



## **Report of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP**

30 May 2025

### **I. Opening**

1. In her opening remarks, the President of the Executive Board of WFP, Chair of the 2025 joint meeting of the Executive Boards (JMB), described the confluence of challenges and opportunities facing the United Nations amid current complex geopolitical and financial pressures and ongoing efforts to reshape the United Nations system, including the UN80 initiative, the Humanitarian Reset and the UN 2.0 Quintet of Change. She encouraged all participants to use the JMB as an opportunity to engage in frank discussion and catalyse joint action on factors that were hampering the capacity of United Nations entities to meet their shared objectives.

### **II. Topic 1: United Nations governance and strategic direction in an evolving global landscape: Considering the 2024 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and strategic planning towards 2030**

#### **Introduction**

2. Introducing the topic, the President of the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) invited participants to consider the opportunity for the United Nations to further strengthen its governance and strategic direction in a fast-changing world, adapting priorities, investing in proven and new solutions, and increasing efficiency. The President also called for renewed commitment to the multilateralism that underpinned the United Nations charter, norms and standards, which in turn provided the foundations for concrete progress at the country level, including in the areas of crisis response, gender equality and inclusion, and institutional capacity strengthening.

#### **Panel discussion with the Principals of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP**

3. The panel discussion was moderated by the Deputy Executive Director of WFP, who asked each principal to address a different question in their remarks.
4. In considering *how United Nations entities could work in a more coordinated way to advance key principles and values*, the Executive Director of UN-Women shared examples of her entity's effective leadership with resident coordinators (RCs) on the integration of gender equality in the United Nations system, such as the implementation of the United Nations Country Team System-Wide Action Plan Gender Equality Scorecard, used by 116 United Nations country teams, up from 19 in only 2018. Governments around the world were using gender budgeting tools to benefit women directly or to fill gaps in the funding for services that supported the survivors of violence against women and girls, assisted households headed by women and improved maternal health. Progress had also been made in empowering women, including in Afghanistan, where gender equality and women's empowerment were central to the United Nations cooperation framework. UN-Women's coordination mandate

was central to its work, as reflected in its new strategic plan, which focused on national priorities, country-level delivery and the commitment to leaving no one behind. In closing, the Executive Director called on United Nations entities and Member States to come together to strengthen multilateralism and retain gender equality as a central pillar of the development system and in the upcoming reforms.

5. The Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) addressed the question of *how the 2024 quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) could help United Nations entities to maximize their collective impact and results as they formulated and implemented their next strategic plans*. He noted that the QCPR should frame the discussions under way in the context of the UN80 initiative, bringing more coherence, coordination, effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and accountability to the United Nations development system – a system that was fit for the challenges of today and tomorrow at the global, regional and country levels. Taking stock of progress made in United Nations coordination through the reinvigorated RC system and the work of the reconfigured United Nations country teams, the QCPR had identified scope for entities to increase efficiency by adopting common back offices, mutual recognition and shared services and by working together based on comparative advantages, in full compliance with their respective mandates. This was a critical point as United Nations development system entities could – and needed to – do better individually and collectively if they wanted to enhance the effective utilization of their resources and unique expertise. UNOPS’ role in implementation complemented the upstream policy advice and financing provided by other entities and helped to maximize the impact and optimal use of resources in support of national priorities.
6. Turning to the question of *how United Nations entities could collectively harness digital technologies, data, strategic foresight and innovation to support countries’ response to humanitarian and development challenges*, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recalled relevant aspects of the QCPR and highlighted the importance of integrated, systems-informed approaches that take better account of multifaceted challenges. He underscored the role that the United Nations can play by helping governments identify early signals of risks such as climate shocks and inequalities through the use of technologies such as artificial intelligence. Remarking on the need to learn from each other, he encouraged the fostering of a system-wide culture of innovation and digital fluency in order to work with countries to help achieve their national development priorities through the deployment of such capabilities. Examples of this work included supporting the development of digital public infrastructure and digital literacy in countries with heavy debt burdens; ensuring that governments had the early warning and foresight tools they needed for risk reduction and climate change adaptation; transforming the digital health ecosystem; and strengthening gender justice. All this work must be guided by national priorities, in accordance with the guiding principles that underpinned the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks (UNSDCFs).
7. With regard to the question of *how to reform the United Nations system in ways that enhanced coherence and accountability amid rising uncertainties and negative trends*, the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) emphasized that the principle of “leaving no one behind” had to be central to the UN80 reform as it was to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For UNFPA, as a public health and population agency, this meant working with other entities to advance sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, gender equality, population dynamics and youth empowerment, with each entity drawing on its unique comparative advantage. The Executive Director emphasized that reform should enhance the United Nations’ ability to deliver better, faster and more equitably, especially for women and girls, and that human rights must be the bedrock of its

