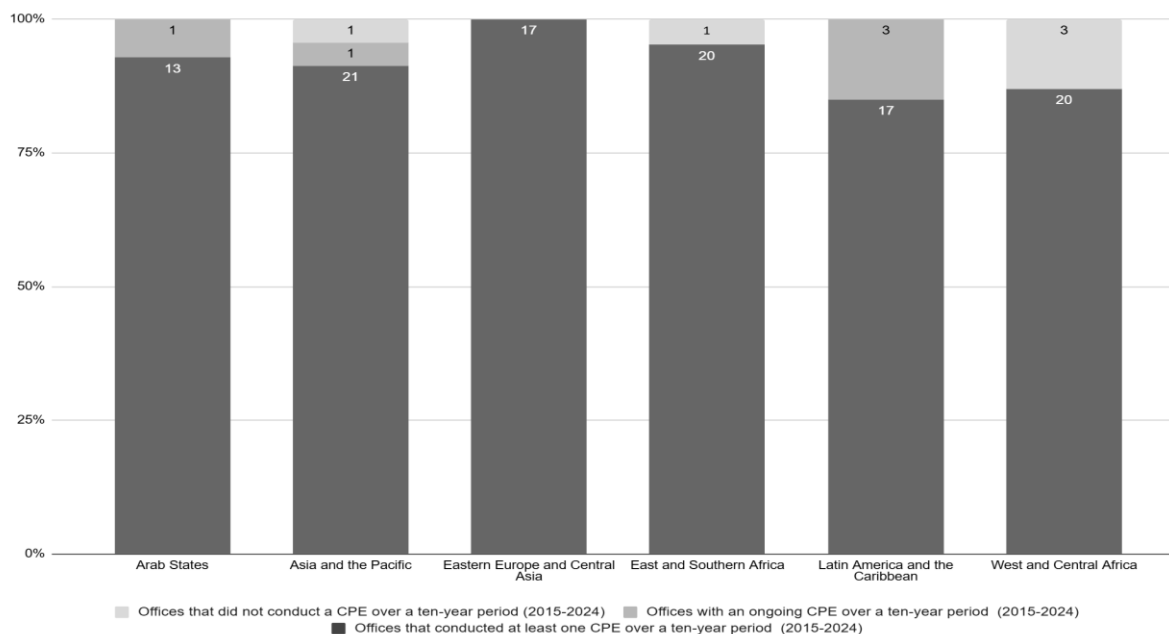


Source: Independent Evaluation Office.

Key performance indicator 3: coverage of decentralized programme-level evaluations

30. The Evaluation Policy requires country offices to conduct at least one CPE every two programme cycles to ensure strong evaluative evidence for programming. The performance of this key indicator remained strong, with 95.8 per cent of country offices completing or on track to completing at least one CPE over the last ten years (the typical duration of two country programme cycles). The high coverage level of CPEs is testament to the commitment of UNFPA to evidence-based action and continuous programme improvement.

Figure 2
Evaluation coverage by region, 2015-2024



Source: Independent Evaluation Office.

Key performance indicator 4: implementation rate of planned decentralized programme-level evaluations

31. The implementation rate of decentralized programme-level evaluations remained at 100 per cent. In 2024, all six regional RPEs planned were completed. In addition, 17 CPEs were implemented as planned, while two CPEs were postponed due to the extension of the country programmes. Ten country offices requested a cancellation of the planned CPE, providing valid contextual or programmatic justification. They opted to use evidence from previous-cycle CPEs to inform the design of their new country programme.²

