

Terms of Reference

UNICEF Evaluation Office

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Evaluability Assessment and Formative Evaluation of UNICEF’s Innovation Hubs

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Executive Summary

Why this evaluation?

UNICEF's Innovation Hubs – the Learning Innovation Hub and the Innovative Finance Hub – were launched in 2022 in partnership with the Government of Finland to help the organization address global challenges in education and financing through innovation. The hubs aim to test, adapt, and scale high-impact solutions while advancing new approaches in collaboration, governance, and systems change.

As they move beyond their pilot stage, UNICEF and the Government of Finland need a clearer view of their strategic positioning, clarity of goals, and operational readiness. The independent UNICEF Evaluation Office offered to carry out this evaluation to assess whether systems and strategies are in place to support future scale and sustainability, and what adjustments or learning are needed to strengthen their role within UNICEF's innovation agenda.

What will the evaluation do?

This is an Evaluability Assessment and Formative Evaluation (EAFE), an evaluative process to assess whether the right strategies, systems, and conditions are in place for success. The EAFE will:

- Review the clarity and plausibility of each hub's theory of change and supporting M&E systems;
- Assess how well the hubs are integrated into UNICEF's structures, strategies, and partnerships;
- Explore the added value of the hub model and its relevance in other contexts; and
- Identify key factors affecting each hub's readiness for scale, effectiveness, and sustainability.

The evaluation will generate forward-looking insights and actionable recommendations to strengthen the hubs' design and operations, laying the groundwork for a planned summative evaluation in 2027.

How will it be done?

The UNICEF Evaluation Office will conduct the EAFE with additional dedicated technical expertise and capacity provided by an external team. An internal Evaluation Reference Group and external Advisory Groups will guide key stages of the evaluation, helping ensure relevance, credibility, and use.

The evaluation will use a mixed-methods, participatory approach, drawing on:

- AI-supported document review of strategic plans, workplans, and financial and partnership data;
- Semi-structured interviews with key internal and external stakeholders;
- Targeted deep dives into selected initiatives or country experiences;
- Participatory workshops, including sensemaking and co-creation of recommendations;
- Where feasible, a light comparative analysis of other hub models; and
- Futures thinking to explore longer-term relevance and direction.

Methods will be finalized during the inception phase and adjusted as needed to stay within available resources.

Who will use it?

Intended users include the teams operating the Innovation Hubs and their technical partners and collaborators. This includes the Programme Group (PG), the Division of Private Fundraising and Partnerships (PFP), the Office of Innovation (OoI), and colleagues in regional and country offices, particularly those engaged in education and financing initiatives. Findings will also support UNICEF senior management, and the Government of Finland as a key strategic partner, in making informed decisions on the role of the Innovation Hubs – and similar models – in advancing UNICEF's work on education, financing, and its evolving delivery model. The evaluation is expected to guide hub-level decision-making, shape future investments, and contribute to broader organizational learning on how to structure, govern, and scale innovation.

When will it happen?

The evaluation is scheduled for December 2025 to May 2026, following a four-phase process: orientation and inception, data collection and analysis, sensemaking and reporting, and finalization and communication. Findings will be shared through a concise final report, co-created recommendations, and user-friendly communication products to support uptake, use, and decision-making.

1. Background and context

UNICEF works across many fronts to protect children's rights and well-being worldwide, but persistent global challenges demand more agile, systemic, and complementary approaches to accelerate results for children. One is the global learning crisis: millions of children attend school yet do not acquire basic literacy and numeracy, limiting their opportunities later in life.¹ Another is the widening of the financing gap to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with trillions of dollars in additional annual investment needed by 2030 – highlighting the urgent need for innovative financing aligned with child-focused results.²

To address these gaps more strategically, UNICEF and the Government of Finland partnered in 2022 to establish two pioneering innovation hubs in Helsinki: the Global Learning Innovation Hub (LI Hub) and the Innovative Finance Hub (IF Hub). Finland's recognized strengths in high-quality education, digital innovation, and responsible investing were considered a strong basis for hosting these hubs, which aim to test, adapt, and embed solutions that help UNICEF respond to these challenges more effectively. Both Hubs were originally established within UNICEF's Office of Innovation and have since evolved beyond their initial pilot stages to more clearly defined operational roles, resulting in adjustments to their structures, governance, and alignment with UNICEF's broader strategies and systems.