work. Moving from reactive to anticipatory delivery as well as relying on disaggregated data to design context-specific programming was crucial to helping the United Nations stay ahead of crises and future-proof its work in support of the SDGs. The UNFPA Executive Director also emphasized the importance of the RCs in promoting rights and country needs, operating transparently and with clearly defined roles, being adaptable to changing conditions and leveraging the expertise of each United Nations entity, privileging inputs from local actors. Finally, she underlined the social and economic value of sexual and reproductive health and rights in ensuring that girls and women can complete their education and lead full lives.

8. In her remarks on the *opportunities offered by innovative financing and funding diversification in a context of growing needs and resource constraints*, the Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Funds (UNICEF) said that while it was essential to broaden the funding base, diversification alone was insufficient to close funding gaps and required large investments of time and resources and the support of Member States. Although UNICEF had one of the most diversified funding bases of all United Nations entities, its private sector financing had taken decades to build and could complement but not replace the essential role and contributions of governments (public sector). UNICEF derived 20 percent of its funding from the private sector, which supported initiatives implemented jointly with international financial institutions, foundations and other actors in areas such as climate risk insurance, disease prevention and digital literacy.
9. In his remarks, the Deputy Executive Director of WFP reported that his organization had been forced to cut food assistance to people in need following a 40 percent drop in its resources. WFP was reducing and reorganizing its internal structure, focusing on its work at the country level; prioritizing the quality of its assistance over the quantity; concentrating on reducing aid dependency by supporting and strengthening national systems and capacity for food security, especially through localization; and strengthening its partnerships, with sharper divisions of labour to avoid duplication and overlaps, and an emphasis on mutual support. Examples included WFP's proposal for a joint delivery mechanism with UNICEF, to which WFP would contribute its capacity in logistics and supply chains to support a mechanism for use throughout the United Nations and beyond as part of the UN80 initiative.

**Interactive discussion between the membership of the four Executive Boards, the Presidents of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP and the Principals of the six United Nations entities**

10. During the interactive discussion facilitated by the President of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, delegations raised the following points:
  - Reform efforts should ensure that the United Nations system could respond to global challenges and deliver as one in a context of funding challenges and increasingly complex needs. The entities were encouraged to coordinate their strategic plans; strengthen inter-agency collaboration by increasing their engagement in joint analysis and programming; make greater use of evidence, digital technology and innovation, replicating successful initiatives; and formulate strategies for the United Nations system that addressed long-term issues and priorities in programme countries.
  - Country-level coordination should be strengthened through the UNSDCF, with entities working with national and local governments and civil society to promote the national ownership and leadership of solutions. Given the role of RCs in those endeavours, there were calls for increased and regular investments in the RC system and for implementation of the Funding Compact for the United Nations' support for the SDGs. Concerns were expressed around potential financial cuts and a reduction in the ambition of the United Nations development system.

