

Options for an assessment on how the Executive Boards execute their governance and oversight functions

1. OVERVIEW & SCOPE

During the Second Regular Sessions in September 2022 for the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, and UN-Women, each Board took decisions issues related to oversight matters. One of the requests by these respective Boards was to provide options on an assessment of how the Executive Board executes its governance and oversight functions. The requests from the decisions of these respective Boards was nearly identical, so below as a reference is the text from the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS [decision 2022/22](#), paragraphs 9 and 10¹:

Para. 9: “Requests the Bureau of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, in consultation with the relevant bureaux of United Nations development system entities, to provide options and cost estimates for an assessment, including the feasibility of a third-party assessment by an entity external to the United Nations system with independent expertise on governance and oversight, of how the Executive Board, in collaboration with UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS as well as the United Nations system, executes its governance and oversight functions, with a view to ensuring that these functions are aligned with the highest international standards and best practices.”

Para. 10: “Further requests the Bureau of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS to present these options for consideration by the Executive Board by the first regular session 2023, with a view to providing a final assessment and relevant recommendations to the Executive Board no later than the annual session 2023.”

In view of the scope of this assessment as requested above, the respective Bureaux of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, and UN-Women are presenting possible options for this assessment. Furthermore, the Presidents of the Executive Boards have agreed that given the scope of this topic and to ensure cross-Board learning and harmonization, there will be one assessment which will cover all three Executive Boards.

The Presidents and the respective Bureaux have further made it clear that the focus of the assessment should not be on re-structuring the Boards nor changing their mandate. Instead, it should assess whether the Boards sufficiently execute their mandates, and that it should focus on providing implementable recommendations within the current structure and mandate of the Boards, with a view to ensuring that the Board’s functions are aligned with the highest international standards and best practices, bearing in mind the specific multilateral and public sector nature of the work of the United Agencies in question.

This assessment will also not duplicate the discussions, reviews, reports, and Board decisions on the ‘working methods of the Executive Boards’ which took place from 2017-2020. This was an extensive and thorough process by the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, and UN-Women as a result of requests in [GA resolution 71/243](#) on the QCPR and [GA resolution 72/279](#) on repositioning of the UN development system and subsequent Board decisions. The aim of that exercise was to improve the working methods of the Executive Boards that addressed issues toward improving the efficiency, transparency, and quality of the governance structures. This resulted in 6 decisions for these Executive Boards on various matters related to the Board

¹ The equivalent requests from the other Executive Boards are contained in [decision 2022/21](#) for UNICEF and decision 2022/8 for UN-Women (link unavailable).

sessions, conduct of business, documentation, decision-making, and other relevant matters. As an example, please see the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS decisions [2018/22](#), [2019/3](#), [2019/16](#), [2019/22](#), [2020/2](#), and [2020/13](#).²

2. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

As requested by the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, and UN-Women, options are presented for the respective Boards' consideration as follows. The following three options were agreed to by the Presidents and the respective Bureaux.

Option 1: Self-assessment by Member States

Assessor & methodology:

- The assessor would be Member States.
- The Bureaux of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, and UN-Women, in consultation with their respective regional groups, would need to determine whether this self-assessment would be limited to the Board or would include observers as well. The assessment would be led and managed by the Bureaux of the three Boards.
- The methodology for this assessment would involve the Bureaux of the three Boards providing further guidance on the assessment by drafting a broad terms of reference (ToR). The ToR will have direct rooting in the language of the Executive Boards decisions requesting this assessment. The assessment may entail surveys being sent to Member States with the Bureau overseeing a process of reviewing the Board's performance against best practices and principles for governance of organizations, such as the [International Standard on Governance of Organizations \(ISO 37000\)](#)³ or other standards established by public or private sector institutions.

Time-frame:

- As determined by Member States, but the aim would be to present a final joint assessment for the Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women by June 2023.

Costs:

- Staff-time of Member States and Board Secretariat staff. There will also be documentation processing & translation costs of approximately USD29,000.

Option 2: Assessment by a UN entity

Assessor & methodology:

- The assessor could be an entity such as the [Joint Inspection Unit \(JIU\)](#). Given the subject matters of the assessment request by the Board and the scope of work, this is the UN entity which would have the mandate for such an assessment.
- The JIU is the only independent oversight body in the UN mandated to conduct evaluations, inspections, and investigations system-wide. It works to secure management and administrative efficiency and promote greater coordination between UN agencies and with internal and external oversight bodies. And one of their main objectives is to help legislative organs to meet their governance responsibilities in respect of their oversight functions.
- The methodology for this assessment would be determined by the JIU and based on further guidance from the Bureaux on the scope of work. The three Bureaux (or they could delegate the task to other

² The Executive Boards of UNICEF and UN-Women had equivalent decisions which were nearly identical.

³ The ISO is an independent, non-governmental organization comprised of members from the national standards bodies of 167 countries and actively works with UN entities. More information may be found [here](#).

delegations) would be in charge to design a broad ToR. The ToR will have direct rooting in the language of the Executive Boards decisions requesting this assessment. The assessment will most likely include an extensive desk review, analysis from documentation received, questionnaires, and several interviews from various stakeholders. They may also review how the Board executes its functions against best practices and principles for governance of organizations, such as the above-mentioned International Standard on Governance of Organizations (ISO 37000) or other standards established by public or private sector institutions.

