

# UN-SWAP 2.0

PEER REVIEW GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Updated November 2019

## Introduction

The UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on gender equality and women's empowerment assigns common performance standards for the gender-related work of all UN entities, ensuring greater coherence and accountability. Sixty-six UN entities currently report against the UN-SWAP framework, or 94 per cent of all UN entities. Since its introduction in 2012, the UN-SWAP has supported substantial and sustained improvement in the UN's performance on mainstreaming gender equality, with the aggregate rating meets or exceeds improving from 31 to 65 per cent across the 15 UN-SWAP Performance Indicators between 2012 and 2017. In 2018, the UN-SWAP framework was updated to further refine and strengthen existing indicators and include new indicators on normative and development results in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and strengthen alignment at the corporate and country levels.

One way to share good practice, experience and mutual learning about components of UN-SWAP implementation, and gender mainstreaming more generally, is to conduct a UN-SWAP Peer Review. The Reviews are substantive exercises that involve systematic exchange of experience and information between two or more entities with similar mandates and operational sizes where possible. Conducting UN-SWAP Peer Reviews has been a requirement of the UN-SWAP framework, under the Coherence Performance Indicator, since the inception of the UN-SWAP in 2012.

In the first phase of UN-SWAP implementation between 2012 and 2017, only 7 entities<sup>1</sup> conducted UN-SWAP peer reviews (this does not include peer reviews specifically conducted for the UN-SWAP Performance Indicator on Evaluation)<sup>2</sup>. To further promote cross-agency learning and accountability, in the move from the first UN-SWAP framework (UN-SWAP 1.0) to the second (UN-SWAP 2.0), conducting a UN-SWAP Peer Review went from a criterion for "exceeding" requirements of the UN-SWAP Performance Indicator on Coherence to a criterion for "meeting" requirements. As a result of the elevated requirement, UN Women has updated the guidance for UN-SWAP reviews to further clarify core requirements for the exercise, strengthen common points for assessment, outline steps for conducting the exercise and provide practical tools and templates to assist entities.

This guidance document is an update to original UN-SWAP Peer Review Guidance produced by UN Women in 2014. The document is designed to serve as guidance that can be adapted to a wide range of UN entities with differing missions and contexts. The Guidance for UN-SWAP peer reviews will be further refined through lessons learned as additional entities participate in the exercises.

In September 2019, an analysis of documents from 8 UN-SWAP Peer Reviews taking place between 2014 and 2019 was conducted to better understand the approach and points of assessment used in the reviews to date. Findings of the analysis show that UN-SWAP Peer Reviews have varied in formality and approach thus pointing to the need for greater clarity of Peer Review requirements and their application. For example, only half of the exercises involved UN-SWAP Business Owners or individuals and units in charge of reporting on and improving UN-SWAP performance across functional units,

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<sup>1</sup> FAO/IFAD/WFP (annually), ESCWA/ ESCAP (2015), IOM/UNOPS (2015).

<sup>2</sup> On a voluntary basis, evaluation units can engage in Peer Learning Exchange as a means for supporting learning and enhancing credibility of the evaluation performance indicator rating. The Peer Learning Exchange is meant to be part of the wider UN-SWAP Peer Review, but when no broader peer review is completed, evaluation units are encouraged to engage in the Peer Learning Exchange on the Evaluation Performance Indicator, which is supported by the UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights (see the website for details).

beyond gender equality units or equivalent. Similarly, senior leadership was consulted in only one of the exercises.

Formal reporting on the Peer Review exercises also varied. Six out of eight entities prepared final reports for the Peer Reviews. Of these 6, all provided details of the methodology used to conduct the Reviews. The rest of the content for the reports, however, varied greatly suggesting more detailed requirements for the reports are necessary going forward. Further, only two entities clearly indicated that they circulated the reports and/or key findings of the Peer Reviews internally.

A more systematic and harmonized approach to UN-SWAP Peer Reviews, both in terms of process and components of assessment, will allow for greater comparability and integrity of the Peer Reviews as a way of strengthening the quality assurance for the UN-SWAP reporting process.

