



**UNEG**

**United Nations Evaluation Group**

Working Paper

## **Background note on the UNEG peer review mechanism**

The purpose of this background note is to provide a history and context to the United Nations Evaluation Group's (UNEG) peer review process. It aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on the relevance of the UNEG peer reviews within the group's membership and highlight issues that should be considered in any further revisions to the peer review mechanism.

**April 2018**

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## Introduction

Consistent with its vision and mission statement, the United Nations Evaluation group (UNEG) has been a key driver for evaluation capacity development within the United Nations system. The group has led several initiatives aimed at strengthening the practice and value of evaluations within the United Nations system most notably through the development of the UNEG norms and standards for evaluation, the development of guidance materials, and others. Among these different initiatives, the conduct of peer reviews of UN evaluation functions stands as one of UNEG's flagship initiatives.

Drawing from OECD's experience in the use of peer review approaches in international cooperation, the OECD-DAC evaluation network (EVALNET) and UNEG established a joint task force to pilot and support the development of a peer review mechanism for UN evaluation functions in 2004. Since then, 17 peer reviews of 13 UNEG members have been conducted.

Overtime, discussions about the need to revise the process and guidance of the peer review mechanism have emerged in UNEG. Based on a document available and a survey administered by the UNEG peer review sub-working group, this note presents an overview of the UNEG peer review mechanism and its evolution, its status and lessons learned so far, leading to a highlight of key issues for consideration in potential revisions of the peer review mechanism.

## Background to the OECD-DAC/UNEG peer review mechanism

The push for greater accountability in development aid over the past 20 years has spurred rapid expansion in evaluation functions and personnel across multilateral and bilateral development organisations, including the funds programmes and independent agencies of the United Nations. During the early years of the new millennium, the OECD-DAC developed norms and standards for evaluation, and UNEG emerged as a professional network. Recognizing the need to ensure that new evaluation entities were incorporating best professional practices, a peer review approach was established under the auspices of the OECD DAC-evaluation network (EVALNET) in 2004. UNDP piloted the approach for the assessment of its evaluation function, followed by UNICEF in 2006.

Building on the lessons from these two pilots, EVALNET and UNEG established a joint task force to initiate and support professional peer reviews of the evaluation function of UN organizations. The task force developed a framework<sup>1</sup> for these peer reviews that included step by step guidance specifying the focus, scope, roles and responsibilities, as well as other process parameters. The framework was designed to serve as a flexible guidance that could be adapted to a wide range of multilateral organizations with differing missions and contexts. The aims of the mechanism are as follows:

- Building greater knowledge and use of evaluation systems by management, governing bodies and other stakeholders of entities reviewed;
- Evaluating the evaluators through a professional peer assessment against recognized international standards;

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<sup>1</sup> DAC/UNEG Joint Task Force on Professional Peer Reviews of Evaluation Functions in Multilateral Organizations - Framework for Professional Peer Reviews

- Sharing good practice, experience and mutual learning, building greater internal capacity and external confidence in multilateral evaluation systems and thus ultimately reducing demands for special outside assessments of performance.

Peer reviews are expected to examine the independence, credibility, and utility of evaluation systems and their products. The reviews should all apply the same following assessment question:

*“Are the agency’s evaluation function and its products: independent; credible; and useful for learning and accountability purposes, as assessed by a panel of professional evaluation peers against international standards and the evidence base.”*

The peer review mechanism was established as a voluntary mechanism, designed to help evaluation offices learn from the experiences of their peers, and help shape a global best practice in evaluation amongst bilateral and multilateral organizations. It was designed to be adaptable to varying functions and processes, including for organizations working in both development and humanitarian contexts.

A Joint EVALNET/UNEG task force was established and given responsibility to manage the overall peer review process, with the following specific functions:

- Conduct joint reviews of experiences following each peer review – as a standard procedure;
- Stock take once every two years on the basis of such reviews;
- Update the approach and methodology on the basis of this periodic stocktaking.

The peer review framework emphasizes the value of sharing experiences and there is an expectation that the approach and methodologies for peer reviews should be further refined through lessons learned. Issues frequently mentioned for revision based on lessons from the peer reviews carried out, include whether a more systematic approach should be taken, with rotational coverage, and an obligation for UNEG members to participate.

### A second generation of peer reviews

In 2011, UNEG issued an update<sup>2</sup> of the peer review framework specific to UNEG members, integrating lessons learned following the completion of five additional peer reviews (WFP, GEF, OIOS, UNIDO, UN habitat/UNEP). The development of this framework specific to UNEG members was preceded by a similar approach by the Multilateral Development Banks, under the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) in 2009 and piloted with the Peer review of IFAD<sup>3</sup>.

The new framework provided a more streamlined framework for the continuation of peer reviews under UNEG’s leadership. The new framework further integrated and affirmed the 2005 UNEG norms and standards as the normative framework for peer reviews of UN evaluation functions. The peer reviews subsequently carried out have assessed the level of adoption of UNEG Norms and standards.

It introduced the option of applying a reduced framework for self-identified small size organizations to “keep costs relatively low and commensurate to the value to be gained from the peer review”. The idea of a differentiated approach for reviewing small or highly specialized agencies was mentioned in the

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<sup>2</sup> UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations

<sup>3</sup> [ECG Review framework for the evaluation function in Multilateral Development Banks](#)

previous framework but not fully developed. The reduced approach included: a reduced number of panel members (2-4) without the recruitment of a consultant; and limited travel to one mission combining both the fact finding and peer exchanges phases. Nevertheless, the scope of assessment for this reduced modality remained the same as for full-fledged peer reviews. The first entity to adopt such a modality was UNIDO in 2009-2010.

The adoption of the revised framework marked a departure from the previous arrangements established with EVALNET members, shifting the overall responsibility and ownership over the mechanism to UNEG. This change has had significant implications, notably on its funding and management.

While the cost of preceding peer reviews had been fully covered by the individual EVALNET members participating in the peer panels, funding for the second generation of peer reviews would be increasingly borne solely by the reviewed offices, and volunteer participation of panel members. Increasingly, UNEG

On the management side, the chairmanship of the peer review panel and associated responsibilities (coordination, logistical, engagement with senior management and governing bodies, and reporting on results and lessons) previously assumed by an EVALNET member, was placed with UNEG heads, with the option of having the function filled by the head of a bilateral office.

Peer reviews were integrated as part of the new UNEG Strategy for 2014-2019, as a tool to ensure that evaluation functions and products of UN entities meet the UNEG Norms and Standards for evaluation (Strategic objective 1). The partnership and involvement of the EVALNET members in the first generation of peer reviews had been widely appreciated by UNEG members and was found to add value and credibility to the process. Thus, the UNEG/EVALNET task group was maintained, to ensure continued involvement of EVALNET members. Progress and results have continued to be reported to both UNEG's AGM and to EVALNET meetings by the co-chairs of the task group.

## Status of peer reviews



**17** Peer reviews of **13** UN evaluation functions conducted since 2005

- **4** Agencies peer reviewed twice (UNDP, UNICEF, GEF, WFP)
- **1** bundled peer review (UNEP and UN-Habitat)
- About **1/3** of UNEG members peer reviewed



**7** were conducted applying a “reduced framework”

**1/3** of peer reviews have a **published management response**

**1/2** of peer reviews **have published a lesson learned note**, from which about **1/2** were joint lessons



The average cost of a Peer review estimated at approx. **50,000 USD/40,000\* USD** applying a “reduced framework”, without staff and panel members time/cost

The average duration of a peer review is **7.8 months / 6 months\*** applying a “reduced framework”.

