# REVIEW OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM-WIDE ACTION PLAN ON GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

*Prepared by*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Review of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women JIU/REP/2019/2

In its resolution 67/226, the United Nations General Assembly requested the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) to undertake a system-wide evaluation of the effectiveness, value added and impact of the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women as a tool for performance monitoring and accountability for submission to the General Assembly following its full implementation. The present report covers the first phase of implementation of the System-wide Action Plan, which began in 2012 and ended in December 2017. The main objectives of the report are: (a) to provide the General Assembly with an assessment of the Action Plan as a system-wide performance monitoring and accountability framework; (b) to review the processes and procedures for its implementation across the United Nations system; and (c) to share good practices and lessons learned. The review was conducted from July 2018 to March 2019. The data collection process has been supported by the 28 JIU participating organizations (corresponding to 55 System-wide Action Plan reporting entities), which actively participated through corporate questionnaires, interviews, an online survey and a focus group.

### What is the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women?

The System-wide Action Plan operationalizes the strategy included in the United Nations system-wide policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women, which was endorsed in 2006 by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), into a framework for the United Nations system organizations. The Action Plan was welcomed by the Economic and Social Council in 2012. The System-wide Action Plan is intended to serve as an accountability and performance monitoring framework designed to measure, monitor and drive progress towards a common set of standards to which to aspire and adhere for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the United Nations system. In accordance with its mandate, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) has been the lead agency for coordinating and facilitating the design, development and implementation of the Action Plan.

The System-wide Action Plan framework includes 15 performance indicators clustered around six strategic areas (accountability, results-based management, oversight, human and financial resources, capacity, and coherence, knowledge and information management). By the end of 2017, there were 66 reporting entities (of which 32 were United Nations Secretariat departments, offices and regional commissions) that provided ratings annually in accordance with the requirements defined in the technical notes issued by UN-Women.

### Accountability framework

In the present report, the Inspectors examine various levels of accountability. At the level of the United Nations system, they analyse the role of CEB, with a particular focus on how it has followed-up on the action plan operationalizing the policy. The main system-wide mechanism for reporting on implementation of the Action Plan, which operates through the Economic and Social Council, was also studied. With regard to the individual reporting entities, the role of the respective governing bodies and the leadership and executive management were examined, as were the processes and procedures for ensuring implementation of the Action Plan by line managers and staff.

### Key findings and conclusions

During the first phase of implementation, the Action Plan has proven to be an effective framework for tracking system-wide progress and a useful benchmark and catalyst for advancement towards gender mainstreaming in most participating entities. Given the resources invested, the progress

made through the implementation of the programme by the United Nations system organizations is considerable. There was nearly unanimous agreement among reporting entities that the Action Plan had been a catalyst for progress towards gender mainstreaming. The entities that had already had a strong focus on gender before the adoption of the Action Plan acknowledged that the programme complemented existing initiatives, contributed to further institutionalization, helped to identify remaining areas for improvement and created internal support to address those areas. The entities that had shown weak performance ratings at the beginning of the programme saw it as providing them with a benchmark helping them to set and achieve minimum standards.

The Inspectors noted that the reporting entities had a positive view of the coordination and facilitation of the System-wide Action Plan by UN-Women. UN-Women succeeded in focusing the United Nations system organizations on gender equality and the empowerment of women using a common framework. UN-Women has leveraged existing inter-agency networks to support the development and the implementation of the framework. The Inspectors see this endeavour as a system-wide achievement, since most of the reporting entities have engaged widely to ensure the success of the programme, first through consultations and piloting and then through the measures described in the present report.

With regard to assessing the degree of improvement achieved through the framework, performance indicator ratings are aggregated into a system-wide view of progress, which is reflected in the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations presented to the Economic and Social Council on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system. During the first phase of implementation (2012–2017), the aggregated percentages of entities meeting or exceeding requirements for all performance indicators more than doubled compared with the figures used as a baseline, with an increase from 31 to 65 per cent. In terms of ratings improvement, the highest performance has been in the area of oversight. However, limited progress has been achieved in the area of human and financial resources, and the weakest performing indicators fall under this area, namely those concerning gender architecture and parity and resource allocation and tracking. This strategic area may be viewed as a reporting entity's most visible commitment to gender mainstreaming, as it is directly tied to the entity's resource commitments.

The measures implemented, the policies developed and the practices followed are adequate to indicate that quality assurance has been taken seriously within most reporting entities. Yet, the fact that the System-wide Action Plan is based on self-assessment and self-reporting is important when considering credibility, and reporting must not simply be a bureaucratic exercise but reflect the real situation of each reporting entity and thereby the system. The Inspectors have included in the present report a recommendation on conducting a periodic check of the quality assurance mechanisms in place to maintain the current status and push for improvement where needed **(recommendation 1)**.

A key objective of the Action Plan is to enhance the United Nations system's ability to hold itself accountable in a systematic and more harmonized manner for its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. Indeed, the members of CEB chose accountability as the first of the main areas of the strategy supporting the 2006 policy. The endorsement of the framework as an action plan by CEB provided a strong system-wide commitment by leadership to implement the policy. The review shows that this endorsement has been perceived as a cornerstone of the success of the Action Plan and should be followed up on. A renewed commitment is advised for the second iteration of the System-wide Action Plan (2.0) **(recommendation 2)**.

The Action Plan framework provides a truly unique model of a well-elaborated framework of performance indicators for monitoring progress system-wide on gender mainstreaming in a systematic and harmonized manner. The Inspectors believe that there is an opportunity to improve the current reporting mechanism and increase transparency by reshaping the section of the report to the Economic and Social Council promoting system-wide accountability for gender mainstreaming so that both aggregated and disaggregated figures are presented for individual reporting entities, accompanied by narrative where necessary to analyse specific situations **(recommendation 3)**.

In the United Nations system organizations, some members of governing bodies have shown great interest in gender-related issues, though this varies according to the mandate of the particular

organization. With respect to the System-wide Action Plan specifically, governing bodies have acted upon it in different ways. Consequently, there is significant variation in the way governing bodies have been informed about achievements in relation to the Action Plan. **Recommendation 4** is intended to promote the role of governing bodies in reviewing compliance with the Action Plan and instructing the executive heads to take corrective actions when it is considered necessary.

In fulfilling its mandate, UN-Women is faced with the challenge of combining vertical accountability within organizations with horizontal accountability across the United Nations system to promote a sense of community regarding the work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN-Women is responsible for coordinating and facilitating the implementation of the Action Plan, giving guidance and feedback to the reporting entities and reporting on system-wide progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Action Plan reporting is intended to be an iterative process for participating entities, and follows an annual cycle that involves entities' designated focal points as well as business owners. There is interaction with UN-Women at various stages of the cycle. To close the loop, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women addresses an annual letter to the executive management of each reporting entity containing an analysis of the progress made, comparisons to cohorts and suggestions for improvements needed to meet the expected results in relation to each indicator. An important added value of the annual letter is to provide high-level visibility to the Action Plan and reinforce the architecture and focal points for gender equality within the reporting entity. As an incentive, the letter clearly links the responsibility for the implementation of the Action Plan to the leadership of the institution. In this regard, the Inspectors believe that the letter should be more formally integrated into the implementation process and used for accountability and transparency by inviting a response from the entity leadership and executive management to address the challenges raised and by encouraging the leadership to share the letter with the governing bodies.

During the first phase of implementation of the System-wide Action Plan the foundation has been laid and a motivated network has been mobilized. As the framework enters a period of consolidation and maturity, the System-wide Action Plan has been updated through the inclusion of several new indicators covering results and leadership, the strengthening of some of the former indicators, and the splitting of one former indicator into two (the equal representation of women and gender architecture). The second iteration of the framework will ideally include additional quality assurance mechanisms, renewed support from leadership and executive management, governing body oversight and independent assessments of the entities' progress towards gender mainstreaming **(recommendation 5)**. In 2018, an updated version of the System-wide Action Plan (2.0) as well as the United Nations country team Gender Equality Scorecard were launched as complementary accountability frameworks. The Inspectors believe that the commitment and motivation to reach the objectives of the System-wide Action Plan 2.0 should be maintained at both the institutional and system-wide levels in order to further strengthen credible benchmarking and accountability with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

### Recommendations

The elements of an accountability framework are present both system-wide and at the level of individual organizations. The present report contains five recommendations aimed at further improvements, of which one is addressed to the members of CEB, one is addressed to the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, two are addressed to the executive heads of United Nations system organizations, and one is addressed to the legislative and governing bodies of the organizations.

**The United Nations General Assembly is invited to endorse the recommendations included in the present report as a means of furthering the effective implementation of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and strengthening the accountability of the United Nations system with regard to gender mainstreaming, gender equality and the empowerment of women.**

**Recommendation 1**

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should critically assess on a regular basis the quality assurance mechanisms in place in their organization to ensure that ratings by indicator under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women are accurate according to the technical notes issued by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and that such ratings are appropriately supported by evidence.

**Recommendation 2**

Before the end of 2020, the members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination should coordinate within the Board's existing mechanisms to undertake a comprehensive review of the results achieved following the implementation of the first phase of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and provide a forum for endorsing the framework as revised in 2018.

**Recommendation 3**

Starting with the next reporting cycle, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women should expand the content of the report on the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women to be presented by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Economic and Social Council and indicate the progress made by individual reporting entities, the drivers of success and the challenges the entities face.

**Recommendation 4**

The legislative and governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should review the UN-Women annual letter addressed to the executive management, accompanied by indications of strategies and measures envisioned by the executive heads to be undertaken to improve compliance with the indicators included in the System-wide Action Plan and their expected contribution to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

**Recommendation 5**

Before the completion of the System-wide Action Plan 2.0, the executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should ensure an independent assessment of effective progress towards gender mainstreaming to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women within their organization, using the Action Plan as a benchmark, as applicable.

**CONTENTS**

## ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| CEB | United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| IAEA | International Atomic Energy Agency |
| ICAO | International Civil Aviation Organization |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| IMO | International Maritime Organization |
| ITC | International Trade Centre |
| ITU | International Telecommunication Union |
| OHCHR | Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| UNAIDS | Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UN-Habitat | United Nations Human Settlements Programme |
| UNHCR | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNIDO | United Nations Industrial Development Organization |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| UNOPS | United Nations Office for Project Services |
| UNRWA | United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East |
| UN-SWAP | United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| UN-Women | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| UNWTO | World Tourism Organization |
| UPU | Universal Postal Union |
| WFP | World Food Programme |
| WHO | World Health Organization |
| WIPO | World Intellectual Property Organization |
| WMO | World Meteorological Organization |

# I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 67/226, the United Nations General Assembly requested the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) to undertake a system-wide evaluation of the effectiveness, value added and impact of the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women[1] as a tool for performance monitoring and accountability for submission to the General Assembly following its full implementation. The Unit included the present review in its programme of work for 2018. It covers the first phase of implementation of the System-wide Action Plan which began in 2012 and ended in December 2017.

## A. Objectives, scope and methodology

2. The main objectives of the present review are: (a) to provide the United Nations General Assembly with an assessment of the Action Plan as a system-wide performance monitoring and accountability framework (chapters II and III); (b) to review the processes and procedures for its implementation across the United Nations system (chapters II and IV); and (c) to share good practices and lessons learned to support future iterations of the Action Plan. These objectives were identified following discussions with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and other stakeholders.

3. Since the Action Plan initially focused on institutional arrangements and processes, gender development programmatic results were excluded from the scope of the present review. Neither does it include an evaluation of each individual reporting entity's progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women through their policies, action plans and other internal measures, which are mentioned solely in the context of participation in and implementation of the Action Plan. The Action Plan framework has been designed through consultations among United Nations entities, endorsed by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and welcomed by the Economic and Social Council. Therefore, the Inspectors do not assess the technical aspects of the framework or the relevance of its performance indicators.

4. The JIU review was conducted at the conclusion of the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan (2012 to 2017), with a special emphasis on the final year, during which 66 reporting entities participated. In accordance with the JIU mandate, the review focuses on the 28 JIU participating organizations (corresponding to 55 System-wide Action Plan reporting entities, among which 32 belong to the United Nations Secretariat, 10 are funds and programmes and 13 are specialized agencies, as shown in annexes II and VII). Even though 11 reporting entities fall outside the purview of JIU, these entities were invited to participate in the survey addressed to all Action Plan focal points. Annex VI presents the evaluation methodology followed when preparing the present report.

5. The System-wide Action Plan is based on self-assessment by each reporting entity of its own performance. This type of reporting has an inherent bias, which JIU mitigated by triangulating data sources and data collection methods to the extent possible. The levels of performance presented in the present report are as reported to the Economic and Social Council or as provided by UN-Women to the Inspectors. In the light of the confidentiality agreement cited in the first progress report on the System-wide Action Plan,[2] by which findings are presented in aggregate form, the present report does not disclose the performance indicator data of any individual entity.

6. Comments on the draft report were sought from participating organizations and taken into account in its finalization. In accordance with article 11 (2) of the JIU statute, the present report was finalized after consultation among the Inspectors so as to test its conclusions and recommendations against the collective wisdom of the Unit.

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[1] The System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women is known as UN-SWAP within the United Nations system and various gender networks.
[2] E/2013/71.

7.    The report contains five recommendations, of which one is addressed to the members of CEB, one is addressed to the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, two are addressed to the executive heads of United Nations system organizations and one is addressed to the legislative and governing bodies of the organizations. To facilitate the handling of the present report and the implementation of its recommendations and the monitoring thereof, annex VII contains a table that identifies the recommendations relevant to each organization and specifies whether they are directed to the legislative and governing body or to the organization's executive head. The formal recommendations are accompanied by informal recommendations that are additional suggestions for executive management.

8.    The Inspectors express their appreciation to all those who assisted in the preparation of the present report, and particularly to those who participated in the interviews, responded to questionnaires and took part in the JIU survey and focus group and so willingly shared their knowledge and expertise. They also acknowledge with appreciation the transparency and support provided by UN-Women and the reporting entities during the review process.

## B.  Background

9.    Gender equality has been at the heart of the values of the United Nations since the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations.[3] A number of international conventions and declarations of world conferences on women endorsed by United Nations General Assembly resolutions have promoted the cause of gender equality and the advancement of women in the global agenda.[4] The Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 were linked to advancing women's rights; Goal 3 specifically called for the promotion of gender equality, and Goal 5 concerned improving maternal health. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development established at its core the concepts of "leaving no one behind" and "reaching the furthest behind first", which are underpinned by the principles of human rights and gender equality. While Sustainable Development Goal 5 focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women, the 2030 Agenda is aimed at integrating these notions into all the Sustainable Development Goals in general.