### **Background to the UN-SWAP peer review mechanism**

In 2018, the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations conducted a review of the UN-SWAP to assess its effectiveness, value added and impact as a tool for performance monitoring and accountability.<sup>3</sup> As the UN-SWAP is based on self-assessment and self-reporting, the review looked at quality assurance practices within and across entities related to UN-SWAP reporting. The review found that less than half of the Action Plan focal points considered the quality assurance mechanisms in place within their respective entity to be effective in ensuring accurate reporting. It also found that quality assurance mechanisms differed widely across reporting entities (ex. varying levels of clearance required before the submission of final reports and varying levels of inputs and validation of data by business owners). The JIU also noted that, within its existing capacity, UN-Women cannot assume a greater role for ensuring quality and accuracy of UN-SWAP reporting, emphasizing that quality assurance practices must be owned by individual reporting entities.

In light of the above, the first recommendation of the report of Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations on the Review of the UN-SWAP (JIU/REP/2019/2) related to improved quality assurance: *“The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should critically assess on a regular basis the quality assurance mechanisms in place in their organization to ensure that ratings by indicator under the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women are accurate according to the technical notes issued by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and are appropriately supported by evidence.”*<sup>4</sup>

As a self-reporting exercise, UN-SWAP 2.0 Peer reviews offer an opportunity to enhance the accuracy and quality of UN-SWAP reporting. Continuous improvement in quality assurance methodologies for the UN-SWAP reporting process is essential to maintaining the credibility and accuracy of reporting. UN-SWAP 2.0 Peer Reviews can assist to improve accuracy of reporting and ensure that reporting is not simply a bureaucratic exercise but reflects the real situation of the reporting entity and thereby the UN system, as encouraged by the JIU.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.unjiu.org/sites/www.unjiu.org/files/jiu\\_rep\\_2019\\_2\\_english\\_0.pdf](https://www.unjiu.org/sites/www.unjiu.org/files/jiu_rep_2019_2_english_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.unjiu.org/sites/www.unjiu.org/files/jiu\\_rep\\_2019\\_2\\_english\\_0.pdf](https://www.unjiu.org/sites/www.unjiu.org/files/jiu_rep_2019_2_english_0.pdf)

## Purpose of UN-SWAP Peer Reviews

The purposes of UN-SWAP Peer Reviews are to:

- Share good practice, experience and mutual learning about components of UN-SWAP implementation
- Review and compare the UN-SWAP process within similar entities, including constraints and opportunities
- Build greater internal capacity to report against UN-SWAP requirements
- Improve credibility and accuracy of reporting through a formal peer assessment
- Strengthen networking and inter-agency partnerships for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women

### **Details of what makes up a peer review and how to carry it out (adapted from OECD-DAC peer review guidance):**

A peer review is the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of an organization by its peers, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed organization improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles.

The peer review process is conducted on a non-adversarial basis, relying on confidence in the process. It is not intended to serve as a procedure for resolving differences - peer review does not imply a punitive decision or sanctions; it generally goes beyond fact-finding to include an assessment of performance and is characterized by dialogue and interactive investigation.

Peer review is a means of peer persuasion which can become an important driving force to stimulate organizations to change, achieve goals and meet standards.

### **Strengths of a UN-SWAP peer review are:**

- It starts with a shared appreciation of the distinctive challenges of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, and the fact that all concerned are constantly striving to improve.
- It can adapt and apply the most pertinent professional principles, norms and standards in coming to an assessment.
- The assessment should carry particular weight, both internally and externally, for the independence and professional credibility of its results.

\* <https://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/1955285.pdf>

## Core requirements of UN-SWAP Peer Reviews as per UN-SWAP 2.0 reporting guidelines for Performance Indicator 17: Coherence

UN-SWAP Peer reviews should:

- ✓ Be substantive exercises that involve systematic exchange of experience and information between entities.
- ✓ Take place at least once every four years.
- ✓ Be conducted between entities with similar mandates and operational sizes where possible.
- ✓ Cover all UN-SWAP performance areas. Separate independent peer reviews for particular UN-SWAP Performance Indicators can also take place, e.g. Evaluation, but are not enough to meet the requirements of the indicator on their own.
- ✓ Involve staff from outside the gender office or equivalent such as Business Owner and include senior management where possible.
- ✓ Conclude with a final report of the assessment to be circulated internally and uploaded with the entity's annual UN-SWAP review (see annex for example Table of Contents for the report). Reports must include: the methodology used, a list of all participants, responses to the peer review assessment questions, and overall conclusions and recommendations.

