



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
20 August 2019

Original: English

---

## Seventy-fourth session

Items 23 (a) and 143 of the provisional agenda\*

### Operational activities for development: operational activities for development of the United Nations system

#### Joint Inspection Unit

## Review of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

### Note by the Secretary-General

#### Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Review of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women” (see [A/74/306](#)).

---

\* [A/74/150](#).



*Summary*

In its report entitled “Review of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women” (see [A/74/306](#)), the Joint Inspection Unit undertook a system-wide evaluation of the effectiveness, added value and impact of the System-wide Action Plan as a tool for performance monitoring and accountability. The review covered the first phase of implementation of the Plan, which began in 2012 and ended in December 2017.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report and supported many of its conclusions.

## I. Introduction

1. In its report entitled “Review of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women” (see [A/74/306](#)), the Joint Inspection Unit presented a system-wide evaluation of the effectiveness, added value and impact of the System-wide Action Plan as a tool for performance monitoring and accountability. The main objectives of the report were: (a) to provide the General Assembly with an assessment of the Plan as a system-wide performance monitoring and accountability framework; (b) to review the processes and procedures for its implementation across the United Nations system; and (c) to share good practices and lessons learned. The review covered the first phase of implementation of the Plan, which began in 2012 and ended in December 2017.

## II. General comments

2. The organizations welcome the report and its findings. They acknowledge the robustness of the methodology as the foundation of the review’s thoroughness and scope, as well as the participatory approach utilized to capture the full extent of the experience of the United Nations system with the Plan and its implementation between 2012 and 2017.

3. The organizations note the positive review of the Plan as a catalyst for progress towards gender mainstreaming, a truly unique system-wide model of a well-elaborated framework and, of great importance, a system-wide achievement.

4. The organizations find the analysis provided to be of great value, as are the conclusions and recommendations suggested, given that they can contribute to increasing the quality of results and the engagement of the leadership and executive management in the process to prepare an updated version of the Plan, known as 2.0, so that both the implementation and the reporting are better anchored at the individual organization level and across the system.

5. The organizations appreciate that the recommendations are directed at the various prongs of the United Nations system, all of which, when working together, enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the objectives that the Plan embodies.

6. The organizations welcome the recognition of the special needs and related capacities of smaller entities and reiterate the importance of taking those individual characteristics into consideration when undertaking assessments.

7. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) appreciates the review’s positive assessment, based on feedback from the participating entities, of the coordination and facilitation role of UN-Women, its work in leveraging inter-agency networks and its overall client orientation.

8. The organizations partially support the proposed recommendations.

## III. Comments on specific recommendations

### Recommendation 1

**The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should critically assess on a regular basis the quality assurance mechanisms in place in their organization to ensure that ratings by indicator under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women**

**are accurate according to the technical notes issued by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and that such ratings are appropriately supported by evidence.**

9. The organizations welcome recommendation 1. In this context, UN-Women plans to create guidance to improve the quality assurance capacity in the context of reporting on the updated version of the Plan (2.0) and encourage more systematic peer reviews across the United Nations system.

10. The organizations note that it would be important to review the benchmarks and related technical notes, make them adaptable to their respective mandates and ensure that there is harmonization with the evaluation offices.

11. The organizations underscore the importance of enhancing internal capacity for gender mainstreaming and monitoring progress, in line with the Plan, as well as of having resources in place to support quality assurance mechanisms.

### **Recommendation 2**

**Before the end of 2020, the members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination should coordinate within the Board's existing mechanisms to undertake a comprehensive review of the results achieved following the implementation of the first phase of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and provide a forum for endorsing the framework as revised in 2018.**

12. The organizations generally support the spirit of recommendation 2 and welcome further discussion of possible approaches within the existing mechanisms of the Board.

13. Given the positive experience of the current review by the Joint Inspection Unit, the organizations hope that a similar review will be carried out by the Unit in the period from 2022 to 2023, after a five-year implementation period for the new Plan (2.0) and the implementation cycles of the United Nations country team Plan gender equality scorecard.

### **Recommendation 3**

**Starting with the next reporting cycle, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women should expand the content of the report on the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women to be presented by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Economic and Social Council and indicate the progress made by individual reporting entities, the drivers of success and the challenges the entities face.**

14. The organizations partially support recommendation 3 and note that, while they are proud of their own achievements and support the principle of transparency, they consider the Plan to be an incentive and believe that disclosing the disaggregated figures of individual entities will reduce the ownership and sustainability of the changes, ultimately undermining the balance between accountability and incentives.

15. The confidential nature of the report on the Plan provides political support to the gender teams in promoting high organizational standards on gender mainstreaming. The risk of inflating self-reporting owing to the removal of confidentiality has also been mentioned by many.

#### Recommendation 4

**The legislative and governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should review the UN-Women annual letter addressed to the executive management, accompanied by indications of strategies and measures envisioned by the executive heads to be undertaken to improve compliance with the indicators included in the System-wide Action Plan and their expected contribution to gender equality and the empowerment of women.**

16. The organizations partially support recommendation 4. Whereas the United Nations system is committed to transparency and accountability with regard to gender mainstreaming, the entities support flexibility with regard to the form in which information is presented to their governing bodies.

17. The organizations note that the letter was not designed to serve the proposed functions and that its circulation will duplicate tools and processes, place an additional reporting burden on generally small gender teams and have a negative impact on the ownership of corporate goals and the means of their implementation.

18. The organizations underscore that the new Plan (2.0) must include a clear section on remedial plans.

#### Recommendation 5

**Before the completion of the System-wide Action Plan 2.0, the executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should ensure an independent assessment of effective progress towards gender mainstreaming to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women within their organization, using the Action Plan as a benchmark, as applicable.**

19. The organizations generally support recommendation 5. They note, however, that it exceeds what is currently set out in performance indicator 4 of the Plan 2.0, in which it is stated that the independent audit should be focused on issues of organizational culture and an external, independent assessment or evaluation is explicitly called for.

20. Some organizations suggest that the implementation of recommendation 5 should be accompanied by specific, additional resources to avoid exacerbating the weak performance of the indicators related to architecture and resource allocation.

21. A standardized approach or methodology, to be used systematically across the United Nations system for assessing effective progress towards gender mainstreaming in order to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women within an organization, would be likely to best serve the purposes of the review, also enabling harmonization for the purpose of comparing results.

22. Some organizations are currently undertaking comprehensive independent evaluations of their gender action plans and note that any other separate assessment would duplicate those efforts.

23. Given the significant investment of staff time required for evaluations and reviews, it would appear unlikely that an entity could meaningfully participate in both a system-wide review and an internal evaluation, both conducted within a short timespan.