Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services

Annual Session 2023
5 to 9 June 2023, New York
Item 11 of the provisional agenda
Annual report of the UNFPA Executive Director

United Nations Population Fund

Report on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit in 2022

Summary

In line with General Assembly resolution 59/267 of 23 December 2004 and as reiterated in resolution 62/246 of 3 April 2008, the present report provides a synopsis of UNFPA management responses to the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). It draws attention to specific recommendations directed to the legislative bodies of the United Nations system organizations.

The present report focuses on the three JIU reports relevant to UNFPA issued since the last report to the Executive Board in 2022 and received by the organization before preparing this report. Of the 20 recommendations relevant to UNFPA in the three reports, 16 are addressed to UNFPA management and four to the Executive Board as the Fund's legislative body. The present report provides UNFPA management responses to the 16 relevant recommendations and also includes an update on the implementation status of recommendations contained in earlier JIU reports issued in 2021 and 2020.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to take note of the present report, including the management responses to the four recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit intended for consideration by the Executive Board.

Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UNFPA

I.   Overview of Joint Inspection Unit reports and notes

1.   The present report provides a summary of the three reports issued by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), which are of relevance to UNFPA and were received since the previous report to the Executive Board [DP/FPA/2022/4 (Part II)] and before drafting this report.

(a)   Review of the management of implementing partners in United Nations system organization (JIU/REP/2021/4);

(b)   Review of the ethics function in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2021/5);

(c)   Business continuity management in United Nations system organizations (JIU/REP/2021/6).

2.   The management responses to the relevant recommendations in the JIU reports, including the recommendations for consideration by the legislative body, are provided below. Annex I to the present report provides a statistical summary of reports that are subject to the present reporting; Annexes II and III provide information on the implementation status of recommendations and notes issued in 2021 and 2020, respectively; Annex IV contains an overview of the recommendations from the JIU reports included in this report, as relevant to UNFPA and directed to the governing body of UNFPA.

II.   Synopsis and review of relevant Joint Inspection Unit reports and recommendations

A.   Review of the management of implementing partners in United Nations system organization (JIU/REP/2021/4)

3.   In this report, the Joint Inspection Unit assesses the progress achieved since its 2013 review on the same topic and analyses the methods and practices used by United Nations organizations system-wide to select and manage the implementing partners for the programme and project delivery, to identify issues, strengths and weaknesses in current practices and to explore areas for further improvement for effective and efficient management of implementing partners. The review aimed to enhance accountability, identify and disseminate good practices, encourage cooperation among involved parties, and address efficiency and effectiveness issues. The review examined governance and accountability frameworks, effective methods for selecting and managing implementing partners, and monitoring and evaluation systems for work delivered by implementing partners. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on engaging implementing partners was also considered.

4.   In this report, the JIU has issued ten recommendations aimed at strengthening the management of partnerships and improving results-based management. These included developing a common definition and agreed guiding principles for implementing partners, providing annual reports and legislative oversight, updating implementing partner policies, incorporating risks into risk management frameworks, developing performance indicators and training materials, assessing approaches to capacity-building, and improving inter-agency coordination at the country level. These recommendations are intended to create a strategic and risk-based approach to implementing partner management that aligns with the entity's strategic framework. UNFPA welcomes the report and agrees with most of the analysis, findings and recommendations.

5.   The review contains ten recommendations: two (recommendations 3 and 9) are addressed to the Executive Board for consideration (discussed further and commented on in Annex IV); the other eight (recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10) are addressed to the Executive Director.

6.   UNFPA aligns itself with the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) response to the report (A/77/317/Add.1).

7.   On *recommendation 1*, UNFPA appreciates the initiatives to establish a system-wide definition and set of guiding principles and standards for implementing partners, which should prioritize a risk-based and strategic approach. These principles and standards should also incorporate oversight standards and

expectations, particularly concerning assurance and emerging issues like the negative earmarking of implementing partners by individual Member States.