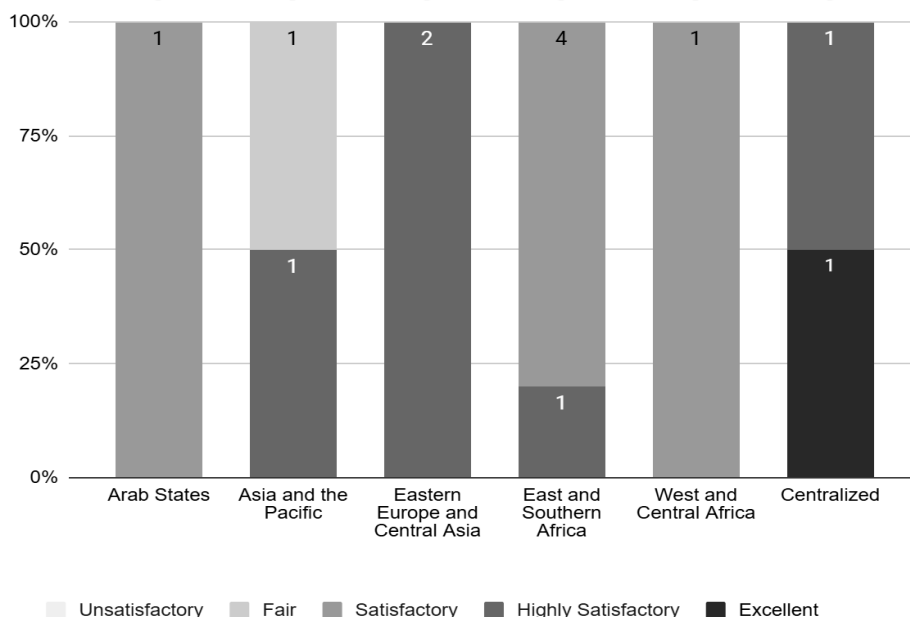
Key performance indicator 5: quality of evaluation reports

32. Rigorous external assessments are essential for maintaining the credibility and quality of evaluations. In 2024, all completed centralized and decentralized programme-level evaluations underwent independent quality assessments to ensure the reliability of their findings, conclusions, and recommendations. While there is room for improvement, the overall quality remains strong: all centralized evaluations were rated either ‘highly satisfactory’ or ‘excellent,’ and 90.9 per cent of regional and country programme evaluations were rated at least ‘satisfactory.’ As in 2023, only one evaluation was rated ‘fair,’ with none deemed ‘unsatisfactory.’

² While the multi-year costed evaluation plan 2024-2027 initially included only four country programme evaluations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 12 country offices in the region voluntarily opted to conduct an optional CPE in 2024. However, eight offices reassessed that decision, having completed a CPE in the previous programme cycle and determined that using existing evaluative evidence would be more cost-effective, while still complying with the Evaluation Policy. In addition, two CPEs in the Arab States region were suspended due to security concerns.

33. The performance of this indicator remained strong, even with the introduction of a revamped quality assessment system featuring more rigorous criteria. IEO initiatives to strengthen decentralized evaluation capacity, robust quality assurance support from RPMEAs, and the dedicated ring-fencing funding mechanism for CPEs were key factors in sustaining this consistent performance. However, with the expansion of the evaluation quality assessment system to project-level evaluations, more investment in capacity development will be needed to maintain the achievement.

Figure 3
Quality of evaluations assessed in 2024, by region



Source: Independent assessment of the quality of evaluation reports.

Key performance indicator 6: rate of completed evaluation reports posted on the evaluation database

34. All completed centralized and decentralized programme-level evaluations were made publicly available on the IEO evaluation database. In addition, centralized evaluations are featured on the IEO website and – to further facilitate their use – shared with all staff and the wider external evaluation community, including UNEG members.

Key performance indicator 7: evaluations with management responses

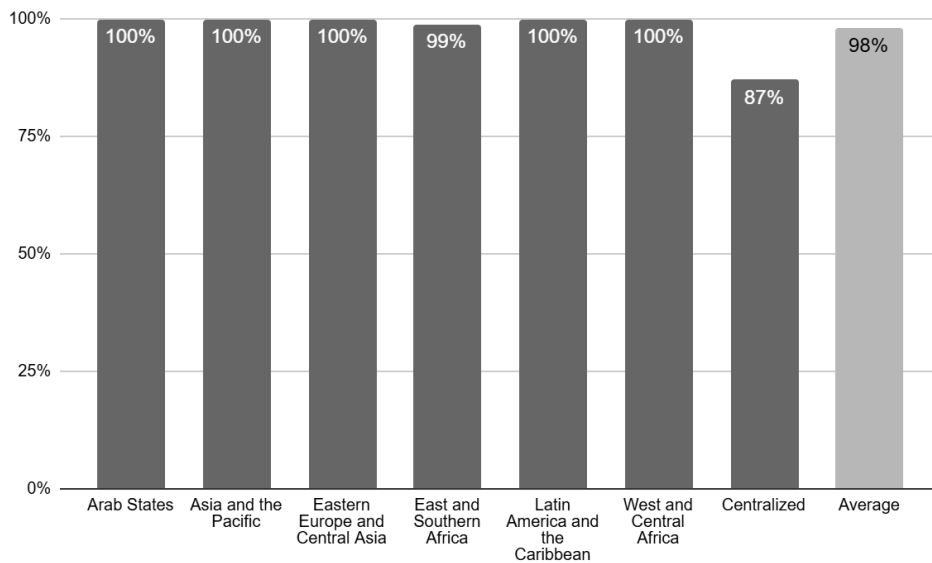
35. Management responses are key to translating evaluation recommendations into action, ensuring accountability and learning. They define how challenges will be addressed, by whom, and when, integrating insights into programming for greater impact. In 2024, the submission rate of management responses was 88.9 per cent. Although the rate declined, only one management response was delayed.

