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Update on organizational culture and diversity

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Executive Board decision 2023/11, which in paragraph 4 “*Requests* UNICEF to provide an update to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2024, as an item for decision, on how the organization is improving organizational culture and on its actions to prevent and respond to all forms of discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination, and to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion”.

This report provides an update on the ongoing work of UNICEF to strengthen its organizational culture, improve the practice of its core values and become a more diverse and inclusive workplace. June 2024 marks five years since the start of organizational culture change. This report looks at the changes since then, while also highlighting key developments in 2023.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section IX.

* [E/ICEF/2024/10](#).



I. Overview

1. In June 2019, UNICEF embarked on a journey of culture change. This was sparked by a series of reports it had commissioned, including the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority, and the Morgan Lewis Report that looked at how UNICEF handled allegations of sexual harassment. UNICEF has completed the certification process by Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE) three times since 2018, and has also been working to advance diversity, equity and inclusion by implementing the recommendations from the 2021 report of the internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination. In short, a comprehensive set of recommendations and frameworks related to organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion have guided UNICEF.

2. This report takes stock of the progress made. Challenges and lessons learned are also documented, as well as future priorities and planned inter-agency collaboration. With respect to the Independent Task Force report, 81 per cent of the recommendations have been completed, 12 per cent are in progress, 5 per cent were not accepted and 2 per cent were not considered feasible at this time. For the Task Team report, 19 per cent of recommendations have been completed, 41 per cent are in progress and 33 per cent have not been initiated.

Figure I

Status of recommendations of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority as of December 2023

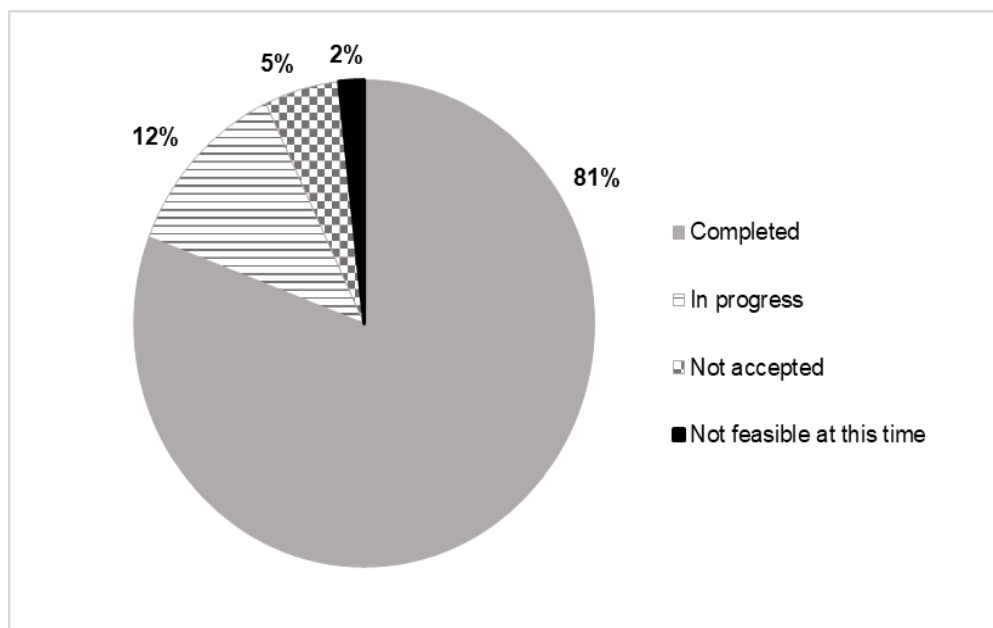
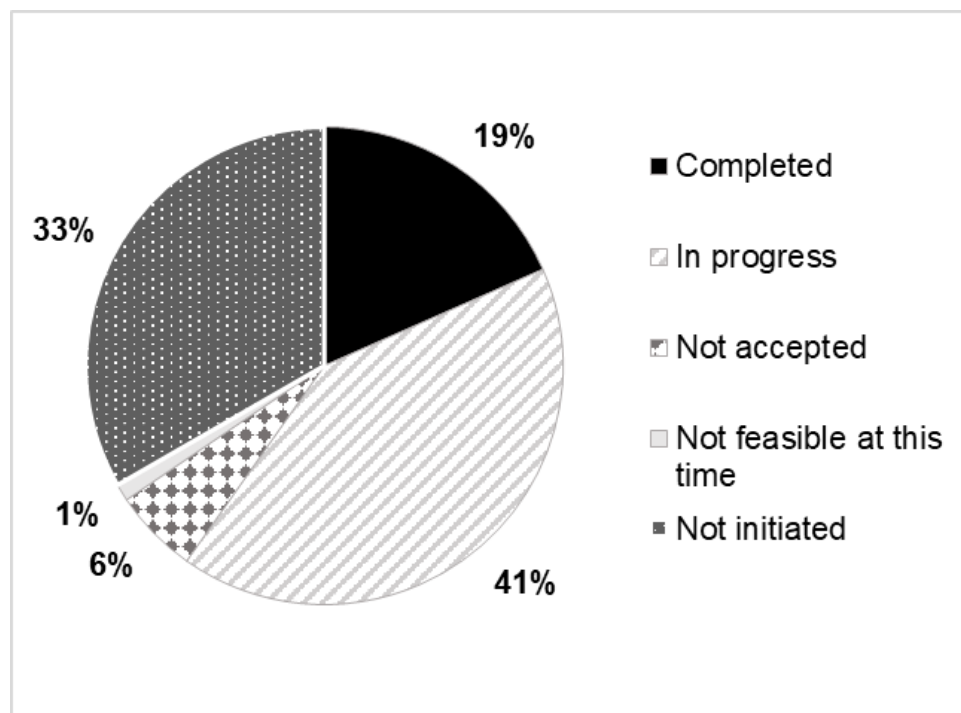


