An accountability framework to mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of women across the UN system
What is the UN-SWAP?

The UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on gender equality and women’s empowerment is an accountability framework to accelerate mainstreaming of gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEEW) in all institutional functions of the entities of the UN system. It constitutes a response to ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2, which called upon the UN system to mainstream a gender perspective throughout its work. The UN-SWAP was endorsed by the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) in April 2012 and set 2017 as the target for the UN system to meet all its Performance Indicators.

With its 15 commonly agreed upon Performance Indicators (PIs), the UN-SWAP constitutes the first unified framework to systematically revitalize, capture, monitor and measure performance and accountability for the work of the UN system on gender equality and women’s empowerment. Spearheaded by UN Women, it has created a clearer picture of areas of strength and weakness and has helped identify the human, financial and knowledge resources needed to propel progress across all entities of the UN system.

The UN-SWAP requires annual reporting by each participating entity, department and office. Ninety per cent of UN entities, offices and departments regularly submit reports. The annual Secretary-General’s report on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system provides an analysis of the annual UN-SWAP reporting results.

Goal

To enhance the UN system’s ability to hold itself accountable in a systematic, coordinated and harmonized manner for its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

How it works

Regular and consistent reporting on the implementation of the UN-SWAP is an essential component to strengthen accountability for gender equality. It establishes:

- A common understanding of gender equality and the empowerment of women
- A common method to advance towards this goal
- A common and progressive sliding scale of performance standards against which to monitor progress and to set aspirational goals.

UN-SWAP reporting framework and rating system

The UN-SWAP includes a set of 15 common Performance Indicators (PIs), clustered around six broad and functional areas against which entities report to UN Women annually through an online reporting system. UN Women reviews all reports to control for quality and accuracy of ratings.

Each indicator includes specific requirements which are measured by five progressive ratings:

- Exceeds requirements
- Meets requirements
- Approaches requirements
- Missing
- Not Applicable

The ‘meets requirements’ rating sets the minimum standard for UN entity performance, based on UN intergovernmental mandates on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

‘Missing’ applies when the entity is not yet meeting requirements for the Performance Indicator.

‘Not applicable’ applies where the Performance Indicator is not relevant to an entity.

Entities provide explanations for each rating.

“To be truly transformative, the post 2015 development agenda must prioritize gender equality and women’s empowerment. The world will never realize 100 per cent of its goals if 50 per cent of its people cannot realize their full potential.”

UN Secretary-General
Ban Ki-moon

“Change is coming, change has to come. The performance indicators are steadily climbing and bringing systemic changes”.

Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women

(Photos credits: front cover, top - Health Workers at Ebola Treatment Centre, UN Photo/Martine Perret; bottom - Nepal Peacekeepers - UN Photo/Pasqual Gorriz; back cover, top - March - UN Women/Ryan Brown; bottom – Egypt – UN Women/Fatma Elzahraa Yassin)
How is the UN-SWAP being implemented?

The UN-SWAP implementation has required a multi-pronged strategy, based on:

1. **Inter-governmental support:** Advocating for the inclusion of relevant UN-SWAP language in parliamentary documentation (resolutions, decisions of executive boards, etc).
2. **Strengthening networks:** In 2015, the UN-SWAP network of Focal Points counts over 300 individuals across 62 UN entities. Responsibility for gender mainstreaming is becoming more widely shared by an expanding web of business owners for the different UN-SWAP indicators within entities.
3. **Leveraging existing networks:** UN Women works with system-wide networks to increase technical expertise and accountability for performance areas. For example, the UN Evaluation Group, UN Representatives of Internal Audit Services and Finance and Budget Network have all provided guidance in their relevant areas.

4. **Central coordination hub:** UN Women has established a UN-SWAP Help Desk which responds to ongoing requests for entity-specific assistance. The Help Desk provides support, guidance and tools for accelerating progress in challenging areas, including the development of gender policies, the key lever driving progress.

5. **Communication and knowledge sharing:** UN Women regularly produces advocacy and knowledge sharing products, including brochures, good practices documents, online catalogues of documents by indicators and annual customized reporting analysis for all entities.