Key performance indicator 8: implementation of management responses

36. The Programme Division monitors the implementation of evaluation recommendations for both centralized and decentralized programme-level evaluations. Due to numerous measures that the Division has put in place over the years – including (a) the addition of two evaluation follow-up indicators in the corporate dashboard; and (b) a more individualized follow-up approach – UNFPA achieved an annual implementation rate of 98 per cent.

37. While the overall implementation rate of management responses is the highest ever recorded, the breakdown by centralized and decentralized evaluations reveals that the rate for centralized evaluations declined to 87 per cent, below the 90 per cent target. However, the implementation rate for decentralized programme-level evaluations significantly exceeded the target, with an achievement of 99.8 per cent. Delays in the implementation of several centralized evaluation actions are largely attributed to their complexity. The Programme Division is committed to working closely with the implementing business units and the Oversight Compliance and Monitoring Committee to ensure that these actions are implemented in 2025.

Figure 4
Implementation of evaluation management responses in 2024, by type of evaluation and region



Source: UNFPA management response tracking system.

Key performance indicator 9: Use of evaluation in programme development

38. Evaluations continued to inform action and decision-making, particularly in developing new country programmes. According to the quality assessments of the inter-divisional Programme Review Committee, all new CPDs submitted for Executive Board approval were informed by evaluative evidence. This marks a significant improvement from 2018, when only 78.9 per cent met this standard.

39. As in previous years, IEO supported evidence-based strategic dialogue for new programming by integrating evaluation findings and lessons into the formulation of new CPDs through its participation in strategic dialogues and Programme Review Committee discussions. White papers and CPDs demonstrated that CPEs provided valuable insights to guide the strategic direction and priorities of country programmes. Still, further efforts are needed to systematically respond to evaluative evidence, particularly in areas where UNFPA needs to do more or work differently to achieve the three transformative results.

Key performance indicator 10: Percentage of centralized joint and inter-agency evaluations

40. Aligned with the IEO commitment to enhance coherence in the United Nations system to drive learning and accountability for collective results, IEO continued its engagement in joint and inter-agency evaluation efforts. In 2024, 58.8 per cent of centralized evaluations were conducted jointly or as inter-agency initiatives.

III. Centralized evaluations

41. In accordance with the multi-year costed evaluation plan, IEO continued to deliver a variety of evaluations that added value, depth and insight across UNFPA Strategic Plan outcomes and priority areas.

42. The implementation rate of centralized evaluations was 100 per cent, with all evaluations completed or on track, as per schedule. The status of planned centralized evaluations is presented in table 3 below.

Table 3
Implementation status of planned centralized evaluations and other evaluative exercises, 2024-2025

#	Title	Status	Management response issued	Presentation to Executive Board / steering committee
1	Independent evaluation of UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025	Completed	Yes	Presented to the Executive Board at the 2025 First Regular Session
2	Independent Yemen country programme evaluation (2023-2024)	Completed	Yes	Presented to the evaluation reference group in September 2024
3	Review of UNAIDS <u>Joint</u> Programme evaluation and assessments (Phase 1)	Completed	No*	Presented to the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board in December 2024
4	<u>Joint</u> evaluation of the Global Action Plan for Health Lives and Well-Being (SDG 3)	Completed	Yes	Presented to the United Nations Principals of the Global Action Plan signatory agencies in December 2024
5	<u>Inter-agency</u> meta-synthesis to support the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy (part 3 on education and employment)	Completed	No*	To be presented at the 2025 ECOSOC Youth Forum
6	<u>Joint</u> synthesis of United Nations system evaluations of SDG 5	Completed	No*	Presented at a Digital Launch Event in May 2024
7	Global SDG Synthesis <u>Coalition</u> : synthesis of evidence on SDG 16 – Peace Pillar	Completed	No*	Presented at the SDG Summit of the Future in September 2024
8	<u>System-wide</u> QCPR evidence summaries	Completed	No*	Shared with Member States during a briefing by the SWEO in September 2024
9	<u>System-wide</u> final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative	Completed	Not yet	To be presented in 2025
10	Independent evaluation of UNFPA support to the integration of the principles of ‘leaving no one behind’ and ‘reaching those left furthest behind first’	On track	Not yet	To be presented to the Executive Board at the 2026 First Regular Session
11	Mid-term evaluation of the UNFPA Supplies Partnership Programme (2022-2030)	On track	Not yet	To be presented to the Supplies Partnership steering committee in 2025