- Structural reforms under the UN80 initiative should reinforce multilateralism and clarify the mandates of United Nations entities, based on comparative advantages, financial constraints and other factors, while removing duplication and filling gaps between their mandates.
  - A people-centred approach that prioritized vulnerable communities, left no one behind and encompassed gender equality, disability inclusion, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and attention to climate change must remain central to work on development, resilience and poverty reduction. The humanitarian–development–peace nexus was more important than ever.
  - Efforts should be made to bridge persistent resource gaps, including greater exploration and use of South–South and triangular cooperation, innovative and diversified funding models, joint fundraising and co-investment with regional actors. Several delegations said that innovative financing should be seen as complementing but not replacing public sector funding, and donors were encouraged to provide flexible and predictable funding.
  - The Boards should seek to ensure that the proposed reforms equipped the United Nations to work where it was most needed; collaborate with other actors, including international financial institutions, the private sector and civil society; and uphold the humanitarian principles and values. Boards’ workplans should be flexible enough to adapt to the outcomes of ongoing reform initiatives. There was also a call for more proactive sharing of information between entities and their Boards, and among Boards.
  - Further insight was sought into how the six entities were maintaining effectiveness in the face of dwindling resources; how collaboration would be strengthened under the new strategic plans; entities’ plans for strengthening their support for the RC system and addressing the challenges they faced in implementing the United Nations Development System reform; the role of RCs in ensuring that strategic plans were responsive to the priorities of programme countries; the factors considered when entities decided where to make cuts in their internal structures in response to funding shortfalls, particularly when staff were affected; and the measures taken to coordinate actions, streamline operations and optimize resource use in line with the UN80 initiative.
  - Delegations requested examples of how entities worked together to deliver concrete results in specific thematic areas and the sharing of good practices in innovative financing. More information was also sought on the findings from the system-wide evaluation of operational efficiency; the mobilization of innovative financing; how best to incentivise cooperation; how entities could help to harmonize Member State considerations of the digital agenda, including on the global digital compact and digital governance; and how entities could implement the QCPR for enhanced impact in Africa, despite the resource constraints.
11. Suggesting that there would be future opportunities to address the questions raised by Member States, the President of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS assured the Principals of the six entities that Member States recognized their role in supporting the work of the United Nations and invited them to respond to Member States’ comments and observations.

12. The Deputy Executive Director of WFP warned that norms and principles were being challenged as never before and that the gap between needs and the resources available to address them continued to grow, such that United Nations entities were facing an existential threat. While those entities continued to seek ways to increase their efficiency and effectiveness, Member States were urged to look beyond the QCPR and think bigger and bolder as they guided the development of the next strategic plans.
13. The Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF reminded participants that inter-agency coordination had been ongoing for years, removing duplication and building on synergies through successful joint work; coordination was often most useful where needs were greatest. Regarding pooled funding, the importance of leveraging the comparative advantages of each entity meant that pooled funds could not be used for everything, and they should be used to achieve results at scale rather than to meet any imposed target. UNICEF supported the RC system and was its largest financial partner, but the system was not perfect, as explained in an information note prepared by UNICEF for its Board.
14. Focusing on the themes of reform and collaboration, the Executive Director of UNOPS reiterated that the UN80 initiative was a moment of hope and aspiration that should not be viewed as a way to align the level of ambition with resource constraints. UN80 was not a call to choose between efficiency and scale. Instead, reforms should focus on how to scale up efficiently, building on and further consolidating previous reforms. Strengthened collaboration and coordination depended on entities clarifying and adhering to their respective mandates, leveraging the RC system, integrating their activities at the global, regional and local levels, and better integrating policy and operations.
15. In her response, the Executive Director of UN-Women shared examples of how her entity was “doing better with a UN system approach” through joint programming and pooled funds, a systemic change approach in United Nations cooperation, increased efficiencies and enhanced cooperation. Other initiatives included moving UN-Women’s headquarters from New York to Nairobi so as to be closer to the people it served; increasing support by diversifying the entity’s donor base, expanding partnerships and building on strong relationships with governments and civil society; and joint programming in the field, which accounted for more than 30 percent of UN-Women’s work.
16. The Executive Director of UNFPA welcomed delegations’ expressions of support for innovation and collaboration, and the importance they gave to working at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, including in protecting women and young people. That work required considerable advance planning, and the United Nations was very good at carrying out such planning through joint programming, but was less successful in communicating its achievements. She also stressed the value of “daring to question and discard what is not working”. Consistent with UN80, UNFPA was already participating in joint programming, which was now its top source of funding, and was increasing its partnerships with international financial institutions. As UNFPA was voluntarily funded, the doubling of its revenue over the previous decade reflected donor confidence in its capacity to deliver. It was vital, however, to be aware that increasingly politicized rhetoric and polarization concerning issues related to human lives and to people facing danger could jeopardize efforts to address people’s needs.
17. After expressing appreciation to Member States for their advice and guidance over the years, the Administrator of UNDP spoke of the need for greater urgency given the extraordinary moment of crisis with which the United Nations system was faced. He referred to the 20,000 staff members that United Nations entities had had to let go in the previous five months, and the millions of people who had been left without assistance as a result. He emphasized that much that would happen with UN80 would depend on Member States –

they had the responsibility to act on duplications, overlaps of mandates and other matters. He encouraged Member States to take a more proactive approach to addressing the challenges, urging them to undertake a deeper consideration of structural reforms. He called for agencies not to be asked to do the impossible and to maintain the ability of the agencies to function. The primary objective should be to maintain the ability of institutions to serve people in countries, and then also invest in doing it better and together – if agencies were no longer operationally present in country, it would make coordination redundant. He noted that Member States, in their capacity as Board Members, were the entities' greatest hope.