8.   On *recommendation 4*, UNFPA regularly and continuously develops, reviews and updates policies and guidance for implementing partner management to adapt to emerging needs, align with the UNFPA strategic plan, further inter-agency harmonization and improve effectiveness and efficiency.

9.   On *recommendation 5*, after reviewing the existing organizational structure for implementing partner management, UNFPA will explore potential options to enhance the coordination and effectiveness of associated activities. Any required alterations identified during the review will be implemented accordingly.

10.   On *recommendation 6*, UNFPA recently introduced a comprehensive enterprise risk management policy, which includes a rigorous framework incorporating well-established policies and practices for implementing partner risk management and linking them to other risk areas. Additionally, in 2022, UNFPA updated the implementing partner risk model that the organization has been utilizing for a number of years by introducing the operating context to its risk assessment.

11.   On *recommendation 7*, UNFPA collects, monitors and reports data for several key performance indicators related to implementing partners, including the UNFPA strategic plan and the organization's internal tools and systems.

12.   On *recommendation 8*, UNFPA actively promotes sharing information to align and leverage agency activities for coherence, impact, and efficiency. However, UNFPA acknowledges that sharing information alone is often not enough and additional efforts are required to harmonize business processes. The CEB can assist in this area by encouraging agencies to join the United Nations Partner Portal, which currently has two new modules in development: a risk and capacity module for sharing implementing partner performance information and a module for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. UNFPA is leading the development of both modules.

13.   On *recommendation 10*, UNFPA welcomes increased inter-agency coordination, especially at the country level. The United Nations Development Coordination Office and the resident coordinator offices might play an important role in supporting agency commitment to overcome barriers to effective coordination and more joint action.

14.   On *recommendation 2*, management believes the recommendation, as stated, is too broad to enable UNFPA to support it without clearly understanding how the information will be used. However, UNFPA may be inclined to provide support if the recommendation could be more specific. UNFPA already discloses financial information on its implementing partners. The request for descriptions of implementing partner programmes is too detailed for inclusion in annual reports or other Board reports due to word limit restrictions. Still, the results achieved by implementing partners overall are included in the reports submitted to the Executive Board. It would be challenging and time-consuming to give a breakdown by individual implementing partners in such reports.

B.   Review of the ethics function in the United Nations system ([JIU/REP/2021/5](JIU/REP/2021/5))

15.   The Joint Inspection Unit undertook a review of the ethics function in the United Nations system with the main objective of informing legislative organs, governing bodies and the executive heads of United Nations system organizations about the current state of the ethics function across the United Nations system and the progress made since the previous JIU review, carried out in 2010, and identifying good practices and lessons learned to support organizations in validating and, where necessary, strengthening their ethics function.

16.   The review aimed to provide recommendations to enhance the organizational setup of the ethics functions, including independence and mandate, and to achieve greater system-wide coherence and cooperation in ethics by addressing the identified shortcomings.

17.   The review found that the ethics function within the United Nations system has evolved considerably, with new offices created, mandates reinforced and better criteria for its independence established. Despite this progress, the review identified persistent shortcomings in the current ethics arrangements of United Nations system organizations, noting that further strengthening of the ethics function is needed to ensure accountability and integrity across the United Nations system.

18.   The report includes four formal recommendations: three (recommendations 1, 3 and 4) are addressed to the Executive Director; one (recommendation 2) is addressed to the Executive Board for consideration (discussed further and commented on in Annex IV).

19.   UNFPA aligns with the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) answer to the report (A/77/258/Add.1).

20.   On *recommendation 1*, UNFPA supports the recommendation and has issued its current Ethics Advisor a full-term appointment in the subsequent renewal. UNFPA is committed to complying by giving a full-term contract to the head of the Ethics Office. On *recommendation 3*, UNFPA is aligned with this recommendation and ensures mandatory periodic refresher courses in ethics for all staff and non-staff irrespective of seniority, category and level. UNFPA supports *recommendation 4* and conducted a comprehensive assessment in 2022, the findings and suggestions of which were approved by the UNFPA Executive Director.

