Background Note: Briefing to the Executive Board

First Regular Session 2025

Update on the Implementation Plan of the Pivoting to Regions and Countries Initiative

Introduction

UN-Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment and rights worldwide. Tasked with a triple mandate to advance and achieve gender equality by providing normative support to members states; coordinating the UN system; and, operationalizing activities to mobilize support for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, and Agenda 2030 – the organization is a global champion for gender equality, committed to mobilizing urgent and sustained action to create an environment in which every woman and girl can live up to her full potential. This unique mandate necessitates a global presence, with emphasis on impact and the better delivery of results across its triple mandate for women and girls at country level. The Entity's founding resolution (A/RES/64/289) states that UN-Women 'shall provide, through its normative support functions and operational activities, guidance and technical support to all Member States, across all levels of development and in all regions, at their request' and to 'continue the existing practice of effective consultation with civil society organizations and encourages their meaningful contribution to the work of the Entity'.

In line with broader UN System reform efforts and the 2030 Agenda, delivering on this vision requires an effective and strengthened field presence. A strong centre in New York is necessary while leveraging other Headquarters locations for global functions to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiencies for a strengthened UN-Women. . The "Pivoting to Regions and Countries" initiative is an internal strategic reorientation for UN-Women, aimed at strengthening its country-based operations to achieve greater impact in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment globally in line with the ambitions articulated in the UN-Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025. The Pivot to Regions and Countries initiative is therefore aimed at strengthening the ability of UN-Women to deliver reliably and consistently on its triple mandate - at the country, the regional and the global level-, and to do so with greater impact and value for money. At this juncture, UN-Women would like to express its appreciation to the Executive Board for its continued support and guidance to this process through the last three years, as it plays its oversight and advisory role in the stewardship of the Entity.

Rationale

The rationale for the Pivoting to Regions and Countries initiative is clear: by strengthening UNWomen's capacities closest to our stakeholders, we will be a more effective and responsive partner and better able to deliver for women and girls where they are. This has been a long-standing request not only from Member States, donors and country-based partners but the need for the Pivot has also been also highlighted by oversight bodies, evaluations and audits. The Pivot seeks to facilitate a shift in business model to a more field focused organization that seeks to more effectively leverage the triple mandate where our stakeholders are. By achieving greater value for money and increasing efficiencies, UN-Women aims to lower operating costs to be able to re-invest these in our mandate. Furthermore, the Pivot aims to bring about a culture shift towards a more global

organization, giving UN-Women a 'louder' global voice in other UN locations such as Nairobi, Bonn and Geneva, where global normative work critical to UN-Women's mandate also takes place. This does not mean that UN-Women will deprioritize normative work in New York, where the Entity will maintain a strong presence.

The Pivot has three main components: increasing delegation of authority to regions and countries and making business processes more enabling of delivery at country level, shifting resources to regional and country level, and moving people closer to the women and girls they serve. Together, the three elements will support efforts to improve the strength, quality, capacity, and alignment of UN-Women's work at country level.

Expected Substantive Impact

The Pivoting to Regions and Countries initiative is expected to deliver significant benefits, both substantively and economically.

For the delivery of UN-Women's triple mandate, the Entity expects the following:

