



## United Nations Population Fund

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### United Nations Population Fund

#### **Evaluation of UNFPA support to the prevention of, response to, and elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices (2012–2017)**

*Summary*

The Evaluation Office conducted an evaluation of the UNFPA support to the prevention of, response to, and elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices as part of the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan (2018-2021).

Covering the period 2012-2017, the evaluation assessed the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of UNFPA support to the prevention of, response to and elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices, covering both development and humanitarian contexts.

As the first broad thematic evaluation in this area of work, the evaluation generated important findings, lessons and recommendations, and is intended to support accountability for past performance, contribute to evidence-based decision-making, and support the ongoing implementation of UNFPA policies and programmes, including the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021. The evaluation is also intended to inform the strategic positioning of UNFPA, reflecting the changing development environment and alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **I. Background on UNFPA work on the elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices**

1. Gender-based violence is a grave violation of human rights and is widely recognized as an international public health crisis. It is estimated that one in three women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime,<sup>1</sup> resulting in multiple physical, sexual and psychological consequences, and affecting the long-term well-being of individuals and communities. Women and girls continue to suffer from harmful practices, including child marriage, female genital mutilation, and son preference.

2. Tracing back to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, UNFPA has a long history of responding to gender-based violence and harmful practices. Since 2006, however, the tempo of this work has accelerated, with UNFPA efforts to eradicate gender-based violence and harmful practices reflected in numerous strategic plans and frameworks. The Mid-term Review of the Strategic Plan 2012–2013 and the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2014–2017 capture work on gender-based violence and harmful practices, with the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2014–2017 specifically recognizing the impact of humanitarian contexts on gender-based violence.

3. While UNFPA strategic plans have previously addressed gender-based violence and harmful practices across multiple outcomes and outputs, Outcome 3 of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021 further elevates the work, with a dedicated output explicitly referencing all three harmful practices for the first time. Notably, UNFPA is the only United Nations agency working to eliminate all three harmful practices (child marriage, female genital mutilation and son preference).

4. Efforts by UNFPA to respond to and eliminate gender-based violence and harmful practices have accelerated progress on the implementation of the Programme of Action of the ICPD and have driven efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and related goals such as SDG 3 (Health).

5. Through human rights-based, gender responsive, and culturally sensitive programming, UNFPA has contributed to the development of normative frameworks, collaborative efforts to learn and share practical programme experiences, campaigns to support accountability, and efforts to engage stakeholders beyond traditional United Nations actors.

6. Engaging in multi-stakeholder partnerships, UNFPA has worked through joint programmes and has managed trust funds to eliminate gender-based violence and harmful practices. The agency has also played a leadership role in the (long-established) Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and the Inter-Agency Taskforce on Violence against Women.

## **II. The purpose and objectives of the evaluation**

7. The evaluation was conducted by the UNFPA independent Evaluation Office, with the support of an external independent evaluation team between January 2017 and July 2018, and the active engagement of a global reference group and (in case-study countries) national evaluation reference groups.

8. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess UNFPA support to the prevention of, response to, and elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The evaluation is intended to contribute to accountability for past performance, support evidence-based decision-making, and inform the

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<sup>1</sup> See WHO key facts on violence against women: <http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

development and implementation of UNFPA strategic plans, policies and programmes, including UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018–2021. It is anticipated that the evaluation will inform the strategic positioning of UNFPA in this area of work, reflecting the changing development environment and alignment with the 2030 sustainable development agenda.

9. Covering the period 2012–2017, the evaluation included all UNFPA support to the prevention of, response to, and elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices (child marriage, female genital mutilation, and son preference). UNFPA work at global, regional and country levels was assessed.

### III. Evaluation methodology

10. The evaluation methodology followed a mixed, multi-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including case studies, interviews, e-survey, and documentation review. Data analysis techniques included qualitative comparative analysis and contribution analysis to generate and triangulate evidence on the causal chain connecting UNFPA interventions to observed outcomes based on a reconstructed theory of change. The evaluation adhered to the evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability and was guided by United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards, guidance on integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluation, and ethical guidelines.

