



Peer Review of the Evaluation Function of UNESCO

This is the second UNEG Peer Review of the Evaluation Function of UNESCO, with the first conducted in 2019.

The Peer Review was undertaken between June and November 2025 and was led by a Panel of three senior staff of UNEG entity evaluation functions, a member of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Network (EvalNet) and a senior international consultant.

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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
ACRONYMS	8
INTRODUCTION	9
BACKGROUND TO THE UNESCO PEER REVIEW	9
PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE PEER REVIEW	11
METHODOLOGY	12
PART I: MAIN RESULTS OF THE PEER REVIEW	13
1. Overall appreciation of the UNESCO evaluation function	13
2. Key areas for UNESCO’s attention	13
A. Evaluation Planning	13
B. Diversity of types of evaluation for corporate evaluations.....	14
C. Usefulness of recommendations	15
D. Decentralised evaluations	16
E. Regional Evaluation Associates	17
F. Evaluation culture, monitoring culture and learning culture	17
3. Core standards for evaluation	18
A. Independence	18
B. Credibility	18
C. Utility	19
4. Key Recommendations.....	20
PART II: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF CORE ASSESSMENT AREAS AND QUESTIONS ACCORDING TO PEER REVIEW TOR	23
A. UNESCO evaluation function (including evaluation policy and strategy)	23
a. Policy adequacy	23
b. Norms and standards in Policy.....	23
c. Needs for Policy updates	23
d. Strategy adequacy.....	24
B. Governance arrangements	24
a. Independence and impartiality	25
b. Evaluation Office position	25
c. Roles and responsibilities	26
d. Relationship with audit	26

C. Evaluation Planning	27
a. Risk considerations.....	27
b. Work plan development process	27
c. Nature of selected topics.....	28
d. Coverage	28
D. Management of the UNESCO Evaluation Function (corporate and decentralised)	29
a. Performance	29
b. External versus in-house evaluations.....	29
c. Timeliness of delivery	30
d. Monitor resource allocation.....	30
e. Evaluation teams	30
f. Synthesising evidence	31
g. Responsiveness to change.....	32
E. Evaluation Resources	32
a. Project level.....	32
b. Budget and staff	33
c. Alignment with needs.....	33
d. Budgeting process	34
F. Evaluation Quality	35
a. Quality and credibility	35
b. Quality assurance mechanism.....	35
c. Social standards	36
d. Annual quality assessment.....	36
G. Evaluation follow-up and use	36
a. Use of evaluation results	36
b. Credibility and usefulness	37
c. Management response.....	38
d. Implementation of evaluation recommendations	38
e. Use by governing bodies	39
f. Communication	39
H. Decentralised evaluation system	40
a. Roles and responsibilities	40
b. Evaluation Office support.....	40
c. UNEG Norms and Standards.....	41
d. Value added of Regional Evaluation Associates	41
e. Financing of Regional Evaluation Associates	42
ANNEXES	43
Annex 1: Panel’s quality assessment of evaluation reports	43
Annex 2: List of persons interviewed	51

Annex 3: List of documents reviewed 55

Annex 4: Theory of Change for Evaluation at UNESCO 57

Annex 5: KPI and performance indicators of the UNESCO evaluation function 58

Annex 6: Capacity-building tools for the decentralised function 59

Executive Summary

This report presents the result of the peer review of the UNESCO evaluation function in 2025. The peer review adheres to the UNEG assessment modality 3: ‘Standard’ UNEG Peer Review’.

Part I of this report highlights the main results of the Peer Review, i.e., key achievements and key areas for UNESCO’s attention. Part II of this report provides the Panel’s systematic assessment of the areas and questions set out in the ToR for this Peer Review.

Core standards for evaluation

Independence

The Panel concludes that the central evaluation function's institutional independence is strong. The behavioural independence is largely protected, although there are occasional pushbacks from Sectors on evaluation recommendations and on the budget contribution. IOS-EV has, in principle, solid financial independence. In 2025, a budget cut was made due to unexpected circumstances.

The independence at the decentralised evaluation level is a challenge, including, at times, the non-existent budget lines for evaluations. UNESCO may consider strengthening the independence of the decentralised evaluations by, for instance, giving the IOS-EV (including the Regional Evaluation Associates) a stronger role in the selection and conduct of decentralised evaluations, and by insisting on the principle to evaluate voluntary contribution projects with budgets over USD 1.5 million, with an allocation of 3%.

Credibility

Most corporate evaluations have high credibility. The IOS-EV is adequately staffed with a highly professional team of experienced evaluators. Before the 2025 budget cuts, the IOS-EV was also adequately funded to conduct credible evaluations in collaboration with external experts, if necessary. The models and methodologies used for conducting and managing corporate and decentralised evaluations are appropriate and comparable to those of other UN agencies. Most importantly, the quality of corporate evaluations is overall good, also because of the steadily improving evaluation quality assurance mechanism. Some stakeholders suggest that external experts and evaluators sometimes lack a sufficient understanding of UNESCO's functioning. Some evaluations address too many questions, leaving the evaluation team with insufficient time to assess each question with the necessary rigour. A targeted (i.e., narrower) and needs-driven scope enhances the potential for credible in-depth analysis.

Utility

Of the three evaluation standards, utility is the one with the most room for improvement, although the Panel noted significant appreciation from internal clients for the evaluation function. However, while the implementation of corporate evaluation recommendations is systematically tracked, the extent to which evaluations (corporate and decentralised) actually influence the course of UNESCO programmes is not well documented and therefore largely unknown.

For decentralized evaluations, there is evidence that recommendations inform the next planning cycle, and several donors indeed make their further funding decisions dependent on previous evaluation results, which provides a strong incentive to build on evaluation recommendations. There is, however, a gap in cross-fertilisation. There is little evidence that findings, conclusions, and recommendations from a given evaluation are used in other projects or programmes where they would be relevant.

All actors agree that stakeholder engagement throughout the evaluation process is essential to ensure an evaluation function that is useful and can have an impact on the Organization. The evaluation reference groups are critical in this regard. While reference groups are a standard practice at UNESCO, the engagement between the IOS-EV and its internal clients can be further enhanced.

Key areas for UNESCO's attention

- Some dissatisfaction about the selection of **evaluation topics** for the corporate work plan.
- Different stakeholders have varying demands for different **types of evaluation**.
- Mixed views on the **usefulness of recommendations** made in corporate evaluations. Some stakeholders are satisfied with the recommendations and note that many of them have contributed to improving the Organization. Other stakeholders are less satisfied with the recommendations.
- The **decentralised evaluation function** does not yet fully meet the UNEG Norms and Standards in terms of independence, planning, accountability, and follow-up. Given the high added value of the Regional Evaluation Associates, they should be institutionalised.
- UNESCO's **evaluation culture** appears to be less developed compared to some of the other UN agencies. Results-based management (RBM), including monitoring, seems not to be given sufficient priority.

Key recommendations

The Panel makes several recommendations to strengthen the evaluation function. Key recommendations are:

- UNESCO senior management should strengthen the **learning culture**, which incorporates evaluations as a vital learning mechanism.
- The IOS-EV should adhere to the planning process as outlined in the Evaluation Policy. The IOS-EV must apply the most essential parameter: "Is the subject of the evaluation an issue of **strategic significance** that contributes to UNESCO's mandate, strategic plan, global priorities or cross-cutting themes?"
- The IOS-EV should spend sufficient time with stakeholders during the drafting of the evaluation ToRs to define the **scope of evaluations**.
- The IOS-EV could further **diversify the types of evaluations** to better respond to client needs.
- The IOS-EV should strengthen the **co-creation of recommendations**, while safeguarding the independence of IOS-EV (i.e., IOS-EV has the final say).

- While keeping in principle the USD 1.5m as the threshold for evaluations for voluntary contribution projects with the mandatory allocation of 3%, the Evaluation Policy could build in, on an exceptional basis, **some flexibility** to ensure relevance and appropriateness of evaluations.
- Given the high added value of the **Regional Evaluation Associates**, their role should be institutionalised by the UNESCO Director-General.
- The IOS-EV should better **document the use and impact of the evaluation function** in UNESCO.
- The UNESCO **Evaluation Policy** may benefit from a few changes (see chapter 4 for details).

Acronyms

EFP	Evaluation Focal Point
IOS	Division of Internal Oversight Services
IOS-EV	IOS Evaluation Office
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee
RBM	Results-based management
REA	Regional Evaluation Associate
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group

Introduction

1. In 2004, the OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation (EvalNet) and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) established a joint task force to pilot and support the development of a Peer Review mechanism for UN evaluation functions. The goal was to encourage evaluation entities within the United Nations system to adopt professional practices and learn from their peers' experiences.
2. The UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN Organisations (2011) describes a Peer Review as a “*systematic examination and assessment of the performance of an organisation by peers with the ultimate goal of helping the organisation improve its policy making, adopt best practices and comply with established standards and principles.*” Guidelines for conducting peer reviews were developed in 2014 and updated in 2023. The present UNESCO Peer Review used the 2023 Guidelines and adhered to Modality 3: ‘Standard’ UNEG Peer Review.¹
3. Peer Reviews seek to answer a central question: Are the UN agency’s evaluation policy, function and products independent, credible and useful for learning and accountability - based on an assessment by professional evaluation peers using available evidence?
4. Evaluating how well the entity aligns with UNEG Norms and Standards is essential in Peer Reviews. The Norms and Standards were first adopted in 2005 to harmonise evaluation practices across the UN system. They were revised in 2016 to align with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. In February 2025, a new Norm (11) and Standard on Environmental and Social Impacts was added, emphasising the interdependence of social, economic, and environmental dimensions for sustainable development.

Background to the UNESCO Peer Review

5. The Evaluation Office of UNESCO was established in 2001. Since then, various assessments, reviews, and studies have informed its development, including the recent MOPAN Assessment (2025). The Peer Review comes at a key transitional moment in UNESCO. In November 2025, the General Conference announced the results of the election for a new Director-General of UNESCO. This is coupled with budget constraints and the importance of value for money.
6. The first Peer Review² of the UNESCO evaluation function was conducted in 2019. It highlighted progress in adherence to UNEG norms and standards, concluding that corporate evaluation products are

¹“Modality 3” Standard Peer Review is the most comprehensive of the three modalities and is better suited to medium and large UN evaluation functions. The 2014 JIU report Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System categorized UNESCO as a mid-sized agency.

²The Peer Review was preceded by a thorough self-assessment. Self-Assessment Report, UNEG Peer Review of the UNESCO Evaluation Function, September 2019, IOS/EVS/PI/183.

useful for both learning and accountability purposes. It also noted that while the corporate evaluation function was mature, the decentralised evaluation function still required development, including improvements in the quality of decentralised reports. The Peer Review informed the drafting of UNESCO's third Evaluation Policy for 2022-2029,³ adopted by Member States at the 214th session of the Executive Board.

7. The Peer Review made seven key recommendations on pooling budget allocations for strategic evaluations, implementing policies to draw funds from extrabudgetary sources, ensuring independence in staff appointments, safeguarding the profile and status of the Evaluation Office, increasing its visibility within UNESCO, strengthening the decentralized evaluation system⁴, and updating the Evaluation Policy to reflect current norms, standards, and organizational changes.

8. The recommendations from the 2019 Peer Review have helped drive progress for evaluation at UNESCO. Some of the significant changes that have occurred since the last Peer Review include:

- Financial independence. Since the 2022-2023 biennium, the budget for evaluation coming from Programme Sectors has been transferred to Internal Oversight Services (IOS), ensuring discretionary control of the budget⁵.
- More adequate investment in evaluation. The 2017-2021 evaluation policy already set an overall target of 3% of programme expenditure (regular and voluntary) as the recommended minimum level of investment in evaluation. In 2016, this amount reached only 1.2% of regular programme resources and 0.6% of voluntary resources. In 2024-2025, this reached around 2.25% of regular programmes and 1.3% of programmes and projects with voluntary resources.
- Results framework for the Evaluation function. The Evaluation Policy has an accompanying Evaluation Strategy 2022-2029, which includes four key areas of work: 1) systematic generation of evaluation evidence, 2) evaluation capacity development, 3) quality and credibility of evaluations, and 4) use of evaluations. It introduces key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure progress and identify areas for potential improvement in each area of work.
- A more comprehensive support for the decentralised function.⁶ Some of the most noteworthy achievements in the strengthened support to the decentralised function include: the publication of the UNESCO Evaluation Manual (2023) to provide practical guidance to UNESCO staff managing decentralised evaluations; the Evaluation Knowledge Hub as a one-stop location for all

³ UNESCO's first Evaluation Policy covered the 2008-2013 period. The second Evaluation Policy covered the 2014-2021 period.

⁴ Annual reports from the Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC) have also highlighted the need for a more robust decentralised function. E.g., 2023 Annual Report of the Oversight Advisory Committee, 219 EX/20, 16 February 2024.

⁵ In 2025, an unexpected budget reduction was made and IOS couldn't control all the budget as expected.

⁶ The Evaluation policy defines the decentralized function as decentralized evaluations managed by other UNESCO entities such as Programme Sectors, Field Offices and Category 1 Institutes.

evaluation related material,⁷ and more tailored support through the backstopping and follow-up by evaluation officers in IOS to a regional portfolio, and the evaluation capacity development through numerous training and webinars.

- Regional Evaluation Associates (REAs) in five UNESCO duty stations. Starting in November 2024, five evaluators with a one-year UN Volunteers contract began their assignments at five UNESCO Regional Offices. As discussed above, this role had been recommended in various assessments. Their responsibilities include supporting decentralised evaluation processes, strengthening evaluation capacity development, promoting the use of evaluations and knowledge management, and facilitating UNESCO evaluation coordination with other UN agencies and UN Country Teams.⁸ The first year was a pilot phase. A financing strategy will be required to sustain the positions beyond 2025.

Purpose and scope of the Peer Review

9. The current Evaluation Policy foresees a second Peer Review in 2024/2025. It is expected that the Peer Review provides inputs for mid-point adjustments to the Evaluation Policy, insight into the added value of the recently launched network of Regional Evaluation Associates (REAs), and provide feedback on how to improve the performance of the UNESCO evaluation function so that it can further contribute to organisational decision-making, learning and accountability for results and programme effectiveness. The results of this Peer Review will be presented to Member States at the Spring 2026 session of the Executive Board. The review will be made publicly available on the IOS UNESCO website and the UNEG website.

10. The Peer Review has multiple audiences. The recommendations should help guide UNESCO's Director-General, the UNESCO Governing Bodies, the Programme Sectors, the Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC), the Director of the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS), and the Head of Evaluation of the Office of Evaluation (IOS-EV) on ways forward to enhance the overall quality of the evaluation function.