12	Independent evaluation of UNFPA's support to the 2020 round of population and housing censuses	On track	Not yet	To be present to the Executive Board at the 2026 First Regular Session
13	Independent evaluation of the UNFPA capacities in humanitarian action (2019-2024)	On track	Not yet	To be presented to the Executive Board at the 2026 Annual Session
14	Independent evaluation of the UNFPA humanitarian response in Sudan (2023-2024)	On track	Not yet	To be completed in 2025
15	<u>Inter-agency</u> humanitarian evaluation of the response to the humanitarian crisis in Somalia	On track	Not yet	To be completed in 2025
16	Synthesis of <u>inter-agency</u> humanitarian evaluations	On track	Not yet	To be completed in 2025
17	<u>System-wide</u> evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy	On track	Not yet	To be completed in 2025

* Management responses are only issued for evaluations, and not reviews, meta-analyses and evaluability assessments.

43. Aligned with the United Nations Funding Compact and to facilitate a broader reach of its evaluation activities, UNFPA made all its centralized evaluations available on the UNEG website.

Innovation in evaluation approaches

44. To enhance the value of evaluation results in a complex, dynamic, and challenging environment, IEO continued to adopt innovative approaches that prioritize participation, inclusivity, and utility. In this context, a key objective of the *Independent evaluation of UNFPA support to the integration of the principles of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind* was to adopt innovative approaches to engage representatives of populations identified as the furthest left behind. To ensure that their perspectives shaped every phase of the evaluation process, moving beyond mere consultation to meaningful engagement, IEO established a steering committee composed of members from these groups, including persons with disabilities, Indigenous populations, refugees, and young people. This innovative approach ensured the needs and experiences of left-behind communities were prioritized while fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.

IV. Use of evaluations to foster change

45. Beyond the implementation rate of management responses to evaluations, the functional quality (or the added value) of the evaluation function can be measured through the changes evaluations have triggered (or lack thereof) in strategies, policies, programmes or practices. This section provides a synopsis of the strategic use of selected centralized and decentralized evaluations.

A. Centralized evaluations

Independent evaluation of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025

46. In addition to informing the global consultation on the delivery of the remainder of the current Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, this evaluation provided critical evidence that directly influenced the design of the next strategic plan, for 2026-2029. The evaluation, alongside the RPEs, informed senior leadership

consultations, emphasizing the need for continued focus on further acceleration, clarifying UNFPA strategic positioning in population dynamics, strengthening normative work, funding to financing, knowledge management and strategic communication and promoting a better integration of humanitarian, development and peace efforts. The evaluation results were pivotal in shaping the proposal to include a fourth transformative result on demographic resilience in the upcoming strategic plan for 2026-2029.

Evaluation of UNFPA support to population dynamics and data

47. The evaluation underscored the growing importance of population data and dynamics within UNFPA, calling for a bold strategic approach across the data, dynamics, and development continuum. It recommended incorporating ageing, low fertility, demographic dividends, and resilience into UNFPA work, which influenced plans to reintroduce a population and development outcome in the next UNFPA strategic plan for 2026-2029, which was later validated by the independent evaluation of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

48. The evaluation contributed to the decision to create a dedicated Data and Analytics Branch in August 2024 to strengthen UNFPA leadership in population data and policy development. In addition, gaps in understanding of population and humanitarian data identified in the evaluation’s conclusions prompted training for UNFPA staff, national statistical offices and disaster management authorities. Addressing conclusions around the integration of migration and climate change in population initiatives, UNFPA collaborated with the Expert Group on Refugee, IDP and Statelessness Statistics, contributing to the inclusion of displaced populations in censuses. In addition, a recommendation to invest in signature data products resulted in a global report on populations in protracted crises, set to be launched in 2025.

Evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth

49. The evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth recommended improving youth engagement in evaluation processes, including developing guidance for effective youth involvement. In response, IEO launched a comprehensive guidance note in 2024: *Leveraging the Power of Youth in Evaluation: A Practical Guide to Meaningfully Engaging Youth in Evaluation Processes*. The guidance was co-created by young people, the EvalYouth Global Network, and IEO. While aimed primarily at UNFPA staff, it also promotes learning and knowledge sharing across the broader evaluation community, including within the United Nations system, governments, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions.

Decentralized evaluations

50. Across the various regions, evaluations have spurred positive change in programmatic and operational areas. Findings from evaluations have shaped strategic orientation of programming and facilitated the optimization, streamlining and scaling-up of impactful interventions.

51. For example, in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the regional office used the results of the RPE to contribute to interdivisional working groups for the new strategic plan for 2026-2029, influencing the strategic direction of UNFPA and shaping the region’s new business model. The RPE also informed revisions to the regional flagship programme on demographic resilience, ensuring an improved focus and alignment with regional priorities and country needs. In East and Southern Africa, the RPE informed the drafting of the “Futures Paper 2.0” to accelerate progress towards the transformative results. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the RPE and a regional case study, conducted as part of the formative evaluation on UNFPA support to ‘leaving no one behind’, provided key recommendations and lessons that informed the development of the next regional programme and strategy on ‘leaving no one behind’.

V. Decentralized evaluation system

Systems to improve the quality, credibility and use of decentralized evaluations

52. Aligned with the roles and responsibilities outlined in the 2024 Evaluation Policy, IEO and the Division of Human Resources, in consultation with the Programme Division, revised standard job descriptions for M&E personnel in regional and country offices and updated evaluation reporting lines. RPMEAs now report directly to Regional Directors on evaluation matters, with a functional reporting line to IEO, while M&E officers in country offices report to the Head of Office/Representative, with a functional reporting line to RPMEAs.

53. IEO developed new systems and guidance to gradually integrate project-level evaluations into the quality assurance and assessment system. Project-level evaluations will be taken into consideration in the costed evaluation plans for new regional and country programmes presented to the Executive Board starting in 2025, allowing for an incremental increase in project-level evaluations subject to quality assurance and assessment system. In addition, IEO developed a tracking tool to centrally record information from costed evaluation plans, enabling real-time monitoring of all decentralized evaluations, including humanitarian and project-level evaluations. By tracking the progress of each evaluation, the tool will facilitate more efficient evaluation management, preventing delays and supporting timely interventions to address setbacks.

54. To strengthen humanitarian evaluation quality, IEO supported RPMEAs in quality-assuring the terms of reference and inception reports of all CPEs with humanitarian components, as well as selected evaluations of major humanitarian projects. Furthermore, IEO defined criteria for selecting CPEs with humanitarian components to be independently managed by IEO, and for identifying humanitarian project evaluations for which IEO will provide quality assurance.

Internal evaluation capacity development

55. IEO, in collaboration with regional offices and the Programme Division, organized the second cross-regional evaluation capacity development workshop in Kenya. Based on the new Evaluation Handbook, the workshop equipped country-level M&E personnel with practical knowledge and skills to plan, manage and use evaluations. It offered an opportunity for peer learning across countries and regions, enabling participants to share experiences, challenges and lessons for managing, conducting and using decentralized evaluations. Thirty-four participants from diverse country offices that planned a CPE or major project evaluation in 2025 attended the workshop.

56. The cross-regional workshop also rolled out the new humanitarian evaluation compendium to the Evaluation Handbook through a dedicated session on humanitarian evaluation in which the specificities of this type of evaluation were discussed.

57. IEO capacity development activities were complemented by a series of regional learning events and webinars led by the RPMEAs to introduce the 2024 Evaluation Policy, improve capacity to manage CPEs and strengthen the use of evaluative evidence in the development of new CPDs. Overall, over 200 staff benefited from these learning opportunities across six regions.

VI. Enhancing coherence in the United Nations system evaluation functions

58. As part of its commitment to United Nations development system reform, IEO continued enhancing coherence among the evaluation functions across the United Nations system by actively engaging in and collaborating with other agencies through joint and inter-agency evaluations, the UNEG network, the IAHE Steering Group and the UNAIDS Co-sponsor evaluation group.