11. The evaluation team used triangulation and internal and external validation mechanisms. Triangulation, used to improve validity, encompassed cross-checking pieces of evidence from different sources and results by applying different data analysis methods. Internal validation took place through internal revisions among evaluation team members and between the team and the UNFPA Evaluation Office. External validation consisted of presentations and discussions of preliminary findings in debriefings with external stakeholders.

#### Evaluation Key Facts

Over 700+ documents reviewed

Review and analysis of 20 country programme evaluations

Analysis of financial data on budget and expenditure

932 people consulted through individual interviews and focus-group discussions

4 in-country case studies and 8 countries with extended desk review

2 regional case studies: Asia and the Pacific and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

1 global online survey covering country office staff, other UN agencies and implementing partners

### IV. Findings: an overview

#### Alignment with international, regional and country normative frameworks and national needs

12. The evaluation found that UNFPA programming firmly aligns with, and contributes to, relevant international human rights conventions, instruments and reports at all levels. At country level, UNFPA country programmes, priorities and strategies align with national plans of action and contribute to United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs).

13. UNFPA offices draw on situation analyses, studies and mappings to ensure the relevance of programme design to both rights holders and duty bearers. All UNFPA programming

addresses the needs of women and girls. However, the level of context-specific gender analysis informing each intervention is often dependent on the level of integration and the (varying) gender expertise of staff members within each office.

14. The strategic positioning of UNFPA at the intersection of sexual and reproductive health and the elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices is a core comparative strength. UNFPA also facilitates inter-sector relationships, straddles development and humanitarian contexts, has field presence, and leverages analysis of population data to inform programming.

#### **Contribution to development results**

15. The health sector response, especially in terms of the clinical response, is the most tangible contribution of UNFPA to quality, accessible services. UNFPA support to a multi-sector response is advancing, albeit unevenly, thanks to the contribution of UNFPA headquarters to the joint essential services package and strong initiatives by regional offices. Despite pockets of innovation, prevention-side interventions are more limited.

16. Evidence from UNFPA-supported interventions helps to inform the national implementation of international commitments, local laws and gender policies. However, the commitment by UNFPA offices to knowledge exchange and learning across countries on solutions to end gender-based violence and harmful practices (through, for example, South-South and triangular cooperation) is not yet backstopped by a systematic approach to organizing that knowledge (and using it for improved programming) at corporate level.

17. The strongest advocacy for funding gender-based violence interventions is based on a combination of qualitative stories and quantitative incidence data. Success in UNFPA advocacy has brought in other actors and resources, with the regional level proving to be particularly suited for joint advocacy.

18. National capacity development has been extensively supported by UNFPA. This is strongest in relation to the clinical response, with more variation in relation to prevention and the psychosocial response. UNFPA capacity development of civil society at the local level has primarily been operational, with less attention given to building advocacy capacity to influence local political decision-making and budgeting. By generating guidelines and knowledge products, UNFPA also contributes significantly to the public good, but is generally lacking the resources for translation and sustained roll-out (with on-going follow-up) to ensure national implementation of guidance.

19. UNFPA is already making a strong contribution to national tracking of Sustainable Development Goal indicators on the prevalence of violence against women and harmful practices. UNFPA support to national data-management capacity on gender-based violence incidence and response is also a relevant, but still nascent, area of contribution. Neither national nor UNFPA monitoring systems are currently sufficient to track the outcomes of (legal and social) normative interventions.

#### **Organizational efficiency**

20. The elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices has progressively become a more visible component of UNFPA strategic plans. However, an increased proportion of non-core funds limits options for UNFPA offices to address the root causes of gender-based violence and harmful practices through sustained long-term programming. In the past, the UNFPA business model has not taken sufficient account of variations in needs, capacities and inequities at the sub-national level. Greater flexibility, introduced with the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021, is a welcome change in this regard. UNFPA leadership on eliminating gender-based violence and harmful practices can also be strengthened by better integration of thematic teams (particularly at country level), and improved knowledge management.

21. Results-based management systems are in place. However, they are primarily focused on the activities and output levels (with variability in the quality and granularity of reporting),

and therefore contribution to outcomes is insufficiently considered. The short time frame of the annual work plans also creates significant risks to delivering medium-term outcomes and ensuring no harm is created by interrupted services or generating demands that are unable to be met (due to unpredictable support).