11. For IOS-EV, the rationale for a Peer Review lies in the opportunity to get honest, constructive insight and recommendations from a Panel of professional peers on the current state of the UNESCO evaluation function, both at the centralised and decentralised levels. It also involves receiving recommendations for feasible adjustments and adaptations to drive progress and improvements in evaluation at UNESCO. A stronger, more robust function with evaluations that are independent, credible, and used will ultimately support UNESCO in reaching its objectives as outlined in the Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029 (41 C/4) and in achieving Agenda 2030.

⁷ The Evaluation Knowledge Hub contains evaluation guidelines and tools, a database of UNESCO decentralized evaluation reports, knowledge products, a directory of evaluation focal points, recordings of webinars as well as training materials

⁸ The Terms of Reference are listed in the Reference section.

12. The Peer Review covers the period since the last Peer Review. This includes two years (2020-2022), before the adoption of the current Evaluation Policy, and two and a half years since its adoption (2022 to mid-2025).

Methodology

13. The UNESCO Peer Review Panel was composed of:

- Mr Adan Ruiz Villalba, Director, Office of Independent Evaluation, UNAIDS (Panel Chair)
- Ms Sylta Georgiadis, Head of Evaluation, Strategic Planning, Evaluation and Change Management Service, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Panel Member)
- Ms Kahina Yazidi, Head of Evaluation Unit, Multilateral Affairs, Trade and Development Policies, Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle et numérique (Panel Member, representing the OECD/DAC Evaluation Network (EvalNet))
- Mr Urs Zollinger, Managing Partner, King Zollinger & Co. Advisory Services (Panel Consultant)

14. In the preparatory stage, IOS-EV completed the 'UNEG Self-Assessment Maturity Matrix for UN Evaluation functions.' This matrix has 53 performance criteria organised according to the UNEG norms and standards. The IOS-EV team held two half-day participatory workshops in March 2025 to produce the 2025 UNESCO self-assessment. Given the importance of reviewing in-depth aspects related to the decentralised function, the exercise also piloted a draft assessment framework for decentralised evaluation functions, which includes an additional set of 31 assessment factors, each linked (as in the Maturity Matrix) to a four-tiered maturity level scale. The self-assessment was reviewed by the Peer Review Panel and served as the starting point for the Peer Review.

15. The Panel conducted an extensive document review (Annex 3) and data collected along the eight core assessment areas defined in the ToR with tentative findings and open issues. In addition, the Panel conducted a quality assessment of a sample of three corporate and seven decentralised evaluation reports using a quality assessment matrix based on UNEG Norms and Standards. A specific matrix was prepared for each report. Subsequently, the results were aggregated both quantitatively and qualitatively (Annex 1). The specific matrices for the ten evaluation reports were shared with the IOS-EV (not included in this report).

16. The four-member Panel visited the UNESCO Headquarters from 21 to 25 July 2025. During the visit, the Panel conducted interviews and focus group discussions with the IOS-EV team (including both HQ and regional evaluation staff), former members of evaluation reference groups, other IOS staff, UNESCO Programme Sectors and other key Divisions such as the Bureau of Strategic Management (BSP), the Office of Human Resources Management (HRM) and UNESCO Governing Bodies representatives. The Panel also conducted online interviews and meetings with members of the Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC), select Directors of Regional Offices, select Administrative Officers (AOs), Evaluation Focal Points, and previous and current managers of decentralised evaluations (non-IOE staff), as well as consultants who have worked on corporate and decentralised UNESCO evaluations. The complete list of individuals who were interacted with is available in Annex 2. The result of the interviews and group discussion was an almost 30-page-long interview protocol.

Part I: Main results of the Peer Review

17. Part I of this report highlights the main results of the Peer Review, i.e., key achievements and key areas for UNESCO's attention. Part II of this report provides the Panel's systematic assessment of the areas and questions set out in the ToR for this Peer Review.

1. Overall appreciation of the UNESCO evaluation function

18. Overall, the Panel was impressed by the UNESCO evaluation function. Top features are:

- A strong, independent central evaluation function.
- An overall adequate Evaluation Policy which meets recognised international norms and standards, and well-defined roles and responsibilities.
- An excellent Evaluation Manual providing guidance to evaluation managers throughout UNESCO.
- A clear UNESCO 2022-2029 Evaluation Strategy with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which mostly allow for measuring progress in evaluation results across the Organization.
- A well-established planning process for corporate evaluations.
- A modality used for conducting and managing corporate and decentralised evaluation, which is appropriate and comparable to the model used by other UN agencies.
- A very professional and open-minded IOS evaluation team with a high self-reflecting capacity.
- An adequately financed corporate and decentralised evaluation function (before the 2025 budget cut).
- Well-aligned resources to UNESCO's needs for credible evaluation evidence to guide strategic planning and decision-making at both corporate and decentralised levels.
- Mostly credible and quality corporate and decentralised evaluation reports, resulting from a steadily improving evaluation quality assurance mechanism.
- Systematic management responses for corporate evaluations.
- A well-functioning system for tracking the implementation of recommendations of corporate evaluations.
- A remarkable, multifaceted effort made by the IOS-EV in the past few years to support, guide and oversee the decentralised evaluation system.
- Newly established Regional Evaluation Associates who significantly contribute to strengthening the decentralised evaluation function.
- A useful annual Synthesis report of UNESCO corporate and decentralised evaluations.

2. Key areas for UNESCO's attention

A. Evaluation Planning

19. The planning of evaluation is a critical step in any evaluation function. The selection of evaluation subjects and the timeline are decisive for the usefulness of evaluations. In principle, the current planning process for corporate evaluations pursued by the IOS-EV is well-founded. A gap analysis is conducted,

clients (e.g., Sectors) are consulted, and Member States during the Executive Board and other Governing Bodies submit evaluation requests to IOS, demonstrating an interest in and appreciation for the independent evaluation function. The current planning process reflects a balanced mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches. The “parameters for evaluation planning and design” established in the Evaluation Policy are meaningful (para. 36).

20. However, the Panel found some dissatisfaction about the selection of evaluation topics for the corporate work plan. While some appreciate the selection of evaluation topics, others contest it. This is not surprising. Different stakeholders have different needs. There can be a trade-off between accountability (resource orientation) and learning (thematic orientation), and the evaluation function cannot always meet both dimensions equally. All parties must accept this.

21. Still, the, in principle, sound planning process appears to be too much driven by ad-hoc requests from Sectors. The process could be further strengthened by ensuring that topics chosen for evaluations truly address the strategic issues faced by the organization at a given time. IOS-EV must consistently apply the most critical parameter: *“Is the subject of the evaluation an issue of strategic significance that contributes to UNESCO’s mandate, strategic plan, global priorities or cross-cutting themes.”* (Evaluation Policy). The following examples of possible evaluation subjects may illustrate the Panel’s idea of evaluations of strategic significance to UNESCO: How did UNESCO respond to the previous financial crisis? What is UNESCO’s most important role in a given geographic region in comparison with other agencies? What are the main lessons learned from the field reform?

22. Once the evaluation subject is identified, the scope of the evaluation is defined. Defining the scope of an evaluation provides another opportunity in the planning process to address stakeholders’ needs. The IOS-EV should spend sufficient time with stakeholders to determine the scope of evaluations, i.e., define a manageable number of key evaluation questions (e.g., not every evaluation must assess all OECD/DAC evaluation criteria). A targeted (i.e., narrower) and needs-driven scope enhances the potential for learning and the timeliness of evaluation results. This can improve the credibility and usefulness of evaluations.

B. Diversity of types of evaluation for corporate evaluations

23. The Panel found that different stakeholders have varying demands for different types of evaluations. Some stakeholders request impact evaluations to make their case to donors and partners. Other stakeholders, for instance, in crisis situations, call for real-time evaluations (or developmental evaluations) to receive guidance during ongoing project implementation. Other stakeholders place a high value on joint assessments, either in conjunction with the IOS Internal Audit Office or through joint evaluations with key partners. Yet others would welcome comparative analysis and benchmarking with other actors in the same thematic area. The IOS-EV could further expand the types of evaluations conducted to better respond to client needs.

24. Impact evaluations are a significant type of evaluation. In a time when public resources are under pressure, Official Development Assistance (ODA) must demonstrate its value more than ever. However, impact evaluations are expensive and methodologically demanding. They are particularly challenging for organisations such as UNESCO that support countries through higher-level interventions such as policy

development or institution-building, which, only in the long run, contribute to better lives.⁹ However, some methods allow for evaluating the impact of higher-level interventions.¹⁰ Because these methods are complex and labour-intensive, the Panel is of the view that UNESCO, like other UN agencies¹¹, should explore partnering with universities or other organisations with expertise in the field which can conduct impact evaluations as research projects. UNESCO, which supports international scientific cooperation, is well-positioned to partner with the scientific community on evaluations as well.

C. Usefulness of recommendations

25. The Panel found mixed views on the usefulness of recommendations made in corporate evaluations. Some stakeholders are satisfied with the recommendations and note that many of them have contributed to improving the Organization. Other stakeholders are less satisfied with the recommendations. From their perspectives, the recommendations have limited added value because they are either too generic, too process-oriented, too prescriptive, insufficiently substance-oriented, do not offer anything new, lack strategic and transformational potential, or are not adequately solution-oriented. The time lag between data collection and the submission of recommendations is another factor mentioned, which reduces the recommendations' usefulness. Another reason cited for at times weak recommendations is the use of external consultants with insufficient understanding of UNESCO's institutional mechanisms.

26. The Panel is intrigued by the alleged weakness of the recommendations, because the IOS-EV shares and discusses the recommendations extensively with clients before they are finalised. Stakeholders claim that IOS-EV has a limited readiness to incorporate client feedback into the recommendations. While this cannot be ruled out, the Panel considers that there may also be other reasons for this somewhat puzzling situation. The perceived weakness of recommendations may be partly attributed to unrealistic stakeholder expectations. And it may be less about the quality of the recommendations than about disagreement with recommendations. There is a possible way out. IOS-EV could co-create recommendations jointly and in a time-efficient way with the client during future-proofing workshops, under two conditions: The IOS-EV has the final say to retain independence, and the client retains the right to disagree with final recommendations (in the management response).

27. Another factor for the at times perception of limited usefulness from recommendation owners may originate in the weakness of the conclusions section in evaluation reports, which came from the Panel's quality assessment of evaluation reports. Conclusions often provide only a summary of findings, adding little value. While conclusions build on findings, they should be forward-looking and reflect the evaluator's professional judgment. Firm conclusions are the basis for useful recommendations.

⁹ It is comparatively easier to evaluate the impact of projects that directly affect lives of people through for instance randomized controlled trials (RCTs).

¹⁰ Process-tracing is such an evaluation method. It uses a detailed theory of change to assess how and why an intervention produced specific outcomes or impact, by tracing the causal mechanisms step-by-step.

¹¹ UNICEF has for instance partnered with the Center for Child Well-Being and Development at the University of Zurich, Department of Economics.

28. Finally, if the need for recommendations is time-critical, ways should be explored to shorten the time required to conduct evaluations at the outset. One approach is to narrow the scope of an evaluation or to opt for a rapid review rather than an in-depth evaluation.

29. IOS-EV may also wish to strengthen capacity building, such as training, on the drafting of management responses, as these provide the opportunity for stipulating concrete actions on recommendations, which is what some clients are looking for.

D. Decentralised evaluations

30. The modality used by UNESCO for the decentralised evaluations is comparable to the model used by other UN agencies. The decentralised evaluations are managed by UNESCO programme staff and conducted by external evaluators. Overall, the decentralised evaluations are making steady progress towards meeting the UNEG Norms and Standards. The number (coverage) and quality of decentralised evaluations are on an upward trend. This is the result of a remarkable, multifaceted effort by the IOS-EV over the past few years to support, guide, and oversee the decentralised evaluation system (see Part II, H.b.).

31. However, the decentralised evaluation function does not yet fully meet the UNEG Norms and Standards in terms of independence, planning, accountability, and follow-up. The independence at the decentralised evaluation level is a challenge, as evaluation managers are often also programme/project managers. The risk of undue influence on evaluation results or a perceived conflict of interest cannot be ruled out, which may diminish the credibility of an evaluation, even when external evaluators conduct it.

32. The planning of decentralised evaluations does not adhere to a strategic approach but is rather administrative, driven either by donor needs or the USD 1.5 million threshold. Furthermore, the Organization does not track the implementation of recommendations from decentralised evaluations. The result is a lack of accountability for decentralised evaluations, also stressed by the OAC in 2024.

33. While there are several mechanisms in place to strengthen the independence and impartiality of the decentralized evaluation, such as evaluation reference groups, guidance for selecting evaluation consultants, a strict procurement process, IOS-EV backstopping together with the new Regional Evaluation Associates, UNESCO may consider strengthening the independence and impartiality of the decentralized evaluations by having large or important programme/projects evaluated at the corporate level by IOS-EV (conducted or commissioned).

34. To set aside a fixed % for evaluation purposes is a good practice which is comparable to the practice in other UN agencies, and 3% is a reasonable target. Additionally, establishing a threshold for externally evaluating voluntary contribution projects beyond a specific financial volume is a standard practice, and USD 1.5 million is a reasonable threshold. However, some Field Offices view the threshold as relatively rigid and not always reasonable. Also, for some projects with large budgets, the 3% may generate an evaluation budget that is too large. While maintaining USD 1.5m as the threshold for evaluating voluntary contribution projects with an allocation of 3%, the Evaluation Policy could, on an exceptional basis, incorporate some flexibility to ensure relevance and appropriateness. The responsible entity could approach IOS-EV to explain why an exception might be appropriate and propose ways to address the evaluation requirements in a meaningful way, such as through lighter modalities or pooled evaluations, for example, in cases where several donors evaluate the same programme or complementary aspects of it. In any case, it

should be IOS-EV's prerogative to grant exceptions to the rule to evaluate voluntary contribution projects with budgets over USD 1.5 million, with an allocation of 3%.

35. The Panel notes that there is a weak systematic feedback loop from the decentralised evaluations to the Organization beyond the immediate project management. The repository of all reports on the intranet, while necessary, is not sufficient for knowledge management and is not accessible to Member States. UNESCO is not complying with the UNEG Norm on transparency, which requires that evaluation products be publicly accessible. The only systematic feedback tool available is the annual Synthesis Report. This valuable knowledge product aggregates findings from decentralised evaluations and brings them to the attention of the entire Organization and its Member States. However, the findings in the Synthesis Report are rather generic and cross-cutting, lacking thematic depth.