A. Inter-agency and joint evaluations

59. Although relatively small, IEO has cultivated a high profile within the United Nations development system through its commitment to joint and inter-agency evaluations. In 2024, UNFPA continued to exceed the Funding Compact target of collaborating in at least one joint evaluation, as it co-led or participated in the management group of seven joint and inter-agency evaluative exercises.

60. IEO actively participated in the management groups of the WHO-led Joint Evaluation of the Global Action Plan on Healthy Lives and Well-Being, the Review of the UNAIDS Joint Programme evaluations and assessment, and the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to the humanitarian crisis in Somalia.

61. Beyond evaluations, UNFPA was actively engaged in four joint and inter-agency evaluation syntheses. IEO continued to co-chair the Peace Pillar synthesis of the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition, which is part of a series of five evaluation syntheses around the pillars of the 2030 Agenda, providing evidence and lessons to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. In partnership with the UNICEF Evaluation Office, IEO co-led the third inter-agency meta-synthesis of United Nations evaluations to support the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy, focusing on priorities 2 and 3 on education and employment. In addition, IEO was a member of the management group of the UN-Women-led synthesis of SDG 5 on gender equality and the IAHE synthesis.

B. System-wide Evaluation Office

62. IEO is strongly committed to supporting independent, system-wide evaluation mechanisms. Recognizing the strategic importance of SWEQ, IEO extended the loan of a senior evaluation specialist at P5 level to SWEQ to manage the evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative. IEO was also actively engaged in the management group for the development of evidence summaries and evidence gap maps to inform the QCPR process and the evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. In addition, IEO provided substantial input in the formulation of the SWEQ Evaluation Policy.

C. United Nations Evaluation Group and regional evaluation groups

63. An IEO staff member continued to serve as UNEG vice-chair, while two others co-coordinated the working groups on data and AI, and young and emerging evaluators, respectively.

64. As a co-convenor of the UNEG working group on data and AI, IEO collaborated with other United Nations entities to share experiences, build synergies and develop UNEG ethical principles for AI use in evaluation. It also contributed to the evaluation synthesis working group, presenting its experience in AI use for syntheses in a learning session on AI and machine learning.

65. IEO continued to co-convene the UNEG working group on young and emerging evaluators, which commissioned a mapping to assess the engagement of young evaluators across UNEG member organizations. The mapping identified opportunities, challenges and good practices, and recommended actions to enhance their engagement. The working group also partnered with UNV to launch the UNEG-UNV Young Evaluators Programme, creating 12 volunteer assignments for young M&E professionals in nine UNEG member organizations.

66. Furthermore, IEO actively participated in the UNEG working groups on evaluation use, decentralized evaluation, and professionalization. It co-led an online seminar on co-creating recommendations for improved evaluation use, where it presented the 'co-creation' approach outlined in the new Evaluation Handbook. IEO also contributed to updating the 2020 mapping of decentralized evaluation functions across United Nations agencies and designing a self-assessment tool to assess their maturity. In addition, IEO supported the testing of the UNEG Evaluation Certificate Course. IEO also continued its involvement in the UNEG humanitarian evaluation, evaluation synthesis and gender equality, disability and human rights working groups.

67. At the regional level, UNFPA served as co-chair of the Regional Inter-agency Working Group on Monitoring and Evaluation in Latin America and Caribbean and actively participated in the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific, providing technical assistance to United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) evaluations and supporting evaluation capacity development. In the East and Southern and West and Central Africa regions, UNFPA actively engaged in the United Nations Network for Evaluation Systems Strengthening. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNFPA contributed to the establishment of the regional evaluation group.

D. United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and integration of disability inclusion

68. For the sixth consecutive year, UNFPA ‘exceeded requirements’ of the evaluation performance indicator on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, with a composite score of 10.0. In addition, all evaluations completed in 2024 analysed whether and how the needs of persons with disabilities were addressed.

E. Joint and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework evaluations

69. UNFPA actively supported UNSDCF evaluations in 28 countries by providing technical assistance, quality assurance and/or financial support. In addition, six decentralized evaluations were jointly conducted with other United Nations agencies.

70. Beyond involvement in UNSDCF and joint evaluations, UNFPA actively engaged in and provided leadership to M&E groups of United Nations country teams in 15 countries.

F. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development

71. In line with General Assembly resolutions 69/237 (building capacity for evaluation of development activities at the country level); 70/1 (endorsing the 2030 Agenda); 77/283 (strengthening Voluntary National Reviews through country-led evaluation); 79/226 (QCPR); and the 2024 Evaluation Policy, UNFPA continued its efforts to strengthen national evaluation capacities, together with major stakeholders, including United Nations entities.

72. IEO continued to be a member of global evaluation coalitions, including: (a) the EvalPartners Executive Committee representing the United Nations system together with WHO and UNAIDS; (b) the EvalGender+ Management Group, representing the United Nations system together with UN-Women; (c) the Global Evaluation Initiative Implementation Committee, led by the World Bank and UNDP; and (d) the Global Evaluation Forum organizing committee. In addition, IEO continued to partner and support regional evaluation associations for evaluation capacity development through regional conferences.

73. IEO continued to co-lead the Eval4Action campaign, including its flagship initiative, Youth in Evaluation, together with the EvalYouth Global Network and the Global GPFE. In Asia and the Pacific, the regional office and IEO continued to support the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association, EvalYouth Asia and the Asia Pacific Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation in implementing the regional evaluation strategy. This included: (a) organization of a biannual summit on professionalization of evaluation; (b) support for a consortium of academic institutions in M&E education, (c) organization of the fifth winter school for young and emerging evaluators; and (d) organization of a regional dialogue on national evaluation policies and systems.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships to enhance meaningful participation of youth in evaluation

74. Eval4Action continued its engagement with the 19 champions recognized at the first Youth in Evaluation awards. To showcase their approaches and inspire broader action, Eval4Action launched a blog series featuring the champions and hosted discussions on X (formerly Twitter). This awareness-raising is also encouraging wider adoption and self-reporting on the Youth in Evaluation standards. Nine panel sessions

highlighting meaningful youth engagement in evaluation were conducted in several regional and global evaluation conferences.

75. In partnership with EvalYouth, UNFPA advanced the capacity development of young evaluators through training and involvement in evaluations. Five young evaluators attended the cross-regional evaluation capacity development workshop for M&E personnel in Kenya. In addition, young evaluators contributed to the evaluation teams of 18 completed or ongoing decentralized programme-level evaluations in 2024, including four of the six RPEs.

76. IEO also continued to support Global EvalYouth strategic priorities, including by supporting capacity building of young evaluators through training, technical sessions, pre-conference workshops and mentoring, particularly on supporting young people to build a professional career in evaluation.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships to enhance the demand for and use of country-led evaluation by national policymakers

77. As part of its long-standing partnership with GPFE, IEO continued to support its outreach to parliamentarians, strengthening the capacity of individual parliamentarians, including regional parliamentary fora, on demanding and using evaluation for evidence-based decision-making. IEO also supported the African Parliamentarians Network on Development Evaluation as a member of its Executive Committee, together with the African Development Bank. Furthermore, IEO partnered with academia through the Academic Symposium on Monitoring and Evaluation Education to promote academic courses on evaluation to enhance evaluation capacity of young professionals and policymakers at the national level.

VII. The Independent Evaluation Office programme of work in 2025

78. In 2025, IEO will continue its work in four key results areas.

A. Centralized evaluations

79. As detailed in its multi-year costed evaluation plan (2024-2027), IEO will manage 15 evaluative exercises during 2025/2026.

B. Decentralized evaluation system

80. IEO will continue strengthening the decentralized evaluation function by providing technical support to regional and country offices, rolling out the new costed evaluation plan guidance and implementing the revamped evaluation quality assurance and assessment system, with a particular focus on project-level evaluations. In partnership with the RPMEAs, IEO will continue to develop decentralized evaluation capacity through training workshops and webinars. To enhance humanitarian evaluation, IEO will provide quality assurance support to decentralized evaluations of major humanitarian projects.

C. Enhancing coherence in the United Nations system evaluation functions

81. IEO will continue to engage with UNEG, SWEQ, the IAHE Steering Group and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in humanitarian action.

D. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development

82. IEO will continue advocacy for influential evaluation through Eval4Action and its partners, including advocacy for youth engagement in evaluation through the promotion of the Youth in Evaluation standards. In 2025, it will co-lead the Summit for the Future of Evaluation, with a focus on youth and AI, to bring a forward-looking vision to evaluation.

E. Budget for the 2025 workplan

83. The total IEO budget for 2025 is \$4,874,855; this includes \$3,435,757 allocated for posts and \$1,439,098 for operations and related operational costs.
