EXECUTIVE BOARD OF UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS
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INFORMATION NOTE

Strengthening Organizational Culture, Preventing Discrimination and Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

I. Introduction

1. This information note includes updates on a wide range of approaches, interventions and frameworks. UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, have made significant investments in promoting healthy and inclusive workplace cultures.

2. In line with this commitment, these agencies have adopted a 'Leave No One Behind' approach to their joint efforts, guided by a unified vision of a United Nations System of Organizations that is fair, diverse, and inclusive. Significant investments have been made in promoting healthy workplace cultures. This information note includes updates on a wide range of approaches, interventions and frameworks that catalyze progress on equity, inclusion, anti-racism, gender parity and non-discrimination at critical inflection points within these organizations.

3. This information note has been prepared in response to decision 2024/1 of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board.

II. United Nations Development Programme

4. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is driven by its critical mission to enhance the quality of life for people around the world. UNDP operates in a rapidly evolving global landscape, facing unprecedented challenges such as the climate emergency, multiple crises, and deep-rooted inequalities related to, among others, gender and poverty. Additionally, the organization contends with shifts in the world of work, from managing a geographically dispersed and diverse workforce to navigating the implications of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and automation, as well as adapting to evolving generational expectations.

5. Against this background, UNDP is committed to deliberately cultivating a workplace culture that not only aligns with but enhances the delivery of its mission. This entails regular substantive insights into UNDP's cultural dynamics, identification of areas where organizational culture can be strengthened to increase impact, and the establishment of clear metrics to track and measure progress.

6. The UNDP People for 2030 Strategy has defined a new trajectory for people management aligned with the United Nations values and in support of UNDP's mission and strategy. Launched in June 2019, the strategy is currently in its second phase and has been a pivotal driver of cultural transformation with a

view to enhancing UNDP's capacity to deliver better development results. It has spurred the implementation of key initiatives that promote the realization of our desired culture, fostering organization-wide efforts to promote sustainable high-performance and innovation, collaboration and engagement, continuous learning and improvement as well as inclusive and respectful workplace practices.

7. Building on this, the People for 2030 Strategy prioritizes a supportive and positive experience for personnel by enhancing transparency, trust, and collaboration across the organization. Through strategic workforce planning integrated with talent acquisition, onboarding, and career development, UNDP is positioned as an employer of choice, attracting and nurturing diverse talent that enriches organizational culture with varied skills and lived experiences. A strong focus on leadership excellence reinforces trust, accountability, and ethical behavior, while a strong focus on people analytics enables continuous monitoring and improvement. These efforts collectively foster a high-performance, inclusive workplace where personnel feel valued and empowered.

III. UNDP's approach to understanding and shaping its organizational culture

8. In 2023, UNDP introduced #UNDPListens—a robust people-listening initiative that enables personnel to share frequent and targeted insights about their work experiences. The primary goal of #UNDPListens is to foster a dynamic dialogue between management and personnel, promoting better alignment of individual and organizational goals. By providing a platform for anonymous feedback #UNDPListens addresses workplace culture, engagement, and other critical concerns, enhancing trust and collaboration across the organization.

9. The #UNDPListens initiative introduces several "listening channels" in two phases. Phase 1 focuses on the design and implementation of shorter organization-wide surveys, introducing two concise surveys aimed at assessing Engagement and Inclusion within the workplace. These surveys, which take only five minutes to complete, are conducted annually. In Phase 2, the initiative will involve implementation of targeted, and on-demand feedback mechanisms that feature a more limited scope and audience. These include decentralized pulse surveys, employee life cycle surveys, and leadership and team effectiveness assessments, allowing for more specific and actionable insights thus enhancing the overall feedback process. To date, UNDP has successfully rolled out the annual Engagement and Inclusion Surveys, as well as the People Leadership Pulse.

10. The Engagement Survey aims to gauge UNDP personnel's perceptions of their working experience and environment. In 2024, UNDP's overall Engagement Index Score increased by 2 points, from 72/100 in 2023 to 74/100. This achievement places UNDP on par with the global benchmark of other international organizations established by the vendor Glint-Microsoft.