#### **Sustainability of benefits**

22. UNFPA is laying the foundation for national capacity for prevention and response to gender-based violence, with the creation of operational tools a key pillar of UNFPA strategies for sustainability. At the same time, UNFPA advocacy at the country level is winning political will for policy change, but this is not often translated into firm national budget commitments. UNFPA has strong multi-sector relationships with ministries and local administrations to support national implementation. However, diverse links with the executive branch of governments place a limit on political sustainability. In many places, UNFPA is part of the wider movement to change socio-cultural norms and these partnerships are a mechanism for sustainability beyond the programme cycle.

#### **Humanitarian action**

23. Within the Protection Cluster, the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility is the most high-profile strand of UNFPA leadership within humanitarian contexts. Though UNFPA commits crucial core funding to this leadership role, the work on the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility and within sub-clusters remains under-resourced at global and country levels to ensure that UNFPA can deliver on its commitment. Despite these constraints, UNFPA has made a significant effort to establish proper systems and structures to support humanitarian response and coordination. The UNFPA surge has been a critical achievement and a first step in establishing agency capacity to address gender-based violence in emergencies at the operational level.

24. UNFPA is maturing in its role as a sub-cluster lead agency for the elimination of gender-based violence in humanitarian action. Where UNFPA has met the immediate operational and capacity challenges, humanitarian crises have been a key opportunity to kick-start the transformation of policy into action. Protracted crises provide opportunities to address prevention as well as response, and UNFPA can more systematically seize this window of opportunity.

25. The Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) has successfully consolidated the entry point for UNFPA work on gender-based violence preparedness to ensure greater consistency and impetus to accelerate the coverage of preparedness work across more countries. UNFPA is actively enhancing its contribution to the development-humanitarian-peace nexus, with both the Essential Services Package and the Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to gender-based violence in Emergencies making significant contributions to this.

#### **Shifting social norms**

26. Social-norms programming, especially at the community level, is a key UNFPA contribution, with extensive evidence of concrete programming with men and boys. However, interpretations of social-norms programming, which do not tackle the structural determinants of marginalization, are limited in their contribution to eliminating gender-based violence.

#### **Advocacy and partnerships**

27. UNFPA has contributed significantly to keeping gender-based violence and harmful practices on political and programmatic agendas at all levels of decision-making and practice. However, outside joint programmes, inter-agency cooperation and coordination between UNFPA and other United Nations entities at field level is inconsistent, sometimes strained, and would often benefit from more structured governance agreements at the global level.

28. The current approach of UNFPA to eliminating gender-based violence is responsive to contextual variations. In addition, various forms of strategic partnerships contribute to outcomes through gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action, knowledge production, and

support to services. When strategic partnerships are developed within the United Nations system, they can mitigate interagency competition.

29. UNFPA has worked quietly to support national champions and make connections with different actors and civil society partners at various levels. This has been an essential contribution by UNFPA to ensure no one is left behind. Alongside this, UNFPA is building alliances with non-traditional stakeholders but has not yet systematically collected data on the value and potential risks of doing so.

## V. Conclusions

30. *Conclusion 1.* Working with multiple stakeholders, UNFPA made unique and valuable contributions to the international system response to gender-based violence at all levels across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. UNFPA made direct contributions to national capacity development and to institutions across the health sector and national gender equality mechanisms. Support also frequently linked to the justice, security and economic livelihoods sectors, as well as to the education, youth and planning sectors. Contribution was primarily in the area of response to gender-based violence through health-sector and multi-sectoral referral pathways and coordination. Emerging evidence of contributions to prevention and examples of gender-transformative programming were also documented.

31. The evaluation also found that UNFPA made important systemic contributions to inter-governmental normative frameworks on eliminating gender-based violence at the global and regional levels, and on eliminating harmful practices at the global level with promising work at the regional level. These contributions benefit from the strengths of UNFPA in (1) collaborative approaches to partnerships, (2) diversity of partners, (3) working across sectors, and (4) proactive participation in United Nations coordination mechanisms and global normative processes.