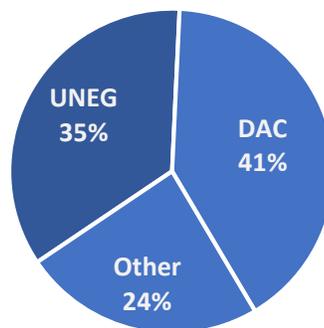
\*Estimates based on figures reported by offices, and may not be captured consistently

Average of **1 peer review** completed by year  
Maximum of **4 peer reviews** in a year (2012)

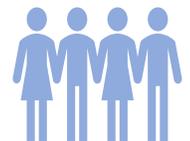


Average panel is composed of **4 members** and **1 advisor**

**80%** of panel members & advisors participated in only **1 peer review**  
**53** panel members have volunteered  
**18** different advisors recruited

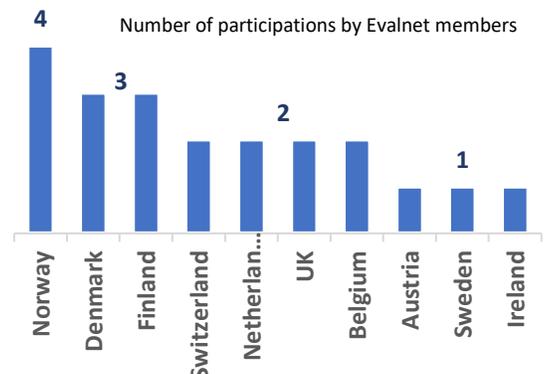


Participation from  
**7** Independent  
**4** MDBs  
**1** INGO, Foundation, VOPE



There is **Gender parity** in the overall participation of panel members, but **2/3** of consultants who have advised panel members were males

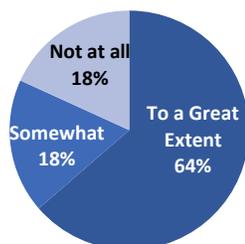
**10 Evalnet members** have participated in panels



## Highlights from survey on demand and supply (February-March 2018)

### Feedback from offices peer reviewed

Offices peer reviewed indicated that 64% of recommendations were implemented



Perception by offices peer reviewed on the process

#### Strengths

1. Participation of EVALNET members
2. A review by those who understand evaluation in the context of UN agencies
3. Common, flexible, and tested framework against UNEG N&S

#### Weaknesses

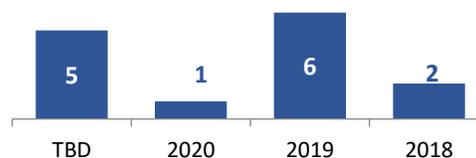
1. Perceived lack of independence
2. Resources to engage (time and money)
3. Lack of integration with formal decision-making process of Governing bodies
4. Varying depth and quality

### Demand and supply for peer reviews

21 UNEG members likely to undertake a peer review

Likely (21)	Unlikely (14)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*10 are "small" offices</li> <li>*85% of office peer reviewed likely to do it again</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*2 offices already peer reviewed</li> <li>*10 "small" offices</li> </ul>

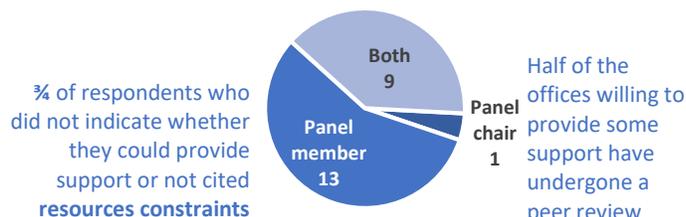
9 UNEG members planning a peer review in the next 3 years



Main Benefit expected from peer reviews

- Comparison to **norms and standards and best practice** to identify areas for improvement
- **Strengthen credibility of evaluation function within organizations**
- **Heighten utilization of evaluation products by senior management**

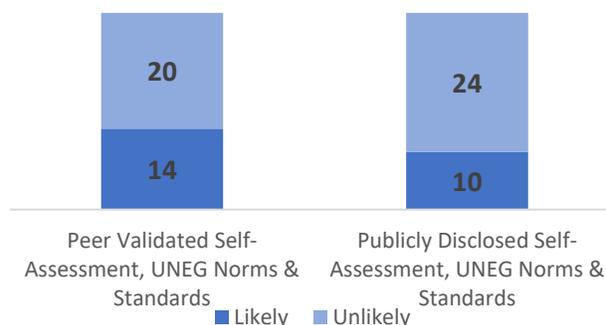
22 Evaluation offices have indicated their readiness to support peer reviews



The main reasons cited for a peer review to be unlikely are:

1. Opportunity cost for small functions
2. Perceived lack of credibility/independence by boards
3. Evaluation function already covered by other assessments
4. Timing (recently completed, or function not mature enough)

Some UNEG members indicate interest in exploring new modalities for peer reviews



## Format and adherence to the UNEG peer review framework

In considering adherence to the UNEG framework for peer reviews, it is important to highlight that the guidance detailed in the current peer review framework are rather flexible, adherence is uneven.

Based on the findings from a lesson learned study conducted in 2012<sup>4</sup>, an overall good level of adherence to the UNEG framework was noted except for the two following areas:

- collaboration with local partners and stakeholders as well as harmonization and coordination with other external partners;
- coverage of organizational achievements.

The resource intensiveness of the peer review mechanism has been highlighted as a concern by many of the peer reviewed offices. The objective of reducing the cost and time associated with the conduct of peer reviews was one of the ambition of the UNEG revised framework in 2011.

Noting the expected flexibility in the use of the framework, they are at least 3 areas where inconsistent adherence can be observed: the issuance of management response and lessons learning from peer reviews, and the application of the reduced framework.

### Management response and lessons learned

Under the UNEG framework, the publication of both a management response and lessons learned note appears to have been less systematic. Since 2011, half the peer reviews (5/11) have produced a lesson learned note, separately by the reviewed office or panel members, or then jointly. Management responses have been published for a third of the peer reviews (4/11). This contrasts to the peer reviews developed through the earlier DAC/UNEG framework. After the two initial pilots, all four of the earlier peer reviews had a lesson learned note, and all but one had a management response.

Compliance with the requirement for each review to have a management response may be affected by factors outside the control of UNEG members, but it raises questions as to the overall level of follow up and the linkage between the peer review mechanism and the formal decision-making process of respective organizations. The evaluation units reviewed have the responsibility to produce a follow up reports after one or two years on actions taken and impacts of the review but this requirement does not seem to have been applied so far.

Some of the feedback collected through a survey administered by the UNEG peer review sub working group in February 2018 highlight mixed experiences in terms of how the peer review exercise was used and its recommendations implemented. While 64% of respondents who have undertaken a peer review indicated that implementation were to a great extent implemented, feedback provided through the lessons learned notes and survey by the peer review group suggest that they some peer reviews have had little uptake by Governing bodies and senior management of respective organizations. Similarly, feedback on perceived weaknesses of the peer review process clearly highlight the lack of integration and visibility of the UNEG peer review within the UN system, by Governing bodies and Senior Management. This is however contrasted by other experience where the peer review report was presented and considered by governing bodies/senior management as expected (recent examples include UNICEF, ITC, UNODC for instance).

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<sup>4</sup> C Davies & Julia Brümmer, "Lessons-Learned Study of Peer Reviews of UNEG Evaluation Functions"

The follow up and uptake in the formal decision making of offices peer reviewed, and impact of peer reviews in the organizations reviewed would require more in-depth analysis.

While the previous framework did not specify the method through which panels and evaluation offices reviewed should share lessons learned, the UNEG framework specifies that it should be the subject of a note from both the panel and evaluation office. Paradoxically, compliance with this requirement was higher under the previous generation of peer reviews under the EVALNET/UNEG framework (about half of peer reviews have produced such note). The UNEG peer review framework, as its predecessor, puts emphasis on the role of peer reviews in continuously testing the usefulness of norms and standards, suggesting that peer reviewed offices and panels should suggest ways to improve them based on their experiences.