C.   Business continuity management in United Nations system organizations (JIU/REP/2021/6)

21.   The Joint Inspection Unit conducted a review of the business continuity management in United Nations system organizations, with the primary aim of examining the current utilization and integration of business continuity policies, plans, processes, and practices in United Nations system organizations.

22.   The review aimed to identify good practices and lessons learned to guide decision-making regarding ongoing and future initiatives. The review specifically focused on accountability and oversight measures regarding business continuity management and compared progress made over the last decade to the previous JIU report. Additionally, the review analysed how business continuity management across the United Nations system operated during the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

23.   The review found that more comprehensive policy guidance was available in 2021, but only a few organizations are implementing all core elements of business continuity management. Internal capacity to support business continuity management needs greater attention and integration. There should be more consideration in developing business continuity plans that reflect risks and other crucial elements. Improving the rigour and discipline of maintenance, exercise, and review practices is necessary. Internal oversight offices should assess business continuity management more comprehensively. Interagency coordination has an uneven implementation of system-wide policy.

24.   The report includes six formal recommendations: five recommendations are addressed to the Executive Director (recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5); one is addressed to the Executive Board (recommendation 6) for consideration (discussed further and commented on in Annex IV).

25.   UNFPA aligns with the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) response to the report (A/77/256/Add.1).

26.   On *recommendation 1*, UNFPA management partially supports the specific recommendation since the current UNFPA business continuity policy and plans already incorporate this recommendation. Therefore, no further revisions may be necessary.

27.   On *recommendation 2*, UNFPA, while supporting the recommendation overall, notes that the suggested action is already implemented through the adjustment, exercise and revision of the UNFPA business continuity policy based on actual implementation and lessons learned.

28.   On recommendation 3, UNFPA has adopted a dynamic approach to business continuity policy implementation, considering it a living document that evolves based on the lessons learned. This involves tailoring crisis management and business continuity plan scenarios to fit specific operational contexts.

UNFPA also reviews its Crisis Response Team mechanism, assessing its effectiveness in responding to various incidents that could impact the organization's delivery and adjusting its strategies based on lessons learned.

29.   On *recommendation 4*, UNFPA, as an active member of the organizational resilience management system network (ORMS), considers its regular input to the reports of the Secretary-General on ORMS implementation as meeting the action required by the proposed recommendation and that additional reporting would be duplicative.

30.   On *recommendation 5*, this is an ongoing practice in UNFPA; its findings of the preliminary impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on UNFPA business continuity policy and plans were shared with the JIU team.

III.   Status of UNFPA implementation of Joint Inspection Unit recommendations

31.   The above-mentioned three JIU reports were issued in 2022 and received by UNFPA prior to the completion deadline of this report. In these three reports, 20 JIU recommendations were directed to UNFPA; 16 recommendations (80 per cent) are accepted, one (5 per cent) is not relevant, and three (15 per cent) have not been accepted. Out of these 16 recommendations, eight (50 per cent) have been implemented and eight (50 per cent) are in progress.

32.   In accordance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/258, requesting the JIU to enhance dialogue with participating organizations to strengthen the implementation of its recommendations, the JIU requested information on the follow-up to its recommendations. Of all JIU recommendations issued between 2014 and 2021, UNFPA has accepted 249 (93 per cent), while 20 (7 per cent) are either not accepted or not relevant; Of those accepted, 208 (77 per cent) have been implemented, and 49 (15 per cent) are under implementation.

33.   Annexes II and III of the present report provide an update on the implementation status of the most recent recommendations from the reports issued in 2021 and 2020.

34.   Of the six recommendations in JIU reports issued in 2021 that are relevant to UNFPA (see Annex II),[1] five (83 per cent) are accepted, and one (17 per cent) is not accepted. Two recommendations (40 per cent) have been implemented,[2] while the remaining three are in progress and on target (60 per cent).

35.   Similarly, of the 45 recommendations of relevance to UNFPA in JIU reports issued in 2020 (see Annex III),[3] two are not relevant. The remaining 43 recommendations (96 per cent) are accepted, with 31 (72 per cent) having been implemented and the remaining 12 in progress and on target (28 per cent).