11. The Inclusion Survey offers valuable insights into UNDP's progress in fostering an inclusive workplace. The Inclusion score for 2024 was 75/100. In addition to measuring levels of inclusion at UNDP, the Survey measures key drivers of an inclusive culture. Aligning with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy (2023-2025), drivers such as belonging, trust and psychological safety are tracked to provide diagnostic signals to guide diversity, equity and inclusion efforts for maximum impact.

12. In addition, BMS/OHR designed a new UNDP People index which builds on the results of both the Engagement and Inclusion surveys. This Index is intended to be integrated with the corporate performance data to offer a holistic view of an office's performance, combining people-focused metrics

with operational outcomes. Initial analysis reveals a correlation between higher People Index scores and better delivery outcomes at the office level. Notably, the latest analysis suggests that each additional point in the People Index corresponds to an increase in programmatic delivery.

13. In 2024, UNDP introduced the People Leadership Pulse, a pivotal initiative in driving cultural transformation, recognizing the critical role leaders play in this process. It marks a significant step forward in the ongoing commitment to fostering a culture of excellence and continuous improvement. The Leadership Pulse empowers personnel to provide upward feedback to their direct managers and, when applicable, to their manager's manager, offering insights into their leadership experiences based on the expected UNDP people management competencies and behaviors.

14. In an effort to leave no one behind and target follow-up actions, UNDP introduced an expanded voluntary demographic section across all #UNDPlistens surveys. This allows the organization to collect information on the experiences of people with different identities and backgrounds and also to run intersectional analyses of the survey data. This has been instrumental in ensuring that scores are not reviewed only in the context of one-dimensional identity markers but examined through a lens that acknowledges the full spectrum of identities which form an employee's experience in the workplace. The expanded set of voluntary demographics includes gender, ethnic and racial origins, and questions regarding disability status and LGBTQI+ affiliation, all in addition to the mandatory demographics drawn directly from UNDP's employee records.

15. As UNDP reaffirms its commitment to high employee engagement and a positive workplace experience, it acknowledges that engagement and culture are deeply intertwined. High levels of engagement stem from a strong alignment between individual and organizational success, with misalignment often rooted in organizational culture. Therefore, while the UNDP organization-wide Engagement and Inclusion surveys focus on how personnel perceive their work, leadership, and the organization, the People Leadership Pulse explores their experiences with the managers in their teams. Together these surveys offer valuable insights into broader cultural trends and dynamics.

16. Beyond collecting feedback, UNDP is committed to transparency and actionable responses to the insights garnered through the #UNDPListens programme. The results of these surveys are shared openly within the organization, fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. This transparent sharing of results at all levels of the organization serves not only as a reflection of UNDP's commitment to inclusivity and engagement but also as a catalyst for meaningful change. Leadership and management across UNDP are tasked with developing and implementing targeted actions based on the feedback received, ensuring that the voices of personnel directly inform strategies to enhance workplace culture and operational effectiveness. This process of reflection, dialogue, and action reinforces UNDP's dedication to creating an inclusive environment where every team member feels valued, heard, and empowered to contribute to the organization's mission without fear of retaliation or discrimination.

IV. UNDP's efforts to promote an inclusive and respectful workplace culture.

17. As part of a comprehensive effort to foster an inclusive and respectful culture, in 2023 UNDP launched a new Diversity Equity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2025. It aspires to establish UNDP as a transformative organization that provides employees with a diverse equitable and inclusive workplace which is free from all forms of discrimination and empowers all its people to deliver on the organization's mandate across all duty stations. It is guided by a diversity, equity and inclusion committee established to oversee its implementation. While focusing on advancing the under-represented and marginalized amongst its workforce, the Strategy continues to ensure that UNDP is promoting fair and equitable work practices and fosters inclusion in the workplace for every one of its

personnel. The effort is being spearheaded through a 'Speak Up' Culture initiative and is bolstered by continuing efforts to guarantee inclusion for all personnel including gender equity.

A. Fostering a Speak Up Culture at UNDP

18. With the aim of accelerating progress towards its commitments to foster a diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace, UNDP introduced a flagship initiative 'Speak Up Culture'. This initiative aims to strengthen organizational culture values centered on civility, transparency, respect, and freedom from fear, promoting a more inclusive workplace environment

19. Its design was informed by the sentiment analysis of previous Global Staff Survey comments and recommendations from the behavioral change research conducted in 2022 regarding bias, racism, discrimination, trust and reporting. Initially aimed at addressing racism, this analysis revealed key 'Speak Up' barriers which indicated that racial and other biases manifest in nuanced ways which often do not rise to the threshold of wrongdoing. Rather they are rooted in organizational culture, ways of working and interpersonal relations in the workplace which requires adopting a holistic framework towards shifting organizational cultural principles.

