



UNICEF's Journey  
of Organizational  
Transformation

unicef   
for every child

**Cover:** Ahmed Osman Adam, UNICEF Child Protection Officer in Garowe, stands for a portrait with a young displaced girl in the IDP camp where she lives in Garowe, Somalia, Monday, December 10, 2018.

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# UNICEF's Journey of Organizational Transformation

For over **70 years**, UNICEF has attracted generations of talented and committed women and men to serve the needs of children and young people.

Today, more than **15,000 UNICEF staff members** work in more than **190 countries**, including in some of the world's toughest places, to reach those most in need.

Like any large, decentralized organization, our culture must reflect our mission. There is no separation.

**How we work collaboratively in and across every office and workplace.**

**How we embrace inclusivity at all levels of our organization.**

**How we act with ethics and integrity in everything we do.**

**How we work with partners in complex, high-stress environments.**

**How we prevent the sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children across our work.**

**How we end all forms of harassment and abuse of our staff, in every office.**

**How we put in place and use accountability mechanisms that staff members use and trust.**

**How we support the careers of our staff.**

At all times, these elements must match our mission and our organizational values of care, respect, integrity, trust and accountability.

UNICEF is not alone in asking these questions.

Global movements like #metoo and #aidtoo are sounding a global call for increased accountability for perpetrators of all forms of harassment and abuse — including in the international cooperation field.

At UNICEF, we always want to **lead by example**, so we took a hard look at where we are succeeding as an organization — and where we are failing.



## WHERE WE'VE BEEN

From the outset, our Executive Director established a high benchmark: **zero tolerance** for all forms of sexual harassment, harassment and abuse of authority. This includes unacceptable behaviors such as bullying and intimidation. At the same time, UNICEF must act more strongly to prevent the sexual exploitation or abuse of the children and women we serve.

Between 2018 and 2019, UNICEF commissioned a series of reports and assessments that provided an unvarnished look at UNICEF's culture, how we work together, and what we could do better as we carry out our mission.

The various reports found an overwhelming pride in, and commitment to, UNICEF's mission among staff members.

But they also revealed some important areas where the virtue of our mission was not always being matched with the same level of support and care that staff members need and deserve as they carry out their vital work. They also revealed some deficiencies in our systems to prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation and abuse of those we are mandated to serve and protect.



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The reports found:

- A worrying "results-at-all-costs" culture that may have encouraged abuses such as bullying and harassment;
- A management culture that was authoritarian rather than empowering, made worse by a lack of managerial accountability;
- Fear on the part of staff to speak up about wrongdoing;
- A lack of faith in the organization's complaint mechanisms, and its ability to properly investigate and adjudicate cases of sexual harassment or abuse of authority;
- A human resources system that was not centred around the needs of our people;
- Persistent gender imbalances at many levels of the organization;
- Organizational divides related to supervisees and managers; national and international staff; general service and professional staff; racial and ethnic lines; and gender expression and sexual orientation;
- A fragmented approach to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, both within UNICEF and across the UN system as a whole — with an organizational culture that did not give this issue the priority it deserves; and
- An internal communications function that failed to welcome a diversity of opinions and constructive dissent.

Left unchecked, all of these failures threaten to undermine our mission, our mandate, and the results we must achieve for children and young people.





## WHERE WE'RE GOING

Armed with the findings, data and recommendations from these reports — and with the full support of our Executive Board and staff members around the world — UNICEF began a new journey: to build a more ethical, inclusive, empowering workplace where all our staff respect, enable, and inspire each other to do our best for the world's children.



### Spotlight on: UNICEF workforce by the numbers

- The total number of staff is 15,278, with 29% being international professionals, 34% being national officers, and 37% being general service staff.
- 48% of our staff are female. We have reached gender parity at the most senior levels of the organization (Directors and higher). There is, however, a gap in favor of men at the senior management level immediately before the Director level (i.e. P5 level), where only 42% of these positions are held by women.
- 54% of the global international professional workforce is from programme (non-industrial) countries.
- 32% of our staff are under the age of 40.
- 75% of our staff work in family duty stations.
- 12% of the workforce is on temporary contracts, while 82% are on fixed-term/continuing/permanent appointments.
- We have 4,063 consultants working with UNICEF.
- We completed 4,129 recruitments in 2019, taking 59 days on average to recruit. Our recruitment times for humanitarian contexts were faster (around 45 days).
- The proportion of staff taking some form of flexible work arrangement increased from 7% to 29% over the course of 2019.

