

Terms of Reference

UNICEF Evaluation Office

14 October 2025



Evaluation of UNICEF’s U-Report

Assessing how U-Report amplifies young people’s voices and strengthens participation and accountability across programmes, partners, and systems.

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Executive Summary

Why this evaluation?

U-Report is UNICEF's global digital platform and community for youth engagement, enabling young people to share opinions, access information, and take collective action on issues affecting their lives. Since its launch in 2011, U-Report has grown to more than 38 million users across over 95 countries, evolving from an innovation pilot into a key mechanism for participation and accountability to children and young people.

As UNICEF enters a new strategic cycle under the Strategic Plan 2026–2029 and continues its broader transformation through the Future Focus Initiative, U-Report stands at a pivotal moment of transition. UNICEF and partners now need clear evidence on its performance, value, and sustainability to ensure its continued relevance and efficiency within the organization's engagement and accountability architecture.

What will the evaluation do?

The evaluation will provide an independent assessment of U-Report's:

- *Relevance* – how well it responds to the priorities of children and young people and aligns with UNICEF's strategic direction;
- *Performance and results* – how effectively it engages young people, generates actionable insights, and contributes to programmes, advocacy, and accountability;
- *Efficiency* – whether resources, coordination, and governance arrangements are used economically and proportionately to deliver results;
- *Governance and systems* – how institutional structures and partnerships ensure ethical, safe, and effective delivery; and
- *Sustainability and future readiness* – how U-Report can adapt to changing priorities, technologies, and funding environments.

Findings will generate practical, forward-looking recommendations to inform decisions on U-Report's configuration, resourcing, and role under the Strategic Plan 2026–2029 and the Future Focus Initiative.

How will it be done?

Managed by UNICEF's Evaluation Office with support from an external team, the evaluation will combine mixed-methods and participatory approaches, integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence from:

- AI-assisted document and data review, including poll datasets, and safeguarding records;
- Semi-structured interviews with UNICEF staff, partners, and youth representatives;
- Light-touch country case studies reflecting diverse contexts and maturity levels;
- Youth consultations through U-Report channels and participatory dialogues; and
- Comparative analysis of other digital or hybrid youth-engagement platforms.

Ethical and safeguarding standards will guide all engagement with young people, ensuring informed consent, data protection, and safe participation practices.

Who will use it?

Findings will inform decisions by the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy (GCA), the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD), the Programme Group (PG), and country offices running U-Report platforms, as well as by partners and donors supporting youth engagement. The evaluation will help strengthen participation and accountability mechanisms, guide resource and governance choices, and advance learning on how digital and hybrid approaches enhance inclusion and innovation.

When will it happen?

The evaluation is scheduled to run from December 2025 to October 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

U-Report is UNICEF's global digital platform and community that enables young people to connect with UNICEF and partners, exchange information, and make their voices heard on issues affecting their lives, both globally and locally. It serves as both a communication and empowerment tool, linking child and youth¹ perspectives to programmes, advocacy and decision-making across sectors. Accessible to individuals aged 13 and older, U-Report primarily engages young people aged 13–24. Established to address persistent gaps in opportunities for children and youth to express their views and to access reliable information, U-Report is powered by *RapidPro*, UNICEF's open-source platform for automated two-way communication. It operates through mobile messaging and social media channels, complemented by in-person activities that foster dialogue, co-design and collective action at the community level.

Origins and evolution

Launched in Uganda in 2011, U-Report began as an SMS-based feedback tool enabling young people to share their opinions with leaders and service providers.² Its success in generating rapid insights and mobilizing communities illustrated the potential of low-cost, scalable technologies for youth engagement. Building on this success, UNICEF expanded the model with support from the former Global Innovation Centre (GIC), which developed shared tools, branding, and guidance during early scale-up. As the platform matured, coordination transitioned to the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy (GCA), embedding U-Report within UNICEF's broader youth-engagement architecture and recognizing it as a core mechanism for realizing children's right to participation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, while also advancing the engagement of young people aged 18 and above in civic and policy processes, consistent with international human rights standards. The Youth Engagement Section within GCA – soon to be renamed the Child and Youth Engagement Section – provides global stewardship for U-Report and related initiatives.

