



## “Turin Agenda for National Evaluation Capacities”

### Conference Approach Paper

(June 2022)

## 1 Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim for a better world by 2030 and seek to end poverty, fight inequality, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. The implementation of the SDGs can be accelerated globally through evaluation as a powerful tool that improves public accountability and contributes to positive development change.

Despite the progress evaluation systems and capacity gaps at the national level remain a major challenge among most countries. To tackle these issues the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP ([UNDP IEO](#)) has organized biennial [National Evaluation Capacities \(NEC\) Conferences](#) in partnership with governments since 2009. In 2020, UNDP IEO joined forces with the [World Bank IEG](#) and many other partners to establish the [Global Evaluation Initiative](#) (GEI), bringing together different evaluation capacity development initiatives under one umbrella, including the network of [Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results \(CLEAR\)](#) and training programmes such as [the International Programme for Development Evaluation Training \(IPDET\)](#).

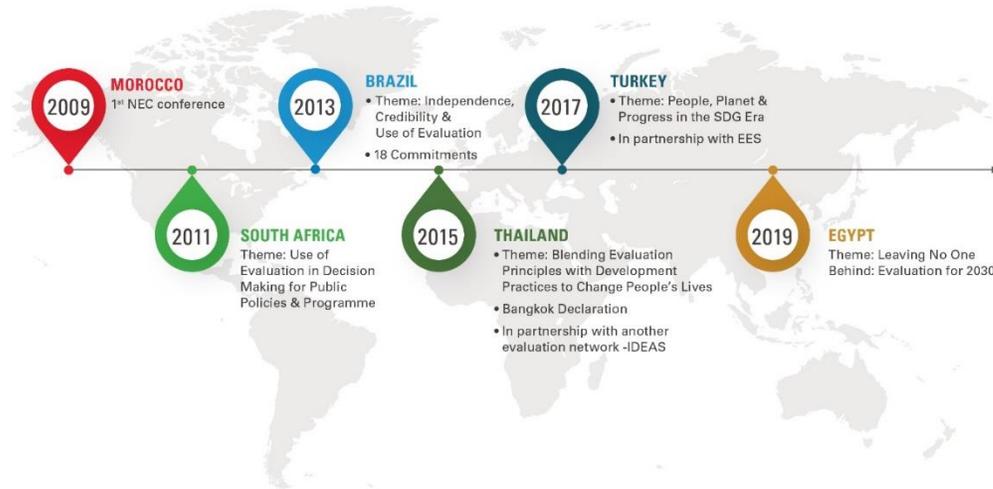
The 2022 NEC Conferences is part of this collaborative offering and will take place from 25-28 October 2022 in Turin, Italy and will focus on the overarching theme of **“Resilient National Evaluation Systems for Sustainable Development”**. The Conference will take a mixed in-person and virtual format and is among the first in-person UNDP IEO/GEI events and will provide a unique platform to bring together an even greater range of partners than in the past.

The conference will give renewed emphasis to sharing progress and lessons learned in strengthening national evaluation systems, and how – in light of the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic – these systems are essential for countries to “build forward better” and get back on track towards the SDGs.

## 2 Background: the NEC Conference series to date

The first NEC Conference was held in Morocco, with 55 participants from 30 countries. Each subsequent conference has been held in a different (UNDP) region, as illustrated in the figure below. Ten years after the first event, the sixth conference was again held in the Arab States region, in Egypt, with over 500 participants from more than 100 countries.

## History & Evolution of NEC CONFERENCES



Since 2015, the conference themes have been dedicated to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2017, the theme was People, Planet and Progress in the SDGs Era, and in 2019, Leaving No One Behind: Evaluation for 2030. The last two conferences were organized around three interrelated strands, defined slightly differently in each case, but essentially relating to: i) SDGs and evaluation; ii) progress and lessons learned in strengthening national evaluation systems; and iii) new directions or new ideas in evaluation.

A unique feature of the NEC Conferences is the level of engagement they offer its primary target audiences: government officials from national and sub-national institutions directly and indirectly engaged with evaluation and public policy (including central planning and finance ministries, sectoral ministries, parliamentarians, evaluation units, national statistical agencies, supreme audit institutions). Government participants play a critical role in strengthening national evaluation capacities and they represented about a third of attendees in recent conferences.

Other participants include the private sector, civil society, academia, who are critical for strengthening the practice of evaluation as means to improve governance at national level. The UN agencies and other international organization staff engaged in supporting national governments on evaluation, governance and/or the SDG agenda, evaluators (including young and emerging evaluators) and other development actors from programme countries, members of evaluation networks and the wider global evaluation community.