**First, we are dramatically improving our accountability and response mechanisms in the event of wrongdoing.**

Staff members must have trust in our systems and feel safe that any reported instances of wrongdoing will be subject to swift, efficient and impartial investigation, judgment and, if necessary, discipline. We must create a culture in which “speaking up” is not only encouraged, but rewarded — one that eliminates fear of retribution, and inspires confidence that *the system works*.

To do this, we are committed to establishing a spectrum of responses for a spectrum of behaviours.

This means finding the least intrusive mechanism to resolve individual conflicts as early as possible — including mediation. Staff have access to a range of informal mechanisms to resolve conflicts, including the UN Ombudsman for mediation services.

It also means building the size, skills, and diversity of our investigative staff to address the most serious matters, including investigations into inter-personal issues/conflicts, which staff are reporting in increasing numbers — a sign of growing confidence in our system.

We are also expanding support services for victims, survivors and witnesses, and partially decentralizing our investigative services to be closer to where the majority of UNICEF staff work, with a new office opening in our Shared Services Centre in Budapest as a first step.

And we are committed to sharing with staff the latest information about investigations and disciplinary cases more systematically. These updates include the type of misconduct and the sanction imposed.

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**Spotlight on: Mediation**

As part improving how we respond to grievances, UNICEF and the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes are providing additional mediation services for UNICEF staff.

Staff will have the opportunity to raise concerns and issues informally to a confidential, independent body (the Office of the Ombudsman) and have these issues addressed in a faster, less intrusive way than a formal investigation process. Contacting the Ombudsman should be one of the first natural steps in seeking an informal resolution to workplace issues. We hope this will happen in the first week after an incident.

Mediators are proficient in all UN languages, and are on-call at:  
[ombudsmediation@fpombudsman.org](mailto:ombudsmediation@fpombudsman.org),  
+1 646 781 4083

## Second — we are reforming our human resources system to make it more “people-centric.”

From the time a new colleague “on boards” to UNICEF, throughout the development of their career, to their separation or retirement from our organization, our people deserve support across their employee “lifecycle.”

To do this, we have established a new competency framework that defines the behaviors that we expect staff members in every office to adhere to. Stemming from UNICEF’s core values, this new framework includes eight expected sets of behaviors: building and maintaining partnerships, demonstrating self-awareness and ethical awareness, driving to achieve results for impact, innovating and embracing change, managing ambiguity and complexity, thinking and acting strategically, working collaboratively with others, and nurturing, leading and managing people. We will use this framework to assess our staff performance throughout the year, and as part of our recruitment process.

We are phasing-in “matrix management” (adding a second supervisor for staff) to reinforce accountability for performance, encourage collaboration across areas of work, break down silos between teams, and equip our people with more, diverse feedback on their performance and career development.

We continue to improve the rigor and quality of our recruitment processes, through additional vetting — including the UN system-wide ‘Clear Check’ database — and external assessments and increased reference checking, including from those whom the candidate supervised.

And we are investing, as a priority, in building the skills of two groups of UNICEF staff members: **national staff** and **mid-level managers**.

For **national staff**, we are introducing two new programmes: the Impact Programme, to build key technical and soft skills for those staff who wish to stay in country, and the Reach Programme, to give these staff the skills and support they need as they move to an international career.

For **mid-level managers**, we are scaling-up our flagship training programme, the Management Masterclass (MMC), which has reached around 33% of all our managers as of the end of 2019; we plan to reach 50% by the end of 2020. These learning programmes complement the others already in place for senior managers, including those for Country Office Representatives, Directors, and their Deputies.

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### Spotlight on: Humans of UNICEF



Humans of UNICEF is a staff-led appreciation programme that identifies and celebrates individual colleagues who live UNICEF’s values in a way that encourages and creates a better work culture.

