



6 November 2024

INFORMATION NOTE by UNFPA management

in response to the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board decision 2024/12 on the assessment of how the Executive Board executes its governance and oversight functions

I. Summary

1. This note has been prepared by UNFPA management in response to Executive Board decision 2024/12, requesting the management of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS to provide, in an information note, their initial views on the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report on the review of governance and oversight functions of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women (JIU/REP/2023/7).
2. UNFPA acknowledges the crucial role played by the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, as well as other executive board and governing bodies, in guiding UN entities, as part of the United Nations development system, to deliver more effectively and efficiently their respective mandates and achieve system-wide results towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. In today's rapidly changing and ever more complex and interconnected world, and over the last three decades, UNFPA has benefitted enormously from its Executive Board's oversight and guidance, ensuring that the organization can operate in an effective, efficient, transparent and agile manner. It has also benefitted from decisions that the Board has already taken to adapt its own working modalities to evolving Member States needs.
4. UNFPA very much welcomes the ongoing efforts of the Executive Board, in collaboration with the other Executive Boards, notably those of UNICEF, UN-Women in New York and WFP in Rome, to remain fit for purpose, informed by the JIU report on the review of governance and oversight functions of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women.
5. The present note highlights the perspective of UNFPA management on the overall JIU report and on some of the specific recommendations therein contained.
6. As always, UNFPA is guided by Member States and stands ready to support the Executive Board, as requested, in identifying and implementing the changes it ultimately decides to undertake in the follow-up to the JIU review, and to work in close collaboration with other UN agencies to support a fully cross-board and consultative process.

II. UNFPA management reflections on the JIU report

7. As the Executive Board decides on next steps, it may wish to ensure that any future change to its governance and oversight functions should be undertaken within the existing framework of roles and responsibilities, as set forth in General Assembly resolution 48/162 (20 December 1993), which established the Executive Boards. It is likewise important to ensure that any decisions made are consistent with the United Nations Charter and agency financial rules and regulations.

8. In addition, in assessing whether the recommended changes are indeed necessary, the Executive Board may wish to consider whether, rather than establishing new mechanisms, more effective use can be made of already existing mechanisms. In those cases where the Board wishes to create a new mechanism, it would be important to reflect whether Member States and UN entities have the necessary capacity and resources needed to indeed implement the measures and also whether those mechanisms (such as committees) can be sustainable and inclusive in their operations.

9. In any assessment of which decisions should be taken forward, the Board should also take into account the specific mandate and operations of each entity.

III. Proposed actions derived from key JIU recommendations

Formal JIU recommendations	UNFPA management comments
COMPONENT I: EXECUTIVE BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	
<p>1. The Executive Boards should request that the Economic and Social Council clarify the definition of new initiatives, as outlined in General Assembly resolution 48/162, and define a process by which such initiatives will be recommended for approval, through the Council, to the General Assembly, as necessary.</p> <p>2. The Executive Boards should develop terms of reference that fully describe their governance responsibilities and adhere to the best practices in relation to the JIU benchmark and submit them for approval by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• UNFPA interventions are clearly defined in its Strategic Plan, which is line with the UNFPA mandate and approved by the Executive Board. All UNFPA initiatives will continue to be developed within the framework of the Executive Board-approved Strategic Plan.• UNFPA is supportive of all efforts to enhance transparency. Should the Board wish to develop such Terms of Reference, it would be important to note that the overall mandate and functions of the Executive Boards are described in General Assembly resolution 48/162. The functions are identified in a way that ensures full complementarity with the functions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.• The overall mandate is identified as “providing inter-governmental support to and supervision of the activities of each fund or programme, in accordance with the overall policy guidance of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.”• The following five key support and supervisory functions are clearly identified (in paragraph 22, b, d, e, f and h):<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Receive information from and give guidance to the head of each fund or programme on the work of each organization;➤ Monitor the performance of the fund or programme;➤ Approve programmes, including country programmes;➤ Decide on administrative and financial plans and budgets; and➤ Encourage and examine new programme initiatives.

3. Based on their own approved terms of reference, the Executive Boards should develop terms of reference for Board members that are aligned with the JIU benchmark, including for specialized positions, such as Bureau members.

- UNFPA is supportive of all efforts to enhance transparency. Should the Board wish to develop such Terms of Reference, the existing Rules of Procedure provide guidance on the functions of Executive Board and its members.

COMPONENT II: EXECUTIVE BOARD COMPOSITION AND STRUCTURE

4. The Executive Boards should, as part of their overall structures, consider creating appropriate committees and corresponding terms of reference.

- UNFPA supports all efforts at enhancing effective oversight. Before creating any new committees, the Board may wish to consider whether existing structures/mechanisms could be used more effectively to the same end.
- Should the Board wish to establish committees, the Board may wish to consider how to avoid duplication between such committees and other existing committees, such as the ACABQ or the Fifth Committee.
- It should also consider how to avoid politicizing the work of the Board in providing oversight and technical guidance to the operational agencies.
- The feasibility of this recommendation should also be assessed, with respect to:
 - Ensuring inclusive representation of the five regional groups;
 - Taking into account the actual capacity of the delegations, as well as capital-based teams, and in particular how participation in such committees could be equitably ensured for Member States with different resource capacities;
 - Costs associated the establishment and functioning of such committees and how these costs will be funded/financed on an ongoing and sustainable basis;
 - How to ensure the continued primacy of the full Executive Board in exercising its oversight functions.

5. The Executive Boards should implement the recommendations made by JIU in its 2019 report on audit and oversight committees, including on strengthening the independence of an oversight committee, by having a direct reporting line to the Executive Board.

- The UNFPA Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC) was established with the specific mandate of providing advisory services to the *UNFPA Executive Director* – in line with the UNFPA oversight policy approved by the Executive Board – in order to allow the Executive Director to fulfill their oversight responsibilities. Hence, the reporting line of the OAC is to the Executive Director.
- The Executive Board has full access to the UNFPA Oversight Advisory Committee, and its annual report is shared with the Board ahead of its annual session. The OAC Chair has unrestricted access to the Board and its President. As part of the OAC’s revised TOR, the Executive Director also invites on an annual basis the OAC Chair and the Board President to a meeting to discuss issues of common interest.
- In response to the recommendations in the JIU report on audit committees (JIU/REP/2019/6), in 2021, UNFPA revised the OAC terms of reference to specifically include a presentation to the Executive Board at its annual session. The Executive Board (in decision 2023/7) also requested the UNFPA OAC, and equivalent bodies in other agencies, to present its annual report and key considerations to the Executive Board at its annual session. This request is in line with the updated UNFPA OAC terms of reference, and UNFPA has implemented the decision since the annual session 2024.
- The proposed change in reporting line could also compromise the very nature of the Committee – as an advisory body that supports the Executive Director in her oversight functions – thereby ultimately weakening the exercise of such function. Establishing more opportunities for dialogue between the Executive Board and the audit committees may be one effective avenue to pursue instead.