Governance and operating model

U-Report operates through a dual-governance model that combines global stewardship and national ownership. The worldwide team of GCA's Youth Engagement Section ensures coherence, technical support and safeguarding standards, while country offices lead implementation with national partners. Each country platform is typically guided by a Steering Committee that includes, as relevant to the national context, youth representatives, government counterparts, civil society organizations and private-sector partners. At the country-office level, U-Report is usually housed within programme or communication and advocacy sections, depending on context, while upholding common standards for ethics, privacy and data protection. Six core standards – covering privacy policies, anonymized workspaces, essential messaging flows, referral mechanisms, Ethical Focal Points and Steering Committees – constitute the framework underpinning U-Report's operational integrity. A forthcoming Traffic-Light System will rate compliance globally by 2027.

Growth, reach and participation

Over the past decade, U-Report has evolved into one of the world's largest digital youth-engagement platforms. By 2020, it had reached 10 million users across 68 countries;³ by 2021, 13 million in 76 countries;⁴ and by 2025, over 38 million across more than 95 countries. This growth has established U-Report as a trusted channel for youth dialogue and real-time feedback. Once considered mainly an innovation and polling tool, it is now increasingly recognized as a system for meaningful youth engagement and community mobilization. The platform aims to reach 100 million young people by 2030, further strengthening its role as a scalable mechanism for youth participation.⁵

Young people join by sending a simple keyword, such as JOIN, to their country's U-Report number via SMS or messaging apps (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram Direct Message, Telegram, or Viber). A short registration flow collects age, gender, and location, and provides links to privacy information. All subsequent digital interactions are anonymous. Once registered, U-Reporters can respond to *polls* on topics

from education and health to climate and mental well-being, and access *chatbots* with information and referrals. Many country platforms also extend participation beyond the digital space through *U-Actions*, *U-Communities*, and *Girls' Clubs*, which translate online dialogue into in-person engagement, co-design, and collective action at the community level.

Participation is free and voluntary, and no personally identifiable information is collected through registration or subsequent interactions. Poll results are aggregated in real time through RapidPro dashboards and are shared with UNICEF programmes, partners, and policymakers. The resulting insights have informed national strategies (e.g., health campaigns in Mali and Haiti, and climate and skills initiatives in India) and supported accountability and community feedback in humanitarian settings. For many young people, U-Report offers a channel for expression and a sense of agency, connecting them with peers and institutions that shape their lives.⁶

Consolidation and institutionalization

Since 2020, U-Report's focus has shifted from rapid expansion to consolidation and institutionalization.

Key developments include global standards and privacy policies, Ethical Focal Points, Steering Committees and the Traffic-Light System to monitor compliance. The Global Support Team provides toolkits, training, and peer learning to strengthen coherence and capacity. Country platforms vary in scope—from large-scale national deployments (e.g., in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) to thematic or humanitarian initiatives on migration, gender equality, or emergencies. Selected countries have piloted machine-assisted message classification (e.g., Zambia) to manage rising volumes.⁷ U-Report has supported real-time communication with affected populations, including during mpox and cholera responses, as well as youth-led initiatives such as the Green Rising climate campaign and adolescent girls' rights advocacy. These developments signal a shift from innovation to institutionalization, but also raise questions about sustainability, equitable capacity and the use of data for decision-making and accountability.

Strategic relevance and evaluation rationale

U-Report is a key mechanism for participation and accountability to children and young people, connecting their perspectives directly to UNICEF's programmes, communication, and advocacy while complementing broader organizational efforts to strengthen engagement and feedback. It supports the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025,⁸ which calls for stronger mechanisms for youth participation, accountability, and inclusion, and aligns with the *Youth Engagement Strategic Vision 2023–2026*,⁹ which envisions UNICEF as a child- and youth-powered organization. The forthcoming Strategic Plan 2026–2029 reaffirms the role of children, including adolescents, as rights-holders and agents of change, emphasizing digital technologies, innovation and partnerships as enablers of participation and accountability.¹⁰ It also underscores UNICEF's commitment to strengthening systems that ensure effective mechanisms for youth engagement.¹¹

Building on this foundation, U-Report is regarded as one of UNICEF's main instruments for digital youth engagement and accountability. Historically linked with Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) colleagues at the country level, future roles and structures are evolving under UNICEF's broader transformation agenda, including the Future Focus Initiative.¹² In this context, the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy has requested that the Evaluation Office assess U-Report's relevance, performance, governance, and sustainability considering UNICEF's strategic direction.

