
Evaluation: annual report

1. In 2018, the Executive Board approved WHO's amended evaluation policy at its 143rd session.¹ The policy requires the Secretariat to report annually to the Executive Board on progress in implementing evaluation activities. This annual report presents progress in implementing the policy and the Organization-wide evaluation workplan for 2022–2023² and outlines evaluations that are prioritized in 2024 from the workplan for 2024–2025.³ The details of the implementation status of the Organization-wide evaluation workplans, as well as key findings from evaluations completed in 2023, are presented in a separate document made available online.

2. The Executive Board at its 153rd session in May 2023 considered the annual report on evaluation.⁴ It also considered the report of its Programme, Budget and Administration Committee,⁵ which recommended, among other things, that the Evaluation Office should conduct a comparative study⁶ of evaluation functions and coverage across entities of the United Nations system that are comparable to WHO in size or structure with recommendations to strengthen the independence, credibility and use of the evaluation function. In its deliberations,⁷ the Executive Board concurred with the recommendation of the Committee. The present report summarizes the findings and recommendations of the comparative study, and proposes a way forward for the Board's consideration.

PROGRESS MADE BY THE SECRETARIAT IN IMPLEMENTING THE EVALUATION POLICY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

3. During the biennium 2022–2023, WHO's evaluations supported the Organization in achieving its strategic goals and its health sector contribution to attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Emphasizing accountability of results, the evaluations assessed the strategic relevance and effectiveness of WHO's programmes and activities and provided lessons learned and recommendations for further improvements.

4. As noted by the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board at its thirty-eighth meeting, evaluation is a cornerstone of results-based management.⁸ In the biennium 2022–2023, WHO was encouraged to use evaluations to guide its programmes and activities. In 2022,

¹ Decision EB143(9) (2018).

² Document EB150/35.

³ Document EB154/31, Annex, approved by the Executive Board at its 154th session in decision EB154(2) (2024).

⁴ Document EB153/6.

⁵ Document EB153/2, paragraph 32.

⁶ The full report is available at <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/comparative-study-of-who-evaluation-function-with-selected-un-entities-report> (accessed 18 April 2024).

⁷ See document EB153/2023/REC/1, summary record of the second meeting, section 1.

⁸ Document EB154/4.

to strengthen the regional evaluation functions, the Evaluation Office re-launched the Global Network on Evaluation, a network connecting staff engaged in evaluation across the Organization. To operationalize WHO's evaluation policy across the three levels of the Organization, a framework was developed to guide: (1) Organization-wide thematic evaluations; (2) evaluations of WHO's contribution at country level; and (3) decentralized evaluations (that is, typically commissioned, funded and managed by organizational entities that are responsible for the programme/initiative).

5. During 2023, tools were developed to foster coherence and joint ownership across the three levels of the Organization and support **decentralized evaluations** in particular. These included: (1) a practical guide that offers step-by-step operational guidance for the entire evaluation process; (2) a guidance note on integrating health equity, gender equality, health equity, disability inclusion and human rights in evaluations; (3) an expanded roster of prequalified evaluation experts; (4) long-term agreements with prequalified external evaluation companies; (5) a roster of preapproved quality-assurance advisers; and (6) quality-assurance checklists. In 2023, the Evaluation Office supported seven departments and offices commissioning and managing decentralized evaluations. The Evaluation Office will continue to provide support, while seeking a more systematic approach to strengthening the evaluation function at the decentralized level.

6. In 2023, WHO made progress **evaluating its contribution at the country level**, with a new methodology. Commissioned jointly with the regional offices, these evaluations aim to review WHO's contributions in countries in a holistic manner, taking into consideration national priorities and needs, as well as partners' contributions, with the goal of promoting the national public health agenda and the well-being of the population. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region such evaluations were conducted in Djibouti, Iraq and Tunisia. These evaluations were showcased to other regional offices and the workplan for 2024–2025 now includes such evaluations for countries in three other regions. Furthermore, the Evaluation Office is assessing the demand for supporting country-led sector-wide evaluations, as promoted by the United Nations General Assembly in resolution 77/283 (2023) and focused on Sustainable Development Goal 3 on Good Health and Well-being.