The notes available (5/11) convey useful information, though the scope and coverage of these notes has not been systematic. They nevertheless provide a useful source of feedback and lessons about the process but less on norms and standards and their application in the context of the review. Overall, the contribution of peer reviews to debates on evaluation practice within UNEG and with EVALNET members is likely but not evident.

Overall, there are gaps in data available about the peer review process, including in the level of resources invested in the exercise. The frequency and inconsistency at which peer reviews have reported on the level of resources invested throughout the process (money and staff time) only allow to draw estimates about the average cost and time span of peer reviews. In addition, the voluntary participation of panel members and the various sources of funding of some peer reviews only enable to aggregate estimates rather than definitive figures.

#### Applying the reduced framework

Further illustrating the flexibility in the framework and challenges to assessing adherence with the peer review framework, is the reduced modality introduced under the UNEG framework for small evaluation units; and characterized by the following features:

- Merger of the fact-finding mission and peer exchange into one mission.
- Panels of 2-4 members
- No consultants
- Scope remains the same as a full-fledged peer review.

Out of the 11 peer reviews that were conducted following issuance of the 2011 framework, 6 adopted a reduced framework (UNEP, HABITAT, GEF, UNRWA, ITC, UNODC). The peer review of UNDP, while not referred to as a reduced peer review, adopted a similar configuration. All the reduced peer reviews used a consultant serving as an advisor to the panel. It is useful to note that two of the evaluation units that used the reduced framework – UNDP & GEF, are not small offices. Both adopted a reduced scope that focused on key strategic issues, and involved only one mission to the peer reviewed office. Only 3 peer reviews completed after 2011 have included two missions as envisaged for a full-fledged peer review, including one adopting a reduced framework (UNODC). In terms of the size of the review panel, except for the most recent peer review of UNICEF in 2017, all peer reviews whether reduced or full-fledged, have had a panel composed of 3-4 members.

**Parameters of peer reviews conducted since the adoption of the UNEG framework**

Orgs peer reviewed	Size	Framework applied (as reported by orgs)	Size of panel	Number of Consultants	Number of missions	Scope
UNEP/ HABITAT	Small	reduced	3	1	1	Full
FAO	Large	Full	4	1	2	Full
UNDP	Large	reduced <sup>5</sup>	4	1	1	Reduced scope
WFP	Large	Full	3	2	2	Full
GEF	Large	Reduced	4	1	1	Reduced scope
UN WOMEN	Large	Full	3	1	1	Full
UNRWA	Small	Reduced	3	1	1	Full
ITC	Small	Reduced	3	1	1	Full
UNODC	Small	Reduced	3	1	2	Full
UNICEF	Large	Full	5	1	1	Full

## Lessons learned from the UNEG peer review mechanism

In 2012, UNEG commissioned a study based on the 7 peer reviews of UN evaluation functions conducted between 2005-2011<sup>6</sup>. The key objectives of the study were to assess whether (a) the reviews have made a difference in the use made of evaluations undertaken by UN evaluation departments by different stakeholders, in particular by donors; and (b) whether these reviews have had a positive impact on the evaluation departments of the UN agencies which were subjected to such reviews. In addition, the study aimed to provide insights on the usefulness and feasibility of the Peer Review approach as outlined in the UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews.

### Key lessons from the 2013 review and UNEG response

The study concluded that the peer reviews conducted had a **direct positive impact on reviewed evaluation functions as well as on their organizations, at both levels of governance and of management**. It further concluded that they have had a positive and strengthening effect on the community of evaluators that spans bilateral donors, UN agencies, and the evaluation profession. The peer review approach was thus found to be contributing to quality evaluations and, through them, to improved organizational performance.

While **the study could not clearly confirm whether the process increased donor reliance on evaluations of peer reviewed UN evaluation departments** and subsequently reduce their own evaluations of UN agencies, **it noted a positive effect on donor and stakeholders' perception of the value and credibility of evaluations** undertaken by peer reviewed evaluation offices, as well as the accountability of their respective organizations.

<sup>5</sup> UNDP

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

Based on this, the study concluded that peer reviews constitute “a necessary but insufficient building block for increased and full reliance on UN agency evaluations by donors and stakeholders”. The study also found that, overall, the positive effects of the peer reviews could be achieved in a more economical and efficient manner. In this regard, the report made a set of recommendations that can be categorized as follows:

**1. Clarify the purpose of the peer review process:** The study suggested that the process should seek less to provide direct assurance but more to contribute to the professionalization of its evaluation practice through peer assessment, exchange and support, internally and externally. It further recommended that the capacity building value of the peer review process be emphasized.

**2. UNEG should map out a strategy for professionalization of evaluation within its network and for connecting with external professional evaluation networks.** The re-balancing and re-clarification of the purpose of the peer review would require the adoption of an explicit agenda of professionalization of evaluation as a basic frame of reference for adapting the current peer review content and process. The study suggested de-emphasizing the initial purpose of the peer review mechanism (the provision of assurance to donors to foster greater reliance), to give its appropriate remit as part of the broader system of professional evaluation and assurance. The EVALNET-UNEG peer review mechanism “can’t do it all” with respect to providing assurance on evaluation in the UN system

**3. Review the peer review framework** to better reflect the role of peer reviews as part of an overall system of professional evaluation quality assurance, with a particular emphasis on the peer involvement, i.e. a “professional model” of peer review, including:

- Making unambiguous the required/appropriate balance between peer assessment and provision of assurance;
- Making assessment criteria more explicit;
- Reviewing the consistency and coherence of the UNEG norms and standards in the framework with emerging professional standards and practices in evaluation.

**4. The funding of peer reviews:** The development of a different funding mechanism/ model that would allow for equitable access to financing by all multilateral evaluation functions, and which would, in turn:

- Allow to consider a more systematic and compulsory approach to peer reviews;
- Address the perceived source of partiality and bias of having financing donors as panel members, as well as in the selection of advisors/consultants to the panel;
- Increase UNEG ownership over the process.

**5. The composition and selection of panel members:** Reviewing the composition and the selection of panel members to ensure efficiency and quality of the peer review process (balance between professional credentials and familiarity with the UN).

#### UNEG’s management response

The report was presented at UNEG’s 2013 Annual General Meeting. A draft management response was prepared by the UNEG Peer review sub working group and tabled for consideration by UNEG heads at the

2015 AGM as to take into account changes in the broader context related to the Post-2015 debate, and other internal developments in UNEG.

Overall, the findings and recommendations from this review were well received by the membership. The management response document prepared by UNEG outlines a mix of accepted and partially accepted recommendations.

