

# Adapting evaluation questions to the COVID-19 pandemic

UNFPA Evaluation Office

February 2021

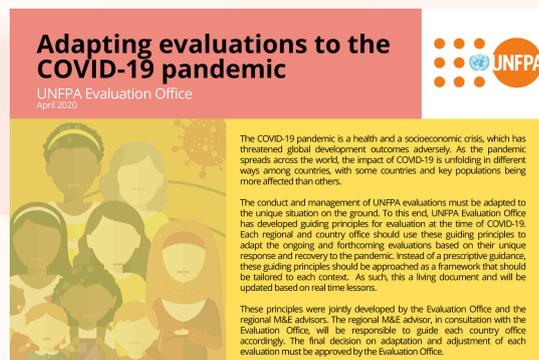


## Background

At an early stage in the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Evaluation Office developed a guidance note on **'Adapting evaluations to the COVID-19 pandemic: Guiding principles and their practical implications'**. The guidance sought to help UNFPA country offices to adjust and provide alternative approaches, methods and considerations to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on evaluations. Encouragingly, the evaluations conducted since then have made notable efforts in reflecting and applying those guiding principles in the contextual analysis, methods, and data collection schemes.

However, owing to the protracted nature of the COVID-19 crisis, the environment in which UNFPA programmes are implemented has changed significantly. The increasingly complex and dynamic contexts have led UNFPA offices to revisit, redesign, and repurpose programmatic focus, priorities, and modes of engagement. Correspondingly, resources have been reallocated and new programmes and activities have been implemented to respond to emerging needs and to ensure an equitable and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, across development, humanitarian, and fragile contexts.

This calls for adapting the evaluation questions in order to assess the extent to which UNFPA has adapted its interventions to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure an equitable and sustainable recovery.



### Guiding principles

- ✔ **Evaluation is even more critical at the time of a crisis**, as it provides evaluative evidence on what works, why, for whom and under what circumstances
- ✔ Crisis affects different people in different ways, impacting disadvantaged populations disproportionately. **Human rights-based, equity-focused and gender responsive evaluations** are more important than ever, to inform interventions focused on leaving no one behind
- ✔ Evaluation should always comply with the **'no harm'** principle for all stakeholders involved
- ✔ **Learn, adapt and share** on an ongoing basis, with the evaluation community within UNFPA, the UN and beyond
- ✔ Evaluation should explore the **opportunity to strengthen UN coordination, including enhancing national evaluation capacities**, in particular:
  - Explore opportunities for joint and UN system-wide evaluations (see ahead)
  - Engage national evaluators, including young evaluators and Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluations (VOPEs). This requires assessing your role, and potentially moving from being an evaluation manager only, towards taking on a mentoring role
  - Given the multi-dimensionality of the crisis, explore opportunity and call for joint/system-wide efforts to enhance national evaluation capacities for countries to evaluate its own response

## COVID-19 related results indicators by strategic priorities

Strategic priority	Indicators
Continuity of sexual and reproductive health services and interventions, including protection of the health workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of countries where pre COVID-19 levels of institutional deliveries are maintained</li> <li>Number of women and young people who have utilized integrated sexual and reproductive health services in COVID-19 affected countries</li> </ul>
Addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities, subject to violence who have accessed essential GBV services in COVID-19 affected countries</li> <li>Number of countries that have included in their preparedness, response and recovery plans for COVID-19 measures to address GBV</li> </ul>
Ensuring the supply of modern contraceptives and other reproductive health commodities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of COVID-19 affected countries that reported no contraceptive stock-outs</li> <li>Total couple-years of protection for contraceptives procured by UNFPA, including condoms</li> </ul>

## Adapting evaluation questions based on national contexts and operational realities caused by COVID-19

Due to the pandemic, the reliability and validity of the underlying assumptions made at the country programme formulation stage may not be holding as originally anticipated. As a result, heavy reliance of evaluations on pre-pandemic information/evidence may not produce meaningful insights to inform the design of new Country Programme Documents and programmes. Instead, **it requires evaluations to carefully examine results frameworks and/or retrofit the theories of change to take stock of the changing context and country realities.**

The immediate corollaries of these changes require a parallel adaptation and fine tuning of evaluation questions. This entails adapting areas of inquiry for assessing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence/coordination, and sustainability of country programmes and/or other interventions. In other words, this necessitates an approach that finds the right balance between assessing performance against the original results frameworks while evaluating the degree of adaptation and response to the COVID-19 crisis. The approach must also address the ability of UNFPA to leverage partnership, coherence, and coordination to deliver more, better and faster across the three strategic priority areas of **UNFPA response to COVID-19**<sup>1</sup> while ensuring that the recovery is truly inclusive<sup>2</sup> and sustainable.

### Purpose of the guidance

This note complements the guidance on '**Adapting evaluations to the COVID-19 pandemic: Guiding principles and their practical implications**'. It aims at encouraging evaluators to integrate COVID-19 related issues in the evaluation questions and subsequent analysis.