- UNFPA appreciates that there are different approaches to securing the independence of the oversight committees; however, it maintains that the current structure and functioning of the OAC, as an advisory body to enable the UNFPA Executive Director to fulfill her oversight responsibilities, is a best practice in terms of independence – and of immense value in strengthening oversight, transparency and risk management within the organization.
- Appointed following a robust recruitment process, involving an external recruitment company, the OAC has unfettered access to senior managers and documentation, and independent authority to reach any findings or conclusions and make any recommendations it deems appropriate.
- UNFPA stands ready to support any change requested by its Executive Board. Should the recommendation to change the reporting lines of the oversight advisory committees of the organizations be implemented, the recommendation would need to be implemented consistently across all committees of the various entities across the UN.

COMPONENT III: EXECUTIVE BOARD SECRETARIAT

6. The Executive Boards should request that their secretariats collaborate on the preparation of harmonized terms of reference for all Board secretariats, aligned with the JIU benchmark and submitted to their respective Boards for approval.
- UNFPA supports all efforts at enhancing transparency and stands ready to support this exercise. The Rules of Procedure of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board (in particular rules 10 and 11) refer to the functions of the Secretariat.
 - It is also important to reflect that different structure and sizes of the Secretariats and mandates of the organizations in question.

COMPONENT IV: EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

7. The Executive Boards should assess their current rules of procedure and working methods to support more engaged participation by all Board members and more effective and efficient means for discussion and decision-making.
- UNFPA supports all efforts at enhancing engagement of Member States. The Board has, over time, introduced changes to its working methods to be more effective, efficient and engaged. For example, informal consultations were introduced ahead of the Board sessions to provide more time for discussion and ensure that consensus could be built. Also, retaining a practice introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, all informal consultations and briefings are now held virtually to ensure boarder participation. Documentation for the sessions is now provided only in electronic format, increasing efficiency and sustainability.
 - UNFPA agrees, however, that, in light of the increasing complexity of the sessions, in terms of number of items to be discussed, and the need to ensure engaged participation by all Board members and observers, additional changes could be introduced.
 - Whichever change the Executive Board decides to introduce, it is imperative that the practice of striving for decision-making by consensus, which is at the heart of the policy guidance set forth in General Assembly resolution 48/162 and has been kept over three decades of Executive Boards decisions, is maintained to ensure maximum inclusivity in the process and ownership of the decisions, as well as support for the agency work at the country level in particular.

COMPONENT V: EXECUTIVE BOARDS AND OVERSIGHT FUNCTIONS

8. The Executive Boards should direct their respective organizations to ensure that the charters, frameworks and terms of reference of independent and advisory functions and committees reflect the roles and responsibilities of the Boards, including in relation to reporting lines, access to the
- This recommendation aggregates different independent offices into one recommendation.
 - In line with Executive Board [decision 2022/22](#), UNFPA now includes, as an annex to the annual report of the Executive Director, a summary of the oversight functions responsible for audit, investigation, ethics, evaluation and whistle-blower protection, and their reporting lines.

Board and consultations on human and financial resources, to ensure independence.

- The [charter](#) of the UNFPA Office of Audit and Investigation Services, which was revised in 2023 and shared with the Executive Board, makes clear reference to the Executive Board and the OAI reporting requirements to the Executive Board.
- The [UNFPA evaluation policy](#) already reflects the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Board, including in relation to reporting lines, access to the Board and consultations on human and financial resources, to ensure the independence of the evaluation function within UNFPA. This new policy was in fact adopted by the Board at its first regular session 2024.
- Regarding the framework and terms of reference for the Ethics Office of UNFPA, this is set forth in ST/SGB/2007/11, the Secretary-General's bulletin on the United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes. The Secretary-General's Bulletin has been introduced as an integral part of UNFPA's regulatory framework by the Executive director's issuance document of 1st December 2007.
- The bulletin also created the Ethics Panel of the UN which is tasked with establishing a unified set of standards and policies of the United Nations Secretariat and of the separately administered organs and programmes. The bulletin also provides that the executive heads of the separately administered organs and programmes include in their annual report to their respective Executive Board, the recommendations made by the United Nations Ethics Panel that specifically relate to them.
- The UNFPA OAC terms of reference include very clearly the OAC reporting obligations to the Executive Board.

COMPONENT VI: EXECUTIVE BOARDS AND RISK MANAGEMENT

9. The Executive Boards should direct their respective organizations to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the Boards for risk management are appropriately reflected in the organizational policies on risk management.

- The UNFPA enterprise risk management (ERM) policy and the 'three lines of defense' model already spell out the role of Executive Board in ensuring accountability for organizational oversight, clearly indicating that the Executive Board is responsible to ensure integrity, leadership and transparency.
- The UNFPA ERM policy also clearly highlights, in a dedicated section, UNFPA reporting responsibilities to the Executive Board on risk management.
- In decision 2024/1, the Executive Board requested the inclusion of a recurring joint agenda item for decision on risk management, at its first regular sessions, starting in 2025, to provide updates on the continuous work to improve the system of enterprise risk management and to inform the Board of critical risks of strategic importance.

CONCLUSIONS

10. By the end of 2024, each Executive Board should create an ad hoc committee to assess the recommendations (formal and informal) in the present review and prepare an action plan to address and implement them, including setting target dates and regular reporting on progress.

- UNFPA stands ready to implement the Executive Board decisions on the way forward and collaborate with other UN entities to this end.

IV. Governance good practices

10. The Executive Board has proven itself to be adaptable and flexible, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic when it continued to function and take decisions. This flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and priorities and to demonstrate the resilience and continued relevance of multilateral institutions in a rapidly changing world.

11. In response to a changing work environment and the growing need to be more agile and flexible, the Executive Board has already introduced some innovations in their business practices over the past few years. Such changes were accelerated and then normalized following the COVID-19 pandemic.