Recommendations	Response	Actions undertaken to date
1. Clarify the purpose of the peer review process	<b>Partially agreed.</b> The peer review process should maintain but make unambiguous its dual objectives of accountability and learning; while stressing that assurance/accountability of the evaluation function was of vital interest to Member States, Governing bodies and management of organizations	Revision of the peer review guidance framework (draft)
2. UNEG should map out a strategy for professionalization of evaluation	<b>Agreed.</b>	Development of a professionalization framework strategy by the UNEG working group on professionalization, including a competency framework in 2016
3. Review the peer review framework	<b>Agreed.</b> It was considered that in the short term, revision of the peer review guidance would address this recommendation. The need to make assessment criteria more explicit was considered in the long run, as a continued effort in reflecting UNEG's professionalization strategy, the norms and standards, and wider changes in the UN context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revision of the peer review guidance framework (draft)</li> <li>• Revised UNEG Norms and Standards (2016)</li> </ul>
4. Develop a new funding model for Peer reviews	<b>Partially agreed.</b> The need for a different funding model was recognized, but the suggestion to make PR compulsory and more frequent was noted to have broad implications requiring agreement on a more standard led approach to UNEG Professionalization and development of the evaluation function across the UN. UNEG	UNEG peer review funding mechanism proposal (draft), which includes the establishment of a fund to cover costs of consultants, up to 50% of UNEG members travel, and other related costs.
5. Review the composition and selection of panel members	<b>Partially agreed.</b> It was highlighted that the peer review process guidance being revised addressed this recommendation, specifying however that given the focus on UN evaluation function, the presence of UN peer panel members was logical.	Revision of the peer review guidance framework (draft)

### Additional lessons captured by more recent peer reviews (2012-2017)

Since the publication of the above-mentioned lessons learned study, 4 out of the 9 reviews completed have generated lessons learned notes (FAO, UNDP, UNWOMEN, and UNRWA). They highlight some additional issues and challenges for consideration in any new update of the peer review framework. The key lessons and challenges highlighted in these notes vary based on the context of the peer reviewed offices, and they offer a variety of messages, lessons and recommendations.

The 4 lessons learned notes confirm the usefulness and overall appreciation for the peer review process. Suggestions and recommendations were formulated in the following areas:

#### Challenges with the analytical framework:

- A fuller description of what is actually meant by norms and standards and how the situation is assessed could be worked on (FAO);
- More emphasis on the peer too peer aspects of the review (dialogue, exchange, learning) (FAO, UNDP), and emphasis on its participatory nature with the reviewed office (UNWomen). Both FAO and UNDP recommended that peer exchange session (world café format be formally recognized as a part of the framework.
- There should be a more complete and descriptive self-assessment in future peer reviews (FAO), or a more standardized or harmonized self-assessment should be carried out to enhance comparability and quality assurance (UNRWA);
- The analytical framework should be open enough to include consideration of the relevant areas of work and their normative, operational, and coordination dimensions of the mandates as they are implemented with regards to the evaluation function (UNwomen);
- There is a need to better reflect the integration of human rights and gender dimensions (UNwomen, UNRWA)
- the peer review framework should include a section on limitations that clearly spells out that peer reviews need to report on key issues that should be further studied and how this could be done. (FAO, UNDP)

**Efficiency:**

- Greater involvement is needed by the peer reviewed office in the preparation of background documentation, to transfer some of the workload typically carried by panel members (FAO)
- The existing analytical frameworks from previous reviews should be used, as well as utilizing the results from other assessments of the UN evaluation function. This was highlighted particularly in the case of UNRWA, but also reflected in the peer review of WFP, and UNODC (use of JIU maturity matrix).

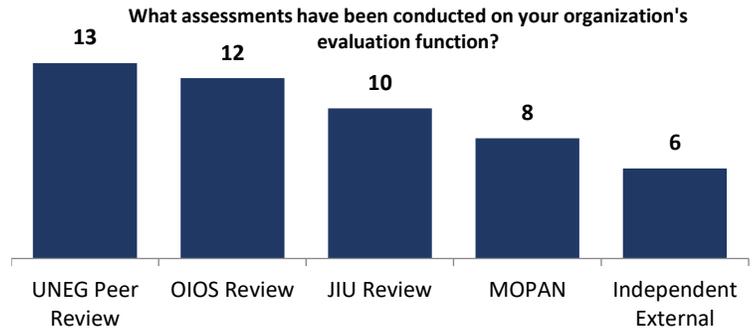
**Scope:**

- Focused peer reviews should be introduced, and explicitly recognized in the peer review framework based on the existence of recent evaluative evidence that covers areas typically addressed by a peer review, and use of existing evidence to identify requirements for the focus peer review. (UNDP)

UNEG peer reviews and other assessments of UN evaluation functions.

## Feedback from the survey

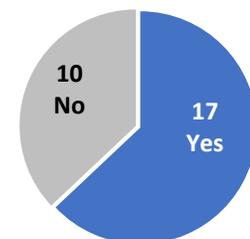
Other forms of assessments of evaluation functions have existed and developed concurrently to the UNEG peer review mechanism. One can distinguish between assessments that are specific to the evaluation function as opposed to organization-wide assessments, that include the evaluation function. These assessments can also be categorized by those that are carried by entities of the United Nations system (JIU, OIOS); and those that are carried out by entities external to the formal oversight system of UNEG members (donor led assessments such as MOPAN or individual donor reviews). These assessments vary in their coverage of the UNEG membership, in their assessment approaches, and the purpose and demands they respond to. Increasingly, UNEG members have also commissioned independent evaluations of their functions with a view to enhance accountability and credibility.



The survey administered by the UNEG sub working group on peer review in February-March 2018 highlights the wide range of assessments of evaluation function that UNEG members commission as part of the overall oversight and quality assurance mechanism of the evaluation function as well. Out of the 27 respondents who answered this question, about 60 % indicated that periodic assessments of the evaluation function was required by their evaluation. In general, these assessments (11/17) are required every 4-6 years, and focus on assessing the evaluation policy, systems and processes of the evaluation function. These assessments focus primarily on evaluation policy, systems and processes, and quality of evaluations. Based on responses from the survey, these assessments do not focus on the conformity to UNEG Norms and Standards though they would be covered indirectly in the areas they focus on.

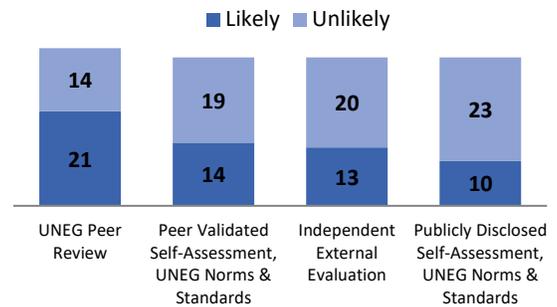
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**Are periodic assessments of the evaluation function required by evaluation policy**



The extent to which the different existing assessments constitute competing demands to the UNEG peer reviews or whether they complement each other is not always clear, and should be the subject of further analysis. The survey sought to assess the demand for peer reviews relative to other assessments, as well as untested modalities discussed and considered within the UNEG membership. The results of the survey would suggest that these assessments may complement each other as respondents indicated that they would be likely to undertake different types of assessments including peer reviews, and to a lesser extent for a lighter modality of peer reviews taking the form of peer validated self-assessment.

**In the future, what is the likelihood that your organization will undertake**



It is worth highlighting that only two of the evaluation offices who indicated that they are likely to undertake an independent evaluation thought that they were unlikely to do a peer review. Only two offices already peer reviewed (2/13) indicated that they were unlikely to do another one, in one instance because it did not achieve the expected results, and the other instance because a peer review was just completed. This demonstrate to some extent a continued interest for UNEG peer reviews, and suggest a form of appreciation for the differentiated value they provide against other forms of assessments. However, half of the offices who provided qualitative information (4/8) about perceived weaknesses based on their peer review cited their lack of independence. As many, small evaluation offices consider it likely and unlikely that will do a peer review, citing opportunity cost (cost/size of the function), and in some case coverage by other form of assessment.

Considerations have been given to introduce new modalities of peer reviews due to resources challenges and the related unequal access to peer reviews for small evaluation functions. Overall, more respondents indicated that they were unlikely to opt for these new modalities, with respondents indicating more interest for peer validated self-assessment against UNEG norms and standards, than for the other modality of self-assessment publicly disclosed (which would require the development of a detailed self-assessment tool). Out of these evaluation offices that indicated interest, almost half are small evaluation offices (6/14) and offices that have been peer reviewed (6/14). Likewise, the ten offices likely to opt for a publicly disclosed self-assessment are offices already peer reviewed and small evaluation offices.