20. Accordingly, UNDP is implementing a 'Speak Up' culture initiative that enhances the quality of the psychological environment in which UNDP personnel operate, nurtures 'up-stander' actions and discourages 'by-stander' culture. The initiative is being delivered through a combination of interventions which were piloted with 13 offices across UNDP since 2023. It included 2,000 personnel of all contract modalities, representing every bureau at UNDP. The 'Speak Up' culture experiences includes over 20 different team exercises designed to cultivate behaviors focusing on areas such as strengthening psychological safety, fostering inclusive leadership, navigating barriers to speaking frankly, and effectively responding to personnel speaking candidly. These sessions were delivered alongside a 'safe space' app which aimed to create a channel for personnel to informally address instances of exclusion or bias. The piloting of the 'safe space' app ended in December 2024. The scaling of the 'Speak Up' culture initiative will be supported through a dedicated Training of Trainers programme which will be launched in 2025.

21. UNDP has also introduced a new self-led learning site which includes various resources such as diversity, equity and inclusion and anti-racism skills building workbooks and team activities aimed at building relevant behaviors, knowledge and capabilities amongst personnel to support an inclusive and 'Speak Up' culture.

B. Promoting gender parity and a gender inclusive culture

22. With regards to gender balance within the organization, UNDP is implementing its Gender Parity Strategy 2022-2025 which secures UNDP's gender parity achievements and continues to advance gender equality values and principles throughout its operations. As such, it is designed to cement UNDP as a gender inclusive workplace, reinforce UNDP's commitment to level the playing field for all personnel, and ensure that everyone can bring their best self to work in a gender inclusive environment.

23. The Strategy includes three objectives: (1) maintain equal representation of women and men among staff at all levels at UNDP, and among senior management, as well as reach parity at P4 through D2 levels by 2025; (2) foster gender parity in crisis and post-crisis contexts and increase the share of women serving in crisis and post-crisis contexts; and (3) strengthen UNDP as a gender inclusive workplace and ensure that all personnel enjoy an enabling work environment and a positive employee experience.

24. On representation, UNDP has proved to be resilient to COVID-19 and other ongoing crises and continued to maintain full gender parity for over five years at the UNDP-wide level. There is also parity among Resident Representatives (RRs). Through its Gender Parity Strategy, UNDP is now taking targeted action to increase women's representation in specific grades and contexts.

25. UNDP has also strengthened its policies to ensure they are gender inclusive, such as the recent introduction of a new harmonized, gender neutral and extended parental leave policy. In addition, the organization offers other family friendly workplace policies such as flexible work arrangements which personnel are encouraged to leverage to promote a healthy work-life balance. UNDP has also undertaken an analysis of parental support facilities across the organization to ensure adequate support for parents on its premises.

26. To support the attraction and retention of more women in hardship locations, UNDP conducted a focused analysis of gender parity barriers and enablers in crisis and post-crisis contexts. The recommendations of this analysis are being considered for implementation.

27. As a result of these concerted efforts to enhance gender parity, UNDP has been EDGE re-certified - an international acknowledgement of continued progress towards building a gender equal and inclusive workplace. The Equity, Diversity and Gender Equality (EDGE) certification is a globally recognized standard for gender equality in the workplace, which measures where organizations stand in terms of gender representation, pay equity, the effectiveness of policies and practices to ensure equitable career flows, as well as inclusiveness of their culture as reflected in employee perceptions. UNDP received its first certification in 2021, becoming one of only two United Nations entities to achieve this milestone. In 2024, UNDP retained the EDGE MOVE certification which acknowledges UNDP's strength as a gender-equal workplace, as well as the EDGEplus certification, which recognizes UNDP's commitment to gender diversity and inclusion.

C. Special Programmes launched to diversify UNDP's workforce

28. With its commitment to leaving no one behind, UNDP continues to implement programmes that promote demographic and geographic diversity, aiming to increase representation of under-represented groups—such as persons with disabilities, young talent and women—ensuring its workforce continues to reflect the communities it serves.