### 3 Objectives of the NEC Conference

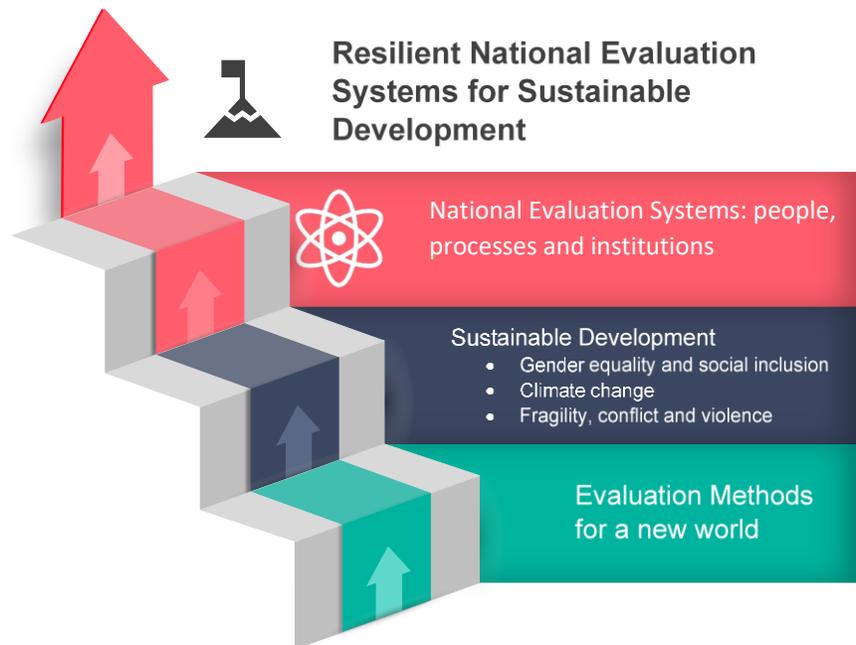
The NEC Conference offers a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences in developing sustainable and effective monitoring and evaluation systems that support the use of evidence to make better decisions to improve people's lives. The 2022 NEC Conference will provide opportunities to:

- Share progress, lessons, innovations and experiences and perspectives in strengthening national monitoring and evaluation systems
- Understand the demand for resilient national evaluation capacities development during turbulent times
- Enhance skills of those commissioning, conducting, using, and advocating for evaluation

- Foster existing and new partnerships to strengthen national evaluation systems, with an emphasis on South-South Cooperation

## 4 NEC 2022: Theme

The overarching theme of the NEC 2022 will be **Resilient National Evaluation Systems for Sustainable Development**. The conference will give renewed emphasis to sharing progress and lessons learned in strengthening national evaluation systems, and how – in light of the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic – these systems are essential for countries to “build forward better” and get back on track towards the SDGs. Conference sessions will be organized around the following sub-themes.



**National evaluation systems:** The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that a “robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review framework will make a vital contribution to implementation and will help countries to maximize and track progress in implementing this Agenda in order to ensure that no one is left behind.” It further highlights the importance of country-led evaluation and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.”<sup>1</sup> Generating such data and conducting such evaluations to inform policy making requires a “national evaluation system”, a complex set of arrangements of people, processes and institutions that operate within a wider enabling environment. Each such system is different, arising from history and adapted to context, but all can benefit from peer learning. Conference sessions will provide opportunities for participants to share successes and challenges and identify new opportunities to strengthen cultures of evidence-informed decision making in the context of a post pandemic recovery.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, General Assembly, A/RES/70/1, October 2015, [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#), para. 74.

**Sustainable Development - People, Planet and Peace:** The COVID-19 crisis has shown us how deeply connected we are to others and to the planet. COVID-19 is forcing us to revisit our values and challenging us to design a new era of development, one that truly balances economic, social and environmental progress as envisioned by the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.<sup>2</sup> What does this mean for evaluation and national evaluation systems? Conference sessions will delve into these questions, with emphasis on the following:

- **Gender equality and social inclusion:** Six years ago, 193 countries committed to achieve gender equality and reduce inequalities. However, COVID-19 has exposed and deepened existing inequalities, and disproportionately impacted women and girls, and members of marginalized and vulnerable communities. Going forward, policies need to address the differential effects of the pandemic and other crises across society.<sup>3</sup> Having the appropriate data and systems to collect and use evaluative evidence is critical to doing so. How can evaluation help ensure no one is left behind? How are countries designing gender and inclusion responsive M&E systems?
- **Evaluation for climate change governance:** Signatories to the 2030 Agenda committed to “protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.”<sup>4</sup> COVID-19 has resulted in changes in individual behavior and social attitudes, and in responses by governments that will have impacts on the environment and the ability to combat climate change.<sup>5</sup> While some of these changes may even have been positive, there is a great need to better understand the ‘footprint’ that human and economic systems make on the environment. To address and mitigate environmental degradation, it is essential that decision-makers account for potential and actual environmental impacts of all policies and programmes. Evaluations – regardless of the sector - need to integrate a climate change lens and provide evidence on policy impacts. Sessions will explore what has been learned about integrating interlinkages between human and natural systems into monitoring and evaluation systems and how this can be further strengthened.
- **Fragility, conflict and violence:** A traditional binary view that distinguishes conflict from non-conflict settings no longer holds in our increasingly fragile world. Fragility, conflict and violence can affect any country or society, and not just those affected by, or emerging from, protracted warfare.<sup>6</sup> With extreme poverty on the rise amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, redoubled efforts to break the vicious cycle of poverty, fragility and conflict are critical.<sup>7</sup> It is also key to understand whether and how renewed efforts are diminishing drivers of conflict and promoting foundations for peace.<sup>8</sup> Yet, monitoring and evaluation systems are often weakest in the most fragile

