EXECUTIVE BOARD OF UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS
ANNUAL SESSION, JUNE 2025

INFORMATION NOTE

I. Introduction

1. This information note has been prepared in response to decision 2024/10 of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board which requests the management of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS to provide updates on the implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit on addressing racism and racial discrimination in United Nations organisations.

2. UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS are committed to cultivating a safe, UN value-driven working environment that prevents and addresses all forms of discrimination and creates equal opportunities for all.

3. In line with this commitment and rooted in International Human Right law[1] including the *International Convention for Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)*, which calls for the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, and in line with Article 1 of the *United Nations Charter*, on promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, and in respect of the recommendations in the United Nations *Joint Inspection Unit Note* on "*Review of measures and mechanisms for addressing racism and racial discrimination in United Nations system organizations: managing for achieving organizational effectiveness*", UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS continue to take steps to ensure a discrimination free environment for all personnel is promoted and maintained.

II. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

4. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is committed to its mission to help people world-wide to build a better life. Operating in a rapidly evolving global landscape, it works to help countries to confront unprecedented challenges, including natural disasters, conflicts, and deep-rooted inequalities. To remain agile and effective in achieving its goals, UNDP relies on a diverse global workforce of over 20,000 personnel about 170countries, representing 189 nationalities.

[1] Existing International Human Rights Laws that contain provisions to address and condemn racism include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention (IC) on Civil and Political Rights, the IC on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

5. In managing such a geographically distributed workforce, UNDP makes deliberate efforts to create a cohesive and supportive workplace where all individuals feel valued and empowered. It is actively cultivating a culture of belonging, ensuring that inclusion is not just a commitment, but a lived experience embedded in daily workplace interactions. This includes fostering a safe and respectful environment where all forms of discrimination, including racial discrimination, are actively prevented and addressed.

III. UNDP's approach to addressing racial discrimination

6. Since 2020, UNDP has taken decisive steps to address racial discrimination, by embedding anti-racism efforts into its broader efforts to foster an inclusive and discrimination-free workplace.

7. In 2021, informed by a town hall discussion led by the Administrator and an all-staff survey, a new Advisory Group on anti-racism developed an action plan focusing on integrating anti-racism in organizational policies and culture, and enhancing accountability mechanisms. In 2022, the Advisory Group presented the final report and recommendations leading to the formation of a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee and the integration of anti-racism initiatives into UNDP's broader Strategy (2023-2025). This strategy acknowledges that racism, as any other form of discrimination, is never a stand-alone phenomenon. It stems from the workplace culture, interpersonal dynamics, and systemic structures and often manifests in subtle ways, which requires a proactive holistic response.

8. The Committee oversees the implementation of the Strategy, and includes representation from all Bureaus and Offices, with the Associate Administrator serving as the Executive Sponsor, reinforcing the high-level leadership commitment.

9. UNDP's efforts in these areas align with the Secretary-General's Strategic Action Plan on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All (2021), which outlines actions in four key areas: organizational culture, management practices, systems and policies, and accountability mechanisms.

10. The JIU recommendations are integrated into various initiatives and strategic frameworks. This ensures that efforts are embedded in existing mechanisms, for instance, leveraging best practices on workplace experience data collection and analysis mechanisms to identify priority areas, cultivate an inclusive workplace culture, strengthen capacity and accountability mechanisms, as well as ensure equal opportunities.

IV. Common Set of Racial Categories for Voluntary Self Identification

11. In response to **Recommendation 1 of the JIU Review** which calls for the development of a common set of racial categories for voluntary self-identification of UN personnel, UNDP introduced a voluntary demographic section in its Engagement and Inclusion Surveys (2023 and 2024) to be able to better analyze workplace experiences across various dimensions. The racial and ethnic options are based on the JIU categories that were used during the review. These Surveys are part of UNDPListens, a robust people listening architecture, and provide

structured insights into personnel experiences, enabling leadership to identify and address concerns as well as pinpoint and encourage areas of success.

12. UNDPListens was rolled out in two phases. Phase 1 introduced Engagement and Inclusion Surveys, designed as organization-wide feedback tools that are deployed annually. Phase 2 expanded the framework to include targeted feedback mechanisms such as pulse surveys and leadership assessments, gathering more focused insights on specific concerns. The Engagement Survey evaluates workplace experience, while the Inclusion Survey tracks belonging, trust, and psychological safety, key indicators of an inclusive culture. It also identifies areas where challenges may persist, allowing UNDP to take proactive action. The analysis of 2023 and 2024 Engagement Survey data showed no statistical differences in engagement outcomes by racial or ethnic origins.

13. The 2024 Inclusion Survey reported a score of 75/100, reflecting good results in fostering a safe, respectful, and harassment-free workplace. The survey revealed some broader cultural challenges that affect all personnel, including those related, for example, to communication gaps and perceived lack of recognition. The highest-rated factor, belonging (78%), indicates that personnel feel valued, respected, and connected to their peers. As a follow up to the Inclusion Survey, and to supplement the quantitative outcomes with robust qualitative information on specific gaps identified by the survey, UNDP is implementing listening sessions across the organization.