29. To support the development of a talent pipeline of qualified professionals with disabilities, and to enhance the employability and career prospects of young professionals with disabilities UNDP established a talent programme for young people with disabilities in collaboration with UNV in 2017. Since the programme's inception 120+ young professionals with disabilities have deployed across the globe in UNDP country, regional and headquarter offices.

30. Other efforts that have enhanced geographical diversity of UNDP personnel, includes the introduction of paid internships in 2020. These created early career pathways at for junior talent from less advantaged groups. Since introducing the stipend, UNDP has successfully attracted and onboarded up to 87 per cent of its interns from the Global South in recent years.

31. In addition, UNDP launched a series of young talent programmes enabling UNDP to increase diversity in its early career pipeline. These programmes include the award-winning 'Graduate Programme' and the 'African Young Women Leaders Fellowship Programme'.

32. The ‘Graduate Programme’ which provides a unique opportunity for young talent from diverse backgrounds among the least represented programme countries – in particular young people who are the first in their families to graduate from a university, and who are from disadvantaged communities – to begin their careers with UNDP, has shown particular success in attracting and retaining talent with multi-dimensional diversity markers. For instance, the first cohort of Graduates included individuals from 15 nationalities, with nine first generation university graduates, and six who identified as belonging to an Indigenous Peoples Group, and one person with a disability. The second cohort of graduates included a similar diverse group of quality young talent representing 13 nationalities, 7 first generation university graduates and seven individuals who belong to an Indigenous Peoples Group. Overall, the retention rate for the ‘Graduate Programme’ is showing great promise with 50 per cent of Graduates retained for short-term (less than 3 months) roles and 21 per cent for long-term (more than six months) roles.

33. The African Young Women Fellowship Programme has shown similar success in introducing young African female talent from across the continent into UNDP’s early career pipelines. Established in 2019, the African Young Women Leaders (AfYWL) Fellowship Programme seeks to cultivate a new generation of young African women leaders to serve Africa and the world through the design and implementation of development programmes in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Africa’s Agenda 2063. The ‘Fellowship Programme’, a joint initiative between the African Union Commission and UNDP, aims to advance gender equality by investing in global women leadership. The first cohort of fellows included representation from 20 African countries, the second from 22 countries and the third cohort included representatives from 24 African countries.

34. UNDP launched a Futures Fellowship programme in 2022, bringing together a cohort of geographically diverse individuals to enrich the work of the Strategy and Futures team by incorporating external perspectives to expand thinking beyond our institutional boundaries and assumptions. The fellowship provides young talent with an opportunity to learn about the United Nations system and UNDP while gaining experience applying foresight skills in a large organizational setting. The fellowship has seen remarkable growth in applications (from 180 in 2022, to 1,126 in 2023, and 6,602 in 2024), with efforts made to select fellows from every geographical region (Africa, Arab States, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America) who bring wide-ranging expertise from technology and space exploration to architecture and design.

35. In addition to special programmes intended to boost representation of specific populations, UNDP’s overall recruitment approach is guided by our recruitment and selection policy, which establishes non-discrimination principles as well as several diversity considerations. The policy emphasizes the importance of recruiting candidates on as wide a geographical basis as possible. For gender parity, there is an explicit provision on including at least one female shortlisted candidate for each role to increase the likelihood of hiring women into the workforce. In terms of disability inclusion, 80 recruiters recently underwent training in disability-inclusive recruitment practices to create a more inclusive and positive candidate experience for people with disabilities. More generally, interview panel members are encouraged to undertake unconscious bias training available on UNDP’s Quantum Learning Platform and technical tests are submitted to markers without any candidate identifiers, to reduce bias in candidate assessments.

36. While these efforts advance UNDP’s goal of fostering an organizational culture that respects and celebrates diversity and centers inclusion by promoting a ‘Speak Up’ Culture, they are not standalone and are carefully integrated with other wider efforts focused on strengthening the quality of leadership at UNDP and driving ethical behaviors and accountability through formal justice mechanisms.

V. Strengthening leadership development

37. The quality of leadership is crucial in shaping organizational culture as leaders set the tone for values, behaviors, and expectations within the organization. It is for these reasons that UNDP has made significant investment into leadership development processes and methods in its efforts to promote an inclusive, respectful and non-discriminatory workplace culture.