36. Finally, with shrinking resources for corporate evaluations, the decentralised evaluations will gain importance for the Organization as a whole.

E. Regional Evaluation Associates

37. The five Regional Evaluation Associates are a significant step in strengthening the decentralised evaluation function. The REAs contribute to improving the entire evaluation process, from supporting the development of evaluation plans and reviewing ToRs to selecting evaluators, reviewing report drafts, and following up on recommendations. The REAs strengthen the culture of accountability and learning. Moreover, while project managers commission decentralised evaluations, the REAs add a degree of independent oversight to the evaluation process. In addition, the REAs are IOS-EV's field-level antennas and provide a much clearer overview of the decentralised evaluations taking place within UNESCO. With the establishment of REAs, UNESCO is catching up with other UN agencies, which also have evaluation officers at national or regional levels.

38. As the REAs are new, their responsibility and the division of labour between REAs and the Evaluation Focal Points are not yet reflected in the evaluation policy.

39. The REAs started at their posts in early 2025. REAs are young UN Volunteers (below the age of 36). Working with the "UNEG-UNV programme for young and emerging evaluators" was a creative way to generate additional posts, which would otherwise have been very difficult in the current context. However, the status of UNVs with one-year contracts is unsatisfactory. This temporary set-up is not conducive to building relationships and trust. Given the high added value of the REAs, the Panel is very clear that they should be institutionalised. The Panel notes with great concern that the financing of the REAs is currently not secured. This requires immediate attention by the Organization.

F. Evaluation culture, monitoring culture and learning culture

40. The Panel found that UNESCO's evaluation culture appears to be less developed compared to some of the other UN agencies. Results-based management (RBM), including monitoring, seems not to be given sufficient priority. Although an RBM policy exists, the implementation is patchy. While the evaluation function is referenced in the RBM manual, and the RBM system provides some elements to support evaluation (e.g., logical frameworks), evaluation is not fully integrated into the system. The organisational culture of results, accountability, and learning is only partially reflected in the Organization's practices.

The availability of monitoring data, necessary for evaluation, appears to be a challenge. Moreover, the regular openness to evaluation is not always a given, which can constrain knowledge management and learning. The Panel's first message to the new Director-General is therefore to strengthen UNESCO's learning culture, which embraces evaluations as an essential learning mechanism.

3. Core standards for evaluation

A. Independence

41. Overall, the Panel concludes that the institutional independence of the central evaluation function is strong. The central evaluation function is well placed in the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS). IOS has a good reputation across the Organization, which the evaluation function can benefit from. Being part of the IOS gives the IOS-EV direct access to the Director-General, senior management, and the UNESCO Executive Board.

42. The behavioural independence is also assessed favourably by the Panel. While the evaluation work plan is developed in consultation with Member States and Sectors, the IOS Director has the final say on the biennial corporate evaluation plan. The IOS Director and the Head of Evaluation have discretion on the development and issuance of corporate evaluation reports. The IOS-EV has, in principle, a solid financial independence of 3% of the operational budget of Sectors as stated in the Evaluation Policy. The 3% is a target. During the last biennium, the figure was at 2.25%, which is reasonable. In 2025, a budget cut was made due to unexpected circumstances. The behavioural independence is largely protected, although there are occasional pushbacks from Sectors on evaluation recommendations and on the budget contribution. However, the Panel is of the view that occasional diverging views are inherent to the nature of the evaluation function, and the IOS-EV can insist on its independent oversight function as established in the Evaluation Policy.

43. The independence at the level of decentralised evaluation is a challenge, as outlined above, including at times the non-existent budget lines for evaluations. UNESCO may consider strengthening the independence of the decentralised evaluations by, for instance, giving the IOS-EV (including the REAs) a stronger role in the selection and conduct of decentralised evaluations, and by insisting on the principle to evaluate voluntary contribution projects with budgets over USD 1.5 million, with an allocation of 3%.

B. Credibility

44. Most corporate evaluations have high credibility. The location of the IOS-EV in the Division of Internal Oversight strengthens its standing in the Organization, and the impartiality of the central evaluation function is strong. The IOS-EV is adequately staffed with a highly professional team of experienced evaluators. Before the 2025 budget cuts, the IOS-EV was also adequately funded to conduct credible evaluations in collaboration with external experts, if necessary. The models and methodologies used for conducting and managing corporate and decentralised evaluations are appropriate and comparable to those of other UN agencies. Most importantly, the quality of corporate evaluations is overall good, also because of the steadily improving evaluation quality assurance mechanism. UNESCO's governing bodies request that the IOS-EV conduct specific evaluations, a strong testament to the evaluation function's credibility.

45. The use of external subject matter experts and/or external evaluators can enhance the credibility (and independence) of evaluations. The IOS-EV selection process for external consultants meets international standards and is based on terms of reference (shared with evaluation reference groups) and a competitive bidding and selection process. However, the selected experts or evaluators do not consistently meet the expectations of in-house stakeholders. Some stakeholders suggest that experts and evaluators sometimes lack a sufficient understanding of UNESCO's functioning. And at times, it can be difficult for UNESCO to engage top experts because UNESCO can't pay top fees, a challenge faced by other UN agencies.

46. The credibility of an evaluation can also be undermined by the scope of the evaluation. Too often, evaluations address too many questions, leaving the evaluation team with insufficient time to assess each question with the necessary rigour. A targeted (i.e., narrower) and needs-driven scope enhances the potential for credible in-depth analysis.

C. Utility

47. Of the three standards for evaluation, utility is the standard with the most room for improvement, although the Panel noted much appreciation from internal clients for the evaluation function. Many in-house stakeholders greatly appreciate the corporate evaluations and believe they have contributed to UNESCO's improvement. Also, Member States appear quite satisfied, partly because they request specific evaluations.

48. However, while the implementation of recommendations of corporate evaluations is systematically tracked, the extent to which evaluations (corporate and decentralised) actually influence the course of UNESCO programmes is not well documented and therefore largely unknown. Neither the IOS annual reports nor the Synthesis reports capture the impact of evaluations on the Organisation (i.e., the results of implementing recommendations).

49. The use of evaluations depends to some degree on the nature of the evaluation, e.g., corporate, decentralized, in the context of ongoing projects, etc. For decentralized evaluations, there is evidence that recommendations inform the next planning cycle, and several donors indeed make further funding decisions dependent on previous evaluation results, which provides a strong incentive to build on evaluation recommendations. There is, however, a gap in cross-fertilisation. There is little evidence that findings, conclusions, and recommendations from a given evaluation are used in other projects or programmes where they would be relevant. This goes back to the previous point about the Organization's learning culture. For corporate evaluations, when implementing recommendations is challenging, these are mostly cases where the owners of a given recommendation were either unclear or spread across too many actors (e.g., this seems to have been the case for the COVID evaluation).

50. All actors agree that stakeholder engagement during the whole evaluation process is essential to have an evaluation function that is useful and can have an impact on the Organization. The evaluation reference groups are critical in this regard. While reference groups are a standard practice at UNESCO, it appears that the engagement between the IOS-EV and its internal clients can be further enhanced. Also, there is a demand for different types of evaluations (see above). Reflection on the type of evaluation that can enhance the utility of the evaluation function.

51. The utility of the evaluation function also depends on the communication about evaluation results. Overall, the Panel got the impression that stakeholders (Member States, Sectors, and field offices) are generally satisfied with the way the IOS-EV communicates evaluation results, although targeted communication with key actors is likely more important than wide dissemination. The feedback loop from decentralised evaluation can undoubtedly be improved. The REAs' job description includes strengthening the use of decentralised evaluations. However, given that the positions are new, progress on this has been uneven.

4. Key Recommendations

1. Evaluation culture, monitoring culture and learning culture

- a. UNESCO senior management should strengthen its learning culture, which incorporates evaluations as a vital learning mechanism. Transforming the learning culture and recognising failure as a valuable part of learning and innovation are key leadership responsibilities.
- b. In addition, UNESCO senior management should strengthen the implementation of UNESCO's monitoring system¹² to provide the evaluation function with the necessary data.

2. Evaluation planning for corporate evaluations

- a. The IOS-EV should adhere to the planning process as outlined in the Evaluation Policy. The IOS-EV must – after the stakeholder consultation phase - apply the most essential parameter: “Is the subject of the evaluation an issue of strategic significance that contributes to UNESCO’s mandate, strategic plan, global priorities or cross-cutting themes?” What is needed above all is the judgment of IOS-EV.
- b. Once the subjects are identified, the IOS-EV should spend sufficient time with stakeholders during the drafting of the evaluation ToRs to define the scope of evaluations. It is critical, together with stakeholders, to determine a limited number of key evaluation questions at the outset to ensure evaluations are credible and useful.¹³

3. Types of evaluation for corporate evaluations

The IOS-EV could further diversify the types of evaluations to better respond to client needs. Examples are real-time evaluations in crisis situations, joint evaluations with key partners, or comparative analysis and benchmarking. Impact evaluations are another important type of evaluations. UNESCO should partner with universities or other organisations with experience in the field, which can conduct impact evaluations as research projects.

4. Usefulness of recommendations

¹² “Results-Based Management (RBM) approach as applied at UNESCO - Guiding Principles, Planning, Programming, Budgeting, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting, Bureau of Strategic Planning” Dec. 2024, BSP/DPP/RBM/2024/1

¹³ Too many evaluation questions can lead to superficial analyses undermining credibility and usefulness.

- a. The IOS-EV should strengthen the co-creation of recommendations, while safeguarding the independence of IOS-EV (i.e., IOS-EV has the final say).
- b. Additionally, IOS-EV should give attention to firm conclusions in evaluation reports, as they form the basis for useful recommendations.
- c. If the need for recommendations is time-critical, ways should be explored by IOS-EV to shorten the time required to conduct evaluations at the outset (e.g., rapid review).

5. Decentralised evaluations

- a. The UNESCO Executive Board may consider strengthening the independence and impartiality of the decentralised evaluations. Strengthening the role of the IOS-EV may include a stronger role in (a) the selection of projects to be evaluated and/or (b) in the conduct or commissioning of large or critical programme/project evaluations.
- b. While keeping in principle the USD 1.5m as the threshold for evaluations for voluntary contribution projects with the mandatory allocation of 3%, the Evaluation Policy could build in, on an exceptional basis, some flexibility to ensure relevance and appropriateness of evaluations. The responsible entity could approach IOS-EV to explain why an exception might be appropriate and propose ways to address the evaluation requirements in a meaningful way, including through pooling evaluations¹⁴ or identifying lighter modalities such as outcome harvesting, as applicable. In any case, it should be IOS-EV's prerogative to grant exceptions from the rule to evaluate voluntary contribution projects with budgets over USD 1.5 million.

6. Regional Evaluation Associates

- a. Given the high added value of the REAs, their role should be institutionalised by the UNESCO Director-General.
- b. In addition, the title (associate) IOS-EV should be changed to reflect better the critical responsibility of the function (e.g., specialist or a similar title).
- c. The REAs require more stable contracts, and the financing of the REAs should be secured for the next biennium by the Director-General.

7. Use and impact of evaluations

- a. Considering the possibility of conducting recommendation follow-up workshops involving all relevant stakeholders.
- b. The IOS-EV should better document the use and impact of the evaluation function in UNESCO. The use of a systematic, short questionnaire that focuses on key areas of evaluation use could unearth valuable data that can later be followed up and become "success stories", good practices, or even case studies to prove the worth of the evaluation function across time and themes. An additional option could be to offer (perhaps not for all but some selected evaluations) follow-up workshops (in person or online) to discuss the status of implementation,

¹⁴ e.g. if several donors require the evaluations of different aspects of a programme, instead of undertaking several small evaluations, one comprehensive evaluation could be undertaken, meeting the different donor requirements thus contributing to reduction in costs and streamlining engagement with stakeholders/interviewees.

bottlenecks, etc. A quantitative and qualitative synthesis of the questionnaire (and workshop) outcomes could be included in the IOS annual reports and become part of the value proposition of the evaluation function.

8. Evaluation Policy

The UNESCO Evaluation Policy may benefit from a few changes to be approved by the UNESCO Executive Board (the suggested changes below are based on findings in Parts I and II):

- The inclusion of the Regional Evaluation Associates (REA) (in chapter V, Roles and responsibilities for evaluation).¹⁵
- The inclusion of the role of the IOS-EV in support of the REAs. (in chapter V, Roles and responsibilities for evaluation).
- Make sure that the division of labour between REAs and the Evaluation Focal Points is clear (EFP). (para. 24)
- Keep the USD 1.5 million as the threshold for evaluations for voluntary contribution programmes and projects with the allocation of 3% as a principle. However, build in some flexibility, on an exceptional basis, to ensure relevance and appropriateness of evaluations of projects with budgets beyond USD 1.5 million. Follow the principle: “Comply or explain”. With the IOS-EV having the final say. (para. 21)
- Make it explicit that Senior Management, Directors, Heads of Field Offices and Category 1 Institutions are responsible for providing monitoring data of activities under their supervision (para. 20 and 21).
- Add to the Policy the need for different types of evaluation, including in crisis and humanitarian situations (“Types of evaluation”).
- Adjust the Policy to allow the IOS-EV to conduct or commission decentralised evaluations of strategic relevance to UNESCO (para. 19).
- In the parameters for evaluation planning, redefine “risk” as corporate risks to UNESCO (e.g. financial risk, reputational risk), rather than as a factor that may hinder the achievement of the programme/project objectives (para. 36).

¹⁵ Building on the recently developed document ‘Roles and Responsibilities’ which outlines who is responsible for what, including REAs.

Part II: Systematic review of core assessment areas and questions according to Peer Review TOR

Part II of this report provides the Panel’s systematic assessment of the areas and questions established in the ToR of this Peer Review.

Panel assessment rating scale		
Satisfactory	Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement	Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

A. UNESCO evaluation function (including evaluation policy and strategy)

a. Policy adequacy: Is the UNESCO Evaluation Policy adequate at providing direction, ensuring compliance with norms and standards and encouraging consistency in evaluation practice across the organisation?

Finding: The evaluation policy is overall adequate. It clearly describes the roles and responsibilities for evaluation, the UNESCO evaluation architecture, planning for evaluation, dissemination and use of evaluations, and follow-up. It also includes evaluation follow-up, evaluation quality assurance system, and a theory of change for evaluation at UNESCO.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory

b. Norms and standards in Policy: Does the UNESCO Evaluation Policy meet recognised international norms and standards for an evaluation policy?

Finding: The UNESCO Evaluation Policy meets recognised international norms and standards for an evaluation policy. The Policy extensively describes the adaptation of the UNEG Norms & Standards.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory

c. Needs for Policy updates: Does the Evaluation Policy require updates or clarifications?