Learning Innovation Hub

The LI Hub focuses on digital technologies and education innovation (EdTech) to improve learning outcomes for children, with an emphasis on inclusion, well-being, and safety. This work includes leveraging innovation and technology for development (T4D), exploring novel approaches and digital solutions that enhance teaching, learning, and UNICEF's service delivery in diverse contexts. In 2024, UNICEF's Senior Adviser for Digital Education also assumed the Hub lead role, further strengthening alignment with UNICEF's digital education programming. By 2026, the LI Hub is expected to transition into the new Education Centre of Excellence created as a result of UNICEF's Future Focus Initiative.³ This integration reflects a strategic shift toward embedding innovation into UNICEF's core education programming, aligning closely with the forthcoming Digital Education Strategy 2025–2030.⁴

As reported by the hub, through initiatives like [EdTech for Good](#), [Learning Pioneers](#), and [Accessible Digital Textbooks](#), it has:

- Upskilled more than 45,000 teachers and improved learning outcomes for over two million children;
- Launched the Learning Cabinet, a curated platform that includes nearly 500 reviewed EdTech solutions;
- Partnered with more than 25 governments to pilot and scale high-impact digital learning tools; and
- Advanced inclusive education through the Accessible Digital Textbooks initiative, which uses AI to generate multi-format learning materials for children with disabilities and linguistic difficulties.

The LI Hub also works closely with Finnish institutions such as FinCEED and Education Finland to incorporate Finnish pedagogical expertise into global programming. In addition, the hub has received support from other donors for specific initiatives, further diversifying its partnerships and resource base.

Innovative Finance Hub

The IF Hub aims to transform how UNICEF mobilizes capital for children through its Child-Lens Investing (CLI) approach, which integrates child rights and well-being into investment decision-making. This approach aligns global capital with the SDGs, addressing the estimated multi-trillion-dollar annual financing gap. According to the Hub's reporting, CLI has early pilots in both private and public investment portfolios and is gaining recognition among development finance institutions and other partners. In 2023-2024, the IF Hub transitioned from the Office of Innovation to the Division of Private Fundraising and Partnerships (PFP), reflecting a broader strategic shift to embed innovative financing within UNICEF's sustainable finance portfolio.

Between 2022-2025, the IF Hub has:

- Developed the [Child-Lens Investing Framework \(CLIF\)](#) and toolkit, providing guidelines for investors;
- Partnered with Finnfund and Triodos Investment Management to integrate CLI into real-world investment funds, demonstrating its practical applicability;
- Built an ecosystem of stakeholders through bilateral engagements, roundtables, and global events such as SOCAP, the [Global Impact Investing Network \(GIIN\)](#) Forum, Asia Venture Philanthropy Network, PRI-In person, and the UN Financing for Development Conference; and
- Supported the integration of CLI-related metrics into the GIIN's IRIS+ impact measurement system, a widely used global framework that provides standardized indicators for impact measurement and management by investors.

Looking ahead to 2026-2028, the IF Hub aims to develop further guidance across asset classes and scale the adoption of CLI, with a target of aligning an estimated US\$600 million in assets under management. It also seeks to strengthen the field of child-lens investing by building partnerships, launching a Community of Practice, and exploring whether a Child-Lens Investing Index could help to channel more capital toward child-focused priorities.

Strategic context for the Evaluability Assessment

The hubs are not standalone initiatives but are increasingly embedded in UNICEF's broader programmatic and partnership frameworks to enhance sustainability, coherence, and impact. The LI Hub contributes directly to the Digital Education Strategy 2025-2030 and to achieving Impact Result 2 in UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2026–2029, which focuses on equipping 350 million children and young people with essential learning and skills. The IF Hub responds to the growing need to accelerate resource mobilization and foster new partnerships for children's well-being, as emphasized in UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2026–2029. Its positioning within UNICEF's partnerships structures aims to maximize reach and synergy between public and private actors.