Figure II
**Status of Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination recommendations
as of December 2023**



3. The culture of UNICEF has changed, and continues to change, and its impact is evidenced in quantitative and qualitative ways. The existence of policies, tools, data and the capacity to deal with different aspects of organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion indicate attention to issues that were previously unaddressed or under-addressed. These include managing hybrid teams, respecting the core values in dealing with each other as UNICEF staff, and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce. Regular data on organizational culture is generated, shared and followed up on at country, regional and global levels. UNICEF has adopted a new approach to promote a more diverse representation in its workforce, along with updated metrics and monitoring mechanisms. Conversations about ethics, the core values, leadership role-modelling, discrimination and inappropriate behaviour are taking place openly and regularly in 2024 in a way that was not done before June 2019.

4. One of the most visible signs of change was the creation, in June 2019, of a dedicated seven-person team on organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion. The team has driven the work on culture change with a ‘whole of UNICEF approach’, working closely with partners at global, regional and country levels, such as staff associations, human resources colleagues, employee resource groups, leaders and managers, peer support volunteers, staff counsellors, ethics and culture champions and accountable business owners, including the Division of Human Resources, the Ethics Office, the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI), and the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy. Taking such a wide-ranging ‘whole of UNICEF’ approach to culture change has been one of the enabling factors to the progress made thus far.

5. Inter-agency collaboration has always been part of the UNICEF culture change process, whether through more established forums such as the United Nations High-

level Committee on Management, or less formal networks such as the United Nations Laboratory for Organizational Change and Knowledge Change Management Network and the informal inter-agency working group on anti-racism. These coordination platforms have enabled technical and high-level discussions to be initiated and to be mutually reinforcing.

6. Now, after five years of implementation, UNICEF can identify some critical challenges and lessons. One persistent challenge has been the reluctance of some leaders and managers to embrace the notion that the culture change work is essential, rather than merely desirable, for staff to be able to deliver better on the mandate of UNICEF. With the renewed system-wide attention of the United Nations to issues of organizational culture and risk management in 2023–2024, UNICEF can further internalize and deepen its understanding of the value of organizational culture and its crucial impact on all areas of its work. It is therefore critical to ensure leaders and managers act as role models in the culture UNICEF is building, and are being held accountable. Without this, there can be a ‘say-do’ gap, undermining staff trust in the organization, as well as in its overall accountability and credibility. Another lesson has been the need to ensure a focus on changing individual behaviours, rather than relying primarily on interventions related to policy, data, tools and systems, to shift the culture. Focusing more on individual behaviours also requires stronger attention to individual accountabilities, including for performance and for delivery of results for children.

II. Evidence-based and data-driven approach

7. The culture change journey began in 2019 with various independent reviews and reports. Since then, UNICEF has continued the focus on regular, objective assessments to guide its work on organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion. Data are critical for understanding the situation of culture and diversity, equity and inclusion, and for demonstrating progress (or lack of it). While it is impossible to measure all aspects of organizational culture, UNICEF has made great progress over the past five years to capture some of the critical aspects, disseminate the data, and – most critically – take action informed by the data.

