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Description of independent oversight functions/bodies in UNICEF

Summary

In accordance with Executive Board decision 2022/21, this annex provides a concise and updated summary of the oversight functions and bodies in UNICEF. It follows a uniform template, as agreed by the Bureau of the Executive Board after discussion with the relevant Bureaux of the United Nations development system entities.

* E/ICEF/2025/11.



I. Background

1. The purpose of this annex is to provide a snapshot of the oversight functions of UNICEF. Insights on results achieved by the oversight offices can be found in the reports to the Executive Board of the independent functions and offices, and in each agency's annual reports from their principals, to which this annex is attached.

II. Audit and investigations

A. Mandate, purpose, reporting requirements and partnerships

2. The Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI, or "the Office") provides independent and objective assurance and investigative and advisory services, primarily through internal audits and investigations. Its charter was last updated and approved in June 2021.

3. The Office conducts risk-based internal audits of UNICEF offices and activities. Audits and advisory engagements are selected by OIAI through its annual workplanning exercise. The workplan, which is refreshed midyear, evaluates the most significant and emerging risks to the organization and identifies those warranting review by OIAI within the Office's resource envelope. The workplan is approved by the Executive Director.

4. The Office also provides advisory services, which seek to provide guidance on organizational improvements and other operational activities. All internal audit reports are issued to the Executive Director and, in accordance with Executive Board decision 2012/13, are then made publicly available on the UNICEF website.

5. The Office conducts investigations to examine and determine the veracity of all allegations received concerning corrupt and fraudulent practices and allegations of misconduct involving UNICEF staff, consultants, non-staff personnel, institutional contractors and implementing partners. The investigations cover all forms of misconduct, including, but not limited to, fraud, corruption, workplace harassment, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse, and abuse of authority.

6. Based on delegation of authority from the Executive Director, individual investigation reports pertaining to UNICEF staff are issued to the Deputy Executive Director, Management, for adjudication. Investigation reports pertaining to non-staff personnel and institutional and implementing partners are issued to the relevant head of office or other appropriate office for action. Investigation reports are not made public.

7. The Office presents an annual report to the Executive Board providing an annual opinion on the effectiveness of UNICEF systems of governance, risk management and control, and summarizing its findings from audits and investigations.

8. In addition to its charter, the independence of OIAI is ensured through its direct and independent reporting line to the Executive Director, and by reporting independently to the Executive Board on the results and activities of OIAI.

9. The Office works with other assurance and oversight providers (including the Board of Auditors and the Joint Inspection Unit) to maximize the oversight value for the Executive Director and the Executive Board. The Office also liaises with other United Nations oversight units and, as appropriate, with Member States. The Office closely collaborates with other offices within UNICEF, particularly those that are also part of the organization's integrity framework (e.g. the Ethics Office, the Division of Human Resources and the Culture and Diversity team).

10. OIAI reports on its results and activities to the independent and external Audit Advisory Committee¹ and is also subject to external and independent quality assessments, generally once every five years; the results of those reviews are available online. The Office conducts its work in conformance with applicable professional standards, including the standards issued by the Institute of Internal Auditors and the Uniform Principles and Guidelines for Investigations.

B. Structure

11. The Office is led by a Director, with a Deputy Director for Audit and a Deputy Director for Investigations. The Audit Section has four Chiefs, each leading a team of auditors. The Investigations Section has three Chiefs, two leading investigations teams, and the third leading the Strategy, Intake and Analysis Unit. At the end of 2024, the Office had 63 authorized posts, of which 42 are in New York, 11 are in Budapest and 10 are in Nairobi. In 2024, the OIAI budget was \$16.1 million.

III. Ethics

A. Mandate, purpose, reporting requirements and partnerships

12. The Ethics Office of UNICEF was established in December 2007 based on the Secretary-General's Bulletin on United Nations system-wide applications of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes, with the purpose of ensuring the highest standard of ethics and integrity among staff members. The Ethics Office works "to cultivate and nurture a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability, and thereby enhance the trust in, and the credibility of, the United Nations, both internally and externally" ([ST/SGB/2007/11](#)).