Each hub has developed a theory of change to guide its work. Initial versions were prepared before the launch, while updated versions were included in the latest 2026–2028 proposal to Finland, reflecting their evolving vision and alignment with UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2026–2029.

The original 2022 proposal to Finland and the renewed partnership proposal for 2026–2028 both include a commitment to conduct an Evaluability Assessment and Formative Evaluation (EAFE). At this pivotal moment of transition and re-positioning, the assessment will help UNICEF and its partners take stock of the hubs' evolving roles, governance arrangements, and institutional transitions, and provide evidence to guide future planning, decision-making, and potential scaling of the hub model within UNICEF's broader organizational structures and innovation agenda. It also complements the organization-wide Evaluation of Innovation in UNICEF, now being finalized, which examines innovation as a change strategy and its contribution to results for children.

2. Purpose, use and scope

The purpose of this Evaluability Assessment and Formative Evaluation (EAFE) is to assess how well the two Innovation Hubs are strategically positioned, how clearly their goals are articulated, and whether they are operationally ready to sustain and scale their impact for children. By identifying strengths, gaps, and opportunities for refinement or expansion, the EAFE will inform practical decision-making, strengthen accountability, and guide future investments in innovative solutions for children's learning and well-being.

What is an Evaluability Assessment and Formative Evaluation (EAFE)?

An EAFE is a structured, learning-focused process that helps take stock of an initiative's goals and assess the clarity and readiness of its strategies before undertaking a full-scale evaluation. Rather than serving as a compliance check or pass/fail test, an EAFE creates a collaborative space to clarify priorities, refine theories of change, and identify critical adjustments early on.

The EAFE combines two elements: First, an evaluability review that assesses whether strategies, systems, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) arrangements – including clear performance measures and the availability of reliable data – are in place. Second, a formative lens that surfaces lessons and opportunities for course correction. It will also review the hubs' 2026–2028 plans to test their assumptions and intended directions and assess readiness for the planned summative evaluation in 2027 by confirming that M&E systems and data are sufficient to provide credible evidence of results.

Findings will help determine whether adjustments are needed in programme design, the theory of change, and M&E systems from early to mid-2026 to ensure alignment and readiness for the next phase. In this way, the EAFE supports adaptive management and provides early evidence to guide decisions on whether and how to refine, replicate, or scale the hub model within UNICEF.

Specifically, the EAFE will:

- **Assess the clarity and plausibility of each hub's theory of change and results framework**, including whether intended outcomes are realistic and measurable, and supported by reliable indicators, baselines, monitoring systems, and data sufficient to support a future evaluation;
- **Examine how effectively each hub is integrated within UNICEF's governance structures, operational systems, and partnerships**, especially considering recent structural changes, such as the LI Hub's integration into the Programme Group and the IF Hub's transition to the Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division;
- **Assess how well each hub aligns with key UNICEF strategies**, notably the Digital Education Strategy for 2025–2030 and the Strategic Plans for 2022–2025 and 2026–2029;
- **Examine the added value of the hub model** compared to traditional approaches, and its potential applicability to other thematic or regional contexts; and
- **Identify key enabling and constraining factors** influencing each hub's readiness for scale, effectiveness, and sustainability.

The findings and recommendations from this EAFE are intended first and foremost to inform the teams operating the hubs, along with their technical partners and collaborators. This includes the Programme Group (PG), the Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division (PFP), the Office of Innovation (OoI), and colleagues in regional and country offices, particularly those engaged in education and financing initiatives. In addition, the evaluation will provide insights for UNICEF senior management and the Government of Finland as a key strategic partner, supporting informed decisions on the role of the Innovation Hubs – and similar models – in advancing UNICEF's work on education, financing, and the organization's evolving delivery model. The EAFE will directly contribute to organizational learning, guide donor engagement, and establish a clear foundation and roadmap for the planned summative evaluation in 2027, including a formal management response to ensure uptake and accountability.

