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Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of the implementation of recommendations made by the Committee at its sixty-first session on the inspection of the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division, is submitted pursuant to the decision of the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on evaluations submitted to the Committee (see [A/37/38](#), para. 362). In the present triennial review, a determination is made as to the extent to which recommendations emanating from the inspection conducted by OIOS of the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) ([E/AC.51/2021/7](#)) were implemented.

The triennial review was conducted through: (a) an analysis of documentation; (b) interviews with a sample of staff members; and (c) an online survey of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) personnel.

OIOS determined that the four recommendations were implemented.

In recommendation 1, UN-Women was requested to update its evaluation policy to reflect the current organizational structure of the evaluation function and priorities of the organization. UN-Women adopted a revised evaluation policy in September 2020. The revised policy reflects the new organizational structure and the emerging practice of having the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) lead country- and regional-level evaluations, and it has the potential to enable an evaluation function

* [E/AC.51/2024/1](#).



that is more utilization-focused and flexible in response to the organization's evidence needs. The recommendation is considered fully implemented.

In recommendation 2, the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) of UN-Women was asked to ensure that the corporate evaluation plans aligned with the evaluation policy and reflected the needs of the organization and that evaluations were timely. In response, UN-Women developed a corporate evaluation plan that is comprehensively aligned with the organization's four-year strategic plan. IES also systematically identified evidence gaps against the strategic plan, which were used to inform topics for corporate evaluations. Planned corporate evaluations have been delivered, and there is evidence that timeliness has improved. More than 70 per cent of country and regional evaluations are led and delivered by IES, although the timeliness of such evaluations appeared to vary by context. The recommendation is considered implemented, with positive implications for the strategic relevance and utility of UN-Women evaluations. Opportunities remain for UN-Women to improve measurement of and reporting on the timeliness of evaluations conducted outside headquarters.

Recommendation 3 addressed IEAS custodianship of the UN-Women evaluation function. Since 2020, all UN-Women corporate evaluations have been led and conducted by IES staff, and evaluations at the country and regional levels are increasingly IES-led. Those changes were found to be associated with greater evaluation consistency and enhanced evaluation quality, and they contributed to building a stronger institutional knowledge and evidence base. Since 2020, the presentation of evaluation reports and the use of disclaimers have been reviewed and standardized to clarify authorship and ownership of the content of reports. The recommendation is considered fully implemented.

In recommendation 4, IES was asked to review and standardize the roles of Regional Evaluation Specialists and ensure that Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points were clear about their evaluation responsibilities and had the capabilities to carry them out. The Regional Evaluation Specialist role has been standardized, and specialists are primarily responsible for the conduct of corporate, regional and country portfolio evaluations. The number of dedicated M&E personnel at UN-Women offices has increased, and IES has expanded and updated its evaluation guidance resources and reported increased delivery of training. Nevertheless, onboarding training and continuous coaching for Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points remains inconsistent across countries and regions. Nonetheless, the triennial review found evidence that the capabilities of Monitoring and Evaluation officers and focal points to fulfil their responsibilities improved between 2019 and 2023. The recommendation was considered implemented, with opportunities to further strengthen and standardize the approach to M&E capacity strengthening at the country level.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the decision of the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of recommendations issued by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) three years after the Committee decided to endorse them ([A/37/38](#), para. 362).
2. At its sixty-first session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the OIOS on the inspection of the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) ([E/AC.51/2021/7](#)).
3. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 110 and 113 of the report, as well as the revised recommendation contained in annex II to that report ([A/76/16](#), para. 668).
4. In the present triennial review, OIOS examined the status of implementation of the four recommendations.
5. The methodology for the triennial review included:
 - (a) A review of progress reports on the status of recommendations monitored by OIOS;
 - (b) An analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from UN-Women;
 - (c) Eleven interviews conducted with UN-Women staff, including evaluation specialists from headquarters and regional offices and representatives of senior management and governance mechanisms;
 - (d) A survey of regional and country-level Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points.¹
6. Comments from UN-Women were incorporated into the present report during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with the Entity for its response, which is provided in the annex to the present report. OIOS expresses its appreciation for the cooperation and assistance provided by UN-Women during the conduct of the review and preparation of the report.

II. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 Evaluation policy of UN-Women

7. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

With respect to policy and planning, the Executive Director and the Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services should ensure that the evaluation policy is updated to reflect the current organizational structure of the evaluation function and priorities of the organization.

Indicator of achievement: an endorsed, updated evaluation policy exists ([E/AC.51/2021/7](#), para. 109)

¹ A total of 65 Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) at the regional and country office levels were invited to take part in an online survey conducted from 5 to 18 December 2023. A total of 32 responses were received (44 per cent).

8. The updated UN-Women evaluation policy was endorsed by the UN-Women Executive Board in September 2020, in its decision 2020/4 (see [UNW/2020/9](#)). The formulation of the policy and its adoption were informed by consultation across UN-Women, with a particular focus on stakeholders at the headquarters level. The Advisory Committee on Oversight provided advice on the revised policy in 2020.² The Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) gave an informal briefing to the Executive Board on the rationale for the update and key changes in April 2020. The revised policy was then formally submitted to the Executive Board for its consideration in June 2020. The Board requested that UN-Women bring the language of the revised evaluation policy in line with that of the strategic plan, 2018–2021 and resubmit for endorsement (see [UNW/2020/9](#)). In September 2020, the policy was formally endorsed, following a working group meeting of delegates and technical staff convened by IEAS.³

9. In a review of the previous policy and the updated policy, notable changes were identified:

(a) Definitions for the types of evaluations that UN-Women will conduct were updated, with country portfolio evaluations and regional thematic evaluations defined as “independent”,⁴ which better reflects the emerging practice of having such evaluations led by the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) so as to enhance their independence, credibility and quality, as well as standardization across contexts;

(b) Clarification was provided as to the role of Regional Evaluation Specialists in relation to the conduct of independent evaluations, reflecting a shift in the IES business model towards increased leadership, management and authorship of independent evaluations by in-house IES staff;

(c) Strict parameters for the number and type of corporate evaluations to be conducted in each period and the criteria for prioritization were removed. IEAS separately developed a document on coverage norms,⁵ which is less prescriptive as to the specific subcategories of corporate evaluations and instead notes that such evaluations should cover strategic plan themes and components. This change gives IES greater flexibility to choose evaluation topics that reflect emerging organizational priorities, needs, risks and evidence gaps;

(d) Further clarification was provided as to roles and responsibilities in terms of the conduct of evaluations and quality assurance, as well as in terms of ownership and use of evaluation recommendations. The policy indicates that IES has a responsibility to monitor management response action plans and approve terms of reference for country-level and regional evaluations, and the coverage norms set out who is responsible for managing, providing quality assurance and responding to and implementing recommendations for each evaluation category. These revisions reflect a continued focus by IES on promoting the use of evaluations and embedding evaluation in strategic planning processes;

(e) Lastly, the policy reflects the new structure of IEAS, in which evaluation and audit functions are led by a single director and oversight is provided by an external committee. It notes that the Director of IEAS reports directly to the Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director and appoints the Chief of Evaluation of IES. Both the Director and the Chief must meet the United Nations Evaluation Group

² [UNW/2021/4/Add.1](#), para. 17; and correspondence between the Advisory Committee on Oversight and the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) shared with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) by UN-Women.