7. The approved **Organization-wide evaluation workplan for 2024–2025**¹ includes eight Organization-wide thematic evaluations and 20 programmatic and decentralized evaluations to assess WHO's contribution to health outcomes. For the first time, the workplan estimates the cost of these evaluations as a basis for improved resource planning, yet funding sources are neither systematically identified nor secured. In addition to gradually strengthening capacity across regions, this approach aims to increase overall coverage of the Organization's thematic areas of work across the three levels and achieve a balance between themes and regions. In future, development of coverage norms will be crucial to facilitate the selection of evaluations, increase coherence and strengthen evaluations of WHO's work in health emergencies and WHO's contribution at country level. Another area of focus for 2024–2025 is to continue building an Organization-wide repository of evaluation reports to bolster learning across the Secretariat.

8. To **increase the use of evaluations**, the Evaluation Office has taken steps to enhance stakeholder engagement and the dissemination and communication of evaluation findings and key messages. In 2023, engagement was enhanced throughout the evaluation process to foster stakeholders' ownership and use of evaluation. Evaluation results were disseminated to both internal and external audiences through presentations and briefings. To improve communications, a newsletter and webpages were upgraded, and the use of short videos to summarize evaluation findings and convey key messages is foreseen.

¹ Decision EB154(2) (2024).

9. **Capacity strengthening in evaluation management and use** helps to develop the culture of evaluation and anchor the function in the results-based management cycle. To date, the Evaluation Office has held six learning sessions¹ for evaluation managers and focal points through the Global Network on Evaluation. In 2023, the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean conducted a four-week long online course in partnership with the United Nations System Staff College for 23 of its regional and country office staff members. Based on this experience, the Evaluation Office is considering creating an e-learning course open to all staff members, together with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and the United Nations Evaluation Group.

10. Throughout 2023, the Evaluation Office promoted the funding of evaluations from the evaluated programme/initiative source funds; nevertheless, this is not yet a standard practice at WHO, despite being so in other United Nations entities. In the future it will be crucial to define how to fund evaluation through voluntary contributions. Establishing an adequate mechanism will allow WHO to diversify its funding sources for evaluations, moving beyond reliance on assessed contributions.

11. As compared to other comparable United Nations entities, the Secretariat's staff capacity to plan and manage evaluations both at headquarters and in the regions remains limited. Thus, in the Evaluation Office, staff capacity was complemented by consultants. At the regional level, two offices have fully dedicated evaluation experts, two have evaluation focal points with additional responsibilities and two are currently recruiting dedicated evaluation officers. The Evaluation Office is advocating and providing support to reach, over time, an adequate resourcing level that will enable WHO to ensure an evaluation coverage level that is comparable to other United Nations entities and allows the Organization to adequately measure results.

12. Following the deliberations of the Executive Board at its 153rd session, the Evaluation Office commissioned the comparative study of evaluation functions and practices across entities of the United Nations system that are comparable to WHO in size or structure. The study recommended strengthening the independence, credibility and use of the evaluation function. The findings and recommendations of the study are summarized below (paragraphs 13–16).

13. The study provided insights on how to strengthen WHO's evaluation function. It noted progress in delivering relevant and high-quality evaluations, the provision of detailed guidance in key areas, the relaunch of the Global Network on Evaluation, planning of evaluations together with regional offices and the establishment of long-term agreements with service providers. Resourcing and decentralization of evaluations need attention.

14. The study concluded that, over the past 10 years, while other United Nations entities have made substantial investments in the evaluation function to strengthen their systems and practices, WHO has lagged behind the comparable organizations. A stronger evaluation function will help WHO attain the goals of the draft Fourteenth General Programme of Work, 2025–2028 at global, regional and country levels.

¹ Topics included: evaluating policy impact; outcome harvesting; online workshops facilitation; integration of health equity, gender equality, disability inclusion and human rights considerations; developmental evaluations; and humanitarian action evaluation.

