



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
18 April 2023

Original: English

For information

United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

Annual session 2023

13–16 June 2023

Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

Description of independent oversight functions/bodies in UNICEF

Summary

In accordance with Executive Board decision [2022/21](#), this annex provides a concise summary of the oversight functions/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/2023/9](#).



I. Background

1. The purpose of this annex is to provide a clear and concise 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/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, 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. 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 then, in accordance with Executive Board decision [2012/13](#), are made publicly available on the UNICEF website. Reports of advisory engagements are not made public.

4. 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. 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.

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

6. In addition to its Charter, the independence of OIAI is ensured through its direct and independent reporting lines to the Executive Director, the Executive Board and the UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee.

7. 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 the 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 in the Office of the Executive Director).

8. The work of OIAI is periodically reviewed by the independent Audit Advisory Committee and is also subject to external 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

9. 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. As of 1 July 2023, the Office will have staff located in Budapest and Nairobi as well as New York, with a total of 53 posts. In 2022, the OIAI budget was \$14.1 million.

III. Ethics

A. Mandate, purpose, reporting requirements and partnerships

10. 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 of 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](#))

11. 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 to maintain the highest ethical standards in carrying out their duties and to 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;

(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.

12. The Director of the Ethics Office provides an annual report on the work of the 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 AAC 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.

13. 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."

14. 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 as one of the independent offices performing the role of the third line, along with the Evaluation Office and OIAI, in the report of the accountability system of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2022/24](#)). 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 of Ethics reports directly to the Executive Director.

15. 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 of Ethics currently serves as the alternate Chairperson of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations through December 2023, pursuant to Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2017/2/Rev.1](#).

B. Structure

16. 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 own separate budget envelope. The Office is led by the Director of Ethics and is supported by three professional staff and an administrative assistant. The Ethics Office is based at New York headquarters. The total budget of the Ethics Office for 2022 was \$1.6 million.

IV. Evaluation

A. Mandate, purpose, reporting requirements and partnerships

17. Evaluation in UNICEF has the overarching goal of helping the organization and its partners to achieve the best results possible for children through independent, credible and useful evaluative analysis that strengthens organizational learning and accountability. Accountabilities for the evaluation function are shared across the

organization and include contributions to the oversight processes at the national, regional and global levels. The Evaluation Office is responsible for ensuring organizational accountability and learning through independent evaluations, as well as other evaluative exercises such as evaluability assessments and evaluation syntheses that assess overall organizational performance and the impact of UNICEF programmes.

18. The revised evaluation policy of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2018/14](#)) 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. As called for in paragraph 68 of the document, an independent review on the performance of the policy was undertaken in 2022–2023, with a draft revised and updated policy anticipated to be presented to the Executive Board for its discussion at the annual session of 2023, with ultimate endorsement by the Board at the second regular session of 2023.

19. The evaluation policy is aligned with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group and international good practices. The policy establishes norms and standards that are applicable across UNICEF, notwithstanding the wide variation in operational contexts in a decentralized organization.

20. Consistent with best practice in the profession, UNICEF identifies guiding principles that help to operationalize the broad definition of evaluation into the detailed content of the policy. These include: independence, credibility, utility, impartiality, consultative stakeholder engagement, ethics and transparency.

21. The oversight role of the Executive Board includes the evaluation function itself as well as the implementation of the policy. To this end, the Board endorses the evaluation policy and considers annual reports that cover its implementation and the status and effectiveness of the evaluation function. The Executive Board provides critical support to evaluation as a co-guarantor, along with the Executive Director, of the independence and credibility of the function. The Executive Director is advised by the Audit Advisory Committee, an external independent body that 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

22. The Director, Evaluation reports directly to the Executive Director and leads an Evaluation Office of approximately 25 staff based at UNICEF headquarters. The Office is functionally independent within the organization and provides strategic leadership to the global evaluation function. Senior-level Regional Evaluation Advisers are based in the seven UNICEF regional offices and are supervised in a matrix management model by the respective Regional Directors (each of whom serves as the overall supervisor) and the Director, Evaluation (who advises on technical issues and provides feedback on performance management processes). Dedicated country evaluation specialists are based in some of UNICEF programme countries 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 17) each support two to three country offices in a cost-sharing model. The specialists are based in country or regional offices, close to the colleagues whom they support.

23. The Evaluation Office budget in 2022 was \$6.7 million (including the core budget of \$5.4 million and the funding of \$1.3 million from global thematic funds). In addition to the Evaluation Office budget, a total of \$7.8 million was provided in 2022 through the Evaluation Pooled Fund (for headquarters and regions) of which \$1.9 million was carried forward for spending in 2023–2024. A more detailed account of expenditure across the evaluation function is being presented in the annual report for 2022 on the evaluation function ([E/ICEF/2023/18](#)) at the annual session of 2023.