12. Some of these good practices include:

- (a) Online informal consultations and briefings, in order to maximize participation, including from capitals;
- (b) Availability of documentation only in electronic format, reducing costs and minimizing environmental impact;
- (c) Online (virtual) informal consultations, ahead of the actual negotiations, to provide much-needed additional time for discussion and consensus building;
- (d) Organization of informal consultations and briefings for each formal item on the sessions agenda, to provide an opportunity for Member States to ask questions and provide guidance;
- (e) Organization of briefings on topics that are of particular interest to Member States, even if not on the sessions agenda;
- (f) Closed sessions with the audit and investigation functions, to ensure an open and direct channel of communication between the Executive Board and these independent functions;
- (g) Thematic dialogues organized annually by each entity, which provide an opportunity for Member States to engage in dialogue with the entities on substantive and cutting-edge areas of their work.

13. These examples of new working modalities are a testament to the Executive Board capability to innovate and the fact that the Executive Board has already made significant progress in embracing agility and flexibility.

14. Building on practices adopted so far, additional solutions could be explored to further increase efficiency and effectiveness of the Executive Board.

15. UNFPA stands ready to support its Executive Board in becoming more future-fit and actively contributing, as needed, to the development and implementation of new solutions.

V. Conclusion

16. Given the fundamental role the executive boards play in ensuring that United Nations entities can deliver on their mandates and collectively deliver results as part of the UN development system, ensuring that they remain relevant and fit-for-purpose is imperative.

17. The implementation of the recommendations contained in the JIU report will be critical in ensuring the role of governing bodies and governance can be further strengthened in promoting multilateralism and enhancing the effectiveness of the UN development system in accelerating the implementation of the SDGs.

18. UNFPA stands ready, in collaboration with other entities, to support Member States along this process.

Appendix – UNFPA management comments on informal recommendations

Informal JIU recommendations	UNFPA management comments
COMPONENT I: EXECUTIVE BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be a clearly defined responsibility of the Executive Boards and a mechanism to review the performance of the executive head (para. 23) • The role of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions should be formally considered in the governance framework of the Executive Boards as it provides a source of financial advice (para. 26). • The purpose and requirements of annual reporting to the Economic and Social Council should be clearly described and used to fully report on areas in which the Executive Boards are responsible to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly (para. 28). • The Executive Boards should consider implementing a process by which to assess periodically their overall performance against their mandates (para. 32). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The JIU report states (para. 23) that “Boards are generally expected to have a role in the appointment, performance assessment, and renewal and termination of the contracts of their executive heads.” • While this might apply to the Executive Boards of organizations different than UN entities (and in this regard it is important to note that the JIU benchmarks included only two agencies and a number of private sector entities), the statement is not applicable to the Executive Boards of the UN agencies. In fact, resolution 48/162 makes it clear that the governance responsibilities are divided as follows: Executive Boards (supervision of activities of the funds and programmes); UN Secretary-General (oversight of performance of the executive head), General Assembly and ECOSOC (provision of overall policy guidance). Pursuant to Art. 97 of the Charter, the Secretary-General “shall be the chief administrative officer of the Organization.” Under Art 101 of the Charter, the Secretary-General appoints the staff of the United Nations “under regulations established by the General Assembly.” The executive heads are appointed as staff members of the United Nations. • Given this structure and definition of responsibilities, the Executive Boards are consulted in the appointment and renewal of the executive heads. However, absent a regulation of the General Assembly to the contrary, the evaluation of their performance and any decision on their appointment and renewal of appointment are a prerogative of the Secretary-General as chief administrative officer of the organization. • UNFPA agrees that the ACABQ review of budget reports, made available to the executive boards ahead of the Executive Board deliberations on budgetary matters, provides a crucial input in informing the Executive Board decision on whether to approve the budgets of funds and programmes. • The Executive Boards report annually to the ECOSOC. The Executive Board may wish to consider making the current reporting even more strategic and focused. • The Executive Boards may wish to consider implementing this recommendation.
COMPONENT II: EXECUTIVE BOARD COMPOSITION AND STRUCTURE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Executive Boards should have an independent oversight committee that reports directly to the Board (para. 49). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The same considerations presented for recommendation 4 on the establishment of committees, should be taken into account with respect to duplication of the existing audit and other committees and feasibility (capacity, representation, funding/financing).

COMPONENT III: EXECUTIVE BOARD SECRETARIAT

- The Executive Board members may benefit from a common basic training programme that covers aspects that are common to all three Boards, such as the role and responsibility of Board members, rules of procedure and practices and other general governance and oversight principles relevant in the United Nations, which could be supplemented with separate organization-specific training (para. 58).
- The Executive Boards will need to take action to clarify the role, reporting requirements and accountability of their secretaries, as well as the requirements regarding qualifications and experience, and to reinforce the need for impartiality, secretaries should have a job description that is available to the Bureau and Board members (para. 59).
- It would be appropriate for the Executive Boards to consider the level of resources to be provided to their secretariats and ensure that such resources are commensurate with the respective roles, responsibilities and performance indicators (para. 60).
- UNFPA agrees on the importance of strengthening the training provided to Member States delegates and stands ready to work with the Executive Board Secretariat, and with the secretariats of the boards of UNICEF and UN-Women to this end.
- The JIU report noted strong satisfaction with the work of the Secretariats, reported by the survey: 80% of respondents agreed that the Secretariats provided effective support to the Bureaux and Board members, and more than 70% agreed that the secretariat services were impartial and independent (page 55).
- The UNFPA Executive Board Branch is responsible for providing support to Board members on matters related to UNFPA, including by providing information, arranging informal meetings and ensuring that all the necessary UNFPA -related documentation is timely made available to the Executive Board. At the same time, it also informs UNFPA senior management on matters related to the Executive Board and its governance function.
- While capacity varies across secretariats, as already noted in the report, UNFPA considers the capacity of its Executive Board Branch adequate to the functions that the Branch needs to perform and in line with best practice. This consideration is based on the current scope of activities and structures of the Executive Board.