**Timeline of the UN-SWAP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) calls for the creation of an accountability mechanism for gender mainstreaming (Agreed Conclusions 1997/2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>CEB endorses a UN System-wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (GEEW) (CEB/2006/2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2010</td>
<td>The General Assembly creates UN Women establishing its mandate to lead, coordinate and promote the accountability of the United Nations system in its work on GEEW (A/RES/64/289)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>UN Women operationalizes the GEEW policy (CEB/2006/2) and develops the UN-SWAP framework after consultations with over 50 entities and piloting by 8 entities - IAEA, IOM, ESCWA, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNAIDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2012</td>
<td>CEB endorses the UN-SWAP for application throughout the UN system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2013</td>
<td>ECOSOC requests the UN system to continue to roll out the UN-SWAP and report on progress (E/RES/2013/16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2014</td>
<td>QCPR requests accelerated efforts to implement the UN-SWAP (E/RES/2014/14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2014</td>
<td>ECOSOC requests the UN system to fully implement the UN-SWAP (E/RES/2014/12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2015</td>
<td>ECOSOC reiterates its request for the UN system to continue to fully implement the UN-SWAP (E/RES/2015/58)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What has the UN-SWAP achieved so far?

The UN-SWAP’s innovative and pioneering approach has resulted in several significant and immediate shifts in how the UN system approaches work related to gender equality and women’s empowerment. Consequently, and as testament to its functionality and efficacy as an accountability framework, it has served as an inspiration for other theme areas. Examples include the UN Youth SWAP and the Inter-Agency Support Group for Indigenous Issues SWAP.

### Previously

- Limited guidance and direction on gender equality and empowerment of women
- Lack of accountability, in particular for senior managers
- Disparate and fragmented data
- Responsibility for gender equality and the empowerment of women limited to gender units and Focal Points
- Focal Points worked in relative isolation with few opportunities to network with other agencies
- No system-wide coherence on gender equality and empowerment of women, and limited awareness of similar work by other entities

### Under UN-SWAP

- Agreed standards applied and monitored across all entities, departments and offices of the UN system
- Enhanced clarity as to what gender mainstreaming means for non-gender specialists, and on the differences between equal representation of women and gender mainstreaming
- Enhanced senior manager accountability and leadership
- Member States mandate reporting and compliance against the UN-SWAP
- A uniform and harmonized methodology yields a baseline against which to measure progress, identify UN-wide strengths, challenges and trends, and stimulate the analytic and evidence-based advocacy that is essential to sustainability.
- Shared responsibility by creating a web of business owners for different PIs and revitalized efforts for GEEW within and across entities
- Enhanced sense of empowerment by Focal Points for gender mainstreaming
- Increased knowledge sharing, innovation and entity partnerships
- Rejuvenated networks of gender equality advocates within and across UN system entities, department and offices
- Greater complimentarity of work on gender equality and empowerment of women
- Improved allocation of human and financial resources for gender mainstreaming

“The UN-SWAP provides a common roadmap for the entire UN system to follow as we enter the post-2015 era. For WFP, this framework makes it easier to meet our commitment to address gender inequalities in all fields. The UN-SWAP has also led to much increased collaboration and information sharing with sister agencies as, together, we strive to reach a common goal.”

Sonsoles Ruedas, Director, Gender Office, World Food Programme

To learn more about the UN-SWAP, please take the UN-SWAP dedicated e-module within the “I Know Gender” course available free of charge at [https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/course/description.php?id=2](https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/course/description.php?id=2)
Way forward

Strategies to build on the momentum that the UN-SWAP has generated and to continue to propel progress include:

- **Inter-Entity level**: Continue to work with and strengthen UN system-wide networks of relevance to accelerating progress towards the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEWE), with particular focus on those mainstreaming gender into the institutional functions of the entities of the UN system (e.g., Networks of gender focal points, budget and finance, evaluation etc.).