8. While UNICEF has measured employee engagement periodically since 2011, it started a more frequent mini employee engagement survey in June 2021 with the development and implementation of the Pulse Check on workplace culture survey. The survey measures key aspects of workplace culture in each UNICEF office every six months, with the results disaggregated by gender and disability and available in almost real time (i.e. within three working days of the survey’s completion concurrently to all UNICEF staff globally). The Pulse Check is a complementary tool to the Global Staff Survey. The most recent Pulse Check was completed in November 2023 and had a response rate of 68 per cent, or more than 12,000 respondents. The survey included three key changes: the core questions included one on sustainability after the issue was added to UNICEF core values in 2022; a demographic question on disability was included, allowing the Pulse Check to disaggregate data for this group for the first time; and a subset of questions related to mental health stigma was asked, based on feedback from staff association representatives and staff counsellors.

9. The overall UNICEF workplace culture score was 68.6 per cent in 2023, a drop of 2.6 percentage points since the previous Pulse Check in 2022, the first time that the score has dropped below 70 per cent. The highest and lowest-scoring areas remained largely the same as in previous Pulse Checks. The highest-scoring areas were empowerment, work-life harmony, trust in supervisors and internal

communications. Gender differences became wider in all dimensions, with women experiencing the workplace culture less positively than men. The new question on sustainability shows that more work is needed in this area; only 63 per cent of respondents agree that their office considers the environmental impact of UNICEF work.

10. On mental health, 70 per cent of employees felt that their manager would support them appropriately if they disclosed a mental health issue. This is very positive, indicating a high degree of trust in direct supervisors on this issue. At the same time, however, survey results show the need to address the stigma around taking sick leave for mental health issues and to improve mental health literacy for all colleagues. Significant focus was given to strengthening the capacity of managers to be key partners in supporting the mental health and well-being of their staff in 2023, with a range of learning options provided globally.

11. After the November 2023 Pulse Check, follow-up conversations were held with 10 of the lowest-scoring offices (and, upon request, with other offices) to provide tailored support and advice on how to improve their workplace culture. In addition to being a forum for country-specific discussions and advice, these conversations also reassure staff and management in an office that the organization is paying attention to their workplace culture and that support is available.

12. The data from the Pulse Check are integrated into two key performance platforms: the Office Performance Scorecards, which include key performance indicators across programmes and operations/management for all offices; and the performance appraisal reports for Heads of Offices. This enables accountability and elevates the visibility of workplace culture, and is comparable to other office-level metrics related to the delivery of results, programme implementation, partnerships and financial management.

13. One of the recommendations of the Task Team report was to collect data on staff perceptions disaggregated by multiple demographic factors. In the 2022 Global Staff Survey, for the first time, staff had the option to anonymously disclose their race/ethnicity, as well as their age, number of years they had worked for UNICEF, gender, disability status, contract type and whether they were in a supervisory role. This allowed a more in-depth and intersectional analysis of the experience of different groups of staff.

14. Another recommendation from both the reports of the Task Team and the Independent Task Force was to review the career progression of UNICEF staff, looking historically at what factors encouraged or impeded advancement, from a diversity, equity and inclusion point of view. The Division of Human Resources is conducting this analysis and the results are expected later in 2024.

15. In 2021–2022, as part of the UNICEF Strategic Plan evaluation, the enabler on dynamic and inclusive people and culture' was evaluated as 'sufficient/good enough'. In 2023, performance management in UNICEF was audited and the findings were included in the 2023 annual update on organizational culture and diversity to the Executive Board. An evaluation of the reasonable accommodation fund was completed in January 2024. The evaluation featured a reference group that included several experts on disability inclusion in the United Nations system as well as from other organizations, which helped to ensure that the evaluation was informed by the latest thinking in this area. The evaluation found that the reasonable accommodation fund approach is generally in line with the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and with the objectives outlined in the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. The reasonable accommodation fund has adopted several good and proven practices such as a centralized fund, a self-referral

pathway and an online application form. The evaluation noted that perception of the positive effects of the reasonable accommodation is highly satisfactory and systematically positive. Eighty-eight per cent of survey respondents who used the fund consider that it enabled them to perform job duties that they would otherwise have had difficulty in carrying out.

16. The evaluation flagged some areas of concern:

(a) A low level of awareness of the provision of reasonable accommodation among UNICEF personnel;

(b) Lack of information about who is eligible for reasonable accommodation, despite the availability of various documents on internal SharePoint pages and on the UNICEF careers web page;

(c) The current culture in the organization has led some employees with disabilities to feel uncomfortable disclosing their disability to request reasonable accommodation;

(d) Issues related to data protection of personal information;

(e) Lack of a complaint mechanism.