Time-frame:

- While the Board's aim is to have a final assessment by June 2023, this time-frame would need to be revisited if the Boards proceed with the option of having JIU as the assessor.
- Each year the JIU adopts its programme of work for the following year. Therefore, if the Boards decide in January to proceed with option of having JIU as the assessor, the Bureaux of the Boards would need to submit a proposal (via a form provided by JIU) which would include further details on the scope of the assessment, or would need to send a request from the governing body sometime in 2023 when JIU is ready to accept such proposals. These proposals are extensively reviewed by the JIU inspectors through several rounds of consultations, and then the selected proposals go through a validation stage, which concludes in December. Therefore, given this information, if the JIU takes on this assignment, the feedback received from JIU is that the earliest that this joint assessment for the Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women would commence will be early 2024.

Costs:

- The JIU is funded by its participating organizations, thus there would be no costs for this assessment.⁴ In terms of the capacity needs by JIU for such an assessment, they have indicated that the number of inspectors and the time needed for such an assessment would be determined following the approval of their programme of work for the coming year, so an estimate would not yet be available. The same applies to the time allocation of JIU secretariat staff. There may be some staff-time of Member States, Board Secretariat staff to facilitate this process. JIU also processes its own documentation, so the only financial costs incurred would be the documentation costs for translation services should the Board request it (approximately USD27,200).

Option 3: Assessment by an external third-party

Assessor & methodology:

- The assessor could be external consultants, such as a consulting firm or a consultancy company.
- This third-party would need to meet certain criteria such as having independent expertise on governance and oversight and be very familiar with UN structures and the ways in which UN entities and system operate. Ideally, this this assessor would also have previous experience with UN reports or assessments. Therefore, this assessor's expertise cannot solely be in the governance of private sector entities or even non-profits or public sector organizations, as the unique nature of the construct and operational modalities of UN entities would thus necessitate UN-specific experience.
- The methodology for this assessment would be determined by the assessor and based on further guidance from the Bureaux on the scope of work. The three Bureaus (or they could delegate the task to other delegations) would be in charge to design a broad ToR for the consultants (or consulting firm) with criteria which would include high expertise in governance and oversight systems. The ToR will have direct rooting in the language of the Executive Boards decisions requesting this assessment. The broad ToR designed by the Bureaux will generate more details to recruit independent experts with a proven

⁴ UNDP (11.86%), UNFPA (2.72%), UNOPS (2.87%), UNICEF (14.94%), and UN-Women (1.01%) are all contributing organizations to JIU. The numbers in parentheses are these organizations' percentage share in the costs of the JIU for 2021.

ability and expertise in advising on governance and oversight structures for governing bodies, with a specific focus on multilateral governance, international organizations, and the United Nations system. It would most likely include an extensive desk review, analysis from documentation received, and several interviews from various stakeholders. They may also review how the Board executes its functions against best practices and principles for governance of organizations, such as the above-mentioned International Standard on Governance of Organizations (ISO 37000) or other standards established by public or private sector institutions.

Time-frame:

- While the Board's aim is to have a final assessment by June 2023, the feasibility of this time-frame would need to be discussed with the assessor.
- In order to proceed with a third-party as an assessor, a procurement process would be required. If the Board decides on the option of proceeding with an assessment by a third-party in January, then the Bureaux of the Boards would need to determine additional content on the scope or terms of reference for the assessment in the form of a request for proposals (RFP). This RFP would be issued for 4 weeks (common standard). Upon completion of the procurement process and selection of the third-party, this would mean the assessor could start the work around early March. This would give the assessor about 2 months to perform the final joint assessment report for the Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women with main findings and recommendations in advance of the respective annual sessions of the Boards. But as mentioned above, the assessor would need to advise as to the feasibility of this time-frame. The quality of the assessment should not be compromised by the tight time-frame, and member states could agree to present the final report at their respective second regular sessions 2023.

Costs:

- The costs would be determined upon the conclusion of a publicly advertised procurement process and the selection of an assessor based on the best value for money. In general, similar contracts of this scale with consultancy firms have cost about USD65,000/month. So 2 months of work would be about USD130,000, or USD195,000 for 3 months of work. In addition to these costs, there would be the staff-time of Member States and Board Secretariat staff. There will also be documentation processing & translation costs (approximately USD29,000).

3. FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

- The members of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, and UN-Women will **review** this options paper.
- The Bureaux of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, and UN-Women will lead a **joint briefing** on these proposed options in January 2023.
- There will be a **meeting of the Presidents of the Executive Boards** of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, and UN-Women to discuss their final reviews on these proposed options following the joint briefing in January 2023.
- Following the meeting of the Presidents of the Executive Boards, the respective Bureaux of these Boards would convene to further discuss these options based on a consultative process with their respective Regional Groups and **choose** to proceed with either Option 1, Option 2 or Option 3. This preferred option would be communicated to the other Board bureau via their Board secretariats.
- If there is consensus amongst the Bureaux, the Presidents of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, and UN-Women will **inform** their respective Executive Boards of the decision on the selected option and its associated arrangements going forward. If there is no consensus, then further discussions will take place.