Finding: The policy may benefit from a few changes (the suggested changes below are based on findings in other parts of this document):

- The inclusion of the Regional Evaluation Associates (REA) (in chapter V, Roles and responsibilities for evaluation).¹⁶

¹⁶ Building on the recently developed document ‘Roles and Responsibilities’ which outlines who is responsible for what, including REAs.

- The inclusion of the role of the IOS-EV in support of the REAs. (in chapter V, Roles and responsibilities for evaluation).
- Make sure that the division of labour between REAs and the Evaluation Focal Points is clear (EFP). (para. 24)
- Keep the USD 1.5 million as the threshold for evaluations for voluntary contribution programmes and projects with the allocation of 3% as a principle. However, build in some flexibility, on an exceptional basis, to ensure relevance and appropriateness of evaluations of projects with budgets beyond USD 1.5 million. Follow the principle: “Comply or explain”. With the IOS-EV having the final say. (para. 21)
- Make it explicit that Senior Management, Directors, Heads of Field Offices and Category 1 Institutions are responsible for providing monitoring data of activities under their supervision (para. 20 and 21).
- Add to the Policy the need for different types of evaluation, including in crisis and humanitarian situations (“Types of evaluation”).
- Adjust the Policy to allow the IOS-EV to conduct or commission decentralised evaluations of strategic relevance to UNESCO (para. 19).
- In the parameters for evaluation planning, redefine “risk” as corporate risks to UNESCO (e.g. financial risk, reputational risk), rather than as a factor that may hinder the achievement of the programme/project objectives (para. 36)

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

d. Strategy adequacy: Does the UNESCO Evaluation Strategy provide an adequate framework for measuring progress in evaluation results across the organisation?

Finding: The UNESCO 2022-2029 Evaluation Strategy includes a useful set of eight Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure progress in evaluation results across the organisation. The KPIs encompass both corporate and decentralised evaluations. The KPIs capture coverage, resources, training, delivery, quality, management response, implementation of recommendations and evaluation use. IOS-EV has established KPI targets for most but not all KPIs. Progress for most of the corporate evaluation KPIs are reported in the IOS annual report. Progress for decentralised evaluations is captured in a dynamic (electronic) KPI dashboard. However, an easy-to-read KPI summary with the latest status for corporate and decentralised KPIs is not yet available. Moreover, KPI 8 (use of evaluation) is not reported on, mainly because UNESCO lacks the necessary data-collection system, which is partly due to resource constraints. Discussions are ongoing for necessary adjustments. The Panel encourages the IOS-EV to prepare an easy-to-read KPI update for corporate and decentralised evaluations, which could be included in the IOS annual reports. This would be particularly useful for stakeholders, including Member States. The existing proposals for measuring KPI 8 should be further pursued.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

B. Governance arrangements

a. Independence and impartiality: Are there systems and mechanisms in place to maintain the independent and impartial function of the evaluation office, taking into consideration both central and decentralised evaluation function (DE)?

Finding:

- **Corporate evaluation function:** The independence of the central evaluation function is strong. While the evaluation work plan is developed in consultation with Member States and Sectors, the IOS Director has the final say on the biennial corporate evaluation plan. The IOS Director and the Head of Evaluation have discretion on the development and issuance of evaluation reports. The IOS-EV also had a solid financial independence around 2.25% of the regular operational budget from Sectors (until the recent budget cuts). The behavioural independence is largely protected, although there are occasional pushbacks from Sectors on the scope of the evaluation and/or the recommendations. The Panel is of the view that occasional pushbacks in the form of diverging views are inherent to the evaluation function, and the IOS-EV has the authority to insist on its independent oversight function as established in the Evaluation Policy. In terms of impartiality, the Panel is of the view that the mechanism in place meets standard practices (e.g., reference groups, the use of external experts, and the recording of collected data).

Panel assessment: Satisfactory

- **Decentralised evaluations:** The independence at the level of decentralised evaluation is a challenge (as in many other organisations), as the evaluation managers are usually also the programme/project managers. The risk of undue influence on evaluation results or a perceived conflict of interest cannot be ruled out, which may diminish the credibility of an evaluation, even when external evaluators conduct it. Another limitation impacting the independence is the lack, in most instances of a dedicated budget line, in project budgets for evaluation. Several mechanisms are in place to strengthen the impartiality of the decentralised evaluation, including evaluation reference groups, guidance on selecting evaluation consultants, a standard procurement process, IOS-EV backstopping, and the new Regional Evaluation Associates (REA). Still, UNESCO may consider strengthening the independence and impartiality of the decentralised evaluations. One option would be to have large or important programme/project evaluated by IOS-EV.

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

b. Evaluation Office position: Is the Evaluation Office positioned so that it operates independently from other management roles, free from undue influence? Are there any risks to its independence?

Finding: The IOS-EV's institutional independence is strong, and it operates independently of other management roles. The evaluation office is well placed in the IOS. The head of the IOS-EV reports directly to the UNESCO Executive Board and interacts directly with Member States.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory

c. Roles and responsibilities: Are the roles and responsibilities clearly defined in the Evaluation Policy/ Evaluation Manual, and are these appropriately implemented in practice, including the relationships with the Executive Board, Director General, and the Oversight Advisory Committee?

Finding: Roles and responsibilities are well defined in the Evaluation Policy and the Evaluation Manual. Still, a few changes would strengthen the Policy:

- The inclusion of the Regional Evaluation Associates (REA) (in chapter V, Roles and responsibilities for evaluation).
- The inclusion of the role of the IOS-EV in support of the REAs. (in chapter V, Roles and responsibilities for evaluation).
- Make sure that the division of labour between REAs and the Evaluation Focal Points is clear (EFP). (para. 24)
- Make it explicit that Senior Management, Directors, Heads of Field Offices and Category 1 Institutions are responsible for providing monitoring data of activities under their supervision (para. 20 and 21).
- Adjust the Policy to allow the IOS-EV to conduct or commission decentralised evaluations if of strategic relevance to UNESCO (para. 19).

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

d. Relationship with audit: What are the working relationships with other parts of the Division of Internal Oversight Services? What are the key lessons from joint activities with Internal Audit, such as performance audits?

Finding: A good working relationship exists between evaluation and audit, and the co-location of audit and evaluation in IOS is beneficial.¹⁷ For instance, the audit is leading the risk assessment, which will feed into the development of the next biennial workplan. There are also synergies in using the same tools (e.g., TeamMate+). The Panel found that joint performance audits are appreciated, although they contribute to some confusion among stakeholders regarding the distinction between audits and evaluations. They are also an opportunity to combine expertise from evaluation and audit potentially resulting in a higher quality analyses and products. The Panel is of the view that joint assessments are an opportunity to demonstrate the difference between audit and evaluation. Moreover, joint assessments also provide an opportunity for audit to reach the Executive Board, as only evaluation reports are submitted to the Board. In line with the Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC), the Panel is of the view that the collaboration between audit and evaluation could be further strengthened. Finally, the IOS annual report could emphasise common audit and evaluation findings. Currently, it is segregated by function.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

¹⁷ The Panel did not look at the relationship between evaluation and Investigation, as there is limited overlap.

C. Evaluation Planning

a. Risk considerations: How is risk prioritised in deciding the Evaluation work plan?

Finding: Risk is a parameter for planning evaluations (Evaluation Policy, para. 36). However, “risk” is understood as a factor that may hinder the achievement of programme/project objectives.¹⁸ Risk is not defined as corporate risk to UNESCO (e.g. financial risk, reputational risk). The IOS-EV may want to redefine “risk” as corporate risk to UNESCO rather than as a factor that may hinder the achievement of the programme/project objectives (Para. 36). The OAC also raised the concern about the evaluation work plan, which is based on coverage gaps rather than a risk-based approach (OAC Annual Report 2024, Para 27). The OAC also noted that the practice of identifying the top 10 corporate risks was established in 2019 and that the risks have not been updated since then. However, while corporate risks should be considered when deciding on the evaluation plan, the Panel is of the view that risk is not the most crucial criterion for selecting evaluation subjects. While risk is a strong selection criterion for audit, evaluation is also about learning and knowledge generation. To the Panel, the key criterion for selecting evaluation subjects is strategic significance, which may or may not be related to corporate risks. (More on the strategic importance of evaluation subjects, see next question b.)

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

b. Work plan development process: How effective is the approach for developing the Evaluation Office’s corporate biennial work plan? Are the methods, processes, and criteria used for planning and prioritising evaluation topics suitable, considering other activities such as strategic planning, audits, and reviews?

Finding: In principle, the current planning process is well-founded. A gap analysis is conducted, clients (e.g., Sectors) are consulted, and Member States submit evaluation requests to the IOS-EV (Executive Board and other Governing Bodies) demonstrating an interest in and appreciation of the independent evaluation function. The current practice demonstrates a balanced mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches, and the “parameters for evaluation planning and design” established in the Evaluation Policy are meaningful (para. 36). However, the in-principle sound planning process appears to be overly driven by ad hoc requests from Sectors. The process could be further strengthened by ensuring that topics chosen for evaluations truly address the strategic issues faced by the organization at a given time. What is needed is the application of the full authority given to the evaluation function to ultimately decide what to evaluate. And for that, the IOS-EV must – after the consultation phase - apply the most

¹⁸ Risk as described in the Evaluation Policy (para. 36): “Are there any factors (political, economic, financial, structural, organizational, performance-related) that may prevent the subject of the evaluation from meeting its objectives?”

critical parameter: “Is the subject of the evaluation an issue of strategic significance that contributes to UNESCO’s mandate, strategic plan, global priorities or cross-cutting themes?”

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

c. Nature of selected topics: Are the topics chosen for the biennial evaluation work plan the most crucial/strategic topics meeting the needs and demands of UNESCO’s key stakeholders and balancing accountability and learning?

Finding: The Panel found that the selection of topics is appreciated by some and contested by others. Different stakeholders have different needs. This is normal. There can be a trade-off between accountability (resource orientation) and learning (thematic orientation), and the evaluation function can’t always please both dimensions equally. While the selection of topics may be driven by accountability, the scope of an evaluation offers the opportunity to address stakeholders’ learning needs. The IOS-EV should spend sufficient time with stakeholders to define the scope of evaluations, i.e., define a manageable number of key evaluation questions (not every evaluation must assess all OECD/DAC evaluation criteria). A targeted (i.e., narrower) and needs-driven scope enhances the potential for learning and the timeliness of evaluation results. This can improve the credibility and usefulness of evaluations.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

d. Coverage: Does the coverage and quality of the corporate and decentralised evaluation systems provide sufficient evidence to assess organisational performance and inform other organisational policies or frameworks, such as strategic planning, budgeting, and results-based management?

Finding: This question extends beyond “evaluation planning” and poses a broader question about the utility of the evaluation function. The Panel addresses utility in section G below. The Panel is limiting the present question to “coverage”. According to the IOS Annual Report 2024, UNESCO completed 44 evaluations in 2024, of which 38 were decentralised and 6 were corporate evaluations. Half of the evaluations (23) covered Strategic Objective 3 (Promote inclusion and mutual understanding), and 13 covered SO 1 (Invest in education to transform lives). SO2 (Reconcile humanity with nature) had only five, and SO4 (Foster innovation and technology in the service of humanity) had only three evaluations. The coverage in terms of numbers is therefore uneven. This is partly related to the distribution of resources across programme areas. And it might be more appropriate to assess coverage over a more extended period (2-4 years).

According to the IOS-EV, the total number of decentralised evaluations has increased compared to previous years. This trend is partly the result of UNESCO engaging increasingly in larger initiatives with budgets higher than the threshold of USD 1.5 million, which demand evaluations. This is a positive trend in terms of coverage, and in quantitative terms, the decentralised evaluations cover a larger range of thematic areas compared to the corporate evaluations. However, while the Directors and Heads of Field Offices and Category 1 Institutes need to provide the IOS-EV with the decentralised annual evaluation plan of the field office or institute under their purview (Evaluation Policy para. 21), the planning of

decentralised evaluations is mostly driven either by donor needs and/or by the USD 1.5m threshold. The result is a lack of structured accountability for decentralised evaluations, stressed by the OAC in 2024. Already in 2023, the OAC advised UNESCO to undertake a risk assessment of evaluation coverage to ensure that corporate and decentralised evaluations provide adequate coverage for accountability (OAC Annual report 2023, p. 12). The Panel concurs with the OAC's view.

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

D. Management of the UNESCO Evaluation Function (corporate and decentralised)

a. Performance: How well does the evaluation function achieve its goals?

Finding: As previously mentioned, (see A.d.), an easy-to-read KPI summary with the latest status for KPIs of corporate and decentralised evaluations is not available. The information is dispersed across various locations, including the IOS Annual Reports, the Annual Synthesis Reports, and the KPI dashboard for the decentralised evaluation function. The KPIs capture coverage, resources, training, delivery, quality, management response, implementation of recommendations and evaluation use. These dimensions are addressed in other parts of this present Peer Review:

Coverage (C.d.), resources (E.a., E.b.), training (H.b.), delivery (D.c.), quality (F.a.), management response (G.c.), implementation of recommendations (G.d.), use (G.e.).

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

b. External versus in-house evaluations: Is there a suitable balance between corporate evaluations outsourced to external experts and those conducted in-house? Are the criteria for outsourcing versus conducting in-house evaluations appropriate? Is there value for money in the current arrangements?

Finding: Currently, the IOS-EV decides on a case-by-case basis the extent to which an evaluation should be conducted by the IOS-EV staff and/or external experts. The main factors are the IOS-EV's capacity and the need for subject matter expertise. The Panel is of the view that, in principle, such an approach is meaningful. Given the complexity of UNESCO as an institution, there is merit in active participation by IOS-EV staff to ensure a sufficient understanding of UNESCO by the evaluation team. External subject matter expertise can be valuable and enhance the credibility and usefulness of evaluations. However, given the current budget cuts, the main bulk of the evaluations may have to be conducted by IOS-EV staff in future. The newly appointed Regional Evaluation Associates (REAs) may also conduct selected evaluations. However, conducting evaluations is much more time-consuming than managing or backstopping evaluations. This needs to be adequately reflected in individual annual work plans of IOS-EV staff and REAs.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

c. Timeliness of delivery: What are the main challenges for the timely delivery of corporate evaluations by the Evaluation Office? What strategies can mitigate these challenges?