- Integration of the Triple Mandate: The pivot will enhance programmatic, normative, and coordination efforts at the country and regional levels. Concretely:
    - Normative: The focus on strengthening work at the country level can enable the deepening of normative work in catalytic local spaces to advance gender equality, engage new and non-traditional partners and strengthen partnerships supporting intergovernmental processes and ways of engagement.
    - Coordination: Strengthening investment in coordination activities at the country and regional level can leverage synergies, coherence and greater influence in collective action that is grounded in local context and knowledge. In tandem, the "pivot" can increase the visibility and understanding of the activities themselves to strengthen the connection points between normative and programmatic work, with the potential to increase and deepen the impact of the work of UN-Women, across the triple mandate.
    - Programmatic: Integral to the "pivot" is the improved prioritization and scale of UN-Women's programmatic work, sharpening the focus on interventions that enable UN-Women to directly provide knowledge, approaches, and transformational services. To adapt to the rapidly changing operational landscape it is vital to concentrate on what is most strategic while allowing flexibility to respond to unique local contexts. This requires increased capacity (human, financial and decision making) closer to where the programmatic work is being implemented.
- Strengthened Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement: Closer engagement with Member States, civil society, and other stakeholders will foster stronger partnerships and more effective implementation.
- Increased Effectiveness: Proximity in terms of time-zones and geographically to stakeholders will enable more responsive and impactful programmatic and normative work.
- Support to Country and Regional Offices: Enhanced support through time-zone centrality, knowledge-sharing, South-South cooperation and capacity building in the Global South.

In terms of efficiency gains, UN-Women expects:

- Cost Savings: Relocating staff and resources from high-cost locations to lower-cost locations is expected to generate cost savings on staff related costs, office rental and travel.
- Reinvestment: Savings will be reinvested in the organization's capacity to deliver on its triple mandate, including enhancing impact at the country level and UN-Women's overall value for money.
- Environmental Benefits: Reduced travel will lower the organization's carbon footprint as well as have positive impacts on staff well-being and work-life balance.

Timeline and Internal Consultations

The implementation of the current phase of the Pivot exercise began in 2021. While it is foreseen that the process will be completed by the end of 2026, the principles of orientation towards regions and countries underpin all current and future UN-Women work.

Efforts to bolster UN-Women's country and regional structures have been ongoing since the Entity's establishment, beginning with the Regional Architecture review that took place in 2012. This is to ensure that UN-Women is best equipped to undertake its mandate and effectively impact the lives of women and girls around the world.

Since then, numerous reviews, evaluations and audits have called on UN-Women, inter alia, to undertake a relocation exercise as part of its efforts to strengthen its country and regional presences.

In 2022, in the ED's first speech to the Executive Board, the Pivot exercise was described as one of her three key priorities. Subsequently, UN-Women formed a Core group made up of HQ, country and field-based staff to guide thinking around a possible Pivot process. Working alongside the Core team, the following was undertaken:

- Engagement of 150 individuals from across the organization in interviews or meetings.
- Six regional workshops, which included 62 Country Representatives.
- Six workshops with divisions in headquarters, which included 95 colleagues.
- Workshops with individual Divisions.
- Dialogue and discussions with key staff from other UN Agencies (UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP, UNHCR) to understand their experiences and the principles used for decentralization.

Once a high-level decision was made that UN-Women would proceed with a pivot process, staff were informed by an all-staff email and a Task Force was established to guide the process. In addition, an email address was set up for Q&A, FAQs were provided and HQ-based consultations were undertaken. A Country Representatives Group was also established to help guide the process, to ensure that Country Representatives had a voice in the Pivot process.

The Staff Council has been continuously engaged and briefed and has in turn held briefings with UN-Women staff and personnel. There have also been dedicated Town Halls and Global Convenings on the Pivot process over 2023 and 2024 and most recently in January 2025. Throughout the consultation process, staff were encouraged to share their views and experiences, helping to shape the design and implementation of the Pivot initiative. The feedback gathered during the consultations was instrumental in refining the initiative and addressing potential challenges.

The consultations included a thorough examination of the human resources implications of the Pivot initiative. This involved discussions on staff relocation, career development, and support mechanisms for those affected by the changes. A dedicated HR support strategy was developed, including job search support, career coaching, and additional resources for all personnel.

With the principles of the Pivot agreed and established, HQ Directors developed Pivot plans and were strongly encouraged to do this in consultation with their teams. In parallel, two external consultancy firms were hired to support the process, through providing an independent location assessment and to provide external and impartial feedback on each step of the Pivot process. The Executive Leadership Team reviewed all divisional Pivot plans and decided on locations for functions. Finally, an external firm reviewed the comprehensive set of divisional and organizational plans and decisions regarding the Pivot for consistency against the decision principles agreed upon at the outset of the initiative in 2023.