The assessment will cover the period from the inception of the Innovation Hubs in 2022 through 2025, including the initial establishment phase, implementation, and recent strategic shifts. Recognizing the ongoing transitions, the timeline will also be forward-looking to capture anticipated developments, including the updated 2026–2028 proposals and theories of change.

The EAFE will examine the global operations of the hubs, with particular attention to pilot initiatives, partnerships, and scaling efforts – especially the hubs' engagement with the Finnish innovation ecosystem. In addition, the assessment will cover the strategic positioning and operational readiness of the Innovation Hubs to advance UNICEF's priorities in education, financing, and innovation, and their alignment with relevant organizational structures, governance, partnerships, and strategies.

3. Evaluation questions

The EAFE will address the following indicative questions to examine the clarity, positioning, and readiness of the Innovation Hubs, surface practical lessons for improvement, and generate insights to guide future decision-making and potential adaptation of the hub model. This list may be further refined and prioritized during the inception phase in consultation with key stakeholders.

Evaluability questions – Are systems and strategies in place?

1. **Theory of change and design:** How clear, plausible, and coherent is each hub's theory of change, including whether intended results are realistic, measurable, and underpinned by credible assumptions and causal pathways?
2. **Monitoring and data systems:** To what extent are appropriate indicators, baselines, and monitoring systems in place to track progress, support learning, and ensure accountability?
3. **Positioning and governance:** To what extent are the hubs well-positioned within UNICEF's systems, governance, and partnerships to deliver on their mandates, especially in light of recent structural changes?

Formative questions – What insights can guide adjustments and future directions?

4. **Alignment and responsiveness:** How well do the hubs' strategies and activities align with key UNICEF priorities (notably the Digital Education Strategy for 2025–2030 and the Strategic Plans 2022–2025 and 2026–2029), and how well do they respond to the needs and contexts of country offices and partners?
5. **Value and partnerships:** What unique value does the hub model add compared to traditional programming approaches, and how effectively do the hubs engage and leverage partnerships, including with the Finnish innovation ecosystem? What is the potential applicability of the model in other thematic or regional contexts?
6. **Enablers, constraints, and learning for the future:** What factors are enabling or limiting the hubs' scale, sustainability, and systems-change potential, including the adequacy of human resources, staffing models, and financial resourcing? What lessons can guide course correction now and inform the design or adaptation of similar models going forward?

4. Methodology and approach

This Evaluability Assessment and Formative Evaluation (EAFE) will adopt a structured, learning-oriented approach to generate timely and practical insights into the current status and future potential of UNICEF's Innovation Hubs. The primary focus is on how well the hubs are positioned to deliver on their mandates, identifying critical gaps or enabling conditions in their current design and operations, and providing forward-looking, actionable recommendations to support scale and sustainability. While the EAFE will not attempt to attribute results or assess impact in a summative sense, it is intended to assess whether enabling systems, structures, and conditions are in place to support future results and readiness for scale, thereby laying the groundwork for an evaluation of the hubs performance planned for 2027.

The approach will be **participatory, utilization-focused, and realistic in scope**, given available resources and the timeline. It will combine standard evaluability tools with formative elements that promote reflection and enable adaptive course correction. Methods will be finalized during the inception phase in consultation with hubs teams and other stakeholders.

Key features of the approach

- **Systems-oriented:** The assessment will situate the hubs within UNICEF's broader context. It will examine governance, institutional positioning, and alignment with cross-cutting strategies, including the current and upcoming UNICEF Strategic Plans, the Digital Education Strategy 2025–2030, and the Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022–2030.
- **Forward-looking and adaptive:** Beyond assessing the current state of implementation, the evaluation will explore how the hubs' models and strategies are evolving, and what adaptations may be needed to enhance future effectiveness, learning, and readiness for scale.
- **Participatory:** Stakeholders will be engaged throughout – from refining the evaluation questions to validating findings and co-creating recommendations. This includes attention to gender balance and diversity in stakeholder voices.
- **Utilization-focused:** The EAFE is designed to generate insights that inform decision-making on governance, systems, and strategic alignment. It will feed into internal planning and management processes, support engagement with donors, and contribute to broader organizational learning.
- **Gender-responsive:** The evaluation will incorporate a gender lens throughout, examining how gender equality principles are reflected in the hubs' theories of change, initiative design, and implementation, drawing on the UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2022–2025 as a reference framework.