10.    As part of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted in 1995, the international community established a strategy for gender mainstreaming. The Economic and Social Council further defined this concept, elaborating on the principles of a gender perspective in the United Nations system, and requested the creation of a system-wide accountability mechanism. Gender mainstreaming is described as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.[5]

11.    In response to the Council's request, CEB endorsed the United Nations system-wide policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women: focusing on results and impact in 2006 and stressed the need for the development of an action plan that specifies the actions required for implementation of all six main elements of the strategy following the policy statement.[6]

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[3] A fundamental principle of the Charter of the United Nations is "equal rights of men and women".
[4] See the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993). See also the declarations issued at the World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995.
[5] See Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/2: Agreed Conclusions.
[6] See CEB/2006/2 and Corr.1, paras. 71–74 and annex 1.

12.   Following its creation,[7] and in accordance with its coordination mandate, UN-Women took the lead in the elaboration of such an action plan through an inclusive and consultative process that involved consultations with United Nations system organizations followed by a pilot implementation phase. Following its approval by the High-level Committee on Programmes and the High-level Committee on Management,[8] CEB endorsed the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in April 2012, setting 2017 as the date by which the United Nations system should meet the 15 performance indicators contained in the Action Plan. In its resolution 2012/24, the Economic and Social Council welcomed the development of the Action Plan as an accountability framework to be fully implemented by the United Nations system and called upon the United Nations system to actively engage in its roll-out. The Council reiterated this call over successive years.[9] The United Nations General Assembly also welcomed the action plan in its resolution 67/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

13.   It is important to note that the Action Plan is one of the mechanisms originally envisaged to establish a comprehensive accountability framework for the United Nations system organizations to implement the policy delineated by CEB. During the first phase of implementation, the Action Plan focused on corporate processes and institutional arrangements within an individual entity, while the United Nations country team scorecards and performance indicators, developed in 2008, concentrate on joint processes and arrangements within the United Nations country teams.

14.   A second generation of the System-wide Action Plan (2.0) was developed through widespread consultations across United Nations system entities and was launched in 2018. The framework was updated and expanded to align it with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan was focused on gender mainstreaming, the second phase is designed to focus on results and includes monitoring activities and outcomes for results pertaining to gender-related Sustainable Development Goals. The System-wide Action Plan 2.0 includes performance indicators focusing on the contributions of organizations of the United Nations system to development results at country and normative levels. It is complemented by the United Nations country team gender equality System-wide Action Plan scorecard. In its resolution 2017/9, the Economic and Social Council called for the full and effective mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the United Nations system, commensurate with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through the launch and implementation of the updated System-wide Action Plan and United Nations country team scorecard.

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[7] United Nations General Assembly resolution 64/289.
[8] See CEB/2012/3 and CEB/2012/4.
[9] See Economic and Social Council resolutions 2012/24, 2015/12 and 2016/2.

## II. THE SYTEM-WIDE ACTION PLAN FRAMEWORK

### A. The Action Plan operationalizes the system-wide gender mainstreaming policy

15.    The System-wide Action Plan operationalizes the policy endorsed in 2006 by CEB into a comprehensive framework for the organizations of the United Nations system. It is intended to serve as a "system-wide accountability framework designed to measure, monitor and drive progress towards a common set of standards to which to aspire and adhere for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women" in the United Nations system.[10] The Action Plan follows a holistic approach to gender mainstreaming, which is addressed through six strategic areas in the policy, namely accountability, results-based management, oversight, human and financial resources, capacity, and coherence, knowledge and information management (see annex I (a)). The Action Plan is considered an important development, since progress regarding gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system has been slow. It is worth noting that it took several years to establish a system-wide policy and an accountability mechanism in response to the request made by the Economic and Social Council in 1997.

16.    The policy endorsed by CEB states that, "notwithstanding the specific mandates of United Nations entities, the overall system must reinforce common goals and consistent working methods in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women".[11] The Action Plan is intended to provide a common framework for system-wide performance monitoring based on a common set of performance indicators accompanied by operational guidelines to ensure harmonized implementation. Across the United Nations system, participating entities are required to report annually on these indicators. The Action Plan can be seen as a good example of organizations in the system working together towards coherent and common objectives and is well aligned with the current context of United Nations reform.[12] As outlined by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his report on repositioning the United Nations development system (A/72/684–E/2018/7), delivering on the 2030 Agenda implies the need for accelerating system-wide alignment, joint actions and "whole-of-system" expertise.

17.    The system-wide coverage of the Action Plan is demonstrated by the number of reporting entities it encompasses. In 2012, when the programme started, 55 entities submitted information and ratings. By 2017, this number had increased to 66 entities. Almost half of the reporting entities are United Nations Secretariat departments, offices and regional commissions.

### B. Progress reported on the Action Plan indicators at the level of the United Nations system

18.    The various reporting entities were at different stages in their implementation of gender-related policies, activities and programmes when they joined the Action Plan. Beyond the objective of meeting the requirements for all the performance indicators as defined in the technical notes, UN-Women indicated in its response to the JIU questionnaire that the common vision of success among the United Nations organizations participating in this system-wide initiative was: (a) to strengthen the conceptual model to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; and (b) to reinforce accountability and performance monitoring on these matters across the United Nations system.

19.    There is nearly unanimous agreement among entities that the System-wide Action Plan has been instrumental in advancing the dialogue on gender mainstreaming. However, their assessments of how the Action Plan has contributed to progress differ. Those entities that presented weak performance ratings at the beginning of the programme saw it as providing them with a benchmark, setting minimum standards (such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and

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[10] UN-Women, "UN-SWAP: a plan to improve gender equality and the empowerment of women across the UN system", 2014.
[11] See CEB/2006/2.
[12] See A/72/124–E/2018/3.

the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)). Those entities that had already had a strong focus on gender before the adoption of the Action Plan acknowledged that the programme complemented existing initiatives and contributed to further institutionalization. It also helped to identify remaining areas for improvement and created internal support to address those areas (such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)).

20. Each strategic area of the framework is supported by two or three indicators that measure the performance of the reporting entities against specific elements (see annex I (a)). To ensure commitment to their implementation, all indicators included in Action Plan have been constructed with a reference to existing mandates approved by the United Nations General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council in their resolutions.[13] The level of achievement in connection with each indicator is measured using five ratings assessing the fulfilment of various requirements,[14] of which "meets requirements" sets the minimum standard for the entity's performance. As mentioned, the ratings are assigned by the reporting entities based on their self-assessment.

21. The Secretary-General of the United Nations reported on progress in ratings of the United Nations system as a whole. During the first phase of implementation (2012–2017), the aggregated percentage of entities "meeting" or "exceeding requirements" for all performance indicators more than doubled compared with the figures used as baseline, with an increase from 31 per cent in 2012 to 65 per cent in 2017.[15] The six figures below prepared by JIU illustrate the progress achieved in ratings within each of the strategic areas. Corresponding indicators have been aggregated to represent a single rating for each area. In this framework, the Inspectors wish to point out that all indicators are treated equally, with no prioritization or weighting. Annex I (b) presents progress achieved under each performance indicator to provide a more precise picture of results achieved.

Figure I **Aggregated ratings for performance indicators in area 1: strengthening accountability (PI 1: policy and plan; PI 2: gender responsive performance management)** (Percentage)

The indicators focus on gender equality policies and their implementation plans in alignment with organization-wide strategic documents and policies. Most of the reporting entities have updated or developed gender equality policies and action plans that often include reference to the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Gender-responsive management promotes the integration of gender equality and the empowerment of women into the core values and competencies of the organizations.
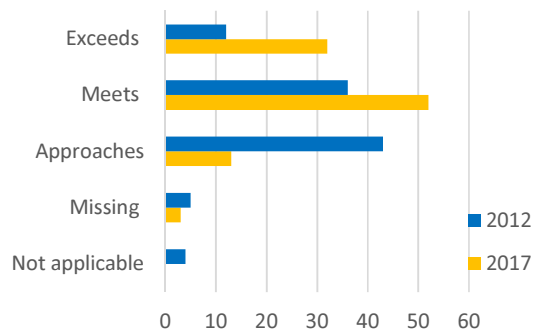


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Figure II **Aggregated ratings for performance indicators in area 2: enhancing results-based management (PI 3: strategic planning; PI 4: reporting and data analysis)** (Percentage)

These indicators promote the inclusion of a gender analysis in corporate strategic planning as well as in main country programme documents. Such integration into a results framework should support strategic decision-making related to gender equality and an approach to working with member States at the country level to achieve results. Reporting entities with a strong results-based management culture have performed well in this area.
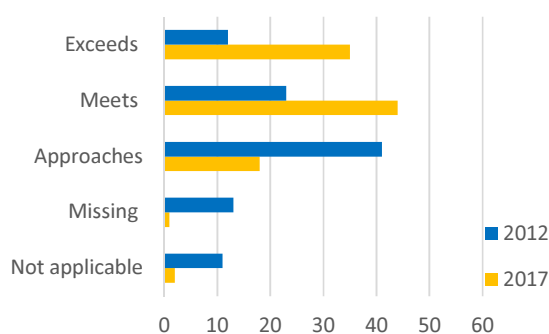


Figure III **Aggregated ratings for performance indicators in area 3: establishing oversight (PI 5: evaluation; PI 6: gender responsive auditing; PI 7: programme review)** (Percentage)

These indicators track the establishment of common standards and benchmarks in the context of monitoring, evaluation and auditing. External and internal programme evaluations, gender audits and peer reviews are some of the tools envisaged. Improvement in this strategic area is due to the engagement of system-wide professional inter-agency networks such as the United Nations Evaluation Group and the Representatives of Internal Audit Services of the United Nations System Organizations. The third indicator promotes a gender perspective in the programme approval process and can be related to area 2 on results-based management.
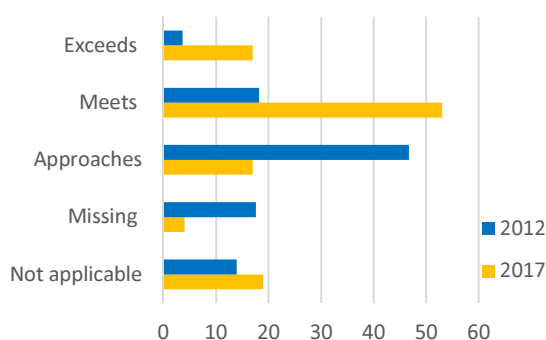


Figure IV **Aggregated ratings for performance indicators in area 4: allocating sufficient human and financial resources (PI 8: resource tracking; PI 9: resource allocation; PI 10: gender architecture and parity; PI 11: organizational culture)** (Percentage)

These indicators are intended to assess the human and financial resources allocated to the implementation of gender mainstreaming. The trend in this area has been less positive. Reporting entities have to juggle multiple priorities and often fall short on allocating resources for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Financial constraints and modus operandi have had a negative impact on gender architecture and gender parity. The performance indicator on organizational culture relates to the implementation of policies promoting a work environment conducive to achieving gender equality.
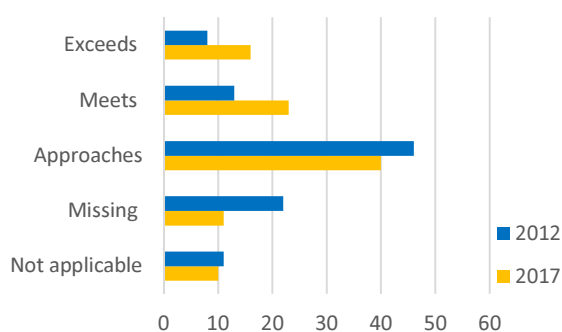
Figure V **Aggregated ratings for performance indicators in area 5: developing and strengthening capacity (PI 12: capacity assessment; PI 13: capacity development)** (Percentage)

These indicators are aimed at assessing the development and strengthening of staff capacity, including at the senior level, and competency in gender analysis, which is seen as an essential asset for the successful mainstreaming of a gender perspective into policies and programmes. Partnerships between gender units or gender focal points and staff development and learning officers have contributed to progress, notably via training.
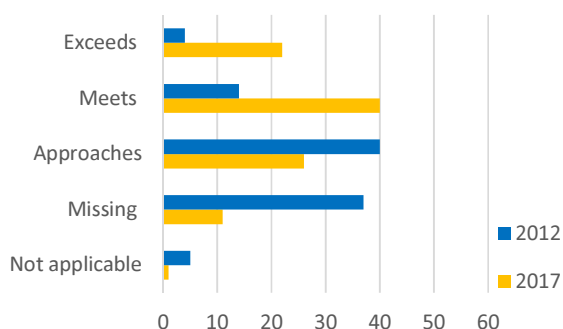


Figure VI **Aggregated ratings for performance indicators in area 6: ensuring coherence, knowledge and information management (PI 14: knowledge generation and communication; PI 15: coherence)** (Percentage)

These indicators are intended to address the way in which the United Nations system reinforces common goals and consistent working methods in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, keeping in mind their respective and specific mandates. These indicators were found important for linking the Action Plan with the programme at country level in order to allow member States to interact with a harmonious United Nations team.
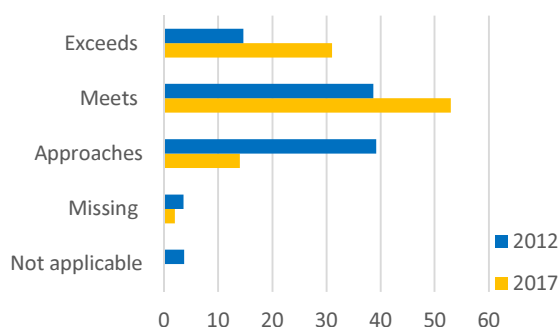


22. The diversity of mandates, operating models and scope among reporting entities has raised several challenges for the implementation of the Action Plan. The relevance and the applicability of some indicators have been questioned by several entities. The Inspectors interpret the noticeable reduction in "missing" information in all strategic areas as a sign that reporting entities have developed internal mechanisms to collect the data necessary for reporting. Similarly, the drop in the "not applicable" rating suggests that the interactions with UN-Women have contributed to increased ownership among entities by clarifying the requirements under the indicators and their relevance. Action Plan focal points also mentioned the dialogue launched within their organizations and within the system-wide network of focal points to explain this positive trend.