- **Entity level**: Continue to expand the scope and depth of commitment and engagement within entities, amongst other measures by development and updating of policies on GEWE and creation of a web of business owners sharing responsibility for the different UN-SWAP Performance Indicators (PIs).

- **PI level**: Continue to respond to PI specific demands from entities (e.g., workshop on specific PIs, development of tools and guidance documents, support to policy development etc.).

- **All levels**: Enhance knowledge generation, management, communication and engagement on GEWE (e.g., development and roll-out of a UN-SWAP knowledge hub, capacity development e-learning modules etc.).

All entities should prioritize the continued implementation of the UN-SWAP indicators to meet the CEB deadline of 2017 with particular focus on the provisions relating to the more challenging Performance Indicators.

---

*In Resolution E/2014/12 the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)*

"Requests the United Nations system, including its agencies, funds and programmes, within their respective organizational mandates, to continue working collaboratively to enhance and accelerate gender mainstreaming within the United Nations system including by fully implementing the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (...)"

---

"The UN-SWAP is making a tremendous impact. Many of the commitments made in UNDP’s Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 are taken from the UN-SWAP framework, thereby committing the entire organization to their achievement. The UN-SWAP is so impactful because it has clear targets and indicators and has been adopted by the CEB."

Randi Davis, Director *ad interim* of the UNDP’s Gender Team
UN-SWAP Performance Indicators (PIs): Requirements to meet performance standards

1. Policy Plan
   - Up-to-date gender equality and women’s empowerment, including gender mainstreaming and the equal representation of women, policies and plans implemented

2. Gender Responsive Performance Management
   - Assessment of gender equality and the empowerment of women integrated into core values and/or competencies for all staff, with a particular focus on levels P4 or equivalent and above

3. Strategic Planning
   - Gender analysis in the central strategic planning document and main country programme documents
   - The central strategic planning document includes at least one specific outcome/expected accomplishment and one specific indicator on gender equality and women’s empowerment
   - Reporting on gender equality and women’s empowerment results in relation to the central strategic planning document
   - All key entity data is sex-disaggregated, or there is a specific reason noted for not disaggregating data by sex

4. Reporting and Data Analysis

5. Evaluation
   - Meets the UNEG gender-related norms and standards

6. Gender Responsive Auditing
   - Consultation takes place with the gender focal point/department on risks related to gender equality and the empowerment of women, as part of the risk based audit annual planning cycle
   - Programme quality control systems fully integrate gender analysis

7. Programme Review
   - Financial resource tracking mechanism in use to quantify disbursement of funds that promote gender equality and women’s empowerment

8. Resource Tracking
   - Financial benchmark for resource allocation for gender equality and women’s empowerment mandate is met

9. Resource Allocation

10. Gender Architecture and Parity
    - Gender focal points or equivalent at HQ, regional and country levels:
      a. are appointed from staff level P4 and above for both mainstreaming and representation of women
      b. have written terms of reference
      c. allocate at least 20 per cent of their time to gender focal point functions
    - The entity has reached the equal representation of women for General Service staff and also at P4 and above levels
    - Gender department/unit is fully resourced according to the entity mandate

For detailed requirements of all ratings for each of the Performance Indicators, please refer to the UN-SWAP Technical Notes, which can be found at http://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/promoting-un-accountability
For each Performance Indicator, reporting entities are required to submit information on:

**Organizational culture fully supports promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women:**

**UN Ethics-related Legal Arrangements**
- a. UN rules and regulations on ethical behaviour are enforced; mandatory ethics training for all staff; and zero tolerance for unethical behaviour.
- b. Implement policies for the prevention of discrimination and harassment.

**Facilitative Policies**
- a. Implement, promote and report on facilitative policies for maternity, paternity, adoption, family and emergency leave, breast-feeding and childcare.
- b. Implement, promote and evaluate policies related to work-life balance with an internal mechanism available to track implementation and accessibility by gender and grade.
- c. Periodic staff meetings are scheduled during core working hours and on working days of staff working part-time, with teleconference or other IT means actively promoted.