The evaluation takes place at a pivotal moment of transition—from growth to institutionalization and from innovation to systems strengthening within UNICEF's evolving engagement and accountability architecture. It will generate evidence to inform decisions on U-Report's future configuration, operating model, and contribution to participatory, inclusive and accountable systems. It will also explore U-Report's potential as a model for integrated, cross-sectoral digital participation for children and youth within UNICEF's wider reform agenda.

2. Purpose and scope

The evaluation will provide an independent assessment of U-Report's **relevance, performance, efficiency, and sustainability**. It will examine how effectively U-Report achieves its intended purpose of providing young people with a safe, trusted and influential voice in shaping policies and programmes, and how it can best evolve to remain relevant and sustainable within UNICEF's changing strategic and funding environment. The evaluation will also explore **strategic options for U-Report's future configuration and role** within UNICEF's broader engagement and accountability architecture, including in the context of the Future Focus Initiative and the forthcoming Strategic Plan 2026–2029.

The evaluation will consider both operational and institutional dimensions, assessing U-Report's performance as a global youth-engagement initiative and its integration within UNICEF's structures, partnerships and digital ecosystem. It will examine not only how U-Report contributes to programme and advocacy results, but also how young people experience and benefit from their participation.

Specifically, the evaluation aims to:

- **Determine the relevance** of U-Report in relation to UNICEF's mandate, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the forthcoming Strategic Plan 2026–2029, including whether it responds to the needs and priorities of children and young people, and how effectively it promotes inclusion, gender equality, and the principle of leaving no one behind;
- **Assess performance and results**, including reach, engagement quality, inclusiveness, and the extent to which U-Report insights and youth voices influence UNICEF programmes, advocacy, and accountability efforts;
- **Analyze efficiency**, examining whether coordination and governance arrangements support cost-efficient delivery, and whether human, financial, and technological resources are used effectively, in a timely manner, and are proportionate to achieved results and added value to UNICEF's mandate;
- **Examine governance, systems and partnerships**, analysing whether current institutional and operational arrangements within UNICEF and with external partners ensure ethical, safe and effective delivery at scale, and how they may need to adapt to evolving roles and structures; and
- **Review sustainability and future readiness**, reviewing the robustness of U-Report's funding and capacity models and exploring how differences in country context, capacity and scale may require varied operating approaches and funding modalities.

The evaluation will generate evidence-based recommendations to guide forward-looking decisions on U-Report's strategic direction, configuration and resourcing within UNICEF's child- and youth-engagement architecture, and its potential contribution to emerging institutional mechanisms for youth engagement in the next Strategic Plan.

Intended use

Findings will provide evidence-based insights to inform strategic and operational decisions by the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy (GCA) and other parts of UNICEF responsible for U-Report's governance, resourcing and integration – including the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD), the Programme Group (PG), regional offices, and country offices operating national U-Report platforms. The evaluation will also be relevant to the UNICEF Global Management Team and country representatives, who shape organizational direction, priorities, and country-level implementation. Findings will also offer lessons for partners and donors supporting digital participation and youth engagement initiatives.

Beyond informing decisions on U-Report's future direction, the evaluation will contribute to UNICEF's wider organizational learning on how digital and hybrid engagement mechanisms can strengthen participation,

accountability and institutional innovation – helping identify gaps and opportunities in how UNICEF engages young people as partners and agents of change.

Scope

The evaluation will cover the period 2020–2025, capturing a phase in which U-Report evolved from a rapidly expanding initiative into a more structured and systematized platform under GCA's leadership. During this period, global standards and safeguarding frameworks were formalized, national platforms multiplied and matured, and efforts began to define a sustainable funding and investment model.

