

Background Note: Briefing to the Executive Board, Second Regular Session 2024

“Management response to the Joint Inspection Unit review of management and administration in the UN-Women”

I. Introduction:

UN-Women management expresses its appreciation to the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations (JIU) Inspectors for their objective and insightful report on the Review of Management and Administration (MAR) in UN-Women (JIU/REP/2024/1), and for the iterative and collaborative process in which the review was conducted.

The report is the first management and administration review of UN-Women and was part of the JIU’s programme of work for 2023. It contains nine formal recommendations, of which five are addressed to the Executive Director and four to the Executive Board, and 53 informal recommendations, which provide additional suggestions for further reinforcing the management framework and related practices in UN-Women.

The objective of the review was for the JIU to provide an independent assessment of organizational arrangements and processes, regulatory frameworks, and related practices concerning UN-Women’s management and administration, with the aim to identify opportunities for UN-Women to further enhance its effectiveness and efficiency. The review focused on the areas of governance, leadership, and executive management; strategic planning and change management; organizational structure and field presence; budget and finance management; human resources management; information and communications technology; other administrative services; risk management; accountability and oversight; outreach and advocacy; partnerships management; and inter-agency collaboration.

Overall, the JIU MAR report supports UN Women’s achievements, role, and mandate, as well as its continued growth ‘*to further fulfill its unique triple mandate*’. It also notes that UN Women ‘*should be further empowered as a central actor in and a custodian of the gender agenda, as well as a knowledge hub, working in partnership with all the stakeholders to ensure that a gender perspective is properly reflected in policies and programmes across the world*’.

This document sets out UN-Women management’s responses and comments to the nine formal recommendations. UN Women is pleased to note that all five recommendations addressed to the Executive Director have been accepted by management. For the four recommendations addressed to the Executive Board, UN-Women provides some management insights aimed at assisting the Executive Board’s consideration and response, as appropriate. As always, UN-Women will be guided by the Executive Board in this regard.

II. General comments:

UN-Women management is pleased to note the Inspectors’ acknowledgement of UN-Women personnel’s engagement and cooperation in conducting the present review.

UN-Women recognizes the timeliness of the JIU’s review and the relevance of its insights and recommendations, particularly given ongoing corporate initiatives, such as the pivot to countries and regions to bring UN-Women closer to the women and girls whom it serves, and the strengthening of corporate ‘second line’ functions. UN-

Women is pleased to report that management actions for these initiatives are already underway and progressing on track.

Additionally, UN-Women appreciates the recognition of the Inspectors of many of UN-Women's notable accomplishments towards maturing its operational efficiency and effectiveness, including in the following areas:

- a) UN-Women has taken positive steps to advance the gender equality agenda, is fully committed to achieving transformational results at scale, and its staff and personnel are passionate in pursuing the Entity's triple mandate in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner.
- b) UN-Women has achieved significant and remarkable growth over the past decade. The steady growth of UN-Women's resources may be interpreted not only as support for its mandate but also as an affirmation of stakeholders' confidence in UN-Women's ability to operationally deliver on its commitments.
- c) Survey responses from Member States indicate high levels of satisfaction with the quality and impartiality of support services the UN-Women Executive Board secretariat provides to the Executive Board, as well as with the monitoring and implementation of Executive Board decisions. Inspectors also acknowledge the positive achievements of UN-Women in supporting the effective functioning of the Commission of the Status of Women.
- d) UN-Women has seen continuous improvements in internal governance through the establishment of effective mechanisms, such as the Business Review Committee (BRC), which was found to have increased the coherence of programmatic operations. The Quarterly Business Review, a management tool to enable data-driven organizational decision-making, and the working-level Technical Management Group were positively assessed as being of high quality. Additionally, the establishment of the Budget Allocation Committee (BAC), which was operationalized in 2023 to advise executive leadership on resource planning and allocation, was highlighted as a positive development. Using a results-driven and risk-informed approach, the BAC covers all funding sources with an organization-wide perspective to maximize the impact of all investments.
- e) For the past 13 years since its establishment, UN-Women has consistently received unqualified audit opinions from the United Nations Board of Auditors on its financial statements. This attests to UN-Women's diligence in exercising its fiduciary responsibilities and ensuring robust budgetary and financial management processes and controls.
- f) The upward trajectory of UN-Women's International Aid Transparency Initiative rating and developments related to the UN-Women Transparency Portal are noted as positive examples in enhancing transparency and demonstrating accountability to promote trust among existing and future funding partners.
- g) UN-Women's strategic planning has improved in recent years, with Inspectors noting several good practices aimed at promoting accountability, such as the promulgation of the Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Policy in October 2023 and the fact that all headquarters units and field offices are required to prepare Strategic Notes that make explicit linkages to the Strategic Plan and its indicators. This is enabling senior managers to contextualize and align their respective division's or office's objectives with corporate objectives, as well as with national priorities.
- h) UN-Women continues to increase its risk management maturity. The first-ever corporate risk appetite statement was rolled out in 2022, with ensuing guidance for risk tolerance boundaries promulgated in 2023. The Inspectors welcome that risk management responsibilities are covered by a key performance indicator with various functions at headquarters and in the field as part of the performance appraisal system since 2021.
- i) UN-Women's promulgation and implementation in 2023 of the Policy, Procedure, and Guidance Framework Policy promotes a standardized approach to enhancing maturity in internal policy cycle