COMPONENT IV: EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

- The Inspector encourages the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS to reconsider its decision to group, at its annual session, all the agenda items related to oversight in the same morning, instead of discussing them under the segments for each organization (para. 67).
- The utility of informal meetings should be assessed, and actions should be considered to focus them clearly on informing the decision-making in formal meetings by providing information and advice resulting from the discussions (para. 68).
- Informal sessions/briefings were mandated as part of General Assembly resolution 48/162: "In order to secure transparency of the system, improved modalities should be developed by the funds and programmes for regular informal and briefings and improved information for all members States of the respective funds and programmes" (para 28).
- A least one informal consultation is scheduled for each item included in the tentative workplans for the formal sessions, ensuring that information is provided to Member States in advance of the sessions and that Member States have the opportunity to provide guidance ahead of the formal sessions. For items of particular importance or complexity (i.e. Strategic Plan, Integrated Budget) several informal consultations are held, often throughout the year ahead of the consideration of the item at an Executive Board formal session. There is, therefore, a direct correlation between the topics discussed at the informal consultations and the formal sessions of the Board.

- UNFPA has received feedback by Member States that these consultations have been very useful in informing the decision-making process and that the UNFPA informal briefings/consultations have also significantly improved. in terms of quality and focus, as well as in terms of the time allocated for discussion.
- In fact, the number of briefings requested by Member States has increased, including on topics that are not directly related to items for formal discussion, thereby underlining the value placed by Member States on these informal briefings and consultations.
- That said, UNFPA welcomes efforts to streamline, as needed, informals. Should the Executive Board decide to reduce the number of the informal briefings or introduce changes to the modalities in which informal consultations are organized ahead of the formal Board sessions, UNFPA stands ready to work with its counterparts to ensure that the changes are effectively implemented.
- The Inspector encourages all Executive Board secretariats to consider introducing a common portal to facilitate communication among Board members, the Boards and the secretariats thereof before, during and after Board meetings (para. 71).
- UNFPA would welcome guidance by the Executive Board on the specific functions that the proposed common portal should perform and stands ready to work with the other agencies to develop the portal.
- The Inspector encourages Executive Board members to assess whether the current process of formulating Board decisions would benefit from a review (para. 73).
- UNFPA would welcome such an assessment, and stands ready to support any new proposed improvements in this regard.
- The decision-making process has already evolved in response to requests of Member States (for example, from 2020 onwards virtual decision negotiations have been introduced).
- In the last five years, for every session, all decisions have been concluded on time and by consensus.
- The Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS should reassess the duration of the UNOPS segment of its sessions and consider options for engaging directly with the organization (para. 74).
- It should also be noted that the JIU report [JIU/2023/1](#) on the review of management and administration functions in the United Nations Population Fund calls for the Executive Board to allocate more time to providing guidance, oversight, support and supervision to UNFPA. It will be important, therefore, to ensure that any revision of time allocation takes into account in a comprehensive manner each entity's needs.

COMPONENT V: EXECUTIVE BOARDS AND OVERSIGHT FUNCTIONS

- To ensure the independence of oversight functions, a consistent approach is necessary so that the Executive Boards are responsible for the approval of all oversight charters (para. 82)
- UNFPA supports the notion that there should be a consistent approach among the entities. It is important to distinguish here between different independent entities. For example, as noted in the main report, the Board approves the UNFPA Evaluation Policy. In the case of UNFPA, issuance of the OAIS charter by the UNFPA Executive Director was, in fact, approved by the Executive Board as part of its adoption of the UNFPA Oversight Policy.
- In accordance with best practices, the selection, performance assessment, and renewal and termination of the contracts of the heads of the independent oversight functions should require consultation with the Executive Boards and should be reflected in their terms of reference (para. 83).
- The report states in para. 83 that “the Executive Boards play no explicit role in the approval, selection, performance assessment, and renewal and termination of contract of the heads of the oversight and evaluation functions, although they are consulted in certain cases”. UNFPA is of the view that this statement is not fully accurate. In fact, in UNFPA’s case, for example, the Evaluation Policy approved by the Executive Board states an explicit consultative role of the Board in the selection/appointment, renewal and termination of contract of the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office.

- The Audit Advisory Committee is involved in the selection, intended removal and performance appraisal of the Director, OIAS.
- Dedicated board oversight committees focused on the oversight and accountability responsibilities of the Executive Boards are logical mechanisms for fulfilling the requirements in relation to independent oversight and advisory functions and committees, as outlined in the benchmark (para. 84).
- The terms of reference of the Executive Boards should incorporate comprehensive tracking and follow-up of oversight recommendations to hold management accountable for implementation, as this is an essential responsibility of governance (para. 86).
- The terms of reference of the Executive Boards should ensure that the Boards recognize the need for appropriate provisions for engagement with independent oversight functions and their independent oversight committees in accordance with previous JIU recommendations (para. 88).
- As indicated under recommendation 5, the Board can consider the establishment of committees.
- In doing so, it would be important to ensure no duplication nor overlap with existing committees, for example the audit committees which report to the Heads of the organizations, but to whom the Executive Boards have unrestricted access.
- Finally, the same considerations presented for recommendation 4 on the establishment of committees, should be taken into account with respect to duplication and feasibility (capacity and representation).
- As mandated by the Executive Board, UNFPA maintains a matrix to track the implementation of the decisions that the Executive Board adopts each year. These matrixes, which are posted on UNFPA website, allow systematic monitoring and provide full transparency on the status of implementation, and they are maintained until all decisions taken in a year have been fully implemented. UNFPA is open to any additional tracking and follow-up mechanism that the Executive Board might consider introducing.
- The Executive Board already has unrestricted access to the independent functions and to the UNFPA OAC, in addition to the formal updates provided at the annual session.

COMPONENT VI: EXECUTIVE BOARDS AND RISK MANAGEMENT

- The Inspector urges the Executive Boards to ensure that they are provided with at least annual updates from the organizations on risk, as well as information on the outcome of the organization's comprehensive review of risk management, as recommended by JIU in its 2020 report on enterprise risk management (para. 96).
- The Inspector reiterates the responsibility, as outlined in the benchmark, of the Executive Board for risk management and requests that attention should be paid to making this explicit in the development of the Board's terms of reference, as requested in recommendation 1 of the present review (para. 100).
- UNFPA agrees on the importance of ensuring that the Executive Board is regularly updated on risk management and welcomes the JIU report's focus also on effective risk management and on an ethical culture (para. 31, chapter VIII).
- As mentioned above, the Executive Board requested, in decision 2024/1, the inclusion of a recurring joint agenda item for decision on risk management, at its first regular sessions, to provide updates on the continuous work to improve the system of enterprise risk management and to inform the Board of critical risks of strategic importance.
- UNFPA has already enhanced its reporting on risk management as part of its annual reporting to the Executive Board.
- Also, UNFPA shares updates and information on its risk management strategy in its management responses to the annual reports of the OAIS Director and the OAC.