³ Meeting records shared with OIOS by UN-Women.

⁴ Subsequently referred to by IEAS staff as “independent and strategic”.

⁵ UN-Women, “Evaluation coverage norms”, Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use (GATE) database, December 2020. Available at <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?EvaluationId=11542>.

core competencies for evaluators. The new oversight architecture for IEAS is also reflected in the policy, with the Evaluation Committee replaced by the Advisory Committee on Oversight, which reports to the Executive Board on an annual basis.

10. Based on the above actions, OIOS assessed this recommendation to be fully implemented, with some evidence of positive impact on the evaluation function of UN-Women. For example, some evidence of management buy-in and immediate impact of the new policy is apparent. Notably, the current UN-Women strategic plan results framework contains new corporate indicators on evaluation quality scores and implementation rates.⁶ The Advisory Committee on Oversight noted that the new policy strengthens the potential for increased evaluation impact “by codifying the requirement for systematic country portfolio evaluations and the provision of technical assistance to regions and country offices on procedures for these evaluations” (UNW/2021/4/Add.1, para. 20). Several IEAS staff interviewed also stated that the process of reviewing and updating the policy had provided opportunities to reaffirm the independence of IEAS and strengthen its voice within the organization.

Recommendation 2

Improved delivery and utility of corporate evaluations

11. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

The Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services should ensure that the corporate evaluation plans follow the priorities set in the evaluation policy, and anticipate the needs of the organization, and that the Independent Evaluation Service delivers on the corporate evaluation plans in a timely manner.

Indicators of achievement: the corporate evaluation plan abides by the priorities set in the evaluation policy; the Independent Evaluation Service delivers the major corporate evaluations indicated in the respective corporate evaluation plan within the time frame indicated in the plan; transparent and timely reporting on changes to the corporate evaluation plan; review of the methodology of the calculation of the implementation rate (key performance indicator 4) (E/AC.51/2021/7, para. 110)

Alignment of the Corporate Evaluation Plan with evaluation policy priorities and organizational needs

12. The current Corporate Evaluation Plan, covering the period 2022–2025, was developed by IES in consultation with internal stakeholders⁷ and the Advisory Committee on Oversight, approved by the Executive Director and then shared with the Executive Board in June 2022. It was based on the structure, outcomes and priorities of the UN-Women strategic plan for 2022–2025 and is focused on the four thematic impact areas⁸ and on cross-thematic medium-term systemic outcomes,⁹ which are the focus of

⁶ UN-Women, “Annex I: Integrated results and resources framework of UN-Women strategic plan 2022–2025”, May 2022. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/UN-Women-Strategic-Plan-2022-2025-Annex-01-Integrated-results-and-resources-framework-en.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2023).

⁷ For example, in mid-2021, at its quarterly briefing to the Business Review Committee of UN-Women (whose participants included some, but not all, directors at the headquarters and regional levels), IEAS presented and consulted on key strategic topics and priorities to be included in the 2022–2025 Corporate Evaluation Plan.

⁸ The four thematic impact areas are: (a) governance and participation in public life; (b) women’s economic empowerment; (c) ending violence against women and girls; and (d) women and peace and security, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction.

⁹ The cross-thematic medium-term areas are: (a) the strengthening of global normative frameworks and gender-responsive laws, policies and institutions; (b) financing for gender equality; (c) positive social norms, including by engaging men and boys; (d) women’s equitable access to services, goods and resources; (e) women’s voice, leadership and agency; (f) production, analysis and use of gender statistics, sex-disaggregated data and knowledge; and (g) United Nations system coordination for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

thematic impact area evaluations or stand-alone evaluations. A review of the new Corporate Evaluation Plan revealed that its coverage of and alignment with the structure and priorities of the UN-Women strategic plan is more comprehensive than that of its 2014–2017 and 2018–2021 predecessors and that it strongly reflected the following key principles from the revised evaluation policy:

(a) IES should assume leadership of approximately 70 per cent of country portfolio and regional thematic evaluations;

(b) Themes under each strategic plan outcome area should be evaluated during the strategic plan period;

(c) Corporate evaluations should focus on organizational effectiveness, efficiency and programmatic approaches.¹⁰

13. Since the 2019/20 inspection, IES has more effectively anticipated the corporate-level evaluation and evidence needs of UN-Women. Evidence gap mapping exercises have been conducted, most recently in 2022, to systematically map evaluation reports against the key thematic, systemic and operational components of strategic plans. In those exercises, the following findings were identified:

(a) Levels of evaluation were comparable across the four thematic impact areas, with a possible overrepresentation of “women’s economic empowerment” and underrepresentation of “women and peace and security, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction”, in relation to distribution of funding;

(b) Thematic-specific and project-level evaluations generated significant evidence, and there is a gap in evidence relating to the holistic interventions and systemic outcome areas introduced in the most recent strategic plan and to intervention types and operational delivery models;

(c) There is a need for more forward-looking (formative) evaluations to inform programming in emerging areas of work;

(d) There is a need for a more rigorous examination of the integration of the “leave no one behind” principle and for better evaluation of progress by UN-Women towards achieving a more effective, diverse and empowered workplace.¹¹

14. Those findings have influenced the topics, scope and objectives of corporate evaluations. IES has conducted: a synthesis evaluation on the modalities of UN-Women support provided at the country level (completed in 2022); formative evaluations to inform work in the areas of innovation and climate change (completed in 2021 and 2023, respectively); a corporate evaluation on capacity development of partner organizations (completed in 2023); and additional formative evaluations relating to work on gender statistics and support to civil society (completed in January 2024). An evaluation on financing for gender equality was ongoing in early 2024. Several of these topics are directly aligned with the cross-thematic systemic outcomes in the 2022–2025 strategic plan and reflect a shift away from thematic- and programme-specific evaluations. In its annual report for 2022, the Advisory Committee on Oversight specifically expressed its appreciation for increased efforts by IES to “conduct independent strategic evaluations designed to assess and understand the broader impact of the Entity’s work and support the development of future planning and strategies; i.e., to gain insights and lessons beyond the evaluations conducted for individual programmes and projects” (UNW/2023/3/Add.1, para. 20).