Data sources and methods

The evaluation will use a **mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative data sources** to enable triangulation and strengthen the credibility of findings. Priority will be given to areas with strong evaluability and high learning potential. Methods are expected to include the following:

- **AI-supported document review:** Analysis of strategic documents, annual reports, theories of change, workplans, financial records, partnership agreements, and prior assessments related to the two hubs. This will help assess clarity of goals, alignment with broader strategies, and the presence of performance monitoring systems.
- **Key informant interviews:** Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a diverse group of approx. 35–45 internal and external stakeholders. These will include hub leadership and staff, technical colleagues (in particular PG, PFP, OoI), selected regional and country office representatives (e.g., Chiefs of Education), and relevant external partners. Interviews with UNICEF senior leaders (e.g., from PG or PFP management) will be important to understand how the hubs are perceived at strategic levels and how they align with broader priorities. Interviews will also include colleagues from the Public Partnerships Division (PPD), which manages the partnership with the Government of Finland, as well as representatives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA). In addition, the evaluation will engage experts in innovation – from both within and beyond the UN system – to provide independent perspectives on the relevance, distinctiveness, and potential of the hubs' models and approaches.
- **Deep dives:** In-depth analyses of the two hubs' operations, potentially zooming in on specific initiatives, country office engagements, or regional collaborations. These deep dives will explore how the hubs' strategies are implemented in practice, examine their relationships with country and regional offices, identify cross-cutting lessons, and assess perceptions of relevance, visibility, and influence across diverse groups.
- **Participatory workshops and consultations:** Building on initial design workshops already held with both hubs, the evaluation will incorporate targeted stakeholder engagements to deepen interpretation, validate emerging findings, and co-create recommendations. Where feasible and cost-effective, selected activities – such as clustered stakeholder interviews or a sensemaking workshop –

may be conducted in person, potentially in Helsinki to engage both hubs and Government of Finland counterparts.

- **Futures and foresight perspectives:** The evaluation will explore long-term trends and strategic shifts relevant to innovation in education and finance, and their implications for the hub model. These perspectives may be captured through select key informant interviews or, if feasible, through a dedicated scenario planning or horizon scanning workshop involving a diverse set of stakeholders.
- **Comparative review of hub models:** A comparative analysis could be conducted to examine how similar innovation or thematic hubs are structured in other parts of UNICEF, other UN agencies or global organizations. This can provide useful insights into the strengths, limitations, and future viability of UNICEF's hub architecture.

Given the scope and available budget, a prioritization of methods and activities will be agreed upon during the inception phase. Core elements will include document review, interviews, and at least one participatory sensemaking workshop. Additional components – such as a foresight workshop, the comparative analysis, or deep dives – may be implemented if feasible. This flexible approach will help maintain methodological ambition while ensuring that the evaluation remains focused, practical, and within resource constraints.

Anticipated limitations and mitigation strategies

As with any evaluation, certain limitations are anticipated during this EAFE. These relate mainly to the evolving status of the hubs, data constraints, and the scope of the exercise:

- **Variation in implementation maturity:** The two hubs are at different stages of development, which may affect the availability and comparability of information across their initiatives and systems.
- **Data quality and availability:** Gaps or inconsistencies in monitoring data, results frameworks, or financial documentation may limit the ability to assess progress or readiness in a fully systematic way.
- **Self-selection bias:** Individuals more closely engaged with or supportive of the hubs may be more likely to participate in interviews and workshops, potentially skewing perspectives.
- **Scope limitations:** As the EAFE is not intended to assess outcomes or impact, it will not attempt to attribute results to specific hub activities. Rather, it will surface enabling conditions, structural factors, and operational dynamics that influence effectiveness.

These limitations will be mitigated through triangulation of data sources, transparent articulation of assumptions, and participatory validation of emerging findings.