Overall, despite the different challenges and weaknesses of peer reviews and the increased number of other assessments, there seems to be a continued interest and demand for a review modality by UNEG with some emphasis on its focus on UNEG norms and standards, and the peer exchange dimension. The average perceived relevance over peer review objectives by survey respondents favor assessing alignment and learning on UNEG

ALL RESPONDENTS Please indicate the relevance of each element to your organization.	Weighted Average (out of 10)
Assessing alignment of policies/practices to UN Norms & Standards for evaluation, identifying strengths and areas for improvement	8.70
Building staff capacity and improving the quality of practices	7.60
Providing an entry point for decisions about policy and practice	8.02
Providing for peer exchange and developing professional networks	6.46
Increasing senior management knowledge about and confidence in the evaluation function	7.71
Satisfying existing evaluation policy requirements	6.15
Providing a mechanism for the evaluation function to be accountable to Member States / governing bodies	6.67

norms and standards, and related at a lower level of relevance the to provide accountability to member states and governing bodies.

### Description of the other assessments of evaluation functions

The following provides a short description of the different assessments to which UNEG members are periodically subjected to.

**OIOS biennial assessment** covers the evaluation function of 30 programmes and departments of the UN secretariat, which includes 19 UNEG members (40% of UNEG membership). The OIOS assessment is conducted bi-annually and reported to the Committee of Programme Coordination (CPC), the main subsidiary organ of the ECOSOC and the General Assembly for planning, programming and coordination. The objective of the biennial studies of evaluation functions is to describe and assess the status of evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat and to identify the key issues emerging from a sample of evaluations. The review consists of a scorecard assessment of 17 indicators on the capacity, quality and utility of the evaluation function of the 30 departments and programmes and to provide a synthesis of results from a sample of evaluation reports. The OIOS assessment is the only systematic and mandated assessment of UN evaluation functions

**JIU assessments** cover the UN secretariat and 29 UN system entities. The JIU is the only entity of the UN system that has the broad formal mandate to assist intergovernmental bodies in “carrying out their responsibilities for external evaluation of programmes and activities”, and may, “... advise organizations on their methods for internal evaluation and periodically assess these methods”<sup>7</sup>. JIU assessments may cover the evaluation function of a specific UN agency, or include it as part of a broader assessment of a single entity or of thematic of system wide nature. The different assessments conducted over time by the JIU have not been systematic and consistent in terms of approach and frequency. Also, its reviews do not cover UNEG members that are not participating organizations of the JIU such as GEF, IFAD or IOM, and, generally reviews the UN secretariat as a single entity.

In 2013-14, the JIU conducted a comprehensive analysis of the evaluation functions of UN system entities covering its 28-29 participating organizations. The study focused primarily on the corporate evaluation function and secondarily on the decentralized evaluation functions of the UN system. The relative performance of corporate evaluation functions was assessed against a “maturity matrix” that identified 5 areas and 66 indicators to benchmark against established standards endorsed by UNEG, JIU and development partners. The areas assessed were: a) the enabling environment; b) relevance, responsiveness, efficiency and adaptability; c) independence / impartiality; d) quality; e) utility; and f) relevance and readiness to support United Nations Organization and system-wide reforms. The report was well received and used by many UNEG members and more broadly by the donor and evaluation community. It is however unclear if such exercise will be repeated in the future.

**Donor led assessments** have emerged as part of the broader demand for accountability and increased oversight of extra budgetary funds by donor countries. The 2015 OECD-DAC report on multilateral aid noted that between 2012-2014, approximately half of DAC members conducted at least one bilateral assessment of multilateral organizations, for a total of 205 bilateral assessments covering 55 organizations

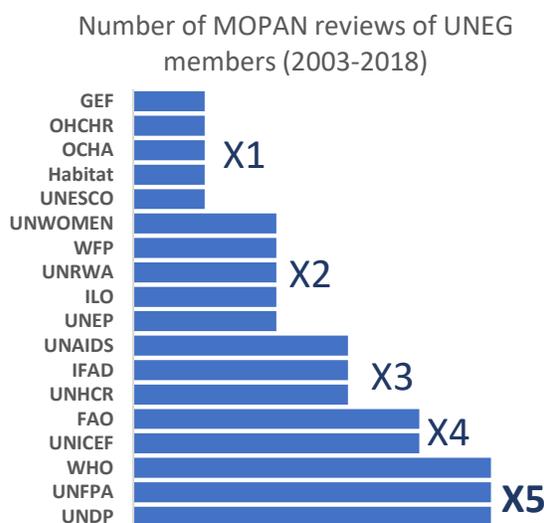
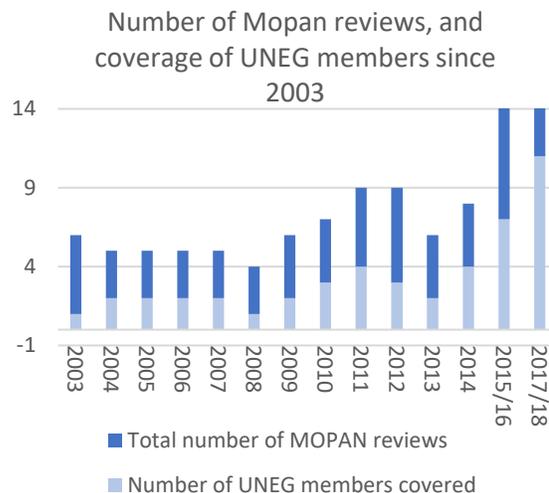
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<sup>7</sup> A/RES/31/192, Article 5 -JIU Statute

during that period<sup>8</sup> and running parallel with assessments that are part of internal oversight of organizations. Some of these donor assessments focus on organizational performance, and/or development effectiveness covering headquarters and/or field offices. The conduct of these reviews seems to be driven by the volume of funding provided by donors, and their specific interest. Donor led assessment organizational effectiveness/performance can include an assessment of the quality of the evaluation function They may cover the evaluation function in various ways and under different analytical frameworks. Among the donor-led assessments is the **Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN)**, a network composed of 16 donor countries, which assesses the effectiveness of multilateral organizations that receive development and humanitarian funding. MOPAN assessments primarily provide a snapshot of four dimensions of organizational effectiveness (strategic management, operational management, relationship management and performance management). It has gradually moved to include a fifth dimension of assessment on development effectiveness involving country level assessments.

The approach/methodology adopted by MOPAN has been updated three times since 2003. The last iteration, MOPAN 3.0, considers evaluation functions as a dimension of performance management, under the key performance indicator: “Evidence-based planning and programming applied”. It examines structural independence, evaluation policy, coverage, quality of evaluation reports and stakeholder participation in evaluation process. The MOPAN assessment is based on information collected through a survey of key stakeholders, document review, and interviews with the staff of multilateral organizations.

The selection criteria for the organization covered by MOPAN assessments is not clear, and seems to be primarily driven by the consensual interest of its member. Since 2003, 27 multilateral organizations have been assessed at least once, including 17 organizations that are UNEG members. These 17 UNEG members (36% of UNEG membership) have been assessed on average more than two times since the start of this assessment, with UNDP, UNFPA, and WHO having gone through the process 5 times (including the 2017-18 round of assessments).



<sup>8</sup> [OECD-DAC : Multilateral Aid 2015-Better partnerships for a post-2015 world](#)

## Additional issues for further considerations

In light of the overall status of the UNEG peer review mechanism and survey results described in this note, key issues for consideration in the revisions and for reflections are worth highlighting. These issues/challenges are presented in the form of questions that may require further analysis and consideration moving forward:

- **The positioning of UNEG peer reviews relative to existing assessments of evaluation functions:**

The results of the survey would suggest that peer reviews propose a differentiated approach and niche through assessment of conformity with UNEG norms and standards, and the peer exchange dimension.