The evaluation will examine U-Report's global operations, coordination mechanisms, and national platforms – recognizing their diversity in maturity, scale and integration within UNICEF's programmes and partnerships. It will also consider U-Report's positioning within UNICEF's broader youth engagement landscape, examining how it aligns with or complements other initiatives, where relevant, and drawing lessons from comparable external platforms that engage young people at scale.

The evaluation will not assess sectoral or thematic outcomes directly. Still, it will examine how U-Report mechanisms enable or support such outcomes through communication, engagement and feedback loops within UNICEF's programmes and partnerships.

3. Evaluation questions

The evaluation will explore an indicative set of questions across four thematic areas. These are designed to examine U-Report's relevance, performance, efficiency, governance, and sustainability, with attention to variations across country contexts and levels of maturity.

Relevance and strategic positioning

- To what extent does U-Report's current role and operating model reflect UNICEF's evolving vision for youth engagement and communication, and where might strategic adjustment be needed?
- How responsive is U-Report to the priorities, interests and needs of children and young people – including girls and marginalized groups – in diverse contexts?
- How does U-Report compare with, and what lessons can it draw from, other youth engagement initiatives within and beyond UNICEF, including digital platforms?
- To what extent does U-Report's strategic positioning enable it to contribute to emerging organizational priorities such as participation, accountability and digital transformation?

Effectiveness, efficiency, and results

- How effectively does U-Report reach, engage and retain young people – online and offline – in meaningful participation?
- To what extent do U-Report mechanisms (e.g., polls, chatbots, communities, and in-person actions) produce timely, credible, and actionable insights for UNICEF and partners?
- How are insights and youth voices generated through U-Report used by UNICEF and partners to inform programmes, advocacy, and accountability efforts?
- What value does U-Report generate for young people, UNICEF, and partners, and what factors enable or constrain this value creation?
- How efficiently are human, financial, and technological resources coordinated and used to deliver results across global and national levels?
- How equitably is access to and participation in U-Report for young people with limited connectivity (e.g., via SMS) or differing gender, age, disability, location, or language profiles?

Governance, systems, and partnerships

- How clear and effective are roles, accountabilities and coordination mechanisms across global and national levels?
- How well are ethical, safeguarding and data protection standards applied and monitored across contexts?
- How effectively does U-Report contribute to UNICEF partnerships with governments, civil society organizations, mobile network operators, and other UN entities to achieve reach, innovation, and sustainability?
- What organizational, system, or contextual factors most influence performance across different operating and funding models?

Sustainability and future readiness

- What financial, technical and institutional factors influence the sustainability of U-Report platforms at global and national levels?
- How well is U-Report positioned to adapt to changing organizational priorities, the funding landscape, and technological trends (e.g., AI, automation, data analytics)?
- What models could strengthen shared resourcing, local ownership, and long-term viability?
- What strategic choices or trade-offs should UNICEF consider to ensure U-Report's continued relevance, credibility, and impact under the Strategic Plan 2026–2029 and beyond?

4. Methodology and approach

The evaluation will apply a **mixed-methods, participatory approach**, integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence across global, regional and country levels. The design will be tailored to provide a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives and operational realities, combining engagement metrics with qualitative insights from users, staff, and partners. This approach is particularly suited to an initiative such as U-Report, where both quantitative data and user experiences constitute key evidence of how the initiative engages young people, mobilizes communities, and informs UNICEF's work at the country level.

The evaluation will be **learning-oriented and utilization-focused**, generating practical insights to inform decision-making by GCA and other parts of UNICEF, while contributing to wider organizational learning on engagement and accountability. Taking a **systems perspective**, it will analyse how U-Report functions within a broader ecosystem of youth networks, digital platforms and national partnerships, and how it can **adapt to ongoing organizational shifts** – including the Future Focus Initiative, evolving youth-engagement architecture and changing digital and funding landscapes. **Equity and gender dimensions** will be applied as cross-cutting lenses, ensuring that patterns of participation, access and impact are analysed where disaggregated data allow.