Ethical standards and safeguarding

All evaluation activities will adhere to UNICEF and UNEG ethical standards.⁵ The evaluation team will:

- **Obtain informed consent** from all participants involved in interviews, workshops, or consultations;
- **Maintain confidentiality and anonymity** of participants, unless explicit permission is provided;
- **Respect the diversity of perspectives**, including gender, regional, and functional representation;
- **Avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest**, and uphold the independence and impartiality of the evaluation process;
- **Foster a safe, inclusive space** for open dialogue, particularly where organizational sensitivities or power dynamics may be present;
- **Proactively identify and address any ethical risks or dilemmas** in consultation with the Evaluation Manager.

5. Governance and management arrangements

The evaluation is commissioned and managed by the UNICEF Evaluation Office, which holds overall responsibility for ensuring quality, independence, and credibility. An Evaluation Specialist will serve as the Evaluation Manager, leading day-to-day coordination under the oversight of the Senior Evaluation Specialist for Institutional Effectiveness. The Evaluation Manager will supervise an externally recruited evaluation team and support data collection, analysis, and quality assurance in line with UNICEF's Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS).

The final approval over all deliverables rests with the Director of Evaluation, after review and endorsement by the Senior Evaluation Specialist for Institutional Effectiveness. A formal management response will be required to ensure uptake and accountability.

The independence of the evaluation is anchored in the institutional mandate of the Evaluation Office, which functions as an impartial and independent unit within UNICEF. The Evaluation Office is responsible for managing the evaluation process, framing the inquiry, validating final deliverables, and ensuring that findings are credible, evidence-based, and free from undue influence. While external consultants will be engaged to provide technical expertise and additional capacity, the Evaluation Office will maintain full oversight, methodological stewardship, and quality assurance throughout the evaluation process, from framing the evaluation scope and questions to validating the final deliverables.

The evaluation will follow a blended evaluation management approach, combining external capacity and technical expertise with meaningful involvement from UNICEF Evaluation Office personnel to ensure relevance, credibility, and use. The Evaluation Manager will oversee quality assurance while also contributing to specific aspects of the process, including stakeholder coordination, participation in interviews and other data collection activities, and analytical inputs to data analysis. In addition, an Evaluation Officer from the Evaluation Office will work alongside external consultants, supporting implementation through tasks such as document review and logistical coordination. This internal engagement will strengthen contextual relevance, facilitate access to key information, and promote the timely use of findings.

To promote transparency, relevance, and learning, the evaluation will be guided by the following structures:

- **Evaluation Reference Group and Advisory Groups:** A strategically composed Evaluation Reference Group of internal stakeholders will provide guidance and feedback at key moments. It will include representatives from the Learning Innovation Hub, the Innovative Finance Hub, and relevant divisions and offices such as the Programme Group (PG), Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division (PFP), and the Office of Innovation (OoI). Regional and country office colleagues may also be invited to join, as appropriate. In addition, two small external Advisory Groups – one for each hub – will be convened to provide targeted, independent perspectives aligned to the hubs' distinct thematic and operational contexts.

The groups will be engaged at three key stages: (i) to present and review the draft inception summary and provide strategic input; (ii) to discuss preliminary findings and inform recommendations; and (iii) to review the draft evaluation report and to co-create recommendations that are grounded in evidence and shaped by organizational feasibility and readiness for change.

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Throughout the evaluation, key stakeholders – including hub teams, strategic partners, and senior leaders – will be actively engaged through interviews, consultations, and co-creation workshops. Attention will be given to ensuring gender balance and diversity of perspectives in all engagement processes. This participatory approach aims to ensure that the evaluation is grounded, inclusive, and designed for use.

The Evaluation Office will apply its standard quality assurance procedures, including milestone-based approvals, ongoing coordination with the evaluation team, and structured review of all key outputs. This governance model is intended to promote ownership, foster shared accountability, and enhance the likelihood that evaluation findings will meaningfully inform strategic decisions on the future of the Innovation Hubs and their contribution to UNICEF's innovation architecture.