In recognizing colleagues who demonstrate UNICEF’s values of Care, Respect, Integrity, Trust and Accountability – and in sharing their stories – we recognize those everyday behaviors that create a work culture that cultivates and celebrates our greatest strength – our people.

Staff nominate their peers and managers who are living one or more UNICEF core values. Nominees are reviewed once per month by a confidential panel of their peers. The Humans of UNICEF Programme includes all staff, at every level of the organization, regardless of contract type.

**Third — we are strengthening how we live our core values of care, respect, integrity, trust and accountability, every day and in every office.**

This includes workshops to raise staff awareness of how to live UNICEF's core values, and discuss people's unconscious biases, which can affect their colleagues. We are also holding targeted discussions to gauge the views of specific groups of staff — for example, young UNICEF staff under 35 years — and identify any problems they are facing in their workplace.

We are strengthening our outreach to colleagues everywhere on ethical behaviors, to impress on them that acting ethically and with integrity in whatever we do, inside and outside the workplace, is a crucial part of UNICEF's culture.

Some offices are finding new ways to celebrate staff achievements through office newsletters, expressing appreciation during all-staff meetings and "wall of fame" boards.

And in 2018, UNICEF became the first UN agency to become certified at the second level of EDGE (Economic Dividends for Gender Equality) — the leading global assessment methodology for gender equality.

As a result of the EDGE process, UNICEF accelerated measures around gender parity in recruitments, and flexible work arrangements — with the result that almost 30 per cent of our staff are now using these arrangements, and two-thirds of them are female.

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**Spotlight on: UNICEF's role as "Champion on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment"**

In 2018-19, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore served as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Champion on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH). She focused her agenda on accelerating PSEA work in humanitarian contexts where these risks are the highest, and strengthening the country-level systems for SEA prevention and response. Humanitarian Country Teams are now integrating prevention and response to SEA into their work, and are tracking progress on reporting, victim assistance, and accountability and investigations.

For more information on the Championship see [UNICEF IASC Championship report \(2018-2019\)](#). In September 2019, UNHCR took over the role of SEA/SH Champion.



### What comes next

To keep us on track, we are augmenting the annual Global Staff Survey with a monthly anonymous “temperature check.” This will help gather staff perceptions about our culture change journey into a single database that will give each office a “scorecard” of its progress.

We will continue working closely with our local and global staff associations, including through an expanded internal communications approach that uses different platforms to directly engage staff — from global town halls to real-time conversations between staff in regional and country

offices, and senior leaders in Headquarters. Our re-vamped intranet is becoming more responsive to staff needs, as seen in the unprecedented staff engagement around our new “Humans of UNICEF” staff-appreciation program.

And throughout our journey, we will share our experiences with all of our partners: UN Member States, members of our Executive Board, and other development partners. As the UN system as a whole looks to attract a dynamic, talented workforce, UNICEF is proud to lend our ideas and strategies to improve our truly “global” workplace and in turn, to learn from the experiences of others in the UN system and beyond.



## A FINAL WORD

We are moving forward quickly and have learned a great deal already in a short time.

But organizational culture change is a process and will take time. In an organization as complex, large, and decentralized as ours, change will not come overnight.

And we continue to learn as we go.

We have learned how important it is to engage with both senior leadership *and* staff at all levels of the organization — across country, regional, and HQ offices — to ensure that everyone understands the changes, how they can contribute to them, and how they will be affected by them.

We have learned that we need to focus on changing our behaviours as well as changing our systems, in tandem. We need to do both, so that our changes take root and stand the test of time.

Most critically, we have learned that how we work, how we deliver results for children, cannot be separated from the results themselves. As an organization that champions the rights of children globally, we as UNICEF must also champion the same standards for our own staff.

The benefits of this journey are huge. As we build a better UNICEF within, we are building a better world for children and young people. A more respectful, values-based work culture will ultimately make us even more effective at delivering results for children, everywhere we work.

As 2020 begins, we will continue improving this organization, and keep alive our motivation for change. To find out more, please contact [orgculture@unicef.org](mailto:orgculture@unicef.org).

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