¹⁰ UN-Women, “Evaluation coverage norms”.

¹¹ UN-Women, “Evaluation evidence gap mapping”, February 2020; and UN-Women, “Evaluation evidence gap mapping analysis 2022”, Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use system, February 2023. Available at: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?EvaluationId=11659>.

In this regard, IES has made good progress in terms of the extent to which it is able to anticipate the evidence needs of UN-Women and update the Corporate Evaluation Plan accordingly.

15. Further evidence that IES is effectively anticipating and meeting the organization's evidence needs can be found in the reporting on the extent to which evaluation recommendations are accepted by management, as well as on the use of evaluations. Management buy-in and use of evaluations have remained high, as indicated by the rate of production and publication of management responses to evaluations, which reached 100 per cent in 2022. The number of UN-Women offices that self-reported using evaluations in their planning processes has also remained high, at 87 per cent in 2022. Similarly, 91 per cent of management response actions were self-reported as implemented in 2022.¹² According to annual reporting data and interviews, IEAS staff are invited to participate in numerous strategic planning exercises as active observers to promote the use of evaluation evidence at the headquarters and regional level. IEAS staff interviewed reported that this was evidence of management's respect for and interest in IES knowledge of the evidence base, as well as confirmation of IES expertise in assessing the measurability and evaluability of objectives.

16. In annual reports, it was also consistently highlighted how corporate evaluations have been used in strategic planning, typically two years after their completion.¹³ Recent examples include corporate evaluations informing the development of a new resource mobilization strategy for women and peace and security and the thematic strategy for women's economic empowerment. Many Executive Board members were sufficiently satisfied with the relevance, quality and utility of evaluations (especially the corporate evaluations that are directly presented to them) to call for an investment in evaluation towards the upper end of the programme expenditure target of 2 to 3 per cent.¹⁴ Some staff interviewed also reported that Executive Board interest in corporate evaluations had been increasing. The consistent practice of establishing internal and external reference groups for corporate evaluations in recent years was also indicative of the importance that IES was placing on stakeholder consultation and the promotion of evaluation uptake and use.¹⁵

17. A minority of IES staff interviewed identified challenges associated with the newer types of evaluation that are produced in alignment with the strategic plan. At the global level, in the conduct of evaluations of systemic outcomes, there were challenges in formulating recommendations and promoting uptake given the absence of a single accountable organizational unit. Evaluations with a more strategic, global scope, in which findings and recommendations are synthesized at the global level, have been more detached from the work of regional and country offices and are therefore less useful at the regional and country levels.¹⁶ In recognition of this issue, several regions are piloting new models that involve either designing regional thematic evaluations based on the priorities of the global Corporate Evaluation Plan (e.g. capacity development) or collaboration among Regional Evaluation Specialists

¹² It is important to note that this figure includes both actions in progress and completed actions. While such actions are self-reported and, in the case of decentralized evaluations, not systematically followed up on or checked by IES, the UN-Women Independent Audit Service may follow up on evaluation recommendation implementation in its assignments, according to IEAS staff interviewed.

¹³ For reporting on key performance indicators and evaluation use, see [UNW/2023/4](#).

¹⁴ [UNW/2021/5](#), para. 29; UN-Women Executive Board decision 2022/4 (see [UNW/2022/5](#)). Some IEAS staff noted that the percentage of programme expenditure should not be the only measure of investment in and buy-in with respect to evaluation.

¹⁵ Review of forewords of corporate evaluations published on the Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use (GATE) system since 2020.

¹⁶ Regarding familiarity of M&E personnel with corporate evaluations, see para. 40 and figure I.

in the leadership and delivery of a global corporate evaluation (e.g. social norms). The aim is to strengthen links between the evaluation functions at different levels of the organization and increase the relevance of corporate evaluations and use of those evaluations at the regional and country levels.

Timely delivery of corporate evaluations

18. The delivery of corporate evaluations over the past five years has generally been timely. Under the 2018–2021 Corporate Evaluation Plan, the aim was to deliver 10 corporate evaluations, two of which were identified as contingent on funding. The Corporate Evaluation Plan did not envisage IES leadership of any country or regional evaluations, which would be co-managed between IES and the commissioning offices, but did envisage technical assistance to up to three headquarters-led evaluations per year.¹⁷ IES completed seven corporate evaluations and four syntheses between 2018 and 2021, going beyond the total numbers set out in the Corporate Evaluation Plan, but those evaluations did not necessarily cover all the topics originally identified and planned. Country portfolio and regional evaluation engagement went beyond what was envisaged in the original Corporate Evaluation Plan, as IES began to consider country portfolio and regional thematic evaluations as “corporate evaluations” (when IES leadership is feasible) and started to lead several such evaluations, rather than just providing technical assistance (for further details on this change, see the section on recommendation 3 below). Under the 2022–2025 Corporate Evaluation Plan, the aim is for IES to deliver 13 corporate evaluations and lead 30 country or regional evaluations.¹⁸ To date, 10 IES-led country portfolio evaluations have been completed and uploaded to the UN-Women Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use (GATE) system. With an additional seven IES-led country portfolio evaluations and five IES-led regional evaluations ongoing or initiated as of November 2023, IES is on track to meet the target. Delivery of corporate evaluations also appears to be on target. As of November 2023, four corporate evaluations from the 2022–2025 Corporate Evaluation Plan had been completed, and an additional seven are ongoing and scheduled for completion during or before the fourth quarter of 2024. If these time frames are met, IES will have completed 11 corporate evaluations by the start of 2025, with one year remaining in the period covered by the strategic plan.¹⁹

19. Analysis of data from the GATE system and IES annual reports to the Executive Board showed a marked improvement in the timeliness of corporate evaluations. The 2019/20 inspection identified that the duration of corporate evaluations completed between 2016 and 2018 ranged from 16 to 25 months, and over half took more than two years, which presented risks to the utility of evaluations (E/AC.51/2021/7, para. 59). In contrast, corporate evaluations completed since the start of 2020 have taken an average of 11 months. There is evidence, however, that one recent corporate evaluation on climate change (completed in 2023) was significantly delayed, taking 29 months in total, according to data from the GATE system.²⁰

20. Based on the available data from the GATE system, the timeliness of country portfolio and regional evaluations is less clear but appears to vary from case to case. Many appear to have been delivered in good time, either during the month planned or

¹⁷ UN-Women, “2022–2025 Corporate evaluation plan”, 2022.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ OIOS analysis of the Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use (GATE) evaluation database system and review of UN-Women Global Evaluation Plan (internal dashboard of ongoing evaluations – as at 21 November 2023).