17. UNICEF will develop its management response to the evaluation of the reasonable accommodation fund in 2024, through consultations across different accountable business units.

18. Since 2021, the Culture and Diversity team has been using an anonymous online questionnaire to collect qualitative data about the experience of colleagues leaving UNICEF employment, including on matters of workplace culture. As at 31 January 2024, 2,761 colleagues had completed the survey. While 95 per cent of colleagues who leave would recommend UNICEF as an employer to others, and an equal percentage would consider working with UNICEF again, differences in culture-related scores persist across different staff levels and demographics.

19. Since 2021, as part of its response to the Task Team report, OIAI has collected data and reported on allegations of discrimination, which are classified by type. In its annual report for 2023, which is also being presented to the Executive Board at the current session, OIAI reported that, in 2023, it had opened eight cases of alleged discrimination, including cases based on race, gender, ethnicity and other characteristics and received 22 reports of sexual harassment. In 10 of the sexual harassment cases received in 2023 or carried over from 2022, OIAI found a factual basis indicating that a staff member had engaged in possible misconduct and sent investigation reports to the Deputy Executive Director, Management, for possible disciplinary proceedings. Six of these 10 cases resulted in findings of misconduct and the imposition of disciplinary sanctions; there was not sufficient evidence in one case to justify a finding of misconduct, and three cases remain under review. In four sexual harassment cases involving non-staff personnel, and in one case involving personnel of another United Nations entity, OIAI submitted investigation reports to the concerned UNICEF office or United Nations entity.

20. In 2023, the Deputy Executive Director, Management imposed sanctions on 23 individuals for misconduct, including sexual harassment, discrimination and sexual exploitation. Since 2020, the Deputy Executive Director, Management has issued six-monthly reports about the disciplinary measures imposed for misconduct cases. These reports provide summaries of the facts of the cases and the specific sanctions imposed. They demonstrate to personnel the factors that are taken into account when deciding on an appropriate sanction, thereby helping to increase transparency and serving as a

deterrent for such behaviour. UNICEF is among the few United Nations entities that issues such reports regularly.

III. Policy, frameworks, tools and guidance

21. Together with data and evidence, the greatest achievements over the past five years have been made in the area of policy, frameworks, tools and guidance related to organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion.

22. Key policies and frameworks developed since 2019 include the following:

- (a) The Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy;
- (b) New human resources policies that provide for more consideration of the spouses of staff members for consultancies and temporary appointments;
- (c) Support measures for dual-career spouses; additional flexibilities with respect to caretaking, bereavement, and family and parental leave;
- (d) More consideration of the unique needs of diverse colleagues (e.g. employees with disabilities) when it comes to rotation and mobility exercises, and on hybrid/flexible work arrangements;
- (e) A new Values Charter that details specific behaviours expected of staff, managers and the organization under each UNICEF core value;
- (f) A Competency Framework to guide the behaviours of UNICEF staff and set the tone for how they work in, and across, teams.

23. In 2024, a new method of addressing workforce diversity is being rolled out, through the ‘whole of diversity approach’, which expands the understanding of equitable geographic representation, maintains a focus on gender parity and adds generational (age) diversity and the representation of persons with disabilities into overall workforce monitoring. In addition, for national staff specifically, UNICEF will devote greater attention to locally specific factors of diversity, such as those related to ethnicity, or first language. Headquarters divisions, regional offices and country offices will develop and use diversity, equity and inclusion road maps to analyse, prioritize and implement strategies to reach under-represented groups. For all recruitments, UNICEF will place a stronger focus on assessing candidates for alignment to the organization’s six core values (care, respect, integrity, trust, accountability and environmental sustainability) while maintaining, as paramount for all recruitments, the expectation of the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity.

24. The new Staff Selection Policy includes attention to factors related to diversity, equity and inclusion. In 2024, UNICEF will be building on the updated human resources delivery model (implementation framework) from 2023. This will entail the development of a more comprehensive 2030 people strategy that will articulate how UNICEF can more effectively attract, retain, empower and encourage the best from all its staff in delivering more effectively on its child rights mission, in line with the core values.

