



# Mapping Decentralized Evaluation Functions across UN Entities

## Synthesis Report

Draft 24 January 2025

### **AGM 2025: Background document**

Prepared by the Decentralised Evaluation Function Working Group (SO1) 2024.

The WG propose to finalise this document in Q1 2025. It will then be circulated electronically for approval by UNEG Heads to be published as a UNEG reference document.

# 1. Introduction

As part of its 2024 workplan, the UNEG Decentralized Evaluation Working Group (DEWG) planned to update the mapping of key features of decentralized evaluation (DE) functions across the UN system, building on the first edition conducted in 2020<sup>1</sup> and agency self-assessment done in 2023. This work aims to facilitate learning, share experiences across UN entities, and potentially support future work by UNEG on DE. The update included case studies of **12 UN entities** (FAO, ILO, IOM, UNESCO, UNEP, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN WOMEN, WFP, WHO). UNEP does not have a decentralized evaluation function.

The study was structured along six dimensions which contextualize UNEG norms and standards for DE. These are: definition and architecture (norm 11); responsibilities (norm 13); quality; impartiality and transparency (norms 5 and 7); professional standards and capacities (norms 10); and utility, use and follow up (norms 2 and 14).

The methodology involved collecting and analyzing data from multiple lines of evidence, including **19 individual and group interviews** with **37 UN evaluation professionals** at headquarters (HQ), regional, and country levels, review of questionnaire-based self-assessment conducted by UN entities in 2023, and an extensive document review covering the evaluation function's policy frameworks (policies, strategies, charters), policy peer review reports, guidance, manuals and tools, as well as grey literature.

This work resulted in three products. The first product is a full DE mapping report that provides comprehensive analysis of DE functions across the 12 UN entities, providing a robust foundation for future normative work by UNEG on DE. The current document provides a synthesis of case studies and is aimed at enhancing learning and foster knowledge sharing beyond the DEWG members. The third product is a framework for assessing DE functions within the UN System. The framework defines a set of assessment factors, each coupled with a four-tiered maturity level scale, and aims to operationalize the established norms agreed in the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation.

## 2. DE architecture and its enabling environment

### 2.1. Definition of DE

DE across UN entities are primarily defined within their normative frameworks (evaluation policies or charters) as evaluations commissioned and/or managed by entities directly responsible for the interventions or specific programmatic units.

Unlike those commissioned by central evaluation offices, which are variously referred to as centralized, corporate, or independent evaluations, DE are referred to by most s, regional bureau and HQ divisional levels are in UNHCR referred to as decentralized evaluations. ILO provides a combination of centralized and decentralized evaluation in a mixed manner, where DE refer to evaluations where the primary responsibility, including resourcing, is assigned to regions and departments, while all staff within the central evaluation office supports DE among their other duties.

Conversely, FAO's Evaluation Charter only covers centralized evaluations, while DEs are referred to as those managed by budget holders, without formal policy coverage. The evaluation architecture at UNEP is distinctly centralized, with the Evaluation Office exclusively mandated to conduct evaluations, while any performance

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<sup>1</sup> UNEG (2020). [Decentralized Evaluation Functions Across UN Agencies](#) (retrieved December 4, 2024).

assessments commissioned and overseen outside this office are defined as “management-led reviews” due to their lack of necessary independence.

## 2.2. Architecture of Decentralized Evaluation

Across all the 12 UN entities mapped in this exercise, responsibility for the overall evaluation function rests with central evaluation offices reporting variously to organization heads, directors of oversight functions, or governing bodies. The DE function across these organizations, where present, exhibits a complex and varied architecture, incorporating **HQ-based, regional, and country-based evaluation staff** who report to directly to central evaluation offices, those who report to regional management (directors or deputy directors) with dotted reporting lines to central offices (matrix reporting structure) and those who report to regional management with no reporting line to central offices.