23. To overcome challenges, reporting entities also benefited from the flexible approach adopted by UN-Women regarding the implementation of the framework and its indicators, which many focal points appreciated. For example, agencies with a technical mandate (the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), ITU, UNIDO, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the Universal Postal Union (UPU), WIPO and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)) were offered a two-year delay of the deadline for achieving expected targets (2019). The characteristics of the United Nations Secretariat departments with management and administrative support functions were also acknowledged and, in

some cases, accommodated. There are, however, pending issues according to the United Nations Secretariat. The ongoing dialogue between UN-Women and the respective reporting entities should help to address thematic and entity specific indicators and ensure that all the entities can report in accordance with their mandates.

## C. Enabling factors for the implementation of the Action Plan

24.    Gender experts in the United Nations system acknowledge that the responsibility of executive managers to take action on the Action Plan and create an enabling environment is a key factor in ensuring the effective implementation of gender-related components of corporate policies. In the same vein, the Action Plan focal points and gender experts interviewed and surveyed stressed the fact that, in addition to good ratings on the indicators, a supportive and enabling environment is necessary to make progress in gender mainstreaming, since awareness does not automatically translate into an in-depth and sustainable change in the organizational culture. UN-Women has produced an analysis of the drivers of progress covering the period 2012–2016.[16] Figure VII below presents the enabling factors for effective implementation of the Action Plan as identified by UN-Women and mentioned by the entities during the present review. Annex III further delineates indicator-specific enabling factors and good practices that have led to improved performance. **The Inspectors encourage the executive management to assess whether the enabling factors are present in their reporting entities and how good practices could be replicated**.

Figure VII **Enabling factors for the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan (2012–2017)**

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**Framework design and guidance**

Framework designed following a consultative process and evolving needs

Engagement and support of system-wide professional networks

**Governance and leadership**

Support and pressure from governing bodies, member States and the donors community

Support from senior leadership and executive management

**Institutional measures**

Objectives and indicators of the Action Plan embedded in an organization-wide results framework

Establishment of a gender unit and a focal points system

Formalization of business owners' roles and responsibilities in the reporting process

Clear internal reporting mechanisms

Sufficient allocation of resources for activities to meet targets

Clear action plans to accompany gender policies or gender-related components of corporate policies

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*Source:* Prepared by JIU on the basis of information provided in responses to the corporate questionnaire and through interviews.

25.    The System-wide Action Plan indicators may not capture all achievements regarding gender mainstreaming and equality within the reporting entities, as some entities found that their own progress and initiatives were not sufficiently documented by the framework indicators (such as UNICEF and the United Nations Office at Geneva). In addition to the progress made in the ratings for the performance indicators, the present review also highlighted other internal benefits for the reporting entities that were linked to their participation in the Action Plan. Firstly, awareness of gender-related matters has generally increased, and exposure to gender issues has expanded beyond the main gender unit (in cases where one exists) to a range of internal stakeholders called on to provide input to the annual reporting. **The Action Plan has helped to foster dialogue across different business units**, some of which may not have had a direct line of communication in the past. "The programme served as an opportunity for 'de-siloing our work'", said one Action Plan focal point. Secondly, capacity for dealing with gender mainstreaming has increased in some organizations, sometimes significantly, aside from the nomination

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[16] UN-Women, "Drivers of UN-SWAP progress 2012–2016".

of a dedicated focal point for coordinating reporting on the Action Plan. UNODC has created a global gender programme supported by a dedicated gender team. The appointment of a Senior Gender Affairs Officer at ITU helped to coordinate the reporting. In the United Nations Secretariat, in some cases, internal gender teams were reinforced and given access to executive management (such as in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights). In many organizations, internal gender focal point networks have also been revitalized (annex V). Respondents to the JIU survey had a positive view of the extent to which the Action Plan had helped to improve the understanding of gender equality and the empowerment of women among senior management and staff in general as well as the promotion of the gender mainstreaming agenda.

## D.  Processes and procedures for implementation of the Action Plan

26.    The institutional arrangements, processes and procedures in place within reporting entities to prepare their submission are shown in figure VIII which illustrates the steps for data collection, validation and submission to UN-Women through a dedicated online platform. The Action Plan reporting is intended to be an iterative process for participating entities, and follows an annual cycle that involves entities' designated focal points as well as business owners and organizational units responsible for data collection and reporting on thematic performance indicators. There are interactions with UN-Women at various stages of the cycle, and these are welcomed, provided that boundaries are set to ensure the independence of data collection and its analysis. To close the loop, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women issues an annual letter to the executive management of each reporting entity containing an analysis of the progress made, comparisons with cohorts and suggestions for improvements needed to meet the expected results in relation to each indicator.

Figure VIII **System-wide Action Plan annual cycle (2012-2017)**
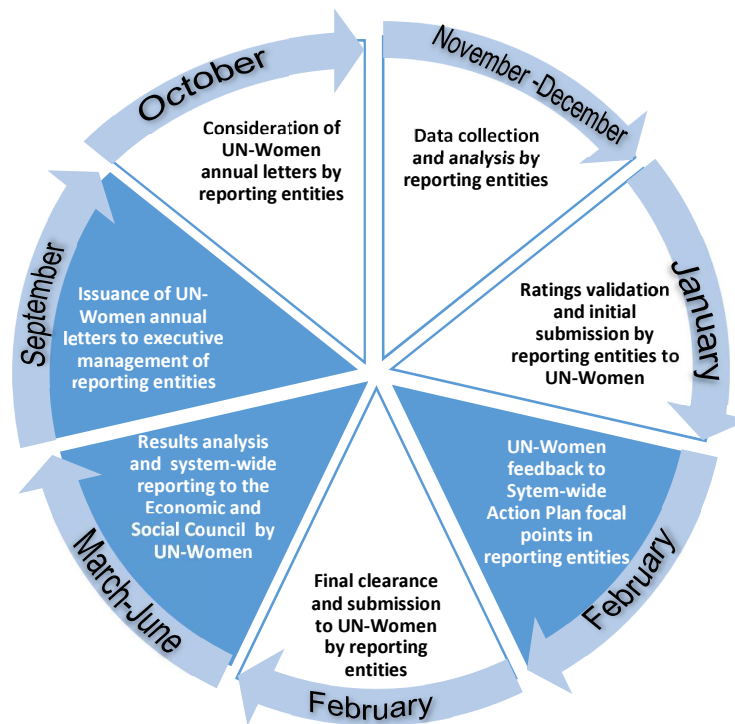


*Source:* Prepared by JIU on the basis of information provided and relevant documentation.

27. The present review highlighted differences among entities in terms of internal capacity and expertise in supporting the implementation of the Action Plan. Annex V compiles information on the gender architecture in the reporting entities. The presence of a gender unit and its placement in the organizational structure varies according to the mandate and operations of the reporting entities. **Regarding the implementation of the Action Plan specifically, the information gathered during the present review shows that most entities have made efforts to designate a dedicated focal point to coordinate implementation and reporting on the Action Plan and to assign responsibilities to business owners in order to provide the necessary information**.

28. These differences correlate with the opinions of Action Plan focal points regarding the reporting process. Overall, respondents to the JIU survey found the reporting requirements to be manageable, however, 15 per cent, mainly from smaller entities with less in-house gender expertise and capacity, judged the requirements "process heavy". The corporate responses to the JIU questionnaire reflected a similar assessment, and the perception of the Action Plan reporting process was likely related to the entities' existing results-based management culture. The Inspectors also noted that those entities with stronger gender machinery expressed more confidence in the sustainability of the results of the programme.

### E.   Enhanced quality assurance for increased credibility

29. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolutions 2016/2 and 2017/9, underlined the need to enhance the consistency and accuracy of reporting to promote institutionalization of transparency and robust accountability systems. As the System-wide Action Plan is based on self-assessment and self-reporting, the Inspectors noted that reporting entities, in their corporate responses to the JIU questionnaire, were confident that the quality assurance mechanisms in place ensured accurate reporting in accordance with the requirements set by the technical notes issued by UN-Women. This is indeed an important issue in terms of credibility to ensure that Action Plan reporting is not simply a bureaucratic exercise but reflects the real situation of the reporting entities and thereby the system. The Inspectors noted that less than half of the Action Plan focal points considered the quality assurance mechanisms in place within their respective entity to be very effective in ensuring accurate reporting. This is an observation that raises some concerns. In several reporting entities, the fact that the process of data collection and initial submission is condensed over a few weeks at the beginning of the calendar year is seen as a potential risk in terms of quality assurance.

30. The quality assurance mechanisms found during the present review differed widely across reporting entities. At a minimum, the review and validation by business owners was complemented by the clearance of the head manager of the relevant units. Those reporting entities with a well-shaped gender architecture were able to ensure dialogue and interactions between the gender unit and the business owners for the consolidation and verification of information and for the validation of ratings. The final clearance at the executive management level can also be seen as an additional layer of assurance. In some reporting entities, oversight-related performance indicators benefit from more scrutiny. **The Inspectors consider it a good practice that the United Nations Evaluation Group has been reviewing the information submitted by all reporting entities on performance indicator 5 on evaluation to ensure a harmonized approach to rating. This is a practice that could be expanded to other performance indicators and networks as applicable.**

31. Following the initial data submission, the UN-Women Help Desk gives feedback on the information recorded and on the rating assigned to each indicator based on the evidence provided by the reporting entity.[17] The Help Desk has limited capacity and has to study the information within tight deadlines imposed for the production of the official documentation in view of the June session of the Economic and Social Council. The feedback provided is for information only, and reporting entities decide whether or not to incorporate it into their final submission. In their responses to the JIU questionnaire, reporting entities commented that the UN-Women feedback was likely to be taken into

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[17] The United Nations Evaluation Group manages the Help Desk for performance indicator 5 on evaluation.

consideration in their final reporting. The technical guidance produced by UN-Women also supports quality assurance, as it clarifies requirements with respect to individual indicators, taking into account specific organizational contexts, and guides reporting entities in their selection of ratings. The present review found that, within the existing capacity, UN-Women cannot assume a greater role in this regard. **Quality assurance must be owned by the reporting entities, with the goal of making progress in gender mainstreaming in their policies and programmes rather than being focused on ratings.**

32. The Inspectors noted that arrangements for peer reviews with other entities, as foreseen when the Action Plan was launched, remained limited during its first phase. Only three peer review exercises involving seven reporting entities were conducted, due to financial constraints and difficulties in identifying appropriate peers. Comparisons between United Nations agencies with different mandates, budgets, staffing and methods of working may not lead to constructive peer review; such a process should be considered between agencies with similar mandates, structures and functionalities. The Inspectors learned that this mechanism is expected to be strengthened during implementation of the second phase of the Action Plan. Despite the fact that peer reviews may be of some interest in terms of learning and sharing good practices, **the Inspectors caution that such a process has limitations in terms of independence and impartiality, may prove to be process heavy and may not be an efficient use of resources.** Instead, as presented in chapter V, a few United Nations organizations (such as IAEA, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP)) have conducted independent evaluations or audits of the implementation of their own gender policy or its operationalization through its action plan. In some cases, these evaluations or audits have included a review of the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan.

33. **Overall, the Inspectors concur that in most entities internal accountability has been reinforced as a result of the Action Plan, attracting the attention of senior management and line managers of business units involved in reporting.** The measures implemented, the policies developed and the practices followed are sufficient to conclude that quality assurance procedures are adequate for most entities to take the pulse of their annual performance. As mentioned previously, this is important for reasons of credibility, and regular attention should be given to ensuring that quality assurance mechanisms are effective. Building on existing good practices, the Inspectors recommend that reporting entities undergo a regular assessment of their internal quality assurance mechanisms and take corrective measures as necessary.

34. The implementation of the following recommendation is expected to enhance transparency and accountability in reporting entities and promote organizational learning.

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**Recommendation 1**

**The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should critically assess on a regular basis the quality assurance mechanisms in place in their organization to ensure that ratings by indicator under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women are accurate according to the technical notes issued by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and that such ratings are appropriately supported by evidence.**

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### III. THE SYSTEM-WIDE ACTION PLAN AS A PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

35. A key objective of the Action Plan is to "enhance the United Nations system's ability to hold itself accountable for and deliver in a unified and more comprehensive manner in support of gender equality and the empowerment of women."[18] The Action Plan addresses accountability both at the level of the United Nations system and at the level of individual entities, with the objective of ensuring a consistent approach. The present chapter examines various levels of accountability that are embedded in the framework and how these have been instrumental in promoting performance monitoring and decision-making regarding gender mainstreaming. At the level of the United Nations system, the Inspectors analysed the role of CEB, with a particular focus on how it has followed up on the action plan operationalizing the 2006 policy. The main system-wide mechanism for reporting on implementation of the System-wide Action Plan, which operates through the Economic and Social Council, was also studied. At the level of the individual reporting entities, the role of the respective governing bodies and the leadership and executive management were examined, as well as the processes and procedures for ensuring implementation of the action plan by other managers and staff.

36. In addition to the mandates and functions of the four entities that were merged to create UN-Women,[19] the United Nations General Assembly also assigned to the new entity the role of leading, coordinating and promoting the accountability of the United Nations system in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. This role is further reviewed in chapter IV. The recommendations included in this chapter point to areas that could be strengthened in order to enhance accountability both system-wide and within reporting entities.

#### A. United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination

37. The members of CEB chose accountability as the first of the strategic areas supporting the 2006 policy.[20] They stated their "intention and commitment to continue to pursue the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women, both collectively within the United Nations system and individually within [their] specific organizations, through coherent and coordinated implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy adopted by the Economic and Social Council in its agreed conclusions 1997/2".

38. **The endorsement of the framework as an action plan by CEB provided a strong system-wide leadership commitment to implement the policy. The present review shows that this endorsement has been perceived as a cornerstone of the Action Plan's success.** As an inter-agency coordination mechanism, CEB does not monitor the implementation of the agreed actions. After the adoption of the policy and its plan of action, CEB has continued to focus attention on gender issues through thematic discussions in its networks on specific aspects, such as gender markers and gender parity, to accelerate the progress of the United Nations system's gender mainstreaming efforts. However, the review of documentation showed the absence of any formal monitoring by CEB, or its main committees, to assess the progress achieved under the Action Plan. This lack of formal monitoring means that individual and collective ownership of the results has not aided the system in identifying the areas that require further attention or acknowledging areas where the Action Plan has succeeded.