18. In closing the discussion, the President of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS assured the panel that Member States were ready to work together with the United Nations entities – words that were echoed by the Chair.
19. A statement submitted after the meeting by a non-governmental donor to the United Nations system echoed many of the points made by delegations during the discussion, including the calls for the alignment of mandates and capacities, enhancement of the RC system, improved financial accountability and transparency, close coordination and collaboration among United Nations entities, and continued promotion of the rule of law, justice, international humanitarian law and human rights, including gender equality. As well as being the governance bodies of the individual United Nations entities, the Executive Boards were also joint stewards of system-wide coherence. Further information was sought on how entities were engaging with their field offices, United Nations country teams and RCs to ensure the link between national programmes and priorities; how the UN80 initiative could be implemented to promote a system-wide approach that realized efficiency gains and increased impact; and the measures being taken to mitigate the risk of cuts in staffing resulting in the loss of critical expertise and institutional knowledge.

### **III. TOPIC 2: Enabling greater coherence on the United Nations' duty of care guidance and frameworks to promote accountability, efficiency and commitment to the United Nations workforce**

20. Introducing the topic, the Chair recalled that Board members had a special responsibility for ensuring that entities had the necessary policies, standards and accountabilities in place for meeting their obligations related to the duty of care for personnel before, during and after deployment, particularly in high-risk areas. An effective duty of care framework enabled all national and international employees to feel supported in their work to deliver their entities' missions safely and with integrity. Board members should send a message that they expected their agencies to modernize their approaches and remain responsive to evolving dynamics for national and international staff.

#### **Keynote speech**

21. In his address, WFP's Assistant Executive Director for Workplace and Management reflected on the increasingly challenging conditions in which humanitarian and development personnel were called upon to work, and the need to protect the physical safety and mental health of employees as they served the world's most vulnerable people, often putting their own lives at risk. In that respect, 2024 had been the worst year on record for the loss of United Nations personnel.

22. The Assistant Executive Director described the characteristics of an effective duty of care system, which had to be equitable, transparent, integrated into an organization's culture and supported by the necessary infrastructure and sustained funding. Such systems encompassed management, wellness, operational support and accountability and were applied to all personnel, regardless of their geographic location, staff level, role or contract type. WFP's new framework covered all its employees, and their dependants where appropriate. It was grounded in a duty of care framework approved by the Executive Director and the Board and had a streamlined governance structure that enabled swift reaction when needed. As other United Nations entities were developing their own duty of care frameworks, the Assistant Executive Director urged them to work together to develop a single framework for the whole United Nations system, consistent with the "One UN" approach.

**Panel discussion with the Director of Human Resources at UNFPA and the Director of UNICEF's Division of People and Culture**

23. As participants in the panel discussion, the Director of Human Resources at UNFPA and the Director of UNICEF's Division of People and Culture were invited to describe two innovations in duty of care at their respective entities and outline the support that they needed from their Boards.
24. The Director of Human Resources at UNFPA said that duty of care processes should be proactive, person-centred, inclusive and responsive to changing circumstances and should improve the lives of personnel, especially in high-risk environments. Her first example of an innovative duty of care initiative was a response to employees' concerns regarding the physical safety of their children attending a local school. It had included training and counselling sessions on how to prevent school-based harassment and address sexual assault and abduction, and the establishment of safe spaces and sexual misconduct focal points in UNFPA offices. The second example concerned the establishment of a network of regional psycho-social counsellors tasked with supporting the well-being of all employees, contractors and consultants, and their families, helping them to deal with trauma, and normalizing requests for help in anticipation of need.
25. UNFPA's flexible working policy also supported the well-being of employees, particularly those caring for elderly parents, young children or other family members with special needs. As part of its duty of care initiatives, UNFPA sought to create a sense of belonging in the workplace by encouraging discussion of difficult and sensitive topics, building awareness and acceptance of people's needs, and treating all employees as individuals. For this work, the entity needed dedicated experts in coaching, mentoring, trauma support, security and psychological support.
26. The Director of UNICEF's Division of People and Culture explained that duty of care was central to UNICEF's principles and values, reflecting its people-centred approach and ensuring that the organization remained well positioned to deliver on its commitments to children. It was implemented through various initiatives designed to foster inclusivity, promote psychological safety, prevent burnout, reduce the strain of repeated deployment to high-stress environments, and improve the living and working conditions of employees working in difficult environments, with specific support for women. Recent innovations included the introduction of psychological risk assessments that facilitated risk prevention and mitigation, thereby minimizing the chances of burnout, absenteeism and human error and supporting operational efficiency. A "burnout toolkit" had been developed to support managers and staff in preventing, assessing and addressing burnout. The development of a framework for staff care in emergencies had been initiated to support staff in emergency settings through internal and external research. For staff members working in high-risk or

