General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session
Items 138 and 146 of the preliminary list*

Programme planning

Report on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report provides an assessment of the state of evaluation across 31 United Nations entities during the biennium 2016–2017 in terms of evaluation functions, resources and practice. The report also presents an analysis of a sample of high-quality evaluations across elements of organizational performance and proposes the evaluation workplan of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for 2020–2021.

As compared with the previous period, entities made modest improvements to evaluation functions in terms of their organizational independence and outputs, including an increase in the overall number and quality of evaluation reports.

However, shortfalls in evaluation capacity persisted. Only six entities met the minimum organizational benchmark for evaluation expenditure, and estimated spending on evaluation was broadly below budgeted allocations, as was also observed in the previous biennium. In addition, evaluation reports fell below system-wide standards regarding the integration of gender and human rights issues.

At the entity level, there was an observable divergence between the entities that have further consolidated evaluation capacity and those that have not improved or that have fallen further behind. The Secretary-General's commitment to strengthening the culture of accountability and evaluation by establishing the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance – notably its Evaluation Section – presents a strong opportunity to address common challenges to help to close that gap.

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Evidence from the sample of evaluations indicated the satisfactory achievement of planned programmatic objectives. However, when wider benefits were assessed, evidence of broader change was not found in most evaluations. A critical performance factor was the ability to forge relationships with programme partners at multiple levels. Aspects of programme management – including strong adaptive approaches, administrative practices and communications – were also identified as drivers of satisfactory performance.

OIOS makes three important recommendations with a view to strengthening evaluation:

- In recognition of the distinct needs of evaluation functions to effectively fulfil the Organization's learning and accountability objectives, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance should prioritize support to entities with the greatest capacity gaps.

- The Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance should develop and issue guidance requiring programmes to consider and include lessons learned from evaluations in future plans and budgets.

- With the coordination of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, entities should conduct joint evaluations on cross-cutting areas of contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

OIOS also raises the following issues regarding its evaluation workplan that the Committee for Programme and Coordination may consider: (a) changing the timing of its review of OIOS evaluation reports to an annual review from 2020 onward during the trial period of annual budgeting; and (b) if it does so, reviewing three evaluations per year from the proposed list (see table 2).

Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms used in tables and figures

DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DFS/DPKO	Department of Field Support/Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DGACM	Department of General Assembly and Conference Management
DM	Department of Management
DPA	Department of Political Affairs
DPI	Department of Public Information
DSS	Department of Safety and Security
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
ITC	International Trade Centre
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Office for Disarmament Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OHRLLS	Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
OLA	Office of Legal Affairs
OOSA	Office for Outer Space Affairs
OSAA	Office of the Special Adviser on Africa
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOG	United Nations Office at Geneva
UNON	United Nations Office at Nairobi
UNOV	United Nations Office at Vienna
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

I. Introduction

1. Evaluation represents a key component of the United Nations programming cycle to strengthen performance and results through enhanced accountability and learning. The present study aims to provide a systematic overview of the state of evaluation in the United Nations over the biennium 2016–2017 across 31 entities to support the strengthening of evaluation in the Organization.[1] It has been conducted since 1994 and is the sixteenth in a series prepared biennially since 1988. In responding to its mandate,[2] the study includes a review of the current structure, capacity and practice of evaluation functions.

2. Comments from entities were sought on the draft report and considered in the final report (see annex II).

II. Methodology

3. The present study focused on the following overarching questions:

- What is the current state of evaluation based on the OIOS Evaluation Dashboard[3] indicators?

- What have been the overall use and utility of evaluations?

- What are the key trends in performance identified in evaluations and how have evaluations added value to programming?

- What is needed to strengthen the evaluation function?

4. Data collection was undertaken between July and November 2018. Evidence was derived from the triangulation of documentary, interview and analytical sources collected through the following methods:

- Document screening and classification of 439 evaluation reports submitted by 26 entities for consideration as evaluations

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[1] The scope of the study includes the Secretariat and three non-Secretariat entities subject to OIOS oversight, namely the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (see annex I). The Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support shared a focal point and were treated as a single entity. Evaluations of the Peacebuilding Support Office were included under the Department of Political Affairs. The Executive Office of the Secretary-General was excluded from the focal point survey and Evaluation Dashboard analytics. Select OIOS reports were included in the quality assessment as well as the meta-evaluation and synthesis of sampled reports, but OIOS was excluded from all other data collection and analysis.

[2] See Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2018/3). The type of evaluation conducted by the entities included in the study is defined in the Regulations and Rules as "self-evaluation", which is synonymous with the use of the term "evaluation" throughout the present report. Hence, independent evaluations conducted by OIOS were excluded, except as noted above. Decentralized evaluations are not disaggregated in this report.

[3] OIOS publishes the United Nations Evaluation Dashboard reports to accompany its biennial reports on evaluation to the General Assembly. The most recent Dashboard report (IED-19-002), which is based on the data used in this study, is available from the OIOS website (https://oios.un.org/page?slug=evaluation-report).

- Quality assessment across the norms and standards for evaluation of the United Nations Evaluation Group[4] of 100 purposively sampled evaluation reports from 21 entities whose reports met screening criteria[5]

- Document review of entity policies, workplans and documentation related to evaluation procedures across established quality criteria

- Survey of entity focal points related to the structural, financial and practical aspects of evaluation functions (100 per cent response rate of 30 entities)

- Semi-structured interviews with focal points of 31 entities, including with senior managers from five selected entities

- Survey of a random sample of 1,727 staff programme managers[6] regarding dimensions of evaluation quality and use (41 per cent response rate of 708 staff)[7]

- Text-to-data quantitative analysis of all evaluation reports for keywords related to the Sustainable Development Goals and gender and human rights areas

- Financial resource analysis based on budget fascicles and data provided by the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts

- Meta-evaluation and synthesis of a subset of 54 high-quality evaluation reports across aspects of programme effectiveness, monitoring and evaluation capacity, and performance factors[8]

5.   The study faced limitations related primarily to the nature of self-reporting for collecting documentation and the sampling scope for assessing evaluation reports. As a mitigating strategy, analyses were triangulated with data from multiple sources to strengthen the study's findings. Aggregated self-reported financial data were not, however, independently verified and therefore provide estimated rather than audited expenditure figures. The sample of reports for quality assessment was not fully representative of the evaluations of some entities for the biennium.

III.   State of evaluation

A.   Key areas of the evaluation function and practice were strengthened in terms of structure, policies and quality of reports

There were modest improvements in formalizing the independence of evaluation functions

6.   The organizational independence[9] of evaluation functions is partly defined by their structural arrangement, which is indicative of their autonomy in setting the evaluation agenda and performing their tasks with minimal interference. While most

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[4] United Nations Evaluation Group, "Norms and standards for evaluation", 2016. Available from http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914.

[5] Three evaluation reports from the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa were not included in the quality assessment owing to their late submission.

[6] The targeted population was at the P-4, P-5, D-1 and D-2 levels. UNHCR staff were excluded upon request.

[7] The response constituted a statistically representative sample of programme managers across all entities with a 99 per cent confidence interval and 5 per cent margin of error.

[8] Subset out of 100 quality assessed reports. Criteria adapted from guidance issued in 2012 by the Network on Development Evaluation of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development regarding assessing multilateral organizational effectiveness.

[9] As defined in norm 4 of the norms and standards for evaluation of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

entities remained at the same level of organizational independence, two entities reported greater autonomy since the previous period (see table 1).

Table 1
Structure of evaluation functions by the end of 2017

Stand-alone evaluation unit	*Dedicated evaluation unit within a multifunctional division*	*Unit not dedicated to evaluation (includes other activities within a multifunctional division)*	*No evaluation unit but some evaluation activity*	*No evaluation unit and no evaluation activity*
DPI	DGACM	DESA[a]	DM	ODA
UNCTAD	DFS/DPKO	ECE	OHRLLS	UNON
UNEP	DPA[a]	ECLAC	OLA	UNOV
UN-Habitat	DSS	ESCWA	OOSA	
UNHCR	ECA		OSAA	
UNODC	ESCAP		UNOG	
UN-Women[b]	ITC			
	OCHA			
	OHCHR			
	UNRWA			

Source: Focal point survey.

[a] Higher organizational independence compared with the previous biennial period.

[b] UN-Women established a dedicated evaluation unit within a multifunctional division in January 2018 after its Executive Board approved the co-location of the Independent Evaluation Service with the audit function in August 2017 (see UNW/2018/4).

7.   The reporting lines of the senior-most evaluation staff indicate the extent to which an evaluation function has the autonomy to plan its work and submit its results to the appropriate level of decision-making. Three entities shifted their reporting line to the head of entity, comprising a total of 17 entities with such an arrangement. In some cases, formal improvements to the evaluation functions represented noteworthy structural gains. For example, the Department of Political Affairs moved its evaluation function into its Office of the Under-Secretary-General and created a dedicated post. Three entities indicated that their reporting line had shifted towards less independence, namely the Department of Field Support/Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Department of Management.

All but three entities adopted evaluation policies, and others strengthened policies that were previously in place

8.   Four entities developed new evaluation policies during the biennium (see figure I), and 11 entities revised their policies, resulting in improved clarity of evaluation purpose, plans and linkages to knowledge management. Most listed institutional learning, accountability and improved performance as the main purposes of their evaluation function. However, the review also identified areas that remained weak, in particular the mainstreaming of human rights and the definition of evaluator competencies. Policies did not consistently cover evaluation standards, institutional frameworks, quality assurance, disclosure and dissemination, and gender

mainstreaming practices. Offices away from Headquarters remained without policies despite having considered establishing a common evaluation policy.

Figure I
Existing evaluation policies
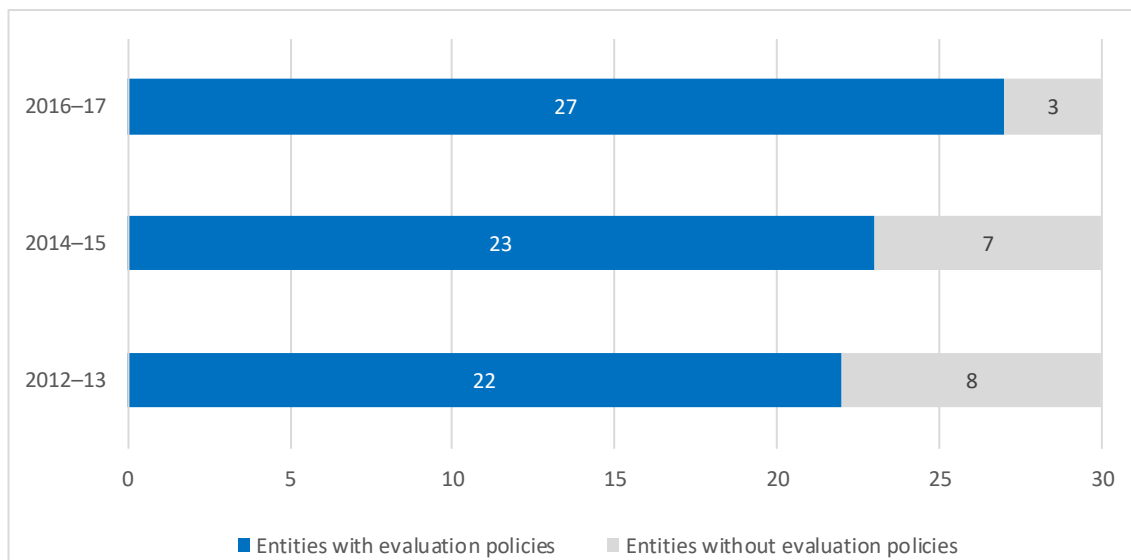
Source: Document review of policies.