²⁰ OIOS analysis of data from the GATE system. UN-Women and IEAS staff acknowledged the delay in the conduct of this evaluation and reported that the issue causing the delay had been addressed.

up to two months later. Some appear to have experienced major delays of up to one year or more.²¹ Such delays present risks to the usefulness of evaluations, as country programme evaluations are timed to inform the drafting of new multi-year strategic notes. Interviewees mostly indicated that recent country portfolio evaluations were completed within six to nine months but also highlighted challenges in delivering evidence in time to inform new strategic notes. Common factors highlighted by IEAS staff as explanations for the reduced time frames of corporate evaluations and for delays in corporate and decentralized evaluation processes are summarized in the table below.

Most common factors contributing to improved evaluation time frames and to evaluation delays

<i>Factors contributing to improved evaluation time frames (corporate evaluations)</i>	<i>Factors contributing to evaluation delays (corporate and decentralized evaluations)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear communication of goals and expectations for evaluation time frames and enhanced internal staff accountability for delivery • Internal staff familiarity with UN-Women data sources, systems and operations, which reduces the learning curve and time spent on scoping, design and desk review • Reduced time spent conducting external procurement of evaluation firms and consultants • Fewer levels of report review, comment and approval (by removing consultant team leadership) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limits to coordination and communication between (a) Regional Evaluation Specialists and country office leadership and (b) programme managers and M&E personnel (within country offices), due to turnover, availability and limited evaluation buy-in • The time-intensive nature of consulting widely on evaluation scope, design and recommendations (including the convening of reference groups and soliciting of their comments) • Recruitment of individual consultants (especially in the cases of country portfolio and decentralized evaluations) • Increased number of corporate reports requiring IEAS headquarters review and approval

Sources: Interviews of UN-Women staff and survey of M&E personnel. Most frequently cited factors, listed in descending order.

Transparent and timely reporting on changes to the Corporate Evaluation Plan

21. A review of Executive Board documents showed some evidence that IEAS reports on changes to the Corporate Evaluation Plan in a transparent and timely manner. The reports provided updates on evaluations completed and on evaluations planned for completion or initiation in the coming year. However, the reports did not contain explicit references to the content of the original Corporate Evaluation Plan developed at the start of the strategic plan period, nor did they address the reasons for any changes in the corporate evaluations planned for each calendar year (either when an evaluation is added or deprioritized). The 2021 report on the evaluation function of UN-Women contained a more explicit introduction of the 2022–2025 Corporate Evaluation Plan and the process of its development. In the report, it is indicated that

²¹ Ibid.

the Corporate Evaluation Plan is time bound and will be monitored, and the target of delivery of 13 corporate and 30 regional and country evaluations is set (UNW/2022/4, para. 7). The subsequent report (UNW/2023/4) does not, however, contain any systematic update of the Corporate Evaluation Plan developed and presented in 2021. Annual reports on the evaluation function have been fully transparent about the evaluations that UN-Women is conducting but include less information on why a small number have been deprioritized or delayed.

22. Nevertheless, key stakeholders and users of corporate evaluations interviewed confirmed that they were regularly updated on evaluation plans by IEAS in meetings. In addition to its reporting to the Executive Board, IEAS also communicates with or reports to the Advisory Committee on Oversight on its activities and work planning, including implementation of and changes to the Corporate Evaluation Plan. All annual reports of the Advisory Committee to the Executive Board over the period 2019–2022 note that the Advisory Committee has engaged with IEAS throughout the year on annual workplans, progress made in delivering them and plans for the forthcoming calendar year (see, for example, UNW/2023/3/Add.1, para. 17). Since 2021, in response to a suggestion made by the Advisory Committee on Oversight to increase regular communication between IEAS and the internal management structures of UN-Women, IEAS gives a quarterly briefing to the Business Review Committee of UN-Women, which includes a discussion of corporate evaluation topics and planning.

Measurement of the evaluation implementation rate (key performance indicator 4)

23. The overall implementation rate and timeliness of UN-Women evaluation activity in its entirety (the majority of which still consists of decentralized evaluations beyond the direct control of IES) is not explicitly addressed by IEAS indicators and annual reporting. IEAS continues to use the same indicator for the overall implementation rate of evaluations as it used at the time of the 2019/20 inspection (key performance indicator 4). The indicator is calculated as the percentage of evaluations listed in the global evaluation plan for the calendar year that have been either completed or initiated (as opposed to postponed or cancelled), which results in high percentages in annual reports (e.g. 77 per cent in 2019 and 95 per cent in 2021).²² However, the indicator does not necessarily reflect the timeliness of evidence generation or accountability, as it does not include any measurement of the extent to which evaluations were delivered within the intended time frame.

24. Based on an overall assessment of the above-mentioned actions, OIOS assessed recommendation 2 to be implemented, with evidence of positive impact on the evaluation function of UN-Women. Since 2020, UN-Women corporate evaluation activity has been more responsive to the organization's evidence needs, more operationally relevant and increasingly timely, especially at strategic levels. UN-Women is also aware of opportunities to further improve the relevance and usefulness of evaluations at the regional and country levels, through more optimal timing of country portfolio evaluations and new regional evaluation approaches. UN-Women may wish to further clarify and provide additional explanation on the methodology for key performance indicator 4 in annual reports so as to help readers to better understand the indicator. IEAS could also consider adding a different indicator comparing planned and actual end dates for evaluations in order to make reporting on the timeliness of evidence generation more transparent across the whole organization.

²² Written evidence provided by UN-Women to OIOS, and annual reports to the Executive Board on the evaluation function.

Revised recommendation 3 Custodianship of the evaluation function

25. Recommendation 3, after some revision based on partial acceptance by UN-Women, reads as follows:

The Executive Director should ensure that Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, as custodian of the evaluation function in the Entity, is responsible for all evaluation activity, and all corporate evaluations should be conducted in-house.