39. In the view of the Inspectors, CEB should undertake a comprehensive review of the results achieved following the implementation of the first phase of the System-wide Action Plan to take stock of its successes and challenges. This discussion should be informed by an in-depth analysis by UN-Women, on the basis of collective and individual results, to enable decisions regarding the way forward to address continuing areas of concern, including with regard to committing resources (human or

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[18] UN-Women, "UN-SWAP: A plan to improve gender equality and the empowerment of women across the UN system", 2014.
[19] The Division for the Advancement of Women, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women.
[20] See CEB/2006/2 and Corr.1.

financial) if and where needed. There is also an opportunity to formally endorse the updated version of the System-wide Action Plan (2.0) as a sign of continuous support for the programme, for gender equality and for the empowerment of women.

40. The implementation of the following recommendation is expected to enhance accountability at the system-wide level.

> **Recommendation 2**
>
> **Before the end of 2020, the members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination should coordinate within the Board's existing mechanisms to comprehensively review the results achieved following the implementation of the first phase of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and provide a forum for endorsing the framework as revised in 2018.**

## B. Economic and Social Council

41. In its resolution 2012/24, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations to report on the promotion of accountability for gender mainstreaming and on the progress made in the implementation of the Action Plan. This is the main system-wide mechanism to monitor performance regarding the implementation of the Action Plan.[21] The report is prepared by UN-Women on the basis of the inputs provided by all reporting entities and, since 2018, has been reviewed and cleared by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. The other reports providing a system-wide perspective on the progress of gender-related issues, such as the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement in the status of women in the United Nations system or the reports on the sessions of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, include references to the Action Plan but do not contain sufficient detailed information on its implementation to constitute an accountability and reporting mechanism.

42. The Economic and Social Council has reviewed the information provided in the Secretary-General's report and included in its annual resolutions on gender mainstreaming calls for the promotion of the institutionalization of transparency and robust accountability systems, with a focus on assessing gender mainstreaming, including at the level of United Nations country teams, by capitalizing on the lessons learned from the design and implementation of the Action Plan.

43. The framework set out in the Action Plan provides an opportunity for more effective monitoring of progress on gender mainstreaming in a systematic and harmonized manner. This is a truly unique model in the system. UN-Women committed to the confidentiality of individual entities' ratings prior to the first reporting cycle in order to build trust, avoid inflated ratings and increase ownership among reporting entities. As a result, the approach focuses on results achieved in relation to each performance indicator compared with ratings from the previous year and baseline figures reported in 2013. The presentation aggregates ratings achieved by certain categories of entities, as determined by UN-Women with reference to their operational model. The clustered reporting is complemented by system-wide aggregated figures that are intended to measure the progress of the 66 reporting entities, which include both small offices and large organizations, normative and operational entities, and headquarters-based and field-deployed entities, with only limited context and disaggregation.

44. This approach does not tell the story of the outliers, nor does it provide a basis for holding each reporting entity accountable for its results, whether these are positive or deficient and need increased attention. Cautious opinions were expressed about disclosing disaggregated figures, because the Action Plan was seen as needing to preserve a balance between accountability and transparency, notably to avoid pressure on gender teams to make superficial changes or inflate ratings. The current reporting

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[21] See E/2012/61, E/2013/71, E/2014/63, E/2015/58, E/2016/57, E/2017/57 and Corr.1 and E/2018/53.

method was questioned in some responses to the JIU corporate questionnaire, in interviews with stakeholders and in responses to the JIU survey. Many suggestions were aimed at enhancing transparency, notably by introducing disaggregation of the data by reporting entity. The Inspectors interpret these statements to mean that the original agreement no longer serves its purpose and that the conditions have changed since the time when confidentiality was seen as important in building trust and confidence. In its comments on the present report, the United Nations Secretariat stated its readiness to engage with UN-Women about the publication of the information that is reported, as public disclosure of that information could help United Nations entities to learn from each other and share best practices.

45.   In the view of the Inspectors, system-wide monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Action Plan should be enhanced, seizing the opportunities offered by the framework. The Inspectors believe that there is an opportunity to increase transparency by reshaping the section of the report to the Economic and Social Council promoting system-wide accountability for gender mainstreaming to present both aggregated and disaggregated figures for individual reporting entities, accompanied by narrative where necessary to analyse specific situations. This would contribute to enhanced system-wide accountability by providing a comprehensive picture of those in the system that are meeting and exceeding indicators and those that are falling behind, and the reasons why. The document prepared by UN-Women on the drivers of progress on the Action Plan (covering the period 2012–2016) is a good example of the type of analysis that, in the view of the Inspectors, should be presented to governing bodies, in the interest of pushing the system towards more effective action regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women.

46.   The implementation of the following recommendation is expected to enhance accountability system-wide.

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**Recommendation 3**

**Starting with the next reporting cycle, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women should expand the content of the report on the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women to be presented by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Economic and Social Council and indicate the progress made by individual reporting entities, the drivers of success and the challenges the entities face.**

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## C.  Reporting entities

47.   In addition to a system-wide approach, the strategy included in the United Nations system-wide policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women also makes accountability at the level of individual reporting entities an essential element for progress. The policy states: "While coherent system-wide accountability is the desired goal, individual United Nations entities will retain their ability to add or enhance their internal approaches to accountability and to take into account their specific mandates and roles."[22] The System-wide Action Plan addresses multiple levels of accountability within the reporting entities, as indicators monitored by the Plan may concern executive management, line managers or staff at large. This is a key feature of the Action Plan, where the reporting entities can make a difference by taking concrete actions. Based on the responses concerning each performance indicator, one can conclude that the majority of the reporting entities have embarked on the implementation of the Action Plan in a positive way and have taken measures to facilitate its implementation, while taking into account their own specific characteristics and their capacity.

**Increasing the role of the governing bodies**

48.   In the United Nations system organizations, some members of governing bodies have shown great interest in gender-related issues, but this varies according to the mandate of a particular organization.

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[22] CEB/2006.2

With respect to the System-wide Action Plan specifically, governing bodies have acted upon it in different ways. The Inspectors came across a few cases of formal endorsement of the Action Plan. For example, the Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union instructed the Secretary-General of the ITU to fulfil the obligation of submitting reports as required under the Action Plan and to improve compliance with the performance indicators. As additional examples, the ILO Governing Body requested the International Labour Office to align its gender action plan closely with the six areas of the Action Plan, and the General Conference of UNIDO encouraged the Director-General of UNIDO to fully implement the relevant performance indicators set out in the Action Plan. The Executive Board of UNESCO took note of the information provided by the secretariat and encouraged the Director-General of UNESCO to continue efforts in implementation. In some cases, the indicators set out in the Action Plan have been incorporated into gender policies to a variable extent, and these policies have been presented and endorsed by the respective governing bodies (such as in UNDP, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), WFP, the World Health Organization (WHO) and WMO), as shown in annex IV. According to UN-Women, at the conclusion of the first phase of the programme, most reporting entities have a policy in place on gender equality and the empowerment of women that is in line with the Action Plan and is regularly reviewed by governing bodies, adding an additional layer of accountability.

49.    The way governing bodies are informed about the results achieved in the implementation of the Action Plan by their respective reporting entities varies significantly (see annex IV). The Inspectors draw attention to the practice followed by ITU, where the Secretary-General shares the UN-Women annual letter with the ITU Council as an information document. In the case of the United Nations Secretariat, the consolidated information prepared by UN-Women for the system-wide report serves as a corporate picture of the 32 departments, offices and regional commissions reporting under the Action Plan. Organizations such as the International Trade Centre (ITC), UNESCO and WMO are other examples where information specific to the Action Plan is presented to the members of the governing bodies. In most cases, achievements under the Action Plan are communicated as part of another reporting mechanism on the implementations of gender policies (as in the case in ILO, UNDP, UNIDO and WFP) or as part of a report on human resources management (such as in IAEA, ICAO, IMO, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNRWA, UNWTO and WHO), sometimes with partial information provided on some indicators only and not necessarily labelled as achievements under the Action Plan. As mentioned, several reporting entities (the funds and programmes and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) have integrated Action Plan reporting into broader reporting requirements to the governing body as part of their corporate results framework, which is considered a good practice.

50.    In the broader context, the origins of the Action Plan can be seen as going back to the declarations adopted during successive international conferences on women and other international instruments. The Inspectors consider that it is a fiduciary responsibility to monitor the progress of gender mainstreaming in the various organizations, with a view to achieving gender equality and furthering the empowerment of women in the United Nations system. The Inspectors believe that governing bodies have a role to play in exercising oversight of the actions taken by the organizations and the results achieved in implementing the Action Plan and more globally in reaching the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women. This echoes recent evaluations conducted by some organizations in the system that recommended such reporting to governing bodies to enhance accountability. [23] Such transparency is expected to further foster accountability among executive heads and overall performance in terms of gender mainstreaming. As stated by a high-level official in one reporting entity, implementation of the Action Plan becomes a governance issue rather than a bureaucratic managerial exercise. The Inspectors believe that the UN-Women annual letter, the content of which is further described in chapter V, provides relevant information that places the governing bodies in a position to better review compliance with the Action Plan, give strategic direction and instruct the executive heads to take corrective actions when it is considered necessary. Recommendation 4 calls for the circulation

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[23] See, for example, WFP, *Evaluation of WFP's 2009 Gender Policy: This Time Around?*, January 2014.

of this letter to the members of the governing bodies, together with indications of actions to be initiated. The intention is not to add an extra layer of bureaucracy but to elevate the debate to the highest level of the organizations. The measures set out in the remedial action plans that reporting entities are required to include in their online reporting and the existing reporting mechanisms in place in several organizations (see annex IV) can be used to that effect.

51.    The implementation of the following recommendation is expected to enhance transparency and accountability in reporting entities.

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**Recommendation 4**

**The legislative and governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should review the UN-Women annual letter addressed to the executive management, accompanied by indications of strategies and measures envisioned by the executive heads to be undertaken to improve compliance with the indicators included in the System-wide Action Plan and their expected contribution to gender equality and the empowerment of women.**

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**Commitment of leadership and executive management**

52.    In the United Nations system-wide policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women, executive heads committed to providing strong leadership within their organizations to ensure that a gender mainstreaming perspective was reflected in all their organizational practices, policies and programmes. UN-Women has identified commitment and support from senior leadership in terms of the Action Plan as well as gender equality and the empowerment of women as one of the critical factors for success.[24] All responses provided to the JIU corporate questionnaire indicated that such support and commitment does exist at senior leadership level.

53.    The Inspectors stress that the Action Plan should not be seen solely as a reporting exercise but as an opportunity for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women through concrete actions. It is the responsibility of the executive heads of the reporting entities to take action to implement the Action Plan and make demonstrable progress toward creating an enabling environment. Results from the JIU survey indicate that support from leadership could be stronger.

54.    One example of the attention being paid to gender issues by the leadership in the United Nations system is the International Gender Champions initiative across the system. However, it is the decisions made by the leadership and the executive management to translate commitment into concrete actions that serve as good indicators. These decisions can relate to the gender architecture within reporting entities, notably the existence of and resources devoted to the gender unit and the establishment of an organization-wide network of gender focal points. Annex V provides elements for comparison between the reporting entities in this regard. In terms of interest from the executive management, one good practice identified concerns putting the results achieved under the Action Plan on the agenda of the senior management team to discuss corporate achievements and corrective actions, sometimes with the representative of the gender unit as a member or an observer. In some organizations, the gender unit provides briefings to senior managers on gender issues and on the Action Plan in particular. A few organizations have a dedicated gender steering committee that is responsible for reviewing the results under the Action Plan. Another good practice is to provide visibility on gender issues and empower the gender unit by ensuring direct access to the executive management.

55.    In the case of the United Nations Secretariat, the departments, offices and regional commissions are considered separate reporting entities under the Action Plan. In the absence of a Secretariat-wide gender policy, several heads of departments and offices have taken initiatives through specific action plans and policies that are within their delegated authority but must also respect corporate-wide policies related to recruitment and training.

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[24] See UN-Women, "Drivers of UN-SWAP progress 2012–2016".

56. The System-wide Action Plan is designed to cascade accountability downwards within the reporting entities. In this regard, one good practice that was found was the formalization of the roles and responsibilities of both the Action Plan focal points and business owners into the gender policies or in a specific gender accountability framework, while acknowledging the work performed and the time devoted to these functions (such as in ITU, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), UNIDO and the United Nations Office at Geneva). The integration of Action Plan indicators or objectives within corporate strategic planning instruments also provides a strong incentive for accountability and reporting, linking the reporting on achievements under the Action Plan to the reporting on corporate objectives (such as in FAO, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF). Several entities have further introduced a gender perspective in their internal performance appraisal system, both for managers and for staff at large (these entities include the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Political Affairs, ITC, UNDP, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO, WHO and WMO). It should be noted that often these elements focus on gender parity rather than on the broader components of a gender-mainstreaming approach.

57. Participation in the Action Plan generates a wide range of internal information. The corporate responses to the JIU questionnaire suggest that this information, related findings and conclusions are not consistently reviewed by senior management or other management committees, nor are they systematically circulated to line managers. The Inspectors believe that Action Plan performance information could be utilized more widely within reporting entities to further develop an accountability-driven culture.

58. In the same vein, once the annual Action Plan reporting is finalized, the achievements made in relation to the performance indicators and the lessons learned are not consistently used in knowledge sharing initiatives. The posting on corporate websites or intranets or the inclusion in outreach products remain a rare practice. This is an important issue in terms of transparency and accountability. In the view of the Inspectors, there is room for increased transparency and public disclosure of such information. Good practices observed regarding the use of the information collected include the publication of Action Plan information in outreach products (for example by the United Nations Office at Geneva) or internal communications products (for example by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management). **Leadership and executive management of the reporting entities are invited to explore additional and innovative channels to disseminate Action Plan information in the context of the entities' work on gender equality and the empowerment of women.** Finally, gender equality and the empowerment of women should be included in corporate communication strategies.

