



15 April 2025

## **Executive Board – UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS**

### **Annual session 2025**

# **INFORMATION NOTE**

**on**

# **UNFPA addressing racism and racial discrimination**

## **I. Introduction**

1. This information note has been prepared in response to decision 2024/10 of the Executive Board, which requests the management of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS to provide updates on the implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on addressing racism and racial discrimination in United Nations organizations.
2. UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS are deeply committed to cultivating a safe, value-driven working environment that prevents, responds and addresses all forms of discrimination and creates equal opportunities for all.
3. In line with this commitment and rooted in international human rights law,<sup>1</sup> including the International Convention for Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which calls for the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, and in line with Article 1 of the United Nations Charter, on promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, and in recognition of the recommendations in the JIU note on the “Review of measures and mechanisms for addressing racism and racial discrimination in United Nations system organizations: managing for achieving organizational effectiveness”; UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS continue to take steps to ensure a discrimination free environment for all personnel is promoted and maintained.

---

<sup>1</sup> Existing international human rights laws that contain provisions to address and condemn racism include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## II. UNFPA

4. UNFPA is an organization with a diversity of perspectives, experiences and opinions. These characteristics are essential in advancing our efforts to foster a more hospitable world for women and girls. Our workforce comprises individuals representing 168 countries and territories.
5. In line with our founding document, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, and as part of the UNFPA 2030 People Strategy, the organization recognizes the importance of fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace. UNFPA encourages its staff to express their full identities and to contribute to their full potential and capacity.
6. UNFPA welcomes personnel from all backgrounds regardless of ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family structure, mental health status and any other dimension. Strengthening inclusive practices in our everyday work, especially in addressing existing biases regarding ethnicity, disability and educational background, is a continuous ongoing effort to bring out the best in the human resources of UNFPA.

## III. UNFPA approach to addressing racism and racial discrimination

7. UNFPA firmly stands as an anti-racist organization.
8. In 2019, UNFPA initiated a range of programmes specifically geared to combat racism and racial discrimination. Rooted on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development principle of ‘leaving no one behind,’ these programmes seek to dismantle systemic biases, promote equality and empower marginalized communities. As part of this effort, UNFPA established the ‘People of African Descent Initiative.’ Using a human rights-based approach – aligned with the objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Montevideo Consensus and the International Decade for People of African Descent – the People of African Descent Initiative seeks to advance rights, justice and development for people of African descent. This initiative responds to structural inequalities, limited rights and inadequate access to high-quality sexual and reproductive health services, the right to bodily autonomy, intersectional forms of discrimination and the need for more disaggregated data and evidence.
9. At the individual and systemic level, UNFPA recognizes that informed and dedicated work must continue to take place to address racism and racial discrimination in the workplace and in the work carried out by UNFPA. This is a fundamental human rights issue, in line with the organization’s imperative commitment to ‘leaving no one behind.’ It requires that everyone, everywhere, helps to affect a culture change regarding racism and racial discrimination.
10. The principle of non-discrimination for UNFPA personnel is reinforced by the [United Nations Charter](#), the [UN Staff Regulations and Rules](#), the [Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service](#) and the UNFPA [Policy on Prohibition of Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Abuse of Authority and Discrimination](#). The principles of fairness, equity and transparency will always apply, alongside the organization’s ‘zero-tolerance’ policy stance to all forms of wrongdoing, discrimination, harassment and abuse. Any unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction based on a person’s sex, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, age, language, social origin or other personal characteristics is considered prohibited conduct, in accordance with the UNFPA legal framework.