The number of entities using one or more key evaluation procedures increased

9.   Twenty-eight entities reported the use of at least one or more procedures to support evaluation work during the biennium 2016–2017, up from 23 entities previously.[10] There were increases in the proportion of entities reporting their use of all key evaluation procedures except the tracking of evaluation workplans (see figure II). A notable good practice included the development and deployment by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) of the Unite Evaluation tool that allows for the systematic tracking of its evaluation budget, activities, results and recommendations.[11]

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[10] Self-reported and not independently verified by OIOS.
[11] Unite Evaluation is a web-based application that allows UNODC to systematize evaluation management and aggregate reporting on evaluation results, among other areas.

Figure II
Procedures incorporated into evaluation practice

Incorporation of procedures into evaluation practice
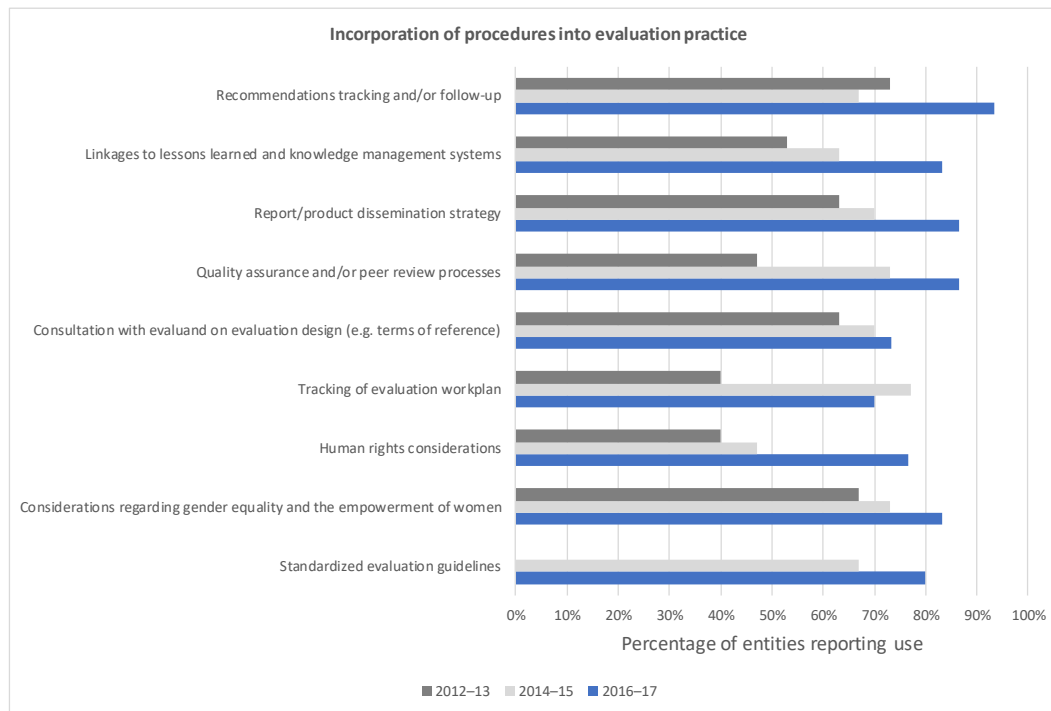
Source: Focal point survey

The number of evaluation reports issued during the biennium increased and the overall quality of reports improved modestly

10.   The number of evaluation reports meeting the OIOS screening criteria increased to 335 evaluation reports, up by about 23 per cent from 273 in the previous biennium. This increase was driven primarily by a few high-producing entities, namely the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which each produced 75 evaluations. As such, the number of entities producing evaluation reports increased slightly (see figure III (a)).

Figure III
Evaluation report screening

(a) Report screening by number of entities

(b) Report screening overall
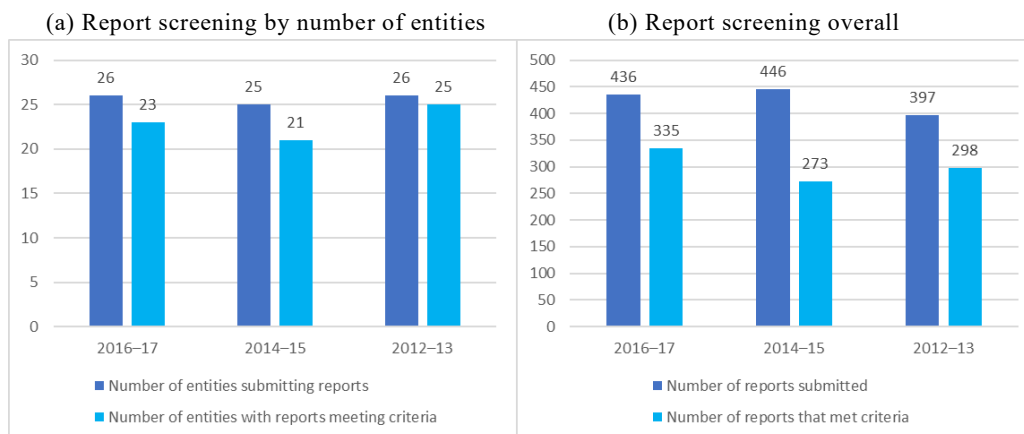
Source: Document review of reports.

11. As compared with the two previous bienniums, the overall quality of reports improved to some extent: 55 per cent of the sampled reports were rated overall as being of higher quality, compared with 47 per cent in the previous period. [12] On average, evaluation quality was slightly higher across six of the seven assessed parameters (see figure IV). Conclusions and lessons learned remained the lowest assessed parameter, not including the parameter on gender and human rights considerations. [13]

Figure IV
Average quality of evaluation reports over time
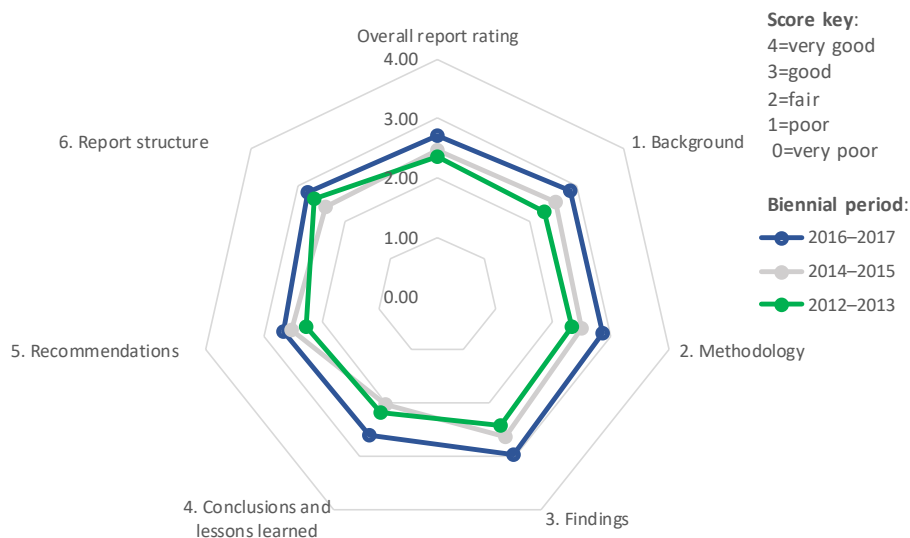
Source: Quality assessment.

12. Overall staff satisfaction with evaluations was nearly 60 per cent positive, with higher ratings at the Director level. Staff also provided largely favourable ratings for the credibility (58 per cent), timeliness (51 per cent) and relevance (67 per cent) of evaluations (see figure V).

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[12] Higher quality reports were rated as good or very good. Some of the parameters used for quality assessment were modified compared with the previous period. Five OIOS evaluations were included in the quality assessment review.

[13] The parameter on gender and human rights considerations was scored on a different scale in order to align it with the methodology of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. It is therefore included separately in figure VIII.

Figure V
Staff feedback on evaluation quality dimensions
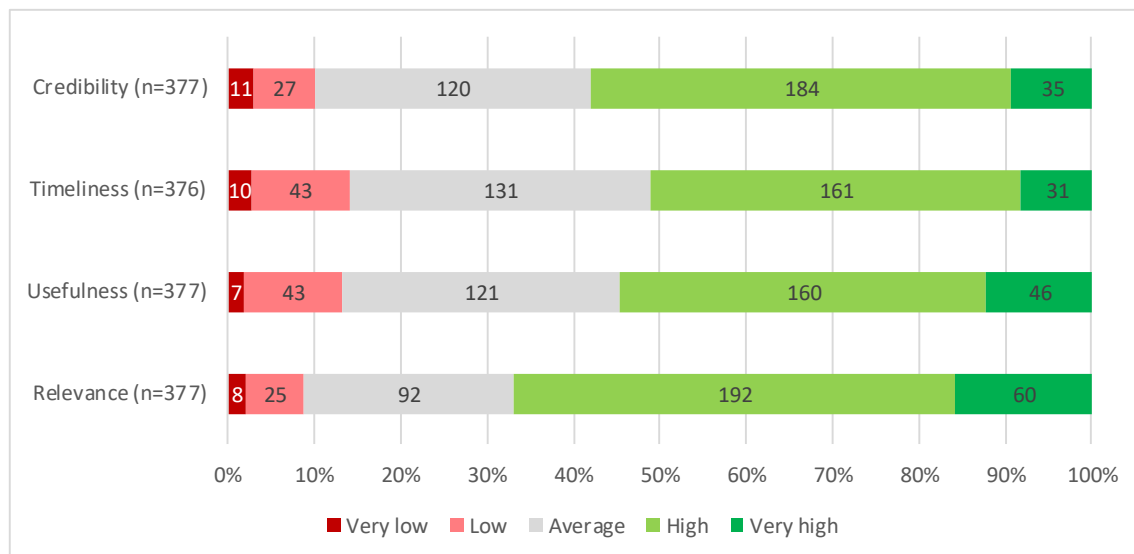
Source: Staff survey.
Abbreviation: n, number of respondents.

13.   There were nonetheless areas of weakness identified commonly across the sample of assessed evaluations. Forty-four per cent of reports provided recommendations that were too vague and needed to be more concrete and actionable, and 58 per cent of reports fell below satisfactory level on the quality standard related to the articulation of reasonable conclusions that added value to findings.