management. The Inspectors considered UN-Women's minimum requirement of reviewing and revising all policies and procedures once every four years, as necessary, as a good practice.

- j) The Inspectors commended UN-Women personnel for their efforts in ensuring a successful transition to the new cloud-based ERP system Quantum, which took place in 2023. UN-Women also maintains well-integrated information and communication technology systems and tools that facilitate efficient and collaborative work across the organization.
- k) UN-Women's Internal Control Framework (ICF) was overhauled in 2023 in line with the three lines model. The revised framework aligns with the ICF profiles in Quantum and ensures that internal controls are robust, transparent, and supports the achievement of organizational goals.
- l) UN-Women crafted and implemented two new strategies to advance partnerships and resourcing: the Strategy for Public Partnerships and Resource Mobilization 2023-2025 and the Private Sector Engagement Strategy 2023-2025. The strategies are complemented by corresponding policies and procedures, which provide the corporate vision and define the funding targets, related roles, and responsibilities across the organization.
- m) UN-Women's advocacy and communication efforts have reached a diverse audience, including Member States, non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector, the media, and the general public, and continue targeting the most influential constituencies in the gender equality space. Civil society organizations have been and continue to be UN-Women's long-standing partners.
- n) The appointment of UN-Women's first-ever Ethics Advisor is noted as a positive development. With an organization-wide remit, the Ethics Advisor supports the fostering of an ethical organizational culture and facilitates addressing workplace issues comprehensively.
- o) UN-Women has benefitted from the joint engagements and data-sharing synergies enabled by the co-location of the Internal Audit Service (IAS) and the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) within the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS). This facilitated the joint conduct of risk identification processes, bringing further coherence to the oversight universe and promoting effective use of resources.

These achievements notwithstanding, UN-Women recognizes that ensuring optimal organizational effectiveness and efficiency is an ongoing process of continuous improvements. This is also why the Entity has made business transformation an essential component of the Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency (OEE) framework of its 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. The following section provides more detailed management responses and reflections on the specific recommendations made by the JIU Inspectors in the context of their review.

III. UN-Women Management Responses and comments to formal recommendations

A. Formal recommendations addressed to the Executive Director

Governance and Leadership

Count	Recommendation 2 – B. Executive Management	UN-Women Management Response
Accepted		
1	The Executive Director should, by mid-2025, revise the terms of reference of the executive management committees in order to improve complementarity and synergies among them, take measures to include adequate field representation and ensure their proper functioning through regular meetings and record-keeping for the purposes of transparency and accountability in decision-making.	<p>UN-Women agrees with, and has implemented, this recommendation. In April 2024, UN-Women’s Executive Director formally launched the organization’s updated internal governance framework. Key elements of this redefined architecture include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A revised Internal Management Framework, with an emphasis on integrating UN Women’s governance structures, including through clear reporting lines and coordination amongst the Secretariats of the relevant bodies. • The launch of the Global Management Team (in lieu of the former Senior Management Team) -- with improved balance in strategic focus and representation between HQ and the field. <p>This update was accompanied by revised Terms of Reference (where appropriate) for all constituent bodies, which specify the scope and mandate of each internal governance body, outline key procedural elements (such as meeting frequency, chairing arrangements, and membership), and clarify decision-making roles. All revised Terms of Reference will be issued as part of UN Women’s Policy, Procedures and Guidance (PPG).</p>