13. The UNICEF Ethics Office is mandated to:

(a) Provide guidance and policy support to management on ethics standard-setting by reviewing and advising on policies, procedures, standards and practices of the organization to reinforce and promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity, as required by the Charter of the United Nations, the standards of conduct for the international civil service, the staff regulations and rules of the United Nations and the directives of UNICEF.

(b) Raise the awareness of staff regarding the values and expected standards of conduct and procedures of the United Nations through training, education and outreach.

(c) Provide confidential advice and guidance on ethical issues to staff and management, at their request, to help them maintain the highest ethical standards in carrying out their duties and make decisions that are in the best interests of UNICEF.

(d) Administer the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme, which helps staff members to identify and manage conflicts of interest and organizational risks that may arise from their personal relationships, financial interests or outside activities.

¹ The UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee is an independent advisory body, without management powers or executive responsibilities, that advises the Executive Director (and informs the Executive Board through its annual report) in accordance with its charter, which was approved by the UNICEF Executive Director on 17 March 2020. The Audit Advisory Committee advises the Executive Director on matters pertaining to the oversight of the audit and investigations, ethics and evaluation functions. The Committee comprises six members who serve on a pro bono basis and are independent of both UNICEF and its Executive Board.

(e) Receive and review allegations of retaliation from UNICEF personnel who allege to have been subjected to or threatened with detrimental action for engaging in good faith in a “protected activity”, which includes reporting misconduct or cooperating with an investigation or other oversight activity or audit, according to the terms of the UNICEF Policy on Whistle-Blower Protection against Retaliation.

(f) Contribute to harmonized approaches to ethical issues within the United Nations system, strengthening collaboration with the Ethics Panel of the United Nations, the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations and other collaboration platforms.

14. The Director, Ethics Office, provides an annual report on the work of the Ethics Office to the Executive Director and the Executive Board. Section 3.1.3 of the charter of the Audit Advisory Committee sets out that the Audit Advisory Committee advises the Executive Director on policies and systems related to ethics and integrity, including highlighting issues that need further examination from the reports of the Ethics Office and the corresponding management responses.

15. The Ethics Office operates under the framework of the Secretary-General’s Bulletin on United Nations system-wide applications of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes ([ST/SGB/2007/11](#)), which confirms that “independence, impartiality and confidentiality are vital prerequisites for the functioning and operation of an Ethics Office of a separately administered organ or programme of the United Nations, and they shall be fully respected”.

16. In line with the Three Lines Model on risk management, oversight and accountability promulgated by the Institute of Internal Auditors as a reference framework for United Nations system organizations, the Ethics Office, while performing certain second-line functions, is referred to in the report of the accountability system of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2022/24](#)) as one of the independent offices performing the role of the third line, along with the Evaluation Office and OIAI. The report articulates the independence of the Ethics Office and its establishment as an independent business unit, which reaffirms the independence of the Office. It further states that the Director, Ethics Office, reports directly to the Executive Director.

17. The Ethics Office cooperates with ethics offices of the United Nations Secretariat and the other United Nations funds and programmes through the Ethics Panel of the United Nations. It is also an active member of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations, which brings together the ethics offices of United Nations funds and programmes and other multilateral organizations. The Director, Ethics Office, served as the Alternate Chair of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations in 2024, pursuant to the Secretary-General’s bulletin [ST/SGB/2017/2/Rev.1](#).

B. Structure

18. The Ethics Office was set up as an independent functional unit separate from the Office of the Executive Director in 2020, with its independence to be further secured through the creation of its separate budget envelope. The Office is led by the Director, Ethics Office, and is supported by six professional staff. The Ethics Office is based at New York headquarters with an outposted position in Istanbul, Türkiye. The total budget of the Ethics Office for 2024 was \$1.6 million.

IV. Evaluation

A. Mandate, purpose, reporting requirements and partnerships

19. The evaluation function is responsible for ensuring organizational accountability and learning through independent, credible and useful evaluations of

the overall organizational performance of UNICEF programmes, policies and other initiatives. It also undertakes other evaluative exercises, such as evaluability assessments and evaluation syntheses. In the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, evidence functions including the evaluation function are reflected as one of the nine change strategies that are seen as critical for helping UNICEF contribute to outcome-level change. Accountabilities for the evaluation function are shared across the organization, with the function itself being responsible for ensuring the relevance, timeliness, quality, credibility and utility of its work, and management being responsible for evaluation use, adequate and predictable resourcing of the function, and the provision of a conducive enabling environment so that the function can undertake its work in keeping with established norms and standards.