6. Evaluation team composition and requirements

The evaluation will be carried out by a team composed of external consultants, supported by the Evaluation Manager and the Evaluation Officer from the UNICEF Evaluation Office. The external team is expected to include up to four members, each with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and time allocations. Together, the team should demonstrate the following qualifications and experience:

- **A senior evaluation specialist with at least 10 years' experience in conducting complex multi-stakeholder evaluations**, a proven ability to work collaboratively, and a strong record of delivering high-quality outputs. The senior evaluation specialist will ensure methodological rigor, manage timelines and deliverables, and coordinate team inputs. It is expected that the senior evaluation specialist will submit all drafts and final deliverables to the Evaluation Manager for quality assurance, and revise as necessary to meet UNICEF quality standards;
- **Subject matter expertise in education and digital learning, as well as in innovative and development financing**, including experience with impact investing, blended finance, or other financing models aligned with the SDGs;
- **Proven experience conducting evaluability assessments** and applying utilization-focused or systems-oriented evaluation approaches;
- **Familiarity with institutional effectiveness, governance, and organizational change** in multilateral or international organizations (e.g. UN agencies, IFIs, INGOs);
- **Knowledge of Finnish or Nordic models of education, financing, or innovation** is considered an asset.
- **Experience with mixed-methods evaluation designs**, including participatory and stakeholder co-creation approaches;
- **Proficiency in data collection and analysis tools** such as MAXQDA (or equivalent), and the ability to integrate digital tools or AI-supported techniques for document review and synthesis;
- **Expertise in data visualization** and communicating complex findings through clear, engaging formats;
- **Commitment to gender equality, equity, and inclusion** throughout all stages of the evaluation;
- **Fluency in English is required**; familiarity with other official UN languages is considered an asset.

The team composition should ensure a balance of skills and experience and, where possible, reflect gender and regional diversity. It should also complement the role of the UNICEF Evaluation Office, which will be engaged through a blended model, with the Evaluation Manager and Evaluation Officer actively supporting implementation.

All external team members will be required to:

- Sign a conflict-of-interest declaration;
- Comply with UNEG Norms and Standards for evaluation; and
- Adhere to UNICEF's data sharing, confidentiality, and ethics policies.

In case of disagreement between the external team members and the Evaluation Manager, the Senior Evaluation Specialist for Institutional Effectiveness in the Evaluation Office will act as mediator and make the final determination, in accordance with UNICEF's evaluation quality assurance procedures.

7. Evaluation process and deliverables

The evaluation is planned for **December 2025 to May 2026** and will follow a structured four-phase process.

1. Orientation and inception (December 2025–January 2026)

- Orientation session for the external evaluation team with the UNICEF Evaluation Office;
- Introductory meeting with key stakeholders from both hubs to align expectations, clarify initial priorities, and initiate collaboration;
- Initial consultations, document review, and refinement of evaluation questions and methodology;
- Feasibility assessment of optional methodological elements and prioritization of activities; and
- First meeting with the Evaluation Reference Group and Advisory Groups to review the draft inception summary and provide strategic input.

Deliverables:

- **Draft inception summary** (in presentation format, maximum 25 slides, excluding annexes), outlining scope, methodology, and proposed adjustments for validation by the Evaluation Reference Group and Advisory Groups;
- **Final inception summary**, incorporating feedback from the Evaluation Reference Group, Advisory Groups, and quality assurance by the Evaluation Office, including the confirmed evaluation design, data collection tools, and prioritized activities.

2. Data collection and analysis (January 2025–March 2026)

- Semi-structured interviews and/or small focus groups with key stakeholder groups;
- Targeted deep dives into selected initiatives or regional experiences;
- Review of financial data, monitoring systems, and partnership documentation;
- Stakeholder workshops or consultations as beneficial and feasible – depending on feasibility and resources, evaluation team members may undertake a short field visit (e.g., to Helsinki) to engage directly with both hubs and key partners; and
- Triangulation and analysis of collected data to develop preliminary findings.