Financial Framework

Count	Recommendation 3 – A. Funding Model and Financial Resources	UN-Women Management Response
Accepted		
2	The Executive Director should, by the end of 2025, issue a standard operating procedure complementing the UN-Women Cost Recovery Policy, as well as other guidance documents, to support implementation of standardized cost recovery principles and practices across the Entity, supported by specific training sessions.	<p>UN-Women agrees with this recommendation and is actively working to ensure full implementation of its Cost Recovery Policy. In this regard, a dedicated Direct Project Cost (DPC) Team has been instituted to finalize the standard operational procedures and other guidance documents to support the implementation of standardized cost recovery</p>

		guidance and templates for consistent application. Capacity-building sessions and the establishment of a help desk will further support this work.
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Management Framework

Count	Recommendation 7 – E. Knowledge Management	UN-Women Management Response
Accepted		
3	The Executive Director should, by 2026, finalize a comprehensive knowledge management strategy to support an organization-wide approach to knowledge management, aligned with the mandate, goals and objectives of UN-Women, and place its implementation under the responsibility of a senior-level officer to strengthen its thought leadership in gender equality and empowerment of women.	UN-Women management agrees with this recommendation. A new Knowledge Management Strategy will be completed by the end of 2025 to accompany the new Strategic Plan 2026-2029.

Human Resources Management

Count	Recommendation 8 – A. Human Resources Management Framework	UN-Women Management Response
Accepted		
4	The Executive Director should prepare a comprehensive human resources management strategy covering all parts of UN-Women and all categories of its workforce, and report biennially on its implementation to the Executive Board, starting in 2026.	UN-Women management agrees with the recommendation to develop a new HR management strategy, which will be prepared alongside and in line with the requirements of the new Strategic Plan 2026-2029. During the preparation of this Strategic Plan, UN-Women will also review and update the organizational effectiveness and efficiency indicators related to HR management. The implementation of results against key milestones and targets will be regularly monitored and reported on in line with the Strategic Plan monitoring and reporting process, including through the Executive Director’s Annual Report to the Executive Board.
Count	Recommendation 9 – B. UN-Women Personnel	UN-Women Management Response
Accepted		
5	The Executive Director should introduce a regular reporting mechanism on the use of the UN-Women affiliate workforce, starting in 2026, assessing the use of such contractual	The implementation of this recommendation is in progress. UN-Women has implemented a corporate dashboard that provides information to internal stakeholders on the use of the UN-Women affiliate

	<p>modalities within the Entity in terms of flexibility, cost-effectiveness, reputational risk, institutional knowledge and the nature of the functions performed, among others.</p>	<p>workforce, updated daily. In addition, UN-Women reports to its governing and oversight bodies (e.g., UNBOA, ACABQ, etc.) on the use of affiliate workforce. UN-Women will review and update the organizational effectiveness and efficiency indicators related to HR management during the preparation of the new Strategic Plan 2026-2029. It will include a KPI on the use of the affiliate workforce and report on this KPI in line with the SP monitoring process.</p>
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B. Formal recommendations addressed to the Executive Board

Governance and Leadership

Count	Recommendation 1 – A. Governance Framework	UN-Women Management Insights
6	<p>The Executive Board should request that the Executive Director submit, at the Board’s 2025 annual session, a proposal for enhancing the interactions between the Board and the Commission on the Status of Women within the multi-tiered intergovernmental structure of UN-Women, as envisaged by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/289, allowing consideration of the work of the Entity in a more integrated manner, and transmit the proposal to the Bureau of the Commission.</p>	<p>[Note: UN-Women takes note of the recommendation addressed to the Executive Board and offers some insights for consideration. UN-Women management stands ready to be guided by any request from the Executive Board in this regard.]</p> <p>In response to the recommendation to enhance interactions between the UN-Women Executive Board (EB) and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), UN-Women stands ready to support its governing bodies as appropriate.</p>