38. Under the umbrella of the award-winning Leaders for 2030 programme launched in 2021, UNDP is working to further enhance positive transformation in its organizational culture by equipping all senior leaders with foundational management skills, knowledge and practices, which are part of UNDP's core leadership competencies and behaviors as outlined in the UNDP Leadership Model.

39. Thus far, over 300 leaders have taken part in the programme and its various learning modalities, all ensuring that leaders embody the principles of inclusion, collaboration, growth, innovation, and accountability. Leadership curriculum includes the provision of certificate programmes and masterclasses on topics such as secure base leadership, systems transformation, and courageous leadership. Formal certificate programmes have been supplemented with specific leadership learning labs on topics such as creating a speak-up culture, emotions in teams, let's make wellbeing a priority and more. Leaders have also been offered 360 assessments aligned with the UNDP's Leadership Model and offered executive coaching to improve leadership efficacy and heighten leaders' self-awareness. To note, offices where leaders participated in the Leaders for 2030 programme were twice as likely to be top-performing offices according to UNDP's Engagement Index (based on results of #UNDPlistens Engagement and Inclusion surveys).

40. In addition, throughout 2024, all newly onboarded Resident Representatives and Deputy Resident Representatives have received a comprehensive training session on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH), and all existing senior leaders have been offered additional virtual training on PSEAH and provided with the resources, guidance and tools to 'set the tone at the top' and to create a safe environment for all personnel.

VI. Strengthening accountability through formal justice mechanisms

41. Formal justice mechanisms play a crucial role in shaping the organizational culture by ensuring that employees adhere to the highest standards of integrity and that any misconduct is addressed. This reinforces a culture where all employees feel valued and empowered to raise concerns without fear of retaliation, driving accountability and a culture of inclusion.

42. In addition to contributing to the initiatives identified above, UNDP's independent Ethics Office, guided by its awareness and communication strategy, has also prioritized activities aimed at influencing UNDP's organizational culture. Among other results, this effort has driven the highest-ever level of engagement by UNDP personnel in live (remote and in-person) ethics sessions, with the record levels reached in 2022 (3,599 participations), surpassed by 78 per cent in 2023 (6,411 participations), and projected to reach a new record in 2024. During these awareness-raising sessions, UNDP personnel reflect on the importance of ethical standards and receive practical guidance on implementing UNDP's Code of Ethics, including UNDP's commitment to protection against retaliation.

43. UNDP is committed to maintaining a system for the administration of justice that upholds principles of fairness, accountability, and transparency. This includes clear mechanisms for addressing grievances and ensuring due process in employment-related matter, investigation and disciplinary proceedings to effectively address breaches of the required standards of conduct committed by UNDP staff members, as well as processes to ensure accountability as applied to vendors, UN Volunteers and other personnel, and to address possible criminal behavior.

44. As part of the formal mechanisms, the Office of Audit and Investigation complements the outreach done by the Ethics Office to instill inclusive behaviors by reviewing and investigating instances where employee conduct falls short of agreed standards. The Office has made it a priority to review all cases of alleged racial discrimination which is now part of the overall category of discrimination within the existing case management system. Information regarding the actions taken in cases of misconduct are reported to the Executive Board in the Annual report of the Office of Audit and Investigations on internal audit and investigation activities, as well as in the Annual Report that is published on the UNDP Administration of Justice.

VII. Conclusion

45. UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS have made significant strides in fostering an inclusive and equitable workplace culture by taking proactive steps to prevent and respond to all forms of discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination. A core focus has been on promoting behavioral change through learning, as well as enhancing data collection and analysis to better understand inclusion gaps and prioritize targeted actions. Data collection, especially regarding ethnicity related data, will continue to be a joint focus going forward with system-wide collaboration on developing race related markers in progress.

46. Through targeted policies and initiatives, UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS individually and collectively are working towards achieving anti-racism practices, gender-balance and geographical representation at every level across the United Nations System by implementing deliberate initiatives to increase equity across the organizations while enhancing inter-agency discussions and collaboration to share best practice approaches and programmes.

47. Together, these actions reflect a continuous commitment to fostering an inclusive and anti-racist organizational culture where diversity is embraced, equity is practiced, and inclusion is continuously improved.