### Examples of evaluation questions

The examples provided below are not meant to constitute an exhaustive list. Rather, the main purpose is to **stimulate a reflection to formulate meaningful evaluation questions that take into consideration COVID-19 implications.** In a nutshell, by asking the right questions, evaluations could yield a far richer source of evidence on the responsive of UNFPA and its adaptive management capacity, ability to learn and innovate, and optimize performance in the midst and aftermath of the pandemic.

While everyone is facing unprecedented challenges, disadvantaged population groups, including young women and girls, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, people living with HIV and internally displaced persons, among others, are disproportionately affected by the health, economic and social fallout of COVID-19. One should therefore examine whether the (country) programme results are still relevant to the needs of the population in general, and to those of marginalized populations (those furthest behind) in particular.

**Under the different evaluation criteria, this would mean assessing whether these specific groups have been reached, and with what results.**

1 Continuity of sexual and reproductive health services and interventions, including protection of the health workforce; addressing gender-based violence and harmful practices and ensuring the supply of modern contraceptives and other reproductive health commodities.

2 This implies the extent to which disadvantaged groups have the information they need, are protected against violence and have access to life-saving services.

## Relevance

Relevance includes an assessment of the responsiveness (dynamic relevance) in light of changes and/or additional requests from national counterparts, and shifts caused by external factors in an evolving country context (examples of visible changes: change of governmental orientation, humanitarian crisis and pandemics such as COVID-19).

### To what extent has the country office been able to respond to changes in national needs and priorities, including those of vulnerable or marginalized groups, entailed by the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic?

- ✓ To what extent have UNFPA programmes ensured a flexible and adaptive approach to ensure access to a continuum of comprehensive life-saving sexual and reproductive health and GBV prevention and protection services as part of the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts?
- ✓ To what extent were the short-term requests for COVID-19 response balanced against mid-term recovery needs?
- ✓ To what extent have UNFPA programmes ensured addressing the changing needs of beneficiaries as part of the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts?
- ✓ To what extent do the UNFPA COVID-19 response and recovery efforts conform to the principle of leaving no one behind and reaching those furthest behind first?

## Effectiveness

When assessing effectiveness, it is essential to critically analyze the theory of change and the results framework (including the corresponding set of indicators and targets), which were developed prior to the pandemic outbreak. The performance of the country programme may require to be assessed against a revised results framework, taking into account the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the capacity of UNFPA and partners to rapidly adapt and respond to the COVID-19 situation, and ensure recovery.

In addition, it may be of value to examine monitoring and evaluation activities, focusing on whether monitoring frameworks were sufficiently flexible to accommodate, or whether they were adapted to, the new data requests emerging from internal and United Nations system-wide COVID-19 preparedness, response and recovery frameworks.

### To what extent were the UNFPA country programme intended results achieved, taking into account potential changes made to the initial results framework due to the COVID-19 crisis?

- ✓ To what extent and in what ways has UNFPA been able to ensure continuity of sexual and reproductive health services and interventions (including ensuring the supply of modern contraceptives and reproductive health commodity), and addressing GBV and harmful practices as part of the COVID-19 crisis response and recovery efforts?
- ✓ To what extent has UNFPA ensured vulnerable and marginalized groups (such as young women and girls, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, etc.) have the information they need, are protected against violence and have access to life-saving services?
- ✓ To what extent has UNFPA systematically incorporated and implemented data-driven, gender responsive and human rights-based interventions to maintain essential services, including quality sexual reproductive health and GBV prevention and protection services (including mental health and psychosocial support), within the framework of the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts?

**Efficiency**

The efficiency criterion captures how resources (funds, expertise, time, etc.) have been used by the country office and converted into results along the results chain.

**To what extent was the mix of resources, procedures and implementation modalities used by the country office adapted to the COVID-19 context?**

- ✓ To what extent was the country office able to adapt the level and the allocation of its resources with a view to mitigating the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis?
- ✓ To what extent did UNFPA systems, processes and procedures (particularly in terms of finance, partnerships, logistics, procurement and human resources) foster or, on the contrary, impede the adaptation of the country programme to changes triggered by the COVID-19 crisis?
- ✓ To what extent has UNFPA appropriately used innovative technologies to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and mitigate its effects?

**Coordination and coherence**

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic requires increased coordination and coherence among United Nations and development partners. These aspects therefore deserve particular attention, as the evaluators are more likely to have access to national and development partners rather than to the beneficiaries of the country programme.

- ✓ To what extent have issues pertaining to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, been adequately integrated and addressed in joint COVID-19 response and recovery programming?
- ✓ To what extent has the UNFPA country office provided leadership in GBV and SRHR coordination and contributed to effective coordination and complementarity within the framework of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) collective response to the COVID-19 crisis?

**Sustainability**

Similar reflections should guide the assessment of the sustainability criterion. For e.g., how does COVID-19 affect the likelihood that country programme achievements will be maintained after the end of UNFPA supported interventions?

- ✓ To what extent has UNFPA been successful in managing the threats to the sustainability of results caused by the COVID-19 crisis?
- ✓ To what extent have UNFPA COVID-19 response and recovery efforts contributed to strengthening national capacities and systems in the fields of SRHR, GBV prevention and protection and data?