Finding: The Panel found a mixed picture with regard to the timeliness of evaluations. While the subject and scope of some corporate evaluations justify a long evaluation process, the timeliness of evaluation results is critical for evaluations to be useful. Recommendations arriving (too) late have limited value. Also, pending management responses can hold back the submission of reports to the Executive Board. It is imperative to establish, at the outset, a meaningful timeline with key milestones to which clients (e.g., Sectors) and the IOS-EV commit. While the lead is with the IOS-EV, clients must provide timely inputs (e.g., data, reviews of drafts, management responses). The “client engagement form” appears to be a reasonable tool for ensuring that deadlines are met. However, if evaluation results are pressing, ways should be explored to shorten the time needed to conduct evaluations at the outset. One approach is to narrow the scope of an evaluation or to opt for a rapid review rather than an in-depth evaluation. When evaluation reports are held back due to pending management responses, IOS-EV should be allowed to submit, on an exceptional basis, reports to the Executive Board without management responses.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

d. Monitor resource allocation: Is there an effective system in place to monitor the time resources allocated to the delivery of corporate evaluations and to identify and address potential inefficiencies?

Finding: The IOS-EV has a time-tracking tool to capture time spent on activities such as corporate evaluation, backstopping, and capacity building. The idea is that each staff member enters data every week. The time analysis would be useful. However, the use of the tool is patchy. The Panel encourages IOS-EV staff to use the tracking tool. It allows the office to (a) better understand how its human resources are actually used and (b) to identify potential for reallocation of resources. Moreover, time tracking helps individuals to (a) realise how time is invested and (b) identify possible inefficiencies.

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

e. Evaluation teams: Is the model used for conducting and managing evaluations appropriate? Are there adequate systems to ensure the selection of professional and competent evaluation teams?

Finding:

- Corporate evaluations: Overall, the model used for conducting and managing corporate evaluation is appropriate and comparable to the model used by other UN agencies. The IOS-EV staff members are all experienced evaluation professionals. The selection process for external consultants meets international standards and is based on terms of reference (shared with evaluation reference

groups) and a competitive selection process. While clients (e.g., Sectors) acknowledge that they are consulted during the selection of consultants, a few complain that their views were not taken into account and that some consultants lacked sufficient understanding of UNESCO's functioning. The IOS-EV acknowledges that the quality of consultants can be a challenge. It is beyond the scope of this Peer Review to assess specific cases. However, to safeguard the independence of the evaluation function, the IOS-EV must have the final say on the selection of external experts, based on the assumption that it is in the best interest of the IOS-EV to recruit the most suitable consultants available.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

- Decentralised evaluations: The model used by UNESCO for the decentralised evaluations is comparable to the model used by other UN agencies. The decentralised evaluations are managed by UNESCO programme staff and conducted by external evaluators. The UNESCO programme staff are not evaluation experts. While the IOS-EV provides evaluation training to UNESCO programme staff, additional support from the IOS-EV, including the Regional Evaluation Associates, is much appreciated. The Evaluation Focal Points (EFPs) also provide some support, although to varying degrees (they are typically not evaluation experts themselves). The support provided can include reviewing the evaluation terms of reference, selecting external evaluators, or quality assurance of reevaluation reports. However, the support capacity is limited, and some Regional Evaluation Associates cover many country offices, making it impossible to provide full support to every decentralised evaluation. Still, the 2024 Synthesis of UNESCO Evaluations notes a significant improvement in the overall quality of decentralised evaluation reports. The quality assessment of seven decentralised evaluation reports conducted by this Peer Review found that only one report was overall below the minimal quality standards (Annex 1). The reasonable quality of the decentralised evaluation reports is an indication that the model used for decentralised evaluations is, for the most part, effective.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

f. Synthesising evidence: Is there a proper balance between conducting new evaluations and synthesising existing evaluation evidence?

Finding: The Panel found that the annual synthesis reports of UNESCO evaluations are widely appreciated. They offer an opportunity to aggregate evaluation findings, particularly from decentralised evaluations. This is of great value in terms of accountability vis-à-vis the Member States, as the decentralised evaluations are not accessible to them. However, the lessons learned from synthesis reports based on the criterion “same year” are rather general, as the subjects are very diverse with limited commonalities. In future, the IOS-EV might therefore consider subject-based synthesis over a period of several years, such as the recent synthesis of the Natural Sciences Sector. The annual synthesis report could be supplemented with other synthesis tools to make the best use of evidence from decentralised evaluations (e.g., regional briefs, maybe with a role for the REAs).

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

g. Responsiveness to change: Is the evaluation function prepared to respond to emerging organisational needs and global changes? [Does the evaluation team have the necessary skills and forward-thinking culture as outlined in the UN strategic initiative Quintet for Change?¹⁹]

Finding: During this Peer Review, the Panel witnessed a very open-minded IOS evaluation team with a high capacity for self-reflection. The team is acutely aware of the changes happening within and outside of UNESCO. The open-mindedness of the IOS-EV team was demonstrated during individual meetings, group discussions and particularly during the debriefing of this Panel on the last day of the visit to UNESCO HQ. The Panel suggested several areas of improvement, which were welcomed by the evaluation team.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory

E. Evaluation Resources

a. Project level: The UNESCO Evaluation Policy instructs all voluntary contribution projects to set aside 3% for evaluation purposes, and for all projects of more than 1.5 million USD to go through an external evaluation. Is this an appropriate approach? How is this perceived in the Field Offices?

Finding: Setting aside a fixed % for evaluation purposes is a good practice, comparable to that of other UN agencies, and 3% is a reasonable target. However, there is a gap between the 3% target and the de facto budget allocation, which is much lower. Also, the absence of a dedicated budget line for evaluation budgets is a shortcoming. Both are major challenges to operationalising the 3% at the level of decentralised evaluations. At the same time, for some large-budget projects, the 3% may result in an evaluation budget that is too large.

Establishing a threshold for externally evaluating voluntary contribution projects beyond a specific financial volume is a standard practice, and USD 1.5 million is a reasonable threshold for UNESCO. However, some Field Offices view the threshold as relatively rigid and not always reasonable.²⁰ While maintaining USD 1.5m as the threshold for evaluating voluntary contribution projects, with an allocation of 3%, the Evaluation Policy could incorporate some flexibility on an exceptional basis to ensure relevance and appropriateness. The responsible entity is encouraged to engage in dialogue with IOS-EV to identify the most appropriate way to address the evaluation requirements, including through pooling

¹⁹ The Panel felt that it was beyond the scope of the peer review to assess the extent to which the team has the necessary skill as outlined in the UN strategic initiative Quintet for Change. The Quintet for Change focuses on five key areas: data skills; innovation; behavioral science; digital advancements and foresight. <https://un-two-zero.network/>

²⁰ For instance, a project with a large procurement component (e.g., 90% of the budget) may surpass the USD 1.5m threshold, but may not merit a full-fledged evaluation.

evaluations or identifying lighter modalities, such as an outcome-harvesting exercise, as applicable. The final say has to be with IOS-EV.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

b. Budget and staff: Is the Evaluation Office (including at the field level) adequately staffed and financed to allow for the conduct and commissioning of high-quality (i.e. credible, useful, timely) evaluations?

Finding: Before the 2025 budget cuts, the IOS-EV was adequately funded. According to the Evaluation Policy, Sectors contribute approximately 3% of their respective operational or activity budgets to the corporate evaluation function. This amount also contributes to the IOS-EV's support of the decentralised evaluation function (Evaluation Policy, para 43). For the biennium 2024-2025, the programme sector contribution reached USD 2.1 million, which is approximately 2.25% of the regular programme, representing an 85% increase compared to the previous biennium (2022-2023). However, due to financial constraints, the budget was reduced by USD 0.5 million in 2025, about a quarter of the two-year budget. This reduction leaves the IOS-EV with low uncommitted resources for the rest of 2025, according to the IOS-EV. Still, IOS-EV had an Activity Budget of around USD 90,000, which allowed the launch of two corporate evaluations.

The IOS-EV has a team of 10 colleagues, comprising 6 staff members (1 Head of Evaluation, 4 P4s, 1 P3) and 4 junior consultants. This is adequate staffing compared to the evaluation offices of other UN agencies. Since the beginning of 2025, there have been five Regional Evaluation Associates (REAs) who constitute the IOS-EV field presence. This is a crucial step to enhance IOS-EV's capacity to support the decentralised evaluations (The REAs will be further discussed under H.d,e).

Responding to the reduced budget for corporate evaluations and the uncertain financial outlook, the Panel is of the view that the IOS-EV should be more engaged in managing critical decentralised evaluations, thereby contributing to further enhancing the quality and independence of these evaluations. Moreover, the Evaluation Policy envisages that one-third of the 3% (i.e., 1%) of voluntary contribution projects set aside for evaluation purposes can be used by the IOS-EV "as pooled funding for evaluations of relevant cross-cutting, thematic or system-wide topics, regional capacity development activities, the dissemination of lessons learned and synthesis" (Evaluation Policy Para 42). Until now, this has not happened, but given the financial constraints, this mechanism could be activated.

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

c. Alignment with needs: To what extent are the available evaluation resources aligned to meet the Organisation's needs for credible evaluation evidence to guide strategic planning and decision-making at both central and decentralised levels?

Finding: The Panel is of the view that the available resources are overall well-aligned to meet the Organisation's needs for credible evaluation evidence to guide strategic planning and decision-making at both central and decentralised levels. While the mechanism is only partially functional, allocating 3%

of both regular Sector activities and voluntary contribution projects to evaluation purposes is a reasonable approach to generate evaluation evidence for decision-making at all levels.

Corporate evaluations: Based on the Panel’s meetings at UNESCO HQ, not all corporate evaluations meet the needs of stakeholders (e.g., Sectors). However, this is rarely a matter of resource allocation. Other factors are more critical, such as the selection of evaluation topics, the definition of the evaluation scope, timeliness, and the usefulness of recommendations (see also sections C and G). Moreover, the IOS-EV could diversify the types of evaluations to better respond to client needs (i.e., real-time evaluations in crisis situations, joint evaluation with key partners, etc.). Impact evaluations are particularly important. In a time when public resources are under pressure, ODA must demonstrate its value more than ever.

Decentralised evaluations: The allocation in 2024 of resources to establish Regional Evaluation Associates (REAs/UNVs) to strengthen the decentralised evaluation function was certainly appropriate, and UNESCO aligns with other UN agencies that also have evaluation officers at national or regional levels.²¹ However, the somewhat rigid mechanism for conducting external evaluations of all voluntary contribution projects with budgets over USD 1.5 million can result in suboptimal resource allocation. While maintaining USD 1.5m as the threshold for evaluating voluntary contribution projects, with an allocation of 3%, the Evaluation Policy could incorporate some flexibility, on an exceptional basis, to ensure relevance and appropriateness (see above E.a.). Some flexibility might enhance the alignment of evaluation resources with the Organisation’s needs, such as conducting multi-project evaluations rather than individual project evaluations.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

d. Budgeting process: How does the budgeting process for the regular budget affect the independence of the Evaluation Office?

Finding: The IOS-EV has prepared a “Guidance on Budgeting for Evaluation at UNESCO” (July 2023). For the regular budget, it states: “Every biennium, the five Programme Sectors and IOC set aside 3% of their operational budget for evaluation-related initiatives. This is used to fund corporate evaluations of large programmes and/or cross-cutting thematic areas managed or conducted by the IOS Evaluation Office. It also funds capacity-building initiatives for evaluation. The ownership of these budget lines lies with the IOS Evaluation Office.” In principle, this process assures full independence of the IOS-EV. However, not all Sectors contributed 3%. Latest data from the KPI dashboard show that for the current biennium, the Sectors’ contribution ranges from close to 3% to only 0.77%. This affects the IOS-EV budget and, in return, its independent use of the resources. The UNESCO leadership should enforce the Evaluation Policy, as the IOS-EV is facing several funding challenges, including financing the REAs. The plan is for the REAs to be funded through voluntary contribution projects by setting aside a portion of the evaluation budgets to fund the REAs, which mainly support decentralized evaluations. The challenge is that there is also a gap at the project level between the 3% target and the actual allocation. Sixty per cent of projects allocated less than 3% in 2026-2027, of which a good proportion allocate less than 2%. A dedicated

²¹ Mapping Decentralized Evaluation Functions Across UN Agencies, UNEG, June 2025

budget line in projects for evaluation should be established. This would help to track movements of budget originally allocated for evaluation.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

F. Evaluation Quality

a. Quality and credibility: What is the quality and credibility of corporate and decentralised evaluations as perceived by key users and stakeholders and as benchmarked against evaluation norms and standards?

Finding: The 2024 Synthesis report notes a significant improvement in the overall quality of evaluation reports, particularly in decentralised reports. Twelve reports were rated “partly satisfactory”, while 14 reports were either “satisfactory” or “highly satisfactory”.

The Peer Review Panel also quality-assessed 10 evaluation reports, of which seven were decentralised evaluations and three were corporate evaluations (Annex 1). The Panel used a similar, but not identical, quality assessment matrix as the IOS-EV. Based on the Panel’s assessment, five reports were of overall sound quality, and four reports were of overall fair quality. Only one report was overall below minimal quality standards. The Panel identified numerous good practices but also highlighted several areas for improvement (see Annex 1 for more details). The main weakness identified by the Panel is the quality of the conclusions section. Only one conclusion section was of good quality. The assessed conclusions sections often provide only a summary of findings, adding little value. While conclusions build on findings, they should be forward-looking and include the evaluator’s professional judgment. Firm conclusions are the basis for useful recommendations.

Overall, the quality assessments conducted for the Synthesis report and the Panel’s quality assessment yield similar results: the UNESCO evaluation reports are, by and large, credible and of decent quality. Most stakeholders share this finding that the Panel interacted with. Occasionally, stakeholders question the credibility of evaluations, particularly because the external experts allegedly lacked sufficient subject-matter expertise or a sufficient understanding of UNESCO’s functioning. This could not be corroborated by the Panel, given the scope of the peer review. The usefulness of recommendations was also questioned by some (not sufficiently strategic, too process-oriented, not timely).

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

b. Quality assurance mechanism: How effective are the mechanisms in place to ensure effective evaluations and high-quality deliverables?

Finding: Based on the finding that the UNESCO evaluation reports are of decent quality (see above F.a), it is fair to say that the quality assurance mechanisms are effective. All corporate evaluations undergo a quality assurance process before they are finalised. The IOS-EV, together with Regional Evaluation Associates and Evaluation Focal Points in Programme Sectors and field offices, provides backstopping

and quality assurance support throughout the evaluation process of many decentralised evaluations. Moreover, the 2024 Synthesis report notes that decentralised evaluations that achieved high quality scores are mostly those that received significant backstopping support from the IOS-EV and the respective evaluation reference groups. As there is room for improvement in the quality of evaluation reports, the quality assurance mechanism can be further strengthened by reaching out to even more decentralised evaluations.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

c. Social standards: How well do UNESCO's evaluations incorporate ethical considerations, human rights, gender equality, equity, and other social aspects such as disability inclusion and environmental standards?