11. The UNFPA 2030 People Strategy highlights the importance of being an anti-racist organization that upholds a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination. UNFPA has taken steps to monitor and evaluate its organizational progress and through various surveys, including the Global Staff Survey and EDGEplus Diversity Survey, UNFPA has had access to data enabling the organization to better monitor and address perceptions from an intersectional lens. In efforts to ensure accountability across the organization, UNFPA has implemented the development of mandatory action plans in response to the outcomes of these survey results. UNFPA will continue to engage its global personnel in 2025 and beyond to further explore and build awareness of ‘othering’<sup>2</sup> behaviours based on attributes such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion and socioeconomic status, leading to discrimination and inequality in the workplace.
12. In 2023, based on evidence produced in March 2022, the JIU published a report titled “Review of measures and mechanisms for addressing racism and racial discrimination in United Nations system organizations: managing for achieving organizational effectiveness;” it found “that while there has been progress in parts of the United Nations system in the use of a comprehensive and holistic approach that is important to successfully prevent and address racism and racial discrimination, the [...] measures and mechanisms are not commensurate with the magnitude of the racism and racial discrimination described....”<sup>3</sup> The report analysed racism and its complex manifestations and provided guidance on measures and mechanisms to address them.
13. To better address racism at the United Nations, the report put forward six recommendations divided into three clusters: (a) support for systems for accountability and transparency; (b) operational activities; and (c) coherence and collaboration in working towards a common system-wide objective. Two of the six recommendations (1 and 4) require inter-agency cooperation.
14. UNFPA did not participate in the preparatory survey that informed the report because the organization was undertaking other surveys at the same time. However, UNFPA has been part of several inter-agency conversations as well as the Working Group on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion under the High-level Committee on Management (HLCM); and in such fora, several of these recommendations and best practices have been shared and discussed.
15. UNFPA believes that all of the JIU recommendations would be best implemented if addressed through an intersectional lens, building on lessons learned from United Nations system-wide strategies and reporting mechanisms.
16. UNFPA has accepted and implemented four of the six recommendations put forward by the JIU. As recommendations 1 and 4 are outside the exclusive remit of UNFPA, these will only be fully implemented if a more formal directive and inter-agency cooperation is mandated by the HLCM.

## IV. Common set of racial categories for voluntary self-identification

17. In response to JIU *recommendation 1*,<sup>4</sup> since this is outside the sole remit of UNFPA, the organization will continue to advocate at the HLCM level for its implementation, to the extent possible. It believes

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA understands and uses the term “othering” as endorsed by the HLCM at its 46th session in 2023 in the DEI Glossary as, “a process whereby individuals or groups are labelled as being outside the norms of the dominant social group. Othering is often a form of dehumanization and is the opposite of belonging.”

<sup>3</sup> “Review of measures and mechanisms for addressing racism and racial discrimination in United Nations system organizations: managing for achieving organizational effectiveness” (JIU/NOTE/2022/1/Rev.1).

<sup>4</sup> *Recommendation 1*. The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should collaborate, in the framework of the CEB, to establish a common set of categories for voluntary self-identification by personnel by June 2024, for the purposes of monitoring, analysing, evaluating and reporting on progress and success in achieving the goals of equality, equity, diversity and inclusion in addressing racism and racial discrimination.

that a more formal inter-agency coordination would be beneficial to establish a common set of categories for voluntary self-identification and to develop resources on anti-racism.

18. UNFPA had previously established a set of categories for voluntary self-identification for these purposes already in 2021, through the EDGEplus Diversity Survey. UNFPA utilizes a set of categories based on the ethnic regional origins that differ from the proposed classification system of racial categories recommended by the JIU. UNFPA employs this expanded set of categories for voluntary self-identification due to the insight garnered through these aforementioned evaluations and in recognition of the fact that the intersectionality of identities has implications on inclusion. UNFPA has found that any approach to develop resources on anti-racism and to address racism and other forms of discrimination in the workplace benefits from the perspective of an intersectional lens so that UNFPA personnel, regardless of their identity or background, are able to be fully present in the workplace and to contribute to their full potential and capacity.
19. For UNFPA, data collection and analysis that cuts across dimensions of identity through an intersectional lens is essential to fully understand lived experiences of personnel and to address discrimination and barriers to inclusion within the workplace. In conducting the EDGEplus Diversity Survey organization-wide, UNFPA continues to demonstrate that commitment.
20. The results of the EDGEplus survey conducted at UNFPA have shown gaps in perceptions by gender – on questions regarding the compatibility of having a career and a family for women; on work-life balance; on having fair opportunities to advance; and in the levels of trust among staff that there would be no retaliation for reporting sexual harassment and discrimination claims. EDGEplus outcomes also showed that regions of origin are not a strong predictor of employee experiences, and women who self-identify as working with a disability reported more pessimistic perceptions across all questions, in comparison to employees working without disability.
21. Addressing discrimination in an intersectional manner is how UNFPA can truly be effective.