B.   Structural challenges to evaluation capacity persisted, including shortfalls in meeting organizational standards on evaluation resourcing, norms and culture

Several entities had little to no evaluation activity despite having budgeted resources, which underscored ongoing issues related to the alignment of budgets with activities and outputs[14]

14.   Resources budgeted for monitoring and evaluation across all the entities included in the study increased to $67.9 million in 2016–2017 from $56.6 million in the previous biennium, according to self-reported data. At the entity level, budgets ranged from $60,400 to $14.1 million. When these monitoring and evaluation figures were calculated as a percentage of programme expenditure, they ranged from 0.02 per cent to 4.58 per cent. Budgeted resources allocated specifically to evaluation totalled $28 million for 2016–2017, compared with $26.4 million in 2014–2015.

15.   Using the output-based approach, [15] spending on evaluation reports at an aggregate level during the biennium 2016–2017 was estimated at $29.9 million, which was an increase from $19.5 million previously. This can be attributed largely

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[14] This finding was first noted in the previous biennial report (A/72/72), with the following recommendation applicable to the biennium 2018–2019: budgeting of evaluation resources should be better aligned with evaluation plans, and evaluation outputs should better reflect such plans and budgets.

[15] On the basis of inputs from the focal point survey, OIOS costed the evaluations produced over the biennium.

to the resource changes in a few entities.[16] Such estimated expenditure for evaluations was provided by 23 of the 30 entities included in this analysis and ranged from $44,650 to $7.6 million. On the basis of these estimates, 18 entities spent below their planned evaluation budgets (see figure VI). No evaluation reports were produced by the Department of Management, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the Office for Outer Space Affairs, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the United Nations Office at Vienna despite their having budgeted for evaluation.

Figure VI
Evaluation budget and report expenditure by entity

(Millions of United States dollars)
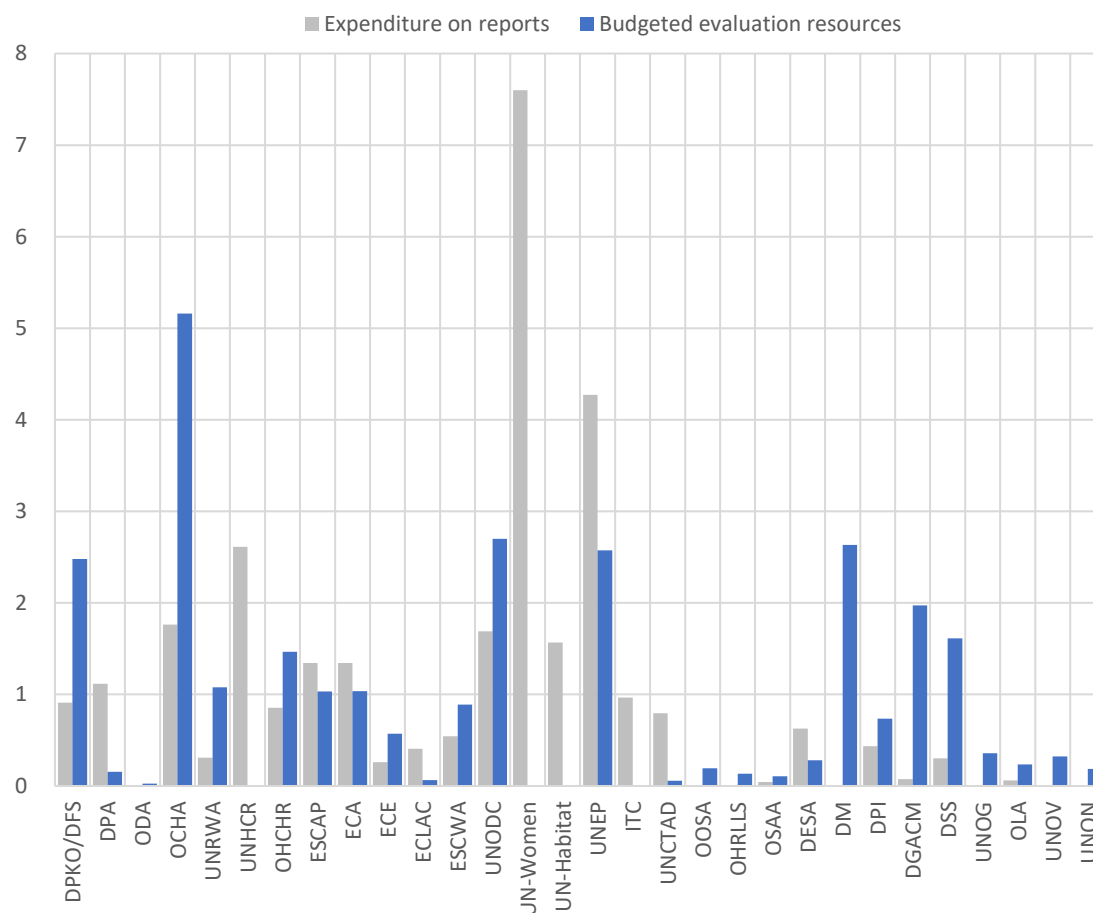
Sources: Department of Management, Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts form 12 (budgets) and focal point survey (expenditures).
Note: ITC and UNHCR were excluded from budgeted evaluation resources, as they do not provide monitoring and evaluation data in the budgeting process; UN-Women tracked budgeting for centralized and decentralized evaluations, but did not compile budgets on annual basis.

16.   Some entities reported implementing other evaluation activities, totalling an estimated $13.8 million, such as the provision of internal guidance and training, work

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[16] UN-Women accounted for about half of the increase. Some entities commented that the increase was related to the evaluation of extrabudgetary activities that had not been included in the budget.

at the system-wide level with the United Nations Evaluation Group and/or on the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and activities related to lessons learned and knowledge management. Regardless of that reported spending on other evaluation activities, overall evaluation spending indicated ongoing issues with inaccurate and potentially misleading financial estimates on evaluation.

While increasing nominally since the last biennium, expenditure on evaluation as a proportion of programme budgets generally remained below organizational benchmarks

17.   Average spending on evaluation reports proportionate to the overall budgets was 0.31 per cent, which fell below the range indicated by the Joint Inspection Unit.[17] At a disaggregated level, six entities exceeded the minimum benchmark of 0.5 per cent of their programme budget allocated to evaluation (see figure VII).

Figure VII
Expenditure on evaluation reports as a percentage of programme budgets by entity
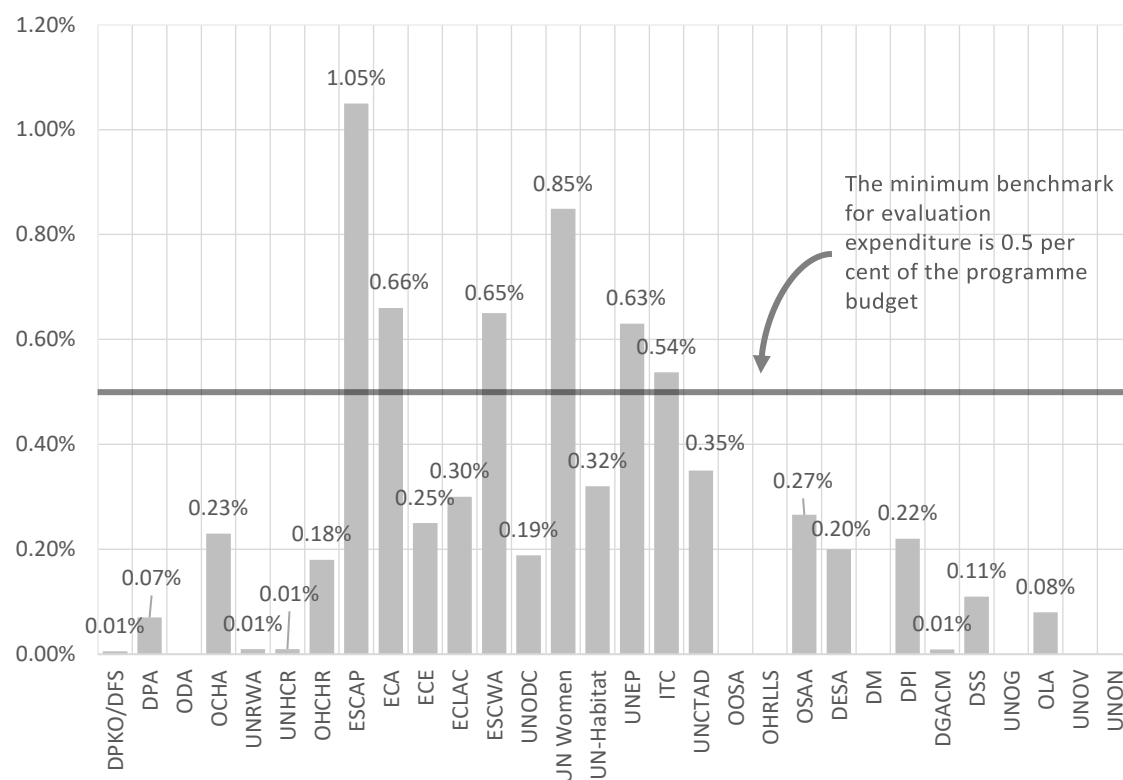
Sources: Budget fascicles and focal point survey.

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[17] The Joint Inspection Unit reported a range from 0.5 to 3 per cent of organizational expenditure for evaluation to be considered as a benchmark. Variation is expected on the basis of differences in the purpose of the evaluation function, the type of evaluation undertaken and the economies of scale achieved, including as influenced by an entity's size (see JIU/REP/2014/6, para. 77).

While United Nations norms regarding human rights and gender considerations were generally reflected in evaluation policies and procedures, they were not adequately integrated into evaluation reports

18. Entities reported an increased level of integration of gender and human rights considerations into their procedures: 83 per cent of entities reported that their procedures incorporated gender considerations into evaluation practice, up from 73 per cent in the previous cycle; and 77 per cent reported that their procedures incorporated human rights considerations, up from 47 per cent previously (see figure III). Most policies included norms on gender and human rights considerations: 78 per cent were rated as having somewhat or fully integrated gender considerations, and 67 per cent were rated as having somewhat or fully integrated human rights considerations.