Analytical framework

During the inception phase, the evaluation team will develop a clear **results framework or theory of change** to guide data collection and analysis. This will describe how U-Report inputs and activities (e.g., polls, chatbots, youth actions) are expected to lead to outcomes such as strengthened youth engagement and participation, feedback loops and accountability mechanisms. The framework will help identify assumptions, test the plausibility of change pathways and guide the coding and interpretation of evidence, linking observed results to underlying drivers and contextual factors across different operating environments. It will also examine U-Report's value proposition for young people – including how the initiative enhances agency, access to information and civic participation – and for UNICEF offices and partners, examining how U-Report supports programme learning, advocacy, and organizational accountability.

Where data permit, the analysis will:

- Explore **plausible contribution pathways** between U-Report engagement and observed outcomes at programme, policy or community level;
- Compare **patterns across countries** with differing maturity, reach and resource levels, including exploring variations in operating and financing arrangements that may point to emerging business models or typologies; and
- Examine **equity dimensions**, including gender, age, disability and access to connectivity, to understand who participates and who may be excluded.

Data sources and collection methods

The evaluation will draw on a broad range of evidence to ensure triangulation and representation of different perspectives. Main data sources and methods will include:

- **AI-assisted document and data review:** Global and national documentation, U-Report internal dashboard, operational guidelines, annual and progress reports, safeguarding and compliance records, and partnership materials. The evaluation will also review U-Report monitoring and analytics data, including poll datasets, user-registration and engagement statistics, dashboard visualizations, and country performance summaries. Where feasible, usage analytics, social-media metrics, and communication datasets will be analysed to assess reach, growth and participation trends.
- **Global and regional interviews:** Approximately 50–65 semi-structured interviews will be conducted with UNICEF staff across GCA, ICTD, the Programme Group, regional and country offices, as well as with external partners and peer initiatives in digital participation. The final number will be confirmed at inception based on coverage needs and evidence saturation. These interviews will complement youth consultations conducted under the dedicated *Youth perspectives* component.
- **Country case studies:** Approximately 3–5 light-touch case studies, selected to reflect diversity in scale, maturity, and context (e.g., large and mature platforms such as the Democratic Republic of Congo; versus smaller or humanitarian-focused deployments). Each case will explore operating models, partnerships, resource arrangements and how U-Report data and networks are used to inform programmes, communications and advocacy. The evaluation will also examine how different configurations of governance, staffing and financing influence effectiveness and sustainability, identifying whether distinct operational or business models are emerging across contexts.
- **Youth perspectives:** Direct engagement with young people will be undertaken through a combination of online focus groups, micro-surveys or participatory digital dialogues hosted via U-Report channels. Consultations will be conducted in several countries, ensuring diversity by gender, age, disability and connectivity level. Formats will be adapted to local conditions – for example, short U-Report polls to capture broad input and small virtual focus groups for deeper qualitative insights. Particular attention will be given to youth perceptions
- **Comparative review:** A concise scan of primarily digital and hybrid participation initiatives (within and beyond the UN system) to contextualize U-Report's approach, identify comparable platforms or networks operating at scale, and surface lessons for scalability and sustainability.

Sampling of countries, stakeholders, and youth participants will be guided by transparent criteria agreed during inception to ensure diversity by region, platform maturity, and thematic focus.

Participatory and innovative elements

The evaluation will actively involve UNICEF staff, partners, and young people throughout the process. Participation will be built into design, analysis, and validation stages, including:

- **Stakeholder consultations** during inception to refine evaluation questions and scope;
- **Sense-making workshops** with UNICEF and partners to interpret emerging findings and co-develop conclusions;
- **Youth feedback loops**, using U-Report or other digital channels to share findings and invite youth reflections; and
- **Collaborative recommendation design**, engaging the Global U-Report team, selected country focal points, and youth representatives to ensure practical and forward-looking use of results.

These participatory processes are intended not only to enhance data quality and inclusiveness but also to strengthen ownership and use of findings within UNICEF and among youth partners. Where feasible, the evaluation will explore opportunities to engage young people as peer facilitators or multipliers in consultation activities and involve a youth advisory group in reviewing the approach and interpreting findings.