25. Through the development of new tools and other informal guidance, several topics have been addressed. In 2021, tip sheets were produced to follow up on the Pulse Check, providing offices with advice and suggestions for good practice on workplace culture. Good practices were documented from more than 55 offices after the 2020 Global Staff Survey, and more offices are continuing to make significant improvements in their workplace culture. One of the more innovative tools introduced in 2022 was the spectrum of behaviours tool, which catalogues in English, French and

Spanish about 200 behaviours to ‘expect’, ‘question’ or ‘stop’. The tool provides examples of each category of behaviour, as well as informal guidance to staff on how to reflect on and respond to a specific behaviour. A tool kit on how to handle domestic abuse involving UNICEF personnel was produced in 2023 and shared with human resource practitioners. Other approaches developed in 2023 included practical experience-informed guides on maximizing the potential of hybrid/multi-located teams for staff members of diverse backgrounds; cultivating a growth mindset; championing inclusion; and ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion throughout recruitment processes.

26. One of the most important systemic responses to interpersonal conflict is through the informal conflict resolution services offered by the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes. In 2023, the office received 565 complaints and requests for mediation, of which 162 were from UNICEF; a 25 per cent increase. One case can involve one person or entire teams or offices. System-wide findings are reflected in the annual reports published by the Office of the Ombudsman. In 2023, the office received 191 mediation requests, of which only 90 met the threshold to enter actual mediation. Of those, 33 involved UNICEF personnel. The settlement rate of all mediation cases was 86 per cent. In follow-up surveys with a rating scale of 1 to 5, the 33 UNICEF personnel expressed a satisfaction rate of 4.8, on average. Some 450 UNICEF colleagues globally attended outreach and learning programmes on conflict resolution provided by the office. UNICEF continues to promote informal conflict resolution for better outcomes.

IV. Capacity-building and behaviour change

27. One of the first building blocks for organizational culture change and diversity, equity and inclusion is raising awareness and understanding around expectations for individual, team and organizational behaviours. UNICEF has invested considerable efforts in this aspect over the past five years.

28. In 2023 alone, UNICEF organized dedicated learning sessions for more than 80 offices on various topics related to organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion, both in person as part of country visits (often jointly across units, such as the Division of Human Resources, Ethics Office, OIAI and the Culture and Diversity team), as well as through virtual and hybrid sessions. In 2023, 81 ethics training sessions were held with UNICEF offices and divisions and different groups of staff. In addition, during Ethics Month in October, Ethics and Culture Champions conducted discussions on the core value of ‘trust’ in 70 offices, engaging more than 4,000 UNICEF personnel. In total, the Ethics Office reached more than 8,600 colleagues through outreach and training efforts globally. Webinars to raise awareness on how to put UNICEF core values into action were held throughout 2022 and 2023 with colleagues from all regions. In 2023, 84 per cent of UNICEF offices reported that they had carried out internal communication activities linked to a global initiative on UNICEF core values.

29. A new e-learning activity on unconscious bias and being an ‘inclusion champion’ has been developed for release in mid-2024; it will be promoted as a first step for staff in learning about diversity, equity and inclusion. While dedicated diversity, equity and inclusion learning is important, it is also necessary to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion is integrated into other organizational learning packages, such as the Management Masterclass or orientations for new UNICEF representatives and other senior staff. In 2023, 105 staff were trained on diversity, equity and inclusion through organizational learning programmes.

30. In January 2024, UNICEF released the Managing People with Purpose programme, which is designed to equip more than 6,000 UNICEF managers/supervisors with the knowledge, skills, peer support, coaching, emotional intelligence and self-awareness to be more effective in their supervisory roles. The programme is available in English, French and Spanish and is expected to be completed over a period of 18 to 24 months. It was designed based on feedback from more than 2,000 managers who identified their major challenges (e.g. managing underperformance; having sensitive conversations about behavioural issues in their teams; providing constructive feedback; and managing mental health) and preferences for self-development. For example, 60 per cent of managers with less than two years of experience as managers said they found managing underperformance to be very difficult or quite difficult, and even among managers with more than seven years of experience, 50 per cent found it to be very difficult or quite difficult.

31. The programme responds to the need for enhanced support to empower UNICEF managers to be more effective. It also helps UNICEF to hold all managers accountable for how they manage their teams to achieve better results for children. The programme is unprecedented in terms of its scale (i.e. targeting all supervisors at the same time, about 25 per cent of the total UNICEF workforce), and its scope (it includes learning, coaching, peer support, leadership conversations, a managers' resource library and help desk, and a self-assessment tool).

32. All UNICEF employees are required to complete an online training course on the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse of authority. The staff completion rate for the training is 94 per cent, while the completion rate for all personnel is 79 per cent. The Division of Human Resources and Ethics Office are jointly developing an updated e-learning course on sexual harassment for release in the fourth quarter of 2024. Additionally, UNICEF is currently Chair of the United Nations Executive Group to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment (2024–2025). The group's draft workplan (expected to be finalized in April 2024) includes a specialized system-wide training module on the rights and dignity of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, which is intended to be rolled out to all United Nations personnel.