Finding: The 2024 Synthesis finds that “across the evaluations, consideration of Gender Equality and Human Rights and Inclusion has not yet been consistently mainstreamed. Where a project is directly related to issues of gender equality or marginalised groups, the evaluation focused on these priorities in all aspects of the evaluation process. On other projects, the Synthesis found that consideration was patchy or non-existent.” (p. 42) The Panel did not go beyond this analysis.

Panel assessment: No assessment

d. Annual quality assessment: Is the annual quality assurance system, conducted by an external expert, effective in evaluating report quality and showing improvement over time?

Finding: Conducting an annual quality assessment of UNESCO evaluation reports by an external expert is a good practice and should be continued.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory

G. Evaluation follow-up and use

a. Use of evaluation results: To what extent are evaluation insights, learning and findings incorporated in (re) orienting and terminating programmes and activities, and in developing and designing new programmes, projects and initiatives?

Finding: The Evaluation Policy, Strategy, and Manual all reflect the importance of using evaluation results. In the Strategy, the theory of change for evaluation (Annex 4) reflects the expected use at the outcome level. The Strategy has two KPIs that capture the use of corporate and decentralised evaluations (Annex 5). First, there is the KPI 7: “Implementation of Evaluation Recommendations”. The implementation rate of corporate evaluation recommendations varies between 86% and 100% for the years 2020-2022 (IOS Annual Report 2024, Para 61). While this is an indication of the usefulness of evaluations, the indicator does not reveal anything about the changes brought about by the

implementation of the recommendations. Moreover, the IOS-EV does not track the implementation of recommendations for decentralised evaluations. Second, there is “KPI 8: Evaluation Use”. KPI 8 is described as the “Extent to which staff report the use of evaluation for Project Formulation and during Annual Reporting”. (Evaluation Strategy, p. 6). However, KPI 8 is currently not measured (neither at the corporate nor the decentralised level), mainly because UNESCO lacks the necessary data-collection system, which is partly due to resource constraints. IOS-EV has made proposals how to measure KPI 8 and discussions are ongoing for necessary adjustments. To measure the use of evaluation is not easy. Alternative *quantitative* indicators for the use of evaluations exist.²² However, the use of evaluation results is probably best captured qualitatively. For instance, success stories are a powerful tool to demonstrate how evaluation results can change the course of entire programmes. The extent to which evaluations (both corporate and decentralised) influence the course of UNESCO programmes is currently not well-documented. Neither the IOS annual reports nor the synthesis reports capture the impact of evaluations on the organisation. The IOS annual reports mainly report on activities (e.g., number of reports, number of training sessions) and provide little information on the actual use of evaluation results (with few exceptions²³). A few “success stories” per year would go a long way in demonstrating the impact of the evaluation function on the organisation. The OAC also recommends tracking the use of evaluation and its impact on the Organisation more systematically (OAC Annual Report 2023, para. 56).

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

b. Credibility and usefulness: How do internal clients (program sectors, central services and field staff) view the credibility and the usefulness of corporate/decentralised evaluations?

Finding: The Panel found much appreciation for the evaluation function. Some in-house stakeholders greatly appreciate the corporate evaluations and believe they have contributed to improving the Organisation. A minority of in-house stakeholders believe that the evaluations have limited utility and influence. Some of the more critical stakeholders view the evaluations as too process-oriented and insufficiently outcome- and impact-oriented. Additionally, the reports could be more strategic and forward-looking.

Critical to the usefulness of evaluations is the usefulness of the recommendations. Some clients are satisfied and say that many recommendations have contributed to improving the Organisation. Others

²² E.g., number of strategic documents or project plans that explicitly reference and integrate lessons from evaluations; or number of policies or programs modified as a direct result of evaluation recommendations.

²³ “The Evaluation of UNESCO’s Periodic Reporting on the Culture Sector’s Conventions and Recommendations delivered practical recommendations to improve the reporting practices of the ensemble of normative instruments in the field of culture. The evaluation provided needed insight to embark on streamlining practices, elaborating a Culture Data Portal and building a better more effective and sophisticated reporting practice which will feed future MONDIACULT global reports.” (IOS Annual Report 2024, para. 14)

are less satisfied with the recommendations. IOS-EV could co-create recommendations jointly and in a time-efficient way with the client during future-proofing workshops, under two conditions: The IOS-EV has the final say to retain independence, and the client retains the right to disagree with final recommendations (in the management response).

Going beyond recommendations, all actors agree that stakeholder engagement throughout the entire evaluation process is crucial to have an evaluation function that is useful and can have an impact on the Organisation. The evaluation reference groups are critical in this regard. While reference groups are a standard practice at UNESCO, it appears that the engagement between the IOS-EV and internal clients can be further enhanced. Some say they would like to be involved at an earlier stage, others would like to have more time (feeling rushed), and others think they are not being listened to. Also, there is a demand for different types of evaluations. Some call for more impact evaluations to make the case vis-à-vis donors and partners, while others ask for more real-time evaluations (e.g., in crisis situations) to have support during ongoing implementation. Others place a high value on joint assessments with audits or joint evaluations with key partners. Some would also appreciate comparative analysis and benchmarking.

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

c. Management response: Do clients understand the purpose of management responses? Are these responses and action plans systematically prepared for all evaluations?

Finding: According to the UNESCO Evaluation Policy, all UNESCO evaluations, whether corporate or decentralised, require a management response (para. 52). KPI 6 of the Evaluation Strategy mirrors this policy, specifically the completion of an Evaluation Management Response for both corporate and decentralised evaluations. The Panel has no indication suggesting that clients do not understand the purpose of management responses. This is supported by the findings of the 2024 Synthesis report, which states that corporate evaluations have consistently adhered to these requirements. The trend for decentralised evaluations is also positive. While in the 2023 Synthesis, none of the decentralised evaluations included a management response, the 2024 Synthesis shows a marked improvement, with close to fifty per cent of decentralised evaluations including a management response. (2024 Synthesis report, p. 44) It is likely that this improvement can be attributed to a large extent to the REAs who are “*sur place*” to push this forward.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

d. Implementation of evaluation recommendations: What tools or systems are used to monitor the progress of evaluation recommendations? Are evaluations followed up in a timely and comprehensive manner?

Finding: The IOS-EV is utilising TeamMate+ to track the progress of implementing evaluation recommendations. The implementation rate of corporate evaluation recommendations varies between 86% and 100% for the years 2020-2022 (IOS Annual Report 2024, para. 61). However, the IOS-EV does not track the implementation of recommendations for decentralised evaluations. This is a serious

accountability shortcoming. The lack of accountability for decentralised evaluations was also highlighted by the OAC (OAC Annual Report 2024, para. 29). UNESCO must establish a systematic mechanism to monitor the implementation of recommendations from decentralised evaluations.

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

e. Use by governing bodies: Do UNESCO’s various Governing Bodies, like the Executive Board, use evaluation findings and recommendations to oversee, adjust, or terminate programs, and to inform new policies and strategies?

Finding: The UNESCO Executive Board reviews all corporate evaluation reports, and resolutions are passed for each one. There are lively debates on evaluations in the Board, and many Member States make statements. This shows an interest and appreciation of evaluations by the Executive Board. The extent to which the Board utilises the evaluation results to inform policy changes exceeds the scope of this Peer Review. This is a task for the IOS-EV (see G.a. on KPI 8).

However, the Panel notes that Member States have no access to the decentralised evaluation reports (they are only on the Intranet). Member States only receive the annual Synthesis report. This is not a best practice. Many UN agencies make all evaluations, including decentralised evaluations, public. UNESCO is not following the UNEG Norm on transparency, which requires evaluation products to be publicly accessible. The Panel is of the view that Member States should have access to all evaluation reports.

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

f. Communication: How well does the Evaluation Office communicate results to different audiences using various formats and methods?

Finding:

Corporate Evaluations: Overall, the Panel found a general satisfaction with the way the IOS-EV communicates evaluation results. The IOS-EV has a “Communication Plan for IOS Corporate Evaluations”, which includes “audiences”, “communication channels” and “tracking of readership”. The IOS-EV has three main products: evaluation reports, summaries for governing bodies, and “Evaluation Insights” (2-pager infographic). In addition, there are bi-yearly newsletters, the Knowledge Hub on the intranet, webinars, briefings and occasionally videos. Corporate evaluations are public on the website. The Communication Plan is a comprehensive dissemination plan. However, a strategic approach going beyond dissemination is not visible. Key questions would be: Who needs to absolutely know about the evaluation results? How can we ensure that the evaluation results are communicated to the relevant actors? How do we move from dissemination to a two-way communication? This may call for a more targeted communication strategy. The communication may need to be oral to ensure that key actors have received the significant evaluation results. The Panel is of the view that qualitative

communication²⁴ is more critical than quantitative dissemination (there is a general information overflow). Significantly, the responsibility to communicate evaluation results extends not only to the IOS-EV but also to the clients (e.g., Sectors, field offices, institutions).

Decentralised evaluations: There is no communication or dissemination strategy for individual decentralised evaluations, apart from making them available in-house on the intranet. The IOS-EV produces annual synthesis reports, which serve as a means to disseminate results from decentralised evaluations. This may not be sufficient. Instead, the idea should be that the evaluation managers make sure that key actors – at the field and HQ level - are aware of the evaluation results.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

H. Decentralised evaluation system

a. Roles and responsibilities: Does the Evaluation Policy clearly define roles and responsibilities for decentralised evaluations?

Finding: The Evaluation Policy and the Manual clearly define roles and responsibilities for decentralised evaluations. The policy may benefit from a few changes (see also A.c.):

- The inclusion of the Regional Evaluation Associates (REA) (in chapter V, Roles and responsibilities for evaluation).
- The inclusion of the role of the IOS-EV in support of the REAs. (in chapter V Roles and responsibilities for evaluation).
- Make sure that the division of labour between REAs and the Evaluation Focal Points is clear (EFP) (para. 24)
- Keep the USD 1.5 million as the threshold for evaluations for voluntary contribution programmes and projects with the allocation of 3% as a principle. However, build in some flexibility to ensure relevance and appropriateness. Follow the principle: Comply or explain. (para. 21)
- Make it explicit that Senior Management, Directors, Heads of Field Offices and Category 1 Institutions are responsible for providing monitoring data of activities under their supervision (para. 20 and 21).
- Adjust the Policy to allow the IOS-EV to conduct or commission decentralised evaluations if of strategic relevance to UNESCO. (para. 19)

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

b. Evaluation Office support: How well has the Evaluation Office supported, guided, and overseen the decentralised evaluation system?

²⁴ Example: discussion of evaluation results at meetings of electoral groups.

Finding: The IOS-EV has made a significant effort in the past few years to support, guide, and oversee the decentralised evaluation system. A key component is the new Evaluation Manual (2023), a comprehensive tool that provides practical guidance to UNESCO staff managing evaluations. In addition, the IOS-EV has developed various capacity-building tools, including training sessions, e-learning modules, webinars, templates, checklists, and specific guidance documents, all of which are available on the Evaluation Knowledge Hub (see Annex 6). The IOS-EV also manages the Evaluation Focal Points network and the recently introduced Regional Evaluation Associates (see H.d). The IOS-EV also provides direct support, through Regional Evaluation Associates, to evaluation managers, including budgeting evaluations, reviewing terms of reference, quality-assuring draft reports, developing management responses, and offering guidance on the dissemination of reports. As a consequence, the number and quality of decentralised evaluations are going up (see F.a). The steps to strengthen decentralised evaluations have also been recognised by the recent MOPAN assessment. (UNESCO MOPAN Assessment 2025).

Panel assessment: Satisfactory

c. *UNEG Norms and Standards:* Do decentralised evaluations meet UNEG Norms and Standards for quality in planning, management, and follow-up?

Finding: This is an all-encompassing question, and many norms and standards related to decentralised evaluations are addressed in other parts of this document: independence (B.a); planning (C.b, C.d); function (D.a., D.e); quality (F.a, F.b, F.c); follow-up and use (G.a, G.c, G.d, G.f.) Therefore, the question can be answered in a summative manner. Overall, the decentralised evaluations have made progress towards meeting the UNEG Norms and Standards. However, they do not yet fully meet them in terms of independence, quality, being accessible, communication and follow-up.

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

d. *Value added of Regional Evaluation Associates (REAs):* Are there benefits and value added of having evaluation officers in Regional Offices?

Finding: The Regional Evaluation Associates are a significant step in strengthening the decentralised evaluation function. Either through the support to Evaluation Focal Points, the participation in evaluation reference groups or directly, the REAs contribute to improving the entire evaluation process, from developing evaluation plans, drafting ToRs, selecting evaluators, reviewing report drafts, preparing management responses, and following up on recommendations. The REAs strengthen the culture of accountability and learning. Moreover, while project managers manage decentralised evaluations, the REAs add a degree of independent oversight to the evaluation process. In addition, the REAs are the IOS-EV's antennas at the field level and contribute to having a much better overview of the decentralised evaluations taking place in UNESCO. With the establishment of REAs, UNESCO is catching up with other

UN agencies, which also have evaluation officers at national or regional levels.²⁵ With shrinking resources for corporate evaluations, decentralised evaluations will gain importance, and so will the REAs.

The ToR for the REAs define many responsibilities (about 20 tasks). To the Panel, this seems overambitious, especially considering that each REA covers many countries (e.g., 40 in the case of the Asia - Pacific region). In the future, it will be essential to clearly establish priorities for each REA, considering the distinct needs of each region.

Panel assessment: Satisfactory, with possible areas for improvement

e. Financing of Regional Evaluation Associates (REAs): Is there an effective plan to ensure the financial viability of the network of decentralised evaluation associates?

Finding: Given the high added value of the REAs, it is clear to the Panel that the REAs should be institutionalised. The REAs require more stable contracts and the financing of the REAs should be secured beyond the next biennium. The Panel supports the plan to fund the REAs through voluntary contribution projects by setting aside a portion of the evaluation budgets to fund the REAs, which mainly support decentralized evaluations.

The REAs began their duties at their posts in early 2025. REAs are UN Volunteers (below 36). Working with the “UNEG-UNV programme for young and emerging evaluators” was a creative way to generate additional posts, which would otherwise have been very difficult in the current context. However, the status of UNVs with a one-year contract is not satisfactory. This temporary set-up is not conducive to building relationships and trust. Moreover, the job title “associate” is not ideal because in the UN, it is associated with a junior function. Also, in comparison to evaluation officers of other UN agencies at the field level, the job title should be changed to, for instance, “specialist”. In short, the current approach is not sustainable.