Evaluability and anticipated limitations

As a global, multi-country initiative, U-Report presents both rich data opportunities and significant evaluability challenges. The evaluation will therefore conduct a light-touch **evaluability review** during inception to determine data quality, accessibility, and comparability across platforms and to refine the methodological design and data collection priorities accordingly.

Anticipated challenges and mitigation measures include:

- **Variation in data quality and availability:** National U-Report platforms differ widely in documentation practices, metadata standards, and monitoring capacity. To mitigate this, the evaluation will (i) map available datasets and dashboards early in inception; (ii) prioritize a representative mix of high- and moderate-quality data contexts; and (iii) triangulate findings across document review, interviews, and youth feedback rather than relying on any single data source.
- **Limited evidence on outcome utilization:** While U-Report collects substantial engagement data, systematic evidence on how results influence programmes or policy decisions may be sparse. The evaluation will address this through targeted interviews with decision-makers and programme leads to reconstruct utilization cases, complemented by document tracing and stakeholder validation to test plausibility.
- **Cross-country comparability:** Large differences in platform scale, resourcing, and institutional anchoring make standardized measurement difficult. The evaluation will mitigate this by using country typologies (e.g. large-scale, mid-level, emergent or thematic platforms) and conducting within-type comparisons rather than attempting uniform quantitative benchmarking.
- **Attribution and contribution:** U-Report operates within a wider ecosystem of communication, advocacy, and programme activities, which limits the ability to attribute observed results directly to the platform. The evaluation will instead use a contribution-oriented analysis, examining plausible pathways of influence and corroborating evidence from multiple perspectives.
- **Ethical and safeguarding constraints:** Engaging young people – including individuals under 18 – across digital channels requires careful management of consent, anonymity, and data protection. These will be addressed by following UNICEF’s established child-safeguarding protocols, ensuring clear consent procedures, and placing all data-collection instruments under ethical review in coordination with UNICEF’s Senior Advisor on Ethics in Evidence Generation.

- **Uneven participation and access:** Levels of youth engagement differ by geography, gender, disability, cultural context and digital connectivity, which may affect the representativeness of perspectives captured. The evaluation will mitigate this by purposively including diverse participant groups, adapting consultation methods for accessibility (e.g. language, digital format, or mode of engagement), and using U-Report channels to reach young people in low-connectivity or under-represented settings.

Across all limitations, the evaluation will maintain transparency in assumptions and analytical boundaries, document data gaps explicitly, and apply triangulation to strengthen the reliability and interpretability of findings. A detailed data-collection matrix, including sources, indicators, and analytical methods, will be finalized during inception.

Ethical standards and safeguarding

All evaluation activities will adhere to **UNICEF and UNEG ethical standards**,¹³ ensuring respect, privacy, and informed consent for all participants – including minors – and upholding UNICEF’s child-safeguarding principles. The evaluation team will:

- Obtain informed consent and ensure voluntary participation;
- Maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants, unless explicit permission is provided;
- Use accessible language and inclusive formats for youth consultations;
- Foster safe, inclusive spaces for discussion, mindful of gender, age, and power dynamics;
- Ensure that all data-collection instruments are submitted for ethical review, in coordination with relevant ethics and safeguarding focal points;
- Comply with UNICEF’s Child Safeguarding Policy and relevant national child-protection protocols when engaging participants under 18; and
- Avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest and uphold the independence and impartiality of the evaluation process.

Analysis, synthesis, and validation

Data will be analysed thematically and comparatively, guided by the analytical framework developed at inception. Quantitative data will be summarized through descriptive statistics and trend analysis where feasible, while qualitative evidence will be coded against key evaluation questions. Findings from different sources will be systematically triangulated both horizontally (across data sources and methods) and vertically (across global, regional, and country levels) to ensure consistency and credibility.

Draft findings will be validated and refined through participatory sense-making workshops with UNICEF staff, partners, and youth representatives to agree on conclusions, co-create actionable recommendations, and support their subsequent use across the organization.

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).

Final approval of all deliverables rests with the Director of Evaluation, following 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 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 defining the evaluation scope and questions to validating the 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. Additional Evaluation Office staff may collaborate with the evaluation team as needed, providing targeted support such as document review, data synthesis, and logistical coordination to facilitate effective implementation. This internal engagement will strengthen contextual relevance, facilitate access to key information, and promote the timely use of findings.