CONCLUSIONS

- The Inspector encourages the Presidents of the three Executive Boards to liaise with the President of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme to identify any potential synergies between the two review processes (para. 104).
- UNFPA stands ready to implement the Executive Board decisions on the way forward and collaborate with other entities to this end.



INFORMATION NOTE

by UNFPA Independent Offices

Initial views on the Joint Inspection Unit’s report “Review of the governance and oversight of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women” (JIU/REP/2023/7)

This information note was prepared in response to [Executive Board decision 2024/12](#), paragraph 11, requesting the directors of the independent oversight offices of UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS to provide, in an information note, their initial views on the Joint Inspection Unit [report](#) “Review of the governance and oversight of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women” (JIU/REP/2023/7).

Contents

I. Background	3
II. Overview	3
III. Key considerations for the Executive Board.....	3
IV. Pathways to further strengthen the independent oversight offices.....	10
V. Conclusion	11

I. Background

1. In February 2023, the Presidents of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)/United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) (referred to as “Boards” or “Executive Boards” hereafter) requested that the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) carry out an assessment of how the Executive Boards execute their governance and oversight functions, with a view to ensuring that these functions are aligned with international standards and best practices. That request was prompted by recent management failures and allegations of wrongdoing at UNOPS. Following consideration by the Joint Inspection Unit, the review was added to its programme of work for 2023.

2. The objectives of the review were to: (a) assess how the Executive Boards execute their governance and oversight functions; (b) identify risks, gaps and opportunities among their current practices and the relevant best practices in relation to governance and oversight; and (c) recommend specific actions intended to streamline and enhance their governance processes.

3. The scope of the review was limited to the three Executive Boards of five JIU participating organizations namely UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS, and UN-Women. A JIU benchmark was developed, including six main components, subcomponents, and criteria for each, and the existing governance and oversight arrangements of each Executive Board analysed to identify gaps.

II. Overview

4. The Executive Board welcomed the resultant report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Review of the governance and oversight of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women” (JIU/REP/2023/7), and took note of its recommendations.

5. The Executive Board committed to a two-track process in implementing the recommendations that constitutes: (a) an information-gathering exercise; and (b) the establishment of a working group.

6. With regard to gathering of additional information, the Executive Board, in its decision 2024/12 requested the directors of the independent oversight offices of UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS to provide, **in an information note**, their initial views of the Joint Inspection Unit report.

7. This informational note was prepared by the independent offices in response to the Executive Board decision.

III. Key considerations for the Executive Board

8. The independent oversight offices of UNFPA welcome and support the efforts of the Executive Board to strengthen oversight practices, risk management discipline, and ethics, in line with relevant professional standards and best practices. As such, they hereby provide to the Executive Board their views on the JIU recommendations and suggestions on how to operationalize them.

On Component 1: Executive Board roles and responsibilities

9. The JIU team developed a detailed benchmark that included specific elements and considered the specific contexts of the three Executive Boards, which have shared responsibilities in some areas with the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and other United Nations bodies.

10. The independent oversight offices of UNFPA highlight the importance of recognizing the specificity of the United Nations (UN) when designing a benchmarking model. Executive Boards in the United Nations system and boards in other sectors, including the private sector, serve similar overarching functions - providing oversight, guidance, and governance - but differ in purpose, structure, and the way they operate.

11. Whereas Executive Boards in the UN system focus on advancing global peace, security, development, human rights, and humanitarian aid, with the primary goal of fulfilling the mission and mandate of the UN and its specialized agencies, Boards in most private entities aim to maximize shareholder value and profitability, oversee management, and ensure long-term financial health and compliance with laws and regulations.

12. Therefore, benchmarking board governance and using commonly accepted best practices in corporate governance, such as the OECD Principles of Corporate Governance, the National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD) guidelines and reports, or other similar benchmarks, is relevant but may omit the overarching goals and specificities of the UN.

On Component II, Recommendation 4: The Executive Boards should, as part of their overall structures, consider creating appropriate committees and corresponding terms of reference

13. The oversight offices are of the view that using and strengthening existing oversight mechanisms may be a more effective approach rather than creating additional committees, which may increase redundancies, inefficiencies, and overlaps. Creating additional committees may prove counterproductive and create distance between the independent oversight offices, Board members, and Member States. It also runs the risk of segregating and deprioritizing the oversight function to a more limited group of member states/Board members. Further, it may also require additional reporting requirements that could increase pressure on the independent oversight offices, some of which are already pressed for resources.

14. Currently, there are two broad types of oversight mechanisms (external and internal) established either by the General Assembly or the Executive Boards of the various agencies, which we believe are functioning efficiently and satisfactorily at UNFPA.

External oversight bodies and mechanisms

15. The oversight role and responsibilities of the **Executive Board of UNFPA** were established by the General Assembly in its resolutions 48/162 and 49/128. The resolutions requested the Executive Board to oversee, on a regular basis, the response of the Fund to needs of countries regarding activities to strengthen national population and development programmes, including specific requests from developing countries for assistance, and to submit annual reports to the Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session, with recommendations for improvement of field-level coordination.

16. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (**ACABQ**) is a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. Its functions, responsibilities, and composition are governed by the provisions of Assembly resolutions 14 (I) of 13 February 1946 and 32/103 of 14 December 1977 and rules 155 to 157 of the rules of procedure of the Assembly. Its major functions include to: (a) examine and report on budgets submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly; (b) advise the General Assembly concerning any administrative and budgetary matters referred to it; (c) examine, on behalf of the General Assembly, administrative budgets of the specialized agencies and proposals for financial arrangements with such agencies; and (d) consider and report to the General Assembly on auditors' reports on the accounts of the UN and of the specialized agencies.

17. The United Nations Board of Auditors (**UN BOA**) was established by the General Assembly in 1946 to provide external audit services to the UN and its Funds and Programmes. The UN BOA mandate is to make independent and professional audit observations with respect to the efficiency of financial procedures,

accounting systems, internal financial controls and, in general, the administration and management of the UN and its Funds and Programmes, in conformity with the International Standards on Auditing and other generally accepted standards.

18. The Joint Inspection Unit (**JIU**) is the only independent, external UN oversight body with a systemwide mandate. It conducts evaluations, inspections, and investigations on cross-cutting issues to promote efficient management and administrative practices. JIU aims to foster coordination among UN agencies and other oversight bodies and supports oversight of human, financial, and other resources. Its work impacts the legislative organs and secretariats of 28 UN system organizations that have adopted its Statute, helping to drive change across the system.