- Based on this, to what extent should the peer review framework be revised to enhance alignment and affirm its strategic niche (peer learning vs quality assurance/ conformity with UNEG N&s)? Should the audience, objective, and by association, the process be revised accordingly?
- Should the peer review mechanism seek to further enhance its complementarities with these other assessments in terms of scope, coverage, frequency, etc.? To what extent should the scope of each peer review be guided by the scope and coverage of other existing assessments?
- Should UNEG seek to play a role in advocating for the harmonization of the different framework applied in the different existing assessments of evaluation functions, including donor led assessments?

- **The UNEG peer review framework:**

- What degree of flexibility/standardization should be set out in the mechanism for agencies to tailor the peer review mechanism to their needs and characteristics (size of function/ governance model/ co-located functions/already peer reviewed/etc.)?
- Should a more standardized and specific assessment framework based on the UNEG norms and standard be developed for peer reviews?
- Should measures aimed at strengthening the overall independence and credibility of peer review processes be introduced?
- What criteria should determine whether a UNEG entity should utilise the 'reduced' peer review set up? Should a different modality, framework, and assessment criteria be developed for small evaluation functions?
- What aspects of evaluation function management and results are not covered or well-articulated in the existing peer review mechanism, which should now be addressed?
- What should be the continued engagement between UNEG and DAC EVALNET on peer reviews?
- To what extent should the peer review framework formally integrate other guidance produced by UNEG?

- **Follow up and lessons learning from UNEG peer reviews:**

*Lesson learning on the peer reviews and UNEG norms and standards:*

- Given the low usage of the mechanism so far, to what extent has the peer review mechanism enabled to ensure compliance and promotion of the UNEG norms and standards? How much organizations that were not peer reviewed have learned and strengthened their evaluation practices drawing from the peer reviews of other offices?
- To what extent have lessons learned from UNEG peer reviews influenced the update of the UNEG norms and standard as envisaged in the peer review framework?
- Should a different system be considered to ensure more focused and systematic lessons learning from peer reviews ? What should be the areas of focus for lessons learning? What system could be considered to enhance knowledge management over the mechanism and dynamic feedback loops/integration of learning in the normative framework and process of peer reviews?

*Management response and follow up to peer reviews:*

- To what extent have peer reviews recommendations been implemented by organizations? To what extent have they contributed to enhance the overall value, confidence, and credibility of the evaluation function by senior managers and governing bodies?
- To what extent have peer reviews reports been integrating in the formal reporting and oversight functions of organizations? Are recommendations of peer reviews tracked and followed upon through the internal oversight mechanism of the organizations reviewed?

## Annexes: Results from the survey on demand and supply for peer reviews (February-March 2018)

### A. Introduction

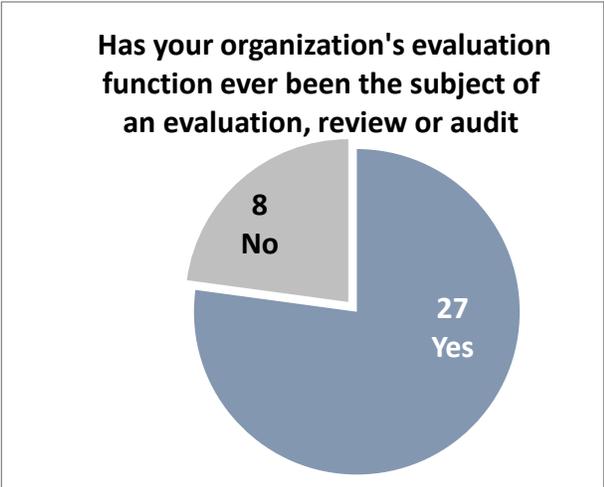
The UNEG Peer Review Working Group circulated an online survey to the heads of UNEG members in February 2018. The following document presents an analysis of the main results of that survey. The survey was conducted during the period 26 January to 19 February 2018. The survey was circulated to 47 UNEG members and a total of 35 responded (74% response rate).

Certain questions were only displayed to certain respondents, depending on the nature of their agency's use of evaluation function reviews. Consequently, the sample size varies according to each set of questions. Each section starts with a description of the respondent group, including the sample size.

### B. Participating entities and experience with evaluation function reviews

An initial set of questions were used to ascertain the entity and its experience as a subject of an evaluation or review. Answers to the experience question then determined following survey questions.

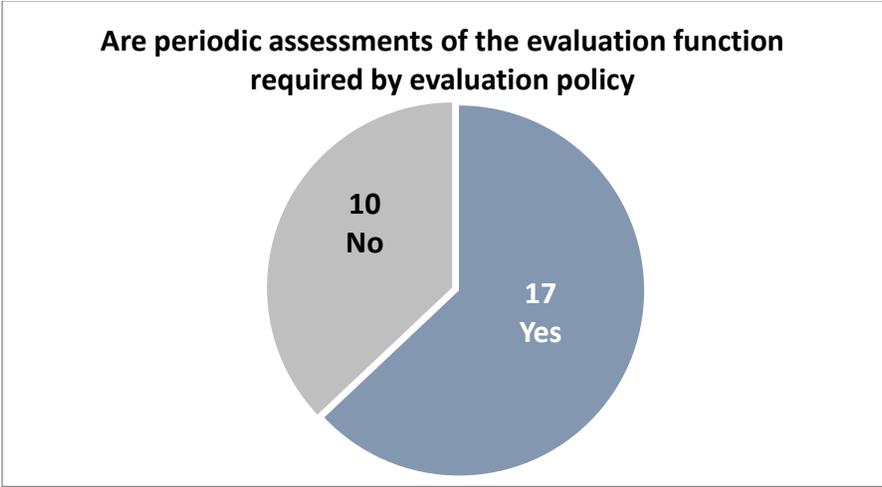
Survey Respondents = 35			
CTBTO	ILO	UNAIDS	UNHCR
DPKO/DFS	IOM	UNCDF	UNICEF
ESCAP	ITC	UNCTAD	UNIDO
ESCWA	OPCW	UNDP	UNITAR
FAO	PBSO	UNECE	UNODC
GEF	UN DGACM		UNRWA
IAEA	UN Environment	UNESCO	WFP
ICAO	UN Volunteers	UNFPA	WIPO
IFAD	UN Women	UN-Habitat	WMO



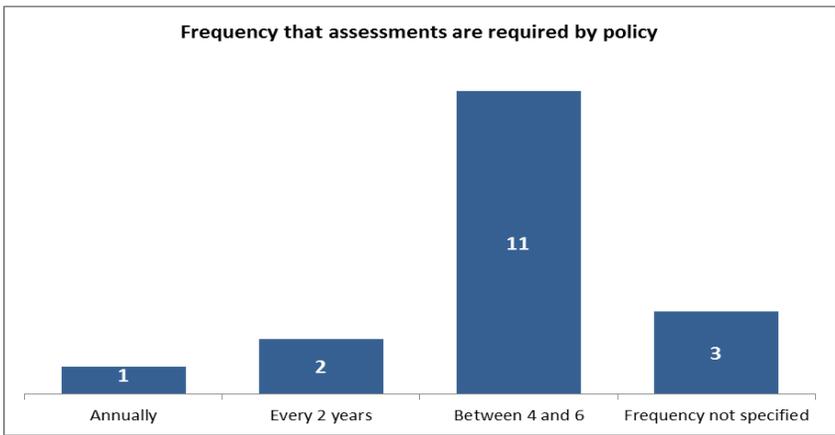
**Entities that have not been subject to an evaluation or review = 8**

CTBTO	ESCWA	IAEA	ICAO
IOM	UN Volunteers	UNAIDS	WMO

**Participants to evaluations or reviews** – The 28 respondents indicating that they “*have been the subject of an evaluation*” were asked questions about policies regarding the functions review. As responses to the question were not required, the total number of responses varied.

