



Background Note: Briefing to the Executive Board Second Regular Session 2026

“Joint UNFPA and UN-Women informal briefing on preliminary proposals under Executive Board decision 2026/2”

Summary

On 6 July 2026, UN-Women and UNFPA convened a joint informal briefing with members of the Executive Boards of UN-Women and UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS to present preliminary proposals for alternative options to a merger, in response to Executive Board requests made in the context of the UN80 initiative. The briefing provided an opportunity for Member States to consider proposals aimed at strengthening alignment, impact and efficiency while preserving the distinct mandates, governance arrangements and comparative advantages of the two organizations.

The proposals focused on four interlinked strategic areas: integrated country-level delivery and impact; a joint strategic framework on ending violence against women and girls and gender-based violence; enhanced SDG 5 data, analytics, evaluation and foresight collaboration; and strengthened operational and service delivery interoperability. These areas would be supported by enhanced governance coordination as a cross-cutting pillar. During the discussion, Member States broadly welcomed the opportunity to review the preliminary options and requested further evidence-based analysis on costs, savings, risks, governance implications, implementation modalities, timelines, mandate preservation, civil society engagement and links to broader UN80 reform workstreams. UNFPA and UN-Women indicated that these issues would be addressed in a more detailed report to be provided in early August, ahead of the second regular sessions of the Boards.

I. Introduction

On 6 July 2026, UNFPA and UN-Women convened a joint informal briefing, held virtually via Zoom, on preliminary proposals developed under Executive Board decision 2026/2. The briefing was co-chaired by H.E. Mr. Cornel Feruță, President of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board and Permanent Representative of Romania to the United Nations, and H.E. Mr. Godfrey Kwoba, President of the UN-Women Executive Board and Deputy Permanent Representative of Uganda to the United Nations.

The meeting was convened following Executive Board discussions and decisions related to the UN80 Initiative and the request for alternative options to a potential merger between UNFPA and UN-Women. The briefing was intended to support the work of both Executive Boards ahead of their upcoming sessions, provide Member States with a better understanding of the preliminary proposals, and facilitate direct engagement on issues under consideration. Participants were informed that the process remained ongoing and that additional analysis would be shared in early August.

II. Opening Remarks

Opening the meeting, President of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board welcomed participants and recalled that UNFPA and UN-Women had shared with Member States a joint document outlining alternative options for enhanced alignment, impact and efficiency. He noted that the purpose of the briefing was to provide



an opportunity for direct engagement with Member States and to support the evidence base for the Boards' continued deliberations under the UN80 Initiative.

The President of the UN-Women Executive Board recalled that, through decisions 2026/6 and 2026/15, the Board had requested the timely presentation of alternative options, together with further analysis regarding operational models, anticipated efficiencies, costs, implications for operational delivery and country-level implementation. He expressed appreciation to the management teams of UNFPA and UN-Women for their collaborative work and encouraged delegations to engage actively and in a spirit of collaboration.

It was reaffirmed that the Board remained committed to considering both a potential merger and alternative options, with a view to formulating a well-informed recommendation once the requested information and analysis has been made available.

III. Presentation of Preliminary Proposals

The proposals were presented by Mr. Pio Smith, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director (Programme), ad interim, of UNFPA, as practical alternatives to a merger that would seek to strengthen alignment, impact and efficiency while safeguarding the distinct mandates, governance arrangements and comparative advantages of the two organizations.

The presentation outlined four interlinked strategic areas: integrated country-level delivery and impact; a joint strategic framework on ending violence against women and girls and gender-based violence; enhanced SDG 5 data, analytics, evaluation and foresight collaboration; and strengthened operational and service delivery interoperability. These areas would be supported by enhanced governance coordination as a cross-cutting pillar. It was emphasized that the options could be considered individually or as an integrated package and were intended to deliver greater collective impact and efficiency. It was underlined that the options were designed to move the needle on efficiency while maintaining political viability. They were in fact developed in such a way that they would not require reopening mandates or a GA decision.

It was further noted that the proposals focused on areas where stronger alignment could generate meaningful value, particularly in ending violence against women and girls and gender-based violence. The earlier merger assessment had found that functional overlap between the two entities was limited, with results generally achieved through complementary engagement rather than substitution. The proposals do not seek to combine the full scope of either organization's mandate. Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as well as work on population data and dynamics, would remain central and distinct priorities for UNFPA, while the full scope of UN-Women's mandate would also be preserved.