Direct to central offices	Matrix reporting structure	Reporting to only RB
UN Women, UNDP, FAO, UNHCR	ILO, UNFPA, WFP, UNICEF, UNESCO	IOM (Regional Director) WHO (Chief of Planning)

**DE staff levels** range from P3 in ILO, to P5 in UNFPA, UNDP, and UNICEF:

ILO	FAO	IOM	UNESCO	UN WOMEN	WFP	UNHCR	WHO	UNFPA	UNDP	UNICEF
P3/4	P4	P4	UNV (Int. Specialist)	P4	P4	P4	P4/P5	P5	P5	P5

In some agencies regional staff **balance evaluation responsibilities** with other functions like monitoring and planning, though evaluation remains a primary focus. In others, evaluation staff are **dedicated solely to evaluation** tasks. At WHO, some regional evaluation staff focus exclusively on evaluation, while others also take on monitoring responsibilities.

Evaluation and other responsibilities	Varies	Only Evaluation
IOM, ILO, UNFPA	WHO	UNICEF, WFP, FAO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNHCR, UN WOMEN

The functional connection **to central evaluation offices** varies, with some entities like UNFPA and WFP having dedicated units at HQ that focus on supporting DE. Others, such as ILO and UN Women, have regional staff reporting directly to the heads of evaluation without a dedicated DE unit.

Additionally, larger funds and programmes may extend their DE function to the **country level**. UNICEF, for instance, employs P4-level Country Evaluation Specialists and Multi-Country Evaluation Specialists, who variously report to regional directors or country representatives. Since 2023, WFP has a country evaluation specialist in one large country office to manage DE, reporting to deputy country director.

Central and regional evaluation staff typically provide technical support and advice to staff managing DEs. This can entail coaching evaluation managers through the life cycle of the evaluation as it is planned, resourced and managed; as well as more formal capacity development and quality assurance. In funds and programmes,

including WFP, UNDP and UNFPA, evaluation offices **report on the performance and status of the evaluation function, including DE**, to their governing body as part of their annual reports.

## 3. Responsibilities for the DE function

### 3.1. Management arrangements

Across UN entities, **decentralized evaluations are managed** through a variety of arrangements that emphasize independence or practicality, reflecting each organization's uniqueness. Evaluation management is handled by **either evaluation staff or personnel from other roles** within the organization:

- In some funds and programmes like UNICEF, DE are managed by dedicated **evaluation staff**, including Regional Evaluation Officers (REO), Multi-Country Evaluation Specialists (MCES), or Country Evaluation Specialists (CES). This includes evaluation staff physically posted in locations other than the evaluand, with provisions for day-to-day management shared with staff posted in the country subject to intervention. UNFPA also allows evaluation staff, including Regional Monitoring & Evaluation Officers (RMEO) or even HQ-based staff, to manage DE when they are of strategic importance. In entities like UN Women or FAO, evaluation staff posted in regional offices manages some evaluations which are labeled as independent.
- In contrast, several entities delegate DE management to **non-evaluation staff** who frequently handle other roles within the organization. For example, ILO, UNFPA, WFP, WHO, and UNESCO typically have DE managed by programme or technical officers, including but not limited to M&E officers, who in some cases undergo specific training to manage DE. At UNDP, DE are usually managed by the programme units' M&E focal points. Specialized agencies like FAO and ILO, as well as funds and programmes including UNDP and WFP, additionally require that DE managers have no prior involvement in the design and implementation of the evaluated projects, enhancing the independence. ILO further strengthens this requirement through a mandatory certification for DE managers. In contrast, DE at UNESCO and UNFPA can be managed by staff involved in the project under evaluation, though the central evaluation office encourages the selection of independent managers whenever possible.
- The **appointment of DE managers** is generally overseen by senior management of the commissioning office, sometimes in collaboration with regional evaluation staff. In ILO, the appointment process is distinctly voluntary and demand-based, where requests for DE management are posted by staff on an internal platform, and available DE managers who fit the requirements can apply. Finally, DE are largely conducted by external consultants, either individual experts or firms. However, in entities like FAO, UN Women, and UNICEF, regional evaluation staff may also conduct or co-conduct evaluations.

### 3.2. Evaluation planning

The degree of formal planning for decentralization evaluation varies across the UN system. Planning for DE is often **integrated into strategic programming** across various entities. Funds and programmes like UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, and WFP embed DE plans within multi-year frameworks such as Country Strategic Plans (CSP) or Country Programme Documents (CPD). These plans are often reviewed by the central evaluation

office to ensure they are strategic, realistic, and inclusive. For some cases, as in UNICEF and UNFPA, evaluation plans are approved by Executive Boards along with the country documents.

