

Update to the GMT on Draft Report of the Independent Task Force
Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority

The Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority, established by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore in 2018 during her first year in office, has completed its work and has provided senior management with its draft report for comment. The Task Force was one of several initiatives established to help inform and guide the Executive Director and senior management in positioning the organization as best-fit for purpose today and in the future. UNICEF welcomes the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report. The final report will be delivered by the ITF to the Executive Director in June 2019.

Overall Findings

The draft report has found that UNICEF is not living up to its values. There is an environment of ‘results at all costs’ where staff feel that offenses go unpunished. While acknowledging UNICEF’s “resolve to turn things around in the organization... to make it the best workplace”, the draft report states that dysfunctional support from systems designed to provide checks and balances on the exercise of authority – notably Human Resources Management, Investigations (OIAI) and internal communication - has led to increased stress, frustration and fear among staff, resulting in worrying low-levels of trust in management. It describes UNICEF’s complaints and HR systems as “broken”.

UNICEF takes the findings of the ITF very seriously and sees this as a defining moment. UNICEF welcomes the critical perspective which provides a useful benchmark against which the reforms of the last 18 months can be measured. UNICEF appreciates the draft report’s direction on areas where the organization must redouble its efforts and take urgent action to strengthen management capacities.

The draft report serves as an important and timely reminder of the need for culture change. UNICEF has begun this process and has taken several actions to this effect. This change process will take time, commitment and energetic determination and will require the entire organisation to rally around change solutions – something that UNICEF leadership is fully committed to.

Key issues raised in the draft include:

Management culture: The draft report points to the need to ensure UNICEF’s drive for results for children is supported by an empowering collaborative workplace culture rather than a culture which conceals unacceptable workplace behaviors.

Microcultures: The draft report identifies “micro-cultures” in some offices where certain behaviours have been able to flourish including favouritism, belittling and marginalising staff. The hierarchical approach is having negative consequences for culture and accountability, which we must seek ways to mitigate and address.

Organizational Divides: While acknowledging the strides UNICEF has made in diversity and gender balance, particularly in recruitment, the Task Force finds that there are groups of staff who still feel strongly that they are victims of an “us and them” culture. It describes the divides as “ossified” and notes they increase the potential for, and the perception of, workplace abuse and microaggressions.

Checks and Balances: Linked to organizational divides, the draft report raises questions about the adequacy of checks and balances, and strongly suggests UNICEF needs to continue to improve human resources management, policies and practices, and investigations and reporting mechanism systems – which all must be fixed. Investments will be prioritized to ensure that managers have the skills to manage well. Tools and sources of management change must be re-taught. It calls for stronger analytics, more coherent support and guidance to staff. It calls for a more consistent and transparent application of systems for the application of policies, of recruitment, of promotions, of abolishment's of posts and of investigations, both to improve fairness in our personnel systems and to improve perceptions of fairness and trust regarding those systems.

Internal Communications: The Task Force found a risk averse approach to internal communication and identified the need to strengthen communications within UNICEF including the need to build an environment that encourages creativity and welcomes a diversity of views. This will be one means of addressing the lack of trust between management and staff.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS AND EARLY ACTIONS: Some of the specific recommendations contained in the draft report, along with a preliminary management response, are listed below.

Articulate and drive a new management culture: This recommendation is accepted, and work is ongoing in line with UNICEF's core values of care, respect, integrity trust and accountability.

Develop new managerial competencies for people management: This recommendation is accepted. Consultations around updated people management competencies commenced in 2017. The new competencies iteration, and the enhanced people management performance scorecard, should be fully implemented for all staff by 2020.

Offer comprehensive training in people management: This recommendation is accepted, and work is on-going. UNICEF is providing a Management Masterclass, obligatory annual 360-degree feedback for all senior staff, and a range of other initiatives including a leadership transition coaching initiative and mandatory orientation for senior leaders who have been newly selected for SSR posts. The content and roll-out will be reviewed and further strengthened.

Ensure managers are aware of all procedures: This recommendation is accepted. All staff have received updated information on accountabilities regarding identifying and reporting gender discrimination, sexual harassment, harassment and abuse of authority in the form of global announcements from the Executive Director, the Deputy Executive Director Management and the Division of Human Resources. In addition, the Ethics Office has been very engaged on ensuring issues are better understood, and trainings on PSHAA and PSAE are mandatory for all staff. Following this recommendation, management will explore ways to enhance the information dissemination process.

Put in place a credible and safe system for staff to report sexual harassment, harassment and abuse of authority: This recommendation is accepted. We are reviewing the system in a renewed effort to ensure people fully understand and trust the credibility and safety of the system.

Establish a code of conduct: UNICEF accepts that a clear statement of the conduct expected from all personnel is very important. Compliance with the UN Standards of Conduct document is mandatory for all UNICEF staff members and we make it mandatory for UNICEF consultants. Various additional bulletins and policies are also mandatory. As part of the internal communications actions following the ITF report, UNICEF will improve colleagues' understanding of these requirements and help colleagues comply.

Purposefully address all organizational divides: A range of suggestions fall under this recommendation, including reporting on disaggregated data on gender, training on diversity and inclusion and systematic exit interviews. UNICEF accepts the recommendation and in the process of updating and modifying its processes to take full advantage of this guidance. Among the initiatives that will be introduced will be a new National Staff programme designed to identify and support National Officers who wish to pursue international careers.

Fundamentally reform the annual performance evaluation: This is in process and once the revised competency framework for all staff is complete, it will be incorporated into new performance appraisal processes.

Improve and fully implement the workplace flexibility policies: UNICEF agrees with this recommendation, which was also one of the action items arising from UNICEF's 2018 EDGE certification. New practices have been introduced to encourage more flexible working arrangements and these will be incorporated into a formal policy change. In the first quarter of 2019, the number of approved flexible working arrangements doubled against 2018.

Full outsourcing of the investigations function: UN privileges and immunities do not allow for full outsourcing. Partial outsourcing is accepted, and this will be our intent.

Reconceptualize internal communications and develop a cohesive internal communications strategy: UNICEF accepts this recommendation. An internal and external communications strategy for PSHAA and PSEA is in process and should be completed and operational by end Q2. A broader review of all internal communications is also currently underway.

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