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

- **Evaluation Reference Group:** A strategically composed Evaluation Reference Group (an advisory body of key stakeholders) will provide guidance and feedback at key moments. It will include representatives from the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy (GCA), the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD), the Programme Group (PG), as well as selected regional and country offices engaged in U-Report implementation. Other divisions or external partners may be invited as relevant. The group is advisory and does not interfere with the independence of the evaluation team.

The Reference Group will be engaged at three key stages: (i) a first meeting to present and review the draft inception summary and provide strategic input; (ii) a sensemaking session to discuss preliminary findings and inform recommendations; and (iii) a review of the draft evaluation report and co-creation workshop to develop recommendations that are grounded in evidence and shaped by organizational feasibility and readiness for change.

- **Youth Advisory Group:** The evaluation will seek to leverage the Youth Steering Committee that GCA is in the process of establishing for U-Report, engaging it as an advisory group for the evaluation where feasible. This group will provide youth perspectives on the evaluation design, emerging findings, recommendations, and communication products, ensuring that the process remains inclusive and grounded in young people's experiences.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Key intended users will be engaged throughout the process, with participation tailored to their roles and decision-making needs. The Evaluation Office will maintain close coordination with core counterparts in the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy (GCA) and other relevant divisions to ensure alignment with operational realities and evolving priorities. Senior leadership will be engaged in key milestones, particularly during the review of draft findings and the co-creation of recommendations. This focused, iterative approach is intended to ensure the evaluation remains relevant, credible, and actionable.

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 structure is intended to promote ownership and use of evaluation findings, strengthen transparency, and support the effective use of findings for organizational learning and decision-making.

6. Evaluation team composition and requirements

The evaluation will be carried out by a team composed of external consultants, supported by the Evaluation Manager from the UNICEF Evaluation Office, with possible contributions from other colleagues as capacity allows. The external team is expected to include three members, with complementary expertise in evaluation, digital engagement, and youth participation. The precise composition and responsibilities may be adjusted in consultation with the Evaluation Office.

Team composition

- **Senior Evaluation Specialist and Team Lead:** At least ten years' experience leading complex, multi-stakeholder evaluations, with a proven ability to coordinate teams and deliver high-quality analytical outputs. This role will be responsible for ensuring methodological rigor, coordinating team inputs, and managing the timely delivery of high-quality outputs. The Senior Evaluation Specialist will submit all draft and final deliverables to the Evaluation Manager for quality assurance and revise them as needed to meet UNICEF quality standards and expectations.
- **Digital Engagement and Youth Participation Specialist:** Subject-matter expertise in digital communication, civic-tech ecosystems, and youth engagement platforms such as U-Report or comparable initiatives. Demonstrated experience with participatory, systems-oriented, or utilization-focused evaluation approaches and with the ethical management of data involving young people.
- **Evaluation / Research Analyst (mid-level):** Proficiency in qualitative and quantitative analysis tools (e.g. MAXQDA, NVivo, Excel, Power BI) and in integrating digital or AI-assisted techniques for document review, synthesis, and data visualization.

Qualifications and experience

Collectively, the team should demonstrate:

- Experience designing and implementing multi-country or global evaluations;
- Expertise in digital engagement, communication and advocacy, social and behaviour change (SBC), or youth-participation approaches;
- Experience with mixed-methods evaluation designs, including participatory and stakeholder co-creation approaches;
- Familiarity with institutional effectiveness, governance, and organizational change in multilateral or international organizations;
- Strong capacity for data interpretation and communicating complex findings through clear and engaging formats;
- Commitment to gender equality, equity, and inclusion throughout all stages of the evaluation; and
- Excellent analytical, writing, and presentation skills in English. 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 apply a blended management model, actively supporting implementation through coordination, data review, and analytical inputs.

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, timeline and deliverables

The evaluation is planned for **December 2025 to October 2026** and will follow a structured four-phase process. The timeline may be refined during inception in consultation with key stakeholders and the Evaluation Reference Group to confirm realistic dates for deliverables, reviews, and stakeholder workshops.