Internal oversight mechanisms

19. UNFPA leadership and senior management is responsible for establishing the organization's governance, risk management, and internal control processes, including performance measurement and mechanisms to detect and prevent fraud or misuse of resources. This includes the handling of investigation outcomes and applying disciplinary actions, as per policy. Management also provides the Executive Board with detailed responses to annual reports prepared by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), the Ethics Office, the Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC), and the Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS). These responses by management assure the effectiveness of internal controls and include updates on implementing audit recommendations.

20. Oversight Advisory Committee (**OAC**) assists the Executive Director of UNFPA in fulfilling their responsibilities for accountability, risk management, internal control, financial management and reporting, and the fiduciary oversight process, including external audit matters, the internal audit, investigation, and evaluation functions, and ethics. The primary role of the OAC is to advise the Executive Director, taking into account the organization's process for monitoring compliance with Regulations adopted by UNFPA Governing Body and the Rules promulgated thereunder, to enhance accountability and transparency. Comprising five external experts appointed by the Executive Director, OAC also participates in, advises on the selection and any intended removal of the Director of OAIS prior to the end of the term of appointment, and provides inputs to the performance assessment of the Director of OAIS. It also reviews the OAIS Charter and the OAIS and IEO scope, plans, activities, resources, staffing and organizational structures. The OAC's responsibilities are outlined its terms of reference that are approved by the Executive Director.

21. Oversight Compliance Monitoring Committee (**OCMC**). OCMC, previously known as the Audit Monitoring Committee, is an internal coordination mechanism, chaired by the Executive Director or Deputy Executive Director (Management), with secretarial support provided by the Executive Office. OCMC meets monthly to review pervasive and recurrent issues identified in internal and external audits, centralized evaluations, JIU reviews, and other assurance and oversight activities as they relate to the identification and mitigation of compliance-related risks. OCMC also advises on systemic solutions to address the root causes of audit issues, as part of its goals to mitigate the risk of systemic vulnerabilities and to reduce the frequency of operational issues. Heads of headquarters divisions and offices, and regional directors are members of OCMC.

22. Office of Audit and Investigation Services (**OAIS**) provides the Executive Director, the Executive Board, and UNFPA with independent, objective assurance and advisory services designed to add value and improve UNFPA operations. Its mandate is defined in the UNFPA Financial Regulations and Rules, Article XVII. 47. Consistent with its operationally independent status, as provided in UNFPA Financial Regulation 17.1, OAIS determines the scope of all its internal audit, investigation and advisory services freely and independently, without undue interference from or influence by UNFPA management. The scope of internal auditing includes the examination of the adequacy and effectiveness of the UNFPA governance, risk management and internal control processes. Access to internal audit reports and investigation information is regulated by Executive Board decisions [see sections VII and VIII of the oversight policy for details].

23. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) is the custodian of the evaluation function. It reports functionally to the Executive Board and administratively to the Executive Director. The office is independent from the operational, management and decision-making functions in the organization, and is impartial, objective and free from undue influence. To enhance its independence, positioning and visibility, IEO has its own logo and brand, in line with UNFPA guidelines. IEO directly manages and decides upon the resources – human (including consultants) and financial – required for centralized evaluations and the implementation of its work plan, consistent with the UNFPA financial regulations and rules. IEO has the authority to determine the scope, design, conduct, commissioning, dissemination, publication and communication of centralized evaluations and to submit reports directly to the appropriate decision-makers, including the Executive Board. Management cannot impose any restrictions on language, content or the publication of evaluation reports. Evaluation teams hired by UNFPA must demonstrate relevant expertise and should have a gender and geographical balance. Incrementally, young evaluators should be engaged in all evaluations.

24. The UNFPA **Ethics Advisor** is responsible for: (a) developing and advising on ethics policies aligned with UN values; (b) guiding management to uphold ethical standards; (c) raising staff awareness about expected ethical behaviour; (d) offering confidential ethical advice to staff; (e) reviewing retaliation complaints and referring them for investigation, if needed; and (f) overseeing the corporate financial disclosure programme. These functions support integrity and transparency across UNFPA operations and its staff conduct.

Recommendation 5: The Executive Boards should implement the recommendations made by JIU in its 2019 report on audit and oversight committees, including on strengthening the independence of an oversight committee by having a direct reporting line to the Executive Board.

25. The Chairperson of OAC has free and unrestricted access to the Executive Board and its President. It is worth noting that, in accordance with the relevant Board decision, the OAC Chairperson, for the first time, had a separate agenda item at the Executive Board’s annual session of 2024 to present the OAC annual report and interacted freely with the Member States, and responded to all queries, demonstrating actual independence.

26. In addition, and as per the OAC terms of reference, the Executive Director will, on an annual basis, invite the OAC Chairperson and the President of the Executive Board to a trilateral meeting to discuss matters of shared interest.

27. The independent oversight offices of UNFPA wish to highlight that independence should be demonstrated through actual practice, behaviour, and the structural setup, rather than having it merely written. Independence implies freedom from conflicts of interest, influence, and control from other parties that could affect objective decision-making.

On Component V: Executive Boards and oversight functions

Para 82 – To ensure the independence of oversight functions, a consistent approach is necessary so that the Executive Boards are responsible for the approval of all oversight charters.

28. Not all independent oversight offices are governed by Charters. It is only OAI that is required to prepare a Charter. This is in line with Standard 6.2 (Internal Audit Charter) of the Global Internal Auditing Standards. The Chief Audit Executive must develop and maintain an internal audit charter that specifies, at a minimum, the internal audit function’s: (a) purpose of internal auditing; (b) commitment to adhering to the Global Internal Audit Standards; (c) mandate, including scope and types of services to be provided, and the board’s responsibilities and expectations regarding management’s support of the internal audit function; and

(d) organizational position and reporting relationships.

29. The current OAIS Charter was approved by the Executive Director in August 2023 and annexed to the OAIS annual report on UNFPA internal audit and investigation activities in 2023 for the Executive Boards information. OAIS welcomes further discussions on how to reflect the views or inputs of the Executive Board in the Charter.

30. The UNFPA evaluation function is governed by the evaluation policy of UNFPA that is presented to the Executive Board by IEO and approved by the Executive Board. The current evaluation policy was approved by the Executive Board at the 2024 First Regular Session. Policy includes a detailed description of the roles and responsibilities of various positions, offices and committees. The Executive Board reviews this when it approves the policy.