The **involvement of central evaluation offices** in helping formulate evaluation plans varies considerably, with some allowing the DE function to decide themselves based on suggested criteria as well as mandatory coverage criteria. For example, UNICEF and UN Women require that every country programme is evaluated at least once every two cycles, emphasizing consistent coverage across regions. WFP emphasizes a “demand-led” approach, requiring only one DE within every programme cycle.

Central evaluation offices sometimes play a formal role in deciding what to evaluate. FAO uses a centralized “intake” process for planning its evaluations, looking at criteria like learning needs. Similarly, ILO’s Criteria-based Integrated Evaluation Planning System (CIEPS) looks at knowledge **requirements** and evidence gaps **beyond financial thresholds**. Similarly, UNICEF has provisions for an “evidence gap map” to guide DE planning. For FAO and ILO, central evaluation offices maintain a comprehensive map of all initiatives requiring evaluations and regional evaluation staff is responsible for tracking key dates and timelines.

### 3.3. Financial resources

The arrangements to finance decentralized evaluation vary by entity.

#### ***Funding DE staff***

Funding for **decentralized evaluation staff** that is posted in regional offices are variously covered by regional offices, country offices (e.g. UNICEF), or through programme resources (e.g. WFP). Some entities fund all or part of the decentralized function from the resources set aside for the central function.

#### ***Funding the conduct and management of DE***

The conduct and management of DE, including implementation costs, is typically **funded from the budgets of the commissioning units** or divisions. These funds are variously sourced directly from project budgets, as seen in UNICEF and ILO, and country portfolio budgets, as in WFP’s case. In WHO, major DE proposed by Regional Offices are mostly funded by voluntary (project budget) or assessed contributions (regular budget). In funds and programmes like UNDP and UNICEF, where evaluation plans are costed, central evaluation offices provide guidance to programme units on budgeting and financing sources. At UNICEF, evaluation staff can also engage in **resource mobilization** by working closely with the partnership team to ensure DE are financially supported.

#### ***Additional provisions***

There are also arrangements where **central evaluation offices** supplement budgets for DE in specific cases. Several entities utilize specialized **trust funds** to support their decentralized evaluations. WFP operates a Contingency Evaluation Fund to aid country offices facing sudden financial shortfalls and ensure that evaluations can proceed despite budgetary constraints. UNICEF’s Evaluation Pooled Fund specifically covers costs for certain multi country evaluation staff. The ILO’s Evaluation Trust Fund pools unused resources to finance extended-timeline evaluations for extra-budgetary activities. UN Women leverages a matching fund to provide partial support for country portfolio evaluations in resource-limited offices. FAO’s Evaluation Trust Fund finances a variety of independent evaluation activities, including capacity building.

## 4. Quality controls

The quality of DE across the UN is routinely supported through a dual approach: quality assurance measures for the planning and management of DE, and quality assessments of evaluation outputs.

### 4.1. Quality assurance

All UN entities surveyed report a role for central evaluation offices in setting quality standards for their decentralized functions. These are sometimes integrated into stand-alone guidance for the broader evaluation functions, while other times guidance is issued for the DE functions specifically. Organizations like ILO and UNFPA utilize **comprehensive DE packages** that include integrated guidance across the evaluation cycle;; similarly, WFP has in place a DE Quality Assurance System. These packages normally follow the key steps of evaluation planning and management, from planning, preparation, conduct, reporting, to use and follow up.

UN entities deploy a range of quality assurance mechanisms to ensure the credibility of their DE. Tools such as **handbooks** and **guidelines** are widely used, with entities like UNDP, UNESCO, and UN Women incorporating these into their quality frameworks. Guidance typically includes roles and responsibilities of different evaluation stakeholders as well as **templates** for different evaluation deliverables and **checklists** for checking quality of these deliverables at different stages of the evaluation management cycle.

These materials are often used as basis for **capacity development** efforts. To improve the competency of DE managers, ILO requires staff to take its internal Evaluation Manager Certification Programme; others, like WFP and UNDP have developed evaluation learning programmes for DE managers and other staff; and UN Women provides regular training sessions.

To ensure evaluations meet quality standards, some entities incorporate multi-layer, often multi-stakeholders review processes. UNHCR, UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP, and UN Women establish Evaluation Reference Groups or similar **advisory panels** that include both internal and external experts. These groups review deliverables at various stages to provide insights aimed to enhance the evaluations' credibility.