19. However, the integration of these gender and human rights considerations in evaluation reports was comparatively weaker. Across the four measured areas for these norms, between 40 and 60 per cent were below satisfactory quality (see figure VIII). Two thirds of reports included either partial or no mainstreaming of human rights issues. Gender considerations were not satisfactorily integrated into the evaluation methodology for 60 per cent of reports. On average, the quality assessment results across the gender-related criteria were on par with the report on the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women for 2017, falling short of meeting requirements for visibly integrating gender issues into the evaluation's scope and/or design.[18]

Figure VIII
Integration of gender and human rights considerations into evaluation reports
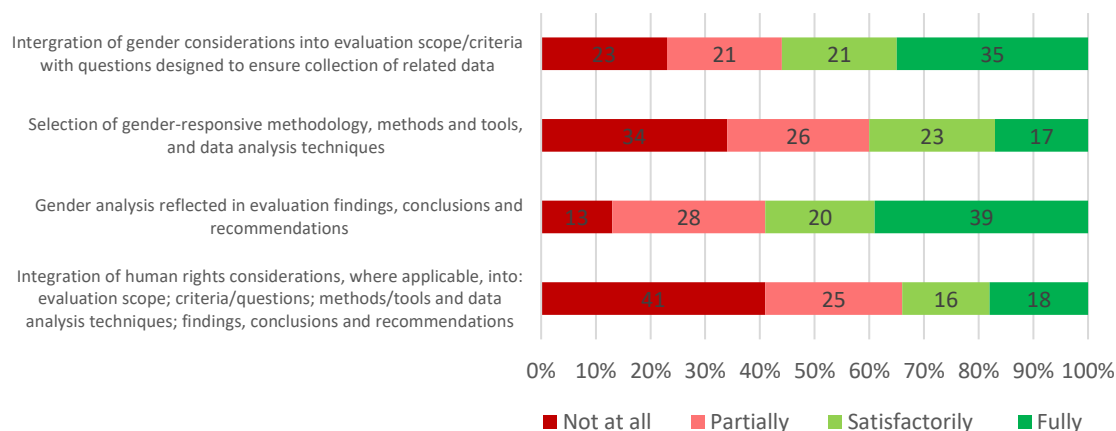
Sources: Quality assessment.
Abbreviation: n, number of evaluation reports.

20. Despite these shortcomings, seven entities demonstrated positive changes in these areas by successfully integrating gender and human rights dimensions into both their evaluation policies and their evaluation reports.[19] Of the 30 evaluation reports

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[18] The average meta-evaluation score was 5.87. The scale applied in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women was: 0–3.49 = misses requirements; 3.50–6.49 = approaches requirements; 6.50–9.0 = meets requirements.

[19] UNHCR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, UN-Women, the Department of Safety and Security and the Office of Legal Affairs.

from this subgroup of seven entities, nine exceeded and 16 met requirements on gender and human rights considerations. While this demonstrated ongoing and constructive efforts to anchor policies in the existing body of guidance, norms and standards for these crucial areas, it nevertheless showed the persistent gap in other entities.

Organizational culture continued to be considered by stakeholders as a major hurdle to strengthening evaluation, including across the dimensions of monitoring, results-based planning and learning

21. Entity focal points identified the need for ongoing capacity-building and a strengthened evaluation culture among the key areas requiring improvements to make evaluation a more integral part of the Organization's work. Nearly half considered that organizational culture was a major factor impinging the strengthening of evaluation. Surveyed staff provided mixed ratings on dimensions of evaluation culture with innovation, lessons learning and other types of self-assessment considered the weakest areas (see figure IX).

Figure IX
Staff feedback on dimensions of the evaluation culture
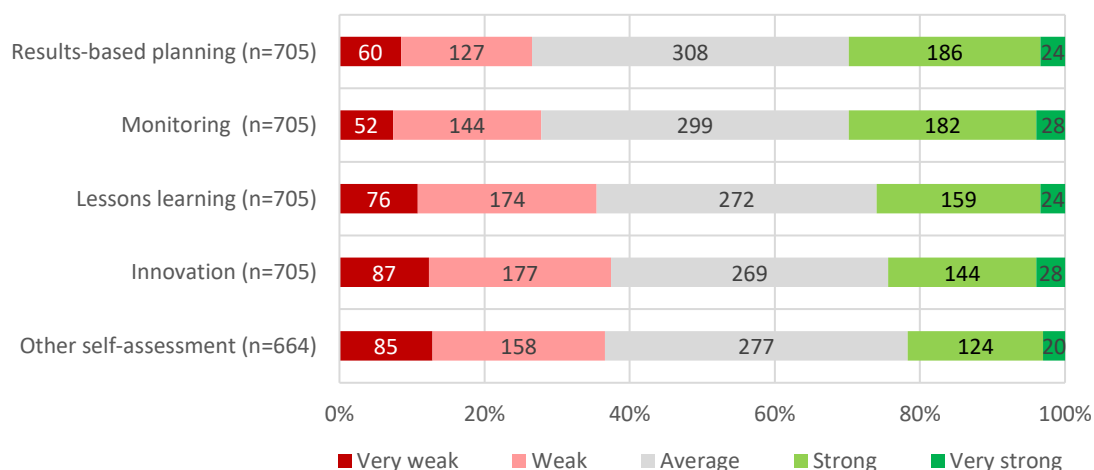
Sources: Staff survey.
Abbreviation: n, number of respondents.

22. This feedback from staff on the challenges to the evaluation culture was substantiated by evidence from the sampled evaluation reports. In most reports, systems and processes for evaluation were found to be unsatisfactory (63 per cent), as was the use of evaluation to improve programme effectiveness (64 per cent). As the weakest area, almost all reports (94 per cent) indicated a lack of evidence of a satisfactory approach to results-based management systems (see figure X).

Figure X
Ratings of monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems in evaluation reports

Category	Highly unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Highly satisfactory
Evaluation systems (n=44)	9	19	12	4
Monitoring and reporting systems (n=44)	5	29	7	3
Results-based management systems (n=54)	35	17	2	
Use of evaluation (n=45)	20	9	9	7
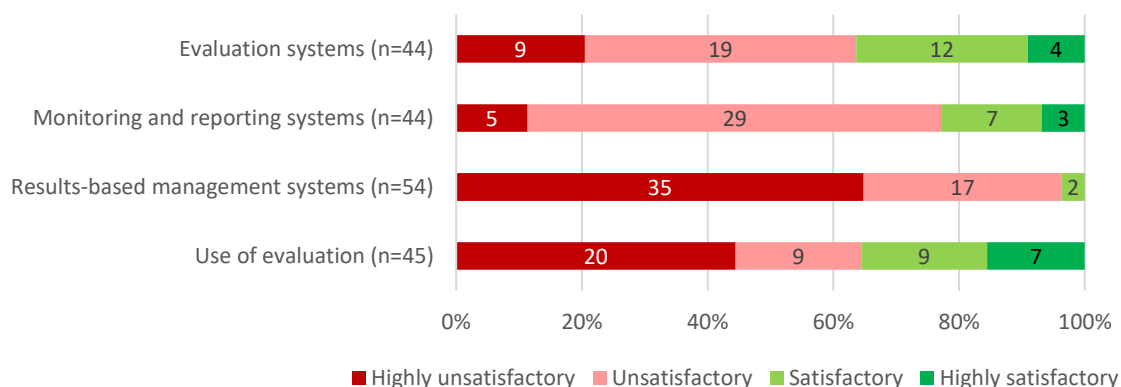
Sources: Meta-evaluation.
Abbreviation: n, number of evaluation reports.

23.   Results of the meta-evaluation were analysed across the following five thematic areas within which entities were classified: norm-setting and development; peace and security; management and support; human rights and humanitarian coordination; and regional cooperation. Reports covering the norm-setting and development area tended to document satisfactory levels of evaluation systems in roughly half of reports. The use of evaluation, however, was more limited under this thematic area when compared with evaluations conducted in the areas of regional cooperation (45 per cent) and human rights and humanitarian coordination (63 per cent). Evidence in support of effective monitoring and reporting systems was rare throughout the five thematic areas. While monitoring and reporting systems do tend to exist, reporting is either not carried out on a regular basis or is inadequate in terms of frequency, coverage or reliability.

C. Evaluation use was mixed across the entities and tracking systems were uneven

Entities reported multiple dimensions of evaluation use, but systems for effective tracking and follow-up were variable and sometimes absent

24.   Focal points considered evaluation as contributing to dimensions of accountability, learning and management. The types of usage differed by entity: almost all indicated use for organizational learning; two thirds noted use for management and decision-making; and half identified use for accountability. Major contributors in reported cases of improved learning and management included linkages between evaluation results and planning and management meetings, as well as their integration into design, development and approval of programmes and strategies.

25.   Entities reported most commonly that evaluations were used for reporting to higher levels of management, informing programme implementation and future planning (see figure XI). Those with no evaluation function reported the use of other mechanisms, among which performance management activities were commonly identified. Some focal points argued that such mechanisms (such as surveys and audits) fed into lessons learned and decision-making processes and were sufficient for their evaluation needs.

Figure XI
Types of evaluation report use

Category	Percentage
External communications and outreach	33%
Informing new strategic plan	60%
Informing policy development	40%
Informing future planning	77%
Informing programme implementation	80%
Reporting to donors	57%
Reporting to intergovernmental bodies	53%
Reporting to higher levels of management	83%

Percentage of entities reporting use
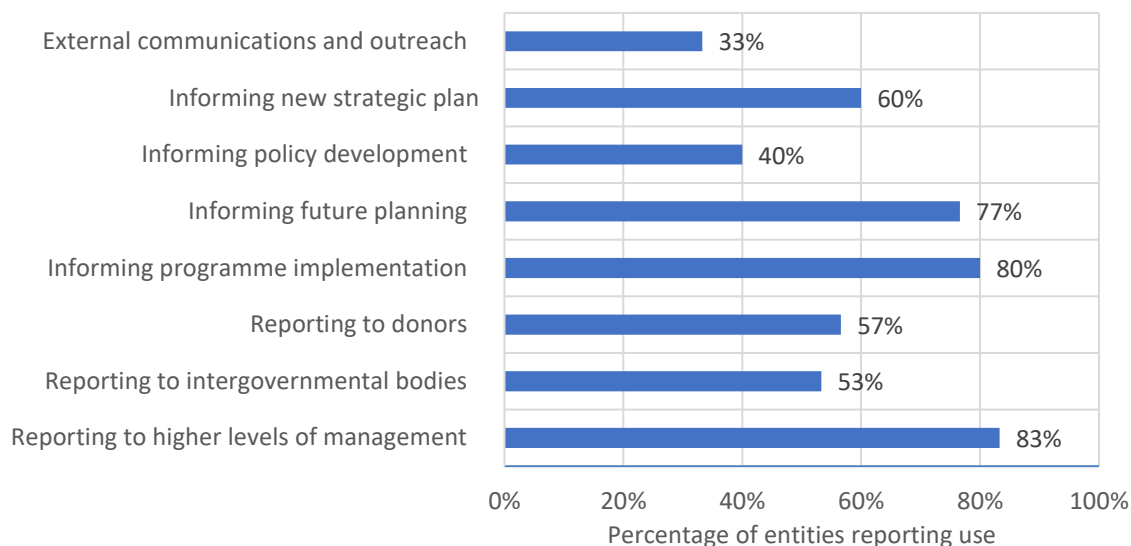
Sources: Focal point survey.

26.   The review of evaluation policies from 27 entities showed that all but one policy contained specific language on the use and follow-up of evaluation recommendations. However, only 21 focal points indicated that their entities had some sort of mechanism to follow up on the implementation of recommendations (see figure II). Six entities therefore still required the development of recommendation follow-up procedures identified in their policies. Of the 21 entities with established follow-up procedures, most (15) used basic recommendation trackers (such as Excel-based trackers), while the remaining (6) entities deployed more advanced online platforms. Recommendation implementation rates were not found to be affected by the type of procedure or mechanism used.