31. To the extent the recommendations concern the framework and terms of reference for the ethics office of UNFPA, this is set forth in ST/SGB/2007/11, the Secretary-General's bulletin on the United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes. The bulletin promotes a harmonized approach in support of an Ethics Office's goal to "cultivate and nurture a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability, thereby enhancing the trust in, and the credibility of, the United Nations, both internally and externally." It also created the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (EPUN), which is tasked with establishing a unified set of standards and policies of the United Nations Secretariat and of the separately administered organs and programmes.

32. The Secretary-General's Bulletin has been introduced as an integral part of UNFPA's regulatory framework by the Executive Director's issuance document of 1 December 2007.

33. In its earlier and separate report on the Review of the ethics function in the United Nations system (the "2021 JIU Report"), the JIU noted that "[t]he mandate or terms of reference of the Ethics Offices of the United Nations and its funds and programmes all conform to the standards suggested in 2010. In the main, the funds and programmes¹ apply the terms of reference set out in the Secretary-General's bulletin on separately administered organs and programmes in the United Nations system-wide application of ethics², issued in follow-up to General Assembly resolution 60/1."³

34. As the framework and terms of reference for the ethics offices has been issued by the Secretary-General, to the extent there would be any revisions thereto, it would be appropriate to engage in further consultation with the United Nations Secretariat thereon.

Para 84 - Dedicated board oversight committees focused on the oversight and accountability responsibilities of the Executive Boards are logical mechanisms for fulfilling the requirements in relation to independent oversight and advisory functions and potential sub-committees, as outlined in the benchmark.

35. The independent oversight offices invite the Executive Board to consider using or strengthening the role of existing oversight offices and mechanisms rather than creating new committees.

36. In fact, the recommendation by the JIU (para 24) to formally consider the role of ACABQ, as a source of financial advice, in the governance framework of the executive boards may give the Executive Board the necessary assurance it seeks.

¹ The JIU made express reference to UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UNICEF in its footnote. At the time of the report, UN-Women had not yet created its own in-house ethics function. The Ethics Advisor at UN-Women has established the ethics function at UN-Women consistent with ST/SGB/2007/11.

² ST/SGB/2007/11, section 3.

³ JIU/REP/2021/5, paragraph 73.

Para 83 – In accordance with best practices, the selection, performance assessment, and renewal and termination of the contracts of the heads of the independent oversight functions should require consultation with the Executive Boards and should be reflected in their terms of reference.

37. All contracts of heads of the independent oversight offices are managed in line with the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations, including selection, performance assessment, renewal, and termination. Moreover, as noted in paragraph 20, OAC also participates in and advises on the selection and any intended removal of the Director of OAIS prior to the end of the term of appointment and provides inputs to the performance assessment of the Director of OAIS. If OAIS (or its director) were to come under any undue pressure, interference or threat to its independence, it would raise these to the Executive Board and OAC through existing channels, such as closed briefings with the Executive Board and OAC, and annual reports.

38. The UNFPA Evaluation Policy makes specific reference to the consultative role of the Board in the selection/appointment, renewal and termination of contract of the IEO Director: “The Executive Board is consulted on the appointment, renewal and dismissal of the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office” (para 29, c).

39. The Ethics Office considers independence a prerequisite for the effective implementation of their mandate. In its 2021 JIU Report, the JIU noted “...the independence of the [ethics] function to be of utmost importance to protect it from undue influence and pressure. This independence is critical to ensure the unbiased and objective discharge of its responsibilities, in particular in cases of protection against retaliation.”⁴ In this regard, the Ethics Office notes that the JIU identified specific standards for the independence of the ethics function. These standards already include provisions concerning engagement with the governing body, as well as safeguards in the selection/appointment, performance and dismissal/removal of the head of the Ethics Office. With respect to reporting lines, consistent with the bulletin, the JIU standards for independence of the Ethics Office provide that each ethics office shall be headed by an Ethics Officer, who shall function independently and report directly to the Executive Head.

40. This reporting structure is consistent with Articles 100 and 101 of the United Nations Charter which provide that the staff shall be appointed by the Secretary-General under regulations established by the General Assembly and that in the performance of their duties, the staff shall not seek or receive instructions from any government or from any authority external to the Organization. Further, the Secretary-General has delegated authority in human resources matters, including the appointment of staff, to the executive heads of the separately administered organs and programmes. To the extent any revisions under consideration may entail additional involvement of the Executive Boards beyond the standards identified for the Ethics Offices in the 2021 JIU report, it would be relevant to also consider compatibility with the bulletin setting out the framework and terms and conditions for the Ethics Offices as well as the aforementioned provisions of the Charter.

Para 85 – In response to the JIU survey and in interviews, Executive Board members expressed some dissatisfaction with the fact that the information presented to them on oversight was not effective in assisting them to discharge their oversight duties. That includes internal and external oversight reports and quality assessment reviews of the functions themselves.

⁴ JIU/REP/2021/5, paragraphs 97-100.

41. The IEO Director requested a ‘Briefing on the independent peer review of the UNFPA evaluation function, and management response’ for EB members ahead of the presentation of the 2024 Evaluation Policy. The Chair of the Independent Peer Review (Head of Evaluation Office, UNHCR) presented the conclusions and recommendations at an informal session of the EB. Further, UNFPA IEO publishes the independent quality assessment of evaluation reports, which ensures transparency and accessibility for any stakeholder, including EB members. Finally, the IEO Director reports the aggregated quality assessments rating of evaluations produced by UNFPA as part of a specific KPI within its own annual report on the evaluation function presented to the Board at the Annual regular Session each year.

Para 86 – The terms of reference of the Executive Boards should incorporate comprehensive tracking and follow-up of oversight recommendations to hold management accountable for implementation as this is an essential responsibility of governance.

42. The Annual Report on the evaluation function is presented to the EB during the annual session in June. One of the KPIs reported on under the ‘implementation of management responses’ is the percentage of management response actions completed. Relatedly, the OCMC has recently revised its TORs to include a responsibility to, “review, analyse and follow up on the timely implementation of recommendations from internal and external (BoA) audits, Joint Inspection Unit reviews, centralized evaluations and select donor assessments.” This revision was noted by the ED in her opening remarks at the second annual session in August 2024.