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

- Orientation session for the external evaluation team with the UNICEF Evaluation Office;
- Introductory meeting with GCA and key stakeholders to align expectations, clarify initial priorities, and initiate collaboration;
- Initial consultations, document review, and refinement of evaluation questions and methodology;
- Light-touch evaluability review to assess data quality, accessibility, and comparability across platforms, identify key evidence gaps, and inform the prioritization of data collection activities; and
- First meeting of the Evaluation Reference Group to review the draft inception summary and provide strategic input.

To account for ongoing organizational developments, the inception phase has been extended to allow sufficient time for reflection and design. This will enable the team to integrate insights from UNICEF's transformation processes, including the Future Focus Initiative and the rollout of the Strategic Plan 2026–2029, while conducting early desk review, consultations, and data mapping to ensure a responsive and robust evaluation design.

Deliverables:

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

2. Data collection and analysis (April–July 2026)

- Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with UNICEF staff, partners, and youth representatives;
- Light-touch country case studies, including document review and remote consultations;
- Analysis of U-Report monitoring data, dashboards, and poll datasets; and
- Ongoing triangulation and synthesis of evidence to identify preliminary findings.

Deliverables:

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

3. Sensemaking and reporting (August–September 2026)

- Facilitation of a Sensemaking Workshop with the Reference Group and other key stakeholders to review preliminary findings and emerging conclusions;
- Drafting of the evaluation report based on triangulated evidence, workshop insights, and feedback from the Reference Group.

Deliverables:

- **Workshop presentation materials;**
- **Draft evaluation report** (maximum 35 pages and 17,500 words, excluding annexes), including an executive summary of up to five pages.

4. Finalization and communication (September–October 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;
- Development of concise, user-friendly communication products to support learning and uptake.

Deliverables:

- **Workshop presentation materials;**
- **Final evaluation report**, incorporating feedback from the Evaluation Reference Group, 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.
- **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 evaluation's purpose, methodology, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Quality standards and submission 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 In line with the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989), UNICEF defines *children* as individuals under the age of 18 years. *Adolescents* are those aged 10–19 years, and *youth* refers to individuals aged 15–24 years, [as defined by the United Nations](#). The term *young people* is used more broadly to encompass adolescents and youth, so usually those aged 10–24 years. U-Report platforms typically apply a minimum participation age of 13 years, consistent with international data-protection and platform-consent standards (e.g. EU General Data Protection Regulation, U.S. Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act, and messaging platform terms of service such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger).
- ² Participedia (2023), [Enabling Youth Participation Through Technology: U-Report Uganda](#) (Participedia case study).
- ³ UNICEF (2020), [U-Report Reaches 10 Million Young People Worldwide](#), UNICEF website, 23 March 2020.
- ⁴ UNICEF USA (2021), [U-Report: Using UNICEF’s Social Messaging Platform to Improve Lives](#), UNICEF USA website, 15 April 2021.
- ⁵ UNICEF (2025), *U-Report: 37 million young people voicing their opinion through mobile phones*, Investment Case Note (draft), internal document.
- ⁶ UNICEF (2024), *U-Report Playbook*, Division of Global Communication and Advocacy, New York: UNICEF, internal document.
- ⁷ Imran et al. (2016), [Enabling Digital Health by Automatic Classification of Short Messages: The Case of U-Report Zambia](#).
- ⁸ UNICEF (2022), [UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025](#), UNICEF website.
- ⁹ UNICEF (undated), *Youth Engagement Strategic Vision. Becoming a child- and youth-powered organization*, internal document.
- ¹⁰ UNICEF (2025), [UNICEF Strategic Plan 2026–2029](#), New York: UNICEF Executive Board, 3 July 2025.
- ¹¹ UNICEF (2025). [Integrated Results and Resources Framework \(IRRF\) of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029](#). New York: UNICEF Executive Board, 3 July 2025.
- ¹² 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, abolishing selected posts, relocating functions to lower-cost duty stations, consolidating expertise into thematic Centres of Excellence, and merging or reconfiguring divisions, organizational units, and regional offices.
- ¹³ 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](#).