## **V. Capability development**

22. In response to JIU *recommendation 2*,<sup>5</sup> UNFPA firmly stands as an anti-racist organization, and is continuously working to address racism in the workplace by raising awareness of employee experiences; developing capacities among managers and staff through training and coaching on unconscious bias; inclusive leadership; enhancing the ability of staff to denounce and report discriminatory behaviour; and reviewing its policies and the effects of its work practices to recognize and address systemic racism. As part of this effort, UNFPA established the People of African Descent Initiative, using a human rights-based approach and aligned it with existing United Nations system-wide initiatives and frameworks.
23. In 2020, UNFPA embarked on a deliberate effort to address racism within the organization and its activities.
24. In 2021, the UNFPA Division for Human Resources hired its first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Specialist to ensure anti-racism efforts are more centralized. Under this portfolio, UNFPA hosted safe

---

<sup>5</sup> *Recommendation 2.* The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should direct their respective training and learning units to develop and implement a high-impact and integrated curriculum to improve awareness, learning and performance that responds to the needs of personnel of various functions, categories and levels in order to address all forms and configurations of racism and racial discrimination in the workplace.

spaces for conversation on a wide variety of DEI topics and dimensions, always trying to capture the intersectionality of the different dimensions.

25. In 2022 UNFPA launched the 2030 People Strategy, which highlights the importance of being an anti-racist and anti-discrimination organization, providing a roadmap on DEI efforts for the years to come.
26. In 2023 UNFPA inaugurated the Leadership Dialogue, to solidify the commitment of the senior leadership to foster a more inclusive and anti-racist organization.
27. In 2024 and beyond the organization continues its conversations as a way to raise awareness; and with the hiring of a senior consultant on anti-racism, it will ensure that the learning activities revolving around anti-racism are focussed and relevant.
28. In the course of three years, the dedicated DEI team has led and supported the delivery of over 50 webinars and workshops for all UNFPA personnel, with engagements from all regions. These programmes seek to dismantle systemic biases, promote equality and empower marginalized communities. With this increased awareness of DEI, personnel have reached out from different parts of the world asking for team-specific training or advice on how to launch regional DEI initiatives, including in addressing topics such as LGBTIQ+ inclusion, gender, disability, racism and psychological safety.
29. We welcome inter-agency cooperation in developing a system-wide training curriculum to address racism in the workplace, as this will make the efforts more effective and accessible.

## **VI. Culture and leadership**

30. In response to JIU *recommendation 3*,<sup>6</sup> in 2020, the Executive Committee leadership and senior management of UNFPA demonstrated their commitment to set the “tone at the top” by endorsing strategic initiatives conducted globally to engage the organization. UNFPA has initiated several events and programmes to increase awareness on anti-racism – for example, by inviting external speakers to participate in discussions such as “Calling in the calling out” or “Black health matters: national and transnational COVID-19 impact, resistance and intervention strategies”; by organizing leadership dialogues with UNFPA senior leaders on power equity and health equity; and by conducting, in partnership with the Office of the Executive Director (OED), a discussion on human rights and intersectional racism. These efforts have outlined professional learning opportunities to build the capacity of leadership and management to disseminate and support the work.
31. Recognizing that entry into the United Nations system is not equal to everyone, and to further the United Nations efforts in increasing diversity and strengthening support to young professionals from developing and least developed countries, UNFPA launched in 2021 the [Young Professionals from Africa and of African Descent Programme](#), a groundbreaking initiative to bring talented young leaders from Africa and the African diaspora into the heart of international development.
32. Ten young professionals of African descent have since joined UNFPA and are receiving hands-on experience in a fast-paced, international environment. The organization is confident that these carefully selected young professionals will grow into impactful leadership roles in international development. Four of the five young professionals of African descent from the first cohort of the programme have already secured positions with UNFPA at P-3 and P-2 levels, even before completing their three years

---

<sup>6</sup> *Recommendation 3*. The executive heads of United Nations system organizations who have not done so should provide sufficient resources to support the achievement of defined results for the implementation of action plans for addressing racism and racial discrimination.

in the programme. This speaks to the calibre of these young professionals and the benefits of providing opportunities.

33. UNFPA welcomes inter-agency cooperation in finding synergies and ways to maximize these initiatives.

## **VII. Inter-agency standing mechanisms**

34. In response to JIU *recommendation 4*,<sup>7</sup> and since this is outside the sole remit of UNFPA, the organization will continue to advocate for its implementation at the HLCM level, to the extent possible; it believes that a more formal inter-agency coordination would be beneficial to establish a common set of categories for voluntary self-identification and to develop resources on anti-racism.
35. UNFPA has been actively involved with the Working Group on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, mandated by the HLCM, playing a key role in the creation of a system-wide set of seven values and principles, which were formally adopted by HLCM in 2023.
36. Building on these efforts, in 2024, UNFPA, UNDP and UNOPS partnered with the Staff Council and hosted together the DEI Awareness Series, which included a session on “Understanding Racial Justice, Gender Justice and Disability in the Workplace,” aimed at sharing best practices and encouraging mutual learning. This initiative further solidified the organization’s dedication to cultivating an inclusive and supportive work environment for all UNFPA staff members, regardless of race or ethnicity.