14. Beyond internal efforts, UNDP actively contributes to inter-agency initiatives on racial data standardization, led by the UN Secretariat's Anti-Racism Office under the Secretary-General's Strategic Action Plan. This interagency effort aims to develop a common racial categorization framework for voluntary self-identification across the UN system, enhancing monitoring, evaluation, and accountability in addressing racial discrimination. UNDP, alongside UNFPA and UNOPS, is engaged in this work through the High-Level Committee on Management's DEI Working Group, ensuring alignment with best practices.

15. Through these efforts, UNDP is strengthening its approach to workplace experience data collection and analysis, reinforcing data-driven decision-making, in alignment with this JIU recommendation.

V. Capability development

16. **Recommendation 2** requires training and learning units to improve awareness, learning and performance to address all forms of racism and racial discrimination in the workplace. In line with this recommendation, UNDP has developed a variety of tailored initiatives, including individual learning opportunities through guided self-reflection, which are designed to help employees strengthen their skills in areas such as understanding different cultures, standing up for what's right, and being your true self at work.

17. UNDP has launched several resources to help employees deepen their understanding of anti-racism, including a dedicated SharePoint site, an anti-racism skills self-reflection workbook and an anti-racism skills building session led by external experts. UNDP also organized events,

training and webinars to create opportunities for personnel to learn and build workplace practices and behaviors that sustain UNDP's safe and value-driven organizational culture.

18. To further strengthen inclusive leadership, UNDP also introduced a workshop series for Resident Representatives, titled Below the Surface Leadership, which focused on key leadership practices that support the development of skills to reduce discriminatory behaviors.

19. UNDP's independent Ethics Office continues to provide learning, guidance and awareness raising regarding expected workplace behaviors and conduct, as well as reporting mechanisms. The sessions reflect on the importance of ethical standards where personnel receive practical guidance on implementing UNDP's Code of Ethics, including UNDP's commitment to protect against retaliation.

20. This holistic approach to capacity building aims to foster an environment of continuous learning, ensuring that personnel are not only aware of values, standards and policies, but are equipped with skills to contribute to the organization's goals of eliminating all forms of discrimination.

VI. Culture and leadership

21. **Recommendation 3** emphasizes the need for organizations to allocate sufficient resources to achieve defined results in implementing action plans to address racism and racial discrimination.

22. UNDP's organizational commitment to ensuring sufficient support for this work is reflected both in policies and in the allocation of resources— financial and human—to ensure meaningful implementation in accordance with the priorities in the various related strategies. By embedding measures to prevent all forms of discrimination within recruitment, retention, leadership development, and workplace culture initiatives, UNDP aims to foster an environment where all personnel are treated with fairness and respect, and discriminatory practices are actively identified and addressed.

23. Through a dedicated Strategy, UNDP reinforces its dedication to providing a workplace free from all forms of discrimination, including racial discrimination, while empowering all personnel to effectively deliver on the organization's mandate across all duty stations.

24. Aligned with UNDP's Strategic Plan, the Strategy operationalizes the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle, which is fundamental to UNDP's mission of ending poverty, strengthening democratic governance, upholding the rule of law, and fostering inclusive institutions. As articulated in the Strategic Plan, LNOB compels UNDP to address discrimination and intersecting inequalities that undermine fundamental human rights.

25. Several programmes have been resourced and implemented as part of UNDP's commitment to achieving a workplace free from discrimination.

26. A flagship initiative, the Speak Up Culture Programme advances UNDP's commitment to fostering an organizational culture rooted in civility, transparency, respect, and freedom from fear. It aims to cultivate a culture where people are empowered and have the tools to shape their employee experiences and create an environment where they can thrive. It focuses on measures that help prevent and dismantle any discrimination in the workplace and discourage staff from believing that discrimination must be silently endured.

27. The Programme is designed to drive behavioral change through three key areas: personal mastery, perception disruption, and speaking up to power, equipping individuals with the self-awareness and skills needed to challenge biases, navigate difficult conversations, and build psychological safety. Through team experience sessions, self-reflection exercises, and a safe space framework, it encourages personnel and leaders to engage proactively rather than retreat into silence.

28. The Programme was piloted in 12 UNDP Country Offices and the findings from the evaluation of the pilot highlighted key achievements. The Speak Up Culture experiences had measurable impact on workplace behaviour at office level. For example, Offices that participated in an experience session more than a month before the Inclusion Survey generally showed stronger improvements, and 5 of the 12 pilot offices also showed an improvement of 5-10 points across most dimensions of the Engagement Survey during the pilot period. Additionally in one office, participation in the pilot led to a 10-point engagement score increase, with 93% of metrics improving including in three areas of Speak Up intervention: respectful treatment, care and leadership.

29. With these strong outcomes in mind, UNDP is scaling up the reach and impact of the Speak Up Programme through a Training of Trainers (TOT) programme. The establishment of a cohort of trained personnel who can deploy Speak Up experiences will deliver dividends not only in scale and reach of the experiences but will also provide personnel with career growth opportunities through upskilling in areas of public speaking, facilitation, communication and behaviour change.