Recommendation 8 – The Executive Boards should direct their respective organizations to ensure that the charters, frameworks and terms of reference of independent and advisory functions and committees reflect the roles and responsibilities of the Boards, including in relation to reporting lines, access to the Board and consultations on human and financial resources, to ensure independence.

43. The UNFPA Evaluation Policy reflects the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Board, acknowledging that the Executive Board relies on a strong evaluation function to support its oversight of the organization in the following ways:

44. The Board’s oversight role includes setting the conditions for the success of the evaluation function. The Board ensures that IEO is inscribed in a defined institutional structure that anchors it solidly as part of the UNFPA oversight function. It approves the evaluation policy and considers IEO annual reports on the evaluation function, and the related management commentaries. It approves the budget of IEO within the integrated budget, and the global multi-year costed evaluation plan. At its annual session, it considers the annual report of the evaluation function. The IEO Director meets the Executive Board’s Bureau or President, as needed, on evaluation priorities and plans;

45. As a user of evaluations, the Executive Board requires independent, evidence-based analysis. The centralized evaluations considered by the Board are submitted directly by the IEO Director, together with the corresponding management response by senior management. The institutional structure guarantees the Executive Board has continuous and easy access to IEO to obtain information on organizational accomplishments and challenges, thus facilitating a well-informed decision-making process;

IV. Pathways to further strengthen the independent oversight offices

Anchoring operational aspects of the independent oversight offices into UN policies and procedures

46. The revised UNFPA oversight policy was approved by the Executive Board in its decision 2015/2. The policy sets out the oversight roles and responsibilities within UNFPA, as well as the principles, purpose, and scope of oversight, including definitions of oversight-related concepts. In the policy, oversight is defined as processes by which to ensure organizational, programme, financial, operational and individual accountability, effectiveness of internal controls, including prevention and detection of fraud and malpractice.

47. Thus, we believe it to be important that any new requirements are reflected in the respective oversight policies of all agencies.

Preserving the independence of the oversight offices and shielding them from undue influence

48. Independence is a key pre-condition for the effective functioning of internal audit, investigative, evaluative and ethics-related activities of any internal oversight function. Principle 7 ('Positioned Independently') of the Global Internal Audit Standards charges the board with responsibility for enabling the independence of the internal audit function. The UN Evaluation Group Norms and Standards include independence as one of the foundational norms. Independence is defined as the freedom from conditions that impair the internal audit function's ability to carry out its responsibilities in an unbiased manner. The internal audit function is only able to fulfill the Purpose of Internal Auditing when the Chief Audit Executive reports directly to the board, is qualified, and positioned at a level within the organization that enables the internal audit function to discharge its services and responsibilities without interference.

49. According to Standard 7.1 ('Organizational Independence') of the Global Internal Audit Standards, the Chief Audit Executive must confirm to the board the organizational independence of the internal audit function at least annually. This includes communicating incidents where independence may have been impaired, and the actions or safeguards employed to address the impairment.

50. Similar principles are enshrined in the Conference of International Investigators Uniform Principles and Guidelines for Investigations and other relevant UNFPA policies.

51. In line with the relevant professional standards, corporate policies, and Executive Board decisions, the Directors of IEO and OAI are free to determine the scope of their interventions and the methodologies used, to conduct their work as they deem necessary, and to communicate results publicly. In fulfilling these obligations, IEO, OAI, and the Ethics Office consider independence as the cornerstone for providing effective assurance to UNFPA.

52. The Director, IEO, functionally reports to the Executive Board and has free and unrestricted access to the Board, as well as OAC, UN BOA, and any other entity having any fiduciary oversight or governing function in relation to UNFPA. Similarly, the Director, OAI, has free and unrestricted access to the Executive Board, OAC, UN BOA and any other entity having any fiduciary oversight or governing function in relation to UNFPA. The Chairperson of OAC has free and unrestricted access to the Executive Board, UN BOA and any other entity having any oversight or governing function in relation to UNFPA.

53. The Ethics Office engages regularly with the Executive Board. Pursuant to Executive Board decisions, the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women have requested that ethics be added as a recurring item for decision at their annual sessions and for ethics to directly submit an annual report on its activities to their respective Executive Board. Each of the Ethics Offices also has an informal session with Executive Board members prior to the annual session.

Strengthening transparency for enhanced accountability

54. Transparency means that reliable and timely information is made available to Member States and the public at large. Towards this end: (a) the Director, IEO, submits to the Executive Board, at the same time as UNFPA presents its integrated budget, a multi-year costed evaluation plan, and each year, an annual report on the evaluation function. The Director or his/her designee, presents centralized evaluations to the Executive Board. The multi-year costed evaluation plan, the annual report on the evaluation function, as well as all centralized evaluation reports and their corresponding management responses, are all publicly available; (b) the Director, OAI, presents annual reports on internal audit and investigation activities to the Executive Board. The contents therein include information requested by the Executive Board. The reports are publicly available. All internal audit reports are also publicly available in accordance with the disclosure procedures included in Section VII of the oversight policy. Disclosure of information on investigation is detailed in Section VIII of the oversight policy.

55. The independent oversight offices welcome further consultations (formal and/or informal) with the Executive Board. Meetings, particularly closed briefings, held in 2023 and 2024 with the Executive Board have proven to be very effective in updating Board members on recurrent audit findings, new and emerging risks affecting the organization, and other issues of concern. Continuing these briefings is highly recommended.

Strengthening and preserving the confidentiality of key oversight processes and protection of the agencies

56. Confidentiality is not only a legal and ethical duty but also a practical strategy to ensure fair, reliable, and effective investigations.

57. The independent oversight offices deal with information or material whose unauthorized disclosure could be reasonably expected to cause exceptionally grave damage to or impede the conduct of the work of UNFPA. This includes information or material deemed particularly sensitive relating to third parties or a country, government or administration, or that could compromise pending action and where such is likely to endanger the safety or security of any individual, violate his or her rights or invade his or her privacy.

58. Breaching confidentiality can result in legal consequences, including claims of defamation, breach of privacy, or retaliation. Maintaining confidentiality minimizes these risks, helping to protect the organization from potential legal and financial repercussions.

59. As such, it is critical to ensure that the integrity of the investigation processes and financial disclosure are not compromised.

V. Conclusion

60. The directors of the independent oversight offices of UNFPA thank the Executive Board for the opportunity granted to them to provide their initial views on the JIU report recommendations and remain available to discuss or present additional views or clarifications at the Board's discretion.
