

UNICEF Executive Board

Annual Session 13-16 June 2023

Agenda item 5: Annual report on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2022-2025

Madam/Mr. President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States and my own country Iceland.

Thank you for the presentation on the first Annual Report on the implementation of the 2022-2025 Gender Action Plan.

The Secretary General's progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals paints a bleak picture overall, including on gender equality. It is therefore more important than ever that UNICEF continues to gain traction in its gender equality programming. We appreciate that the Gender Action Plan symbolizes an intentional programming shift, addressing the root causes of gender inequality for more transformative, lasting results. We also thank the Executive Director for having a strong focus on gender equality and for acknowledging that the achievement of gender equality is truly central to all our development goals.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Lauren Rumble and her gender team for their tireless efforts towards promoting gender equality in UNICEF's work. The Annual Report details some impressive results achieved during these challenging social, political and economic contexts for women and girls worldwide. This includes a 5-percentage point increase in live births attended by skilled health personnel. Nearly half of all UNICEF country offices are reporting gender-transformative results. And 116 million children and adolescents benefitted from UNICEF-supported gender-responsive nutrition programming. An important result, given that one billion adolescent girls and women suffer from undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency, or anemia, with devastating consequences for their wellbeing and the development of their children.

However, more can and needs to be done. Too many girls continue to be out of school and girls' learning opportunities and outcomes remain disadvantaged compared to boys. Undernutrition, slowing progress on reducing child marriage, lagging HIV rates, lack of access to services for sexual and reproductive health and rights and ongoing high levels of violence, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence, all point towards the necessity of scaling up interconnected adolescent girls' programming. One important step in that direction is the UNICEF Adolescent Girls Programme Strategy for 2022-2025, which targets 20 million girls in 30 countries by 2025 and aims to leapfrog girls' health, nutrition, protection, education and learning and economic outcomes.

We take note of the new gender transformative expenditures formula and the corresponding drop in expenditures from around 14% to 6%. At the same time, we appreciate your efforts in

revising the calculation formulas to reflect more ambitious goals in terms of gender. Because this is no time to be complacent, we must be ambitious.

Ambition is also needed when it comes to evaluating the impact of our actions. While we note with satisfaction that the number of evaluations covering gender increased in 2022, the Annual Report on the Evaluation Function also notes that the quality of the integration of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the scope of the analysis has declined, as did the overall performance of UNICEF under the UN-SWAP on Gender Equality.

The whole-of institution approach to gender equality is vital for achieving transformative results, as is institutional strengthening. We note that around half of country offices have a system in place to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. While there have been positive gains, we urge the acceleration of the achievement of the target that at least 90% of country offices have a system in place by 2025.

Gender equality is a major challenge that cannot be met without ample coordination and joint initiatives among all UN actors, and we encourage UNICEF to work closely with other UN agencies, such as UN Women and UNFPA, on joint programming and sharing of data and best practices on gender equality.”

Allow us to pose a few questions.

When do you expect to reach the institutional gender transformative expenditure target of 15%?

We regret that the Thematic Fund on Gender continues to be the least funded of the thematic funds, despite its pivotal role in mainstreaming gender across UNICEF’s strategic objectives. Could you indicate how much of core funding is dedicated for the implementation of the Gender Action Plan and what can be done to increase funding for the thematic fund on gender?

And finally, we pivot towards countries where we are witnessing increasing restrictions on women and girls’ exercise of their rights, such as Afghanistan and Iran, with devastating results. Could you elaborate on how UNICEF manages to deliver gender-transformative services under these circumstances?

Madam/Mr. President,

You can count on us, as a collective, in advancing the rights of children and gender equality worldwide with UNICEF as a key partner.

Thank you.

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