### 4.2. Quality assessment

Across UN entities, quality assessments of DE outputs are a routine part of ensuring that evaluations meet established standards. Most entities surveyed implement a combination of internal and external mechanisms to assess the quality of DE outputs. For example, entities including ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNFPA, WFP engage **external companies or consultants** to conduct **post-hoc quality assessments** of all their evaluation reports. Other organizations like FAO and IOM contract external firms to periodically review batches of evaluations. Reports at UNDP are reviewed by independent reviewers recruited and managed by the central evaluation office. UNEP conducts an internal "validation" of their decentralized management review reports.

In all these cases, reports are assessed based on **standard criteria** aligned with established UNEG frameworks that assess the robustness of findings, methodology, objectives, conclusions, recommendations, and adherence to ethical standards, often using a 5-point scale. Many entities, like ILO, UNESCO and UNFPA utilize templates that are **harmonized from UNEG quality checklists**, while integrating entity-specific priorities and guidelines on cross-cutting issues. UNHCR performs quality assessment not only on reports but also on other products including TOR, inception reports, and/or feedback matrix.

Ratings from the quality assessments are typically aggregated and **summarized in annual reports** of many funds and programmes' broader evaluation functions reporting, which are submitted to their governing bodies (e.g. UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA, WFP).



## 5. Impartiality and transparency

To ensure DE are impartial and conducted without undue influence, most entities rely on **external evaluators (individuals or firms)**. These evaluators are typically selected through transparent and competitive processes to prevent conflicts of interest, often with requirements to exclude those previously involved in the project's design or implementation. Entities like UNEP, ILO, UNFPA, UNHCR, WFP, and WHO mandate that evaluators sign a Code of Conduct to affirm their commitment to operate impartially. Entities like UNHCR, ILO, WFP also require that **DE managers have no prior involvement** in the interventions under evaluation, while IOM, UNESCO, and UNFPA encourage the selection of staff as DE managers that are independent from the evaluand where possible.

Most agencies establish advisory panels or **Evaluation Reference Groups (ERG)** that include both internal and external stakeholders to oversee the evaluation processes. This practice is aimed to add a balanced perspective by integrating diverse viewpoints. For instance, UNHCR's ERG may include project partners such as networks of displaced persons. To integrate stakeholder perspectives and ensure a participatory approach, entities such as ILO and UNICEF also conduct **periodic meetings with stakeholders** to discuss the DE process and findings. Finally, entities like UNDP, UNHCR, and UNFPA utilize **audit trails** to record sources of information and collect stakeholder feedback on draft reports.

To enhance transparency, DE **reports** by ILO, IOM, UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF, UN Women, WFP, and WHO are **published** on their **websites**. However, publication practices vary among other agencies. For example, not all WHO reports are public. UNHCR only publishes DE reports that meet a certain quality threshold, while UNFPA makes public only specific types of DE reports, excluding others. Agencies like UNDP, IOM, ILO, and UN Women also make management responses and additional materials, including Terms of Reference (TOR) and evaluation briefs, publicly available. In contrast, UNESCO does not publicly release its DE reports.

## 6. Professional standards and capacity

Across UN entities, various measures are put in place to ensure **capacity and professionalism** in DE, emphasizing the qualifications of evaluation and non-evaluation staff and consultants.

Most UN entities, including FAO, ILO, IOM, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, WFP and WHO, require their **evaluation staff involved in DE**, especially those at regional offices, to have substantial expertise in evaluation methodologies, experience in various evaluation roles including both managing and conducting evaluations, and often advanced knowledge in specific areas like gender responsiveness or human rights. These professionals are typically hired at **mid-to-senior levels (P4 or P5)** and are expected to have diverse field experiences. UNEP and UNESCO, among others, align their qualifications with the UNEG Evaluation Competency Framework to ensure high professional standards.