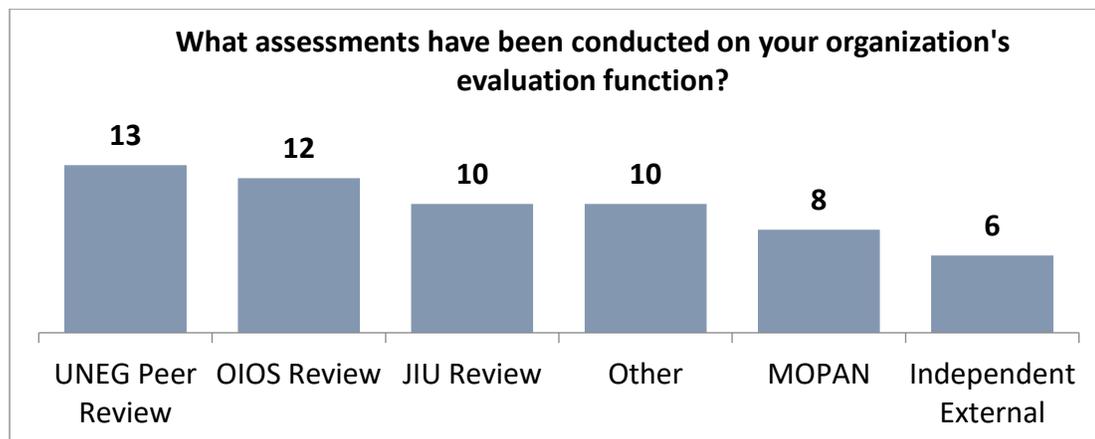


The 17 respondents who indicated that assessments were required by policy were asked a following question.



### C. Types of reviews conducted and expectations for future use of a UNEG Peer Review and other review type

28 respondents were asked about the types of reviews conducted on their evaluation function.



What assessments have been conducted on your organization's evaluation function? = 28					
Respondent	A UNEG Peer Review	OIOS Assessment	JIU Assessment	MOPAN Assessment	Independent External Evaluation
DPKO/DFS		Yes			
ESCAP	Yes	Yes			
FAO	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
GEF	Yes				
ILO					Yes
ITC	Yes				
PBSO		Yes			Yes
UN DGACM		Yes			
UN Environment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
UN Women	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
UNCDF					Yes
UNCTAD		Yes	Yes		
UNDP	Yes		Yes		Yes
UNECE		Yes			
UNESCO			Yes	Yes	
UNFPA				Yes	
UN-Habitat	Yes				
UNHCR		Yes	Yes	Yes	
UNICEF	Yes		Yes	Yes	
UNIDO	Yes		Yes		

UNODC	Yes	Yes			
UNRWA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
WFP	Yes				
WIPO					Yes

Ten respondents noted other types of reviews including: ECG, audit of evaluation governance, EXCOM mandated, validated self-assessment, A pilot external evaluation with a steering committee chaired by UNEG, self-assessment, self-assessment combined with governing body review, OIOS scorecard, review of decentralized evaluation function 2017/18.

A set of questions were used to ascertain **demand for UNEG Peer Reviews** and to learn the extent to which other evaluation types were likely to be used by UNEG members. This question was presented to all 36 respondents.



In the future, what is the likelihood that your organization will undertake:				
Respondent	UNEG Peer Review	A Peer Validated Self-Assessment against UNEG Norms & Standards	Independent External Evaluation:	Publicly Disclosed Self-Assessment against UNEG Norms & Standards
CTBTO	Likely		Likely	
DPKO/DFS		Likely		
ESCAP				
ESCWA				Likely

<b>In the future, what is the likelihood that your organization will undertake:</b>				
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>UNEG Peer Review</b>	<b>A Peer Validated Self-Assessment against UNEG Norms &amp; Standards</b>	<b>Independent External Evaluation:</b>	<b>Publicly Disclosed Self-Assessment against UNEG Norms &amp; Standards</b>
FAO	Likely	Likely	Likely	
GEF	Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely
IAEA			Likely	
ICAO	Likely			
<b>IFAD</b>			Likely	Likely
<b>ILO</b>			Likely	
IOM	Likely	Likely		Likely
ITC	x			
OPCW	Likely	Likely		
PBSO			Likely	
UN DGACM	Likely	Likely		
UN Environment	Likely			Likely
UN Volunteers				
UN Women	Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely
UNAIDS	Likely		Likely	
UNCDF		Likely		
UNCTAD	Likely	Likely		
UNDP	Likely		Likely	
UNECE				
UNEG	Likely			
UNESCO	Likely	Likely		Likely
UNFPA	Likely		Likely	
UN-Habitat	Likely			
UNHCR	Likely			Likely
UNICEF	Likely	Likely		Likely
UNIDO	Likely	Likely		
UNITAR	Likely	Likely		
UNODC	Likely			
UNRWA	x	Likely		Likely
WFP	Likely		Likely	
WIPO			Likely	
WMO				

## Organizations likely to undertake a ‘bundled’ UNEG Peer Review - ITC and UNDDF

The 22 organizations that indicated they were likely to undertake a UNEG Peer Review were asked about the timeframe they anticipated. Most (n=6) indicated 2019 and those that were unsure noted dates in 2020 or 2021.

**Qualitative responses** - In addition to the closed, quantitative questions, the survey also asked respondents a few open, qualitative questions. The number of responses to most questions was not significant enough to allow for a quantitative analysis. Instead, in cases where statements were raised repeatedly, they are summarized. For a complete overview, the full unedited survey results can also be viewed in the survey spreadsheet, with notable and/or representative responses **highlighted in red**.

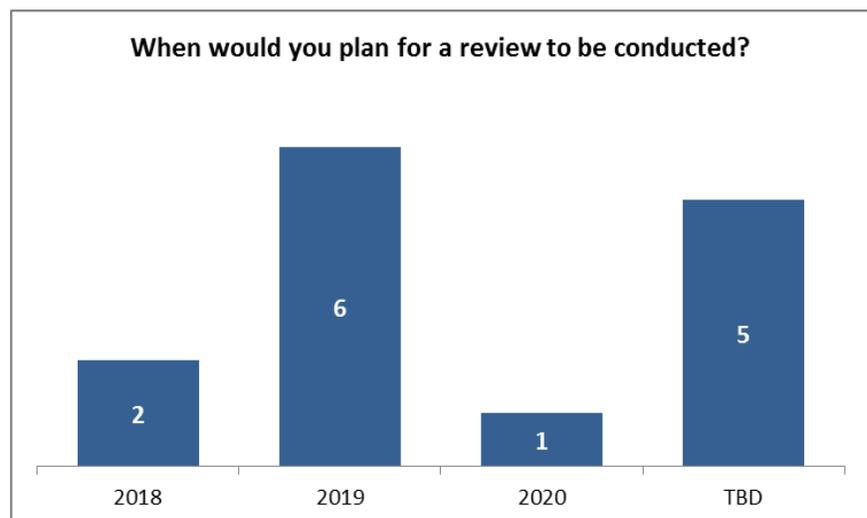
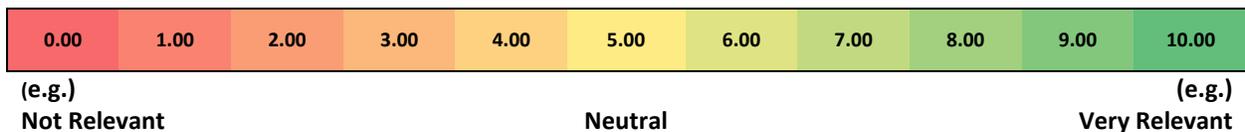
### What are the main reasons why a UNEG Peer Review is unlikely?