32. At country level, UNFPA was often the only United Nations agency working on a particular thematic issue or with a particular stakeholder group. Indeed, the long history of rights-based engagement by UNFPA generated unique evidence from country level to inform the design of global programmes. Leveraging policy level experience with on-the-ground sources of evidence and illustrations of practice proved essential to establishing the authority and legitimacy of UNFPA. Cultivating and sustaining trusted relationships also contributed to greater effectiveness.

33. UNFPA has developed expertise in areas shared with other United Nations agencies on: social norms (UNICEF), health systems (WHO), youth empowerment (UNDP), and structural causes of gender inequality (UN-Women). UNFPA uniquely combines three attributes: (1) programming at the intersection of gender-based violence, education, and sexual and reproductive health; (2) programming on gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health across the development-humanitarian-peace nexus; and (3) producing, analysing, packaging, and leveraging population-based data for advocacy on eliminating gender-based violence and harmful practices.

34. *Conclusion 2.* The global joint programmes on harmful practices demonstrate UNFPA collaborative strength in addressing gender inequality and social norms, as well as its comparative advantage in efforts to create space for civil society. Although the global joint programmes on harmful practices demonstrate the collaborative strengths of UNFPA, they also highlight strategic challenges facing UNFPA, including: (1) strategic plan priorities on harmful practices that, over time, reflect available funding streams, rather than an intentional, evidence-based decision to emphasize specific harmful practices; (2) the theories of change of global joint programmes becoming the corporate approach to each harmful practice “by default”; and (3) excluding countries not involved in a joint programme from the knowledge ecosystem and resource mobilization opportunities generated by the joint programme..

35. Despite these challenges, the evaluation collected substantial evidence to indicate that UNFPA (in partnership with UNICEF and within the global joint programmes) is making significant contributions to efforts to shift social and gender norms at the local level.

36. *Conclusion 3.* With rapid growth in discourse, policies and systems, UNFPA is making important progress in its preparations to respond across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. In a relatively short period of time, UNFPA has made significant progress in establishing humanitarian systems, functions, human resources and leadership. Specifically, UNFPA has: (1) undertaken sole leadership of the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility; (2) created a human resources surge, fast track procedures, and emergency funds; (3) formed a second generation humanitarian policy; (4) employed regional humanitarian specialists; and (5) developed and implemented minimum standards. As a result of these efforts, the agency's partners have recognized the contribution UNFPA is making in several areas including: preparedness, women and girls' safe spaces, dignity kits, psychosocial support, clinical management of rape, and prevention-awareness across multiple emergencies.

37. Despite these notable achievements, the evaluation identified important gaps, challenges, and areas for growth that are indicative of the early stage of the humanitarian function in UNFPA. These include: (1) an insufficient number and range of people available through surge rosters; and the unintended use of sequential surge postings to address chronic gaps in staffing at country level; (2) emergency funds with a lower ceiling and shorter duration than other entities and without the ability to roll-over at the financial year end; (3) the burden of an extensive set of guidelines, guidance notes, checklists, relating to humanitarian programming; (4) insufficient commitment of core resources to support consistent and high-quality coordination of the global Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility and respective in-country gender-based violence sub-clusters; (5) inadequate procurement and financial systems for local purchase and prepositioning of emergency commodities; (6) insufficient mainstreaming of humanitarian knowledge across job profiles in key positions (especially regarding (i) limited understanding of the humanitarian cluster system in the profiles of UNFPA country representatives, and (ii) limited integration of the clinical management of rape in the profiles of sexual and reproductive health advisors).

38. In addition, country offices often do not scale up human resources ahead of the flow of humanitarian funds because they cannot guarantee corporate backstopping. As a result, UNFPA misses out on recruiting well-trained staff before other agencies, existing staff are overwhelmed, and resource mobilization opportunities are lost. Notably, however, the Syria Hub in Amman, Jordan stands as a key outlier to this, where UNFPA invested in human resources and benefitted from successful resource mobilization.

39. As a result of these gaps, UNFPA is not yet fully ready to respond rapidly and appropriately to humanitarian events, or to the opportunities they may create for longer-term gender-based violence programming. Contributing to these challenges are two organizational characteristics that are common features of UNFPA: (1) a historical organizational culture of direct involvement in technical support to implementation. This can quickly overwhelm available capacity, creates competition, and inhibits shared action. UNFPA has not yet fully absorbed the lessons learned by other cluster lead agencies regarding the nature of this role; and (2) a varied understanding across UNFPA of the "boundaries" of the work on gender-based violence. This has benefits for programming in the development space (though unintended effects emerged as well). However, as the lead of the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility, UNFPA needs to clearly articulate the scope of gender-based violence work and "persons of concern" so that all agencies can participate based on a common understanding of what these terms mean. (see Conclusion 4).