In December 2024 UN-Women announced decisions regarding the future locations of UN-Women functions, meaning that some programme and policy functions, UN Coordination, civil society, private sector engagement and global security will relocate to Nairobi with some partnership and corporate functions moving to Bonn. This was accompanied by a series of Town Halls and Staff-Council facilitated conversations with all personnel to gather their perspectives and priorities regarding the implementation of these decisions, as well as an informal session with the Executive Board.

As the next immediate step, we will move forward with decisions on individual posts, with these decisions to be communicated to personnel in the early months of 2025. Recruitment for existing vacancies at the new duty stations will open, and we expect the first personnel moves to occur around the second half of 2025, with flexibility into 2026 to address personnel needs. While the Entity is not yet at the stage of implementing individual post movements, early indications of team relocation plans are already emerging. In planning these moves, we are carefully considering business continuity, including the delivery of key corporate priorities in 2025, to ensure the organization's ability to deliver remains intact. The timeline—targeting completion of all moves by the end of 2026—has been specifically designed to provide adequate time for staff and the organization to plan effectively and facilitate as seamless a transition as possible. This timeline reflects best practices from other UN agencies undergoing similar organizational restructurings.

In summary, the internal consultations for the Pivoting to Regions and Countries initiative were comprehensive and inclusive, providing a solid foundation for the successful implementation of the initiative. By engaging with staff at all levels and incorporating their feedback, UN-Women has ensured that the Pivot initiative reflects the needs and aspirations of the organization and its stakeholders.

Functional Analysis and Location Assessment

UN-Women's internal analysis classified functions based on location dependency and time zone requirements. The team then refined these locations to define four different pivot pathways, which cover all functions performed at Headquarters. Pathway A covered functions working with external stakeholders, primarily partners through Liaison Offices. For these functions physical proximity is a key consideration. Pathway B covered functions focused on providing programmatic, normative and UN Coordination guidance. While cost and operational considerations play a role for the location of these functions, programme-strategy considerations should impact heavily on the chosen location. Pathway C comprises global functions performing corporate service provision and internal management functions. As such, connectivity and time zone and

mobility are factors driving their location. Pathway D features management functions providing corporate services and operational support and transactional services to regional and country offices. Most functions can be performed asynchronously, and priority for location is based on cost effectiveness and operational efficiency.

For the location assessment, an external consultant was contracted to conduct a thorough and impartial analysis of potential duty stations, including on the long list only those locations where UN-Women or other UN Entities have a significant presence, based on the principles of the QCPR. This assessment took into account operational environment, personnel wellbeing, cost-effectiveness, time zone, physical proximity to partners and other benefits including Common Back Office and the availability of joint premises. These criteria were given different weightings depending on the function under consideration: for example, for programme and policy functions, time zone and physical proximity was weighted more strongly, whereas for back-office functions like transaction processing, cost effectiveness was the main driver.

Based on this analysis, UN-Women found Bangkok, Bonn and Nairobi to be optimal locations. Based on these drivers, for Pivot Pathway A, there would be a continued focus on key partner locations; for Pathway B where colocation with regional and country offices was a driver, Nairobi/Bangkok were priority locations; and for Pathways C and D where connectivity, time-zone and cost effectiveness were key drivers, Bonn was the priority location.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

As part of the Pivot process, UN-Women conducted a cost-benefit analysis covering relocations associated with the Pivot. The relocation is expected to yield significant financial savings for UN-Women, given the lower personnel costs in Bangkok, Bonn and Nairobi compared to New York. Furthermore, the per-seat office costs including facilities, security and common services costs are significantly lower than in New York.