20. The Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/27](#) and [E/ICEF/2023/27/Corr.1](#)) was endorsed by the UNICEF Executive Board at its second regular session of 2023 and came into force on 1 January 2024. This policy governs the organization's evaluation function by providing a comprehensive framework for all evaluation activities undertaken by UNICEF. The policy aims to support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by responding to the need for high-quality, accessible and timely evaluation evidence. Additional implementation guidance will be disseminated by mid-2025.

21. The evaluation policy is aligned with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group and international good practices. It establishes norms and standards that are applicable across UNICEF, notwithstanding the wide variation in operational contexts in a decentralized organization. These include: independence, credibility, utility, impartiality, consultative stakeholder engagement, ethics and transparency. Evaluation relies on rigorous methods to ascertain the expected and unexpected results of the organization's work – at the outcome and impact level, wherever feasible and appropriate – as well as the processes, contextual factors and causal relationships along the results chain, in relation to evaluation criteria such as relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

22. The Executive Board plays an important role in overseeing the performance of the evaluation function, the conduciveness of its enabling environment within the organization, and the implementation of the evaluation policy. To this end, the Board endorses the evaluation policy and considers an annual report of the evaluation function that assesses the implementation of the policy and the status and effectiveness of the function. The Executive Board provides critical support to evaluation, along with the Executive Director, for the independence and credibility of the function. It also approves the quadrennial Plan for global evaluations, the country-level costed evaluation plans associated with UNICEF country programme documents, and the Evaluation Pooled Fund.

23. The Executive Director fosters a culture of learning, critical self-reflection, evidence-based decision-making, and continuous improvement and accountability, as well as ensures that the necessary human and financial resources for evaluation are secured. The Executive Director is advised by the Audit Advisory Committee, an external independent body that advises on matters pertaining to the oversight of the audit and investigations, ethics, as well as the evaluation function. It includes at least one evaluation expert, on matters pertaining to the oversight of the evaluation function, including the implementation of the evaluation policy.

B. Structure

24. The Director of Evaluation reports directly to the Executive Director and leads an Evaluation Office of approximately 31 staff, most of whom are based at the

organization's New York headquarters and some of whom are based in Nairobi. The Director is supported by a Principal Adviser and by six Chiefs of section, each leading a sub-team of evaluators and related specialists. The Office is functionally independent within the organization.

25. The Director of Evaluation also provides strategic leadership to the global evaluation function at all three levels of the organization (global, regional and country levels). Senior-level regional evaluation advisers are based in the seven UNICEF regional offices and are supervised in a matrix management model by both the respective regional directors (each of whom serves as the overall supervisor) and the Director of Evaluation (who advises on technical issues and, in addition to the supervisor, provides feedback on performance management processes).

26. Dedicated country evaluation specialists are currently based in 18 UNICEF country offices around the world, with many additional staff providing part-time support to the evaluation function as part of their broader set of responsibilities. Additional multi-country evaluation specialists (of which there are currently 19) each support two or more country offices in a cost-sharing model. The specialists are based in country or regional offices, close to the operations they support.

27. The Evaluation Office budget in 2024 was \$14.4 million, including the core budget of \$13.6 million and funding of \$0.8 million from global thematic funds. The core budget of \$13.6 million includes \$8.2 million from the Evaluation Pooled Fund. A more detailed account of expenditure across the evaluation function is being presented in the annual report for 2024 on the evaluation function in UNICEF at the annual session of 2025.

28. The evaluation function is supported by the Evaluation Pooled Fund representing a partial contribution towards realizing 1 per cent of the total budget of the organization's programme expenditure. The 1 per cent target is a commitment enshrined in the Revised evaluation policy of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2023/27](#) and [E/ICEF/2023/27/Corr.1](#)) (paragraphs 78–83). The expectation that UNICEF will achieve this target has been reinforced in Executive Board decisions 2022/5 and 2023/12. As part of its decision on the Report of the midterm review of the UNICEF integrated budget, 2022–2025 (decision 2024/17), the Executive Board approved funding of \$30.5 million for the quadrennium.