40. *Conclusion 4.* The scope of UNFPA work on eliminating gender-based violence offers a flexibility that has programmatic advantages. However, having various understandings and articulations of the boundaries of gender-based violence within the agency are a barrier to United Nations coordination and shared understanding with partners. The evaluation found that

the various programmatic understandings of gender-based violence within UNFPA remain contested (both internally and externally), particularly in relation to the issue of whether gender-based violence is defined as gender-discriminatory (manifested specifically in violence against women and girls), or if it also includes men and boys.

41. There are advantages to having inclusive understandings of the “boundaries” of gender-based violence work: (1) UNFPA can adapt programming to the situation in different political contexts and work with people in the most marginalized situations; (2) UNFPA can differentiate itself from other entities and agencies working on gender-based violence in the same place; and (3) UNFPA will have flexibility to accommodate the different professional backgrounds and traditions of its staff (such as clinical, statistical, or gender).

42. However, the evaluation also identified a pattern of (most negative) unintended effects resulting from the absence of a shared, agency-wide understanding of the “boundaries” of UNFPA work on gender-based violence or the theory of change for gender-based violence (and how it relates to harmful practices). These unintended effects included: (1) confused efforts at coordination with other United Nations entities and partners; (2) the fact that existing theories of change, such as those for the global joint programmes on harmful practices, became a default central reference point for global discussions; (3) the risk of dilution or confusion of UNFPA positions and analyses in negotiations with donors; (4) decentralized responsibility and accountability to the country level for defining important elements of local gender-based violence strategy, without the necessary resources or authority; (5) the lack of a corporate theory of change integrating both gender-based violence and harmful practices.

43. *Conclusion 5.* Working in partnership and through inclusive approaches are the dominant characteristics of UNFPA programming on the elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices. However, the highest level of results has been achieved when this approach is combined with a sequenced focus on a specific “domain of change” (i.e. focusing on change to the legal/policy framework, or community level social and gender norms, or institutional services delivery), ground-presence, and engagement in joint programmes. The evidence indicates that the approach of UNFPA staff at all levels exemplifies an inclusive, human rights-based approach to programming. Transparent, inclusive, and participatory partnership were found to be the norm in most places, traditionally supported by a robust and reliable pipeline of core funding – a situation that is rapidly changing for UNFPA.

44. The most consistent and strongest partnerships were found to be with ministries of health and women’s civil society organizations; with growing levels of partnership with national gender equality mechanisms and development and humanitarian NGOs. Much of this work covers response, although there is a growing portfolio of: (1) gender-based violence-prevalence data work with national statistical authorities; (2) gender-based violence-prevention work with ministries of education; (3) work to eliminate harmful practices primarily with UNICEF, local authorities and civil society; and (4) gender-transformative work with non-traditional partners such as men’s groups, enterprises, and religious institutions. Balancing and integrating work with these traditional and emerging partners is likely to be a challenge compounded by the funding environment, in which non-core funding increasingly emphasises near-term results.

45. With limited core resources, the evaluation found decreasing scope for UNFPA to invest in the capacity of women’s civil society organizations, the agency’s traditional partners. While the social capital established by UNFPA offices means that these organizations often “stay-in-conversation” with the agency, the evaluation detected growing incentives for women’s rights groups to deliver projects in partnership with international development and humanitarian NGOs, or through non-traditional partners, such as the private sector and religious institutions. While these types of organizations/partnerships can be effective in project delivery terms, the evaluation found that some lacked gender-awareness or did not apply the same level of human rights principles (i.e. participation, inclusion, transparency, universality, accountability, etc.) that have been the hallmark of past UNFPA partnerships and interventions. This is of particular concern regarding work on social and gender norms and institutional transformation.