Indicators of achievement:

- A review of all current and planned major evaluation activity in the Entity is conducted jointly by the Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services and the Senior Management Team Number of corporate evaluations that the Independent Evaluation Service conducts each year
- Independent Evaluation and Audit Services should clarify authorship and ownership of the contents of corporate reports that resulted from outsourced evaluations.

Indicator of achievement: Clear guidelines on authorship (and disclaimers) are created and approved by the Executive Board, and the authorship of past corporate evaluation reports is explicit on the title page (see [E/AC.51/2021/7](#), annex II)

In-house evaluation activity and conduct of corporate evaluations

26. Since 2020, all nine corporate evaluations completed and published in the GATE system have been internally led by IES, rather than being outsourced to firms or groups of independent consultants. Furthermore, for all evaluations, the majority of team members have been IES staff, with an evaluation specialist or the Chief of Evaluation as team leader. Independent consultants still participated in 8 of the 9 assignments, typically as thematic experts in evaluation topics or to bring additional evaluation and data analysis capacities to the team. IES staff are expected to be lead authors of all reports. IES also created a new evaluation roster in 2022, which should improve the efficiency with which teams of IES staff and independent consultants are selected and established. All corporate evaluations conducted by IES since 2020 have a Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System quality rating of “very good”.²³

27. IES ownership and leadership of strategic evaluations conducted away from headquarters has also grown significantly. While direct management and implementation by IES of country portfolio or regional evaluations was not envisaged in the 2018–2021 Corporate Evaluation Plan, IES started to take the lead in directly commissioning and implementing such evaluations during the 2018–2021 period. In recent years, the most common model for IES-led evaluations in this category has involved the Regional Evaluation Specialist (who reports to the IES Chief of Evaluation but is located in a regional office) serving as a team leader, evaluation manager or coordinator, supported by individual external consultants. This approach was formalized in the 2022–2025 evaluation strategy and Corporate Evaluation Plan, which classified country portfolio and regional thematic evaluations as strategic evaluations that should be commissioned, managed and conducted, insofar as

²³ OIOS analysis of documents and data extracted from the GATE system. The Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System is an organization-wide system established to assess the quality of the evaluation reports of UN-Women.

possible, independently of the implementing office. In those documents, a target was set for 70 per cent of such evaluations to be led or co-managed by IES.²⁴

28. Since the start of 2020, the 70 per cent target has been met. Most country portfolio and regional thematic evaluations (21 out of 30) have been IES-led, and the other nine have been co-managed with the implementing office. Co-managed reports are generally outsourced by country or regional office managers to consulting firms or individuals.²⁵ According to quality rating data from the Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System, all IES-led country and regional evaluations completed in this period were rated “good” or “very good”; in comparison, 89 per cent of office-led country and regional evaluations were rated “good” or “very good”.²⁶ These data supported the inspection finding that IES leadership generally correlates with higher quality evaluations than those that are office-led, which can present challenges for the aggregation of results, synthesis of findings and identifying lessons learned at corporate levels. Staff interviewed indicated that IEAS plans to continue to increase the number of country portfolio and regional evaluations that are IES-led and conducted in-house.

29. Staff interviewed suggested that the improved quality of both corporate evaluations and country and regional evaluations can be explained by the following factors related to their conduct by IES:

- (a) Closer management and greater accountability for performance of internal evaluation staff (compared to consultants);
- (b) Greater familiarity of evaluators with UN-Women operations and data sources, leading to greater consistency in the use and analysis of data sets;
- (c) The ability of internal staff to develop recommendations that are more contextualized, relevant and implementable;
- (d) More consistent methodological design and sampling approaches;
- (e) Greater standardization of report format, design and length;
- (f) Improved cross-organizational dissemination and institutional learning and knowledge management opportunities created by internal implementation and authorship.

30. Owing to the higher quality of country portfolio evaluations, there has been greater buy-in from country offices and more systematized use of evaluation in strategic planning. UN-Women staff interviewed noted that evaluation culture at country offices in the organization had shown some signs of improvement, with IES-led country portfolio evaluations generally being valued and appreciated by country offices. Examples of new interest and investment in evaluation came in various forms, including requests for evaluability assessments of new country strategic notes. The corporate requirement for country strategic notes to demonstrate use of previous evaluations and plan and budget for future evaluations has also been strengthened somewhat. However, staff interviewed commented that the practice of conducting a country portfolio evaluation in every strategic note cycle at an optimal time, such that it could inform a new strategic note, had not yet been fully institutionalized.

²⁴ OIOS analysis of documents and data extracted from the GATE system; UN-Women, “2022–2025 Corporate evaluation plan”.

²⁵ OIOS analysis of documents and data extracted from the GATE system.

²⁶ Ibid.

Clarity on authorship and ownership

31. Since 2020, the following standard disclaimer has been included on the cover pages of all corporate evaluation reports:

Disclaimer: The analysis and recommendations of the evaluation are those of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UN-Women. This is an independent publication by the UN-Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS).²⁷

32. The disclaimer has made it much clearer that the report's content is the responsibility of IEAS and that IEAS is independent and does not speak for UN-Women as a whole, its management or its Executive Board. The authorship of the document and the disclaimer appear consistently on the inside cover page of evaluation documents. The consistency of presentation and communication for country portfolio evaluations has also been enhanced by the creation of a communications package checklist with guidance aimed at standardizing the structure of reports and length of sections, the evaluation brief, webinars and email announcements by IES.²⁸

33. Based on the above-mentioned actions, OIOS assessed recommendation 3 to be implemented, with evidence of a positive impact on the evaluation function of UN-Women in terms of corporate evaluation consistency and quality and some signs of improvement in terms of the relevance and utility of evaluations produced by the UN-Women evaluation function to decision makers at the headquarters, regional and country levels.

Recommendation 4 Evaluations produced outside headquarters

34. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

With respect to UN-Women personnel away from headquarters critical to the production of evaluations, the Independent Evaluation Service should:

- (a) Re-examine the roles and responsibilities of each Regional Evaluation Specialist to ensure that there is greater standardization in their interpretation and discharge.

Indicator of achievement: reviewed and standardized roles and responsibilities of each Regional Evaluation Specialist

- (b) Develop onboarding training and continuous coaching to ensure that monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points are clear about their evaluation responsibilities and have the capabilities to carry them out.