### Focus of UN-SWAP Peer Reviews:

UN-SWAP peer reviews are expected to examine the accuracy and completeness of UN-SWAP reporting and identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in each entity's reporting results and approach to UN-SWAP implementation. To capture this information, reviews should apply the following assessment questions:

#### Assessment by each Performance Indicator:

- 1) Is the entity's reporting accurate and complete for the Performance Indicator?
- 2) Has an adequate plan of action been put in place to improve or maintain performance (in cases where requirements have been met or exceeded)? Is the Action Plan being implemented? Which actions could be implemented to accelerate or maintain progress?
- 3) Will the entity likely meet or exceed the Performance Indicator by 2022?
- 4) What are the risks and constraints to achieving the requirements of the Performance Indicator?
- 5) What are the lessons learned for this Performance Indicator?

#### Assessment of overall reporting quality of process and implementation:

- 6) What is the entity's internal existing quality assurance mechanism for UN-SWAP reporting, and could they be improved (ex. review by governing body, implementation of the Business Owner model for all indicators if this has not already been done)?
- 7) What are some of the good practices to date related to UN-SWAP implementation for each of the entities being reviewed?
- 8) What have been the greatest challenges to UN-SWAP implementation?

## Process for UN-SWAP Peer Reviews

The peer review process needs to be flexible to accommodate the different parts of the UN system. The peer review should involve three main stages: i) preparation and planning; ii) fact-finding, analysis and report writing; iii) and approval and dissemination of the report. The below are suggested steps to follow:

### Preparation and planning

**Step 1:** Discuss the idea with senior managers and get their buy-in, explaining that the peer review process is central to the UN SWAP roll-out and necessary to meet the minimum requirements for UN-SWAP 2.0 Performance Indicator 17: Coherence. You may also wish to emphasize that UN-SWAP peer reviews can help improve an entity's overall work on gender equality and the empowerment of women by sharing good practices and serving as an entry point for collaboration among entities.

**Step 2:** Determine a partner entity and when each entity will visit the other (in person or virtually). Where possible, partner with an entity of a similar size and mandate. Selecting a similar entity in a close geographical location will also reduce costs and facilitate collaboration. Peer reviews can also be conducted remotely. UN Women can assist with partnering entities for UN-SWAP Peer Reviews. For assistance contact the UN-SWAP Help Desk: [unswap.helpdesk@unwomen.org](mailto:unswap.helpdesk@unwomen.org).

**Step 3:** Determine who will be part of the review and receiving teams – there will need to be time allocated by both the host and visiting entities of approximately 2-3 days for each peer review visit depending on the size and mandate of the entity. Each entity should identify 1-2 Focal Points to lead the coordination of the exercise. Focal Points should ideally be lead coordinators for UN-SWAP reporting or familiar with the reporting process and the entity's current performance and remedial action plans.

**Step 4:** Develop an agreed timeline and schedule including the provision and review of documentation by the reviewed member and timing of all missions.

### Fact-finding, analysis and report writing

**Step 4:** Before the visit or virtual meetings, review background documents, in particular the entity gender equality policy or equivalent and strategic plan, the latest UN-SWAP reports and any key supporting documents, and any other key entity documents.

**Step 5:** At the peer review entity, hold an initial meeting with the gender unit/focal point to discuss the peer review process.

**Step 6:** Set up individual meetings with Senior Managers (particularly for the Leadership performance indicator but also more generally) and any relevant Business Owners (ie. staff from evaluation, HR, strategic planning, programme, audit, communications office and units responsible for meeting and exceeding the UN-SWAP Performance Indicators), particularly for areas with poor performance, to discuss progress to date and challenges and opportunities. Review the action plans for missing and approaching requirements ratings and regular plan of action for meeting and exceeding requirements rating in each case as appropriate.

**Step 7:** With the assistance of the peer review focal point(s), draft a short report (5-8 pages) on main findings and observations, including progress since the last UN-SWAP reporting period (see annex for content and suggested Table of Contents).

#### Approval and dissemination of the report

**Step 8:** Hold a joint validation meeting to present and validate the draft findings of the peer review to staff who have been involved in meetings.

**Step 9:** Complete the report, share it with Senior Management, UN-SWAP Business Owners, gender and UN-SWAP Focal Points and post it on the receiving entity website or circulate internally.

**Step 10:** Upload the report to the UN-SWAP reporting site as supporting evidence for Performance Indicator 17: Coherence.