27.   Entities identified structural gaps that hampered the follow-up and implementation of evaluation recommendations. While some of the commonly identified factors were within the purview of entities to address (such as staff shortages and turnover, absence of follow-up systems, and administrative issues), other concerns were potentially outside of their control (for example, changes in operating conditions and contexts, follow-up actions not being resource-neutral, and physical access issues). Focal points indicated that systematic follow-up on the implementation of recommendations and the sharing of evaluation results with donors and Member States were key drivers of accountability, despite gaps remaining in practice.

28.   Regarding the 71 evaluation reports on projects funded from the Development Account, their use was limited according to some of the entities producing them. With the Department of Economic and Social Affairs acting as the overall managing entity, these evaluation reports were produced using funds earmarked in accordance with an internal policy by which a proportion of the project budget is allocated to an evaluation to be conducted by the implementing entity. Focal points in implementing entities reported a lack of use and follow-up of such evaluations after their publication despite their accounting for a sizeable proportion of all evaluations.[20]

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[20] The Department of Economic and Social Affairs reported that such evaluations were being used in a formal manner for the Secretary-General's progress reports submitted to the General Assembly (for example, A/72/92).

Staff ratings of evaluation quality were largely positive, however, they did not translate into wider perceived change in terms of the expected outcomes of evaluation work

29.   As discussed above, most surveyed staff who were aware of evaluations carried out in their respective entities found them to be useful, credible, timely and relevant (see figure VI). However, these positive ratings across evaluation quality dimensions translated into more limited perceived change in terms of the primary twin objectives of evaluations according to the relevant Secretariat policy over the period 2016–2017: systematic reflection and learning, and evidence-based adjustments to policies, programmes and/or operations (ST/SGB/2018/3, article VII).

30.   Survey respondents gave mixed ratings regarding evaluation's benefit for learning. Some commented that changes were too slow or that no serious follow-up took place. Survey respondents were asked to rate the extent to which evaluations affected processes, programmes and policies. About half responded that evaluations had led to minimal or no changes, while the other half noted moderate to large changes (see figure XII). The "other" category received the lowest rating on average, including regarding areas of management, leadership and accountability.

Figure XII
Staff ratings of the extent of changes resulting from evaluations
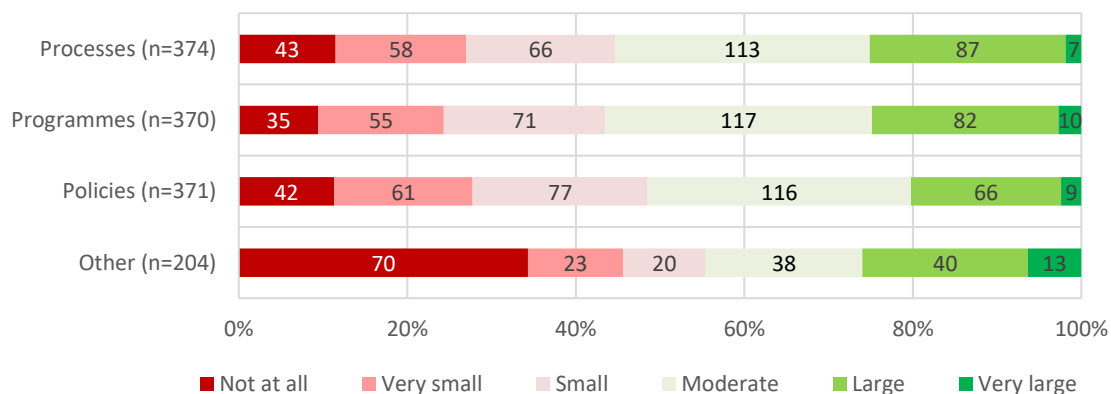
Sources: Staff survey.
Abbreviation: n, number of respondents.

31.   In identifying how evaluation could be helpful in their work, surveyed programme managers focused most commonly on: management; project design and improvement; learning, knowledge management and good practices; and checking for impact and results. While these areas were certainly aligned with the intended outcomes set out in the Secretariat guidance on evaluation methods, staff ratings underlined that there remained a gap in practice. This may be attributable not solely to gaps in evaluation capacity, but also to wider organizational factors related to a weak evaluation and learning culture.

In terms of use of evaluation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, about half of sampled evaluations referenced the Goals, but there was no systematic linkage of evaluative evidence with monitoring of any level of contribution to their achievement

32.   About half of the sampled evaluation reports included an explicit reference to the Sustainable Development Goals, with Goal 16 being the most cited, given that many entities contribute to peace, non-violence and justice. Goal 5, related to gender equality and women's empowerment, was the second most cited, followed by Goal 8

on economic growth and employment. Only six evaluation policies linked the Goals to organizational goals.[21] No entity defined a mechanism for structuring or linking evaluative evidence relating to the relevant Goals for wider use. There was no strategy across the Secretariat for synthesizing such scattered attempts at gathering evaluative evidence on the Goals across the large body of evaluations conducted biennially.[22]

D. Evaluations indicated that entities were achieving immediate objectives, but often fell short of effecting broader change

Most evaluations found satisfactory achievement of immediate planned objectives

33. The meta-evaluation and synthesis found that in 80 per cent of high-quality evaluations, programmes had performed satisfactorily when assessed against their stated objectives and results.[23] About 80 per cent of evaluations also found that programmes resulted in positive benefits for target group members, while the remaining reports found little or no positive change for target group members (see figure XIII). This is broadly consistent with findings from the previous biennium (A/72/72, figure XII).

Figure XIII
Evaluation report ratings on results achievement
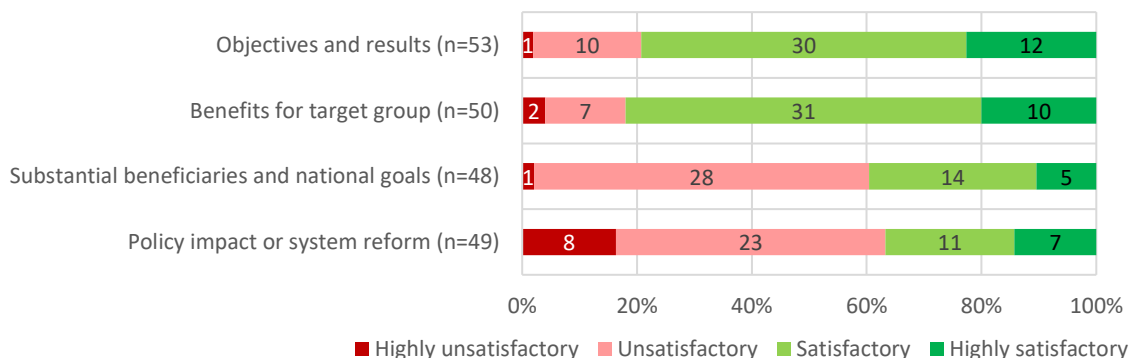
Sources: Meta-evaluation.
Abbreviation: n, number of evaluation reports.

34. In terms of results achieved by priority area, "sustained economic growth and sustainable development" accounted for most of the evaluations included in the sample, of which the majority (85 per cent) had satisfactory ratings. Other priority areas had limited evidential basis for any meaningful conclusion (see figure XIV).

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[21] Only 18 policies date from 2015 onward and, therefore, the total relevant pool of policies established in the period since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals is smaller than the total number of entities in the study.

[22] The OIOS evaluation of the preparedness of United Nations entities to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals found that the lack of a framework to monitor how effectively the system was assisting Member States in implementing the Goals has impeded a consistent, unified whole-of-system approach (see IED-19-001).

[23] A satisfactory score means that the reviewed evaluation reports found programmes had achieved most stated output and outcome objectives. Four OIOS reports were included in this body of 54 high-quality reports.

Figure XIV
Evaluation report ratings for objectives and results by priority area
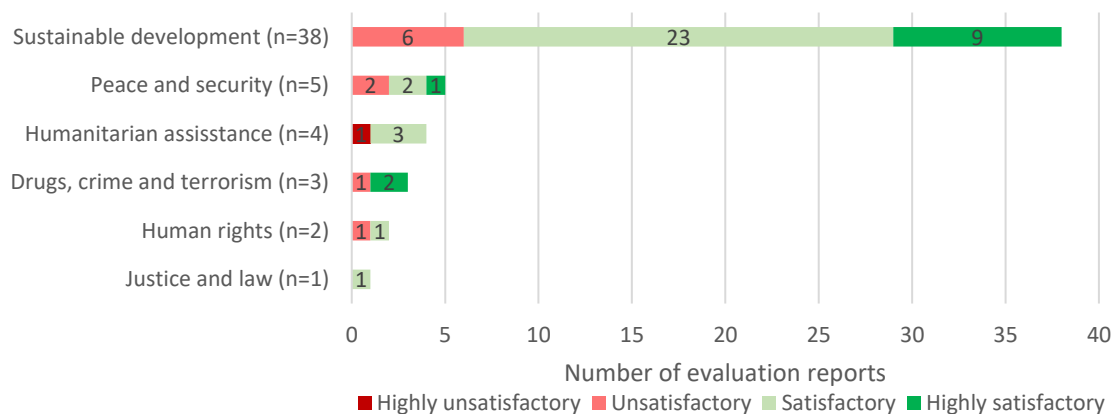
Sources: Meta-evaluation.
Abbreviation: n, number of evaluation reports.

When wider benefits were assessed, most evaluations did not find evidence of broader change[24]

35.   In more than 60 per cent of evaluations no evidence was found of differences made to a substantial number of beneficiaries or national development goals, and policy impact or system reform (see figure XIII). Most reports found that programmes had brought about positive changes for only a small number of beneficiaries. Where national policies and programmes were deficient, programme activities either did not address the deficiencies at all (16 per cent) or did not do so in a significant way (47 per cent). Nonetheless, 36 per cent of evaluations found evidence of substantial contributions to either reorient or sustain effective national policies and programmes. Barriers to achieving policy impact included transition in government structures, leading to delays and loss of political buy-in, and limited mandates of humanitarian programmes.

A commonly cited contributing factor affecting performance was the ability to forge relationships with programme partners at multiple levels

36.   The role of the host government was critical in ensuring the sustainability of programmes. A strategic emphasis on the relationship with well-positioned stakeholders helped to orient programmes towards government ownership. To strengthen relationships with local governments, the importance of planned and unplanned interactions through shared office spaces, shared auxiliary staff and informal personal contacts, links and networks for policymaking was noted in successful programmes. Involving multiple tiers of government (i.e. national, regional and local) was critical to achieve legislative and policy reform. In fact, country ownership was found to be a key determinant of broader sustainability as well. Programmes that built on existing processes and complemented them with high-quality technical products instead of developing new ones received greater local

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[24] The higher threshold for change at the policy, wider beneficiary and systems levels is not necessarily articulated as an objective in respective programme designs, and therefore a lack of achievement could not be considered a negative sign of performance per se. Broader change may also occur beyond the period of programme finalization and evaluation, including in ways that may be difficult to measure.

government support. Conversely, some programmes found that weak government structures impeded partnership development, particularly in humanitarian settings.