Indicators of achievement: number and percentage of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points that have monitoring and evaluation training as part of their onboarding process; proportion of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points that attended at least one coaching session per year; proportion of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points who feel capable of fulfilling the monitoring and evaluation officer and focal point job responsibilities (E/AC.51/2021/7, para. 113)

²⁷ From corporate evaluation reports published since 2020, extracted from the GATE system.

²⁸ Country portfolio evaluation communication package shared by UN-Women.

Reviewed and standardized roles and responsibilities of Regional Evaluation Specialists

35. In line with the revised evaluation policy from 2020, the pivot in the business model to make IES a more internally focused service that prioritizes the direct conduct of corporate, country portfolio and regional evaluations by in-house evaluation specialists has also provided an opportunity to review and better standardize the Regional Evaluation Specialist role. As part of the significant changes to ways of working at IES, headquarters and regional evaluation specialists alike now undertake corporate, regional and country portfolio evaluations as their primary job responsibility.²⁹ All regional and headquarters evaluation specialists are now expected to dedicate approximately 80 per cent of their time to evaluation delivery, 15 per cent to technical assistance and quality assurance for decentralized evaluations managed outside IES and the remaining 5 per cent to other activities, including evaluation capacity development and other external facing work. All evaluation specialists are expected to conduct a minimum of two evaluation assignments per year. Interviews with IES staff confirmed that the approximate time allocation and the number of evaluations delivered per year are, in practice, generally adhered to across the six regional positions. The shift to prioritize internal evaluation delivery is well understood and followed by Regional Evaluation Specialists, who reported spending between 60 and 80 per cent of their time on IES-led evaluations.

36. UN-Women personnel (including both evaluation users at the headquarters level and Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points in country offices) are generally very satisfied with the relevance of the Regional Evaluation Specialist role and how it is executed, based on interviews and a survey conducted for the present review. In all, 96 per cent of Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points indicated that the support they received from regional specialists in the conduct of evaluations was adequate (81 per cent “fully adequate” and 15 per cent “somewhat adequate”). Qualitative feedback on the work of Regional Evaluation Specialists was positive in relation to all of their key functions.

37. Nevertheless, there remain some minor inconsistencies in how the role of Regional Evaluation Specialist is executed. For example, the support available from additional M&E personnel to Regional Evaluation Specialists in the execution of their expanded roles is uneven. Four out of the six regional specialists have mobilized various types of support in the form of United Nations Volunteers, consultants on retainer contracts and temporary staff contracts. Those roles are typically funded by regional office budgets, rather than by IEAS. Several interviewees suggested that a more flexible approach to the management of human resources across IES should be explored, under which headquarters and regional-level support could be moved and shared across different offices, regions and assignments according to fluctuating levels of evaluation need and demand. Furthermore, interviews with Regional Evaluation Specialists also highlighted some inconsistency in the extent to which they are able to engage in national evaluation capacity development and United Nations system evaluation coordination, both of which had previously been a larger part of their mandate. Those regional specialists that reported spending comparatively less time (closer to 60 per cent) on conducting evaluations also reported spending more time on these two areas. In most regions, specialists commented that such work had become less feasible or had been deprioritized by IEAS management in order to ensure delivery of internal evaluations. Just one Regional Evaluation Specialist reported spending considerable time on such activities across several countries in the region. Some interviewees reported that they found it somewhat challenging to engage meaningfully in strategic planning at the regional and country levels (which

²⁹ Clarified in job descriptions shared with OIOS.

is part of the rationale for their location in regional offices), while others reported being more consistently and systematically involved in such exercises. Lastly, the nature of internal capacity development of country M&E personnel was found to be somewhat inconsistent across the regions (as is explained in further detail in paras. 41–43 below).

Onboarding training, continuous coaching and capabilities of Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points

38. Dedicated M&E positions in UN-Women offices have increased in number over the past five years. As of December 2023, 64 per cent of UN-Women offices had dedicated M&E personnel (an increase from 43 per cent in 2018), 33 per cent had M&E focal points and 3 per cent had vacant or non-appointed M&E positions.³⁰ The increase was attributable to enhanced IES advocacy for the creation of dedicated M&E roles (especially in medium-sized and large offices) as noted in the 2022 annual report on the evaluation function. The survey and interviews with IES staff found that the time M&E focal points spent on M&E functions varied considerably across contexts. While UN-Women staff interviewed reported that turnover of M&E personnel was an ongoing constraint on their effectiveness, retention in the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer and focal point roles appears to have improved somewhat since 2019, with a greater proportion of survey respondents having been in their positions for three years or more (38 per cent in 2023, compared with 12 per cent in 2019).

39. Between 2019 and 2022, IES expanded and updated the evaluation guidance resources available to Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points. Amid the disruption of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020, IES produced a tool to support evaluations during the COVID-19 pandemic,³¹ and in 2022, it published an update to its evaluation handbook for internal and external audiences on how to manage gender-responsive evaluations,³² as well as an update to its internal country portfolio evaluation guidelines.³³ Those resources are in addition to existing self-guided online courses on gender-responsive evaluation and results-based management, which are available through the UN-Women Training Centre website in several languages.³⁴ The Advisory Committee on Oversight has also expressed its appreciation for IES leadership in developing and maintaining those tools and resources to improve the skills of UN-Women personnel and implementing partners (UNW/2023/3/Add.1).

40. The Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points surveyed reported high levels of familiarity with the above-mentioned written evaluation resources available to them and positively assessed the usefulness of those resources. As shown in figure I, the vast majority of respondents agreed that they were familiar with the new evaluation policy, the updated evaluation handbook and the country portfolio evaluation guidelines. An even greater proportion of respondents agreed that those documents were useful to them in their evaluation work. A majority of survey respondents were also aware of the UN-Women corporate evaluations and perceived them as useful, but to a much lesser degree; just 9 per cent strongly agreed that they were familiar with recently published corporate evaluations, while 47 per cent

³⁰ IES tracking of M&E resources, shared with OIOS in December 2023.

³¹ UN-Women, “Pocket tool for managing evaluation during the COVID-19 pandemic”, May 2020.