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<sup>2</sup> UNDP, [COVID-19 and the SDGs | UNDP](#)

<sup>3</sup> [To end COVID-19, we must end discrimination and inequality | United Nations Development Programme \(undp.org\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, General Assembly, A/RES/70/1, October 2015, [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#), Preamble.

<sup>5</sup> [COVID-19’s Long-Term Effects on Climate Change—For Better or Worse - Coronavirus Coverage \(columbia.edu\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/UNDP-GOVERNANCE%20AND%20PEACEBUILDING\\_final.pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/UNDP-GOVERNANCE%20AND%20PEACEBUILDING_final.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [With Extreme Poverty Rising Amid Covid-19 Pandemic, More Action Key to Ending Vicious Cycle in Conflict-Affected, Fragile Countries, Top Officials Tell Security Council | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Monitoring Evaluation and Learning MEL in Conflict and Stabilisation Settings A Guidance Note 7 Nov 2019 - Final - 1 .pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

countries. What have countries and practitioners learned about strengthening capacities for and conducting monitoring and evaluation in complex contexts?

**Evaluation methods for a new world:** COVID-19 has brought about a period of rapid global change and adaptation. As the world is changing, individuals and institutions are finding that traditional evaluation methods are not meeting needs of decision makers. Implementation approaches are changing, programmes are being reoriented, new interventions are being designed even as they are being implemented.<sup>9</sup> Data collection and analysis methods have evolved, with limited travel and face-to-face contact, and increased use of technology, remote data collection and secondary data.<sup>10</sup> Using digital data and data collected has proven in many cases to be more cost effective, greener, and faster. However, these may bring ethical and methodological challenges, including ensuring that “no one is left behind” and views of the most vulnerable are still incorporated.<sup>11</sup> What are the implications of these and other changes for designing and implementing national monitoring and evaluation systems and conducting evaluations?

## 5 Conference Format

The event will take place over four days, beginning with a day dedicated to pre-conference training workshops (25<sup>th</sup> October), followed by three days dedicated to the Conference (26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> October).

**The Conference** will be offered in mixed format- both virtual and in-person- and will be designed to provide all participants with multiple spaces for engagement. A mix of plenary sessions and parallel strands on a range of topics will be organized, using a variety of formats including keynote speakers, paper presentations, and panel discussions, as well as innovative arrangements that facilitate more informal discussion and sharing of experiences between partners.

Day	Session 1 9.00 – 10.30	Session 2 11.00 – 12.30	Session 3 14.00 – 15.30	Session 4 16.00 – 17.30
Wednesday 26 / 10	Opening Session	Keynote speaker and Plenary (A)	Parallel sessions (1-3)	Parallel sessions (4-6)
Thursday 27 / 10	Plenary (B)	Parallel sessions (7-9)	Parallel sessions (10-12)	Parallel sessions (13-15)
Friday 28 / 10	Plenary (C)	Parallel sessions (16-18)	Parallel sessions (19-21)	Closing Session

**The one-day training workshops** (in-person) will be organized around the most pressing development challenges and how evaluation responds to them (for example- poverty and inequalities; exclusion and discrimination; violence and conflict; environmental degradation; etc.) to allow participants to explore subjects in-depth with experts from around the world. The training sessions will draw on pool of expert trainers from GEI, UNDP IEO and ITC ILO staff and the evaluation community.

<sup>9</sup> Rogers, Patricia [Why do we need more real-time evaluation? | Better Evaluation](#)

<sup>10</sup> Rogers, Patricia, [Adapting evaluation in the time of COVID-19 – DESCRIBE \(part 1\) | Better Evaluation](#)

<sup>11</sup> Barry, Niamh 2020, [Rethinking evaluation in a post-COVID-19 digital world | by Niamh Barry | Caribou Digital | Medium](#)

In addition, the conference will also offer opportunities for different UN, UNDP and GEI constituencies to host side-meetings, for members of the GEI governance bodies to meet and engage with representatives from programme countries benefiting from GEI support, and for the forging of new partnerships.