37. Successful collaboration with local partners enhanced the legitimacy and momentum of a programme. Harnessing strong local partners throughout all stages of programming – concept and design, implementation, monitoring and exit planning – and leveraging networks of community-based organizations or practitioners for implementation had an impact on sustainability. In some cases, leverage involved enhancing local capacity and promoting those networks. Strong partnerships occurred where programmes helped to facilitate genuine and long-lasting linkages that included the role of an intermediary.

38. When managed well, partnerships among entities and across subprogrammes yielded economies of scale and lent legitimacy and momentum to efforts. Benefits of partnerships across agencies were realized when the strategic goals of the partnership were aligned and logistics were carefully managed, enabling the advantages of scale and complementarity of human resources to thrive. In humanitarian settings, where development and relief work took place concurrently, partnerships across the United Nations became particularly valuable.

Aspects of programme management – including strong adaptive approaches, administrative practices and communications – were also identified as drivers of satisfactory performance

39. Several evaluations highlighted the importance of context-sensitive approaches for robust performance. Targeted policy interventions, supported by advocacy, were associated with positive outcomes. Including a diverse set of stakeholders throughout all stages of programme development strengthened programmes, as did the enhancement of networks between stakeholders and peer-to-peer learning. Understanding local context to identify trends in development and how the programme could meaningfully target existing gaps required an in-depth examination of evidence and field-based data, without which meaningful conversations with government ministries could not take place. Stronger outcomes were seen when programmes successfully adapted to the local context across regional, humanitarian and normative development areas.

40. Aspects of programme management that were integral to performance included a reliable and transparent implementation plan complete with inclusion criteria, effective assignment of human resources, clear administrative and programmatic procedures and efficient financial administration and reporting processes. These had to be communicated well across relevant staff, stakeholders and partners, in a clear and consistent way. In fact, poor internal communication posed a significant challenge to effective programme delivery. When developed in conjunction with the programme's theory of change, monitoring and evaluation systems had the potential to make a dynamic contribution to its direction and management. Furthermore, an effective knowledge management strategy, consisting of technically strong products coupled with targeted and clear communications, contributed to the ability of programmes to attain their objectives and ensure their sustainability.

41. Effective management and administration provided a foundation upon which strong programmes were built. An array of administrative factors – including staffing, financial and procedural clarity – were cited more frequently in evaluations as key drivers of success. The failure to streamline these elements inhibited the realization of the benefits of strong partnerships and responsive designs. In contrast, high performing programmes enjoyed well-functioning management and administrative processes, thus catalysing the programme to employ strategies and partnerships to respond to opportunities and ultimately achieve success.

42. An even greater emphasis on communication strategy was found to be critical to effectiveness in the light of a shift towards integrated programming approaches. Such strategies captured inclusivity, adaptability, programming across subprogrammes and synergies among actors from the private sector, government and donors in pursuit of joint development and humanitarian objectives. While advances in communications technology could enable information to be shared in innovative ways, the integrated programming approach demanded a more pronounced focus on communications than in the past.

E. Entities continued to face shared challenges constraining their respective evaluation functions

43. Entities identified shared challenges that they faced in implementing evaluation activities. Among those, the majority indicated that limited financial and human resources were the biggest obstacles in strengthening the evaluation function. The evaluation culture – including limited institutional and management support and a lack of dedicated evaluation capacity – was the second most commonly cited inhibiting factor for increased use and utility of the function.

44. Other challenges faced during the biennium included: recruitment delays; limited scope of evaluations, including lack of joint and cross-cutting evaluations; lack of linkages to budgeting, programming and operations; lack of political buy-in; and difficulties in achieving the timely delivery of results. Entities also identified areas that would require improvements to make evaluation a more integral part of the Organization's operations, such as earmarked resources, capacity-building and the need to establish stronger evaluation guidelines and follow-up mechanisms.

In addition to these shared challenges across most entities, capacity remained most limited in specific entity types where resources were stretched and where staff perceived evaluations as being redundant to other existing processes

45. There was a visible gap between the entities with more robust and established evaluation functions and those that had yet to embed evaluation capacity. The former, categorized as group A, comprised about one half of entities, which were largely programmatic in nature, spent an estimated $500,000 or more on evaluation and performed well across the assessed evaluation report quality dimensions. The latter, categorized as group B, were mostly smaller entities carrying out programmatic work and entities in the management and support area (see annex I).

46. Group B entities have not produced quality evaluation outputs as part of their regular work cycle despite some improvements.[25] Most focal points in group B highlighted the resource constraints on effectively conducting evaluation activities and some underlined limited buy-in from their management. For these management and support entities, evaluations were considered redundant over and above the oversight already received from auditing.[26] Some suggested piloting evaluations with high-utility potential for the entities to foster stronger buy-in from staff.

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[25] The Evaluation Dashboard report provides a detailed indicator-based review of these areas.
[26] OIOS audited each office away from Headquarters (UNOG, UNON and UNOV) on average five times per year in the biennium 2016–2017.

The establishment by the Secretary-General of a dedicated unit for supporting evaluation capacity in the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance[27] provides an opportune vehicle for buttressing capacity and achieving economies of scale

47.   Focal points stated that the new Evaluation Section in the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance had the potential to add value. Although the roles of the Section were still being defined as at the date of this study's publication, entities commonly voiced a need for guidance and training, coordination and harmonization. These areas would be especially useful for those entities with little to no evaluation capacity and room to achieve economies of scale. Other potential areas of engagement outlined by focal points included: meeting evaluation demand at the country level; mapping of evaluation functions; centralizing and tracking of recommendations; knowledge management and dissemination of results; system-wide and thematic evaluation; and promoting an evaluation culture.

48.   Staff members echoed several of these areas as key steps for strengthening evaluation, including most commonly increasing the strategic orientation of scope, resourcing and support from leadership (see figure XV).

Figure XV
Factors included among the top three factors needed to strengthen evaluation, as ranked by staff
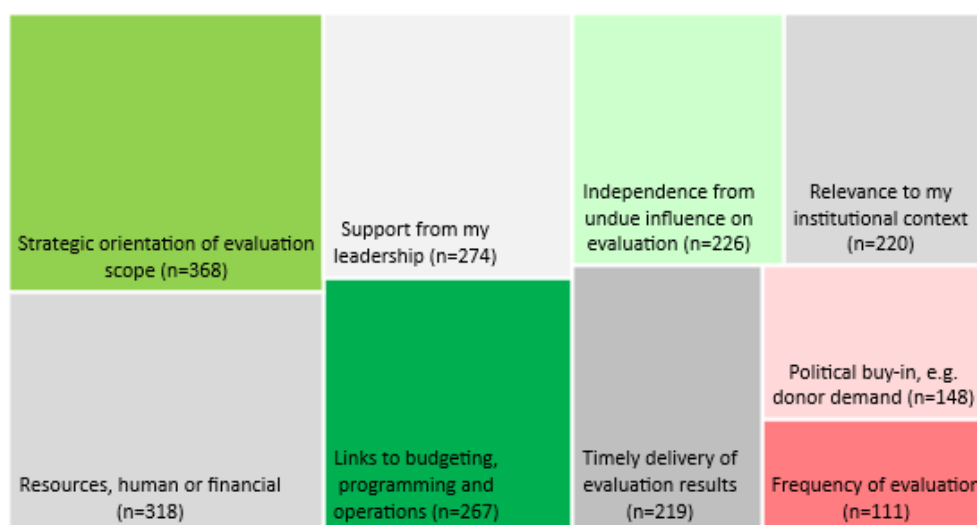
Source: Staff survey.
Abbreviation: n, number of responses.

IV.   Follow-up on recommended actions of the Committee for Programme and Coordination

49.   In response to the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on evaluation capacity and culture (see A/70/16 and A/72/16, as approved by the General Assembly in resolutions 70/8 and 72/9, respectively), the Secretary-General took concrete steps towards strengthening evaluation as part of the management reform with the establishment of a dedicated unit to support evaluations. The Secretary-General also emphasized the need for a longer-term cultural shift to

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[27] A/72/492, para. 61, and A/73/688, paras. 70–73.

allow for the full benefits of the various streams of reform to be realized, which includes a culture of continuous learning and accountability. In the light of the findings presented in this study, concerted and sustained efforts to enable such a cultural shift are required, including strengthening the implementation of results-based management and holding managers accountable for the delivery of results.

50. In its consideration of the previous biennial report, the Committee recommended in the report on its fifty-seventh session (A/72/16, para. 84) that the General Assembly endorse the recommendation that, from the biennium 2018–2019 onward, budgeting of evaluation resources should be better aligned with evaluation plans, and evaluation outputs should better reflect such plans and budgets (A/72/72, para. 63). OIOS will follow up on the implementation of this recommendation in its next study on the present topic.

V. Conclusions

51. Overall, the entities analysed in the present study showed modest improvements in evaluation practice during the biennium 2016–2017. Several entities made operational changes to their evaluation functions, including the strengthening of reporting lines to senior management. All but three entities have established evaluation policies, and most with policies strengthened the integration of key criteria. The number and the quality of evaluation reports increased on average, and surveyed programme managers found dimensions of report quality to be satisfactory. OIOS recognized the need to deploy differentiated approaches to evaluation, depending on the size, capacity and mandate of the entity.

52. However, major shortfalls had an impact on the ability of entities to achieve organizational standards. Only 6 of 30 entities met the minimum threshold for evaluation spending, with most evaluation functions spending under 0.5 per cent of programme budgets on evaluation. Several of the largest implementing entities in the study – namely, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNHCR – spent roughly 0.01 per cent of their respective programme budgets on evaluation, while eight entities did not produce any reports despite budgeting for evaluation. These significant gaps not only reduced evaluation coverage but also affected the potential for the Organization to improve programmes and enhance learning. Moreover, evaluation practice with respect to certain United Nations norms was weak. Evaluation functions continued to struggle to translate the integration of gender and human rights considerations into practice, with most reports rated below satisfactory on these two dimensions.

53. The use and utility of evaluations was mixed. Formally, entities oriented their evaluation functions towards accountability, learning and management dimensions. The study found a moderate level of usefulness of evaluations for such purposes. However, this did not translate extensively into perceived changes to processes, programmes and policies as a result of evaluations. Gaps equally remained with follow-up mechanisms to better link evaluation results to decision-making. The absence of common tools for Secretariat entities to conduct more systematic and harmonized evaluation planning and management constrained more effective reporting and use of evaluative evidence.