33. A key part of capacity development, other than increasing knowledge and skills, is having the personnel to meet organizational commitments. Over the past five years, UNICEF has restructured key units/functions and increased the number of staff supporting different aspects of organizational culture change and diversity, equity and inclusion. This investment has been evident in the Ethics Office, OIAI, the Division of Human Resources and the Culture and Diversity team. In 2023, the Division of Human Resources expanded the capacity of its Policy, Employee Relations, Compensation and Social Benefits team to support cases of interpersonal conflict resolution, performance management conflict, and the prevention of – and response to – sexual harassment.

34. Similarly, UNICEF is harnessing the power of networks. For example, the Ethics and Culture Champions are a global group of staff who facilitate dialogues on these topics in their offices. They receive training and skills development, and act as moderators and channels for offices to raise awareness and build knowledge on culture and ethics issues. Several country offices have established task forces or committees to coordinate local efforts to improve the workplace culture. They are often made up of staff volunteers, staff association members, peer support volunteers, human resources staff, management and, sometimes members of employee resource groups such as Young UNICEF. On the programmatic side, global technical teams were piloted in 2021 and have evolved into important mechanisms for augmenting UNICEF capacity to deliver technical assistance; to strengthen global thought

leadership and agenda-setting; to promote integrated approaches to global partnerships; to facilitate alignment across cross-cutting technical priorities; and to provide high-quality technical assistance to regional and country offices. As of January 2024, the global technical teams were being further institutionalized across UNICEF, with the adoption of matrix management reporting (another Independent Task Force report recommendation, with the first guidelines on matrix management in 2020).

35. Role-modelling is one of the most powerful ways to effect behaviour change. The Humans of UNICEF programme, launched in 2020 under the leadership of the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy, is one way in which UNICEF showcases staff who live by the core values and, in so doing, inspire others to do the same. By allowing staff to nominate each other for informal, peer-to-peer immediate recognition, the Humans of UNICEF programme serves to focus attention on those colleagues who are key contributors to a team, but who may not always be the most visible, senior or recognized members. Dozens of stories of the Humans of UNICEF have been documented and shared via the UNICEF intranet.

36. Another initiative based on role-modelling is the UNICEF UNwrapped podcast that started in 2023, where leaders (from all levels of the organization) discuss their leadership journeys, ‘best’ failures (i.e. those from which they learned the most), personal and professional learnings and insights in 30-minute interviews with the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture. As of early 2024, six podcasts had been completed, with around 4,000 views. Guests have included UNICEF representatives, the Global Lead on Disability and Development, a staff association regional chair, a regional staff counsellor and the Executive Director.

37. In 2024, UNICEF completed internal behavioural science research on two specific behaviours: speaking up when observing inappropriate behaviour such as microaggressions, and providing constructive feedback. The research was conducted in four geographically diverse offices. In one office, a colleague shared their thoughts on giving and receiving feedback: “...certain teams, certain managers...they encourage a culture of exchange and respect and hearing you without judging you and thinking that this person [is a] complainer, and the way they give you feedback... [is] ‘I’m glad you came to speak to me about this’, or they take some action on it”. In another office, the comment was: “Colleagues are afraid of being targeted or being excluded, and this stops people from ‘speaking up’ in the majority of cases”. These two quotes illustrate that progress is needed at individual level, as well as in teams (social networks) and systems, on encouraging respectful communications. This includes reframing the ‘speak up’ culture (which may be seen in some cultural contexts as confrontational) to a ‘speak with’ culture (an invitation to opening a dialogue).

38. The findings from this behavioural research will be used to adjust and inform interventions related to organizational culture change and diversity, equity and inclusion, such as adaptations to the current performance management system, bystander intervention and stronger interpersonal communication, and to promote non-hierarchical behaviours.

V. Focus on leadership

39. The Independent Task Force report highlighted the importance of leadership and tone-setting at the top. UNICEF has therefore focused on improving the accountability of leaders and managers in its overall organizational culture change. With the isolation and uncertainty of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

in 2020, UNICEF leaders – like leaders everywhere – were even more challenged to demonstrate people-centric leadership.