**Monitoring Mechanisms**
- a. Conduct regular global surveys and mandatory exit interviews.

**Entity-wide assessment of capacity of staff at HQ, regional and country levels in gender equality and women’s empowerment is carried out and**
- A capacity development plan is established or updated at least every five years

**Ongoing mandatory training for all levels of entity staff at HQ, regional and country offices**

**Knowledge on gender equality and women’s empowerment is systematically documented and publicly shared and**
- Communication plan includes gender equality and women’s empowerment as an integral component of internal and public information dissemination

**Participates systematically in inter-agency coordination mechanisms on gender equality and the empowerment of women**

**Human and Financial Resources**
- **11. Organizational Culture**

**Capacity**
- **12. Capacity Assessment**
- **13. Capacity Development**

**Coherence, Knowledge and Info Management**
- **14. Knowledge Generation and Communication**
- **15. Coherence**

For each Performance Indicator, reporting entities are required to submit information on:

- **Rating and explanation of why rating has been given including supporting documents**
- **Timeline for improvement**
- **Responsibility for follow-up**
- **Resources required**
- **Remedial plans**
2016 results indicate that the System-wide Action Plan continues to catalyse progress on gender mainstreaming. For the overall United Nations system, the proportion of ratings “meeting” and “exceeding” requirements increased from 31 to 64 per cent between the first year of reporting, 2012, and 2016.

Every year the proportion of ratings “meeting” or “exceeding” UN-SWAP performance requirements have made positive gains. In 2016, 69% of all ratings fell into the “meets” and “exceeds” categories, a 35 percentage point increase since 2012.

2016 Performance by Entity Type

The cluster of Specialized entities continued to be the best performing group of entities, with 81% of ratings “meeting” or “exceeding” requirements. The Funds & Programmes and the Secretariat made commendable gains of 6 and 10 percentage points, respectively, and are rapidly closing the gap with the Specialized agencies. Training and Research entities reported the most significant increase of all entity types, almost tripling their meets/exceeds ratings from 17% in 2015 to 48% in 2016. Technical entities also registered a gain of 4 percentage points since the last reporting period.
Since the roll-out of the System-wide Action Plan in 2012, all 15 Performance Indicators have registered improvement. Further, two thirds of indicators (10 out of 15) now show that 74% or more of ratings meet/exceed requirements. For half of these indicators, gains since 2012 have been substantial – increasing 42 to 77 percentage points. The largest gains were registered by: Gender responsive auditing, Knowledge Generation and Communication, Capacity Development, Programme Review, and Monitoring and Reporting.

While all indicators have progressed, five indicators have struggled to achieve the same levels of compliance as the strongest performing ones, with each registering between 22 and 58 per cent of ratings as meeting/exceeding requirements. Progress remaining notwithstanding, several indicators have made commendable gains since 2012: Capacity Assessment, Resource Tracking and Evaluation have all increased by at least 22 percentage points. Capacity Assessment, in particular, registered the largest gain since 2012 of 34 percentage points. Two indicators have achieved only slight improvements from their 2012 baselines - Gender architecture and Resource Allocation - increasing only 12 and 15 percentage points, respectively.

In 2016, the fifth year of implementation of the System-wide Action Plan, more entities than ever are reporting on their gender mainstreaming progress. A total of 65 entities (constituting over 90 per cent of entities) reported. This represents an 18% increase in Action Plan participation since its inception – from 55 entities in 2012 to 65 in 2016.

Strongest Performing Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PI 6: Gender responsive auditing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 15: Coherence</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 14: Knowledge generation and communication</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 2: Gender responsive performance management</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 4: Monitoring and Reporting</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 1: Policy and plan</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 7: Programme review</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 3: Strategic planning</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 11: Organizational culture</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 13: Capacity development</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weakest Performing Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PI 5: Evaluation</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 8: Resource tracking</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 12: Capacity assessment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 10: Gender architecture and parity</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI 9: Resource allocation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information, please visit: [http://www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)
An accountability framework to mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of women across the UN system

UN Women
220 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017
United States

Tel: +1 646 781-4400
Fax: +1 646 781-4444
Website: www.unwomen.org