54. The study was carried out during an ongoing management reform process of the United Nations Secretariat, affecting aspects of the programme cycle. Among the changes introduced by the Secretary-General, the new Evaluation Section of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance is expected to fill a long-standing gap by addressing the above weaknesses in evaluation capacity and practice. But the Section alone cannot holistically address the critical areas for

strengthening evaluation outlined in this study. Following through to enable a wider cultural shift for enhanced accountability and learning will require a concerted and coordinated effort at all levels, particularly by senior management.

VI. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

55. **In recognition of the distinct needs of evaluation functions to effectively fulfil the Organization's learning and accountability objectives, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance should prioritize support to entities with the greatest capacity gaps.**

Indicators of achievement: The support provided by the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance to entities in Group B demonstrates:[28]

(a) Increased evaluation activity to meet organizational standards, including through the production of reports;

(b) Improved evaluation report quality on gender and human rights dimensions through appropriate training and guidance;

(c) Reconciliation of budgeted evaluation resources with evaluation outputs and activities;

(d) Establishment of common evaluation management tools, including for the tracking of the implementation of recommendations.

Recommendation 2

56. **The Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance should develop and issue guidance requiring programmes to consider and include lessons learned from evaluations in future plans and budgets.**

Indicator of achievement: Guidance from the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance on programme design and management with strengthened requirements on the use of evaluative evidence, in addition to other considerations.

Recommendation 3

57. **With the coordination of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, entities should conduct joint evaluations on cross-cutting areas of contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Indicators of achievement:

(a) Provision by entities of evaluation workplans to the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance indicating potential linkages to one or more Sustainable Development Goals, where relevant;

(b) Identification, planning and coordination by the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance of potential joint evaluations covering shared/cross-cutting areas of contribution to the Goals.

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[28] While OIOS recommends that the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance target group B entities specifically, group A entities may equally benefit from relevant areas of work such as common evaluation management tools and training, which should be implemented in a consultative manner.

VII. Evaluation workplan

58.   With a view to preparing the evaluation workplan for 2020–2021, OIOS further refined its risk assessment exercise, including more systemic consideration of the framework of the Secretariat enterprise risk management risk register, the United Nations reform initiatives and the commitment of the Organization to supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The entities and themes identified for evaluation are presented below in table 2. In addition, OIOS will complete seven triennial reviews, as required by General Assembly resolution 37/234, for evaluations completed in 2017. A biennial review of its evaluation of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals will be conducted, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2422 (2018).

59.   In consideration of the revised organization of the Secretariat (ST/SGB/2015/3) and General Assembly resolution 48/218 B establishing the OIOS oversight mandate, OIOS proposes to focus its programme evaluation work on Secretariat entities. For the three non-Secretariat entities subject to its oversight – UNHCR, UNRWA and UN-Women – OIOS will conduct inspections of their evaluation functions with the option to require programme evaluation as needed. The UN-Women and UNHCR evaluation functions were identified for inspections during the biennium 2020–2021. Accordingly, the Committee for Programme and Coordination may wish to consider evaluations conducted by the evaluation functions of UNHCR, UNRWA and UN-Women.

60.   In view of General Assembly resolution 72/266, approving the proposed change from a biennial to an annual budget period on a trial basis for the budget years 2020 and 2021, the Committee for Programme and Coordination may wish to consider the timing of its review of OIOS evaluation reports. Currently, the Committee reviews reports on a biennial basis on alternate years from when the strategic frameworks are reviewed. An annual review during this trial period would allow the Committee to consider evaluations as appropriate within the annual budgeting and planning processes and allow for more timely consideration of OIOS evaluations to enhance utility.[29] This change would not increase the number of OIOS evaluation reports for consideration by the Committee, but rather distribute the same workload evenly over the two years.

61.   To ensure adequate capacity to enable the completion of the evaluation workplan, as well as the consideration of ad hoc requests for evaluation from intergovernmental bodies or senior management, four additional entities will be subject to OIOS evaluation only if no ad hoc requests are received by June 2019 and if extrabudgetary resources are received for the thematic evaluations in 2021 (see table 2). The number of triennial reviews constitutes a significant increase compared with previous cycles owing to the proportionate increase in the number of evaluations conducted to respond to the Committee's request that OIOS cover all entities within an eight-year cycle. The Committee may wish to consider limiting the number of evaluations considered each year, for example, to no more than three, of those options listed in the workplan below.

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[29] Reports on alternate years of the biennial calendar are typically published in March of that year, then reviewed by the Committee for Programme and Coordination in June of the following year, which results in a lag of 15 months after publication.

Table 2
Regular and extrabudgetary projects

Year of projected completion	Project type	Scope
2020	Reviews	DPA, ECE, ESCWA, OCHA, UNHCR, UNRWA, International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals and thematic evaluation of regional commissions
	Thematic	Sexual exploitation and abuse in the Secretariat
	Inspection	UN-Women evaluation function
	Programme	DESA
		OHRLLS
		OSAA/New Partnership for Africa's Development
		UNODC[a]
		Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs[a]
2021	Biennial report on strengthening evaluation	
	Thematic	United Nations system-wide coordination of and support for Sustainable Development Goal implementation (Executive Office of the Secretary-General/Development Coordination Office)
		Resident coordinator system
	Inspection	UNHCR evaluation function
	Programme	OCHA
		UN-Habitat
		Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance[b]
		OHCHR[b]

[a] Subject to evaluation if no ad hoc requests are received by June 2019.
[b] Subject to evaluation if thematic evaluations in 2021 are funded from extrabudgetary resources.

62.   Planned evaluations in peacekeeping from July 2019 to June 2020 are proposed in table 3.

Table 3
Peacekeeping projects

Year of projected completion	Project type	Scope
2020	Programme	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
		United Nations Support Office in Somalia
	Thematic	United Nations support for Member States for the training of peacekeeping troops
		Political affairs work in peacekeeping operations, including support for the peace process and good offices functions
	Inspection	Inspection of the efforts to increase female representation in the military and police in United Nations peacekeeping

63.   The Committee for Programme and Coordination should also note that the following reports completed in 2019 will be available for its consideration in 2020: the programme evaluation of the Office for Outer Space Affairs; and the thematic evaluation of the preparedness and policy coherence of selected United Nations entities in contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, there will be two peacekeeping evaluation reports available on civil affairs in United Nations Mission in South Sudan and human rights in peacekeeping operations, as well as an inspection available on boards of inquiry in peacekeeping.

VIII. Issues for consideration by the Committee for Programme and Coordination

64.   As noted in section VII, OIOS is raising the following issues regarding its evaluation workplan that the Committee for Programme and Coordination may consider: (a) changing the timing of its review of OIOS evaluation reports to an annual review from 2020 onward during the trial period of annual budgeting; and (b) if it does so, reviewing three evaluations per year from the proposed list (see table 2).

Annex I

Entities included in the study by group

The categorization of the entities for the purposes of the study into groups A and B is shown in the table below. The names of the entities that were reorganized or renamed as part of the Secretary-General's reform since the biennium 2016–2017 are indicated in footnotes to the table.

Entity	Group A	Group B
1. **Department of Economic and Social Affairs**		X
2. **Department of Field Support[a]/Department of Peacekeeping Operations[b]**		X
3. **Department for General Assembly and Conference Management**		X
4. **Department of Management[c]**		X
5. **Department of Political Affairs[d]**		X
6. **Department of Public Information[e]**		X
7. **Department of Safety and Security**		X
8. **Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**	X	
9. **Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**	X	
10. **Economic Commission for Africa**	X	
11. **Economic Commission for Europe**	X	
12. **Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean**	X	
13. **Executive Office of the Secretary-General**	X	
14. **International Trade Centre**	X	
15. **Office for Disarmament Affairs**		X
16. **Office for Outer Space Affairs**		X
17. **Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**	X	
18. **Office of Legal Affairs**		X
19. **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**	X	
20. **Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States**		X
21. **Office of the Special Adviser on Africa**		X
22. **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**	X	
23. **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development**	X	
24. **United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)**	X	
25. **United Nations Environment Programme**	X	

Entity	Group A	Group B
26. **United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)**	X	
27. **United Nations Office at Geneva**		X
28. **United Nations Office at Nairobi**		X
29. **United Nations Office at Vienna**		X
30. **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime**	X	
31. **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East**		X

[a] Department of Operational Support.
[b] Department of Peace Operations.
[c] Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance.
[d] Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.
[e] Department of Global Communications.

Annex II

Comments from entities on the draft report

Economic Commission for Europe

I refer to your memorandum of 20 February 2019 transmitting the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives.

The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) appreciates the ongoing efforts of OIOS to highlight the importance of evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat. The compendium of good evaluation practices released by OIOS in December 2018 and carried out as part of the above-mentioned report will be helpful for improving the quality of ECE evaluations.

In 2016–2017, ECE continued to strengthen the role of evaluation. In line with the biennial evaluation workplan, three evaluations were conducted by independent consultants, one at the programme level and two at the subprogramme level. In addition, ECE evaluated 12 projects in 2016–2017. For each evaluation, ECE issued a management response and a progress report, tracking the implementation of each recommendation.

In September 2016, the ECE Executive Committee requested the Secretariat to increase and strengthen the evaluation function in ECE. In line with the request, a P-4 post was proposed in the proposed programme budget for 2018–2019 under Executive Direction and Management to perform programme evaluation and audit. This post was approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 72/261.

ECE is committed to enhancing the role of evaluation findings to programme design, delivery and policy directives. However, I would like to take the opportunity to highlight a serious and ongoing concern about the lack of adequate resources from the regular budget to evaluate regular budget activities and meet the minimum organizational benchmark of 0.5 per cent of the programme budget allocated to evaluation. Independence and the quality of evaluations are inextricably linked to dedicated resources for engaging external evaluators.

Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance

In reference to your memorandum addressed to Ms. Jan Beagle, Under-Secretary-General for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, dated 20 February 2019, transmitting the OIOS draft report on strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives.

In view of the comments by the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance on the in-formal draft of the report having been taken fully into consideration, we have nothing further to add.

We concur with the three recommendations made to the Department and attach the implementation action plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this valuable report on strengthening evaluation capacity in the Secretariat and for the excellent ongoing advice and methodological support provided to the Department in this regard.

Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

The report on strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives was received with appreciation. We are thankful to OIOS colleagues for the report and for the opportunity to provide comments.

I take note that the OIOS report classifies the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs among entities with a dedicated evaluation unit within a multifunctional division (reference: para. 6). I am pleased to see that OIOS acknowledges the improvements made by the Department, chief among which is the higher organizational independence of the evaluation function compared with the previous biennial period and a dedicated evaluation post in my office.

I acknowledge that the OIOS report categorizes the Department as group B, along with other mostly smaller entities, having less robust and established evaluation functions. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs welcomes the recommendation that the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance should prioritize support to entities in this group and looks forward to receiving further guidance, particularly on conducting joint evaluation on cross-cutting areas of contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs attached great importance to building a robust evaluation function within the Department. Despite the current environment of budget austerity, it will continue to invest in strengthening evaluation for learning and accountability purposes.