## IV. COORDINATION AND FACILITATION ROLE OF UN-WOMEN

### A. System-wide coordination

59. As stated earlier, the United Nations General Assembly mandated UN-Women to lead, coordinate and promote the accountability of the United Nations system in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women.[25] The development of the System-wide Action Plan framework and the coordination and facilitation of its implementation falls under this mandate, as reaffirmed since 2012 by the Economic and Social Council in its resolutions on gender mainstreaming. In fulfilling this mandate, UN-Women was faced with the challenge of combining vertical accountability within organizations with horizontal accountability across the United Nations system entities to promote a sense of community regarding the work on gender equality and the empowerment of women.[26] This challenge applies to the coordination and facilitation of the Action Plan, as UN-Women pointed out that it does not "police" organizations and does not consider that organizations are accountable to it in terms of implementation of their gender policies. In the context of the Action Plan, **UN-Women is accountable for the way it coordinates the action plan and facilitates its implementation, gives guidance and feedback to the reporting entities and promotes system-wide progress on accountability with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women**.

60. The Inspectors noted a positive assessment by the reporting entities regarding the coordination and facilitation of the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan by UN-Women. UN-Women succeeded in providing a focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women among the United Nations system organizations, using a common framework, therefore operationalizing the provisions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the resolutions of the Economic and Social Council on gender mainstreaming and the vision of the members of CEB. Responses to the JIU corporate questionnaire, interviews conducted with officials at various levels and opinions shared through the JIU survey all confirmed that view.

61. UN-Women has been particularly successful in leveraging existing inter-agency networks, including the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, the United Nations Evaluation Group, the Finance and Budget Network of CEB and the Representatives of Internal Audit Services of the United Nations System Organizations, encouraging these networks to assume increased responsibility for providing technical and professional guidance for the implementation of relevant performance indicators included in the System-wide Action Plan. This is well in line with Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/12, which called for mobilizing the system-wide machinery in order to take increased responsibility for the implementation of relevant Action Plan performance indicators. UN-Women connects the network with other contextual initiatives related to gender equality and the empowerment of women (such as the United Nations reform efforts and the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment) to keep the Action Plan relevant.

62. UN-Women has also engaged with governing bodies in a series of informal briefings on the programme and has encouraged gender focal points to dialogue with the governing bodies of their organizations. This has included the participation of UN-Women officials in the meetings of governing bodies of several Geneva- and Vienna-based organizations. UN-Women has also reached out to senior managers of reporting entities to advocate for and promote the System-wide Action Plan.

63. Within UN-Women, the coordination and facilitation of the Action Plan falls under the competence of the Coordination Division. The human resources assigned to the programme, as

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[25] See United Nations General Assembly resolution 64/289.
[26] See UN-Women Independent Evaluation Office, *Coordinating for gender equality results: corporate evaluation of UN-Women's contribution to UN system coordination on gender equality and the empowerment of women*, May 2016.

estimated by UN-Women, amount to the equivalent of 2.5 positions (staff and consultant). The financial resources were estimated by UN-Women at $322,454, representing less than 5 per cent of the corresponding budget line (2016–2017).[27] No additional regular budget resources have been allocated for the coordination and facilitation of the System-wide Action Plan. In 2014, UN-Women and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation entered into a cost-sharing agreement to assist in the implementation of the programme over a three-year period, which was extended into 2017, for a total contribution of $600,000. In its response to the corporate evaluation of its system-wide coordination role, UN-Women's management indicated that resource constraints have impacted on the entity's ability to fully leverage its system-wide and inter-agency functions. Since these extrabudgetary funds are now exhausted, UN-Women expressed concerns about the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan 2.0 and the United Nations country team Gender Equality Scorecard.

64. UN-Women uses these resources to promote awareness and facilitate participation in the Action Plan in the United Nations system. Given the financial context, UN-Women prioritized its actions and resources, both at individual entity and inter-agency levels. It focused primarily on developing, piloting and adapting the Action Plan and on creating the infrastructure to facilitate its implementation, notably through the network of focal points across the system. The support to the reporting entities also included the issuance of technical guidance notes explaining performance indicators to ensure compliance as well as knowledge-sharing activities. **In view of the resources invested, the progress achieved through the implementation of the programme by the organizations of the United Nations system is considerable.**

## B. Facilitation of the implementation of the Action Plan

**Framework design and development**

65. The corporate evaluation of the system-wide coordination role played by UN-Women indicated that it has been most successful when it has taken a participatory and consultative approach to engaging with other United Nations entities.[28] The desk review conducted by the Inspectors and the views expressed in questionnaires and interviews confirmed that this inclusive and participatory approach has been effective and well received. This was found to be crucial in the context of such a system-wide initiative to integrate disparate entities, and only a few dissenting opinions were expressed in this regard. One good practice found involves the piloting of the programme among a few entities before launching the successive versions of the System-wide Action Plan. **The Inspectors encourage UN-Women to continue to pay attention to adjusting the framework and providing the related guidance based on lessons learned and inputs gathered from stakeholders in the reporting entities.** This flexible approach has led to the introduction of changes in the updated version of the System-wide Action Plan (2.0) in the form of the refinement of performance indicators and the inclusion of new ones, for example regarding leadership. **The Inspectors also encourage UN-Women to include a specific section in the report to the Economic and Social Council to highlight changes, improvements and adaptations made to the framework**.

**Technical guidance and support to reporting entities**

66. In parallel to the launching of the System-wide Action Plan, UN-Women implemented a series of measures to assist the entities in their implementation of it. In this context, many described the UN-Women team as supportive and client-oriented. As a priority, UN-Women prepared guidance documentation on developing gender equality policies that were aligned with

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[27] The resources devoted within each reporting entity to the implementation of the Action Plan are not computed here and would need to be added to estimate the overall cost incurred by the United Nations system.
[28] UN-Women Independent Evaluation Office, *Coordinating for gender equality results: corporate evaluation of UN-Women's contribution to UN system coordination on gender equality and the empowerment of women*, May 2016.

the Action Plan, as this element was considered crucial to making progress, and supported the elaboration of gender policies, either by providing expertise or by sharing costs for consultancy.[29] The assistance to reporting entities also included clarification of the requirements under the indicators, interpretation of data and determination of ratings, training and knowledge-sharing. These have been important contributions and have led to concrete changes in the participation of and ratings reported by the reporting entities, as presented in paragraph 22.

67. In their responses to the JIU corporate questionnaire, two thirds of the reporting entities mentioned that they had received technical assistance for implementation of the Action Plan. Figure IX maps the types of support delivered by UN-Women. The guidance on the performance indicators (applicability, requirements and selection of ratings) has been the most commonly accessed, followed by the explanations of the online reporting system. The Inspectors noted that the support provided by UN-Women was rated highly by reporting entities, both in the corporate responses to the JIU questionnaire and from a working level perspective by the focal points through the JIU survey. The review also shows that the need for support and the type of assistance required differs from one entity to another. In the view of the Inspectors, smaller entities with limited capacity and resources may be more receptive to and in need of support.

Figure IX **Types of support provided by the UN-Women Help Desk for the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan (2012-2017), by number of entities supported**
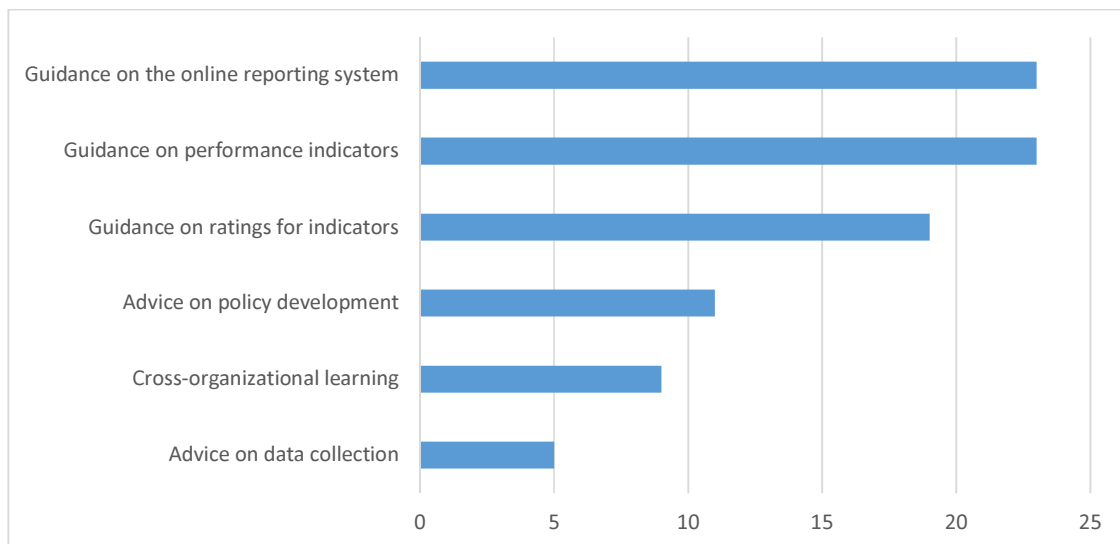


*Source:* JIU questionnaire 2018.


**Quality assurance**

68. Within its existing resources, the UN-Women Help Desk reviews each reporting entity's information against the requirements set out in the technical notes for quality control and accuracy. As noted above, the internal capacity for undertaking this task is currently limited. The Help Desk may suggest revisions of ratings and request clarification and additional supporting documentation. This review process is conducted within a short period of time (three weeks), which limits the capacity for in-depth verification and validation. In any case, it should be noted that feedback provided by UN-Women is for consideration only, therefore changes based on this feedback are not mandatory.

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[29] See E/2017/57, para. 35 and UN-Women, "Drivers of UN-SWAP progress 2012–2016".

**Knowledge management**

69. During the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan, knowledge management and knowledge-sharing have been key areas of attention for UN-Women, taking into consideration its resource constraints, both in staff time and financial terms. This was essential to ensure that good practices were identified and lessons learned were captured, both for the purpose of strengthening internal accountability and in terms of data collection and reporting. Communication, knowledge-sharing and learning processes are supportive of a common understanding of the minimum requirements for quality and credibility of the implementation of the Action Plan. During the first phase of implementation, knowledge-sharing initiatives were managed mainly by UN-Women.

70. A major outcome of the programme is the expansion of the network of Action Plan focal points during the first phase of implementation. The network, which increased from 150 focal points in 2012 to over 400 at the end of 2017, is seen by more than two thirds of survey respondents (67 per cent) as helping them to fulfil their assigned responsibilities. UN-Women has set up annual meetings to gather all key players in a workshop. These workshops serve multiple purposes, such as ensuring clarity about reporting expectations and the interpretation of indicators. They have also strengthened the network by providing a forum for information-sharing and the exchange of experiences, cross-learning from good practices and networking with gender experts across the system. As a result of networking with gender experts in these annual workshops, joint initiatives have emerged, such as the video production on unconscious bias by the International Organization for Migration and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The questions related to the workshop received reasonably good marks in the JIU survey.

71. Interviews and comments in the JIU survey suggest that more needs to be done in terms of knowledge management. The improvement of the user-friendliness and technical reliability of the online reporting system is one preoccupation. The regular updates and improved quality of the documentation posted on the knowledge hub is another area attracting suggestions for improvement. Suggestions were noted relating to further mobilizing entities' specific expertise and competence in certain areas, such as gender markers, to conduct knowledge-sharing initiatives across the system. Intensifying the involvement of inter-agency networks was also encouraged.

72. Knowledge management and knowledge-sharing is an area that might benefit from additional resources, for example to update the online training modules such as "I know gender" that could be used by reporting entities system-wide. The roll-out of the second phase of the System-wide Action Plan (2.0) will also require targeted knowledge management and knowledge-sharing with field offices as well as the integration of the resident coordinators as key stakeholders.

73. Knowledge management initiatives could be further improved to support the implementation of the Action Plan in its second phase. The Inspectors learned that action has already been taken in this area, such as the integration of the knowledge hub into the formal reporting system, which is a positive development. **UN-Women should continue to develop a system-wide knowledge-sharing community of practice. UN-Women might also explore leveraging gender expertise in those entities that are excelling in this area to help those that need assistance, thereby strengthening the gender network and promoting knowledge-sharing**. An important aspect with respect to communication is to highlight the relationship and complementarity between the System-wide Action Plan and the other initiatives promoting gender in the United Nations system, such as the System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity and the International Gender Champions initiatives.

### C. UN-Women annual letter to executive management

74. The System-wide Action Plan annual cycle ends with the issuance of a letter from the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women addressed to the executive management of each reporting entity. UN-Women invests significant time and effort in analysing all 66 reporting entities' information in order to produce a customized letter for each one. It provides a breakdown of ratings per

performance indicator with their evolution over the years and highlights progress as well as those areas in need of improvement, backed up by statistical evidence. In addition, the letter contextualizes the individual entity's performance within the performance of equivalent entities and the system as a whole.

75. The reporting entities use this letter in various ways. Good practices identified in this regard include its circulation among senior managers, business owners involved in reporting, line managers and sometimes among staff at large. As an incentive, the letter is important for promoting participation in the Action Plan; the vast majority of focal points see it as an effective tool in their interactions with business owners. In the customized letter, UN-Women recognizes the contribution of the gender unit and the focal points, which raises their positioning and visibility within the entity, providing an opportunity for them to meet with senior management on gender-related matters. As such, the letter provides additional support to gender teams, where they exist, in promoting the gender agenda with line managers.

76. An important added value of the annual letter is to provide high-level visibility to the Action Plan and reinforce the architecture and focal points for gender equality within the reporting entity. The letter clearly links the responsibility for its implementation and gender mainstreaming and equality at large to the leadership of the institution. UN-Women uses the letter as a means of calling the attention of leadership and executive management to both areas of progress and challenges, and of recognizing good work and the achievements of the entity. UN-Women highlights areas that the reporting entity should focus on or address and expects the content of the letter to be used to set the plan for the next reporting cycle. However, the Inspectors learned that a limited number of reporting entities formally reply to the letter. **To enhance accountability, the Inspectors encourage the executive management of the reporting entities to provide a formal response to the annual letter of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director indicating the measures envisaged to maintain or improve their performance in relation to the indicators set out in the Action Plan.**

77. UN-Women does not collect information on the implementation of measures specifically advocated for in the letter. Entity-level progress is monitored from year to year as part of regular reporting. As the letter is an effective mechanism for engaging the executive management and providing customized feedback, comparable data and areas to focus on, they can also be a lever to encourage transparency. In this regard, the Inspectors recommend that the letter be more formally integrated into the Action Plan implementation process and used for accountability and transparency by inviting a response from the entity's leadership and executive management addressing the challenges raised and encouraging that the letter be shared with governing bodies. **Starting with the next reporting cycle, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director should revise the template of the annual letter addressed to the leadership and executive management of the reporting entities to include an invitation to communicate in writing their plans for implementing the Action Plan based on their progress to date and addressing the areas of concerns highlighted in the letter**.