UN-Women has considered a representative scenario based on target numbers of personnel for relocation outside of New York, since final numbers are not yet known. This financial analysis covers a seven-year horizon and includes the staff costs, relocation costs, office rent and common services costs as well as indicative spend on other contract types to allow a fair and equitable comparison of the costs between all locations.

Based on this analysis, UN-Women expects one-time costs of just under $6m, covered through existing resources and Member State contributions. Beginning from when relocation has been fully implemented, UN-Women expects ongoing operational cost savings potential of approximately $8m per year. Based on these estimates, it is anticipated that the payback period for the initial investment will be within 2 years of relocations beginning and total cost savings over the 7-year timeline will be in the region of $50m. It should be noted that these estimates relate to the total UN-Women resources on all funding sources. As only a small share of UN-Women's resources are Regular Resources the expected savings on Regular Resources will necessarily be more modest. Yet, regardless of the funding source the Pivot is expected to significantly improve the value-for-money of UN-Women.

Risk Assessment and Mitigation Measures

UN-Women has conducted a thorough risk assessment relating to the Pivot, which identifies several potential challenges. Mitigation measures have been identified and are being implemented by a dedicated transition

team. The following table summarizes the key risks, their likelihood, potential consequences, and mitigation measures:

Risk Area	Likelihood	Consequence	Mitigation Measures
Operational disruption and business discontinuity	Moderate	Moderate	Dedicated transition team; HR strategy; business continuity plans
Project cost over-runs	Unlikely	Moderate	Careful financial management; regular monitoring
Delays in project implementation	Likely	Moderate	Good project management; close monitoring of deadlines
Personnel resistance to relocation	Moderate	Moderate	Regular and transparent communications; HR support
Staff attrition and talent loss	Moderate	Moderate	Identify key personnel and 1:1 dialogues; HR planning
Global corporate functions relocation misaligned with project goals	Moderate	Minor	Good project management; close monitoring of deadlines; Division level planning and engagement
Delays in office readiness in new locations	Low	Moderate	Good project management; regular working level follow up; close monitoring of deadlines
Lack of clarity on overall business model and new ways of working	Moderate	Minor	Good project management; regular working level follow up; close monitoring of deadlines; communication of clear expectations around ways of working
Pivoting leaves New York under-capacitated, particularly on the normative mandate	Moderate	Moderate	Capacity mapping around UN-Women's mandate, careful organizational design planning
Pivot negatively affects resource mobilization and financial sustainability	Unlikely	Moderate	Capacity mapping around UN-Women's resource mobilization capacity, careful organizational design planning

When performing the risk assessment for Pivot to Regions and Countries, it needs to be outlined that there are significant risks of "doing nothing": with escalating costs in New York and an overall more challenging funding environment for the organization, a strategically important and financially responsible relocation needs to be considered as a much preferred alternative to reductions in HQ personnel, which we have seen in other UN Agencies.

Lessons Learned

UN-Women has drawn on the experiences of other UN agencies which have gone through similar processes, through extensive interviews and consultations, as well as careful review of evaluations of such processes. The lessons learnt which have informed UN-Women's Pivot process are:

- It is important to provide a strong case for change. Organizations need to continually reinforce the case for change through a coherent rationale that links to the overall strategic interests of the organization.
- Continuous communication with personnel is important throughout the process, especially as it relates to building an understanding of strategic objectives. Ensure that staff receive information and are given opportunities to contribute where appropriate.
- Within the decision-making and planning processes, care needs to be taken in how information is shared and presented to different stakeholders. While there is no single correct way of managing the decision-making process and accompanying communications, it is essential that the approach consider organizational dynamics and enable both decision-making as well as ensuing change processes.
- Relocation is not also just about selection of an ideal location that matches defined criteria; organizations must also consider whether functions could be decentralized to multiple locations, how to shift teams, or even consider bigger changes to the functions and how teams are structured. This requires analysis of key stakeholders (client groups), and careful consideration of reporting lines and support structures
- Care should be taken to maintain momentum and not prolong decision-making as this can erode confidence and contribute to change fatigue. And implementation to follow decisions in a timely manner.
- Relocation should take place in phases to enable business continuity. The JIU proposes a two year phased plan works for most organizations to enable business continuity. For example, there will be need for initial office set up and preparation of the premises to enable arrival of staff.
- Personnel should be supported with settling in and other well-being measures. Prepare plans to help relocating staff with basics such as schools, housing, health care, and relevant amenities. This can be done by outsourcing, for example, to experienced real estate companies.
- Ensure that there are clear reporting and oversight structures. Consider whether the new center would need its own management to whom the 50 plus staff there could report to as well. In addition, ensure that reporting capability is built in from the outset.