Going forward, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs is committed to working with OIOS and the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance to institutionalize effective evaluation as part of its core functions to support mandate delivery. We will also work closely with the Department of Peace Operations and the Peacebuilding Support Office to ensure synergies in evaluation.

International Trade Centre

Thank you for your memorandum dated 20 February 2019, transmitting the draft report of OIOS on strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives.

We appreciate the opportunity you had offered to our staff on the earlier informal draft and the extended opportunity to comment on the final draft of the report.

The management of the International Trade Centre (ITC) welcomes the final report, and fully accepts recommendation 3, while acknowledging that recommendations 1 and 2 are not addressed to ITC.

Regarding recommendation 3, ITC is ready to share evaluation workplans with the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance indicating potential linkages to one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals. ITC looks forward to working with the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, should it identify potential joint evaluations covering shared/cross-cutting areas of contribution to Sustainable Development Goals, and to discussing matters related to their planning and coordination.

ITC appreciates the quality of the review and thanks OIOS and its staff for the good cooperation in conducting the review.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

Thank you for the draft report on strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives.

I welcome this important initiative to promote learning and encourage improvement in evaluation, and reaffirm again that strengthening evaluation capacity and promoting human rights and gender-responsive evaluation in the United Nations system are important priorities for UN-Women.

UN-Women appreciates very much the information and analysis provided in this report and notes with concern the limited progress in improving gender and human rights dimensions in evaluations since the last reporting period.

The annual reports of UN-Women reflect a higher percentage of expenditure on evaluation (2.9 and 2.7 percent) than noted in figure VII. This difference is due to the inclusion of other evaluation activities, such as United Nations coordination on gender-responsive evaluation and national evaluation capacity development that go beyond evaluation reports and staffing costs.

UN-Women notes that the subset of evaluations selected from UN-Women for assessing the quality of evaluations was not representative of the different types of evaluations that UN-Women conducts.

UN-Women agrees with all three recommendations in the report and the welcome guidance on the inclusion of evaluative lessons learned in programmes and the joint evaluation of cross-cutting issues. UN-Women welcomes the recommendation for the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance to work towards "improved evaluation report quality on gender and human rights dimensions through appropriate training and guidance". We stand ready to collaborate with or provide support to the Department in this regard.

UN-Women notes the evaluation workplan for 2020 and the inspection of the UN-Women evaluation function. We look forward to engaging on this process and to be made aware of the implications of the proposal to the Committee for Programme and Coordination in regard to evaluation requests.

Thank you again for this important report on evaluation functions. I look forward to the implementation of recommendations and next steps in strengthening evaluation in the Secretariat.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) would like to thank the Inspection and Evaluation Division of OIOS for the opportunity to offer comments on the OIOS evaluation of evaluation functions within 31 United Nations entities, including UNHCR. We have read the final draft report with interest and taken note of the findings and recommendations.

We note that this evaluation is not specific to UNHCR, but is a broader analysis of the evaluation function in the United Nations Secretariat and UNHCR over the biennium 2016–2017. UNHCR has a strong commitment to evaluation and sees it as a powerful tool to promote accountability and learning throughout the organization. In line with this commitment, the High Commissioner issued an evaluation policy in October 2016, providing the framework to establish an independent Evaluation Service, with a professionalized evaluation capacity in 2017. Many of these improvements are reflected in the aggregated analysis. UNHCR would like to further

elaborate that, as a result of these investments in evaluation in 2016 and 2017, there have been three areas where further progress has been seen in 2018 and 2019:

(a)   Evaluation coverage

In 2018 and 2019, UNHCR prepared annual evaluation workplans for both centralized and decentralized evaluations. To date, 29 evaluations have been commissioned in 2018 and 2019 (14 completed), focusing on major strategic areas such as: (a) emergency response; (b) protection and operational delivery, including the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence and cash-based interventions; (c) critical programming areas with medium and long-term prospects for persons of concern to UNHCR, such as livelihoods, resettlement and the humanitarian-development nexus; (d) UNHCR advocacy, partnerships and inter-agency cooperation; and (e) key organizational effectiveness and performance areas. This represents a significant increase in the coverage of evaluations when compared with previous years (four evaluations in 2016 and six evaluations in 2017).

(b)   Evaluation expenditure

UNHCR has steadily increased its annual expenditure on evaluation reports since the issuance of the new policy, as evidenced by the financial figures and comparisons between 2016–2017 and 2018.

Evaluation budget for 2016–2018 in United States dollars

	2016	*2017*	*2018*
Expenditure	2 477 015.53	2 264 971.46	3 605 462.54
Increase/decrease			
2016–2017	-9%		
2017–2018	59%		

Furthermore, evaluations during this period were conducted cost effectively. By leveraging a range of procurement solutions to contract companies, sign long-term partnership agreements, where applicable, and use individual consultants, the unit cost per evaluation was significantly reduced. In other words, while UNHCR increased the numbers of evaluations significantly in 2018, it spent considerably less than anticipated on producing those evaluation reports.

(c)   Use and utility of evaluation

The expanded evaluation coverage of UNHCR has required commensurate commitment and further efforts from senior leadership and country teams, in addition to the Evaluation Service. The support of senior managers and representatives in operations around the world has been notable in this regard and has enabled engagement with 32 operations in 2018. Since 2017, two methodological approaches have been introduced to generate greater utilization of evaluations and better quality recommendations. These include the introduction of longitudinal or developmental evaluations, designed to evaluate a programme or intervention as it is being carried out. Another methodology introduced related to evaluations that help to inform strategy development; these formative evaluations include contextual analysis, establishing benchmarks set against the standards of other similar agencies, and literature reviews.

UNHCR has reviewed and taken note of the recommendations contained in the report. Although the first recommendation is not applicable to UNHCR, the Evaluation Service continues to play an active role in the United Nations Evaluation Group and the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation group to contribute and learn

from others to strengthen our own evaluation practice. UNHCR is in support of the second recommendation, which focuses on the use and uptake of evaluative evidence in programme design, planning, and management. UNHCR has taken several actions in this regard, including linking with results-based management efforts to incorporate evaluation and use of evaluative evidence in the operations management cycle. These actions, and the lessons learned, may be useful to the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance as it implements this recommendation. Finally, UNHCR supports the principle of joint evaluations, and has offered feedback on the various documents related to United Nations reform in support of an increase in joint evaluations. UNHCR notes that joint evaluations are most usefully commissioned and managed at the request of United Nations entities on a case-by-case basis and has already engaged in such efforts, most notably through the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation group.

UNHCR has communicated its support to the Inspection and Evaluation Division of OIOS for an inspection of the UNHCR evaluation function in the biennium 2020–2021. Finally, the UNHCR evaluation workplans are placed in the public domain and communicated through its website in January of each year; hence there is no need for a separate request to obtain this workplan.

In conclusion, UNHCR looks forward to collaborating with the Inspection and Evaluation Division of OIOS in the coming years as it continues to strengthen the role of evaluation in the agency and the United Nations system.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) welcomes the OIOS biennial report on strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives. In this context, the currently ongoing United Nations reforms demand increased accountability and evaluation at all levels, with special emphasis on evaluating results at the strategic level. Investing in evaluation is essential to fulfil these demands and to ensure that the requirements for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations reforms are met, while also continuing to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes and projects. OIOS reporting is a valuable input to this process.

UNODC has actively engaged with OIOS throughout this assessment and provided in-depth comments at various stages. While fully understanding the complexity of this assignment, UNODC highlights the importance of a strengthened methodological approach for assessing evaluation reports in future biennial studies. In particular, the sampling approach for evaluation reports should be further developed, and the assessment should increase its objectivity and comparability. For example, evaluation report assessments of this importance should not be conducted by only one reviewer – as was the case in this OIOS report – but by at least two reviewers for a more robust and objective result. Moreover, independent evaluation quality assessments – if available – should be included in the analysis to highlight potential discrepancies.

While OIOS assessed only 10 UNODC evaluation reports, which are not representative of the UNODC evaluation portfolio – only 1 out of 5 in-depth evaluations and 3 evaluations of projects with a budget of less than $1,000,000 were sampled – UNODC would like to highlight that all evaluation reports are independently reviewed and independently assessed. This rigorous, external evaluation quality assessment is conducted fully in line with United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards, respective evaluation quality assessment guidance documents, the evaluation performance indicator of the United Nations

System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, etc. by two independent senior evaluation experts, based in New York, ensuring inter-rater reliability. The results showed an increase from 4 per cent (very good) and 41 per cent (good) in 2015 to 33 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively, in 2017, thereby constituting a distinct increase in evaluation quality compared with previous years. Moreover, the evaluation quality assessment in 2017 highlighted that UNODC evaluation reports showed a distinct improvement compared with 2015 in relation to the inclusion of human rights and gender analysis, with 80 per cent of reports being rated as good or very good, thereby reflecting the results of increased investments of the Independent Evaluation Section in mainstreaming human rights and gender equality in all evaluations.

However, considering the increased complexity of evaluations, UNODC is currently revising its evaluation policy to ensure that the quality of evaluation reports is further improved and the increasing complexity of evaluations at UNODC is fully considered. Moreover, different models of evaluations for smaller initiatives – as primarily assessed by OIOS – will be reviewed and considered in the revised policy.

UNODC further reiterates the importance of fully mainstreaming human rights and gender equality in evaluation, as already referred to above. The Independent Evaluation Section of UNODC has invested in further strengthening human rights and gender equality in all evaluations since 2016. This entailed the inclusion of dedicated gender experts in three selected in-depth evaluations, developing tailored evaluation guidance documents, dedicated capacity-building and fully mainstreaming these important issues in all UNODC evaluations. This is also reflected in reaching "meeting requirements" on the evaluation performance indicator of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in 2017, as well as in 2018, as independently rated in the annual evaluation quality assessment.

UNODC welcomes that OIOS identified the web-based application Unite Evaluation, developed by the Independent Evaluation Section in cooperation with the Office of Information and Communications Technology Enterprise Application Centre in Vienna, as a "notable good practice". This innovative tool is based on a predecessor application, which was already highlighted as a "best practice" in the United Nations Evaluation Group-Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee peer review of the UNODC evaluation function in 2016. Unite Evaluation ensures efficient evaluation processes, allows reporting of evaluation results vis-à-vis the Sustainable Development Goals, enhances the dissemination of lessons learned and further strengthens transparency and accountability to Member States, fully responding to the Secretary-General's report A/72/492/Add.2 and the United Nations Secretary-General's strategy on new technologies (2018). This constitutes one example of how UNODC responds to the increased need for evaluation in the United Nations reforms.

Finally, UNODC acknowledges the OIOS finding that 0.19 per cent of the UNODC programme budget is spent on evaluation reports, thereby not meeting the range indicated by the Joint Inspection Unit of 0.5 to 3 per cent of organizational expenditure (JIU/REP/2014/6, para. 77). UNODC reiterates its commitment to further strengthen evaluation at UNODC, thereby ensuring further enhanced accountability, transparency and learning in line with key aspects of the United Nations reforms and the 2030 Agenda.

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