# V. CONCLUSION

78.    The resolutions of the Economic and Social Council highlight the multifaceted dimensions of gender mainstreaming.[30] Although United Nations entities are mandated to mainstream gender, there are varying levels of commitment, concrete action taken on this task, and understanding of how their technical area of work is inextricably linked with gender development results.

79.    The Action Plan has contributed to creating system-wide coherence in promoting gender mainstreaming and monitoring its progress. **The Inspectors stress that such success is indeed a system-wide achievement, as most of the reporting entities had a hand in the development of the framework and its implementation**. The present review also confirms that, among the various dimensions of gender mainstreaming, committing human and financial resources is a key element for progress. The implementation of the Action Plan shows, overall, that this is a remaining area of concern for the United Nations system. The rolling out of the System-wide Action Plan 2.0 to field offices will require more resources in order to be successful. This shows convergence with the motivations for and recommendations from the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, which set up two working groups on financial tracking mechanisms and financial allocations for gender equality and the empowerment of women. At the time of the finalization of the present report, the Inspectors were informed that the working groups may be preparing actionable recommendations to be presented to the Task Force at the principals level.

80.    In the current context of reform, gender equality and gender parity are viewed as priorities. The Action Plan framework has been revised and further enhanced since its first phase to fulfil the other levels of accountability recognized in the 2006 system-wide policy, which called for an accountability mechanism for development results at the country and normative levels. Notably, this revision includes new indicators (annex I (a)). The Inspectors welcome the introduction of a specific indicator on leadership and note the separate indicator on gender parity.

81.    In 2017, the Secretary-General of the United Nations put the spotlight on gender parity again by introducing the System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity, which includes targets and calls for monitoring of four areas of performance (namely leadership and accountability, senior management, recruitment and retention, and creating an enabling environment).[31] Although a parity focus has enabled acceleration of some results, it has created some confusion in parts of the system and may divert attention from what gender mainstreaming and gender equality entail. **The findings of the present review suggest a need for clearer communication about the interplay between gender parity, mainstreaming and equality. The System-wide Action Plan 2.0 and the System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity should be aligned in order to harmonize and simplify reporting requirements**.

82.    The implementation of the System-wide Action Plan 2.0 began in 2018, and entities reported on it from January 2019. It is expected that the recommendations made in the present report will contribute to strengthening the framework, both in terms of its utility to the United Nations system in implementing gender equality and the empowerment of women and in terms of its credibility as a performance monitoring system and an accountability tool.

83.    The Action Plan provides both a benchmark and an indication of how the United Nations system organizations have mainstreamed gender equality considerations in their institutional context. As such, the Action Plan is a proxy that is used to measure organizations' commitment to gender mainstreaming in its various aspects. In the context of the United Nations system, a methodology based on the use of proxies appears to be an appropriate option to monitor broad subjects like gender mainstreaming, which is a multi-faceted theme. In this case, it may contribute to highlighting actions to be taken to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. Ideally, together with a broader analysis, it should represent a basis for decision-making to promote concrete actions to reach this objective, within each reporting entity and at the level of the United Nations system. It has yet to be ascertained whether an

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[30] Economic and Social Council resolutions 2012/24, 2013/16, 2014/2, 2015/12, 2016/2 and 2017/9.
[31] United Nations, *System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity*, 2017.

institution that has mainstreamed gender into all its practices (i.e., reached all the Action Plan performance indicators) delivers better gender equality and development results. The achievement against each indicator does not necessarily imply a change in culture within the reporting entities or sustainable results regarding gender mainstreaming.

84. As seen in some entities, the ratings on performance indicators vary over the years. The System-wide Action Plan requires adequate oversight and validation to produce a more comprehensive picture of how an entity is moving towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Inspectors believe that the Action Plan provides a benchmarking framework for periodic independent evaluations and audits that would provide a more credible assessment of how an entity is progressing towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and would also address some of the limitations of the Action Plan as a performance monitoring tool. In recent years, several United Nations entities (FAO, IAEA, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and WFP) have indeed conducted a review of the implementation of their gender polices and related action plan to evaluate their work to promote gender equality or gender mainstreaming in their programmes.

85. The information collected by the Inspectors shows that external validation mechanisms are not sufficiently utilized. In the opinion of the Inspectors, periodic and independent evaluations and audits could contribute to increased credibility and a more accurate measurement of gender equality and empowerment of women through the Action Plan indicators. They therefore recommend the establishment of an impartial validation system, such as evaluation or audit, to ensure a periodic independent assessment of Action Plan procedures and ratings and an assessment of the entity's progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Inspectors note that the updated version of the System-wide Action Plan (2.0) envisages a similar validation process in order to exceed the requirements for performance indicator 4, which covers evaluation,[32] and they encourage the executive heads to expedite the intention behind this requirement.

86. The implementation of the following recommendation is expected to enhance transparency and accountability in reporting entities and promote organizational learning.

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**Recommendation 5**

**Before the completion of the System-wide Action Plan 2.0, the executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should ensure an independent assessment of effective progress towards gender mainstreaming to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women within their organization, using the Action Plan as a benchmark, as applicable.**

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**Final thoughts**

87. In the course of a multi-year system-wide effort such as the System-wide Action Plan, there is leadership and staff turnover, however, the commitment and motivation to meet **the objectives of the Action Plan should be maintained at the institutional and system-wide levels,** in order to continue the efforts toward demonstrable progress and hold the system accountable for the areas that require more commitment and effort.

88. **With this in mind, the United Nations General Assembly is invited to endorse the recommendations included in the present report as a means of furthering the effective implementation of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and strengthening the accountability of the United Nations system with regard to gender mainstreaming, gender equality and the empowerment of women.**

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[32] In the technical notes for System-wide Action Plan 2.0, the criteria for exceeding performance indicator 4 on evaluation include the following: "Conducts at least one evaluation to assess corporate performance on gender mainstreaming or equivalent every 5-8 years."

**Annex I (a): The System-wide Action Plan framework**

System-wide Action Plan
6 Strategic areas
15 Performance indicators

→

System-wide Action Plan 2.0
2 Levels of action
6 Strategic areas
17 Performance indicators

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Strengthening accountability

1: Policy and plan

2: Gender-responsive performance management

Enhancing results-based management

3: Strategic planning

4: Reporting and data analysis

Establishing oversight

5: Evaluation

6: Gender-responsive auditing

7: Programme review

Allocating sufficient human and financial resources

8: Financial resource tracking

9: Financial resource allocation

10: Gender architecture and parity

11: Organizational culture

Developing and strengthening staff capacity

12: Capacity assessment

13: Capacity development

Ensuring coherence, knowledge and information management

14: Knowledge generation and communication

15: Coherence

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Gender-related Sustainable Development Goals results

A. Results-based management

1: Strategic planning gender-related Sustainable Development Goals results

2: Reporting on gender-related Sustainable Development Goals results

3: Programmatic gender-related Sustainable Development Goals results not directly captured in the strategic plan

B. Oversight

4: Evaluation

5: Audit

Institutional strengthening to support achievement of results

C. Accountability

6: Policy

7: Leadership

8: Gender-responsive performance management

D. Human and financial resources

9: Financial resource tracking

10: Financial resource allocation

11: Gender architecture

12: Equal representation of women

13: Organizational culture

E. Capacity

14: Capacity assessment

15: Capacity development

F. Knowledge, communication and coherence

16: Knowledge and communication

17: Coherence

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*Source:* Prepared by JIU on the basis of the System-wide Action Plan technical notes.

**Annex I (b): Progress on the indicators included in the System-wide Action Plan (2012-2017) at the level of the United Nations system (Percentage)**

| Strategic areas and performance indicators (PI) | Rating | 2012 | 2017 | Trend |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Area 1: Strengthening accountability** | | | | |
| PI 1. Policy and Plan | Missing | 5 | 3 | — |
| | Not applicable | 5 | 0 | ↓ |
| | Approaches | 51 | 15 | ↓↓↓ |
| | Meets | 22 | 33 | ↑↑ |
| | Exceeds | 16 | 48 | ↑↑↑ |
| PI 2. Gender-Responsive Performance Management | Missing | 5 | 3 | — |
| | Not applicable | 2 | 0 | — |
| | Approaches | 35 | 12 | ↓↓↓ |
| | Meets | 51 | 70 | ↑↑ |
| | Exceeds | 7 | 15 | ↑ |
| **Area 2: Enhancing results-based management** | | | | |
| PI 3. Strategic Planning | Missing | 15 | 2 | ↓↓ |
| | Not applicable | 11 | 2 | ↓ |
| | Approaches | 38 | 23 | ↓↓ |
| | Meets | 24 | 30 | ↑ |
| | Exceeds | 13 | 44 | ↑↑↑ |
| PI 4. Reporting and data analysis | Missing | 11 | 0 | ↓↓ |
| | Not applicable | 11 | 2 | ↓ |
| | Approaches | 44 | 14 | ↓↓↓ |
| | Meets | 24 | 59 | ↑↑↑ |
| | Exceeds | 11 | 26 | ↑↑ |
| **Area 3: Establishing oversight** | | | | |
| PI 5. Evaluation | Missing | 18 | 0 | ↓↓ |
| | Not applicable | 18 | 35 | ↑↑ (red) |
| | Approaches | 35 | 18 | ↓↓ |
| | Meets | 24 | 30 | ↑ |
| | Exceeds | 5 | 17 | ↑↑ |
| PI 6. Gender-Responsive Auditing | Missing | 16 | 5 | ↓↓ |
| | Not applicable | 2 | 5 | — |
| | Approaches | 69 | 3 | ↓↓↓ |
| | Meets | 11 | 77 | ↑↑↑ |
| | Exceeds | 2 | 11 | ↑ |
| PI 7. Programme Review | Missing | 18 | 6 | ↓↓ |
| | Not applicable | 2 | 17 | ↑↑ (red) |
| | Approaches | 36 | 14 | ↓↓↓ |
| | Meets | 20 | 41 | ↑↑↑ |
| | Exceeds | 4 | 23 | ↑↑ |
| **Area 4: Allocating sufficient human and financial resources** | | | | |
| PI 8. Resource Tracking | Missing | 33 | 14 | ↓↓ |
| | Not applicable | 16 | 21 | ↑ (red) |
| | Approaches | 33 | 23 | ↓ |
| | Meets | 11 | 33 | ↑↑↑ |
| | Exceeds | 7 | 9 | — |
| PI 9. Resource Allocation | Missing | 42 | 24 | ↓↓ |
| | Not applicable | 24 | 18 | ↓ |
| | Approaches | 29 | 38 | ↑ |
| | Meets | 4 | 15 | ↑↑ |
| | Exceeds | 2 | 5 | — |

| PI | Level | Col1 | Col2 | Trend |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PI 10. Gender Architecture and Parity | Missing | 13 | 5 | ⬇ |
| | Not applicable | 2 | 0 | ▬ |
| | Approaches | 73 | 74 | ▬ |
| | Meets | 7 | 15 | ⬆ |
| | Exceeds | 5 | 6 | ▬ |
| PI 11. Organizational Culture | Missing | 2 | 0 | ▬ |
| | Not applicable | 2 | 0 | ▬ |
| | Approaches | 49 | 24 | ⬇⬇⬇ |
| | Meets | 31 | 30 | ▬ |
| | Exceeds | 16 | 45 | ⬆⬆⬆ |
| **Area 5: Developing and strengthening staff capacity** | | | | |
| PI 12. Capacity Assessment | Missing | 45 | 17 | ⬇⬇⬇ |
| | Not applicable | 4 | 2 | ▬ |
| | Approaches | 36 | 32 | ▬ |
| | Meets | 11 | 29 | ⬆⬆ |
| | Exceeds | 4 | 21 | ⬆⬆ |
| PI 13. Capacity Development | Missing | 29 | 5 | ⬇⬇⬇ |
| | Not applicable | 5 | 0 | ⬇ |
| | Approaches | 44 | 21 | ⬇⬇⬇ |
| | Meets | 18 | 52 | ⬆⬆⬆ |
| | Exceeds | 4 | 23 | ⬆⬆ |
| **Area 6: Ensuring coherence, knowledge and information management** | | | | |
| PI 14. Knowledge Generation and Communication | Missing | 5 | 2 | ▬ |
| | Not applicable | 4 | 0 | ▬ |
| | Approaches | 58 | 17 | ⬇⬇⬇ |
| | Meets | 22 | 35 | ⬆⬆ |
| | Exceeds | 11 | 47 | ⬆⬆⬆ |
| PI 15. Coherence | Missing | 2 | 3 | ▬ |
| | Not applicable | 4 | 0 | ▬ |
| | Approaches | 20 | 11 | ⬇ |
| | Meets | 56 | 71 | ⬆⬆ |
| | Exceeds | 18 | 15 | ▬ |

*Source:* Prepared by JIU on the basis of information provided by UN-Women.

*Legend:* ⬆ (⬇) indicates an increasing (decreasing) trend of 5–10 percentage points, representing an improvement regarding the achievement for the performance indicator.

⬆⬆(⬇⬇) indicates an increasing (decreasing) trend of 10–20 percentage points, representing an improvement regarding the achievement for the performance indicator.

⬆⬆⬆ (⬇⬇⬇) indicates an increasing (decreasing) trend over 20 percentage points, representing an improvement regarding the achievement for the performance indicator.

⬆ (⬇) indicates an increasing (decreasing) trend of 5–10 percentage points, representing a decline in the achievement for the performance indicator.

⬆⬆(⬇⬇) indicates an increasing (decreasing) trend of 10–20 percentage points, representing a decline in the achievement for the performance indicator.

▬ indicates status quo (a difference of less than 5 percentage points).