46. While the evaluation found relatively linear explanations of causality for the achievement of policy and humanitarian outcomes, achieving social and institutional change required very complex, non-linear solutions. This suggests that nuanced and contextually-embedded understandings are particularly vital to working successfully in these spaces. The evaluation found that two key mechanisms made positive contributions to addressing this challenge. The first mechanism is joint programmes – exemplified by the global joint programmes on harmful practices, but relevant elsewhere. These generate both the level of investment and the time and space needed for UNFPA to capitalize on its comparative strengths and historical partners. The second mechanism is sub-national offices, which (particularly in decentralized, federal states) enable UNFPA to reach and accompany partners to successfully navigate complex, long-term issues. When staffed with technically competent individuals, these sub-national offices represent outsized value-for-money for UNFPA and are valuable to both host governments and non-core donors.

47. *Conclusion 6.* Important UNFPA strengths of patient, evidence-based and participatory long-term gender-programming that delivers results are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain because of a global trend towards an increased proportion of non-core and conditional funding. The evaluation found that UNFPA has faced many challenges, including: (1) declining core-contributions to the United Nations system in general, and especially UNFPA; (2) defunding by a major donor; (3) large currency fluctuations; (4) increasing demand by taxpayers in donor countries for the type of interventions that favour non-core funding; and (5) shrinking civil society space. Taken together, these trends (which seem likely to continue), are impacting UNFPA comparative strengths in two key ways: (1) they strain UNFPA modes of intervention and ways of working that were designed around the availability of core funds and (2) they incentivize the balance of work towards spaces with higher resource availability – especially humanitarian response and the global donor-led funds. As a result, the proportion of core funds available in UNFPA budgets is insufficient to adequately maintain critical capacity in coordination or programming for the furthest behind.

48. The largest UNFPA contributions identified in the evaluation have often started with years of quiet, behind-the-scenes work to support national institutions and civil society work and these are disproportionately funded by core resources: a scenario increasingly unfeasible in the current funding climate. As with the flexible definition of the “boundaries” of gender-based violence work itself, responsibility for financing longer term strategies to address gender-based violence is increasingly decentralized within UNFPA, but without sufficient resources and tools.

49. *Conclusion 7.* UNFPA programming frequently transforms the knowledge, discourse and thinking of its partners in a sustainable way, but is less successful in maintaining activities once programme funds have stopped. Policy changes, life-skills education, and national prevalence data all exhibit key attributes of sustainability, in that they alter the on-going decision-making framework of individuals and institutions. In addition to direct benefits, implementation of services and prevention activities can also generate new evidence and experiences that contribute to informing the design of these decision-making frameworks. At the moment, however, these links are not systematically explained, pursued, or captured.

50. Similarly, the evaluation found evidence that response services through the health system make important contributions to driving longer-term policy and social normative outcomes, given the right conditions. Thus, expanding the use of the “continuum” approach across the development-humanitarian-peace nexus provides an opportunity to contribute to longer term sustainable outcomes if lessons about these conditions are captured, analysed, and shared. The evaluation also highlighted the fact that preparedness work in development spaces contributes to the humanitarian response.

51. Aside from some notable exceptions, such as Partners for Prevention in Asia and the Pacific, UNFPA is inconsistently connecting its support to building capacity and developing services with its knowledge ecosystem. It is also not learning from the full range of evidence

about what does and does not work to end gender-based violence. This knowledge ecosystem is a critical value proposition for UNFPA. The generation of evidence includes getting better at acknowledging and learning what does not work, as well as learning from identified good practices. Plans are now in motion for new corporate tools to both capture learning (including from what fails) and share it as well as leverage that learning for improved programming. However, despite strong efforts from regional gender advisors and the global joint programmes, the evaluation found that systematizing knowledge management is an organizational weakness across gender-based violence programming and, to a lesser degree, across harmful practices programming.

## VI. Recommendations

52. The following 11 recommendations are based on the analysis that informed findings and conclusions, and on discussions held with the evaluation reference group.

### **Overarching recommendations at the corporate level**

53. *Recommendation 1.* Reiterate the corporate priority placed on maintaining senior gender and gender-based violence expertise in UNFPA staff positions at all levels in order to deliver on commitments under Strategic Plan 2018-2021 Outcome 3.