Panel assessment: Partly satisfactory, with a need for action

²⁵ Mapping Decentralized Evaluation Functions Across UN Agencies, UNEG, June 2025

Annexes

Annex 1: Panel’s quality assessment of evaluation reports

The Panel quality assessed three corporate and seven decentralised evaluation reports, which the Panel selected from a sample provided by the IOS-EV. The assessment parameters are based on the UNEG Norms and Standards.

Corporate evaluation reports

1. Evaluation of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme (2024)
2. UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN): evaluation (2024)
3. Evaluation of UNESCO's work on teacher development (2023)

Decentralised evaluation reports

4. Support of UNESCO’s activities in the field of science (FUST), 2024
5. Assistance to the rehabilitation and reopening of the Sursock Museum, 2024
6. Support to National Capacity Building to Realize Girls Right to Education in Pakistan (GREP), 2024
7. Strengthening the Resilience of Coastal Communities in the Northeast Atlantic, Mediterranean Region to the Impact of Tsunamis and Other Sea Level-Related Coastal Hazards (CoastWAVE), 2025
8. External Evaluation of the project Empowering Young People in Africa through Media and Communication, 2025
9. Evaluation of the UNESCO project Support for Ukraine in Culture and Education Through UNESCO, 2025
10. Evaluation of UNESCO Iraq & Jordan Support to Livelihoods through Cultural Heritage Development, 2025

A. Assessment ratings

Rating scale	Very poor (1)	Poor (2)	Fair (3)	Good (4)	Very good (5)
Rating explanation	Very weak; missing; fails to meet standard	Weak; hardly meets standard	Partly meets standard; acceptable	Satisfactory; respectable	Strong; above average; best practice
Parameter weight (%)	1. Methodology:	20			
	2. Findings:	50			
	3. Conclusions	15			

	4. Recommendations	15		
	Total:	100		

Parameters	Evaluation reports (no. index see below)									
	Corporate			Decentral						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Methodology										
Is the methodology used for the evaluation clearly described, and is the rationale for the methodological choice justified?	3.8	4.8	3.8	3.0	2.3	3.5	3.5	4.5	2.5	3.3
1. The report specifies and explains the chosen evaluation <u>questions</u> , <u>criteria</u> , performance standards or other criteria.	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	4
2. The methodology clearly describes the level of stakeholder participation, data sources, and data collection and analysis methods.	4	5	4	4	2	4	4	5	3	3
3. The chosen methodology is adequately robust/appropriate for answering the key evaluation questions, including adequate measures to ensure data quality/validity.	4	5	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3
4. The methodology addresses methodological challenges and/or limitations.	4	5	4	2	1	3	3	5	1	3
Findings										
Are the findings clearly presented, relevant and based on evidence and sound analysis?	3.8	4.3	3.8	3.0	2.3	4.0	3.8	4.0	3.8	3.5
5. Findings are presented with <u>clarity</u> , <u>logic</u> , and <u>coherence</u> (e.g. avoid ambiguities).	4	4	5	1	2	4	4	4	4	3

6. Findings clearly relate to the evaluation criteria and questions defined in the scope in terms of report structure and substance.	3	5	3	3	2	4	4	4	3	3
7. Findings are <u>objective</u> and are supported by sufficient evidence reflecting systematic and appropriate analysis and interpretation of the data; they are free from subjective judgements made by the evaluators.	4	5	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4
8. Findings uncover underlying <u>causes</u> for accomplishments/difficulties and <u>opportunities</u> to build on.	4	3	3	4	2	4	3	4	4	4
Conclusions										
Are the conclusions clearly presented based on findings and substantiated by evidence?	2.0	2.5	3.0	2.0	1.5	3.0	2.5	4.0	2.5	3.0
9. Conclusions are <u>clearly presented</u> and <u>logically linked</u> to the findings.	2	3	3	1	1	4	3	4	3	3
10. Conclusions reflect reasonable <u>judgments</u> of the evaluator(s) in relation to the main evaluation questions, and <u>add value</u> to the findings (e.g. include lessons learned; focus on significant issues; answer the evaluation’s big questions).	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	4	2	3
Recommendations										
Are the recommendations well-grounded in the evaluation and clear?	4.3	3.3	3.7	2.7	2.3	4.0	3.0	3.7	3.7	3.3
11. Recommendations are <u>logically derived</u> from the findings and/or conclusions.	4	3	2	2	2	4	2	4	3	2
12. Recommendations are <u>clear, realistic</u> (e.g. reflect an understanding of the subject’s potential constraints to follow-up) and <u>manageable</u> (e.g. avoid providing a laundry list or being overly prescriptive).	5	3	5	4	2	4	3	3	3	4
13. Recommendations are <u>actionable</u> (e.g. specifies who should implement them) and formulated with their use in mind.	4	4	4	2	3	4	4	4	5	4

Overall rating	3.6	4.0	3.6	2.8	2.2	3.8	3.4	4.1	3.3	3.4
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B. Quality assessment

Central Evaluation Reports (3 reports)

1. Methodology

Good Practices

- Inclusion of the evaluation period and duration in all reports.
- Detailed annexes explaining the evaluation approach and methodology, including stakeholder and case sampling.
- Clear distinction between internal and external coherence (Teacher Development).
- Clear explanation of how different stakeholder categories are referenced in findings (MOST).
- Use of visuals to describe data sources and data collection methods (UCCN).
- Application of innovative methods:
 - Big data techniques, process tracing (UCCN)
 - “Significant change” method (Teacher Development)

Areas for Improvement

- Specification of evaluation criteria, but reports do not explain how they are applied in the given case (Teacher Development comes closest).
- Evaluation questions are only placed in annexes (MOST, Teacher Development).
- Missing explanation of links between the TOCs and evaluation questions.
- Lack of detail on participation of ERG and other end users (e.g., in reconstructing TOCs or co-creating recommendations) (MOST comes close).
- UNEG norms, standards and guidance are referenced, but their application in particular cases is not explained (UCCN comes closest).
- Survey response rates are low or not reported (MOST, UCCN; unknown for Teacher Development).
- Missing databases (UCCN) and monitoring data (MOST, Teacher Development).
- Although all reports note limitations, only one (UCCN) explains how they were mitigated.

2. Findings

Good Practices

- Use of bold finding statements improves clarity (MOST, UCCN).
- “Temperature scale” assessment technique provides summary insights (Teacher Development).
- The findings are structured along the evaluation criteria.
- Additional disaggregated findings by gender and by case study in UCCN.
- Little to no subjective evaluator judgment inserted into the finding statements.

- Clear citation of data sources in text and footnotes.
- UCCN makes particularly effective use of graphs and visuals to reinforce findings.

Areas for Improvement

- Findings are not consistently structured in response to evaluation questions (MOST, Teacher Development).
- Finding statements often lack reasoning or rationale - the “why” and “how” are not well explained.
- Inconsistent or superficial discussion of enabling/hindering factors (MOST comes closest to expectations).

3. Conclusions

Areas for Improvement

- Conclusion chapters are very short (UCCN: 2 pages) (MOST: 3 pages).
- No clear logic or rationale explaining how conclusions were prioritised (e.g., by evaluation criteria) (UCCN comes closest with subtitles).
- Evaluator’s voice is largely absent — conclusions mostly reiterate findings without added interpretation (Teacher Development comes closest to expectations)
- Only one report (Teacher Development) has formulated (and numbered) bold conclusion statements.
- Only one report (UCCN) shows how conclusions are based on findings.

4. Recommendations

Good Practices

- No excessive or unfocused lists.
- Clear directional language in recommendations (MOST, Teacher Development).
- Supplementary guidance included:
 - “Options for implementation” (MOST)
 - “Suggested actions” (Teacher Development)
- Clear assignment of responsibilities and implementation timelines.
- Management responses are included in the main reports.

Areas for Improvement

- More emphasis on introducing the recommendations would provide context, build credibility, and help readers understand the structure and navigate the recommendations easily.
- In most cases, recommendations are not explicitly linked to findings or conclusions. MOST partially addresses this by explaining, “this recommendation addresses...”.
- Prioritisation of the recommendations would increase understanding of which recommendations and actions matter more.

Decentralised Evaluation Reports (7 reports)

1. Methodology

Good Practices

- Well-structured evaluation matrices included in annexes (except Sursock Museum).
- Use of advanced data collection and analysis methods:
 - Computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATIs) for beneficiary data (Cultural Heritage).
 - Combination of contribution analysis and outcome harvesting (Youth Empowerment).

Areas for Improvement

- Evaluation criteria are explained (Youth Empowerment, Cultural Heritage, Support for Ukraine, Flanders TF), but not contextualised for the specific evaluations. Cultural Heritage is a good example (see introduction to the main findings).
- Incoherent information about the applied evaluation criteria (Sursock Museum, Coastal Communities).
- Evaluation questions are only listed in annexes as part of evaluation matrices. They are not integrated into the main text (Support for Ukraine, Flanders TF, Right to Education).
- Minimal discussion of ERG involvement or user participation; Flanders TF is a notable exception.
- Inconsistent reference to UNEG standards, norms and guidelines and the UNESCO evaluation policy and evaluation manual. Where referenced, little explanation of how they were applied in the specific evaluation process.
- Limited information on sampling techniques and missing disaggregated data on stakeholders consulted/surveyed. Youth Empowerment has a respectable separate section on sampling, with disaggregated data in the annex.
- Scarce information is available on the data analysis methods applied (Youth Empowerment and Coastal Communities are respectable attempts).
- Weak or unclear links between theories of change and evaluation questions.
- While most reports acknowledge limitations (exceptions: Sursock Museum, Support for Ukraine), they fall short of discussing mitigation measures. Notable exception: Youth Empowerment.

2. Findings

Good Practices

- Bold finding statements improve readability, presented upfront for each evaluation criterion (Coastal Communities, Right to Education) or used to structure the findings chapter (Youth Empowerment, Support for Ukraine).
- Minimal presence of “evaluator voice” in the finding statements and analysis; finding statements and analysis focus on interpreting the evidence.

- Findings are structured according to evaluation criteria.
- Effectiveness is often analysed in relation to project outputs/outcomes (e.g., Youth Empowerment, Coastal Communities, Support for Ukraine, Right to Education).
- Respectable evidence base used to support findings (exception: Sursock Museum).
- Acceptable to respectable attempts to uncover the causes facilitating or hindering UNESCO's performance under the evaluation criteria. To increase the benefit of this analysis, the information could have been brought together in one place.
- Specific evaluation questions under the effectiveness criterion address enabling and hindering factors (Sursock Museum, Youth Empowerment, Right to Education).

Areas for Improvement

- Limited emphasis of the finding statements on the factors that facilitated or hindered performance; few finding statements explain the “why” or “how.”
- Analyses could have been more consolidated, and findings pitched at a higher, more strategic level.
- While aligned to evaluation criteria, findings are not always clearly linked to evaluation questions (Cultural Heritage, Support for Ukraine, Coastal Communities, Flanders TF, Right to Education). Youth Empowerment is a good example.

3. Conclusions

Areas for Improvement

- Inconsistent presentation of conclusions across reports:
 - Some lack a dedicated conclusions section (Sursock Museum)
 - Others have a separate conclusions chapter (Youth Empowerment, Support for Ukraine, Right to Education)
 - Others embed conclusions within the findings chapter for each evaluation criterion (Cultural Heritage)
 - Others combine them with recommendations in a conclusion and recommendations chapter (Coastal Communities, Flanders TF)
- There is no clear rationale for the order or logic of conclusions (e.g., alignment with evaluation criteria). Only two reports (Youth Empowerment, Right to Education) show how conclusions are based on findings.
- Most reports do not include bold or clearly formulated conclusion statements. A good example is Youth Empowerment (although they are slightly lengthy).
- Conclusions often provide a basic synthesis of findings without added value or evaluator insight (especially Support for Ukraine, Coastal Communities, Right to Education). Youth Empowerment shows a respectable attempt at professional judgment.

4. Recommendations

Good Practices

- No overwhelming “laundry lists” of recommendations.
- Clear assignment of responsibilities for implementation (except Flanders TF), although frequent references to UNESCO HQ could detail the responsible organisational unit.
- Some reports include helpful supplementary guidance for implementing recommendations, strengthening the practical value of the recommendations:
 - “Proposed/strategic actions” (Youth Empowerment)
 - “Action plan” (Cultural Heritage)
 - “Necessary steps” (Right to Education)
- Timelines are suggested in most reports (exceptions: Sursock Museum, Flanders TF).
- Support for Ukraine specifies resource levels needed for implementing each recommendation.

Areas for Improvement

- Most reports lack an introductory paragraph in the recommendations chapter to orient the reader - e.g., to help the reader understand the structure and purpose of the recommendations. Youth Empowerment is a good example.
- Recommendations are often not explicitly linked to findings or conclusions. Only Youth Empowerment and the Right to Education make these links clear (both in terms of conclusions).
- Recommendation statements are often too prescriptive and could be elevated to express broader strategic direction.
- Recommendation prioritisation is largely missing, despite being useful in resource-limited contexts. Good examples include Youth Empowerment, Support for Ukraine, and Coastal Communities.