**Annex II: System-wide Action Plan reporting entities (2017)**

| United Nations Secretariat* | |
|---|---|
| Department for General Assembly and Conference Management | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) |
| Department of Economic and Social Affairs | Peacebuilding Support Office |
| Department of Field Support | Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services |
| Department of Management | Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) |
| Department of Peacekeeping Operations | Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) |
| Department of Political Affairs | Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) |
| Department of Public Information | |
| Department of Safety and Security | Secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) |
| Office for Disarmament Affairs | |
| Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs | Secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) |
| Office of Administration of Justice | Secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) |
| Office of Internal Oversight Services | |
| Office of Legal Affairs | Secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) |
| Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States | United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) |
| | United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction |
| Office of the Special Adviser on Africa | United Nations Office at Geneva |
| Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict | United Nations Office at Nairobi |
| | United Nations Office at Vienna |
| | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) |

* The names of the following departments have changed as from 1 January 2019: (a) Department of Management to Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance; (b) Department of Peacekeeping Operations to Department of Peace Operations; (c) Department of Field Support to Department of Operational Support; (d) Department of Political Affairs to Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; and (e) Department of Public Information to Department of Global Communications.

| Funds, programmes and ITC | Specialized agencies and IAEA |
|---|---|
| International Trade Centre (ITC) | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) |
| Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AID (UNAIDS) | International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) |
| Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) | International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) |
| United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) | International Labour Organization (ILO) |
| United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) | International Maritime Organization (IMO) |
| United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) | International Telecommunication Union (ITU) |
| United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) |
| United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) | United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) |
| United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) | Universal Postal Union (UPU) |
| World Food Programme (WFP) | World Health Organization (WHO) |
| | World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) |
| | World Meteorological Organization (WMO) |
| | World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) |

The following reporting entities are not JIU participating organizations: the International Organization for Migration; the International Fund for Agricultural Development; the International Organization for Migration; the International Training Centre of the ILO; the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization; the United Nations Capital Development Fund; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; the United Nations Institute for Training and Research; the United Nations Global Compact; the United Nations System Staff College; the United Nations University; and the United Nations Volunteers.

**Annex III: Enabling factors for the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan and good practices by performance indicator**

| Performance indicators (PI) | Enabling factors | Good practice |
|---|---|---|
| PI 1. Policy and plan | Organization-wide gender equality policies and action plans are aligned with the System-wide Action Plan.<br><br>Gender equality policies and action plans are aligned with organization-wide strategic documents.<br><br>There are clear action plans to accompany gender policies or gender-related components of corporate policies. | UN-Women supported the development of gender equality policies, either by providing expertise or by sharing costs for consultancy. At the end of the first phase of implementation, most of the reporting entities have policies that are considered to be compatible with and complementary to the System-wide Action Plan. Aside from the United Nations Secretariat, two organizations have no gender equality policy, and one is at the drafting stage (see annex IV).<br><br>Gender equality policy includes an accountability framework or a matrix of responsibilities for implementing the System-wide Action Plan and gender measures in general (such as in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UN-Habitat, UNIDO and the United Nations Office at Geneva).<br><br>UN-SWAP indicators, where relevant, are embedded in the entity's gender policy or action plan at the request of the governing body (such as in ILO). |
| PI 2. Gender-responsive performance management | The System-wide Action Plan or gender issues are taken up by the senior management team.<br><br>The performance of executive and senior managers on gender equality and the empowerment of women is formally monitored and rewarded in the corporate performance appraisal system.<br><br>Accountability for gender equality and the empowerment of women is included at all grades and levels through the corporate performance appraisal system.<br><br>A combination of accountability mechanisms is in place with targets, rewards and incentives.<br><br>A dedicated committee on gender equality and the empowerment of women is in place to monitor and follow up on policy compliance. | UN-SWAP information is presented at a senior management team meeting (see annex IV).<br><br>Performance indicators related to gender sensitivity and gender parity are included, a harmonious work environment free from any type of prohibited conduct is promoted, as is a work-life balance, among senior management and staff with hiring or supervisory responsibilities at headquarters and in the field (such as in the Department of Political Affairs, ESCAP, ITC, UNDP, UNESCO, WHO and WMO).<br><br>The United Nations Secretariat senior managers' compact for the year 2013 included a reference to the System-wide Action Plan, which is currently replaced by gender parity.<br><br>The UNDP Gender Steering and Implementation Committee has responsibility for policy setting and oversight of all offices. |

| Performance indicators (PI) | Enabling factors | Good practice |
|---|---|---|
| PI 3. Strategic planning | Capacity of strategic planning officers to develop and report on gender-related results with the support of gender units and gender focal points. | Clear action plans to accompany gender policies or gender-related components of corporate policies. |
| PI 4. Reporting and data analysis | Cascading indicators related to the System-wide Action Plan from corporate strategic planning documents to field offices work plans, to enable a better collection of facts and data so the indicators can be reported on separately.<br><br>Guidance for programme officers to include gender analysis in the design, monitoring and reporting of their activities.<br><br>Information systems and tools allowing figures disaggregated by sex and the internal capacity to analyse such information. | Engagement of the United Nations system informal network on strategic planning to bring a professional and technical perspective to support for the reporting entities in meeting the requirements under the indicators. |
| PI 5. Evaluation | Capacity of evaluation officers to integrate gender-related components into their evaluation work, including for decentralized evaluations.<br><br>Quality control and support during the development of the terms of reference and the evaluation process.<br><br>Guidance on integrating gender-related components into evaluation work. | Engagement of the United Nations Evaluation Group working group on gender equality and human rights to bring a professional and technical perspective to support for the reporting entities in the implementation of the related indicator (see technical notes).<br><br>The United Nations Evaluation Group working group reviews the information and ratings of reporting entities before finalization.<br><br>The annual report of the oversight office presented to the governing bodies includes information on performance indicator 5 on evaluation (such as in UNESCO and UNFPA).<br><br>There are internal procedures for peer review between audit and evaluation components of the oversight office (such as in FAO).<br><br>The System-wide Action Plan is referenced in the evaluation policy or guidelines (such as in OHCHR, UNFPA and UNDP). |
| PI 6. Gender-responsive auditing | Engagement and support from audit experts.<br><br>Consideration of gender issues in corporate risk assessment. | Engagement of the Gender Interest Group of the Representatives of Internal Audit Services of the United Nations System Organizations to bring a professional and technical perspective to support for the reporting entities in the |

| Performance indicators (PI) | Enabling factors | Good practice |
|---|---|---|
| | | implementation of the related indicator (see guidance document). |
| | | Gender issues are specifically considered in risk assessment and risk-based planning by the reporting entities (such as in UNICEF and UNIDO). |
| | | An audit on self-reporting mechanisms is conducted in connection with the System-wide Action Plan (such as in the Office of Internal Oversight Services and as planned in UNESCO). |
| | | The gender unit is engaged in discussions with audit offices to incorporate issues relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women into corporate risk assessment and risk-based audit planning (such as in the Office of Internal Oversight Services, UNDP, UNESCO, WFP and WHO). |
| PI 7. Programme review | The capacity of programme officers to mainstream gender into all areas of programme and project management. | The programme approval process requires all projects and programmes to integrate a gender perspective into deliberations and analysis prior to their approval (such as in OHCHR, UNIDO and UNRWA). |
| | Engagement with and support from programme officers within the reporting entities. | A representative of the gender unit participates in the deliberations of the programme approval committee. |
| | Clear guidance available to programme officers to include gender analysis in their work. | |
| | Information management systems and tools allowing reporting entities to extract relevant gender-related figures. | |
| PI 8. Resource tracking | Information management systems and tools allow sufficient granularity for the implementation of gender markers. | There is system-wide coordination on gender markers through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. |
| | Organization-wide policy or directives on gender markers in place to ensure consistent application both within and across entities. | There is mentoring, cooperation and support across the organizations of the United Nations system and inter-agency workshops on gender markers. |
| | Information management systems and tools have the capacity to analyse information generated by gender markers to guide central strategic planning (including budget allocation, planning and capacity development). | There is a project management quality assurance mechanism to ensure that gender tagging is accurate (such as in UNDP). |

| Performance indicators (PI) | Enabling factors | Good practice |
|---|---|---|
| PI 9. Resource allocation | The existence of an established gender marker system facilitates the definition of financial benchmarks for gender issues.<br><br>There are financial resources to incorporate gender-related results into results-based management systems for monitoring and reporting on gender-related activities (including through gender markers). | Entities have benchmark resources assigned to gender-related issues and programmes (see annex V).<br><br>Specific resources to support gender equality and mainstreaming are assigned by governing bodies (such as in ITU) or donors' contributions fund corporate gender architecture or gender programmes (such as in UNODC and WFP). |
| PI 10. Gender architecture and parity | Gender architecture comprises a corporate gender unit and a network of gender focal points or officers (preferably at the professional level) and a mandated allocation of at least 20 per cent of staff time.<br><br>Member States support and prioritize the attainment of gender parity (Group of Friends for Gender Parity).<br><br>Organizations have specific gender parity strategies. | There is a system of organization-wide gender focal points (in headquarters and field offices) with assigned roles and responsibilities (see annex V).<br><br>The UNAIDS virtual working interdisciplinary team on gender supports UN-SWAP reporting (2018). |
| PI 11. Organizational culture | Effective implementation of organization-wide policies (with regard to, inter alia, recruitment, flexible working arrangements, maternity leave and combatting harassment) promoting a work environment that is conducive to achieving gender equality.<br><br>Training programmes to create awareness and to improve organizational culture with regard to gender equality (covering unconscious bias; the link between gender and the organization's mandate; and resistance, hostility and patriarchal and dismissive attitudes towards gender equality and parity issues).<br><br>Opportunities to change the demographics of the organizations with mandates in typically male-dominated fields. | The UN-Women training module "I know gender" is used and tailored to specific needs (such as in UNIDO and UNFPA).<br><br>The International Gender Champions leadership network promotes a gender-sensitive culture.<br><br>Gender-related training is included in the mandatory training programme or online modules (such as in FAO, ILO, ITC, OHCHR, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNODC and the United Nations Secretariat). |
| PI 12. Capacity assessment | There are strong partnerships between the gender unit or gender focal points and staff development and learning officers. | The UN-Women Gender Equality Capacity Assessment Tool is used by reporting entities for their specific needs (such as in ILO and UNODC). |

| Performance indicators (PI) | Enabling factors | Good practice |
|---|---|---|
| | There are adequate human and financial resources to undertake capacity assessments on gender-related matters. | A gender dimension is included in another organization-wide capacity assessment exercise (such as in UNFPA).<br><br>Gender capacity assessment is included in a corporate staff survey (such as in IAEA, UNICEF and WMO). |
| PI 13. Capacity development | There are strong partnerships between the gender unit or gender focal points and staff development and learning officers.<br><br>Gender issues are included in mandatory training programmes, and compliance is monitored.<br><br>An online course on gender that is tailored to specific mandates is available and to be used system-wide.<br><br>UN-SWAP global annual meetings are held, gathering representatives of United Nations organizations to exchange good practices and lessons learned.<br><br>There are adequate resources to develop and update training modules, keeping in mind the changing workforce and evolution of expertise across the organization. | The UN-Women training module "I know gender" is used and tailored to specific needs (such as in UNIDO and UNFPA).<br><br>Training on gender is included in the mandatory training programme or online modules (such as in FAO, ILO, ITC, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNODC and the United Nations Secretariat).<br><br>The concept of gender equality is included in the induction programme (such as in FAO, IAEA and ILO).<br><br>A gender dimension is included in ethics training (such as in ICAO and UNESCO). |
| PI 14. Knowledge generation and communication | There is a UN-SWAP knowledge management and sharing online platform (Knowledge Hub) systematizing documents relevant to gender mainstreaming and the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan (including policies, good practices, guidance documents, reports and presentations).<br><br>UN-SWAP global annual meetings gather representatives of United Nations organizations to exchange good practices and lessons learned.<br><br>There is cooperation with communication officers to integrate gender-related matters into outreach products.<br><br>Knowledge products such as publications, guidance notes and success stories are available to support gender mainstreaming.<br><br>Gender-related elements are incorporated into strategic communication plans. | A corporate gender communication plan is developed to disseminate knowledge on gender equality and the empowerment of women (such as in FAO).<br><br>A gender awareness event is organized on a regular basis (such as in IAEA and the United Nations Office at Geneva).<br><br>UN-SWAP information is used in outreach products (such as in the United Nations Office at Geneva) or in internal communications products (such as in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management).<br><br>Gender focal points within an entity meet on a regular basis (such as in FAO). |

| Performance indicators (PI) | Enabling factors | Good practice |
|---|---|---|
| PI 15. Coherence | A network composed of UN-SWAP/gender focal points is engaged as a mechanism for sharing best practices among organizations. | UN-SWAP global annual meetings are conducted during the first phase of implementation of the System-wide Action Plan in various locations. |
| | The UN-Women Help Desk offers support during the reporting cycle. | There are local networks of UN-SWAP focal points or gender experts (such as in Geneva and Vienna). |
| | Inter-agency networks are mobilized to implement the System-wide Action Plan, bringing a professional perspective to clarify expectations and procedures. | The United Nations Evaluation Group and the Representatives of Internal Audit Services of the United Nations System Organizations are engaged (see above). |
| | Funds and support for staff participation in inter-agency meetings are provided. | |

*Source:* Prepared by JIU on the basis of the responses provided to the JIU questionnaire and interviews.

*Note:* The acronym UN-SWAP has been used in this table for clarity.