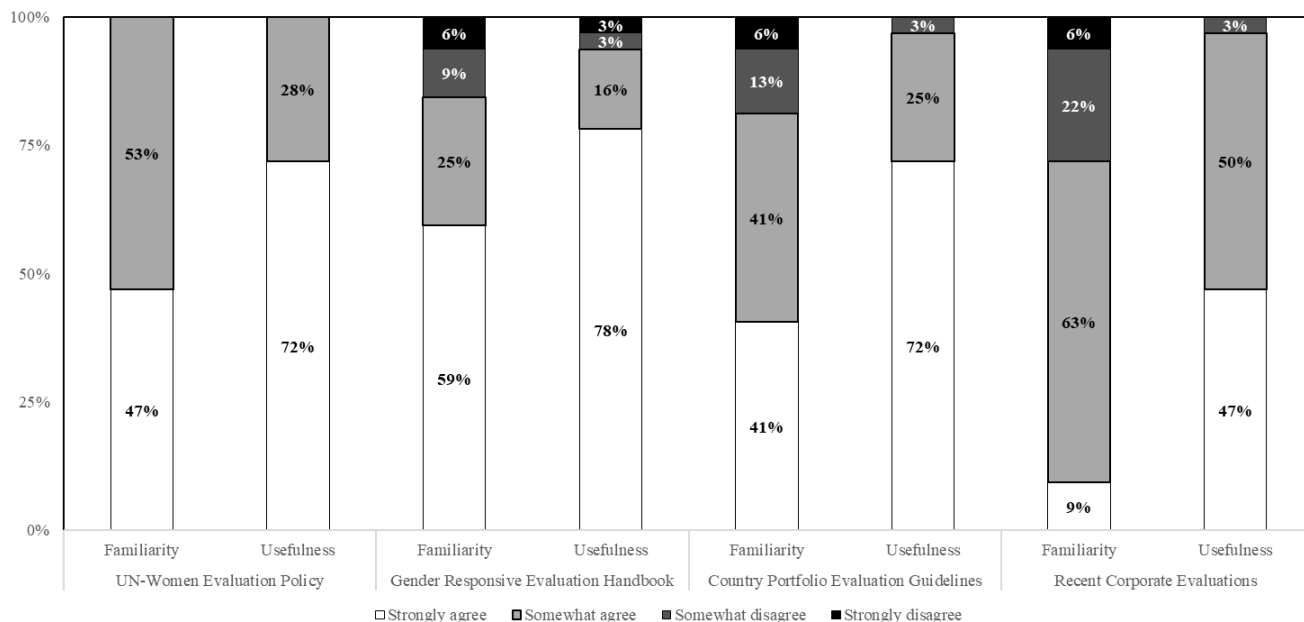
³² UN-Women, *How to Manage Gender-Responsive Evaluations: Evaluation Handbook* (New York, 2022).

³³ UN-Women, *UN-Women Country Portfolio Evaluations (CPE): CPE Revised Guidelines* (New York, 2022).

³⁴ Two interviewees noted that the online training course on gender responsive evaluation was somewhat “out-of-date” since it had not been updated concurrently with the revised handbook on gender responsive evaluation in 2022. Course available at: <https://portal.trainingcentre.unwomen.org/> (accessed on 19 December 2023).

expressed strong agreement that corporate evaluations were useful to their work. These data support the suggestion made by some staff interviewed that, while corporate evaluations were relevant to the higher-level needs of the organization, more could be done to enhance their relevance and use at the regional and country levels.³⁵

Figure I
UN-Women monitoring and evaluation personnel familiarity with and perceived usefulness of corporate evaluation guidance documents



Source: OIOS survey.

Note: n=32.

41. A review of annual reporting suggests that IES has increased its delivery of tailored, in-person and remote training activities for UN-Women personnel since the 2019/20 inspection. In the 2020 report, it was noted that Regional Evaluation Specialists provided some tailored and customized training to M&E personnel in certain offices. By 2021, IES reported that it had reached more than 100 UN-Women personnel with its evaluation-focused training, and in 2022, it reported having provided training in evaluation topics to more than 130 personnel and external stakeholders across five out of the six regions (see [UNW/2021/4/Add.1](#); [UNW/2022/4](#); [UNW/2023/3/Add.1](#)). Such training was provided to personnel in a range of positions in specific offices, rather than directly targeting all Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points. Therefore, despite an increase in training activity, training coverage of the relevant officers and focal points remains somewhat inconsistent across regions and countries in terms of what training is offered to them and the extent to which they participate.

42. The extent to which Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points received M&E training as part of the onboarding process (first indicator of achievement) was found to be somewhat inconsistent on the basis of the information gathered from the interviews and the survey conducted for the present review. All Regional Evaluation Specialists reported conducting orientation sessions with new Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points, being involved in the

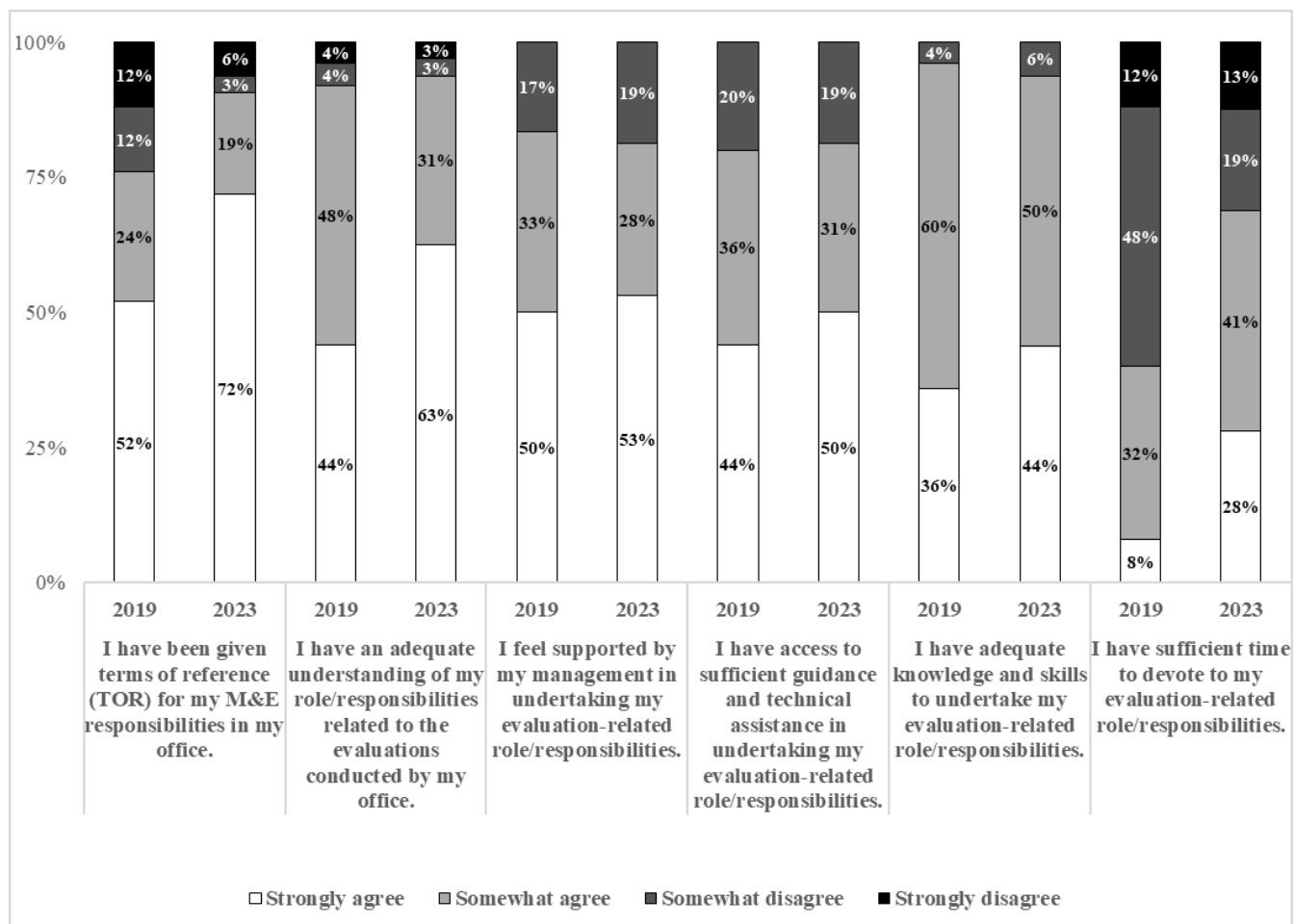
³⁵ See para. 20 above.