40. As previously noted, various initiatives have explicitly targeted building the self-awareness, knowledge, skills and behaviours of senior leaders, such as the Senior Leaders Conversations, the Managing People for Purpose support programme, and the UNICEF UNwrapped podcasts. All senior leaders in UNICEF are required to undergo periodic exercises during which they receive feedback from supervisors, supervisees and peers and are required to participate in five hours of executive coaching. The exercises are intended to increase self-awareness and help them to lead more effectively.

41. A key strategy over the past five years has been catalysing and sustaining a continuous conversation on organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion, at global, regional and country levels. At the Global Leadership Meeting in March 2023, UNICEF senior leadership assessed and reflected on the greatest challenges facing children and how UNICEF is responding, and should respond, in order to turn these crises into opportunities for children. Five main themes and commitment areas were agreed, all of which affect UNICEF organizational culture, with two being the most explicit. As an outcome of the Global Leadership Meeting, some key commitments were made: first, “We must lead with our values, with our people, with our partners, and within the contexts/societies in which we work”. In relation to leadership, one participant noted, “Leadership is not just about the leaders but about the people that are part of the larger team. We need a more holistic approach to reinvent/revamp our leadership with a people focus”. Another commitment that emerged of relevance to the culture of UNICEF was: “We are One UNICEF: One Team, working in all contexts and making tough calls with courage”. As one participant challenged their group: “Why is it so difficult? Our culture is a consensus-driven culture. We need a bit of courage for each of us to address the elephant in the room”. For each thematic area, priority actions were identified and their implementation is ongoing.

42. The Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Directors lead periodic global town hall meetings to provide platforms for UNICEF leadership to share updates on work and to listen to questions, concerns and ideas from the workforce. Staff are encouraged to participate and share ideas and questions. The meetings are also an opportunity to highlight the efforts of UNICEF staff working in acute humanitarian crises. On average, these meetings reach 32 per cent of UNICEF staff globally.

43. All regions have put organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion on the agendas of their Regional Management Team meetings, ensuring continuous attention to these issues. Similarly, Country Management Teams discuss and address workplace culture issues as part of regular office management plans, staff retreats, follow-up to the Global Staff Survey and Pulse Check surveys, or other office-wide events and milestones. As of March 2024, 89 per cent of UNICEF offices had established action plans in response to the 2022 Global Staff Survey.

44. While leadership is most often understood in terms of formal power structures, especially in large organizations, it is important to also recognize the crucial role of informal leaders in UNICEF. The behavioural science research mentioned above found that social power dynamics are one of the most significant determinants of people’s behaviour in any given situation, i.e. the local social norms that underpin behaviours, the reactions and perceptions of informal leaders or those with informal influence in the office. Therefore, it will be important to support national staff peer networks, since it is these staff who generally have longer tenures in an office and greater understanding of local social norms. Such support will help them to be more

engaged in advocating and living UNICEF core values and being role models, both internally and externally.

VI. Inter-agency collaboration

45. When UNICEF began to change its organizational culture five years ago, it was the first United Nations agency to dedicate capacity and investment to it. Today, many United Nations entities have similar dedicated staff or offices, indicating a growing recognition of the importance of this issue.

46. UNICEF has co-led various inter-agency forums on this issue, and has consistently shared its initiatives (for example, the Pulse Check survey on workplace culture) with other United Nations entities in the spirit of mutual learning. UNICEF co-leads the subgroup on disability inclusion established under the Working Group on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion of the High-level Committee on Management. UNICEF is also an active member of the diversity, equity and inclusion working group overall, with technical contributions on a United Nations-wide vision and on the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion and a compendium of practices related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

47. As of 2024, UNICEF leads the new Executive Group to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment in the United Nations system, which aims to further strengthen the whole of system work in this area. The group's priorities include ensuring more visible and concrete support to victims/survivors; and an increased focus on changing workplace cultures to prevent sexual harassment and to encourage the reporting of possible cases.

VII. Reflections and lessons learned

48. When UNICEF began to change its organizational culture, it adopted an approach of consistency between the external and internal, i.e. it is an organization committed to the rights of all children, and it must also be a champion of rights for all its staff, without discrimination. This implied that the culture and diversity, equity and inclusion focus could not be limited only to the internal, management and human resources functions, but also had to encompass functions such as procurement, fundraising and partnerships, communications and programming. The Task Team report took this wide-ranging approach in its recommendations. This dual attention to the internal and external has been a strength for UNICEF, as it has linked the culture and diversity, equity and inclusion work squarely with the UNICEF mandate "for every child".

49. Measuring the impact of culture and diversity, equity and inclusion efforts is difficult and requires both quantitative and qualitative approaches and feedback. Proxy indicators and staff perceptions are often the only means available, yet they are imperfect. Data on organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion should always be seen as just a starting point; contextualization is key for understanding and interpreting the data.