Deliverables:

- **Completion of all planned data collection activities.**

3. Sensemaking and reporting (March–April 2026)

- Facilitation of a Sensemaking Workshop with the Evaluation Reference Group, Advisory Groups, and other key stakeholders;
- Drafting of a concise evaluation report, based on triangulated evidence, workshop insights, and validated conclusions.

Deliverables:

- **Workshop presentation materials;**
- **Draft evaluation report** (maximum 35 pages and 17,500 words, excluding annexes; includes a standalone executive summary of maximum five pages).

4. Finalization and communication (April–May 2026)

- Workshop for validation of final conclusions and co-creation of recommendations with the Evaluation Reference Group and key stakeholders;
- Finalization of the evaluation report;
- Preparation of user-friendly communication products to support learning and uptake.

Deliverables:

- **Workshop presentation materials;**
- **Final evaluation report**, incorporating feedback from the Evaluation Reference Group, Advisory Groups, other key stakeholders, and quality assurance by the Evaluation Office;
- **Comment matrix**, summarizing how stakeholders feedback was addressed and resulting changes;
- **Evaluation brief** (maximum five pages), synthesizing key insights in a user-friendly format. Unlike the executive summary, which mirrors the structure of the full report, the brief may adopt a more thematic or forward-looking focus, depending on strategic needs. Its framing and emphasis can be agreed during finalization (e.g., focused on hub model lessons, systems change, or relevance to future programming); and
- **One-page infographic or visual summary**, capturing key insights and recommendations in a concise, accessible format tailored for strategic sharing and internal engagement; and
- **Final presentation deck** (maximum 20 slides), offering a clear, visually engaging summary of the EAFE's purpose, methodology, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

A detailed work plan and internal milestone calendar will be developed during the inception phase, in consultation with the Evaluation Reference Group, to confirm realistic dates for deliverables, reviews, and stakeholder workshops.

Additional requirements: All deliverables must meet UNICEF Evaluation Office quality standards, comply with the UNICEF Style Book and Brand Book, and be submitted in editable formats (e.g., Microsoft Word, PowerPoint). All graphs, charts, maps, and other visual elements must likewise be provided in editable formats.

Upon conclusion of the evaluation, the external team will provide the UNICEF Evaluation Office with a comprehensive **documentation package**. This will include:

- **All primary data collected** (e.g., interview notes, coded transcripts), retaining role-based attribution to ensure contextual understanding;
- **Key analysis products** (e.g., coding frameworks, analytical matrices, draft findings tables, synthesis outputs);
- **Any tools, templates, or digital assets** developed for the evaluation (e.g., data collection instruments, codebooks, visualizations); and
- **A summary handover note**, describing the structure and contents of the handover package, including any instructions or caveats for future reference.

Review processes: The Evaluation Manager will review each deliverable within 72 hours of submission for quality assurance. The Evaluation Reference Group will be provided with at least two weeks to review and comment on the draft inception summary and the draft evaluation report.

Public disclosure: Key final products – such as the evaluation report, management response, evaluation brief, and presentation deck – will be made publicly available in line with UNICEF's Evaluation Policy (2023) and Information Disclosure Policy (2010).

Endnotes

- ¹ World Bank (2022), [70% of 10-Year-Olds Now in Learning Poverty, Unable to Read and Understand a Simple Text](#), Press Release, 23 June 2022
- ² OECD (2025), [Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development 2025: Bridging the Trillions Gap](#), 7 February 2025
- ³ Launched in March 2025, the Future Focus Initiative (FFI) is UNICEF's global effort to adapt its functions, structures, and ways of working in response to declining international assistance and wider geopolitical shifts. Its aim is to enhance effectiveness, efficiency, agility, and overall readiness while safeguarding UNICEF's delivery for children. Measures include reducing overall cost envelopes, relocating selected functions to lower-cost duty stations, and consolidating expertise into thematic Centres of Excellence.
- ⁴ UNICEF (2025), [Digital Education](#) (UNICEF website)
- ⁵ Key documents on evaluation ethics and quality to be considered include the [UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation](#), the [UNICEF Adapted UNEG Evaluation Reports Standards](#), the [UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation](#), and the [UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis](#).