36.   Further details on recommendations are provided in the web-based JIU follow-up system available to the Member States.

37.   UNFPA is committed to following up on implementing the remaining JIU recommendations relevant to UNFPA and continuing its contribution to the various JIU initiatives in the future.

---

[1] For recommendations considered by the Executive Board in 2021.

[2] Data retrieved as at March 2022.

[3] Whether considered by the Executive Board in 2020 or 2021.

ANNEX I
Summary of reports, notes, and management letter included in this report and of relevance to UNFPA

Report symbol	Report title	Total recommendations	Assigned to UNFPA	Not relevant	Implementation status of UNFPA relevant recommendations		
					Not accepted	Accepted	
						Implemented	In progress
JIU/REP/ 2021/4	Review of the management of implementing partners in United Nations system organizations	10	10		2	4	4
JIU/REP/ 2021/5	Review of the ethics function in the United Nations system	4	4			4	-
JIU/REP/ 2021/6	Business continuity management in United Nations system organizations	6	6	1	1	-	4
Total in the report to the Executive Board for 2023		**20**	**20**	**1**	**3**	**8**	**8**

The following JIU report dated 2022 is not relevant to UNFPA:
JIU/REP/2022/1: Review of management and administration in the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

ANNEX II
Status of implementation of JIU recommendations from 2021 reports, as at 31 March 2023

Report symbol	Report title	Total recommendations	Assigned to UNFPA	*Of which to governing bodies*	Not relevant	Implementation status of UNFPA relevant recommendations		
						Not accepted	Accepted	
							Implemented	In progress
JIU/ML/2021/1	Management letter on securing the integrity of documents, records, and archives of the United Nations system organizations	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
JIU/REP/2021/2[4]	Review of United Nations system support for landlocked developing countries to implement the Vienna Programme of Action	9	3	1	-	1	2	-
JIU/REP/2021/3[5]	Cybersecurity in the United Nations system organizations	5	2	1	-	-	-	2
Total in the report to the Executive Board for 2022 (2023)		**15**	**6**	**2**	**-**	**1**	**2**	**3**

---

[4] One recommendation is now being reported as 'not relevant'.

[5] One recommendation was erroneously reported as 'implemented' in the previous report.

ANNEX III
Status of implementation of JIU recommendations from 2020 reports, as at 31 March 2023

Report symbol	Report title	Total recommen dations	Relevant to UNFPA	*Of which to governing bodies*	Not relevant	Not accepted	Implementation status of UNFPA relevant recommendations	
							Implemented	In progress
JIU/REP/2020/1	Review of the state of investigation function: progress made in the United Nations system organizations in strengthening the investigation function	10	7	6	-	-	7	-
JIU/REP/2020/2	Policies and platforms in support of learning: towards more coherence, coordination, and convergence	9	6	1	-	-	-	6
JIU/REP/2020/3	Common premises in the United Nations system: current practices and future prospects	8	7	1	-	-	7	-
JIU/REP/2020/5	Enterprise Risk Management: approaches and uses in United Nations system organizations	4	4	2	-	-	4	-
JIU/REP/2020/6	Multilingualism in the United Nations system	7	6	3	-	-	6	-
JIU/REP/2020/7	Blockchain applications in the United Nations system: towards a state of readiness	8	5	2	1	-	4	-
JIU/REP/2020/8	Review of mainstreaming environmental sustainability across organizations of the United Nations system	10	10	1	1	-	3	6
Total for the report to the Executive Board for 2021 (2023)		**56**	**45**	**16**	**2**	**-**	**31**	**12**

The following JIU report issued in 2020 is not relevant to UNFPA:
JIU/REP/2020/4: Review of management and administration in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

ANNEX IV
Review of relevant Joint Inspection Unit recommendations in 2022 for consideration by the Executive Board