HR Support Strategy

UN-Women has developed a dedicated HR support strategy to support the implementation of the Pivot. As part of the strategy there is a commitment to support all personnel. It is the product of collaboration and consultation with a broad set up stakeholders, in particular the UN-Women Staff Council. It is people-centred, offering support to personal circumstances, accountable to UN Core Values and adhering to all applicable UN Regulations and Rules, and with a key aim of talent retention. We understand that this is a time of significant uncertainty for our HQ personnel. We expect that colleagues will be informed by the end of February 2025 if they are affected by these changes.

The HQ support strategy offers tailored support to HQ based staff on PA and FTA contracts (both GS and IP), to other personnel based at HQ on TAs, SSAs or other modalities, and to all UN-Women personnel aspiring for career development opportunities.

For personnel who are relocating, the strategy comprises location specific support such as information, housing, visas, schooling and living; flexibility with relocation timelines based on personal circumstances; relocation entitlements and wellbeing support through a contracted provider. For personnel whose function is moving but are not able to move, the strategy offers career development and wellbeing support. Career development opportunities and wellbeing support are offered to all UN-Women personnel regardless of contract type.

The HR Support Strategy will also extend change-management related support to managers.

Next Steps and Conclusion

The Pivoting to Regions and Countries initiative represents a transformative approach for UN-Women, aimed at enhancing its impact and efficiency. By reallocating resources closer to the people we serve, decentralizing decision-making, and strengthening regional and country offices and ensuring internal services are provided from closer to the majority of UN-Women staff, the organization will be better equipped to advance gender equality and women's empowerment globally. The initiative aligns with broader UN reforms and is expected to deliver significant substantive and economic returns, ensuring a stronger and more impactful UN-Women.

The impacts of the pivot will be monitored through regularly updated indicators and evaluations, with findings reported internally and to the UN-Women Executive Board.

The Pivot exercise will adjust UN-Women's operational basis, allowing the next Strategic Plan to articulate how the organization is reshaping its global operations to better deliver on its mandate. By addressing these questions and moving forward with the Pivoting to Regions and Countries initiative, UN-Women aims to achieve a more effective, efficient, and impactful organization, better equipped to advance gender equality and women's empowerment globally.i

UN-Women considers its personnel as its most significant asset and takes its duty of care very seriously. Management has engaged extensively with personnel and with the Staff Council to ensure that their perspectives are incorporated into the design of the Pivot initiative. 2025 is an important year for the Entity and for its mandate: we celebrate 30 years since the Beijing Conference, and we will be vital in developing the next Strategic Plan. With this in mind, the rollout of the Pivot initiative will take place through 2025 and 2026 as business exigencies allow. Meanwhile, a dedicated transition team is working to ensure that the transition is smooths, with advance missions and engagement with host countries.

By addressing these questions and moving forward with the Pivoting to Regions and Countries initiative, UN-Women aims to achieve a more effective, efficient, and impactful organization, better equipped to advance gender equality and women's empowerment globally. UN-Women remains deeply committed to its normative mandate, ensuring that normative work is done with a global perspective and that strategic partners are in the right locations. UN-Women remains available and look forward to the guidance of its Executive Board for guidance advice as we move forward in this most important process.