30. Under its innovative Leaders for 2030 Programme, launched in 2021 and aligned with the UNDP Leadership Model, UNDP is ensuring that its leadership is equipped with the tools to drive meaningful change and uphold its commitment to a workplace free from fear, disrespect and discrimination. The Programme provides senior leaders with essential management skills and reinforces leadership behaviors that actively counter discrimination, uphold fairness, and encourage ethical decision-making.

31. To date, over 300 leaders have participated in the Leaders for 2030 Programme. The curriculum includes certificate programmes and masterclasses on leadership topics such as secure base leadership, systems transformation, and courageous leadership. Additionally, leadership learning labs have focused on fostering a speak-up culture, understanding emotions in teams, and prioritizing workplace wellbeing, further enabling leaders to create an environment where concerns about discrimination are acknowledged and acted upon.

VII. Inter-agency Standing Mechanisms

32. **Recommendation 4** calls on United Nations system organizations, as members of the CEB, to jointly develop and provide resources to a high-level, inter-agency standing mechanism intended to unite organizations, leverage their existing capacities and comparative added value to collaborate and work together to respond to both immediate and longer-term needs for addressing racism and racial discrimination across the United Nations system, and address the transformative changes needed to enhance the continued relevance and value of the various efforts at both the organizational and the system-wide levels. The High-Level Committee of Management (HLCM) currently has the formal representation of most United Nations organizations in the Working Group on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

33. UNDP has been engaging with this Working Group, as it led the development of a set of system-wide values and principles which were officially adopted by HLCM in 2023. UNDP has also continued to exchange best practices, approaches and learning from different regions and country offices with other agencies through interagency forums such as the informal Interagency Group on Anti-Racism and the UN Network on Racial Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities. In 2024, UNDP in partnership with UNOPS, UNFPA, collaborated with the Staff Council to host a series of events to share best practices and foster mutual learning, reinforcing UNDP's commitment to an inclusive and supportive workplace.

VIII. Accountability Mechanisms

34. **Recommendation 5** compels organizations to establish, by 2024, an accountability framework that sets out the expected results, outcomes and key performance indicators for addressing racism and racial discrimination, and to report periodically to their legislative organs and/or governing bodies on progress made in achieving the predefined results. UNDP has mainstreamed these efforts within a wider context of organizational culture. This is to ensure that measures to address racism are not treated as stand-alone but are addressed as part of broader cultural initiatives where all personnel have an obligation to strengthen and support a respectful workplace environment where any kind of discrimination is explicitly prohibited.

35. In this respect, UNDP integrated measures to raise awareness, build skills and create upstander behaviours in the dedicated Strategy including a set of organization-wide performance indicators, which are mapped against a maturity model, to ensure that progress is maintained against agreed outcomes.

36. The Office of Audit and Investigations 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. Since 2021, OAI received 8 complaints of racial discrimination: 5 in 2021, none in 2022, 2 in 2023, 1 in 2024 and 1 as of 1 March 2025.

37. UNDP is also taking steps to enhance its ClearCheck system following the General Assembly (GA) resolution 78/253 (22 December 2023) which now requires UN entities that participate in ClearCheck organization to include in the ClearCheck database individuals whose working

relationship with an organization of the UN system has ended because of a determination that they had perpetrated racism and racial discrimination.

IX. Equal opportunities

38. **Recommendation 6** requires that executive heads of United Nations system organizations strengthen the equal distribution of opportunities in human resources management for all personnel. UNDP is strongly committed to providing equal opportunities for all personnel, ensuring that career growth and professional development are accessible to everyone, regardless of background. To achieve this, UNDP has implemented structured measures that foster career mobility, leadership development, and support. These efforts are designed to remove barriers to advancement and ensure that all personnel have the opportunity to thrive within the organization and have access to the same opportunities for professional growth and development.

39. One key initiative supporting this commitment is UNDP's internal Talent Marketplace which enhances internal career mobility by matching employees with opportunities for detail assignments and facilitates identification of qualified internal candidates for roles. This initiative helps create a more transparent system for career progression opportunities, ensuring that all employees can pursue different experiences within UNDP.

40. Another example is the SPARK (Strive, Perform, Aspire, Reimagine, Know) Programme created in 2020 to meet the increasing demand for quality career development experiences at UNDP. SPARK provides structured coaching workshops tailored to equip colleagues with leadership skills, strategic insights, and confidence needed to advance in their careers. Through expert coaching, peer support networks, and targeted development plans, the programme addresses common barriers to career growth and ensures that colleagues in UNDP have the guidance and opportunities necessary to move into leadership roles.

X. Conclusion

41. UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS have made significant strides in implementing the JIU recommendations on eliminating racism and racial discrimination. Through dedicated strategies, policies and initiatives, UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS individually and collectively are working towards creating a safe, non-discriminatory and UN value-driven organizational culture.