hardship locations, UNICEF offered one month of special leave with full pay after the completion of a tour of duty. UNICEF also promoted mobility and assignments to hardship locations based on the principle of burden-sharing among staff members. Observing that duty of care initiatives require continuous recalibration and adaptation to rapidly evolving and complex security environments, the Director called on all entities to come together to build on and expand tools and lessons learned and appealed to the Boards for their continued guidance and funding.

27. Bringing the discussion to a close, the Chair encouraged the Boards and Member States to recognize duty of care as an essential part of the work of United Nations entities that should be included in budgets as a “cost of doing business”. She suggested that entities’ various approaches to providing duty of care be mapped to identify common features and enable coherence and consistency. Given that the limited time available did not allow for further discussion, the Chair invited participants to submit their comments on duty of care for inclusion in the record of the meeting and recommended that future meetings be scheduled to last a day.
28. In a statement submitted after the meeting, the Executive Director of UN-Women said that her entity aligned closely with the duty of care standards of other United Nations entities and benefited from lessons learned from across the United Nations system. The forthcoming United Nations occupational health and safety mechanism would strengthen alignment, knowledge exchange and a shared culture of employee safety and well-being. Duty of care frameworks had to evolve in response to an increasingly complex global risk landscape and demographic changes in United Nations personnel. For UN-Women, duty of care should be holistic and responsive to the diverse stages of life, roles and circumstances of employees, and the entity was committed to contributing to enhanced coordination and shared responsibility with other United Nations entities. The Executive Director thanked Member States for their partnership in advancing inclusive, data-informed and effective duty of care frameworks and working towards a stronger, more responsive United Nations framework.
29. Harmonized protection standards, context-specific safeguards and predictable funding were emphasized as areas for collective action aimed at strengthening United Nations duty of care frameworks in a statement submitted after the meeting by one Member State. Building on the QCPR, the entities should establish standard measurable frameworks for ensuring the physical and mental health of personnel. They should also ensure that duty of care was localized and extended to national staff, and the Funding Compact should be aligned with duty of care imperatives to ensure that protection was sustained and in place where most needed.

#### **IV. Closing remarks**

30. The Vice-President of the Executive Board of UNICEF thanked all participants for their engagement, candour and commitment to advancing the work of the United Nations system. Despite the increasingly complex environment marked by conflict, environmental threats, deepening inequality, technological transformation and restricted fiscal space, the implementation of the QCPR and the formulation of new strategic plans constituted a shared opportunity to strengthen entities’ responses and evolve together to meet the challenges.



31. Exchanges during the meeting had highlighted the need for deeper collaboration and synergy among entities, including enhanced coordination between the Boards on advocacy for the most vulnerable people and communities; the importance of agility and innovation; and the central importance of equity and the prioritization of the most vulnerable people in all aspects of programming. In addition, as United Nations personnel emerged from the deadliest year in recorded history for humanitarian workers, entities must continue to prioritize and invest in the safety and well-being of their employees, including in duty of care and the promotion of harmonized standards and policies. Diversified and flexible funding models should be explored, while entities continued to strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms so as to build trust and maximize impact.
32. Drawing the meeting to a close, the Chair thanked all participants for their insights, reaffirming the importance of working together in the current highly dynamic environment.