On integrated country-level delivery, a phased model was presented, centered on joint engagement in United Nations Country Team planning and reporting processes, joint communications and advocacy, and greater alignment between UNFPA Country Programme Documents and UN-Women Strategic Notes, under the direct leadership of the Resident Coordinator. The approach would begin with new planning cycles in 2027 and would be supported by co-located regional offices and integrated regional cells. Further analysis of leadership and accountability arrangements at country level would be undertaken, without proposing a predetermined model at this stage.

Regarding SDG 5 data, analytics, evaluation and foresight, opportunities were identified to strengthen evidence-based programming through collaboration on data systems, statistical capacity, integrated analysis, research, shared data platforms and foresight capacities. Proposed joint evaluations would focus on issues of common interest, including ending violence against women and girls and gender-based violence. This work would align with the UN80 and UN 2.0 data agendas, including the UN System Data Commons.



Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Deputy Executive Director for Normative Support, UN System Coordination and Programme Results, of UN-Women, presented the proposed joint strategic framework on ending violence against women and girls and gender-based violence as an example of how closer strategic alignment could generate greater impact. The complementary strengths of the two organizations were highlighted, including UN-Women's triple mandate through normative leadership, United Nations system coordination and operational support, and UNFPA's humanitarian leadership on gender-based violence, including its role as the designated lead agency for the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility under the Global Protection Cluster and as provider of last resort for humanitarian gender-based violence response.

It was explained that the proposed framework would establish a shared vision, better aligned priorities, common results and clear accountabilities, while respecting existing mandates and intergovernmental responsibilities. It would support collaborative delivery through joint planning, integrated teams, coordinated programming, aligned resource mobilization, joint advocacy and knowledge sharing. Joint monitoring, evaluation and reporting would underpin implementation and accountability, with common results frameworks aligned at country level with UN-Women Strategic Notes, UNFPA Country Programme Documents and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

On operational interoperability, the proposals included harmonized business processes, expanded shared services, common premises where appropriate, interoperability across human resources, procurement, information technology, security and operational leadership, and strengthened workforce mobility, knowledge management and talent management. Implementation would be phased, practical and guided by feasibility and demonstrated added value, with success measured through cost savings, faster deployment of expertise, stronger support to country offices and enhanced service quality. Governance coordination proposals included more regular engagement between Executive Boards and Bureaus, strengthened agency-level coordination and one annual joint Executive Board session, while respecting existing mandates and governance arrangements.

IV. Discussion

During the interactive dialogue, Member States welcomed the briefing and the opportunity to engage with the preliminary proposals. Several delegations acknowledged the effort undertaken by UN-Women and UNFPA to prepare a joint document within a compressed timeframe and noted the relevance of the proposals to broader efforts to strengthen coherence, effectiveness, alignment and impact across the United Nations development system.

Delegations requested further clarification regarding the intended end-state of the proposals and whether the options were designed solely to strengthen coordination within the existing institutional architecture or could represent a pathway towards deeper institutional integration. In this regard, questions were raised as to whether the options should be assessed individually or as an integrated package, and whether they constituted a comprehensive alternative to a merger or a step towards a more integrated institutional model.

The preservation of mandates, governance arrangements and legal accountability were central themes of the discussion. Member States requested stronger identification of risks, mitigation measures and safeguards for existing mandates, as well as further detail regarding decision-making requirements, governance implications and the role of the General Assembly. Several delegations emphasized the need to ensure that any governance coordination remained consistent with existing oversight arrangements and respected the distinct mandates and institutional responsibilities of both organizations.

Delegations also requested more detailed evidence-based analysis of expected impacts, costs, benefits, savings and efficiency gains, including staffing implications, implementation timelines and operational requirements.



Several Member States highlighted the need for a stronger baseline assessment of existing collaboration between UNFPA and UN-Women to better assess the added value of the proposed options. Questions were raised regarding funding challenges and the extent to which the alternatives could strengthen financial sustainability.