In summary, the basic structure of the mixed-format NEC Conference Week would be:

- Monday, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022: Arrival of participants
- Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022: Training workshops
- Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2022: Opening Plenary, Keynote address and Parallel sessions
- Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2022: Plenary and Parallel sessions
- Friday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2022: Plenary and Parallel sessions and Closing

The main working language of the conference will be English, with select parallel sessions and training workshops organized in French and Spanish.

Simultaneous interpretations from English into Spanish and French will be available for all conference sessions.

## 6 Participants

The primary audience of the NEC Conference 2022 will be **government officials from national and sub-national institutions** directly and indirectly engaged with evaluation and public policy (including central planning and finance ministries, sectoral ministries, evaluation units, national statistical agencies, supreme audit institutions).

However, a greater balance of **private sector, civil society organizations, academia** will be invited to the 2022 NEC as providers of monitoring and evaluation oversight and accountability agencies.

**UNDP staff and the UNDP Governance Group, and UN Agencies partner staff** engaged in supporting national governments on evaluation, governance and/or the SDG agenda, evaluators, evaluation networks, and other members of the wider global evaluation community will also be invited to the conference.

The World Bank and the Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI) and their capacity development providers (CLEAR etc.) and partners will also take a leading role in the conference outlining national evaluation capacity achievements, partnership pathways and challenges.

To promote the participation of representatives particularly from least developed/ and lower middle-income countries, a bursary program will be established. Donor financing will be sort for the bursary program.

The in-person conference will be by invitation with Government representatives, civil society and academia/ think tanks identified through UNDP country offices.

Online access to the conference will be open to all interested participants. The virtual conference will be open for registration in August/ September 2022.

## 7 Venue

NEC 2022 will be organized at the ITC-ILO Conference and Training Center in Turin, Italy from 25-28 October 2022.

The venue has been chosen keeping in mind:

- Safety and security of participants (including COVID-19 situation)
- Well established infrastructure that can organize state of the art international conference including well-connected international airport, hotels with adequate conference facilities or a convention center with appropriate hotels nearby, internet capacities for any virtual components)
- Time zone (CET/CEST time zones are the best options given global participation)

## 8 Management Arrangements

The UNDP IEO will lead the organization of the conference in close collaboration with the GEI Global Team.

- **Advisory group:** A high-level advisory group will be established comprising of the Director of the UNDP IEO, the World Bank/ GEI representation, others as identified. This high-level advisory group will provide regular guidance (Monthly) on the overall design and messaging of the conference.
- **Conference Manager:** The UNDP IEO has appointed a NEC Conference Manager, who will manage the overall conference organization including if required to a professional event organizer and any other necessary service providers, coordinate a technical working group that will shape the content of the conference, coordinate all of the conference components, service providers, conference team, and ensure the overall success of the conference.
- **Technical working group:** A technical working group will also be established under the day-to-day guidance of the UNDP IEO Deputy Director, Chief of Capacity Development, NEC Conference Manager and GEI Evaluation Adviser. The technical working group will support the NEC Conference Manager in designing the content of conference sessions (including through an open call for abstracts and targeted invitations).
- **Training workshop working group:** a working group with members from the IEO and the GEI Global Team will be established to design and coordinate the pre-conference training workshop programme.
- **Communications and IT:** A conference communications and IT team will be created, comprising members of the UNDP IEO communications and IT team, the GEI communications team, and the ITCILO Conference Center team.

## 9 Bursary Programme

Participants, including Government representatives, will be expected to fully finance the participation of their representatives to the conference. However, UNDP recognizes that some participants from programme countries may need to seek financial support. The UNDP will identify donors for a bursary fund to finance participants from programme countries who would not otherwise be able to attend the conference.

Bursary recipients will be representatives of national institutions responsible for conducting and commissioning evaluations, policy makers, particularly those working on the SDGs, and other national evaluation stakeholders.

Bursary applicants will be invited to submit an abstract on a topic related to NEC 2022 with a statement of interest, explaining how the Conference and training programme will contribute to their current work and how the knowledge acquired will be used to strengthen the national evaluation system.

## 10 Financial and logistics arrangements

UNDP IEO will liaise with the ITC ILO Conference and Training Center in Turin, Italy to provide the on-site conference infrastructure as well as provision of logistics support and the safety and security as per COVID-19 protocols.

Registration fees:

- No conference registration fee
- No training workshop registration

## 11 Post event products

- NEC Proceedings
- NEC Information Centre (papers, presentations, video and photo gallery)
- NEC webinars, through 2023 and early 2024, leading to the 2024 NEC conference.

## 12 Monitoring and evaluation arrangements

- Conferences, participants will be invited to respond to a post-conference survey.
- An internal “after action review” will be conducted to gather lessons learned