There were 14 responses to the question with the most common reason being the small size of the evaluation function. A few also referenced requirements for independent assessments. All answers are provided in the accompanying spreadsheet.

## D. Relevance of UNEG Peer Review benefits

All respondents were asked to rank the relevance of UNEG Peer Reviews to the review’s commonly identified benefits and 24 provided responses.

A five point scale ranged from ‘Very relevant’ to ‘Not relevant.’ The results table below presents the distribution of scores along the 5-point scales, along with a **weighted average score**, whereby ‘marks out of ten’ are calculated: the higher the weighted average score, the more positive the respondent’s assessment. The weighted average scale is colour coded as follows:



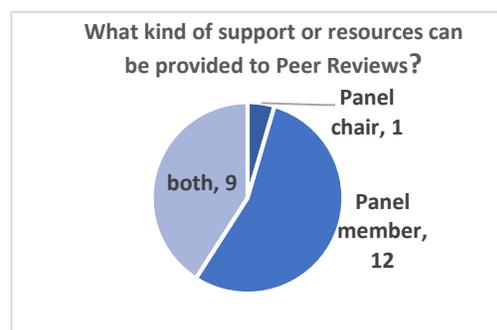
<b>ALL RESPONDENTS</b> Please indicate the relevance of each element to your organization.	Very Relevant	Relevant	Fairly Relevant	Slightly Relevant	Not Relevant	n	Weighted Average (out of 10)
Assessing alignment of policies/practices to UN Norms & Standards for evaluation, identifying strengths and areas for improvement	16	3	3	1	0	23	8.70
Building staff capacity and improving the quality of practices	8	11	3	2	0	24	7.60
Providing an entry point for decisions about policy and practice	10	10	3	1	0	24	8.02
Providing for peer exchange and developing professional networks	4	11	5	3	1	24	6.46
Increasing senior management knowledge about and confidence in the evaluation function	12	6	3	2	1	24	7.71
Satisfying existing evaluation policy requirements	5	8	6	3	2	24	6.15
Providing a mechanism for the evaluation function to be accountable to Member States / governing bodies	7	9	2	5	1	24	6.67

**What are the main benefits that you, your staff and organization would want from a Peer Review?** There were 16 open-ended responses to the question with the most common benefits including:

- Comparison to **norms and standards and best practice** to identify areas for improvement
- **Strengthen credibility of evaluation function within organizations**
- **Heighten utilization of evaluation products by senior management**

## E. Providing support to UNEG Peer Reviews

All respondents were asked if they could provide support or resources to a Peer Review Panel. 19 respondents said “Yes,” 7 said “no,” and 9 provided a written response. 22 respondents noted they could provide support to a panel (see table below). Ten organizations noted they could **chair a panel** include FAO, GEF, IFAD, ITC, UN Women, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNRWA, WFP and WIPO. (**8 entities who have already undertaken a peer review**)



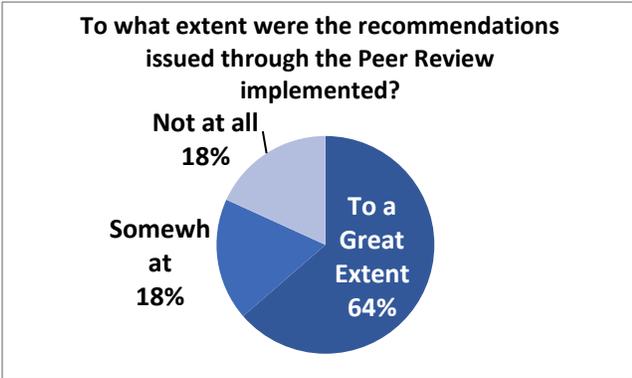
Can Support a Panel	UNESCO	UN DGACM	UN-Habitat
FAO	UNRWA	UN Environment	
GEF	WFP	UNAIDS	UNHCR

IFAD	WIPO	UNCDF	UNICEF
ITC	CTBTO	UNCTAD	UNIDO
UN Women	PBSO	UNDP	WMO

Among the 21 organizations who indicated willingness to support a panel, a bit more than half have already undergone a peer review. 9 entities indicate readiness to both chair and support a panel.

**F. Feedback from organizations that had hosted a UNEG Peer Review**

Organizations that had hosted a Peer Review were asked the questions presented below. Eleven organizations provided input including GEF, FAO, ITC, UNDP, UNEP, UN-Habitat, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNODC, UNRWA and UN Women.



To what extent were the recommendation issued through the Peer Review Implemented	n	%
To a great extent	7	64%
Somewhat	2	18%
Very little	0	0%
Not at all	2	18%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100%</b>

**What key changes resulted from the UNEG Peer Review?**

- Responses indicated that evaluation policies and methods were strengthened and that more emphasis was placed on management responses and recommendation follow-up.
- In the case where recommendations were not implemented, the factors noted included the non-binding nature of recommendations and the absence of a follow-up mechanism. One organization noted *“Recommendations were not implemented as there is no formal recommendation follow up mechanism, and the Agency would not implement without such a process. In the end the peer review did not do much to change the situation, except that some staff in oversight got a better understanding what evaluations should do (not the evaluation staff).”*

**What is the main strength of the UNEG’s approach to Peer Reviews?**

- A commonly identified strength was the involvement of an OECD-DAC panelist and its value in strengthening the credibility and independence of the review.

- Provision of feedback from panelists with knowledge of the operational context for UN agencies was also repeatedly referenced. A quote representative of the input includes: *“The value of having the evaluation function and practices reviewed by those who understand them well in the context of UN agencies, not just on quality of individual evaluations but more on how to make evaluations more useful and credible in the institutional context.”*

#### **What is the main weakness?**

- The most commonly identified concern was the weak perception of its independence. Reliance on volunteer support was also repeated. A quote included: *“The need to rely on volunteer expert panel members, and possibly the resource constraint. Even if resources are there, I found it difficult to justify and accountable for the use of time and money, which are rightly questioned when making expenditure/travel requests.”*
- Responses indicated that the quality and depth could vary.

#### **How could UNEG’s work on and support to evaluation function assessments be improved?**

- Responses indicated that resources should be increased for Peer Reviews leveraging support from consultants, UNEG heads and retired experts.
- Other suggestions included the expansion of or improvement to self-assessment tools and modalities to meet preferences, including the needs of smaller evaluation functions.
- Further, it was suggested that a meta-analysis on the results of the UNEG Peer Reviews be used to learn about the contributions of Peer Reviews. The study could be used to increase awareness about UNEG Peer Reviews, particularly among important target groups, e.g. governing bodies. Further, a study could reflect on the common findings from Peer Reviews, including the strengths and weaknesses of evaluation functions. Specific input included:
  - *“Peer Reviews ought to cover new, reform-bound areas and ask questions such as: how can UNDAFs be evaluated and inform the reform process? Instead of assessing the health of the evaluation functions (which is what OIOS does quite well with its score cards, etc), assess the role evaluation ought to play in the field, working directly with UNCTs. Figure out how the 2030 agenda and the reform process ought to be informing evaluation functions in their very set up and how the modality of delivering evaluation services and products ought to change.”*
  - *“Maybe Peer Reviews should be carried at the level of Field Offices and link up to the 2030 agenda, e.g. how evaluation capacity is being built at the MS levels?”*