recruitment of such officers or specialists and encouraging new M&E personnel to complete the online training on gender-responsive evaluation. Respondents reported varying induction processes, including training integrated into broader regional office-led induction packages, online training and in-person training. Less than half of Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points surveyed (47 per cent) recalled receiving M&E training or orientation as part of the onboarding process for their role; those who recalled such training described a variety of engagements, including online self-guided training on gender-responsive evaluation and results-based management, induction or orientation sessions and written evaluation guidance resources.

43. Similarly, the extent to which appointed Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points in UN-Women offices are receiving continuous coaching to support them in their role (second indicator of achievement) is inconsistent across and within regions. Half of the Regional Evaluation Specialists have established regional communities of practice on evaluation, with regular remote seminars and webinars on various topics and online resource-sharing. Others prioritize multi-day in-person trainings for a specific number of country offices each year. Some view M&E training as more effective and more feasible, given time and resource constraints, when provided as on-the-job training as part of a mentoring approach. Some M&E personnel have also been supported by Regional Evaluation Specialists and regional offices to enrol in and complete M&E courses provided by other entities. A majority of M&E survey respondents (53 per cent) reported that they had not engaged in any evaluation-related training in 2023. Some Regional Evaluation Specialists commented that it was challenging to fulfil this aspect of their role to the extent they would like owing to the prioritization of evaluation delivery and to turnover among Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points.

44. The self-reported capabilities of Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points to fulfil their M&E responsibilities (third indicator of achievement) were found to have improved somewhat over the past four years, as shown in figure II. Having sufficient time to dedicate to M&E responsibilities remains the biggest constraint on their capability, as was noted by many interviewees, but there appears to have been some improvement in this regard. The survey also found some notable increases in the proportion of respondents who strongly agreed that they had been given terms of reference for their M&E role and had an adequate understanding of the role and responsibilities related to evaluation. The proportion of M&E personnel who agreed that they were supported by management to undertake evaluation responsibilities, had access to adequate guidance and technical assistance and possessed adequate knowledge and skills was high and at levels similar to 2019. All Regional Evaluation Specialists interviewed viewed the capabilities of M&E personnel in their region to be highly variable owing to a combination of factors, most notably turnover, available time and management support.

Figure II
Capabilities of UN-Women Monitoring and Evaluation Officers and focal points (self-reported), 2019 and 2023



Source: OIOS surveys in 2019 and 2023.

Note: 2019, n=25; 2023, n=32.

45. Based on the above-mentioned actions, OIOS assessed the recommendation to be implemented. OIOS also noted that the implementation of the recommendation has contributed to a positive impact on the evaluation function of UN-Women. The standardization of the Regional Evaluation Specialist role has contributed to enhancing the quality, consistency and strategic relevance of regional and country evaluations and has expanded the UN-Women institutional knowledge base and cross-country and regional learning opportunities. M&E functions in country offices are increasingly institutionalized, with positive signs of improvement in capabilities and capacities, which should contribute to improved quality and use of decentralized evaluations. Opportunities exist, however, for further strengthening and standardization of the approach to M&E capacity strengthening at the country level.

Annex**Comments received from the Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on the draft report**

I refer to your memorandum transmitting the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the triennial review of the implementations made by the OIOS inspection of the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

Thank you for a constructive and efficient assessment conducted by your team. This review helps us to reflect on achievements as well as to focus on opportunities for improving evaluation at UN-Women.

I welcome the OIOS conclusion that UN-Women implemented all four recommendations of the OIOS inspection of the evaluation function of UN-Women. I am pleased to learn that OIOS found that changes introduced in the revised evaluation policy has “the potential to enable an evaluation function that is more utilization-focused and flexible in response to organizational evidence needs.” OIOS rightly assesses that UN-Women has made good progress in ensuring timeliness, efficiency and quality of evaluation processes, as well as strengthened internal evaluation systems. The review also helpfully identifies areas for further improvement, including measurement of and reporting on the timeliness of evaluations conducted outside of headquarters and opportunities for strengthening and standardizing approaches to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity at the country level.

I am pleased to inform you that the Independent Evaluation Service (IES), in the annual report of the evaluation function of UN-Women will be providing more detailed information of the implementation of the corporate and other strategic evaluations against the UN-Women Corporate Evaluation Plan 2022–2025. In addition, the internal dashboard of all IES-led evaluations and global evaluation plan will aid the tracking of evaluations during the year.

With regard to strengthening M&E capacities, the Independent Evaluation Service will continue to: (1) provide orientation and technical support to new M&E personnel on UN-Women evaluation systems and resources through its Regional Evaluation Specialists; (2) utilize the newly developed United Nations Evaluation Group’s evaluation training for standardized learning on evaluation across the United Nations system; (3) continue to provide one-on-one coaching and training at regional and country-level workshops.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.