## **VIII. Accountability mechanisms**

37. In response to JIU *recommendation 5*,<sup>8</sup> UNFPA notes that anti-racism work is ongoing by nature. The organization believes that accountability frameworks are necessary and important tools to ensure the desired behaviour. At the individual and systemic levels, UNFPA recognizes that informed and dedicated work must continue to take place to address racism and racial discrimination in the workplace and in the work it carries. This is a human rights issue, in line with the organization’s imperative commitment to ‘leaving no one behind.’ It requires that everyone, everywhere, helps to affect a culture change regarding racism and racial discrimination.
38. In 2022, in order to strengthen the organization’s “speak-up” culture, UNFPA established the Integrity Group, which comprises the Coordinator for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment, and the heads of the Division for Human Resources, the Legal Unit, the Office of Audit and Investigation Services, the Ethics Office, and the Office of the Ombudsman.
39. In 2025, UNFPA will continue working on fostering inclusion in the workplace, with a focus on anti-racism and ‘othering’ behaviours, based on attributes like race, ethnicity, gender, religion and socioeconomic status, which lead to discrimination and inequality in the workplace, in order to ensure

---

<sup>7</sup> *Recommendation 4.* The executive heads of United Nations system organizations, as members of the CEB, should jointly develop and provide resources to a high-level, inter-agency standing mechanism intended to unite organizations, leverage their existing capacities and comparative added value to collaborate and work together to respond to both immediate and longer-term needs for addressing racism and racial discrimination across the United Nations system, and address the transformative changes needed to enhance the continued relevance and value of the various efforts at both the organizational and the system-wide levels.

<sup>8</sup> *Recommendation 5.* The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should establish, by 2024, an accountability framework that sets out the expected results, outcomes and key performance indicators for addressing racism and racial discrimination, and report periodically to their legislative organs and/or governing bodies on progress made in achieving the predefined results.

dignity, respect and equity for UNFPA personnel, aiming to create systemic change through enhanced awareness in the workplace and the organization's programme of work.

40. UNFPA will rely on strong collaborations across the organization to tackle racism and racial discrimination in the workplace and foster an inclusive organization – an organization that continues to evolve so that everyone trusts it to be a fair and just work environment.

## **IX. Equal opportunities**

41. In response to JIU recommendation 6,<sup>9</sup> UNFPA acknowledges the recommendation calls for the strengthening of the equal distribution of opportunities in human resources management for all personnel. UNFPA reaffirms its ongoing commitment to this recommendation, and to further enhance this approach according to the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Staff Regulations and pertinent General Assembly resolutions, aiming to secure the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity, while giving due regard to recruitment on as wide a geographical basis as possible and to advancing gender parity.
42. For example, the following statement is included in all job vacancies: “UNFPA provides a work environment that reflects the values of gender equality, diversity, integrity and a healthy work-life balance. UNFPA is committed to ensuring gender parity in the organization and therefore encourages women to apply. Individuals from the LGBTIQ+ community, minority ethnic groups, Indigenous populations, persons with disabilities and other underrepresented groups are highly encouraged to apply. UNFPA promotes equal opportunities in terms of appointment, training, compensation and selection for all, regardless of personal characteristics and dimensions of diversity. Diversity, equity and inclusion is at the heart of the UNFPA workforce – click [here](#) to learn more.”
43. In 2022, and again in 2024, the EDGE Move and EDGEplus certifications for UNFPA demonstrate that the organization has a strong existing framework of policies and practices to ensure equitable career flows in the areas of equal pay for equivalent work, recruitment and promotion, flexible working and organizational culture. Furthermore, with each EDGE certification, UNFPA commits to an action plan that aims at further improving the organization's inclusive practices through learning and training opportunities, both globally and at the regional level, and to ensure that all staff members have equitable access to networking and mentorship opportunities in support of their career development.
44. UNFPA will continue to monitor representation across the different groups, regions, levels and functional areas, as part of its regular human resource systems and reporting. UNFPA is clear in its commitment to develop an equitable and inclusive workplace.

## **X. Conclusion**

45. UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS have made significant strides in implementing the JIU recommendations on eliminating racism and racial discrimination.
46. Through dedicated strategies, policies and initiatives, UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS individually and collectively are working towards creating a safe, non-discriminatory and value-driven organizational culture.

---

<sup>9</sup>Recommendation 6. The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should strengthen the equal distribution of opportunities in human resources management for all personnel.