**Annex IV: Information regarding governing bodies, leadership and executive management**

| Participating organizations | Information provided to governing bodies | Leadership and executive management | | | Gender policies or action plans |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Engagement in finalizing UN-SWAP reporting | Clearance of UN-SWAP final reporting | UN-SWAP results discussed at senior management team meeting | |
| **United Nations Secretariat (32 reporting entities: 28 departments, offices and regional commissions and UNCTAD, UNEP, UN-Habitat and UNODC)** | | | | | |
| **United Nations** | Economic and Social Council resolution 2012/24 welcomes the System-wide Action Plan. The Secretary-General's report to the Council on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system includes a section on UN-SWAP | Very involved (15) Somewhat involved (5) Not involved (3) | Executive head (or deputy): 11 Director level: 9 Professional level (head of department): 3 | Yes: 9 No: 8 Unknown: 6 | 17 departments or offices have adopted or are in the process of adopting a gender policy or action plan |
| UNCTAD | No reporting | Very involved | Executive head (or deputy) | No | Gender Parity Strategy (2018) |
| UNEP | No reporting | Not involved | Professional level (head of department) | No | Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment (2014–2017) |
| UN-Habitat | Information on gender equality and the empowerment of women reported to the Governing Council | Not involved | Professional level (head of department) | No | Gender Policy and Plan (2014–2019) developed along UN-SWAP lines |
| UNODC | Regular reporting to governing bodies on human resources aspects of the UN-SWAP | Somewhat involved | Executive head (or deputy) | Yes | UNODC Gender Equality Policy (2017) in line with UN-SWAP |
| **Funds, programmes and ITC (10 reporting entities)** | | | | | |
| **UNAIDS** | UN-SWAP information reported annually to the Programme Coordinating Board as part of the Update on Strategic Human Resources Management Issues | Very involved | Executive head (or deputy) | Yes | Gender Action Plan (2013) aligned with the Action Plan |
| **ITC** | UN-SWAP achievements reported formally to the Joint Advisory Group | Very involved | Executive head (or deputy) | Yes | Gender Parity and Capacity Assessment at ITC (2016) |
| **UNDP** | UN-SWAP information provided to the Executive Board as part of the report on the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy | Not involved | Professional level (head of department) | Yes | UNDP Gender Equality Strategy (2008–2013, 2014–2017 and (2018–2021), UNDP Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2013), UNDP Gender Parity Strategy (2014–2017 and 2018–2021) |

| Participating organizations | Information provided to governing bodies | Leadership and executive management | | | Gender policies or action plans |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Engagement in finalizing UN-SWAP reporting | Clearance of UN-SWAP final reporting | UN-SWAP results discussed at senior management team meeting | |
| UNFPA | UN-SWAP reporting embedded in the reporting to the Executive Board on the strategic plan (2018–2021) | Somewhat involved | Director level | Yes | Unknown |
| UNHCR | UN-SWAP performance reported to the Executive Committee as part of the report on progress on gender equality in operations | Somewhat involved | Director level | Reviewed by the Deputy High Commissioner | Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity (2018) with reference to UN-SWAP |
| UNICEF | Unknown | Somewhat involved | Principal advisor | Yes | UNICEF Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Girls and Women (2010) and Gender Action Plan (2014–2017 and 2018–2021), which integrates UN-SWAP standards |
| UNOPS | No reporting | Somewhat involved | Director level | Yes | Gender Mainstreaming Policy (2013) and Gender Parity Strategy (2018) and Action Plan |
| UNRWA | Unknown | Not involved | Professional level (head of department) | Yes | Gender Equality Policy (2007) and Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (2008). Gender Equality Strategy (2016–2021) ensures compliance with UN-SWAP |
| UN-Women | No reporting | Somewhat involved | Executive head (or deputy) | No | UN-Women promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women in all work and policies |
| WFP | Executive Board is informed of progress regarding alignment of programmes with the UN-SWAP through the implementation of the WFP Gender Policy and Corporate Gender Action Plan | Somewhat involved | Executive head (or deputy) | No | WFP Commitments to Women (1996–2002) and Enhanced Commitments to Women (2003–2007); Gender Policy (2015–2020) and Gender Action Plan reflecting UN-SWAP indicators |

| Participating organizations | Information provided to governing bodies | Leadership and executive management | | | Gender policies or action plans |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Engagement in finalizing UN-SWAP reporting | Clearance of UN-SWAP final reporting | UN-SWAP results discussed at senior management team meeting | |
| Specialized Agencies and IAEA (13 reporting entities) | | | | | |
| FAO | UN-SWAP is reported biennially in the Programme Implementation Report and annually in the Mid-term Synthesis Report, and more detailed narrative is provided in dedicated annexes to those reports, which are submitted to governing bodies (progress on indicators as embedded in the Medium Term Plan) | Very involved | Executive head (or deputy) | Yes | Successive Gender and Development Plans of Action (1996–2001, 2002–2007 and 2008–2013); Policy on Gender Equality (2012) integrates minimum standards for compatibility with UN-SWAP |
| IAEA | UN-SWAP performance is included in biannual reports to the General Conference on "Women in the Secretariat" | Somewhat involved | Professional level (head of department) | No | Gender Equality Policy (2008) |
| ICAO | UN-SWAP information provided in the Annual Gender Progress Report to the Assembly or Council | Very involved | Executive head (or deputy) | Unknown | ICAO Gender Equality Programme (2017) and implementation plan |
| ILO | UN-SWAP achievement is reported to the Governing Body when summarizing results of implementation of the ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality | Somewhat involved | Professional level (head of department) | Yes | ILO Policy on Gender Equality and ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality (2018–2021); the latter is aligned with the indicator result areas of UN-SWAP |
| IMO | Gender-related information is reported to governing bodies annually, not under UN-SWAP reporting | Not involved | Executive head (or deputy) | No | IMO Policy on Gender Equality (draft) |
| ITU | The UN-Women annual letter to the ITU Secretary-General was shared with the Council in 2016 and 2017 | No information provided | Director level | No | ITU Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Policy (2013 with reference to UN-SWAP requirements) and the ITU Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Annual Action Plan (2017) |
| UNESCO | UN-SWAP achievement is reported to the Executive as a management issue | Very involved | Director level | Yes | Priority Gender Equality Action Plan (2009–2013) and (2014–2021, based on UN-SWAP) |

| Participating organizations | Information provided to governing bodies | Leadership and executive management | | | Gender policies or action plans |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Engagement in finalizing UN-SWAP reporting | Clearance of UN-SWAP final reporting | UN-SWAP results discussed at senior management team meeting | |
| UNIDO | UN-SWAP information is reported to the General Conference in the report of the Director-General on gender equality and the empowerment of women | Somewhat involved | Director level | Yes | UNIDO Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2015) and its Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Strategy (2016–2019), aligned with UN-SWAP |
| UNWTO | UN-SWAP information is partially reported in the report of the UNWTO Secretary-General on human resources to the Executive Council with the inclusion of a gender balance reference | Somewhat involved | Executive head (or deputy) | No | No |
| UPU | No reporting | Not involved | Professional level (head of department) | No | No |
| WHO | WHO monitors gender balance with an annual human resources report to the World Health Assembly on the Organization's workforce. UN-SWAP reporting envisaged for 2020 | Very involved | Executive head (or deputy) | Unknown | WHO Gender, Equity and Human Rights (2013) and Mainstreaming Roadmap for Action (2014–2019); Global Gender Policy in Staffing (2017) with reference to UN-SWAP as a corporate target |
| WIPO | UN-SWAP summary results are reported as part of the Annual Report on Human Resources to the Coordination Committee and the Programme and Budget Committee | Very involved | Director level | Yes (irregularly) | WIPO Policy on Gender Equality (2014) with reference to UN-SWAP |
| WMO | A UN-SWAP report is presented to the Executive Council Advisory Panel of Experts on Gender Mainstreaming. Extracts are included in reports on gender to the Executive Council | Very involved | Executive head (or deputy) | Yes | WMO Policy on Gender Equality (2011, modified in 2015 to include critical UN-SWAP requirements |

*Source:* Prepared by JIU on the basis of the responses provided to the JIU questionnaire and interviews.

*Note:* The acronym UN-SWAP has been used in this table for clarity.

**Annex V: Information regarding human and financial resources**

| Participating organizations | Has a corporate-wide gender unit | Has a corporate-wide network of gender focal points or focal points for women | Tracks resources assigned to gender-related issues and programmes | Benchmarks resources assigned to gender-related issues and programmes | Includes a gender perspective in strategic planning document |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| United Nations Secretariat* (32 reporting entities: 28 departments, offices and regional commissions and UNCTAD, UNEP, UN-Habitat and UNODC) | | | | | |
| **United Nations Secretariat** | Several departments or offices have strengthened gender architecture (for example: DPKO-DFS Gender Unit, OHCHR Women's Rights and Gender Section. | Yes | No, Secretariat-wide tracking system within Umoja (under consideration) Some entities have piloted a gender markers system: ESCAP, ESCWA, OHCHR | No | Yes |
| UNCTAD | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| UNEP | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| UN-Habitat | Unknown | Unknown | Yes | No | Yes |
| UNODC | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Funds, programmes and ITC (10 reporting entities) | | | | | |
| **UNAIDS** | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **ITC** | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **UNDP** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **UNFPA** | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **UNHCR** | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| **UNICEF** | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| **UNOPS** | No | Yes | No | Not applicable | Yes |
| **UNRWA** | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| **UN-Women** | UN-Women promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women in all work and policies | | UN-Women funds are used to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women | | Yes |
| **WFP** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

| Participating organizations | Has a corporate-wide gender unit | Has a corporate-wide network of gender focal points or focal points for women | Tracks resources assigned to gender-related issues and programmes | Benchmarks resources assigned to gender-related issues and programmes | Includes a gender perspective in strategic planning document |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Specialized agencies and IAEA (13 reporting entities)** | | | | | |
| **FAO** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **IAEA** | No | Yes | No | No | No |
| **ICAO** | No | Yes | No | No | Unknown |
| **ILO** | Yes | Yes | Under development | No | Yes |
| **IMO** | No | Yes | Yes | Unknown | Yes |
| **ITU** | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **UNESCO** | Yes | Yes | Under development | Yes | Yes |
| **UNIDO** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **UNWTO** | No | No | No | No | Yes |
| **UPU** | No | No | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| **WHO** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **WIPO** | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| **WMO** | No | Yes | Yes (extrabudgetary resources) | No | Yes |

*Source*: Prepared by JIU on the basis of the responses provided to the JIU questionnaire and interviews.

**Annex VI: Review methodology**

The present review was conducted from July 2018 to March 2019 and covers the 28 JIU participating organizations as listed in Annex VII (corresponding to 55 System-wide Action Plan reporting entities).

In accordance with JIU internal standards and working procedures,[33] the Inspectors used a blend of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods from different sources for consistency, validity and reliability:

Desk review of relevant documentation. A desk review was conducted of UN-Women official documentation, in particular the guidance and technical notes; the annual reports of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Economic and Social Council on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system and subsequent resolutions adopted by the Council (2012–2018); documents from annual workshops on the Action Plan; relevant documents and data provided by UN-Women concerning the ratings on the performance indicators from the 66 reporting entities; and UN-Women annual letters addressed to the executive management of the reporting entities (2012–2017). Secondary sources such as oversight reports and other types of assessments produced by the reporting entities, concerning the System-wide Action Plan specifically or gender-related matters in general, were also considered.

Corporate questionnaires. These were addressed to the 28 JIU participating organizations requesting qualitative and quantitative information and supporting documentation. The responses enabled an in-depth analysis of the processes and procedures in place in reporting entities, highlighting the benefits and challenges of the programme. In the United Nations Secretariat, 25 out of 32 departments, offices and regional commissions provided their input,[34] while the funds and programmes and specialized agencies all contributed.

Two technical questionnaires. These were addressed to UN-Women focusing on its coordination and facilitation role system-wide, and to the secretariat of CEB regarding decisions and other actions taken related to the System-wide Action Plan.

Interviews. A total of 94 interviews were conducted with officials of reporting entities which were selected with the aim of achieving a balance, taking into consideration their mandate, operational model, location and size. At UN-Women, interviews were conducted with the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director, the director of the Coordination Division, the members of the Action Plan team and officials from other departments. The interviews covered 19 reporting entities belonging to the United Nations Secretariat, five funds and programmes and five specialized agencies. In each entity, interviews involved Action Plan focal points and members of the gender unit, gender focal points/focal points for women, and representatives of executive management and of organizational units responsible for data collection and reporting on performance indicators (business owners). The latter included members of human resources management and financial management departments, oversight offices and programme divisions.

Online survey. A survey of Action Plan focal points and gender focal points/focal points for women

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[33] A/51/34/Annex I and A/68/34/Annex VII.

[34] The following 25 reporting entities in the United Nations Secretariat responded to the JIU questionnaire: the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Management, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Public Information, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support, the Department of Safety and Security, ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP, the Office of Administration of Justice, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, OHCHR, the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Office of Legal Affairs, UNCTAD, UNEP, UN-Habitat, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, UNODC/the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office at Geneva. The following seven entities did not return the questionnaire to JIU: ESCWA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the Peacebuilding Support Office and the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

was aimed at gathering perceptions of the efficiency and effectiveness of the System-wide Action Plan and providing triangulation of views collected from other sources on efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. The survey was sent to a targeted list of focal points, some of whom were provided by UN-Women while others were identified through interviews. It was completed by a total of 158 respondents (49 Action Plan focal points and 109 gender focal points from 51 of the 66 reporting entities). The responses were analysed globally and filtered by main categories of reporting entities and by the functions of the respondents. Survey results were aggregated to establish proxies for various themes such as leadership support, reporting mechanisms and the impact of the programme.

Focus group. A focus group of approximately 45 participants, held during the October 2018 Annual Meeting of Gender Focal Points in Geneva, gathered feedback on the three key review areas: (a) the System-wide Action Plan framework, including its performance indicators; (b) the Action Plan as an accountability mechanism, both system-wide and within organizations; and (c) internal and external coordination for reporting.

The full range of information and views received have been dealt with in accordance with the usual respect for confidentiality shown by JIU. The report primarily reflects aggregated responses, and, in cases where quotations are given for illustrative purposes, the source(s) are intentionally never cited.

**Annex VII: Overview of actions to be taken by participating organizations on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit**

**JIU/REP/2019/2**

| Report | Intended impact | | United Nations, its funds and programmes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Specialized agencies and IAEA | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | CEB | United Nations* | UNAIDS | UNCTAD | ITC | UNDP | UNEP | UNFPA | UN-Habitat | UNHCR | UNICEF | UNODC | UNOPS | UNRWA | UN-Women | WFP | FAO | IAEA | ICAO | ILO | IMO | ITU | UNESCO | UNIDO | UNWTO | UPU | WHO | WIPO | WMO |
| For action | | ☐ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ | ☒ |
| For information | | ☒ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Recommendation 1 | a | | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E |
| Recommendation 2 | a | | E | E | E | | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E |
| Recommendation 3 | a | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | E | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Recommendation 4 | a | | L | L | E | E | L | L | L | E | E | L | E | L | E | L | L | L | L | L | L | L | L | L | L | L | L | L | L | L |
| Recommendation 5 | a | | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E |

**Legend: L:** Recommendation for decision by legislative organ; **E:** Recommendation for action by executive head;

☐ (shaded) **:** Recommendation does not require action by this organization

**Intended impact: a:** enhanced transparency and accountability **b:** dissemination of good/best practices **c:** enhanced coordination and cooperation **d:** strengthened coherence and harmonization **e:** enhanced control and compliance **f:** enhanced effectiveness **g:** significant financial savings **h:** enhanced efficiency; **i:** other.

* As listed in ST/SGB/2015/3.