Financial Framework

Count	Recommendation 4 – B. Principles of Recourse Allocation	UN-Women Management Insights
7	<p>The Executive Board should request that the Executive Director prepare a report assessing the relevance of the core programmable criteria adopted by the Consultative Committee of the United Nations Development Fund for Women in 2009, in the light of the current working environment and the upcoming implementation of the pivot to the field initiative, and submit a proposal for change, as required, for consideration by the Board at its first regular session in 2026.</p>	<p>[Note: UN-Women takes note of the recommendation addressed to the Executive Board and offers some insights for consideration. UN-Women management stands ready to be guided by any request from the Executive Board in this regard.]</p> <p>Upon the request of the Executive Board, UN Women will endeavor to submit a report to the Executive Board in the 2026 Annual Session following a comprehensive assessment of the relevance of the core programmable criteria adopted</p>

		by the Consultative Committee of the United Nations Development Fund for Women in 2009.
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Organizational Structure

Count	Recommendation 5 – C. Pivoting to the Field	UN-Women Management Insights
8	The Executive Board should request that the Executive Director present, at the 2025 annual session of the Board, a plan for the implementation of the pivot to the field initiative with an elaboration of the substantive and economic returns, accompanied by a realistic determination of the financial resources required to operate such a reform in a way that enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of UN-Women in pursuing its triple mandate to serve all its stakeholders and support its personnel, and report on the implementation of the initiative on an annual basis.	<p>[Note: UN-Women takes note of the recommendation addressed to the Executive Board and offers some insights for consideration. UN-Women management stands ready to be guided by any request from the Executive Board in this regard.]</p> <p>UN-Women has provided detailed and regular updates to the Executive Board on the aims, scope, and implementation of UN-Women's internal reform initiatives, including its Pivot to Regions and Countries, as part of its briefing on the implementation of Resolution 72/279 on UNDS Reform.</p> <p>UN Women is committed to continuing to provide such updates to the Executive Board.</p>

Management Framework

Count	Recommendation 6 – B. Internal Control Framework	UN-Women Management Insights
9	The Executive Board should direct the Executive Director to prepare a comprehensive action plan aimed at strengthening the second-line functions within UN-Women, containing milestones for its implementation, including a statement of internal control, and resource requirements in the context of the integrated budget 2026–2027, and submit it for consideration by the Board at its 2025 annual session.	<p>[Note: UN-Women takes note of the recommendation addressed to the Executive Board and offers some insights for consideration. UN-Women management stands ready to be guided by any request from the Executive Board in this regard.]</p> <p>UN-Women agrees with the recommendation and will address its substance in the context of the development of the next Integrated Budget, which will be presented to the Board at the 2025 Annual Session.</p>

IV. Way forward

As the above management responses and comments indicate, UN-Women management largely agrees with the JIU's recommendations in the key areas for improvement identified and has already initiated work in a number of these areas. Management actions to implement each of the formal recommendations addressed to its Executive Director will be duly reported on using the JIU's Web-Based Tracking System, as per established practice. On the JIU recommendations addressed to the Executive Board, UN-Women stands ready to support, and to respond to any requests from its Executive Board. In addition, UN-Women has taken note of the 53 informal recommendations, which will be duly considered as relevant, including in the context of the development of UN-Women's next Strategic Plan 2026-2029 and related Divisional and Office Strategic Notes, the development of the 2026-2027 Integrated Budget, and/or in the ongoing implementation of the organizational pivot to countries and regions.

Moving forward, UN-Women will continue to monitor progress on management action plans for all accepted formal recommendations, ensuring that viable and actionable measures are put in place within UN-Women's available resources and context.

Across all its operations, UN-Women remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring the highest standards of transparency and accountability, and to continuous improvements in organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Management recognizes that optimizing resources, structures, and processes is key to ensuring that UN-Women is equipped to deliver and scale up transformative results, as a key partner in a repositioned UN development system and as a central actor in advancing the gender equality agenda in the lead-up to 2030 and beyond.