54. To achieve this, UNFPA should:

- (a) Clearly communicate the corporate priority placed on maintaining senior gender expertise, including expertise in eliminating gender-based violence and harmful practices in country office staff positions, with senior management support for funding these from core budgets;
- (b) Directly reflect this commitment by ensuring that staffing of Strategic Plan 2018-2021 Outcome 3 at headquarters and regional level is at least equivalent to staffing related to Outcomes 1 and 2;
- (c) Consider formally allocating a percentage of programming expenditures to advancing gender equality results, gender programming capacity, and systems-building.

55. *Recommendation 2.* Building on existing United Nations joint programmes, and the opportunity provided by the common chapter of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021, issue clear guidance on the UNFPA gender-based violence portfolio of work, with a focus on clarifying the targets of UNFPA support. The guidance can also be used to facilitate the formally structured mechanism for joint work on eliminating gender-based violence, especially with UN-Women, to ensure no one is left behind.

56. To achieve this, UNFPA should:

- (a) Establish a clear corporate policy on whether specific groups, especially young men survivors of sexual violence, are included as beneficiaries in the scope of UNFPA programming on gender-based violence and, if so, ensure existing tools and guidance are tailored / updated accordingly;
- (b) Ensure that a common understanding of gender-based violence is promulgated throughout UNFPA, and provide clear guidance for field offices on the expected and corporate-supported level of flexibility available for local adaptation of the definition of gender-based violence;
- (c) Through an intersectional lens, ensure the full inclusion of those affected by gender-based violence, including people living with disabilities and members of indigenous communities, within the scope of UNFPA gender-based violence and harmful practices programming.

- (d) Build on existing good practices and best available evidence to support countries strengthen their focus on prevention programmes and services with the greatest potential to reduce gender-based violence and harmful practices;
  - (e) Advocate for visibility and recognition of UNFPA expertise in national prevalence data (especially when combined with qualitative “voices” of survivors) within interagency fora;
  - (f) Strengthen the technical capacity of UNFPA to support development of national administrative gender-based violence data systems that are able to inform United Nations country teams of the evolving needs of marginalized groups;
  - (g) Together with UN-Women, agree and implement a structured partnership framework (for example, based on lessons from UNAIDS) and common guidance on mandates and modes of engagement for both UNFPA and UN-Women in the areas of the elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices.
57. *Recommendation 3.* Systematize the production and exchange of outcome level learning from UNFPA programme implementation. This includes learning on what does and does not work (i.e. programme failures) in the elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices, recognizing this as valuable learning and a contribution to the public good).
58. To achieve this, UNFPA should:
- (a) Identify and promote a single online platform for UNFPA and partners (and others working toward the elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices) to share knowledge on what works and what does not work. Ideally this platform would be open and operated for public benefit;
  - (b) Make contributing to this online platform a reporting requirement for work on eliminating gender-based violence and harmful practices and an activity detailed in annual work plans on the elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices.
  - (c) Create incentives (recognition) for honest appraisal and for acknowledging failure as a valuable learning opportunity;
  - (d) Use evidence from this online platform to inform programming.
59. *Recommendation 4.* Continue engaging Member States and donors in the discussion on the importance of core funding, the need for quality non-core funding through thematic instruments, and adequate levels of predictable funding for gender-based violence, that can be flexibly utilized by field offices to support adaptive longer-term programming capabilities.
60. To achieve this, UNFPA should
- (a) Explore opportunities for innovative approaches to fundraising.

#### **Recommendations for development contexts**

61. *Recommendation 5.* While recognizing the importance of interconnected UNFPA programming on gender-based violence and harmful practices, UNFPA offices with limited resources are encouraged to focus their main efforts on the areas in which UNFPA has the greatest impact, with the aim of avoiding ‘spreading too thin’.
62. To achieve this, UNFPA should:
- (a) Focus on areas of work with the greatest impact.
63. *Recommendation 6.* Progressively rebalance the gender-based violence and harmful practices portfolio towards more and better work on prevention, including the entry point of psychosocial response for prevention.
64. To achieve this, UNFPA should:
- (a) Commit human resources to synthesize evidence on what works, then use this evidence to develop policies and programmes on: (i) prevention (based on the work of the joint

programmes on harmful practices and the Spotlight Initiative Prevention Pillar); and (ii) ensuring a successful multisectoral approach to the elimination of gender-based violence based on the Essential Services Package and other multisector initiatives.