Annex 2: List of persons interviewed

UNESCO HQ

Name	Position	Sector
Bernadin Assiene	Director	Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS)
Claudia Ibarguen	Head of Evaluation	IOS Evaluation Office
Martina Rathner	Principal Evaluation Specialist	IOS Evaluation Office
Ekaterina Sediakina-Rivière	Principal Evaluation Specialist	IOS Evaluation Office
Caspar Merkle	Principal Evaluation Specialist	IOS Evaluation Office
Ina Salas	Principal Evaluation Specialist	IOS Evaluation Office
Taipei Dlamini	Evaluation Specialist	IOS Evaluation Office
Getrude Ndungu	Evaluation Consultant	IOS Evaluation Office
Maxwell Tawanda Mutukwa	Evaluation Consultant	IOS Evaluation Office
Carles Soriano	Head of Internal Audit	IOS Internal Audit
Tuyet-Mai Grabiell	Principal Auditor	IOS Internal Audit
Helen Thanassoulis	Principal Auditor	IOS Internal Audit
Kenny Kuranjari Burawudi	Data officer	Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS)
Flora Moutard	Auditor	IOS Internal Audit
Adina Trunk	Chief of the Executive Office	Executive Office, Communication and Information (CI) Sector
Dorine Dubois	Chief of the Executive Office	Executive Office, Culture (CLT) Sector
Alice Thibault	Associate Project Officer	Executive Office, Culture (CLT) Sector
Jayakumar Ramasamy	Chief of Executive Office	Executive Office, Natural Science (SC) Sector
Mariagrazia Squicciarini	Chief of Executive Office	Executive Office, Social and Human Sciences (SHS) Sector
Juan Pablo Ramirez-Miranda	Programme Coordinator	Executive Office, Social and Human Sciences (SHS) Sector r
Mariana Kitsiona	Programme Specialist	Executive Office, Education (ED) Sector
Anne Coupez	Chief of Unit	Executive Office, Education (ED) Sector

Denisse Bax	Head of Unit	UNESCO Creative Cities Network Unit, Diversity of Cultural Expressions Entity, CLT Sector
Doyun Lee	Head of Unit	Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Diversity of Cultural Expressions Entity, CLT Sector
Zichao Yan	Associate Programme Specialist	Illicit Trafficking and Return and Restitution Unit, Culture and Emergencies Entity, CLT Sector
Nigel Thomas Crawhall	Chief of Section	Section for Indigenous and Local Knowledge Systems, SC Sector
Irmgarda Kasinkaite,	Advisor	Section for Media Development and Media in Emergency, CI Sector
Damiano Giampaoli	Desk Officer	Division of External Relations, Priority Africa and External Relations Sector (PAX)
Carlos Vargas Tames	Chief of Section	Section for Teacher Development, ED sector
Salvatore Mineo	Senior Advisor for Governing Bodies, Strategic Planning and Human Resources	Office of the Director-General (CAB)
Paola Pagliani	Director	Division for Planning and Programming, Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP)
Maria Begona Lasagabaster	Director	Division for Gender Equality
Othilie du Souich	Head of Results Based Management Unit (RBM) Unit	Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP)
Sixtine Toutée	Associate RBM Officer	Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP)

UNESCO Field Offices

Name	Position	Sector
Ennada Lagouit	Regional Evaluation Associate for West and Central Africa	UNESCO Dakar, Regional Office for West and Central Africa
Osama Alkebsi	Regional Evaluation Associate for the Arab States	UNESCO Doha, Regional Office for Gulf States and Yemen
Mariana Chambel Ferreira	Regional Evaluation Associate for Latin America and the Caribbean Region	UNESCO Montevideo, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

Angela Maria Jimenez Penuela	Regional Evaluation Associate for Eastern and Southern Africa	UNESCO Nairobi, Regional Office for Eastern Africa
Ahmad Qazi	Regional Evaluation Associate for Asia and the Pacific	UNESCO Bangkok, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Amir Piric	Director	UNESCO Almaty, Regional Office for Central Asia
Louise Haxthausen	Director	UNESCO Nairobi, Regional Office for Eastern Africa
Soohyun Kim	Director	UNESCO Bangkok, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Drollett Kirimoke	Programme Officer	UNESCO Bangkok, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Salah Khaled	Director	UNESCO Doha, Regional Office for the Gulf States and Yemen
Celestin Mutumayi	Associate Monitoring and Evaluation Officer	UNESCO Yaounde, Regional Office for Central Africa
Shafiullah Rasikh	Monitoring and Evaluation Officer	UNESCO Kabul, National Office for Afghanistan
Abdelgadir Salih	National Professional Officer	UNESCO Khartoum, National Office for Sudan
Federica Matone	Associate Project Officer	UNESCO Nairobi, Regional Office for Eastern Africa
Wally Merotto	Associate Coordination Officer	UNESCO Venice, Regional Office for Science and Culture in Europe
Qingling Kong	Programme Specialist	UNESCO Harare, Regional Office for Southern Africa
Rodrigo Araujo	Project Officer	UNESCO Brasilia, National Office for Brazil

External partners

Member States		
Name	Position	Institution
Peter K. Ngure	Ambassador	Permanent Delegation of Kenya to UNESCO
Rhina Durán	Advisor	Permanent Delegation of the Dominican Republic to UNESCO
UNESCO Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC)		

Menon Saraswathi	UNESCO OAC Chair	UNESCO Oversight Advisory Committee
Mireille Harnois	UNESCO OAC member	UNESCO Oversight Advisory Committee
Fady Zeidan	UNESCO OAC member	UNESCO Oversight Advisory Committee
Consultant(s)		
Meenakshi Sankar	Consultant (UNESCO Yearly Synthesis reports, 2023, 2024 and 2025)	Buddhi Consultancy Limited

Annex 3: List of documents reviewed

UNESCO Integrated Evaluation Self-Assessment, IOS-EV, March 2025
Peer Review of the UNESCO Evaluation Function January 2020
UNESCO Evaluation Policy 2022-2029
UNESCO Evaluation Strategy 2022-2029
UNESCO Evaluation Manual, IOS/EVS/PI 206, January 2023
Guidance on Budgeting for Evaluation at UNESCO, IOS-EV, July 2023
Terms of Reference: Regional Evaluation Associates, IOS-EV, 2024
Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS): Annual Report 2024, March 2025
Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS): Annual Report 2023, February 2024
2024 Annual Report of the Oversight Advisory Committee, March 2025
2023 Annual Report of the Oversight Advisory Committee, February 2024
2024 Synthesis of UNESCO Evaluations, IOS-EV, July 2024
UNESCO Evaluation Quality Assurance - Checklist and Guidance, EVS, 2023
Approved Programme and Budget 2024-2025, UNESCO, 2024
UNESCO Programme Coordination Group, Minutes, 10 April 2024
Communication Plan for IOS Corporate Evaluations, EVS, December 2020
Communication Template for IOS Corporate Evaluations, EVS, December 2020
What to do with our evaluation reports? Communications strategies for evaluations, EVS, (no year)
Summary of IOS Evaluation Office Communication Efforts – 1 November 2020 to 3 September 2024 (downloads from Website)
IOS Evaluation Office website <https://www.unesco.org/en/ios/evaluation>

Corporate evaluation reports

Evaluation of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme (2024)
UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN): evaluation (2024)
Evaluation of UNESCO's work on teacher development (2023)
Evaluation Insights # 58 "Evaluation of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme, January 2025
Evaluation Insights #59: Mid-term evaluation of the UN Ocean Decade, May 2025
Summary of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and Management Response to Evaluation Findings, Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (Of UNESCO), April 2025
Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) Evaluation of the Management of Social Transformations (Most) Programme (Summary), Executive Board, February 2025

Decentralised evaluation reports

Support of UNESCO's activities in the field of science (FUST), 2024
Assistance to the rehabilitation and reopening of the Sursok Museum, 2024
Support to National Capacity Building to Realize Girls Right to Education in Pakistan (GREP), 2024
"Strengthening the Resilience of Coastal Communities in the Northeast Atlantic, Mediterranean Region to the Impact of Tsunamis and Other Sea Level-Related Coastal Hazards (CoastWAVE)", 2025

"External Evaluation of the project “Empowering Young People in Africa through Media and Communication”, 2025

Evaluation of the UNESCO project “Support for Ukraine in Culture and Education Through UNESCO”, 2025

Evaluation of UNESCO Iraq & Jordan Support to Livelihoods through Cultural Heritage Development, 2025

External documents

Mapping Decentralized Evaluation Functions across UN Agencies, UNEG, June 2025

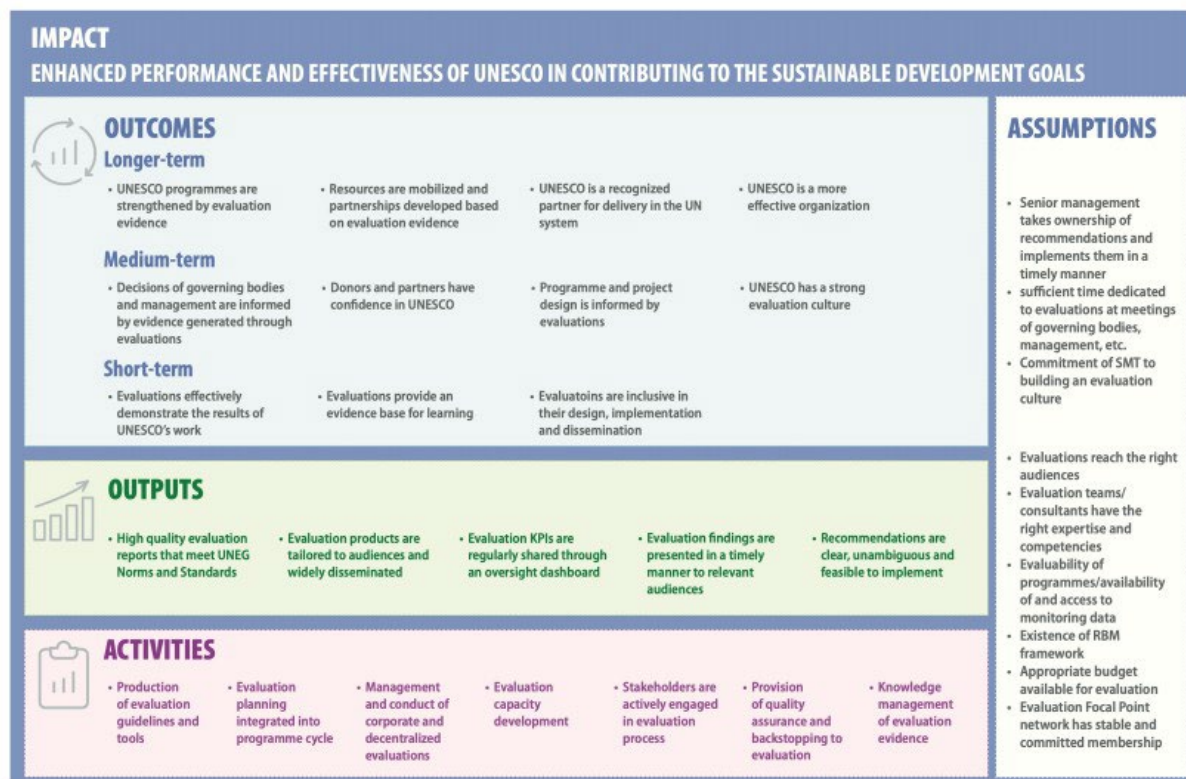
UNEG Guidelines for Professional Peer Reviews, UNEG, November 2023

UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, UNEG, 2017

MOPAN Assessment Report: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Part I), MOPAN, 2025

MOPAN Assessment Report: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Part II, Technical and Statistical Annex, MOPAN, 2025

Annex 4: Theory of Change for Evaluation at UNESCO



Source: UNESCO Evaluation Strategy 2022-2029, p.7

Annex 5: KPI and performance indicators of the UNESCO evaluation function

KPI 1: EVALUATION THEMATIC COVERAGE

Evaluation Priority	KPI	Description	Frequency
Evaluations adequately cover UNESCO thematic areas	Corporate evaluation coverage	# of UNESCO strategic outcomes covered by corporate evaluations	Annual
	Decentralized evaluation coverage	# of UNESCO strategic outcomes covered by decentralized evaluations	Annual

KPI 2: EVALUATION FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Evaluation Priority	KPI	Description	Frequency
Evaluations adequately cover UNESCO thematic areas	Financial resources for corporate evaluations	1. Allocations for corporate evaluations 2. Actual expenditures on corporate evaluations	Biennial
	Financial resources for decentralized evaluations	1. Allocations for decentralized evaluations 2. % of project budget actually spent on evaluation	Annual

KPI 3: COMPLETION OF EVALUATION TRAINING

Evaluation Priority	KPI	Description	Frequency
UNESCO staff have evaluation skills and knowledge	Completion of evaluation training	# of EFPs and evaluation managers who completed a relevant evaluation training	Annual

KPI 4: EVALUATION DELIVERY

Evaluation Priority	KPI	Description	Frequency
Evaluations are implemented on time	Corporate evaluation delivery	% of completed corporate evaluations	Annual
	Decentralized evaluation delivery	% of completed decentralized evaluations	Six-monthly

KPI 5: EVALUATION QUALITY

Evaluation Priority	KPI	Description	Frequency
UNESCO Evaluations are of high quality	Quality of corporate evaluations	% of corporate evaluations rated satisfactory or above	Annual
	Quality of decentralized evaluations	% of decentralized evaluations rated satisfactory or above	Annual

KPI 6: COMPLETION OF EVALUATION MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Evaluation Priority	KPI	Description	Frequency
All UNESCO Evaluations must have a management response	Completion of Evaluation Management Response for corporate evaluations	% of corporate evaluations that include a Management Response	Six-monthly
	Completion of Evaluation Management Response for decentralized evaluations	% of decentralized evaluations that include a Management Response	Six-monthly

KPI 7: IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Priority	KPI	Description	Frequency
Evaluation recommendations implemented on time	Implementation of Evaluation Recommendations for corporate evaluations	Implementation status (started/ completed/ pending) of evaluation recommendations for corporate evaluations	Six-monthly
	Implementation of Evaluation Recommendations for decentralized evaluations	Implementation status (started/ completed/ pending) of evaluation recommendations for decentralized evaluations	Six-monthly

KPI 8: EVALUATION USE

Evaluation Priority	KPI	Description	Frequency
UNESCO programmes and policies are informed by evaluations	Evaluation Use	Extent to which staff report the use of evaluation for Project Formulation and during Annual Reporting	Annual

Source: UNESCO Evaluation Strategy 2022-2029, p.2

Annex 6: Capacity-building tools for the decentralised function

[UNESCO Evaluation Knowledge Hub](#)

- Database of Corporate and Decentralised Evaluation Reports
- Evaluation Guidelines and Tools
- Directory of Evaluation Focal Points
- Evaluation Training and Webinar Repository
- Roles and Responsibilities in Evaluation at UNESCO
- Roles and Responsibilities in Evaluation at UNESCO

[UNESCO Evaluation MyLearning](#)

Guidance Note on Budgeting for Evaluation at UNESCO

UNESCO Evaluation Quality Assurance Resource Documents

- Quality Assurance Template Checklist
- Quality Score Calculator (Excel workbook)

UNESCO Evaluation Tools (available in ENG, FR, SPA)

1. UNESCO Terms of Reference for Evaluation Focal Points
2. UNESCO Evaluation Plan Template
3. UNESCO Guidance on Evaluability Assessment
4. UNESCO Evaluation Stakeholders Mapping Template
5. Sample Letter: Evaluation Reference Group Invitation
6. UNESCO Guidance on Evaluation Terms of Reference
7. UNESCO Evaluation Budget Example
8. UNESCO Guidance for selecting Evaluation Consultants
9. UNESCO Guidance for Developing an Evaluation Communication Plan
10. UNESCO Guidance on Evaluation Inception Reports
11. UNESCO Guidance on Evaluation in the context of the Pandemic
12. UNESCO Guidance on Evaluation Reports
13. UNESCO Evaluation Management Response and Action Plan Template