Those UN entities who delegate DE management to **non-evaluation staff** (e.g. ILO, UNFPA, WFP, UNESCO, and WHO, typically appoint M&E or technical officers not involved with the evaluated project at the organizational level at which the evaluation is being commissioned (Country Office, Regional Bureau, HQ Unit). The capacity and expertise of DE managers can vary significantly. UN entities actively invest in training and **capacity development** for their DE managers. This includes e-learning courses, webinars, and in-person training sessions that cover a broad spectrum of evaluation-related topics. ILO, for example, offers an Evaluation Manager Certification Programme, while WFP and UNDP have developed learning programmes for DE managers and other staff; and UN Women provides regular training sessions. Beyond staff members, UNDP and UNFPA also emphasize **developing national evaluation capacities** to support country-led evaluation systems.

To meet the necessary impartiality requirements, DE are typically conducted by evaluation firms or individual consultants hired by the commissioning unit following established procedures. Most entities, including UNICEF, ILO, UN Women, UNHCR, and WHO, have established **long-term agreements** (LTAs), and some, including UNDP and UNESCO, maintain **rosters** of vetted consultants to streamline the procurement process. UNICEF and UN Women emphasize on **including national and local evaluators** to enhance the contextual relevance of DE.

## 7. Utility, use, and follow-up

### 7.1. Use of evaluation findings

Across UN entities, various provisions are in place to ensure effective internal and external use and utility of DE.

Most entities have developed **structured approaches** to ensure findings are accessible and used. UNICEF, for example, has an Evaluation **Communication Advocacy Strategy** to enhance the visibility and use of evaluative evidence. FAO, UNFPA and ILO have **dedicated knowledge management staff** in their evaluation functions to synthesize learnings and disseminate them across the organization.

Many funds and programmes have developed guidance around how best to make use of DE for evaluation managers to consider at the start of an evaluation, including when best to **plan DE for maximum influence** on programming cycles. In some cases, this takes the form of **strategic timing**. Evaluation activities of UNDP and UNFPA are aligned with strategic planning cycles, ensuring that evaluation findings are timely and directly inform programme design.

Most entities, including UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR, UN Women, WHO produce various **communication products like policy briefs, infographics, and webinars** to make evaluation findings more user-friendly and actionable. Similarly, WFP's approach includes the creation of thematic summaries as well as **end-of-evaluation debriefings** to ensure evaluations inform program design and stakeholder decision-making.

All these provisions are designed to maximize the utility of evaluations by ensuring that they are not only conducted effectively but also that their findings inform design and are integrated into decision-making processes, enhancing learning. To this end, ILO and UNFPA emphasize **participatory processes** and the co-creation of recommendations.

Most entities, including ILO, IOM, UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO, UNHCR, and WFP also work on **synthesizing evaluation findings** to aggregate insights across programmes and projects. This approach helps in crafting overarching strategies and ensuring that individual evaluations contribute to broader organizational learning and strategic planning. A new focus of work in this area is the **use of artificial intelligence** to enable access to high-level trends from sometimes extensive collections of completed DE. UNDP has developed an Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics (AIDA) tool to synthesize insights from evaluation reports, housed in its online knowledge repository. At UNICEF, AI solutions are integrated into the existing Evidence Information Systems Integration (EISI).

### 7.2. Management response

The follow-up and management response to DE across the various UN entities generally follow a structured approach that emphasizes accountability and the use of DE for decision-making. Most entities require



completed independent evaluations – at both centralized and decentralized levels - to be accompanied by **management responses**. Management responses typically outline whether recommendations are accepted and details the planned actions for implementation.

**Responsibility** for issuing the response, and then for tracking the commitments made, rests either with the Evaluation Office, with the entity commissioning the evaluation, or with global strategy divisions. A number of entities, including ILO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, and UN Women also have systems to systematically **track the implementation** of evaluation recommendations, sometimes at the request of their governing bodies. **Guidance** on how to complete management responses is often a central feature of the support provided by evaluation offices to those undertaking DE (e.g. IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women).

In most entities, management responses when completed are made public, but entities differ on the extent to which tracking of commitments made is done publicly. ILO, IOM, UN Women, and WHO for instance, mandates the **publication of management responses** in their evaluation repositories, while UNDP and WFP among others require that the status of management response implementation be **reported regularly**, through specific corporate systems or in annual reports.

Engaging stakeholders throughout the evaluation process, particularly during the drafting of management responses and as early as during the DE's final stages (e.g. WFP), is often emphasized to ensure that DE are not only seen as tools for accountability but also as mechanisms for learning and improvement.