50. UNICEF recently included a systematic behavioural science approach in changing its organizational culture. It may have been useful to consider this aspect earlier in the process, to complement interventions related to data, policy, systems and capacities.

51. Over the past five years, organizational culture has become widely understood as a key consideration in risk management, leadership assessments and overall office

performance and delivery of results for children. However, a perception persists among some managers that leaders who exercise duty of care and live by the core values are somehow less likely to be effective in holding their teams accountable for their results for children. Research consistently demonstrates that the most effective or high-performing teams are the ones with the most values-based and psychologically safe cultures. There is no ‘pendulum’ swinging restlessly between results for children and living by the core values; rather, living by the values serves to make UNICEF more effective on results. This shift in mindset requires further internalization within the organization.

52. Accountability for organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion could be further strengthened. Supervisory and non-supervisory staff both have to better understand their roles and responsibilities, and to deliver on these roles more consistently across all offices. This is part of what makes UNICEF more effective in delivering results for children and remains the fundamental accountability of all staff.

53. As diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives grow across the United Nations system and elsewhere, there is a risk of piecemeal or vertical approaches that focus on specific issues in isolation, such as gender, disability, age or geography. While such specific areas of focus remain necessary, they must also allow for recognition of the intersectional links across identities and the nuances within them. Diversity, equity and inclusion efforts must recognize the convergence of different factors in determining the unique experiences of all employees.

VIII. Next steps

54. In June 2024, the Culture and Diversity team in the Office of the Executive Director will be merged with the Division of Human Resources as an expanded division of people and culture. This merger represents a recognition of the inherent links between people management, organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion. At the same time, there will be a range of work on organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion that will continue outside the people management sphere, such as that related to risk management, audit, intersectional programming support and embedding behavioural science approaches (for example, ‘nudges’, i.e. interventions that support better decision-making) across UNICEF business processes in favour of efficiency and streamlining.

55. For the remaining years of the Strategic Plan, which ends in 2025, UNICEF will continue to implement priority organization-wide initiatives, such as the Managing People with Purpose programme; rolling out the whole of diversity approach to increase workforce diversity; and carrying out the Global Staff Survey and Pulse Check surveys and their follow-up. In addition, UNICEF will scale up efforts to encourage behaviours to be more values-based; establish and promote more inclusive policies and practices; and institutionalize organizational culture and diversity, equity and inclusion more widely. In 2024, a major priority will also be the development of a people strategy, building on the human resources delivery model or approach developed in 2023, by the Division of Human Resources, and the revision of the Whistle-blower Protection Policy by the Ethics Office. At regional and country office levels, all of these initiatives will continue to be implemented, monitored and adjusted in light of feedback, lessons learned and office-specific needs. Offices at all levels will also continue to implement their own solutions to their specific workplace culture challenges and issues.

56. While the organization continues its efforts, it is evident that much has changed in UNICEF since the Independent Task Force report five years ago, most notably greater organizational awareness of the characteristics and dynamics of culture. The

culture of UNICEF is more explicitly grounded in the core values than ever before, and managers and their teams are engaging on these issues in more proactive and intentional ways. New approaches and initiatives are in place to promote more diversity in the UNICEF workforce and to inculcate a more inclusive mindset and practice in every office. Data on culture and diversity, equity and inclusion are available and used to inform policy, practice and decisions. UNICEF is an active agent of change at the United Nations, learning from others and contributing its own lessons and experiences, to enrich the overall efforts across the United Nations system in this area.

57. The next five years will be a period of sustaining the momentum and internalizing the principle that making the UNICEF culture more values-based and inclusive is fundamental to the organization's ability to more effectively deliver on its mandate for children. In short, a diverse and inclusive organizational culture in which staff members respect, enable and empower each other allows UNICEF to achieve impactful and sustainable results for children.

IX. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Welcomes* the update provided by UNICEF on the progress in making its organizational culture more values-based and inclusive;
 2. *Also welcomes* the utilization of an evidence-based and data-driven approach in this regard and encourages UNICEF to focus measures on persisting challenges, including on dedicating sufficient time to workplace culture and diversity, equity and inclusion issues; on the pace and visibility of progress on action taken by UNICEF; and on enhancing levels of psychological safety and trust;
 3. *Requests* UNICEF to provide an update to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2025, as an item for decision, on how the organization is improving its organizational culture and its actions to prevent and respond to all forms of discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination, and to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion.
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