65. *Recommendation 7.* Further support recognition of sub-national inequities within UNFPA ‘quadrant classifications’ by encouraging field offices to apply UNFPA modes of intervention flexibly.

66. To achieve this, UNFPA should:

- (a) Clearly define the structures and processes of those sub-national levels, and then rank them based on the quadrant criteria. As both the boundaries and the ranking of sub-national units are often contested, UNFPA should encourage an interagency effort. UNFPA strengths in population-based data can help facilitate this process;
- (b) For countries lacking reliable or sufficient disaggregated data on the eight criteria (which UNFPA uses to determine “need”) at the sub-national level, support should focus on building the capacity for objective analysis;
- (c) For countries in which the sub-national units are not capable of following the principles of this quadrant determination, minimum criteria should be established to determine the appropriate level for sub-national action.

#### **Recommendations for humanitarian contexts**

67. *Recommendation 8.* The evaluation endorses the agreed Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) principal of “Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation” on a “no-regrets” basis,<sup>2</sup> and recommends that UNFPA senior management fully support the operationalization of this commitment to ensure that senior-level humanitarian gender-based violence coordinators are present in all active humanitarian emergencies.

68. To achieve this, UNFPA should:

- (a) Ensure that an approach to scaling up in rapid onset humanitarian emergencies is operationalized, including provision for dedicated senior gender-based violence sub-cluster coordinators;
- (b) Ensure a staff position for a gender-based violence sub-cluster coordinator is included, by default, in the organogram of country offices that experience a number of sudden onset and protracted crises per year.

69. *Recommendation 9.* Ensure that both staff profiles and procurement policies and practices respond appropriately to the requirements of sudden onset humanitarian emergencies.

70. To achieve this, UNFPA should:

- (a) Mainstream competencies in gender-based violence in emergencies in senior gender advisor profiles (in circumstances where specialist gender-based violence advisors are not available due to resource constraints);
- (b) Include competencies in the humanitarian system in country representative profiles for countries vulnerable to disasters;
- (c) Include competencies in clinical management of rape in the profiles of senior sexual and reproductive health staff;
- (d) Develop a post-surge, medium-term fast track recruitment solution to prevent “surge” from being used on a rolling basis after the initial response;

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<sup>2</sup> The IASC Principals have agreed that “major sudden-onset humanitarian crises triggered by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide mobilization are to be subject to a Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation.” In exceptional circumstances - where the gravity justifies mobilization beyond normally expected levels - this measure should be applied for a time-bound period.

- (e) Evaluate the performance and lessons from current and recent humanitarian supplies preparedness and prepositioning initiatives (drawing on lessons from other humanitarian agencies and on the findings and conclusions of previous evaluations, including the Mid-Term Evaluation of the UNFPA Supplies Programme 2013-2020).
71. *Recommendation 10.* Strengthen the humanitarian component of UNFPA work to further adapt the lessons and tools from other cluster lead agencies. This would mainstream the practice of cluster coordination as an interagency function (the value of which is to represent the voice and facilitate the success of all agencies).
72. To achieve this, UNFPA should:
- (a) Undertake a synthesis desk review of other United Nations cluster lead agency evaluations and reviews specifically for cluster responsibilities and extract learning and recommendations for UNFPA.
73. *Recommendation 11.* Create a global continuum fund window within an existing funding mechanism in UNFPA. This will strengthen partnerships, accelerate the continuum approach, and scale up innovation across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.
74. To achieve this, UNFPA should:
- (a) Advocate with Member States that are supportive of the “New Way of Working”<sup>3</sup> to support a global UNFPA continuum-funding window (within an existing UNFPA funding mechanism) to accelerate and scale up the continuum approach;
  - (b) Advocate for flexible financing models and multi-year joint appeals that cut across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.
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<sup>3</sup> The New Way of Working (agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit 2017) can be described, in short, as working over multiple years, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors, including those outside the United Nations system, towards collective outcomes. Wherever possible, those efforts should reinforce and strengthen the capacities that already exist at national and local levels.  
See: <https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/5358>.