At the country level, delegations sought further information regarding the proposed model for integrated delivery, including alignment between UNFPA Country Programme Documents and UN-Women Strategic Notes, leadership and accountability arrangements, implications for country-level implementation, and the relationship between the proposed model and existing Resident Coordinator, United Nations Country Team and Cooperation Framework arrangements. Further clarification was requested regarding the regional-level implications of the proposals.

Member States requested additional reflection on cooperation in normative work, system-wide gender equality results, accountability mechanisms, and the ability of the proposals to strengthen UN-Women's triple mandate and contribute to broader UN80 objectives beyond bilateral cooperation between the two organizations. Questions were raised regarding implications for SDG 3 and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as well as the relationship between the proposed alternatives and broader UN80 workstreams, including shared services, back-office functions, common data and enhanced coordination mechanisms.

Several delegations highlighted the importance of civil society engagement and requested further information on consultations with civil society organizations. Reference was also made to the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan and the need to ensure coherence with existing interagency coordination mechanisms and system-wide gender equality efforts. Delegations requested that the August report provide a comprehensive assessment of legal, operational, financial and political risks, as well as clearer links with the Secretary-General's forthcoming report and broader UN80 reform discussions.

V. Responses from UN-Women and UNFPA

In response, UN-Women and UNFPA thanked Member States for their guidance and reaffirmed their commitment to addressing the issues raised in the forthcoming August report. It was confirmed that the report would include further analysis of anticipated costs, savings, risks, governance implications, implementation modalities, timelines and alignment with broader UN80 reform workstreams.

UN-Women explained that, as part of the ongoing analysis, each option would explicitly identify the existing mandates of both organizations and map areas of complementarity, to support mandate preservation and institutional clarity. It was emphasized that governance-related proposals would remain consistent with existing mandates and General Assembly arrangements. UN-Women underscored the importance of continued engagement with civil society and reaffirmed its commitment to existing interagency coordination mechanisms, including those related to the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan.

UNFPA clarified that the proposed alternatives were intended as a comprehensive stand-alone package rather than a temporary phase or pilot towards a merger. It was stressed that the alternatives were intended to preserve separate mandates, governance structures, leadership arrangements and operational identities while seeking to achieve many of the anticipated benefits associated with closer cooperation. Based on current legal advice, none of the alternative options under consideration would require a General Assembly decision.

Regarding the funding environment, it was noted that a merger alone would not resolve challenges related to funding volume, predictability or earmarking. The alternative options sought to improve efficiency through shared services, common procurement, co-location and other forms of interoperability. It was further confirmed that the forthcoming cost-benefit analysis would quantify potential efficiencies gained through shared services,



common procurement, and collocation, while also comparing transition and recurring costs against a structural merger scenario.

On country-level implementation, UNFPA emphasized that the proposals were not intended to create a parallel structure, but rather to strengthen the contribution of both organizations within the existing Resident Coordinator system, Cooperation Frameworks and United Nations Country Team arrangements. It was further clarified that aligned Strategic Notes and Country Programme Documents would remain subject to their existing approval processes and governance structures.

Regarding broader system reform, both organizations highlighted connections with existing UN80 workstreams, including the Unified Services Roadmap, Global Shared Services initiatives, Common Premises, the UN System Data Commons and ongoing country and regional configuration reviews. It was stressed that the proposals were designed to build on, rather than duplicate, those efforts. UN-Women elaborated on how the proposals could support its triple mandate through stronger evidence generation, enhanced data and analytical capacities, more integrated support to ending violence against women and girls programming, and improved delivery at regional and country levels.

VI. Conclusion

In concluding remarks, President of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board thanked participants for the substantive discussion and noted that UNFPA and UN-Women had responded to the Executive Boards' request to present an initial paper on alternative options by the end of June. He emphasized that the process remained ongoing and that attention would now turn to the more detailed analysis to be submitted in early August. Continued engagement between Member States and the organizations was encouraged, with particular emphasis on ensuring coherence with the broader UN80 process and upcoming high-level discussions on the future of the United Nations.

UN-Women and UNFPA thanked Member States for their guidance and reiterated their commitment to delivering a comprehensive package by early August, that would provide detailed operational models, cost analyses, risk assessments, impact assessments and stronger clarification of links with UN80 reform efforts.

The meeting was subsequently adjourned.