

Joint Statement

Executive Board of UNICEF

Internal audit and investigations, Agenda Item 10

ANNUAL SESSION 2021

2 June 2021, New York

Mr. President,

I make this statement on behalf of Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, The United States, The United Kingdom, Turkey and my own country Norway.

We thank the Office for the Internal Audit and Investigation (OIAI) and the Audit Advisory Committee (AAC) for their reports, hard work and commitment.

We congratulate UNICEF for the overall assurance opinion from the office of internal audit. We further thank UNICEF for its management response and follow-up of recommendations and encourage UNICEF to continue their efforts in implementing the recommendations from the internal audit. We commend OIAI for its fast ability to adapt to the Covid-19 situation and encourage the Office to continue exploring innovative solutions and options for remote audits and investigations, without compromising the quality of its work;]

We strongly recommend that UNICEF prioritizes actions posing the highest risks on its results and use the recommendations strategically in the work with the new strategic plan. At the country level, we would like to see UNICEF give priority to addressing the most recurrent audit issues such as need for improved alignment of the results chain. In addition, we would like to underline recommendations to promote the sustainability of interventions, including by strengthening capacities for construction and corresponding operational concepts.

We welcome the thematic audit of the HACT and Management's response and on-going actions to strengthen the mechanism, including through digital solutions. We urge UNICEF to continue

their efforts, including educating staff as the milestone for staff HACT training in 2020, for example, was not achieved.

We are concerned, by the increase in actions that have been pending implementation for more than 18 months and call on the Office and UNICEF management to work together to close out these recommendations in a timely manner.

We note the continued high number of investigation cases and the internal audit recommendation of further strengthening the policies and routines for preventing and follow-up of both fraud and sexual harassment. We encourage UNICEF to prioritise this. We are happy to note that UNICEF uses the UN ClearCheck database when hiring but it is unclear whether UNICEF also reports cases on sexual harassment and abuse to the database. We would welcome information on this in future reporting to the Executive Board.

We commend UNICEF for its work on community reporting. However, we find the whistleblowing page on UNICEF's webpage relatively difficult to find, compared to for example UNDP and UNFPA, as searches for keywords do not direct users to the site and it is currently only available in English. We would therefore want to reiterate our concern that this channel for reporting cases of abuse or harassment is not intuitive, particularly for children and young people.

We are also concerned about the capacity in the internal audit and investigation office. The Office identified a number of additional risks in 2020 it was unable to address, primarily due to resource constraints. This is further underlined in the Audit Advisory Committee's report which recommend a review of both capacity and competence needs in the internal audit office. We strongly support this recommendation. As Member States and Donors, inadequate resources for crucial functions of assurance and control are of great concern and we again request UNICEF to remedy the issue. We welcome on-going efforts to update the internal accountability framework and corresponding guidance and expect such streamlining to improve case-management and referral processes of issues to the relevant unit within UNICEF. We expect this to reduce workload by reducing redundancies.

We encourage UNICEF to continue its work with other UN funds and programs on harmonized definitions and reporting for audit and investigation matters and encourage UNICEF to include progress on this work in the annual internal audit report for 2021.

Lastly, we congratulate UNICEF with the updated mandate for the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations. We believe the mandate has improved and is well structured.

Thanks again for the reports and the presentations and we look forward to UNICEF's answers to our concerns and questions expressed.

Thank you!