#### **Role of UN Women**

UN Women has established a UN-SWAP 2.0 Help Desk to support ongoing requests for entity specific assistance and offer individualized guidance and training on UN-SWAP 2.0 reporting. The Help Desk provides support, guidance and tools for accelerating progress in all areas of the framework, including for UN-SWAP Peer Reviews. For further information and support in preparing for and conducting Peer Reviews, please contact the UN Women Help Desk: [unswap.helpdesk@unwomen.org](mailto:unswap.helpdesk@unwomen.org).

## Annex (Tools for conducting UN-SWAP Peer Reviews)

### A. Suggested Table of Contents for UN-SWAP Peer Review Report

1.	Background	Include points on the purpose of the peer review and origin (ie. requirement of UN-SWAP 2.0 reporting exercise, opportunity for sharing/learning/collaborating)
2.	Methodology	Include points on process (timeframe, scope, team members, interview process, etc). Indicate whether senior management is involved as well as business owners
3.	Key Findings	<p>Include key findings from the assessment of reporting against individual Performance Indicators as well as the overall quality of process and implementation of the UN-SWAP Framework. Include key responses to the below questions:</p> <p>Assessment by Performance Indicator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Is the entity's reporting accurate and complete?</li> <li>2) Has an adequate (remedial) plan of action been put in place and is it being implemented? Which actions could be implemented to make progress against the performance indicator?</li> <li>3) Will the entity likely meet or exceed the Performance Indicator by 2022?</li> <li>4) What are the risks and constraints to achieving the requirements of the Performance Indicator?</li> <li>5) What are the lessons learned for this Performance Indicator?</li> </ol> <p>Assessment of overall reporting quality of process and implementation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Is there a satisfactory mechanism in place to ensure the accuracy of reporting by indicator? Could internal quality assurance be improved (ex. review by governing body, etc)?</li> <li>2) What are some of the good practices to date related to UN-SWAP implementation?</li> <li>3) What have been the greatest challenges to UN-SWAP implementation?</li> </ol>
4.	Conclusion and Recommendations	Include any concluding remarks and recommendations
5.	Annex	Include key data points, ex. tables included in this annex



## B. Overview of entity reporting against the UN-SWAP

Performance Area	Performance Indicator	Previous year's rating	Current year's expected rating	2022 expected rating
A. RESULTS-BASED MANAGEMENT	P1: Strategic planning gender-related SDG results			
	P2: Reporting on gender-related results			
	P3: Programmatic gender-related results not directly captured in the strategic plan			
B. OVERSIGHT	P4: Evaluation			
	P5: Audit			
C. ACCOUNTABILITY	P6: Policy			
	P7: Leadership			
	P8: Gender-responsive performance management			
D. HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES	P9. Financial resource tracking			
	P10. Financial resource allocation			
	P11. Gender architecture			
	P12. Equal representation of women			
	P13. Organizational culture			
E. CAPACITY	P14. Capacity assessment			

	P15. Capacity development			
F. KNOWLEDGE, COMMUNICATION AND COHERENCE	P16. Knowledge and communication			
	P17. Coherence			

**C. Data collection matrix for assessment by Indicator (to be used by Peer Review Focal Points and Business Owners)**

<b>Performance Indicator Title</b>	
Is the entity's reporting accurate and complete?	
Has an adequate plan of action been put in place to improve or maintain performance (in cases where requirements have been met or exceeded)? Is the Action Plan being implemented? Which actions could be implemented to accelerate or maintain progress?	
Will the entity likely meet or exceed the Performance Indicator by 2022?	
What are the risks and constraints to achieving the requirements of the Performance Indicator?	
What are the lessons learned for this Performance Indicator?	
Has an adequate remedial plan of action been put in place for indicators with missing or approaching requirements ratings and is it being implemented?	

**D. Data collection matrix for assessment of overall reporting quality of process and implementation (to be used by Peer Review Focal Points and UN-SWAP Reporting Focal Points)**

<b>Assessment of overall quality of UN-SWAP reporting process and implementation</b>	
Is there a satisfactory mechanism in place to ensure the accuracy of reporting by indicator? Could internal quality assurance be improved (ex. review by governing body, etc.)?	
What are some of the good practices to date related to UN-SWAP implementation?	
What have been the greatest challenges to UN-SWAP 2.0 implementation?	