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT COMMENTS
Review of the management of implementing partners in United Nations system organization (JIU/REP/2021/4)	
Recommendation 3. The legislative organs and governing bodies of organizations of the United Nations system should, starting in 2024 and on the basis of reports submitted to them annually by their respective executive heads, provide overall strategic guidance and legislative oversight to the management of their implementing partners, including in the framework of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, especially with regard to capacity-building, inter-agency coordination and information sharing.	UNFPA aligns with the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) response to the report (A/77/317/Add.1). UNFPA has robust processes and controls in place to manage implementing partners and is pro-actively engaged in inter-agency coordination, information sharing and capacity-building efforts. UNFPA notes that the recommendation should be reviewed within the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review monitoring framework for 2021-2024. This framework includes specific indicators to monitor the United Nations system engagement with national and international partners at the country level, and the reporting should be done in accordance with existing modalities.
Recommendation 9. The legislative organs and governing bodies of United Nations system organizations should, beginning in 2023, assess their approaches to capacity-building of implementing partners and strengthening national capacities and ownership, in the framework of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, including the effectiveness of such efforts since 2013, progress made and lessons learned, based on reports prepared by their respective secretariats, and adopt specific measures to strengthen national capacities and ownership and build the capacities of their implementing partners.	UNFPA aligns with the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) response to the report (A/77/317/Add.1). UNFPA supports this recommendation and looks to CEB support for solutions to the dilemma that agencies face: between (a) the mandate to strengthen implementing partners capacity – and engaging with those implementing partners who are best poised to reach those furthest behind (often lower-capacity CSOs) – and (b) assuming the necessary ownership (often with programme government entities) and meeting donor oversight expectations of near-risk-free programme delivery. Governing bodies can support this area by committing the resources needed to improve agency efforts.

Review of the ethics function in the United Nations system (**JIU/REP/2021/5**)	
Recommendation 2. The legislative organs and governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations that have not yet done so should request that organizations update the terms of reference of their respective audit and oversight committees by the end of 2023 to include, where necessary, provisions for ethics, and ethics as a desirable area of expertise for new committee members.	UNFPA aligns with the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) response to the report (A/77/258/Add.1 paragraph 11), which notes, inter alia, that further information on the specific type of "expertise" expected from committee members would be beneficial in evaluating whether the suggested recommendation has been fulfilled.

That said, the terms of reference for the UNFPA Oversight Advisory Committee, which were revised in May 2021, already include responsibilities related to the Ethics Office and a provision that members of the OAC shall have the required level of expertise in, inter alia, ethics. |
| Business continuity management in United Nations system organizations (**JIU/REP/2021/6**) | |
| **Recommendation 6.** The legislative organs and governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should consider, at the earliest opportunity, the conclusions of the internal management assessment of the continuity of operations during the COVID-19 pandemic prepared by the executive heads of their respective organizations and, on that basis, take appropriate decisions to address the identified gaps and risks and to ensure continuity of business operations. | UNFPA aligns with the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) response to the report (A/77/256/Add.1). UNFPA wishes to emphasize that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous exercises and surveys have been conducted to identify lessons learned. However, these efforts have often duplicated each other and added an unnecessary burden on the field personnel. While Business Continuity Planning is an essential component of each organization's mechanism to deliver its mandates, it should be seen as complementing other mechanisms, such as Enterprise Risk Management, Security Risk Management or Crisis Management. It is the responsibility of each organization to oversee these mechanisms.

It is important to ensure that efforts to address the pandemic and related challenges are coordinated and do not duplicate each other, which can lead to inefficiencies and waste of resources. UNFPA believes that a more streamlined and coordinated approach would be more effective in addressing the challenges of the pandemic. Moreover, the Evaluation Office recently commissioned an evaluation on organizational resilience of UNFPA in light of its response to the COVID looking at the UNFPA response to COVID-19; the scope of the evaluation has been expanded to an assessment of the ability of UNFPA to anticipate, adapt and respond to future global crises. This will be shared with the Board in due course and, as always, UNFPA is committed to learning and adapting as needed based on such findings. |

_____