15. Furthermore, it identified priorities to further strengthen the evaluation function, including action to:

- (a) update **WHO's evaluation policy** and develop an implementation road map (recommendations R1 and R3 of the study);
- (b) develop explicit **coverage norms** in key areas of WHO's work, and track progress annually (R2) and further develop institutional and inclusive work planning (R4);
- (c) set out an **explicit budget line for evaluation** to ensure delivery of the costed Organization-wide evaluation workplan and underpin the function's structural independence (R5), including commitment to a target level of resourcing as a percentage of WHO's expenditure (suggested 1.0%) (R10) and draw down resources for humanitarian and emergency responses (R9);
- (d) strengthen **evaluation oversight and visibility** through informal sessions with Member States to present evaluation reports and management responses and possibly an internal evaluation committee at senior management level (R6);
- (e) build a common strategic approach for evaluation across the three levels of the Organization with a quality-assurance system (R8), monitoring **coverage and quality of decentralized** evaluations, with plans to build evaluation capacity and dedicated resources (at the P4 level) in the regions (R7, R11 and R12);
- (f) strengthen awareness of evaluation through a major **communications and training initiative**, led by the Evaluation Office and championed by senior managers, and communicate a clear vision for evaluation (R13); and
- (g) build demand, support and buy-in for evaluations and maximize their use through better **dissemination** and strengthen systems and incentives for **follow-up** of their recommendations (R14 and R15).

16. While recognizing constraints to WHO's undertaking impact evaluations (for instance, WHO often works through the governments and other partners, and hence the impact is not precisely attributable), the study identified an appetite for considering in more detail how the Secretariat might still do more through its technical departments, with a clear focus on results and accountability to beneficiaries.

17. While prioritizing the delivery of the 2024–2025 workplan, the Evaluation Office will continue to engage with Member States, building on guidance of the Executive Board¹ with a view to: (1) finding ways to secure sufficient resources, including human resources, at headquarters and in the regions; (2) increasing the number of evaluations of contributions in individual countries to their national public health agenda and the well-being of their population; (3) providing information briefings on the results of evaluations and management responses to them; (4) continuing to reinforce the culture of evaluation in the Organization; and (5) exploring the development of a training programme on evaluation with the WHO Academy.

¹ Document EB154/4, paragraphs 58 and 59.

18. In view of the comparative study's recommendations, the Evaluation Office proposes that the Executive Board considers an update to the WHO Evaluation Policy. The Evaluation Office further proposes to prioritize the following objectives for the updating of WHO's evaluation policy:

- (a) define coverage norms for evaluation across WHO;
- (b) determine how to fund evaluations with a dedicated budget line to meet the cost of evaluations and of resources for the management of evaluations;
- (c) promote decentralized evaluations by strengthening their support structure, with clear roles and responsibilities for programme managers, and deepened engagement with evaluation functions at the regional level and with evaluation focal points across WHO;
- (d) improve the usefulness of evaluations, by means including information sessions with Member States on the results of evaluations and their management responses; and
- (e) strengthen ownership and oversight of evaluations by setting up an internal evaluation committee at senior management level to advise on the evaluation activities and to review the recommendations and management responses prepared by departments for major Organization-wide evaluations.

ORGANIZATION-WIDE EVALUATION WORKPLAN AND OTHER ONGOING WORK

19. From the workplans for the bienniums 2022–2023 and 2024–2025, 15 thematic, programmatic, corporate, emergency/humanitarian and country-level evaluations were completed, including joint and decentralized evaluations, while 18 such evaluations were under way and 14 were planned. The breakdown and the status of these evaluations can be consulted online.¹

20. As requested by Member States, a summary and synthesis of evaluations completed in the past year has been prepared and can be consulted online.¹ This section outlines how evaluation evidence has been used to inform decision-making across the three levels of the Organization.

Collaboration with other entities to enable an effective evaluation function

21. To contribute to accountability and strategic learning across the United Nations system, the Evaluation Office chairs the Working Group revising the process guidelines for Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations and continues to be part of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group; and participates in the working groups of the United Nations Evaluation Group, including on national evaluation capacity development. WHO also collaborates with the UNAIDS Evaluation Office and participates in meetings of UNAIDS cosponsor agencies on evaluation.

¹ See WHO's Member States Portal (<https://www.who.int/about/accountability/governance/member-states-portal>, accessed 24 April 2024).

22. In addition, WHO contributed to international professional conferences and meetings such as the Asian Evaluation Week, the Global Evaluation Forum of EvalPartners, and the Banbury Center Meeting on Strengthening the Role of Evaluation in the Sustainable Development Agenda for Health.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

23. The Board is invited to note this report. It is also invited to consider the recommendation made in the comparative study to revise the evaluation policy, and consider the following draft decision:

The Executive Board, having considered the annual report on evaluation for 2024,¹

Decided to initiate a revision of the evaluation policy, and to request that the draft revised evaluation policy, following review by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee, be submitted for consideration by the Executive Board at its 157th session in 2025.

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¹ Document EB155/4.